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Osceola

"Josephine"

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Early Visions of Florida

Poetry • Stories • Chronicles from an American Borderland

Josephine, “Osceola”

[Josephine.] ‘Osceola.’ Published in The Hudson River Chronicle (Sing-Sing, NY) on 4 April 1838, after the death of Osceola on 30 January of that year, during the Second Seminole War. The author, “Josephine,” is unidentified.

Chief of the pale arid lofty brow,

Thou eagle of thy race,

We miss thee in the forest now,

We miss thee in the chase.

Warrior true, why comest thou not

We look for thy return—

Still In this calm sequestered spot

Our council fires burn.

They burn, but not as when ye went

To seek the Pale Pace camp;

The fading brands are almost spent,

The air is chill and damp.

A gloom is on the Everglades,

On streamlet, flow'r, and tree;

Spirits mean sighing through the shades

A sad lament for thee.

A cloud is on our souls, O Chief!

We dream of thee in chains;

We see thee die in ling'ring grief,

Far from thy native plains.

We know our fears are false and vain—

The Pale Face chief is brave:

He'd scorn to fling so foul a stain

On the broad folds that wave

Triumphantly above his head,

His country's pride and boast,

Left by Columbia's martyred dead,

Pure as their own bright host.

Great Spirit! O watch o'er thy child!

Why hidest thou thy face?

Remember that thou once hast smiled

On our abandoned race.

Thus through the night the watching chief

Sighed to the list'ning air

A dirge of mingled hope and grief,

Of agony and prayer.

And, Osceola, where art thou—

Bird of the wild-wood free—

White chief, and sage, and prophet, bow

Beneath the council tree!

Where sentries pace with equal tread

The guard-room's narrow round,

Drooping o'er hopes forever fled,

The captive chief lay bound.

Not many suns have sank to rest

Since that sad night of gloom;

Yet hast thou found on earth's soft breast,

Brave Seminole, a tomb.

Thy lofty spirit loathed the chain

That fettered it to life;

And Heaven that weeps its children's pain,

In mercy closed the strife.

Away beyond death's darksome sea

The hunting grounds are fair,

And far from wrongs and tyranny,

Thy tribe shalt meet thee there.