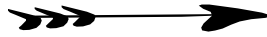


Build a fire under them. When it gets hot enough, they'll move.ⁱ

~Andrew Jackson



Citizen

For those of us at One Who Knows' Place in The Maple Forest, it's almost easy to forget the world outside our garden walled around wrapped up as we are with the business of life being mothers, fathers, daughters, sons, sisters, brothers, leaders, and friends. The crops, those we grow and those that grow wild in our wood, begin to make their early appearance. We look forward to the gift they will give us with their bounty that'll keep us fed through the coming winter and chase away the season of starving that every early springtime brings. For the women, the tending of our fields and the foraging in the forests is a time for laughter and gossip besides the hard work of it all. Work is always easier with a friend at your side.

It rarely happens to me but every now and then my white self makes a surprise visit in my head and I find myself watching the world I live in and call home with something akin to wonder and just a bit of amazement. It's like unexpected lamplight late on a dark, moonless night. I suppose it ain't that unusual given that I lived my first fourteen years of life as the only daughter of Andrew and Elizabeth Graves. The white part of me still carries Pa's wise words in my head and still remembers the music of my little brother Eli's laughter. The *little* white girl in me still has moments when it misses the comfort of Ma's prayers. I think about my brother, Henry. Where is he? Is he well? Is he safe? At one point in my life I thought he was dead, too, only to discover that not to be so. Now I worry again for his safety. The only thing that I know of my brother is that he joined the Army. After Pa and Eli were killed. After I was taken. After the farm was lost. After he had nothing left.

I wonder sometimes if Ma, Pa, and Eli can see me? For the Real People, to mention someone who has passed on to the spirit world is never done. What if they hear you and return?

The red world I live in lives only for the day we are in. We never speak of the past or the people that are no longer with us and we do not worry for the future. If we keep things right and orderly *now* then all things will be as they should be.

But I do worry. I guess that's the white part of me. And I suspect that Great Elk, the leader of our tribe, and his mate, War Woman, work to keep things *right and orderly* now in the village because they know just how wrong things can become. Safe as we are in our little village that my mate, Bright Feather, and I like to call our *garden walled around*, there are those who would do us great harm. Red and White. Aside from our regular visits with Deer – whether it's us going to him or him coming to us – we hear little of the outside world. But visits to Deer and his family at their Trading Post give us all a glimpse of this world and not a speck of it's pretty. It's a world that we cannot truly put aside and forget, for to do that would mean nothing but bad things for us. I wonder sometimes, is that why Deer and I – both with white faces but red hearts - were brought here to be a part of this village? Maybe that's what Reverend Wilder and Miss Rebecca meant when they said to me so long ago, "Perhaps we can teach The Real People how to survive in a white world *and* teach The Real People of God's Great Love and Faithfulness ...". Perhaps this white God of Great Love and Faithfulness looked at these people that have become *my people* and thought, "Maybe I'll send them down a bit of help." It's a puzzle to me, though, how one white trader and one almost eighteen year old girl is going to make much difference.

But that's my white head talking. Thankfully, it makes appearances only on the odd occasion. For the red part of me knows what a powerful woman I've become. I'm a mate, a mother, a daughter, a sister, and a friend. I can hunt and ride and even hold my own with a knife. I can start a fire from scratch, track a deer through the bush and have survived on my own in the wilderness *in the winter pregnant with my son, Storm*. I've been in a passel of right difficult circumstances and managed to keep a clear and level head (along with what some would call a smart lip). I've discovered as my Indian mother One Who Knows has told me (although she would be quick to tell you that some things take a while to get into my thick skull) that I was always a powerful woman, even before I knew it. I'm Bear, daughter of One Who Knows, of the Elk clan of the Real People of the Maple Forest and the mate of Bright Feather, son of War Woman of the Wolf clan and Great Elk, chief of the Real People of the Maple Forest. And mighty proud of it.

Our village is like a bear trap in the autumn woods. Covered with the beautiful colors that the trees change into just before their winter's sleep, a bear trap is mighty harmless unless you make the mistake of stepping into it. On the surface, we are a quiet Indian village situated in The Maple Forest in a place the whites would call Virginia. Quiet that is as long as you don't think about the collection of caves that are carefully readied and prepared and continually restocked and supplied. Things are fine as long as you don't notice the stock of new rifles that a number of the braves in our village now proudly count as part of their weapon's collection (including Bright Feather, Raccoon and Red Fox) and you don't count the large accumulation of arrows that are carefully maintained as well. And there's nothing to worry about as long as you don't listen too closely to discussions each night at the council circle, with or without Deer present, about the various governments of the white people that continually try to knock at our paper treaty walls and test their strength.

At the end of the spring, in the second summer after my son Storm's birth, we are invited, via a messenger from Dark Cloud's village, to travel to a meeting which will be attended by all those red and white who have interests – *good or bad* – in The Real People and the land they claim to be theirs. We suspect, as we discuss things in the council circle over many nights, that the invitation is specifically at Beaver's insistence. Having left the Maple Forest unhappy with choices made by those in the council, he has chosen a different path. *We walk a different path to get to the same place.* As a whole, The Nation of The Real People seems to have enough on their minds without concerning themselves with our band that has chosen to no longer be a part of their mighty struggles. Contact with Beaver, Bright Feather's brother, over the past two years has consisted almost completely of indirect messages from those who have had dealings with him. It's our job to sort through and find the truth of the things we hear.

From Deer we know that things in the state of Georgia have only gotten worse for The Nation of The Real People. I'm amazed to read an advertisement that he has secured from a traveler that advertises the Georgia Land Lottery – land belonging to The Real People. It promises land lots, rich and fertile, varying in size from 40 acre gold lots, with no guarantee of profit, to large 490 acre spreads, with minimal water access. Applicants interested in participating in the seven drawings which are to be held in variously listed locations across the state had to be white, males over 18, or widows or orphans.

