

Saint Kateri Tekakwitha

Courageous Faith



Adapted from a book
by Lillian M. Fisher

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Illustrated by Barbara Kiwak



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CHAPTER 1

SUNSHINE AND CLOUDS

War cries and fierce drumbeats filled the air. The Mohawk warriors had scored another victory, this time over their old enemy, the Algonquins (al-GON-kwins). Caught off guard by the surprise attack, many men were killed. The Algonquin women and children found themselves at the mercy of their enemies.

The warriors led their captives through forests and over lakes, along the trail from the wide St. Lawrence River into the valley of the Mohawks, a two hundred mile trip on foot.

As they traveled, Tsaniton-gowa (dzanee-do-GO-wa), chief of the tribe's Turtle Clan, could not help but notice Kahontake (guh-hoo-DAHG-ay), one of the young Algonquin women. He watched with both wonder and respect as she volunteered to carry the heaviest burdens for the older women as they grew tired. This woman was different from the others, and because of that difference she was fast winning the

chief's heart. Tsaniton-gowa did not know that she had learned about the one true God from Jesuit missionary priests. He did not know that Kahontake was Catholic.

When they arrived at the Mohawk village that was called Ossernenon (o-SAH-neh-non), Tsaniton-gowa married Kahontake. She soon adjusted to Mohawk customs. Being the wife of a chief, Kahontake was treated well by the other Mohawks. When God blessed their marriage with a baby girl, Tsaniton-gowa set aside his many worries, war councils, and tribal meetings.

Proudly holding the infant in his arms, he asked, "Kahontake, what name should we give our little one?"

The new mother sighed. She wanted so much to give her child a Christian name, but Kahontake did not dare to suggest this to her husband. Mohawks did not trust the European settlers, or their religion.

"Let's call her Ioragode (yo-luk-O-day), 'sunshine,'" she said.

"That's a good name," agreed Tsaniton-gowa. "She is a sunshine to all of us. When she grows older, we will give her a permanent name."

Smiling, he gently placed the sleeping child in her mother's arms and left.

Kahontake's eyes filled with tears. "Someday," she said softly, "someday the priests, the blackrobes, will pour the water of life on you, my little one. Then you, too, will belong to Rawanniio (la-wa-NEE-yo), the one true God."

"Hush! You must watch what you say," warned Anastasia, an older Algonquin woman who loved Kahontake. "If you are not careful, all of us who are Catholic will be punished."



Ioragode was her parents' delight. As a lively four-year-old, Ioragode followed her mother everywhere. She was full of curiosity and always asking questions. But more than anything, Ioragode loved to hear her mother's stories, especially those about Jesus, his mother, Mary, and the saints.

"Mamma, where do the birds come from?" asked Ioragode. She had heard the answer many times, but she loved to hear her mother repeat it again and again.

"Rawanniio made them, my little one. God made all the beautiful things of this world: the trees, the flowers, the birds, and the river; he made everything. He also made us, Ioragode.

“And because he loves us, God gave us a soul that will live forever.”

“I wish I could see the soul. It must be beautiful,” said Ioragode.

“Yes, and we must keep it beautiful by not committing sins.”

The little girl looked down.

“Don’t be sad, Ioragode. Even if we sin, Rawanniio will forgive us. He sent his Son, Jesus, to save us.”

“Jesus is our brother. And beautiful Mary is his mother and ours too!” cried Ioragode with excitement.

“Yes, little one, and she loves us very much,” said Kahontake. “But we must keep our love for Jesus just between the two of us, hidden in our hearts.”

“Yes, Mamma, just between us,” the little girl replied.

One day as she was walking with her mother, Ioragode heard strange drumbeats in the village.

“Mamma, why are they beating the drums like that?” the frightened girl asked.

Shaking her head sadly, Kahontake put her arms around her daughter.

“Ioragode, smallpox has visited our tribe.”

“What is smallpox, Mamma?”



*"God made all the beautiful things
of this world . . ."*

"It is a sickness. When it strikes, it usually kills," answered Kahontake. "Many have died already."

"But Papa is a great chief. He will stop the smallpox," said Ioragode.

"My little one, it is not in his power. Only Rawanniio can help us."

It was not long before most of the people in the village were infected with the dreaded disease. Though he was a chief, Tsanitongowa and his family were not spared. All of them —Ioragode, her baby brother Otsiketa (o-dzee-KAY-da), and both her parents—became very ill. Because she was so sick with fever, Ioragode was not aware that her father, mother, and brother had died.

Kahontake's friend Anastasia did what she could to help. Pulling the animal skins from the doorway to let in clean air, she carried away the soiled furs and burned them. She covered the earthen floor with sweet dried grasses and swept it clean. Once fresh furs and blankets had lined Ioragode's sleeping shelf, Anastasia brought hot cornmeal stew and herb teas; she held the child while she fed her. Anastasia also applied medicine, but nothing would erase the scars from the round face of the four-year-old child.

Finally, the fever passed. In a weak voice Ioragode called for her mother. "Where is Mamma?" she whimpered. "I want to see her."

"Your mother has gone to heaven. She is with Rawanniio, the one true God, Little Sunshine. She is not dead. The *rakeni* (LA-keh-nee), the black-robed missionaries, brought her the message. Your mother was a Catholic like I am. She will never die. You will see her again one day."

Ioragode's eyes filled with tears. "I want to be a Catholic like my mamma. She told me stories about the one true God and how Rawanniio is the only way to happiness."

Anastasia turned her head and looked back as if someone might be lurking nearby. She lowered her voice. "Remember this, Little Sunshine. You are a Mohawk and the Mohawks despise Christians. Your father's brother-in-law, Iowerano (yo-weh-LA-no), will now be chief. Tomorrow he will come into this house, bringing his wife, Karitha (ka-LEE-tha), and her sister Arosen (a-LO-zuh). His daughter Enita will now be your adopted sister. They will be your family and you must obey them. Never speak of the blackrobes or Catholics—or of Rawanniio again."

Ioragode frowned. "I will obey them and be silent. But I will keep Mamma and the one true God in my heart."

Anastasia put her arms around Ioragode. "Soon I must go back to my longhouse. I will pray for you, Little Sunshine. I will ask the blackrobes to pray for you, also."