

Sample: Whispers Of The Old Southern Oaks By Demetria McDonald

In the land where liberty stands tall,

With the Father Republic, we call and fight,

With Prosperity's light, And values so bright,

Mother Democracy's freedoms for all.

- Demi, 2023

PREFACE

Fallen Acorn

On the evening of December 25th, 1750, under a waning crescent moon, the village of Padshilaika lay quietly at the junction of Patchilaika Creek, west of the Toa River. The tranquility was suddenly pierced by the painful scream of a woman named Mikha. She bit down on a thick cloth she'd woven days prior, her face contorted in both agony and fierce determination as she labored to bring a child into the world.

At a secluded temporary campsite east of the village, Mikha was attended by two town elders. Lomasi, the eldest, had long curly white hair, milky eyes with grayish pupils, and skin resembling beautifully fossilized mummy flesh, dripped in water-diluted red clay. Her voice, though brittle and frail, was soothing. She intoned softly, "Breathe, child, follow the rhythm of the ancients."

Orenda, the younger elder, had vibrant energy radiating from her galaxy-blue eyes. As she watched a speck of light in the sky carrying a long sparkly tail ascend and disperse on the horizon, her fascination was palpable. Lomasi tried to pull Orenda back from her trance. "Orenda, sister. Come now," she called softly in their native tongue.

Mikha's gaze flickered with fear and wonder as she endured the waves of pain. Between her gritted teeth, she murmured a prayer for strength and the future of her child. The scent of burning sage mingled with the damp earthiness of the riverbank, forming a heavy aroma that settled over the gathering like a blanket. The crackling campfire punctuated the rhythmic drumming of distant thunder, while a cool breeze swept through the clearing, carrying the rustle of leaves and the occasional distant call of a night bird.

As the cries of a child grew stronger, Orenda returned to the campfire. "Once again, you join us. You must pardon my interruption of your meeting with the spirits, but your help is greatly needed amongst us. I'm sure the spirits will understand," Lomasi said with a smile.

“I beg sorrow, my sister, but light stun me. Orenda here now, and ready,” Orenda replied cheerfully. Even as the baby's first cry pierced the night, whispers of an impending council meeting to address these very threats mingled with the wind, hinting at the unrest that might soon challenge the village's harmony.

The elders carried the baby to a ceramic washbowl made by the village elders from sun-fired clay used only for this purpose. The vessel held herb-infused water, and the infant was gently placed in the prepared water and cleaned by a pair of leathery hands while chanting in their native language. This calmed the child as if a memory of that chant was being drawn from a file and re-evaluated. For this small group, the Birthing Ceremony was a greeting ritual welcoming the half-spirit into this world under the guidance of experienced elders to assist the half-spirit safely through its womb journey. This was mentally recorded as the spirit's very first journey of life.

“For the half-spirit, the journey was long. It must now rest,” Lomasi commanded as she firmly placed the resting infant on its mother's chest to reconnect with the unceasing music it listened to throughout its life. Bundled in its newly created receiving blanket, the child instantly searched for a suckling object. Mikha then pulled out her index finger and placed it at the infant's lips. The child didn't hesitate to grasp with full approval, suckling itself back into slumber. The navel cord was prepared for its final resting place at the porchway of their small home. A proud father, Tsopo, completed the carving of a wooden pestle and mortar for future prayers of blessings on behalf of the half-spirit throughout its years. The unnamed being was now placed in a hammock as the elders brought closure to the ritual.

On the fourth morning after birth, another ceremony was prepared. This was the naming ceremony of the new fire-life, which demanded the attendance of the village's population. Everyone gathered to watch as the new being crossed over from a half-spirit into a real human being belonging to the earth. The new being would then, along with a famished father, break their fast. Mikha had also incurred a strict diet of her own, taking only berries, nuts, and bread for four days to nourish milk extraction. The villagers all brought dishes prepared as a group. Mikha and

Tsopo sat at the center of the celebration alongside the three town chiefs and elderly midwives.

Mikha's mother was absent today, as she was three nights ago. Three years ago, Mikha received word from a neighboring town that her mother was kidnapped by white men while returning from the market. Her father never returned from his desperate search for her.

As the sky drew to dusk, Tsopo was candid in his restraint from devouring every edible object presented before them. As Mikha stood and greeted the crowd, she gave a brief history of her clan and their fortune of joining with her new clan as one people. After the blessings and approval of all three chiefs, Mikha held her half-spirit to her breast and said, "My brothers and sisters, we give you Sky Rider. We will call her Keecha!" She glanced at Orenda before continuing, "Firstborn of Mikha and Tsopo in the spirit of the Tsoyaha. The village had adopted the ritual of the colonizers to give conventional names to their newborns. The Great Spirit has granted our town abundance in this new feminine fire to join our light! May she feed our illumination with brimful brightness." Tsopo silently interrupted with a hidden tug of her apron and whispered, "My hunger has grown most powerful at this moment." Mikha smiled at him, putting her speech to an abrupt end by yelling, "Now we eat!" Not a second later, the dancing and singing started as if patiently waiting for a cue. Tsopo fervently attempted to sample everything within sight of his eyes. Since attaching to her food source, little Keecha's detachment from the fierce captivity of a nipple was impractical but not impossible as she began her rotation of arm passings.