I sit in the council circle and listen to the discussion about the reasons we should or should not attend the meeting. At last, I organize my thoughts enough to say something. It's unusual for me to talk at council circle times. It's not that I'm frightened or feel unwelcome to do so, it's more that until now, the council circle has been a great learning time for me and I've been content with that. I now am comfortable with the workings of the village and those who make the decisions. I now am familiar with the personalities around the fire and the sometimes strong opinions that hold up that individual. I now find that while I've always had my own opinions and beliefs, I now have a pile of experience to back them all up and I know that I've earned the respect of many people in the village and they're ready to listen to me.

"I think that there is no other choice but to go to New Echota," I say finally after the last person has expressed an opinion.

War Woman looks across at me and she seems almost to have an expression that says, *At last.* "Why do you feel that is so, Bear?"

I've already thought of my reasons, so I speak right away. "To stay here in the village, perhaps hoping that we will be forgotten in all the arguing, is as unlikely as one being able to forget a tick silently but fiercely embedded in your skin. Sooner or later the tick's presence is so annoying you must dig it out no matter how deeply it is embedded.

"Also, in desperate times, people do desperate things. My presence here in this village is proof enough of that. I do not want to be sitting here silently and tensely waiting for The Nation of The Real People and The Government of the United States to settle their disagreements with each other, uninformed and unprepared. You are listening to someone who more than once over the course of her life has been used by others as a weapon, a pawn, and even as bait. I was innocent and

uninformed in most cases and yet more than once my life was put in grave danger simply because I was in the wrong place at the wrong time. Should The Nation of The Real People or the Government of the United States get truly desperate, don't for one moment think that they will not look in our direction.

"Why wait? I say we show our strength, our intelligence, and our unity by making a show at this meeting. In doing so, they will remember not only that we are smart and capable, but they will also see that we are different from the others. We do not need to show them everything, but perhaps, like a rattler shakes his tail in warning before he strikes, we can make enough noise to make them think twice should they look at us and decide we are in the right place at the wrong time.

"And the opportunity to study our enemies with our own eyes will carry more weight than *any* words of *any* person could." I look around the circle at the serious faces listening to my words and suppress the urge to giggle all of a sudden that *my* words should carry *any* weight with this experienced group of elders. I shrug instead and flash them a smile, "I am finished speaking."

It's decided that a delegation from our village will travel to New Echota, Georgia. I'm chosen to go for my language skills and that automatically includes Storm for he's still nursing and Bright Feather for we will hold fast to our promise, *Never, ever again will we be separated. We will travel together and face our challenges together. Never again will we let life break us apart.* I'm surprised to learn that Great Elk will travel with us too, as well as the two braves that originally traveled with Red Fox, Young Wolf and Spring Frog. I study the group around the fire and think, *Our strength and our intelligence* and yet am pleased to know how much strength and intelligence still wait behind to care for and defend our village.

We travel out one hot, summer day not more than a week after the decision. Storm is beside himself with excitement shouting and calling and waving to anyone who will return the enthusiasm. I'm excited about the journey, too, I realize as I have time to think over the course of the nine days we travel. I go to this place not as a captive this time, but of my own free will as a mate, daughter, mother, and sister of The Real People of the Maple Forest. I realize that even my white skin is no longer something to cause me fear, for I now know that my white life as Elle Graves is safely settled and stored away like all of my other memories of Ma, Pa, Eli and Henry in my Hope Chest spot in my head. I look forward to seeing Miss Rebecca and Reverend Wilder and wonder, will Major Everett be there if the Army will be present? I wonder how I will be received by Dark Cloud this time and will his behavior toward me be filled with hatred for the role he knows I must have played in the death of one of his sons? I remember New Echota and its very odd mix of red and white and wonder what changes three years will have brought?

It seems that New Echota has made the most of the three years since I was last there. As we ride into town down the wide main street, I recognize the large building that had been the school, meeting place and church all in one and the two small wooden buildings that had been the Wilders' and Dark Cloud's home. But even those buildings have gone through great change.

The large building now bears a sign that says, 'New Echota Council House and Supreme Court'. The Wilder's small cabin is now obviously a general store and Dark Cloud's home is now a printing office, 'Home of the Cherokee Phoenix Newspaper.' The Mission School and what must be

the dreamed of dormitory building that could sleep many is in full use. Standing next to the school is an obvious church, tall wooden spire included. There are so many people walking about town that our arrival causes no particular notice at all. The realities of the way things are gradually sinks in. *No one* comes and goes in Great Elk's village without note.

There are soldiers everywhere. While the large fields of crops are no longer as visible as they once were due to all the new buildings, I can see a vast encampment of white army tents just on the outskirts of town. The field I can see, far off in the distance, has a large white home standing proudly amidst the growing produce. As I watch the press of people it's hard to tell who there are the most of: Indian, white, or soldiers.

"Do you have any suggestion where to go?" I hear Bright Feather murmur close to me and I realize that we all are sitting in awe of what we see. As I scan the village – no, I correct myself, *This is not a village, it's a town!*, I spy a familiar figure coming out of the mission school, turning to walk the road away from the city. Wide as she is tall, with her basket of school books held in her arm, Rebecca Wilder is one person that seems to have changed little at first glance.

"We will go to the Council House," Great Elk says, and I realize he's perhaps more familiar with the *town* than I am from what Young Wolf and Spring Frog have told him. "Do you join us?"

I nod my head in the direction of Miss Rebecca's departing wide back. "That is someone I know from my time last here. I would like to go speak with her." I smile at Bright Feather and Storm sitting looking at me with the same curious expression and I feel a rush of love that makes me breathless for a moment.

"That is Miss Rebecca," Bright Feather says, having heard all my stories and descriptions from my time here before. He looks at his father and the other two braves. "We will join you later." They nod and ride off.

My first glance at her makes me think that little has changed, but as I draw closer it seems that the spring in her step and the same breathless enthusiasm and energy has dimmed a bit. When I'm close enough, I dismount Willow and walk holding onto the reins.

"Miss Rebecca?" I say at last, and even the fact that she seems unaware of my approaching presence does not seem in character I realize.

In those first few moments as she turns and looks at me, I know that she does not recognize me. Have I changed so much I wonder as I allow her to study me, a white woman who looks very, *very* much like a savage Indian maid? My permanent chin marks are new, my hair is longer, but my dress and horse are the same. Even my shape has returned to my former premotherhood size. She looks unafraid but still unsure.

