

THE KATERI CHANTING

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THE SEVEN VOICES SPEAKING FROM THE SEVEN DIRECTIONS

Priest: from the North
Mother: from the East
Friend: from the South
Uncle: from the West
Holy Woman: from the Sky
the People: from the earth
Kateri: from the Center

(Here follows the first three voices of the work in progress:)

HOLY WOMAN SPEAKING FROM THE SKY

The old ones say
time is the womb of eternity
enveloped by eternity
for seeded by the Creator
in the spirals of time
time gives birth to the sunlight
incarnate on the waters
which flow into the sea of forever
and enlighten our path
if we only know
to open the eyes of our hearts
and see the holy road before us
He brought me a sacred child
blinded by the disease
of the strange ones
they arrived in the evening
as shadows fell
but I saw her bathed in light
light playing
light shining around her
they were only two
who came to me
but I kept seeing glimpses
of holy ones standing
all around her

protecting her
and before her suddenly appeared
a figure with wings of light
an eagle man
with bright shining from his long dark hair
holding a lance of light
the light growing so bright
I threw my blanket over my head
and fell to the earth seeking refuge
falling like sky woman
from the heavens
before the bird people caught her
before earth diver brought up the soil
to spread out on the great turtle's back
a place for the people to live
So I fell startled to the earth
like sky woman
amidst the evening shadows flickering all around us
all around us
light and darkness gentle in the leaves
and her uncle said to me
"what's the matter with you,
holy woman?
there's no one here but us
you know me, I am not crazy,
I do not drink the English rum
I mean you no harm,
and this little one, my niece
she is now my daughter
I want you to help her
I have tobacco for you"
I looked out from under my blanket
slowly, carefully, rising to my feet
he had not seen,
the great soldier did not see the other world
and the other world's people
were kindly veiled now from my sight
except for a faint shining around the child herself
and here was the holy child they loved,
they must have loved her so
the child standing before me
"she's blind," he said, Don't you see?
from the sickness of the evil ones,
she feels her way, Tekakwitha,
do something for her
holy woman

she is my daughter now"
yes, I said
I can help her eyes some
but you, great warrior
you must remember my words
for these my words come from the realm of spirit
from the good place where the heart can be only one
and no two heart ever goes there
be careful of this holy child
or you will someday
break your own heart
on the mountains of her soul
for only the mountains and the sky last forever
and there are the great mountains of the spirit world
hidden in this little one's heart
I have the medicine for sore eyes
I will gather from the forest
and with the sacred ways
the healing prayers of four days
I can return some of her sight
but the honor gift I ask in return –
not this time tobacco
"Anything, he said,
anything within my power"
only, I said, only
that she will remember
that you teach her to remember
I said, that I asked her
in the coming seasons to pray for me
in this world and the next
will you remember, little one?
I asked, turning to her
She Feels Her Way
kneeling down to touch her face
with all those mean scars and she smiled
she smiled her yes to me the best smile
and her thoughts touched my mind with the goodness
that flowed through her
from the realm of the good twin's lodge
from the song of the wind above me
blowing through the green leaves of the great world tree
and in her smile
I remembered the old song
of the marriage of earth and sky
which my mother sang to me
when I was her child,

her little one,
 so long ago
 singing of the sunlight on the combing waters
 my mother singing in my heart of memories singing,
 sunlight on the combing waters
 sings on a summer's morn
 when quiet reigns in the land
 and soft lights on a new moon whispering crescent
 to the greening trees
 so wayward calls of wandering birds
 follow distant on the fallow field
 yellow in a winter's afternoon
 then good earth with blue sky in truest
 consummation
 makes our endless horizon of love
 becomes one together, two and one forever, a ring
 conjoined in a circle of doves
 morning doves
 white, bright against an azure flight, strong
 good in nature and in true
 so chant the song of oneness sing the chant, chant of love
 remember a turning of all the seasons
 recall the long springs of desire
 true promises are treasures and fruited heavy
 in the loving of our leafing souls
 today earth and sky have come together
 earth and sky are one forever sunlight hums on clear flowing waters
 bright as a summer's day
 so the child gave me to remember my mother's song
 and for a moment I was there in the garden of my mother's heart