The Town Square, draped in the warmth of the setting sun and the coolness of the evening breeze, was alive with anticipation. As the ceremony began, Keecha was passed around and admired among the women. The wind unified with the soft instrumental compliments of joyous voices singing and chanting while surrounding the town. Keecha, admired among the women, observed Mikha preparing an amulet attachment to a string of pearls traded by their neighboring Yamasee and Guale. At least two of the women, including Sandy, were caught shaping the head and nose of young Keecha. Traditionally upheld by elders, performing this task in

public, especially during the naming ceremony, contracted an unspoken commitment to Keecha's well-being and growth.

During the celebration, villagers were careful not to mingle too greatly with the couple, as this was their time for communion with the spirits through the new fire child. As the evening wore on, conversations ebbed and flowed like the tides. Mary regaled the younger women with tales of the outsiders who frequented her tavern, while the Indian traders discussed routes and trades that might prove beneficial in the coming seasons.

Twelve Years Later

Keecha sat with Mikha and Nenah, weaving baskets for the new crops next month. Nenah commended Keecha's work on flattening her head and shaping her nose. "Your sacrifice was greatly appreciated but unnecessary, my sister." The exchange led to playful camaraderie. Nenah glanced at Mikha, and they exchanged silly smiles as they continued weaving.

As they worked, the conversation turned to Keecha's impending ceremony. "Is she ready for tonight?" Nenah asked Mikha as Keecha got up to gather new straw. "Yes, she is ready!" Keecha responded as she walked away with a subtle attitude. The two older women grinned like teenagers at a social gathering.

Despite Keecha's subtle attitude, she was indeed excited for the evening ahead. Tonight, Keecha would turn thirteen, marking her journey into womanhood. She prepared meticulously, from straightening her frizzy hair to weaving a beautiful calico dress. In their village, where warriors were scarce, Keecha's interest in both traditional feminine skills and warrior training raised eyebrows. Yet she remained determined to embrace all aspects of her identity.

Mikha had prepared a lye-based paste to straighten Keecha's curls, a method traditionally used to add natural luster for ceremonial purposes. Nenah, always supportive, prepared the red paste appropriate for unwed women. Keecha had woven a beautiful calico dress and moccasins she was anxious to try on after her chores.

As the sun set, guests for the ceremony began to arrive. Among them was Mikha's sister, Sandy, who had traveled from a neighboring village, bringing warmth and cheer. Her presence brought a sense of completeness to Mikha on this special day.

Joining the gathering were a few Indian traders, well-known to the village for their roles in facilitating trade between the natives and the settlers. Their presence was a testament to the interconnected economies and the mutual dependencies that characterized frontier life.

Mary, the local tavern keeper known for her boisterous laughter and candid stories, added a lively spirit to the gathering. Her tavern was a place where many stories began and ended, and her connection to the village was marked by her relationship with the leaders of the village.

The inclusion of Sandy, Mary, and the traders added layers of social and cultural complexity to the event, highlighting the diverse tapestry of relationships that defined Keecha's world.

Demiah, a native servant from a nearby plantation, frequently visited the village for goods. Granted permission to attend Keecha's important event, Demiah's presence highlighted the complex relationships that spanned societal divides. Mrs. Miller, observing more than participating, provided a glimpse into the colonial influence pervading the region. Demiah, though reserved, shared quiet insights with Keecha, planting seeds of friendship promising to grow in depth and significance.

With only twenty-five families, the village occasionally saw visits from Creeks and white settlers. The ceremony proceeded as village women carried bowls inscribed with blessings. Keecha and Demiah joined in the singing while Keecha completed her ceremonial attire. Pretty Flower, a young girl of seven, brought Keecha flowers.

"These is for you, Keecha. I just picked them myself."

"Thank you, little one," Keecha responded. "I will cherish them with my heart."

The girl smiled and gave Keecha a loving hug. It was now time for the wash. Keecha's hair was placed in the first bowl of freshly boiled water, and the concoction was rinsed out. A lathering substance was rubbed throughout her hair, now straightened, and then washed out. A smoothing substance combined with oils and homemade butter was applied to her hair and remained until she sat in a larger vessel of water blessed by the chiefs and elder women. The water, charged by the moon and sun three days prior, was warmed by surrounding the vessel with burning wood, achieving the blessing from the fire spirit. Keecha was placed in the sacred water and left to meditate. After an hour, Mikha and Nenah washed Keecha's hair one last time before she exited her ceremonial bath.

As Mikha and Nenah washed Keecha, Mikha thought of her own ceremony, remembering the boy who yelled, "Ka-Ka here! Ka-Ka here!" Ka-Ka was the name her people used to describe ill-mannered Europeans with barbaric habits. Nenah gave her a slight push on the arm and asked, "Are you back?"

Mikha, lost in thought, missed her family, who should have been there today. This was a special day not only for Keecha but also for Mikha.

"Yes, I am here."