"It's Bear, Miss Rebecca. I stayed with you and Reverend Wilder a few years back ..." at the mention of Reverend Wilder's name she seems to become more alert and at last her eyes truly focus on me and I know that at last she remembers me.

"Bear ..." and a slow smile spreads across her face. "Oh forgive me, Bear, for not recognizing you and greeting you right away!" And then the full force of her greeting settles on me as I'm pulled into a crushing, sweat-damp hug. After a few moments, she pulls back. As she wipes

tears away with a crumpled handkerchief she draws out from her sleeve, she looks around, “Why are you here, Bear ...?”

I look to Bright Feather and a wriggling Storm only a short distance away. “I come with my mate and son and the chief of my village, who is also my mate’s father, to attend the meetings that it seems everyone else is here to attend as well.” I smile at the noise and confusion that seems to be in all directions and she, too, looks around at the bustling town, seeming to look at it almost with the same wonder as I am.

“Your mate? Your son?” she looks all around at first not seeming to comprehend that my mate and son could be the fierce Indian brave sitting proudly on his horse holding the squirming Indian baby with silky black hair and big dark eyes. At my glance, Bright Feather slowly begins riding toward us.

“May I introduce you, Miss Rebecca, to my mate, Bright Feather, son of War Woman of the Wolf clan, son of Great Elk, chief of the Real People of the Maple Forest.” Bright Feather stops Companion and nods his head respectfully.

I feel Miss Rebecca start, when he says to her in clear, perfect English, “How do you do, Miss Rebecca?”

“GET DOWN,” Storm says in Indian, but whose meaning is clear to everyone as he squirms to get out of Bright Feather’s arms. I reach up and take him.

“And this is my son, Storm Eli,” I say and grin a proud mother’s grin.

“GET DOWN,” Storm says again and wriggles out of my arms to begin exploring wherever his feet will take him.

Miss Rebecca studies the three of us for a brief moment. She can’t resist and bends down to Storm’s level. “Well hello,” she says to us, but clearly enchanted with Storm who immediately toddles over to her and begins inspecting her basket. “Welcome to New Echota,” she says as she reaches up to tenderly touch Storm’s head bent in concentration over the treasures he’s searching for. She looks to me and then to Bright Feather as he dismounts from Companion. “Our cabin is down the road from here. Won’t you come along and enjoy some refreshments?”

“We would be delighted,” I say.

I hear Bright Feather say to Storm, “Come, let’s help Miss Rebecca carry her basket back to her place,” and I feel compelled to link my arm in hers and begin walking.

The new cabin that Miss Rebecca calls home is just a short walking distance from the new mission school and dormitory. It’s not much larger, but she explains that it was quieter than being in the center of town. “As the town grew, it became obvious that the old cabin could be used for business purposes and we could enjoy a bit more quiet and privacy away from the hustle and bustle.” She serves Bright Feather and me a cool glass of apple cider and offers Storm some early strawberries. He sits happily at my feet making a terrific mess of himself and her clean floor. “The town is not always so busy as you see it today. When big meetings are not scheduled, things are much more quiet.” She studies me for a moment. “But probably busier than you remember.”

She’s much more quiet I think as I study her. I remember that breathless energy that she and Reverend Wilder had when I was last here. “Tell me of the school,” I say.

Flashes of her excited old self flash to the surface as she talks. “Oh, the school is just magnificent! It was just being built when you were last here, wasn’t it?” She asks me and I nod, ‘yes’. “James has worked tirelessly to promote the importance of spiritual salvation and literacy among the Cherokee. He has been friends for many years with a brilliant young Cherokee man named Pig’s Foot and -”

I can’t help myself. “*Pig’s Foot?*” I interrupt. “He’s named Pig’s Foot?”

“I have heard of him,” Bright Feather speaks for the first time and he speaks in English as a courtesy to Miss Rebecca. “His name is because he was born with feet that look like those of a pig.” He says all this as if it makes perfect sense to him and as I look at him he shrugs his shoulders. “He’s the one that writes talking leaves.”

“*Talking leaves?*” I say now as I look at both of them.

Miss Rebecca can’t help herself and she smiles and laughs a small laugh. “Many whites call Pig’s Foot, ‘George Gist’, but I know he has always preferred his Indian name and so I call him by it.” She looks at me with a little twinkle in her eye. “I’d prefer George Gist though!

“The talking leaves that Bright Feather speaks of is the Cherokee language in written form.” She frowns at me. “You have not heard of it?” I must shake my head ‘no’. She stands up and goes beside the bed and picks up a newspaper and hands it to me. *Half* of it I can read, for it’s written in English. The other half *has* to be the language of the Real People for I realize as I stare at the unfamiliar shapes that it looks exactly to my eyes what the sounds sounded like to my ears in the first months as a captive; a tangled unintelligible mess.

“You knew of this?” I ask Bright Feather.

“Deer spoke of it one of the last times I saw him, although neither of us has had the chance to see the actual writing. Deer feels that it is a great progressive step for The Nation of The Real People as a means of communication.” He looks at Miss Rebecca. “I understand that it is very easy to learn by anyone who already speaks the language.”

She nods her head enthusiastically. “Yes, here, look!” Bright Feather leans over my shoulder as we look at the paper and she speaks the sounds and points to the shapes that correspond. She no longer struggles with the words as she did the last time I saw her. It’s amazing to me to see the language before me on a written page. “There are eighty six symbols that must be learned and once they are mastered, you are virtually able to read almost immediately.

“James was very passionate about the newspaper and is good friends with the editor, Elias Boudinot. They’ve known each other since college times up north. James felt that if he could achieve a level of literacy within the tribe, then he could spread God’s Word to them as well. He has been actively working on translating major portions of the Bible into Cherokee. The newspaper has been a grand success these past years. The first issue was February 28, 1828,” she says with great pride. As I go to hand the paper back to her she says, “Please, keep it.

“Between the newspaper, the church, the school, the translating, the building, and,” she chuckles, “at times he serves even as the local doctor, James was busier than five men! The Cherokee call him Messenger, you know. He was very proud to receive that name ...” She grows silent and seems at a loss for words for a moment. Gradually, her face crumples and she begins to

cry great gulping sobs. Bright Feather and I look at each other. Storm, all red and sticky from the strawberries, stands up and toddles over to Miss Rebecca and I cringe at the strawberry stains that are added to the pattern of her skirt.