UNCLE: SPEAKING FROM THE WEST

my friends
 I remember her so well
 the little child in my brother's village
 the sunlight always chased her
 across mother earth's round breasts
 the little girl who laughed
 at squirrels playing in the trees
 with such happy brown eyes
 bright eyes, flashing joyous in the sun
 full of light
 before the sickness
 scarred them
 I wish I had opened my eyes
 long ago

we did not understand
we thought her passion for the Sacred Being
foolish, misdirected, traitorous, even
though we knew she meant no harm
we tried to shame her to see the error of her ways
I did not understand
You see the same ones
the ones who came from far away across the ocean
who brought us death and disease
who wanted our lands
the lands of the people
these violent, greedy ones I have fought so hard so long
with their treacheries, naive snobberies, and shooting sticks
and their rum which can steal your heart away
their rum which can make you crazy
these unbathing ones
who always want more, more, more
never satisfied
after every treaty sealed forever
forever for them is only a day
And then they say
give us more, more of everything
they always want more of the people's earth
more land, more trees, more streams, more deer
more dead native people
and they say
move a little farther away from us
our God has given us your land
no longer your land
we want more land, they say
these greedy invaders from far away
the ones who take everything
the ones who want the fat of everthing
I ask you, honestly,
how was I to know
that their God was any better
than his worshippers?
ow was I to know
that she simply loved this God so
that she did not care
what incredible hypocrisies had hidden Him from me
that He had chosen her
this holy being had chosen her as His love
and what more powerful sacred medicine can there be
than the way Kateri loved this God in return
You would hear her in the whispers of her prayers

saying Iesos, I love you
Iesos, konoronkwa
but I did not see this and I would not listen,
my ears were stopped
because of my anguish for our people so endangered
maybe He is Rawenio
I don't know
but I miss my daughter
all I know is I drove my daughter away
I did not see in my own strong heart
the greater strength in her heart of love
so now I remember the little girl who laughed
the sunlight always chased her
and she ran after the sunlight too
for sunlight and she were playmates
dancing through the light and dark
of the wind moving leaves
across the grass amid the tall forest trees
and then back to her mother
the beautiful Meli of the Algonquins
who first taken captive by my Mohawk brother
in war's fierce sorrows
then took him captive with her beauty and goodness
and her strange Chrestien ways in joy she loved
and became my younger brother's wife
beautiful mother of the sun chasing child
the last time I saw them together
alive
she was in her mother's lap and enfolding arms
smiling up at me in the summer sunlight
listening to her mother's stories of Jesus Nanaboza
the Son of our Rawenio, so she did say
for my part I do not know
I really could not deny it
not anymore
and her father smoking his pipe
frowning at the Christian superstitions
but full of love, my younger brother,
full of love from his strength for his wife and child
a warrior chief like me
who could protect them from anything and anyone
but the breath of death himself
Death who came to our land with the invaders
and walking with sorrows . . . with so many sorrows
following in his steps
the way little children would later happily follow

Kateri, my daughter
then when the word came later to me
through the ancient sun guided trails of the forests
that the eating up disease of the invaders
small pox, which we had never seen
that breathing of death himself
that bad medicine they brought with them
along with their intense greed for our lands
across the great waters
had killed my brother and his Algonquin wife
and almost, almost their sun chasing daughter,
leaving me with a holy child to care for
and all I knew was to protect her like the bear
protects, growling
I did not know
that the Highest One had chosen her
I did not understand what the holy woman told me
for when I found her
when I found the little sun chasing one in the ruined village
do you know
we had always called her the sunlight Girl
the laughing daughter
now bereft with the pitiful remnant of her clan
in that old village
most of the longhouses emptied
empty after so many generations of life
so many bright summers and white winters
gone away, lost to us
until I go to them
soon . . . soon enough
but there was the little daughter
there before me in the ruins of that smallpox sickened town
she could not see anymore to chase the sun among the trees
and the wind was not moving but still
as she felt her way painfully through the camp
this once laughing child so ill our Sunlight Girl
our Sunlight Girl
afterwards we called her
She Feels Her Way Tekakwitha
who bore the terrible scars and the blindness of death's breathing
so she wandered frail
hearing of my coming for her and stumbled
bumping into the longhouse looking for the door
then stumbling over a tree root
feeling her way deeper into my heart
and each bump and stumble struck my heart

with a pain
 until she heard me call
 when I could
 "Sunlight Girl"
 and she turned to the sound of my voice
 "Uncle" in her soft voice calling "Uncle"
 and I wept and knelt before her
 as she felt her way into my arms
 felt her way deeper into my heart
 into my heart forever
 my younger brother's daughter, and Meli's daughter,
 now my daughter, my beloved little daughter
 who stumbled once and found me
 put her fresh scarred hands out to my face
 and softly wiped away my tears
 Sunlight Girl was her name
 until her fourth summer
 until the greedy ones' sickness came
 and took away her father, her mother, her new baby brother
 and made the sunlight hurt her eyes
 the bright light she had so loved
 with a child's tender love
 her brown eyes now wincing in that light
 her blind eyes pained
 so we called her ever after Tekakwitha
 She Feels Her Way
 And how I wish now I could feel my way
 feel my path
 back to her heart, back to her good smiles
 to the sound of her voice calling me
 "Uncle," "My Uncle"
 but she has gone far from me
 first running away from my fear for her
 and from my anger toward the greedy ones
 whose deity I thought she followed
 running away from my growls
 running to her Iesos Nanabozo
 to a land of summer light and bright shadows
 where the trees dance always in the winds of heaven
 when she is Sunlight Girl once more
 for she felt her way into the heart of the Creator
 forever
 Rawenio who walked among the people
 Jesus Nanabozo
 whose love took her from me, from my anger and my fears
 and no one can wipe away my tears