Keecha interrupted, "You go now. I got."

Mikha looked with pride. Her little girl had grown.

"Your Ka-Ka speaking is better, my child. You are good student."

Keecha held her back strong with joy and responded, "Thank you. Good teacher."

The two left, giving Keecha the privacy she politely demanded. Dressed in her favorite scents and with her newly straightened hair flowing in two shiny braids, Keecha and Demiah admired her as they leaped into the woodlands seeking fresh flowers for further adornment, alongside Pretty Flower.

Soon, after the last trader left along with Sandy who is married to an attending trader; soldiers arrived on horses while participants waited in the village town square during the ceremony. The first horseman stopped and spoke with Mikha.

“The general would like to speak with the town at once. Gather everyone in the town square.”

Mikha replied, “The village is here. A ceremony is taking place as we speak.”

The festivities deadened as Mikha raised her hand to the elderly. All looked confused as questions were asked amongst each other in a language unintelligible to the outsiders. Mikha and Nenah were the only ones present in the village besides Keecha, who could speak the language of the Ka-Kas.

“Chief has retired himself presently. I’m sure someone can request his immediate presence!” Mikha cried out.

“That would not be necessary,” the announcer proclaimed.

Mikha didn’t like the situation, giving a glimpse of discomfort to Mrs. Miller. Mikha knew the process of communication with the Ka-Kas in the absence of at least one chief. Now the whereabouts of Chiefdoms were questioned amongst the breaths of several overlapping whispering voices. The general arrived, still horse-mounted, inside the sacred space of worship, prayer, celebration, and Chiefdom Meetings. The villagers acknowledged the general’s disrespectful gesture and waited in silence for his report. Guron, a young boy of about ten, attempted to leave the now-guarded sacred space to locate the chiefs.

“Where are you headed?” a soldier asked.

“I’m going to find Chief, so he can kill you all for your disrespect,” the boy replied in their native language. Mikha quickly pulled the boy away and uttered a tone suggesting he calm down. Guron was so angry that he sprinted off, releasing himself from Mikha’s grasp. A soldier pulled out a sword as the boy fought through the general’s horse legs, contemplating his victory. The boy was greeted with a sword through his chest. The villagers ranted, enraged, and unarmed, running for the riders. Muskets were drawn and villagers were threatened. All but Guron’s mother continued forward. She ran quickly to the boy and grabbed his soon-to-be lifeless body as he began choking on his blood. Mikha burst into tears as she tried to comfort the mother with a soft touch and demanded, “What now do you seek?”

“Your chiefs or Micos are all dead. And soon you will join them. If you can’t give me the names of your spies working under the command of the British,” the soldier replied.

Mikha turned to the crowd and calmly uttered a profane display of words in their language. The crowd began moving in slow, articulated formation, confusing the soldiers.

“The villagers know none such person amongst them,” Mikha stated defiantly.

The general realized what was happening. The villagers formed lines to protect their young, preparing for the soldiers to fire. The general released a devilish grunt of arrogance. Men were strategically placed in front of the women, who then covered the young and elderly lying flat on the ground furthest from the fire range. Mrs. Miller was slowly guided to the floor by another elder, saying, “Come, child, this fight not for you.” All except Orenda, who was fierce in courage despite her age.

Keecha, lying on the floor, slowly stood beside Orenda, grabbing Nenah’s hand and nodding fearlessly. Demiah immediately stood next to Keecha with readiness.

The soldiers hesitated to fire at the crowd of unarmed townspeople. The isolated man threw down his weapon and lay flat on the ground as the others fired. Although they did not have a chance to reload, warriors gallantly sprinted towards the end, becoming human shields for the women armed with small scalping knives. Shots were fired, but none fell. Within two feet, the women leaped from behind the men, piercing and stabbing without mercy until no others moved. Mikha pulled the general from his horse and held a sharp pendant to his neck, asking in his language, “What do you gain from our deaths? There is no honor in this!”

“Your land!” the man replied.

Mikha held up his head and let him watch his men being eradicated by wounded men and fierce women armed with anger. Outside the Square, other soldiers witnessed their demise and abandoned their attempts to set the village ablaze.

“Mikha, kill him!” the villagers demanded. “No!” she shouted calmly, looking into the eyes of the madman. “This one has a story to tell. We will let him speak it!”

Mikha knew the madman wasn't a general. No heavily ranked soldier would lead so poorly. The group displayed unorganized and savage warfare without a true cause. Mikha realized that while the Ka-Kas were as organized and civilized as her people, small groups of independent, free-acting stray dogs ruled for low causes curated by greed and self-importance.

The Town Square was suddenly barricaded by its only known entrance. The village had prepared for the worst with a secret tunnel leading to a place hidden by undisturbed brussels and overgrowth. East of this opening was a cave ending several miles northeastwards in an eight-hour foot route. Mikha looked around in shock as Nenah and Keecha secured the two surviving prisoners. The outsiders were blindfolded and taken through the cave.

From deep within the woods, Tsopo and other warriors saw the fire of the village. They ran towards the smoke as fast as they could, destroying any obstructions.