“Lady cry?” Storm asks. “Lady sad?” She snuffles and searches for her handkerchief again. She smiles down at Storm’s concerned face and touches the top of his silky head and cups his fat cheek in her palm. She then takes a deep breath as she meets first my and then Bright Feather’s concerned faces.

He’s dead, my mind flashes all of a sudden and I feel a great sorrow for the loss of this good man and for this loving woman who is left to travel on the path of this life without him. “I’m sorry for your loss,” I say to her but the words feel empty and useless as I hear them.

She realizes the conclusions we have come to and waves her hand as she blows her nose. “He’s not dead,” she finally says to us. “but he may as well be. He’s been sentenced to four years of hard labor at the Georgia State Penitentiary” As Bright Feather and I exchange shocked looks she says, “I miss him *so*,” and she dissolves into loud sobs again.

I decide, reminded of my comforting times at Jane West’s home, to make Miss Rebecca a cup of tea while she makes every effort to pull herself together. As she sips on her tea and Storm has an afternoon snack courtesy of my breasts, the story gradually is told.

“Georgia and the United States Government want to be rid of all Indians east of the Mississippi,” she begins. “The Georgia state legislature officially adopted a policy of forcible Indian removal right after President Jackson passed the Indian Removal Act more than two years ago.” She looks at us with sad eyes. “This year, Georgia began a Land Lottery in which *white* would-be settlers, pay a small fee for the opportunity to take a chance and draw a parcel of land *free for the taking*. It’s not free for the taking, it’s Indian land. Land owned and settled by the Cherokees. The state has already passed laws that say no Indian can cause a white man to be brought to court and no legal documents can be considered valid if signed by an Indian. Those Indians whose land will be drawn in the lottery cannot even defend themselves when the new owners arrive to take possession.” She looks out the window and says very quietly, “Leave on your own or we’ll make you leave. That’s the choice.

“Georgia has been incensed for a long time that the Cherokees have written their own constitution and set up their own form of government.” She smiles a proud smile. “The Nation of the Cherokee have become quite a force to be reckoned with you see; establishing a government modeled after the white man, developing a written language, electing powerful leaders. Now add in the fact that *gold* has been discovered on Cherokee lands! Not only are there whites who have no land and want some, now there are whites who already have some land, but want some *with gold in it*. For the Georgia Government, success of the Cherokees and the establishment of their own government was tantamount to the Cherokees dismissing Georgia and their authority.” She shrugs. “Which I guess they were.

“When Georgia passed a law requiring all whites – missionaries included – to get a license to work on Native American lands, that was the last straw for James. You see,” she explains, “in requesting from the white government the permission to operate on Indian lands, the hierarchy of

authority is clearly established. In other words, if Indians cannot give permission as to who or what is occurring on their lands, then obviously the land in reality is not theirs after all.”

Miss Rebecca smiles a tired smile and looks at me. “You can imagine James’ reaction to all of this. Oh, the fury!! We prayed and prayed as to what to do and were very gratified when our very own mission board took a strong stance *against* the state and federal policies. James and a number of other missionaries in the area drafted an official resolution of protest against the laws of the Georgia state assembly and published them right up the road at our very own printing office. In it James, *of course*, refuted the authority of the state to require permission of whites to continue working and living on Cherokee lands. In his opinion, which I share, he had already received the permission from the Cherokee leaders and would not seek permission elsewhere.” Lost in thought, she says softly, “Twelve brave men of the cloth signed that document.”

She’s quiet for many moments, and I stand and carefully lay a sleeping Storm on Miss Rebecca’s bed in the corner. “The militia arrived not long after the resolution was published and arrested James and all the others who had signed the protest.”

She sighs a world weary tired sigh. “It was a quick trial. All of the men were sentenced to four years of hard labor. Their lawyers appealed and brought the case to the State Supreme Court and did such a wonderful job, that we actually won! The Supreme Court of the State of Georgia ruled that the Cherokee Nation was independent and all dealings with them fell under the federal jurisdiction that had been originally established.”

I look at Bright Feather and he looks at me, unable to understand the way of things. “Then why is Reverend Wilder still in prison?” I ask puzzled.

“The governor of Georgia *and* President Andrew Jackson chose to ignore the Supreme Court’s rulings. All but two of the men charged *have* been released. I suspect, because James is so eloquent and forceful with his words, that they chose to keep him imprisoned rather than setting him free to continue talking and writing inflammatory newspaper articles. James has been in the penitentiary doing hard labor for over a year now. I have not seen him since last fall.”

She sits at the table and looks out the small window of her cabin. “I had a terrible time in those early months. I couldn’t even seem to get out of bed. I laid there,” she looks at Storm’s sleeping form and smiles, “and thought, I shall just lie here until I die.”

She gets up and collects the cups which she carries over to the wash basin. “What kind of example would *that* have been? I thought of you, then, Bear. I remembered those months you were here and all of a sudden I knew how you had felt to be separated from those you loved and cared for. I understood the feeling of powerlessness and the frustrations of just wanting to make everything right again. It was bitter medicine to swallow some of the words I had so glibly told you ...” She turns and looks at me. “I agonized over whether I had ever provided you any true comfort while you were here, not really understanding what you were going through. At some point, I realized that after this time of trial, I would be better able to minister to those suffering from loneliness and despair and heartache. I knew that I would be better in the end for all of this sorrow and that to just lie here and let everything fade away was a travesty to all the hard work and answered prayers that James and I had experienced.

“That made me realize that *we know that all things work together for good to them that love God, to them who are the called according to His purpose.*”ⁱⁱ I lay there in that bed and thought of the love that James and I shared, and the many blessings that Our Wonderful Lord had bestowed upon us, and I looked at all of the tremendous things that James and I had accomplished by God’s faithful grace and mercy. There was no doubt in my mind that I was one of those *who had been called according to His purpose*. So I got out of bed, made sure I always had a handkerchief ready for when the tears come, and went back to teaching and working here in town. I pray for James and his health and state of mind *every single moment that I can spare*. I know he does the same for me. Just because I can’t hold his hand does not mean that he is outside of my embrace.

