

# WIMAWITA—A LEGEND of CRATER LAKE

By MARK BRICKELL KERR

**W**IMAWITA\* was the pride of his family and tribe.\*\* He could kill the grizzly bear, and his prowess in the fight was renowned even among those fierce braves who controlled the entrance to the Lake of the Big Medicine, where the black obsidian arrowheads are found. But the chase no longer had pleasure for him, and he wandered far up the slopes of the Shasta, where the elk and deer abound, and they passed slowly by him, down into the heavy growth of murmuring pines, as if knowing that his mission was of peace. Above was the line of perpetual snow, where the tamarack was striving hard for existence in the barren rock. From this great height Wimawita gazed upon the lodges in the prairie, among the huge trees far below, and then suddenly descending, disappeared in the forest, advancing to the east, where springs the great, gushing sawul,\* the source of the Wini-mim.\*\* There in a little hut dwelt old Winnishuya.† “Tell me, O mother,” he cried, “what can I do to regain the love of Tculucul?‡ She laughs at me, and the dog Tsileu‡ wanders with her over the snowclad mountain.”

“’Tis well; Tculucul still loves you, but since your brave deeds among the Klamaths, your thoughts are far away, and you long for further peril, to chant your great exploits in the councils of the brave. Tculucul has noticed your neglect and distate for the exploits in which you formerly took pleasure. Why, O Wimawita, do you not seek for greater glory? Know you not of the great lake, far away and deep down in the mountain top. The way is long and difficult, and but few reach its rocky slopes. If you have the strength and courage to climb down and bathe in its crystal waters, you will ac-

quire great and marvelous wisdom. Tculucul will look upon you with favor, and none will equal you among your people. The Lalos (children of the Great Spirit) guard the lake, and far in the past one of our own tribe reached it, but not propitiating the spirits, they killed him, and his body was sunk in the depths of the blue water.”

As she spoke the old woman’s strength increased. Wimawita, listening, caught her energy.

“’Tis well, my mother; tomorrow, while all sleep, will I start upon this journey to the river where the Klamaths dwell. Then will I find the way to the wondrous lake and bathe in the deep water.”

While speaking, he noted not the parting of the brush, where Tculucul was concealed, and who in her fright almost betrayed her presence. Nor was Tsileu visible behind the granite rocks near by, eagerly watching and hearing all that happened.

At dawn the following day, when even the dogs were still, Wimawita stole quietly away. Close behind him, clad in the raiment of a young brave, followed Tculucul, and after a short interval, gliding stealthily in the tracks of the others, came Tsileu. Thus they marched for several long and weary days, over the prairies of Shasta and the dreary lava fields of Modoc, until Wimawita reached the great river of the Klamaths. Then Tculucul came forth and accosted him.

“Whither goest thou, Wimawita, and why are you alone in this desolate place?”

“I seek the great lake in the top of the mountain, to bathe in its limpid waters.”

\* Grizzly bear. \*\* Shastas.

\* Large spring. \*\* McCloud river.

† Forethought. †† The lark. ‡ Red Flicker.

"There would I also go and share your perils."

"'Tis well, and I will reward your faith in me."

Tsileu, inwardly raging, cast a look of hate upon them, and sped northward through the land of the Klamaths.

The next day Wimawita and Tculucul journeyed up the river. They came to a large lake, and after some distance this gradually narrowed to a small but rapid stream. After a course for some distance through a deep ravine, the water again spread out into a lake, and far north could be seen the prairies of the Klamaths. Towards the east was a succession of rolling hills, with scanty vegetation, clear cut in the rarified atmosphere. On the west high mountains rose up precipitously, while here and there a snow-clad peak towered in the sky.

"'Tis there," said Wimawita, "where we must seek for the deep mountain lake." At last, after many weary days, they reached the lake and made camp close to the precipice. All night Wimawita chanted his song, and when the sun was just lighting up the circular wall across the lake, he clambored down the steep and rocky walls, and plunged into the deep, clear water. His spirit seemed to soar from him: but it required all his

strength to climb back to the rim of the crater. Next day he bathed again, and on returning said, "Once more only, Tculucul, will I have to bathe in the crystal water, then wisdom and strength will be mine, our tribe will be the grandest in the land, and you will be the greatest squaw of all. Thus will your faith and help to me be rewarded."

On the third morning he started, but, just as he reached the last descent, he beheld Tsileu.

"Dog of Wimawita, we will here find who is the greater man."

Like two great whirlwinds they came together, then struggled on the edge of the cliff, advancing, retreating, swaying far out over the dizzy height, watched by Tculucul from above, powerless to aid. Suddenly Wimawita slipped on the mossy rock, and Tsileu, exerting all his strength, raised and hurled him far out into the lake. Then the Llaos arose in their wrath, tore Tsileu's body in pieces and cast them on the lake. As they disappeared the waters parted and lava burst out with a mighty noise. The island of Llaos\* arose as the gasp of a dying crater, and here it is said dwells the spirit of Wimawita, the brave, and Tculucul, the lark.

\*Wizard Island.