



The Cherokee Sacred Pipe

Long ago, when the world was new, a tribe of red-skinned people came to live on the lands around the Blue Smoke Mountains. At this time, the animals of the world still talked to men and taught them how to live on and care for the land. These people were called "Ani Yun Wiya," or the One True People. In this tribe lived a brave warrior woman called Arrow Woman, who was taught to use the bow, the spear and the knife. Even though it was a man's job to hunt and fight, Arrow Woman could shoot straighter with them, and she could throw the spear into eye of a hawk in flight. Because of all this, no man would tell her to be like a woman.

One day while on a hunt, Arrow Woman came upon the tracks of Yona the bear. She saw blood on the ground and knew he was wounded, so she followed his tracks. High into the mountains she went. Soon she came to a place that she did not know. It was in this place, a place known only to the animals that she finally saw Yona the bear. He had a deep cut in his side and she saw him bowing down in prayer. Arrow Woman saw him bowing toward a large field of tall grass and speaking words that she had not heard before. Suddenly, the grass shimmered and became a lake, and Yona dove into the water. After a time he emerged from the water, his side completely healed.

Yona approached her and said, "This is the sacred lake of the animals, called, 'Atagahi' and its location is known only to the animals. It is where we come for healing and strength. You are the first man creature to see the sacred lake. You must never tell your kind of its location for it is the home of the Great Uktena."

After said these words and left, Arrow Woman was tired and decided to

rest a while by this lake. She built a small fire and sat down to eat a meal that she had brought with her, and as she took a drink of the water from the lake, she felt instantly refreshed. She felt strong as Yan'si the Buffalo, as if she could run faster than Coga the Raven could fly.

The woods were quiet: Unole the wind was sleeping, Nvda the sun was shining bright but was not hot, and the surface of the lake was completely calm. Arrow Woman soon began to get sleepy. It was at this time that she saw Uktena, whom she had been told of when she was a child but no one in her tribe ever claimed to have seen him.

High above the water he raised his great serpent's head, the jewel in his forehead glistening. He began to move toward her. Arrow Woman grabbed up her spear and stood up to face the great creature coming to her, standing proud, showing no fear — the way any warrior should. She raised her spear and prepared to strike the huge beast.

Uktena stopped a short distance from her. He smiled, his mouth grinning larger than a man was tall and full of teeth longer than man's forearm. He spoke to the brave woman on the bank of his lake. To her he said, "Put down your weapons for I mean you no harm. Uktena told her to sit and to listen. Uktena dipped his head below the surface and came back up a moment later. In his mouth he had a strangely crooked stick and a leather pouch, which he lay on the ground in front of Arrow Woman.

Then the Great Uktena began to teach. He said, "This that I have laid before you is the Sacred Pipe of The Creator." He then told her to pick up the pipe. "The bowl is of the same red clay the Creator used to make your kind. The red clay is womankind and is from the Earth. Just as a woman bears the children and brings forth life, the bowl bears the sacred tobacco (tsula) and brings forth smoke. The stem is man, rigid and strong. The stem is from the plant kingdom, and like a man it supports the bowl, just as man supports his family."

Uktena then showed Arrow Woman how to join the bowl to the stem saying, "Just as a man and a woman remain separate until joined in marriage so too are the bowl and stem separate. Never to be joined unless the pipe is used."

Uktena then showed her how place the sacred tsula into the pipe and with an ember from the fire lit the tsula so it burned slightly. He told her this, "The smoke is the breath of the Creator. When you draw the smoke in into your body, you will be cleansed and made whole. When the smoke leaves your mouth, it will rise to the Creator. Your prayers, your dreams, your hopes and desires will be taken to Him in the smoke, and the truth in your soul will be shown to Him when you smoke the pipe. If you are not true, do not smoke the pipe; if your spirit is bad and you seek to deceive, do not smoke the pipe." Uktena continued his lesson well into the night

teaching Arrow Woman all of the prayers used with the pipe and all of the reasons for using the pipe. He finished just as the moon was beginning her nightly journey across the sky in search of her true love. He told Arrow Woman to wrap the pipe in red cloth, keeping the parts separate.

Uktena then returned to depths of the lake, telling Arrow Woman she would never again be able to find this place but she would remember all she learned. Arrow Woman saw the water shimmer and become again the field of grass. She left, taking with her the pipe and her lessons and a wondrous tale.

Ever since that time, The Ani Yun Wiya have used the sacred pipe and never again has any man seen the sacred lake of Uktena.

The pipe is not a symbol of things that are sacred. The pipe itself is sacred. Not everyone is called upon to be a pipe bearer. The person who carries the pipe and practices the pipe ceremonies and traditions has a great responsibility to his brothers and sisters, his land and country and even to the Earth Mother.