anymore, not anymore
as my eyes grow dim with sorrows
as my heart weeps in silence
as the Holy Woman of the Mohawks forewarned me
to be careful of this holy child
not to stand in the way of her path
when I took her to the holy Woman to help her eyes
but I did not listen
when I carried her in my arms away
from that desolate village
forever

PRIEST: SPEAKING FROM THE NORTH

My brother priest wrote me
You will soon see what a treasure I am sending you
and I saw
but perhaps I did not see
I knew she was a holy child
And I watched over her as best I would
but perhaps I did not see
really see
she was a holy girl
who belongs in a special way to our Lord
until she left us
then I could see
do you know, do you know
what she said before she died?
as her last breath shaped into words
I know what she said, know
for I was there
Iesos, konoronkwa
she said
and I had thought their language the tongue of children
until her soul leaving her body spoke
those words in a long last breathing
my mind translating the words slowly
my heart shuddering like a bird struck in flight
because then, only then did I know
now knowing as she left my care
what a treasure God had sent me
she said this in the moment of her painful death
with utter sincerity and bliss
and the words now haunt me forever
and I see her in my my dreams
as I'm sleeping
speaking to me of God's love for her people
a holy woman of God

Jesus, I love you
Kateri said
I see her in my dreams
every night coming softly in the light
like sunlight brightening the shadows
of my early morning dreams
and I am the one who told this treasure
and her close friend when they came to me
she could not be a nun
because they were too young
too young in the faith
they wanted to found an order of native women
but I said no
her people too young in the faith
children I thought
Iesos, konoronkwa
Jesus, I love you
her words sang her soul into eternity
and left me with my regret and these holy dreams
I was so late in recognizing her
but yet when her memory returns to me returns to me
in the dreams of day
so that I can see her in the eyes of my mind
standing there before me as of old
as I have tried to paint her for the people
she asking me to bless the people
telling me how much God loves her people then something
I have lost
comes back to life in me
when I remember Kateri's good smile and I know
even with winter's advent
I remember the dreaming time again
and I know once again
when the trees lose their leaves
and the winds become the cold breeze
in the November of our lives
let us remember and return
to all the songs of Spring
to that green place of our souls
which we left without knowing when
and seek the dreaming time again
yet I was not dreaming
when Kateri died
and we all were gathered round her
and she died loving God and her Iesos,
Iesos Konoronkwa, she said

so simply her words cut through my very heart
Jesus, I love you
and what happened after she died after her soul
winged her way to heaven
like the dying eagle's spirit wings its way
the eagle sounding without sound to the sun
and rising toward God knows the song of the sun
so these native people say
and when you have been among them
long enough like me
you begin to see some glimpses
of what they keep trying to tell me
how patiently they try to teach me
and when she died
and her mortal remains lay quite
like the day of a winter snow
when the snow is soft
and soundless falling soundless in the sun bright winter
then did we hear the wind's rising
all around us in the trees
full with April's promise of spring
and an uncanny light
played all round her face
which even with the scars
was so beautiful, so full of peace
that you were drawn to gaze
and I rubbed my eyes in wonder,
with peace
peace like the early spring winds wandering now in the trees
as we gazed upon her in wonder
peace like a good smile
peace you cannot describe all around her body
and suddenly we realized
the scars of the small pox
which had blighted her life
and took her family from her
the scars
for twenty years they had marred her visage
though she never complained once
the scars, my God, but I tell the truth
I tell you what I saw, the scars
they disappeared
and her skin became as fresh as the beautiful lily
which later grew inexplicably from her grave
and I am the one who told her
she could not be a nun

too young in the faith, I said,
I thought her people nothing more than children
to be led like children
Kateri
this little one
who in a few minutes
from her death
must have beheld
the face of God
in Heaven
where no scars can mar
nor my prejudice injure anymore
and the world so full of heavy hatreds
cannot weigh down her wings of light
any longer
this uncannonized saint so patient with our slow hearts
Jesus, I love you
she said
I hear her every night as I'm sleeping
Kateri in my dreams