

I Will Sing (For my people)

The father of my Mohawk blood stands next to Train No. 33, circa 1869. He is frozen in time, wrapped in starched American textiles, conductor's cap slightly askew as he holds a silver waist-band-bound watch in his hand. It is a brown hand, like his brown eyes, which seem to regard the world from a great distance, over jutting cheekbones seen mostly now on reservations, in movies, in other sepia stills.

When his body had stilled and was recycled into the earth, where did it go? Not into steel for train track rails, or cotton for fabrics made by white hands, but into a sassafras or a lily, green friends that speak to me in quiet Appalachian sunlight. Does he watch me now, from his seat around the council fire, and wonder why it took three embarrassed generations for someone who listens to be born again?

Regardless, I watch him now, and wonder why three embarrassed generations ago he stepped out of sassafras stands in northern New York, turned his tongue to English, married a German bride, and closed his ears to the wailing of the spirits as another red skin became trapped in white clothes. I wonder what time his watch reads, and if he needs it truly or could instead use the sun to tell time.

I feel it is time to listen again. The owl flies through my sleep, calling, and the southbound river gurgles my name over the Ohio clay: *Ori:té*, she says, *come home*. Who are these Mohawk men to leave their women in the north, their language in the south? Now my Mohawk-feeling heart can't rest in a Mohawk-looking home, and my blood is quiet on the subject of color, telling me to show what I am in other ways. *Ori:té*, it says, *ask questions*.

As the daughter of a father of a daughter of a father who was one-half something wild, I question why three generations did not listen, why I feel I must. I hear the father of my Mohawk blood chanting into the smoke that blows off the council fire: He changed his clothes but he couldn't change his blood. Every time Tonniataren:ton calls across the lake, I hear him; every rustling of leaves holds his voice: He sings the war-song, the love-song, the life-song: These days they are all one melody, which I will sing too. My blood may be quiet, but my voice is not.

Caitlin Kight