“While you are in town, you will stay here,” she says to Bright Feather and I in a tone that does not offer any discussion on the matter. “Bright Feather, I suggest you make your way into town and establish your presence here with Dark Cloud and the other leaders. Bear and I will get dinner started.”

I look at Bright Feather and grin. I guess he’s been told. He stands and says, “I thank you for your kindnesses to Bear when she was here last. You said that you worried that you had not provided her any true comfort while she was here. She has told me of the time she spent with you and Reverend Wilder. She spoke with great love and respect of the two of you. We have talked many nights of the things you shared with her, of this God that you can talk to even in just your thoughts and who had such a great love for all of us that He was willing to sacrifice His son for us.” He looks at Storm sleeping peacefully on her bed and places a hand on my shoulder. “You can be assured that Bear’s time here with you and your husband *was* full of comfort and peace, strong enough to follow her home to our village and still work within our home and hearth even up to this day. Sometimes the greatest gifts one person can give another is nothing the eye can see.” He gives her a gift of one of his rare smiles and quotes Isaac Watts, *Yet, Lord, thy saints on earth may reap, some profit by the good we do; these are the company I keep, these are the choicest friends I know.*ⁱⁱⁱ”

I laugh at Miss Rebecca as she sits there in stunned silence, looking at this fierce Indian savage quoting to her Christian hymns in perfect English. At last, she manages, “Was that Isaac Watts you just quoted to me?”

Bright Feather nods. “Bear has taught me English to speak and Isaac Watts has taught me English to read.” He touches my cheek and walks out the door saying over his shoulder, “We will be back in time to eat with you.”

Once he leaves, she looks at me and finally said. “You taught James and I things, too, while you were here. You taught us to appreciate the culture of the Indians and to understand that it is just as greatly involved and important to them as ours is to us. You taught us that we must approach them as intellectual equals rather than uncivilized savages. I learned from you something that every successful missionary must know and understand, but that we are rarely taught during our schooling and preparations: Everyone on this vast earth is part of God’s great design and plan without consideration to race or nationality or even gender. We are all just at different spots along the way. Once I stopped thinking that only I had something valuable to teach them, and realized that it should be more importantly an equal sharing between us, I was accepted and felt a part of this wonderful

Nation. Just like you now, Bear, I am a little more pink than white I think.” She laughs as she looks down at herself. “But all my pink is on the inside.”

I insist on sharing some of the food we have brought along in our pack. There’s dried venison and some herbs that One Who Knows has insisted I bring along to cook with or to trade. Miss Rebecca and I set about preparing a meal for the six of us, plus Storm. Over dinner, she asks me many questions and I fill her in on my time with The Real People of The Maple Forest. It feels good to tell her *everything* now and not have to be careful to guard my words. I tell her of my first capture and my early time in Great Elk’s village. I tell her of my second capture and how it was that I arrived at her doorstep three years ago. I tell her of my time with the Coopers and my fears of giving birth and how quickly my prayers were answered. I tell her of Major Everett’s many kindnesses and my time at Fort Winston. I do not tell her of my time with Weasel and my rescue by Bright Feather and Raccoon and she does not ask. Some things are just better left unsaid.

“Alexander was to be here for this meeting,” she says. “but he has once again traveled to the Georgia Penitentiary to discuss James’ release. He has done everything in his power to secure James’ release and is greatly frustrated at his lack of success. Poor boy, he has had almost as much trouble with this as I have.”

Great Elk tells us, and I translate for Miss Rebecca, as we all talk over dinner, that our arrival here is a great surprise, but we are not unwelcome. In another two weeks time, at a time when the corn is to reach it’s highest height, a meeting is to be held in which all parties will discuss the path that The Nation of The Real People should take. At that time, all people who have any opinions will be given the opportunity to speak and a decision will be proposed and voted on.

Bright Feather, Storm and I set up camp in a nearby grassy meadow behind Miss Rebecca’s place. We politely decline her hospitable invitation to sleep in her cabin. The heat, cramped quarters, and Storm all combine to make it a most unappealing prospect. She seems content with our close proximity and the apparent ease in which we seem to adjust to this temporary outdoor life. *Little does she know*, I think to myself. Great Elk, Young Wolf and Spring Frog find places elsewhere in the town to stay.

Beaver is nowhere to be seen. Careful questions reveal that although he’s well known, he’s not someone that’s considered a permanent inhabitant of the town. Bright Feather and I are not surprised at this and we discuss among ourselves whether he will even be present for the meeting in two weeks.

“I cannot see Beaver attending council meetings here very regularly,” he says. “Knowing his opinions, they are even too far in the direction of the Old Ways for even John Ross.” I must agree.

My first encounter with Dark Cloud, in my opinion, goes well. The five of us attend an evening council meeting a few nights after our arrival. Miss Rebecca, as taken with Storm as he is with her, has agreed to care for him while we go. I sit between Bright Feather, Great Elk, Young Wolf and Spring Frog and I enjoy the feeling of peace and security that seems to flow through my body seated between these fierce Indian braves. *You cannot harm me*, my thoughts sing over and over again as Dark Cloud makes every effort to ignore my presence.

The feel of the council meeting is different than it was last time I was there. There's a clear division between the two leaders, Dark Cloud and this John Ross we have heard about. John Ross is not anything like I would have expected. He looks nothing like any Indian I've ever seen; short in stature and without the slightest bit of Indian features anywhere, from the top of his head to the tip of his toes. Sitting near Dark Cloud around the large meeting table, his tiny size, compared to Dark Cloud's looming presence, could almost be funny. But what he lacks in size is more than made up for when you hear him speak. I'm mesmerized by the way he handles each and every person and topic that's brought up. This is a man that's intelligent, shrewd, and focused. I cannot imagine *anything* stopping him in his quest to secure what is best for his people. This council meeting is filled with tension and anger. I think of children fighting: No you did not! Did to! Did not! John Ross handles things well, however, for those who acknowledge Dark Cloud as the preferred leader, there's only so much he can do.

