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## The Birth of the Easter Lily

In the Land of the  
Mighty Tortoise  
It Grew from the  
Grave of a Paleface  
A Legend of  
Indian Love  
and Reverence  
By Bert Lennon

**T**HE moon, stealing softly across the heavens, spread a carpet of shimmering silver over the hushed waters, and through the sagging branches of the veteran pine a faint and soft light filtered down. Out in the lake a fish leaped twice its length into the moonlight amid a shower of liquid radiance. From a distance the mournful cry of a loon floated through the heavy silence—and then the mystery of the night closed in again.

Gradually I realized that the old Indian was speaking, and as I listened the words shaped themselves into a legend sacred in the traditions of the once mighty tribe of which this storm-beaten, grizzled son of the forest was the sole survivor.

Through the spell of the night, like a mystic charm weaving it tighter and tighter, droned the voice of the venerable warrior, and as the years rolled backward before me this is the tale he told: "Many years ago, when the father of my father's father was a young brave among the lodges of his people, the tribe of the Crawling Tortoise was indeed mighty. The sturdiest hunter could not reach in seven days' journey land which was not theirs, and the Great Spirit smiled on his favorite sons—and the warmth of his smile made them great and strong.

"One day, when the frost king had fled before the spirit of spring, and the song of the river hummed all day, a band of hunters, returning from a journey, saw strange sights. Where the bed of the river joined with the shouting stream that flowed to the southward they had watched the smoke of many fires. Stealing through the trees, they came close—and wondered at what they saw.

"Warriors whose skins were as white as the mantle of the frost king sat about the fires, and as they sat they smoked and talked; but it was in a strange tongue, and with many pointings to the north. And as the hunters of my people watched the strange warriors broke camp and departed with their faces set toward the north, with my people hurrying before them.

"From the cluster of palms where my people lay hidden there came the signal croak of a bullfrog and the air filled with arrows. Three of the white warriors lay dead on the ground, but the rest, forming a hollow square, faced the onrush of my people, and from where they stood came a blinding flash of fire—and the ground shook as with the thunder of the storm spirit.

"Ten of the bravest red warriors would speak no more, and yet not one had been struck by an arrow—not one pierced by a knife. Again came the thundering roar, and again our warriors dropped like leaves. Then the red warriors fled as before an evil spirit. But the fair-skinned fighting men who breathed death and fire through war sticks did not pursue them and vanished into the forest.

"When the shadow of the night closed about the deserted lodges the people of the Tortoise cautiously returned. To the south of the awe-stricken village, where two palm trees guarded a grassy knoll, the father of my father's father sat and watched—and through his mind ran many strange thoughts. From the deep black of the forest there came no sound but the whine of the panther or the cry of the owl.

"Then upon the night wind there came to the ears of the watcher on the knoll a faint groan. Again it came, and again. A patch of moonlight fell through the trees, and as the warrior gazed about him he saw lying at his feet the body of a man—a body with a white face shrouded in a robe of sable. Through the fair hair ran a red streak where an arrow had bitten its way. For a second the father of my father's father stood motionless; then he stooped, and, taking the body of the wounded white warrior in his arms, strode swiftly toward the lodges of the village.

"Three days followed the struggle on the borders of the village. In the lodge, strongly guarded, lay the wounded white-haired warrior; and by now his mind had been given back to him. But he said no word, only gazed about him and slept, for as yet the fever was strong upon him.

"In the council lodge the fathers of the tribe had already passed sentence. For all the red blood drawn from the veins of the Tortoise there should be paid back in full measure the blood of the white stranger who came with death and fire into the land of happiness. It was so ordered.

"For two more days the paleface slept and dreamed, and on the third day he was awake. And on this day the father of my father's father, who was one of those set to watch over him, saw him take from about his neck a golden image. And he kissed it, and spoke to it, and seemed happy. And the story of the white man's worship spread through the lodges, and said the braves: 'We shall see if the white man's medicine makes him strong at the hour of death.'

"When the sun drew close to the green shoulders of a near-by hill the word went forth, and before the council lodge gathered the fighting men of the village. Still seeking strength from the golden image (it was in the shape of a crossed stick), the white-haired warrior was led to the end of the death line and his hands unbound. An instant the white warrior stood still, and then bowing his head walked slowly to the opening of the lane.

"Truly, his medicine stood him well.



ashed among the sharp-pointed rocks thrust out an arm—and it closed about the little chief.

"On the banks the sons of the Tortoise watched the battle with the river spirit. A dozen red warriors were slipping through the waters to the rescue, but ere they could reach the white-haired one he was thrown against the rocks—and he became still. The hand of the nearest brave reached out and seized the little chieftain from the grasp of the sinking paleface. A score of hands bore him safely to the shore, and with him came the crushed form of the white man.

"The great chief strode to the river bank. And he stopped and knelt down before the silent form of the stranger. The heart of the great chief had been touched and the paleface was carried tenderly to the chieftain's own lodge. Then were summoned the mightiest medicine men of the village, but the Great Spirit had called the white-haired son to him—and he was dead.

"The rising sun beheld the sons of the Tortoise a nation of mourners. In the center of the village reposed the body of the stranger, and about it was heaped high the flowers of the Southland. Gifts were strewn about his feet and the maidens of the village chanted softly the death song of the Tortoise. Upon the still breast of the fallen one lay the golden image blazing in the sunlight, and as the warriors gazed upon it they bowed their heads.

"He was buried when the sun had half crossed the heavens, buried as befit a great chieftain. That night in the council lodge the old men of the village sat long and smoked, and as they smoked they talked. And it was only of the departed warrior who came from the land of the rising sun—and who was a man.

"Again the voice of spring had frightened the frost king from the Southland, and the warm sunshine brightened the lodges of the Tortoise. It was morning, and the father of my father's father, returning from the haunts of the hunter, came toward the village—and as he came he passed the burial mound of the sleeping white warrior. ABOVE THE MOUND A FLOWER, WHITE AS THE DRIVEN SNOW, SWAYED GENTLY IN THE MORNING WIND. It was the spirit of the white man's medicine sent by the Great Father to watch over him. All through the spring the flower bloomed, and came again the next spring. And the sons of the Tortoise, marveling greatly, spoke in whispers of the fair flower and knew that all was well.

"Summers passed and the sons of the Tortoise moved to the North. The white-haired people came to the deserted lodges of the Tortoise in great numbers and built strong wooden lodges—and the land was ever after their own. On the mound where the white lily nodded in the sunlight there was built a lodge of logs, and on it there stood a crossed stick in the form of the image of the sleeping white warrior. But it was of wood and not of gold. Here gathered the sons and daughters of the rising sun—and they worshiped the Great Father who watched over them. And the lodges of wood grew and grew until they became a mighty city.

"The quiet of the forest is no more and the tribe of the Tortoise has long been forgotten. Where the white warrior slept his last sleep, where the white lily so carefully guarded his slumbers, now stands a mighty temple of the Great Father, and its towers reach high into the heavens. Above them, catching the rays of the sun, stands the image of the crossed stick, a golden image, such as he who came to die in the lodges of the Tortoise bore with him. The redmen of the hills are no more and the white man rules the land."

So ended the legend of the lily.



"He already was within the circle of the drawn knives when a shout went up from the river bank. And as the warriors gazed about them, startled, the head of little Lightning Cloud, son of the chief, and future ruler of the Tortoise, floated outward on the rushing waters. A dozen braves rushed to the bank—but before them all sprang the white-faced stranger.

"Already the rushing rapids had borne the form of Lightning Cloud far out into their midst. But with mighty strokes the white-haired one followed close upon him, and where the shouting waters