

The Lily
of the
Mohawks

Rise up, O flame!

Red flame!

From the martyr's breast,
from Isaac's grave!

Scour the land

with the light that is your vision,
with the blaze that is your passion,
with the warmth that is your heart!

VENERABLE

Until . . .

(You had returned to meet their sneers,
A foolish child had need of longer years!)

The Blackrobe's Spirit Guide
led him to your long-house cell,
and found the soul He had prepared,
still praying well.

He came unto His own at last,
as Saving Waters trickled past
the outward audience of sense,
the conquered sin . . .
and pooled itself within
your citadel,
where all the liliness of "Kateri's" bulb
took root.

Ah, then you knew the reason why
you could reply
to no one less than He
who asked for all,
but gave so much the more
in true love's purity!

TEKAKWITHA

A Christian is enchanting
to a curious pagan face;
But a Christian cannot linger
under pagan-turned grimace,
And a Christian life . . . rebuking . . .
is deprived its magic place.
Thus again you gathered forces,
(knowing now your Spirit Guide)
and again, you fled from shelter,
pushing home and fear aside . . .
From Kanawaké's denial,
from its sacrilegious snare,
To Caughnawaga's fervor,
to the trysting House of Prayer;
From your father's tuned authority,
so long renewed,
To your mother's risen melody
so long subdued . . .

But not from pain and hardship,
and not from grim subjection,
and not from struggling fortitude
in lone, complete rejection.
You moved along the cindered ground
well-heated by the martyr's flame . . .
your life became
a part of it.

VENERABLE

In three swift years,
 you sanctified the Hunting Tribe,
 you sanctified the Dwelling,
 you purified its work and prayer,
 your gaiety impelling;
 you joined the penance practiced there,
 your own excelling . . .

It was not the taste of ashes,
 nor the numbing grip of snow,
 nor the thorns that lashed your tenderness,
 that made you relish so
 the trail of red.

It was the pearl you held within
 seeking Indian discipline.

It was the true propitiation
 that all the cruelties of a nation
 failed to slack . . .

It was the future expiation
 that a future land would see,
 caught in its chain of liberty . . .
 looking back.

TEKAKWITHA

To years of eight were added ten,
 When (you shunned this day with dread)
 the one betrothed to you by elders came.
 You did not know that this would be the hour
 (he came so many times before);
 but when you saw his claiming shadow tower
 the place beside your own,
 unsuspicious of your will,
 with all the patience of Algonquian care
 in your stare,
 with all the pent-up pride of Iroquois
 inside,
 you waited . . . O so still,
 until
 a voiced command unloosed your hand.
 "Give the sagamite"
 to wed.

Instead,
 your heart drum-beating "NO!"
 you pushed aside the bowl . . . and fled!
 You fled . . .
 from what maids cherish most,
 from the hopes for which they sigh,
 from the future's kind protection,
 from tradition's patterned eye,
 from the home-blessed joy of friendship . . .
 And you fled not knowing why!

VENERABLE

You lived . . . and all your life
 you kept their relics, no one vieing
 the tradition that you held
 salvaged from the dying—
 the dimness in your eyes, ever pressing,
 the scars upon your face, long caressing.

They called you "Tekakwitha" . . .
One who moves, pushing things aside.

You vivified that name,
 as quietly,
 you moved along the tide
 of years,
 rejecting long-house fame
 and pock-marked scorn.

You moved, with hands outstretched,
 nimble to adorn the Mohawk maids
 with all the beaded vanities they sought—
 more eager to release rebellious hands
 from weary tasks, soiled-worn.

You moved around in darkness,
 pushed aside the babbling space,
 and . . . alone
 in a corner throne,
 you found the unknown God!

TEKAKWITHA

In three swift years
 you fulfilled
 a racial destiny . . .
 peace in unity
 with One Supreme!

It lay, a pulsing theme,
 within the manna taste
 of Banquet Bread,
 love-quested,
 faith-sweetened Communion.

It floated from the bannered vow
 that Mary's virgin Feast unfurled
 above a startled world . . .
 heart-blossomed,
 soul-knighted union.

All eyes were turned, awoke from dream,
"How can this be done . . ." in Indian life
 . . . to know not man?
"With God it can!"

VENERABLE

In three swift years
 you fulfilled
 a single destiny
 of sanctity.
And once again,
 you pushed aside the world of men
 . . . and fled!
Not as a renegade from earth,
Not to the ancestral dead!
You fled
 to life
 that at once portrayed
 the torch of grace that led
 A Christian maid,
 An Indian maid,
 A lily made
 to God.

TEKAKWITHA

Child of an Algonquian mother,
 a captive slave,
 a Christian slave;
Child of an Iroquois father,
 a sachem chief,
 a pagan brave;
There mingled in your veins
 submissive wisdom
 with relentless constancy,
 passive longing
 with fierce expectancy,
 peaceful loneliness
 with zealous agitation,
 Stoic dignity
 with wild determination.

You never knew
 what destiny these two
 were spared to face,
 race to race.
They died! You lived . . . to see
 your father . . . in his brother's lore,
 Algonquian free,
 your mother . . . only in the wings
 of humming words
 that brushed your ears of four.

TEKAKWITHA

Rise up, O flame!
White flame!
From the virgin's breast,
from Kateri's grave!
Scourge America
with the light that is your vision,
with the blaze that is your passion,
with the warmth that is your heart!

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