Dark Cloud, in contrast to John Ross, seems the same sly, self-assured person. Although all present, except ourselves, are in proper white man clothes, Dark Cloud's heritage as an Indian leader, chief, and brave seems to seep out of him from every pore. He seems to communicate that he knows a secret and that he has all the answers and he's not going to tell it to anyone until he's good and ready. The division between the groups is evident at almost every level; where people sit, how people speak to each other; and what opinions come out of each person's mouth. If only these two forces could work together rather than apart, I think to myself.

I distinguish *Elias* whom Miss Rebecca has referred to and who must be the editor of the tribe newspaper. When he speaks, he does it with care and choice words. He seems one of the few in the meeting that has not chosen to be part of one side or the other. Bright Feather points out Young Snake, Weasel's brother and the one who I remember Deer saying was present with the military when they took the census of the tribes back in 1818. He, of all the people in the council meeting that night, is the only one who makes direct eye contact with me. It's the only time I feel a bit frightened.

There are soldiers present at the council meeting. Important ones, I suspect for they have ribbons and buttons and all manner of fancy bits on their uniforms and seem to carry themselves with a certain air that makes you want to sit up straight and look serious. More than once I know they glance at me, the odd white girl surrounded by Indian braves, but try very hard to not let me see that they do.

We fall into a routine and by the end of the second week, I regularly spend mornings with Miss Rebecca in the school helping her with her teaching responsibilities while Bright Feather cares for Storm. In the afternoon, while Miss Rebecca deals with the many aspects of her and Reverend Wilder's other responsibilities in the town, we are left to our own plans. I'm unsure whether word has been spread regarding me and my history or that the town is just so busy and full with all manner of people from all walks of life that no one thinks much of a white woman in Indian dress. No one seems to take much notice of me and that suits me just fine. We visit the General Store on occasion and Miss Rebecca insists that we have a tour of the newspaper office, but we do not have the opportunity to meet Mr. Elias Boudinot. I do avoid the areas that seem to attract the most soldiers

and find a private space to bathe and do my domestic chores like collecting water and cleaning clothes. Still, the high activity of the place keeps me careful and I work hard to draw as little attention to myself as possible. Aside from the occasional council meetings we attend (unlike Great Elk who attends them every night), we decide to keep quiet and out of the main view of things as much as possible.

Walking home, after my school time with Miss Rebecca one hot early afternoon, my thoughts are interrupted by the sounds of horses approaching. The jangle of metal and loud laughter and voices can only mean one thing: soldiers. I move to the side of the road, keep my head down and pick up my pace.

“Well, lookie what we have here!” I hear and I keep *walking just a bit faster*.

“Ain’t this the white woman that seems to prefer dressin’ and livin’ like an Injun squaw?”

“That’s her. Even got herself an *Injun husband* and *Injun brat* by him, too, I hear.”

“That’s disgusting. Tain’t natural. It revolts me to just think about it.”

“Can’t rightly tell though with her head down and such. Hey, Injun squaw! Do ya speak English? Be respectful to your *superiors* and look at me when I’m talking to you. Let’s have a look at you so we can do introductions proper like.”

What do I do? my mind thinks. *Ignore them, keep walking.*

“Hey! Now that ain’t polite now is it? We’re trying to have a neighborly conversation and she’s just being plain rude. Stop her, Jimmy.” My path is suddenly blocked by an enormous horse. I stare at the shiny boots and the blue uniform trousers. I take a deep breath. I stand there and wait.

“What’s a matter, girly?” A voice says to me full of amusement and fun and *unkindness*. “Why won’t you have a neighborly chit-chat with us here by the side of the road? We’re just trying to have a *conversation* with you. You gave up your white life it seems, don’t tell me you can’t no longer speak the white language? Why have you chosen the Injun way of life over the white one anyway? Never found a white man to keep you happy I suspect ...” There’s snickering laughter. “Why, just spend a few moments with me and I’ll show you what you’re missing and change your mind back right quick ...” More laughter.

I take stock of things. There are four of them, all on horses. I’m unarmed except for my knife in its sheath strapped to my belt. I’m a distance from the town, almost to Miss Rebecca’s house which I know is probably empty. Even if Bright Feather is there, can he and I deal with four soldiers armed with serious weapons and filled with trouble on their minds? And then I have an awful thought. *This is Georgia*, where Indians have no rights and cannot even defend themselves in court. I must *not* go to Miss Rebecca’s, *especially* if Bright Feather is there for if there’s trouble, he will surely suffer the most for it. I’m a fast runner, but would be unable to outrun even the slowest of horses and I know I cannot make it back to town before they would catch me. That leaves the woods ...

They’re to my immediate left for I’ve stepped to the side of the road to allow the soldiers to pass. It’s not dense underbrush which is good for me should I choose to run into it, but is also good for any one chasing me on foot or on horseback.

“Cat got your tongue, squaw?” I hear in an impatient tone and one of the soldiers dismounts and begins walking towards me. I know, that once I’m in their grasp, I’m not strong enough to escape. I’ve been there before. Before he has time to take one more step towards me or I’ve time to think one more thought, I drop my basket of books and things and take off into the forest at a full run.

They seem delighted by my move. They laugh and whoop and shout like this is what they had planned all along. Three crash their horses into the woods after me while the one on foot follows close behind. I tear through the woods, my mind, heart, and legs racing. I reach for my knife and pull it out of its sheath.

A river runs behind Miss Rebecca’s property and it’s where I hike to each morning to wash and gather water for our camp. I feel the ground slope down gradual as I run and I know that we are approaching it. Branches slap my face and tear at my skirt. I loose one moccasin. I run as fast as I can through the branches and bushes and rough ground. I listen to the soldiers shout instructions to each other and try to adjust my path accordingly. When I finally fall I’m almost more angry at myself and my clumsiness than I am at the soldiers.

Breathing heavy, clutching my knife, I manage to stand as they surround me. The soldier on foot is the last one to arrive, but he’s grinning.

As he takes in great gulps of air, he surveys the wild forest all around us and looks me right in the eye. “Couldn’t of chosen a better spot, myself. Right private and *secluded*,” and I realize with great dread that he’s right. I hear the other soldiers dismounting from their horses and slowly begin walking toward me, closing in.

