



The Peace Queen

By night she dreamed of battle. By day she heard the sounds of men hollering, women screaming and children crying as if they were no further than the hill behind her lodge. When she walked to draw water, she saw horrors reflected in the pool; images of village after village falling to steel and fire, families turning upon one another in anger, hate and ruin. It had been like this for days. She knew what these visions meant. They had come with her title.

War was coming.

Before long, the seers would come. They would ask her to choose a leader from amongst them. Only this time, she did not know what counsel she could give.

Jikonsaseh. It was a title as old as the Confederacy itself and when it had come to her, she had been honoured. How not? For generations, her predecessors had watched over the

fragile peace that stood between the Haudenosaunee and the Wyandot.

Each of these great nations held a shared interest in the falls where the great snake was buried and each of their nations had learned a lesson when the monster had finally been laid to rest. No one could forget how the Thunder Spirits moved across Turtle Island, transcending physical boundaries by their very nature, fulfilling their responsibilities so effortlessly they could not help but evoke respect and gratitude.

The nations needed to honour the Thunders, each in the way they had been taught. And so they did. But without someone to tend to the peace in the region, differences became hard to bear at times. Skirmishes broke out and more than once, blood that should never have been spilled fell into the water, threatening the safety of all.

It fell to the Peace Queen to negotiate the terms and guard the peace. And so she had. Until now.

Doubt was slowly tearing the Peace Queen apart.

They were leaderless. War or something very like it, was on its way. Everyone said so. Why had she not chosen someone to lead them in battle?

Rocking back and forth, hands clutching her hair, again and again she sought the advice of the spirits. “Tell me what you want me to do?”

Day and night she prayed. Day and night the same answer came. A child. A small baby with tufts of black hair, soft brown skin and a pink tinge on her cheeks.

But she did not know what to make of this vision. Did it symbolize hope? The need for a new leader, unfettered

by pride and prejudice? She did not know. And so she told the clan mothers to bring their candidates to her. She would choose from among them.

There was arrogance in his heart. It shone as bright and blue as a flame, though he tried to disguise it with humility. A leader some would call him, but she knew better than to do the same. His heart would turn to war faster than any other, and his war wouldn't stop with his enemies. He would make it with his family, his friends, his wife and his children. In the days to come a sorcerer of no great talent would try to control him and the sorcerer would succeed, for the young man did not guard himself well against such powers. This could be avoided, but only if he were taught to respect what he could not see.

“This one will need many teachers, very patient teachers, to help him find peace.” She told the old woman, who had brought him to her. “And even then, his path is his own to choose. And should he fall into darkness, only Shogwayadisoh will be able to set him back on the path again. This is not the leader we are looking for.”

The next man they brought to her had a smooth tongue and like the first, was admired by many in the village for his skills in diplomacy. Indeed, he had proven himself in battle before and he was not known to be short of temper.

She could have chosen him. He would have been an easy choice and the people would have accepted him. But when she looked into his eyes, she saw that while he was a great orator,

he would compromise too much, thinking it could simply be recovered later. People would be angry that they had trusted him. If this man were to lead them, they would lose more than if they had gone to war.

The Peace Queen slept and dreamed terrible things. On the third day they came with another candidate. But she did not leave her house.

Instead, she stayed inside and thought about what she had seen in her vision the night before. Sadness came over her as she struggled to understand why she seemed to be failing in her duty. Eventually, the people outside left, muttering to themselves. They were disappointed and angry that she had not come out to see their candidate.

Later that night, there was a knock at her door.

The candidate who had been brought to her earlier had returned. She started to send him away until she realized that he had not come to her seeking approval to lead their people. He had come to see how she was feeling.

She opened her door and let him inside.

She never thought that marriage would make so many people so angry. No one understood why she made the choice that she did.

To her—it was all so clear. Peace Queen she may be, but not even she could stand outside of the peace and hope for it to prosper. Peace, after all, is not a thing to be tended and admired from afar. It is a way of being and moving in the world.

She saw that she could build peace in her relationship with the third candidate and with the family they would have. And she realized this was the strongest defence she could prepare against the war that was coming. Family.

This was not to say that she saw the union between herself and her husband as a kind of weapon to be wielded. It was not such thing. It was a path chosen. A commitment made. A love born.

People were angry with her. She did not blame them. She had broken the pattern that they had become used to. Choose a war leader. Go to war. Win. Or don't.

Start again.

But even though people were angry, she did not regret having chosen him. It felt more natural than anything in the world and though she would not be remembered for winning any great battles, she would build a strong family. She would learn to maintain the peace in her relationships with them. And in learning to balance peace, friendship and respect with those she loved, she would honour the Treaty spirit.

She knew that many would not understand this decision. Indeed, there had always been those who longed to abolish her title. They would be excited now. They would say that she was a weak woman who should never have been trusted, as if there were something stronger or more important than a woman's love—her resolve to protect her family.

If they did this, she knew that over time they would also forget who women are, what they stand for, and there would be no Peace Queen there to guard against the violent backlash that women would experience.

But she was not afraid. She was not afraid because she knew a secret that was so important and so simple that she had hardly dared to believe it herself.

Everyone carried the peace. Everyone had a responsibility to guard it. Yes, it may have been easier to relegate matters of peace to another person, a symbol, or an idea but the spirit of peace was something shared, something strengthened only through using it.

Just as there was no great leader to be found amongst the men, there was no perfect ambassador to be found amongst the women. There was no Peace Queen. Not really. There didn't need to be.

There only needed to be people, willing to work together for the sake of one another.