

EXT. PENNACOOK VILLAGE - RIVERSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Keme stands in the river with a fishing spear. His eyes are trained on the water that laps at his knees. Wonalancet walks behind him.

WONALANCET

You scare the fish away by standing in the water. When did you pick up such a bad habit?

KEME

Samoset caught a large fish like this yesterday.

WONALANCET

Even the biggest fools have luck. But, the fickleness of luck is nothing compared to learned skill. Now, come out of there, and look at me when I talk to you.

Keme lowers his spear and turns to face Wonalancet. Shame makes his formal stiffness creep back.

KEME

I'm sorry for the disrespect, Father. Thank you for teaching me.

WONALANCET

I would like it better if you did as I taught, not just listened. Come out, I said.

Keme climbs out. Wonalancet sits in the shade of a nearby birch tree; he motioning for Keme to join him. Keme lays his spear at his side when he lowers himself beside Wonalancet.

WONALANCET (CONT'D)

I thought we agreed to let you attend the debate under the condition that you wouldn't speak?

KEME

I said nothing!

Wonalancet raises his eyebrows.

KEME (CONT'D)

During the debate!

WONALANCET

Only because I kept you quiet. And even that small outburst was disrespectful.

KEME

They disrespected the Chief--

WONALANCET

They were elected by their families to represent them. You came along because you're my son. That was a learning opportunity, one you'll lose if you flaunt those privileges.

KEME

Don't I have a right to be there?

WONALANCET

Frankly, no.

KEME

How can I be chief one day if I never learn?

WONALANCET

Which is why Chief Passaconaway allowed you to come. The issue isn't your right to learn; it's that you draw attention to your place in this family.

KEME

I am your son!

WONALANCET

By chance, in the eyes of many.

KEME

But the storm! The signs! Don't they trust the word of the spirits?

WONALANCET

I don't know, Keme. Likely, they think the shamans told the Chief what he wanted to hear, giving me a child and him a successor.

KEME

So they're sac religious as well as disrespectful.

WONALANCET

You jump to such a harsh conclusion
with so little evidence?

KEME

I heard all I needed to.

WONALANCET

Years of war have hardened us all.
Learn the lessons I teach, and back
your instincts with logic. If you
grow into a passionate leader,
you'll never earn the respect you
need.

KEME

How can I earn respect that no one
gives me?

WONALANCET

By growing into a leader worthy of
divine intervention.

Keme takes a moment to collect his thoughts. A million emotions swirl in his mind; each wave hits him harder and harder.

Wonalancet wraps his arms around him. Keme buries his face in his father's neck. His whole body is shaking. Everything, even the river, is silent. They're in another world.

A beat.

Keme pulls away, but he can't bring himself to separate completely from his father. Nothing's resolved, but, when Keme sees the fire in Wonalancet's eyes, it sparks one in his own.

KEME

I won't make today's mistakes
again, Father.

WONALANCET

Good.

INT. PASSACONAWAY'S WIGWAM - EVENING

The wigwam has a fourteen-foot diameter.

Benches, made of branches, line the walls. Woven grass baskets are littered under the benches. Pelts and clothing hang on wooden beams that run from wall to wall at the base of the ceiling. A three-foot-wide fire burns in the center.

A few people bustle around--sons of Passaconaway and their wives and children--eating, talking, cleaning.

Keme sits by the fire, spooning a bowl of stewed meat into his mouth and talking to a YOUNG CHILD, around eight.

AUNTIE enters. AUNTIE, ACHANACK, and his WIFE are all middle to old aged.

AUNTIE

Keme! Kanti asked for you.

Keme chokes on his food. The onlookers laugh.

YOUNG CHILD

Oooooo.

KEME

(coughing)

Do you know what she wants, auntie?

ACHANACK

When you'll marry her, most likely.

A few more chuckles.

ACHANACK'S WIFE

Quiet, Achanack.

AUNTIE

You best ask her. And finish your food.

Keme throws the rest in his mouth and runs out. Achanack's wife shakes her head at her husband, though she grins.

EXT. PENNACOOK VILLAGE - RIVERSIDE - MOMENTS LATER

Keme and KANTI, a girl of eighteen, lounge side-by-side under the birch tree.

Keme pulls a flowery weed from the grass next to him and braids it into Kanti's hair.

KEME

You made a pretty big scene with my family.

KANTI

I'm sorry--I couldn't find you. I heard about the debate.

KEME

You disappointed in me? That I
couldn't keep to myself?

KANTI

I guess... I expected as much, but
hoped you'd surprise me.

KEME

It's harder than it sounds.

KANTI

(teasing)

Then you must work that much harder
to learn.

Keme laughs.

KEME

Yes, teacher. Thank you for your
wisdom.

Kanti kisses him; Keme lets his elbows fall so he lies in the
grass, choosing to weave his hands into her hair instead.

A little too suddenly, his smile darkens. He pulls away.
Kanti watches warily, but he stares only at the night sky,
eyes lost in the distant stars.

KEME (CONT'D)

Do you think I'll make a good
chief?

KANTI

Of course I do.

KEME

Does your family?

Kanti lays down with Keme, using his chest as a pillow.

KANTI

It depends on who you ask. My
father does, and my mother...
but...

KEME

Others said you're degrading
yourself with me.

KANTI

No one I value the opinion of.

Keme closes his eyes and takes a deep breath of the night air.

KEME

I hear whispering everywhere I go.
Harsh whispering. Now, I know
they're about me.

Kanti searches for something to say but comes up with nothing.

KEME (CONT'D)

Father said I need to be a great
chief to earn their respect.

KANTI

Then you know what to do.

KEME

But, who can tell me if I'm good
enough?

KANTI

Wonalancet, Chief Passaconaway, the
elders, the shamans...

KEME

But, how will I know they're
telling me the whole truth?

KANTI

You have to trust them.

KEME

Trust those who think I'll fail, or
lied to me for twenty-two summers?

Kanti pulls herself up. Keme stares after her.

She wades into the river. She finds round, smooth stone the size of her palm in the clear water and picks it up from the bank.

Kanti returns to Keme with the stone and holds it out to him.

KANTI

This stone started like the others,
jagged and rough and raw. But, it
gave itself to the river, and,
though it changed, the changes
smoothed it.

(MORE)

KANTI (CONT'D)

Though the river battered it in storms and pushed it to strange places, it gave itself to the river and was rewarded for its faith.

Keme takes the stone from her. His fingers curl around it.

KEME

You're saying I should listen to the Elders, even if they've hurt me.

KANTI

I'm saying to make sure that whatever course you take will make you better in the long term, even if it hurts at first.

Keme continues to stare at the stone under Kanti's gaze.

After a moment, he lays the stone beside him, and puts his hand back in her hair, the tips of his fingers graze the petals of the braided weed. Her face glows in the moonlight.

KEME

Kanti, will you marry me?

KANTI

You could've had me two years ago. Why ask now?

KEME

I'm a child. If I want respect, I have to be a man. You always lead me to the right path; you'll make sure I always follow the smoothing current.

She takes her time to answer. Even though she's clearly stringing him along, Keme gets more nervous with each passing second.

KANTI

I would be honored to serve as your wife.

Keme laughs with relief.

KEME

"Serve as my wife?"

KANTI

It sounded most official.

KEME

You sound as though you've
practiced.

KANTI

Who's to say I haven't?

Keme leans in to kiss her again.