Now what? my brain says to me again. Beaver taught me how to use a knife in a fight, but he neglected to instruct me as to what to do when the fight involves *four soldiers*.

They all jump me at once and I’m disgusted that I do not even have the chance to draw the blood of one of them. The knife is knocked from my fingers and rough hands grab me by my arms and long braid and there’s great laughter and fun as if this is some planned celebration.

“Hold her arms!”

“Carefull! I hear squaws bite something fierce.”

“Ow! Christ! Someone grab her feet! She just kicked me.”

“Where’s that knife of hers? Make sure it’s out of reach.”

Before I know it I’m on my back, with one soldier kneeling on my braid and holding both of my arms. Two other soldiers both hold my legs. The fourth soldier, the one who did all the running, kneels between my legs and lifts my skirt. “Now let’s just see if things *down here* have changed any.”

The laughter now is different. And a trembling starts to run through me, full of fear and helplessness. *Oh Bright Feather!* I think, *Not again! Terrible trouble does seem to follow me wherever I go!*

I feel myself exposed and the laughter goes away for a moment as the one who’s pulled up my skirt says, “Nope, seems like things are *just fine* down here,” and I see him reach down to start undoing his trousers. “I’m first boys, I did the most work. Now you hold her tight. We don’t want my rhythm to get interrupted or anything ...”

As the nervous, tense laughter travels around the circle of those holding me down, I can't help myself as I look up at the one looming over me, sitting on my hair and holding my arms. His face is flushed with the chase and more so, with the prospect of what is to come. He licks his lips nervously. He's not looking at me, he's looking at the place where all the action is about to happen; between my legs. He must feel me looking at him and he briefly glances at my face.

We stare into each other's eyes for that brief moment and I think clear as a bell, *Why bello, Henry, my brother, imagine meeting you here.*

The shock on his face, quickly replaces his flush of excitement and he lets go of my arms and jumps away from me like he has just uncovered a rattlesnake. I sit up fast and without even thinking grab forward at the soldier who is still working on getting his trousers open. I grab him by the hair and pull him toward me with all my might. All chaos erupts as he topples forward and they begin shouting and cursing and I work very hard to remove the soldier's ear with my teeth.

The soldier, whose ear I hold between my teeth, is tangled and trapped, fighting to free his arms pinned beneath his own body while I work at holding him down with my free arms and concentrate on making my teeth meet. His screams are horrible and the two soldiers still holding my legs seem confused at the turn of events and can't seem to decide whether they should let go of me or not.

It's my brother Henry, that recovers his senses enough to scream, "LET GO OF HER FOR GOD'S SAKE!!" and I feel my legs released. Then I hear Henry, shouting in my ear, "Elle! Elle! FOR CHRIST'S SAKE! WHAT ARE YOU DOING?!! *LET GO.*"

I do finally let go, and the soldiers who had held my legs, help their still screaming comrade to his feet. "SHE BIT MY EAR OFF!" he screams, clutching the side of his head as blood trickles down his neck and between his fingers. "The *Injun whore* BIT MY EAR OFF!" He looks at me with tremendous fury and I know I'm closer to death than I've been in a long time.

"Actually," I say, as I wipe my mouth of his blood and spit out a rather large piece of his ear into my hand, "I only bit *part* of it off, not *all* of it." I toss the piece of ear at him and it lands with a quiet *thump* at his feet.

As he makes a lunge for me, Henry steps fast between us and puts his hand out to stop further movement. "Get a hold of yourself, Steven," he says. "Pull your self together and listen to me! *She's my sister.*" That seems to stop the rest of them in their tracks. The three of them stare at me in disbelief.

"You *said* that she was *dead* and that the *Injuns* killed her," says one of them with two missing front teeth as he continues to stand and hold his bloody friend.

"Obviously, I got it a bit wrong," I hear Henry say. I straighten my top and do my best to rearrange my skirt. I walk over to where I see my knife laying and pick it up and put it back in its sheath. I'm still breathing heavy and suddenly feel light headed and dizzy. *Great*, I think as I sit down on the ground for a minute and put my head in my hands, *now I'll faint.* I feel the prickly feeling my breasts get when my milk lets down and feel the trickle of milk dribble down my belly.

Moments pass and no one, including me, seems to know what to do. Missing Ear pulls himself together enough to button up his pants. I hear the horses munching clover they find on the

forest floor. Gradually my blood slows to a quiet enough pace that I can hear the river flowing in the distance. At last I look up and the four of them are looking at me, seeming to wait to see what I'll say or do next. I'm at a loss for words, too, but *only I've drawn blood*, I think, so I feel better for it.

I look at Henry standing with his friends. *How old must he be now?* I wonder. *Twenty - two at least*, I think, for I know him to be four years older than me. With nothing better to say, I address my brother standing tall and grown up in his military uniform. "How have these past years treated you, my brother? I hope the friends you have here are not the best you have to show for yourself."

He looks across the patch of forest at me and I'm surprised to see loathing and disgust as he answers back, "The years seem to have treated me kinder than they have *you, my sister*, since I've not sunk so low as to be an *Injun whore*."

Oh, a tired voice in my head says to me, *so that's the way it's going to be*.

I stand up and take a moment to test my head and my strength. I'm happy that there's no dizziness anymore. "So good to see you, too," I say to Henry and walk off into the forest in the direction of the river.

I take a long time to get back to Miss Rebecca's field and our little camp sight. My thoughts keep me company as I work my way down the river. I walk in the river as it's cooling and I know I leave no trail. It being high summer the river is low so the going is easy and refreshing. I listen carefully to the forest and see if it tells me that I'm being followed, but it seems that I'm alone at last.

My mind plays tricks on me and it seems that a bird calling in the tree says over and over again, "HenREE! HenREE!" I cannot believe what has happened to me over the space of just a few very, very long moments. Twice the tears build up behind my eyes and I fight them back. What good are they to me? Will they change the bruises and scratches I feel all over my body including between my legs? Will they change the look of loathing and disgust I saw on my brother's face? Will they change the awful set of events that I fear will come into play when Bright Feather and Great Elk hear what has happened?

As I near the spot in the river at Miss Rebecca's where I only this morning washed out a top of mine and gave Storm a quick bath, I decide that perhaps the best course of action might be to say nothing at all. I decide that maybe, the chase and attack and appearance of my brother is better left as an awful memory only in my own head. Surely the soldiers will say nothing. That leaves only me. But as I hike up the slope that leads to the place that we call our temporary home, I know that that'll not be possible, for not only do I see Bright Feather, mounted on Companion, but I see Miss Rebecca crying, Great Elk, Young Wolf, Spring Frog, and two cavalry soldiers all mounted and obviously ready for action. And toddling at their feet is Storm, carrying the basket I dropped in the road just before I ran into the woods.

The relief I see on Bright Feather's face cannot be put into words. He seems at one moment to be stiff, alert, and ready for battle and with the sight of me, in moments, almost unable to stay seated on Companion. In fact, he slides off quickly at the sound of my voice and the sight of me and runs the distance to me. It's almost slow motion as I watch him coming toward me and I know that what he sees does not calm his fears; I'm scratched and bleeding, my skirt is torn in many places, and as an afterthought I wonder, *Have I washed Missing Ear's blood off my mouth?*

“Bear ...” is all he can gasp out before he grabs me and crushes me to him. “We were just going out to hunt for you ...” He pulls back and holds me at arm’s length. “Are you well? Are you injured?” He touches my mouth and the dried blood. “You are bleeding ...”

“No,” I say to him, “it’s not my blood there. I’m alright but I need to sit down.” *And I need to feed Storm*, I think as my breasts tingle again.

It’s no use, I must tell them the entire story, down to the attack and finally seeing my brother as one of the men holding me down. I assure them, fearful of Bright Feather’s reaction, that Missing Ear is far more injured than I am. Miss Rebecca, all the while I talk, tends to my scrapes and cuts and provides me with a clean cloth to wipe my face. The soldiers, two cavalry officers who had just happened to be talking with Miss Rebecca when Bright Feather came tearing up the road with Storm and my dropped basket, stand silent in the background as I talk.

As I finish, one finally speaks. “We will need to know the name of your brother, Miss, er ...” he finishes lamely.

“I’m called ‘Bear,’” I say quietly. I hesitate, unsure if I want things taken any further.

“And your brother’s name, Miss, er, Bear?” he says.

“My brother’s name is Henry Graves,” I say at last. “Missing Ear should be quite easy to find. I also heard the names Steven and Jimmy.”

“Thank you,” the soldier says. “There will, of course, be an investigation. We will need you to come to the officer’s tent to give a statement. Would tomorrow be convenient?”

I sigh a great tired sigh. The prospect of traveling to the soldier part of the town, never an appealing one, now seems more than I can possibly even consider. I reach down and lift Storm into my lap and kiss the top of his downy head and enjoy the warmth of his body close to mine. He seems to be of the same mind as me and begins to make the motions to pull my top up and have a quick bit to eat.

It’s Miss Rebecca who speaks up. “We’ll do our best,” she says at last, “but perhaps it might be the day after tomorrow, eh Bear?”

I nod my head. “I’d like to feed my baby, now,” I say and don’t wait as I begin shifting my top. It’s amazing how fast some men will run at the prospect of watching a woman nurse her baby.

Bright Feather and I talk that night in the safety of our temporary shelter as Storm snores his quiet little baby snores in the corner. It’s then that the tears come as I tell him of Henry’s look of disgust and loathing and of him calling me an *Injun whore*. As I lay there beside Bright Feather, all the disappointments come crashing down on me, with the realization that things will never be as I had hoped they would be should I have found my brother. I remember Joan Foster and her barely hidden disgust to discover that I was pregnant with an Indian’s child. I remember her question to me when she thought that Deer was my brother, *Will your brother be understanding of the child do you think?* and my confident answer to her, *When I last knew my brother he was a hard working, loving ... man. I cannot see how he would reject this child of mine.* I think about how wrong I was and cry a little bit more.

Finally, Bright Feather says quiet in my ear, “Would you have changed anything about the way your life is now if you could?”

I think about all the things that have happened to me over my life, good and bad that have brought me here to be in this quiet space with a man that loves me and a healthy, happy baby besides. I think of the friends I have, white and red, and those that are my family. “No,” I finally say to Bright Feather, “there is nothing I would change.”

“Perhaps Henry cannot say that,” he says back and for the first time I must look at the world through Henry’s eyes. Loss of his entire family, failure to keep his family farm, unable to help his sister captured by savages, alone, frightened, surrounded now by strangers in the military – the only option to a penniless young man I would think. Could I have developed such a hate as he seems to have? What type of person would I be? Who could know? I feel the anger and the very large disappointment slowly fade and be replaced with great sorrow and pity for him. *My life is so much better than his and he will never know or understand that.*

I sigh and snuggle closer to Bright Feather and I feel him relax against me, knowing that my thoughts are easier in my head. “Thank you,” I say at last out loud and then I wonder, *Who am I saying that to?* I realize that it’s a prayer, for the difference between my life and Henry’s can only be through this *mercy* that Isaac Watts writes about all the time in his songs. *Thy mercy stretches o’er my head, the shadow of thy wings; my heart rejoices in thine aid, my tongue awakes and sings^{iv}.*

Two days later, with Bright Feather by my side and Storm in front of me in the saddle, we travel to the military tent that contains the commanding officer. We have decided that I’ll do all the talking and Bright Feather will observe. Our secret of his ability to speak the white word seems one better left kept between just us. As we ride through the town, past the general store and the newspaper office, I’ve a wave of homesickness for One Who Knows Place in the Maple Forest that takes my breath away. I look at Bright Feather riding straight and serious next to me and am never so glad to see him within arm’s reach. He glances over at me and quick as a flash winks at me. *I love you*, I think to him.

“I am First Lieutenant William Dawes,” the officer says to me as I’m escorted into his tent. “Thank you for coming,” and he ruffles through the papers on the table that serves as his desk until he finds one that he’s looking for.

“Ah yes. We need to take a statement from you which is your version of the events which transpired on,” he refers to the papers in front of him, “Friday, August 12, 1832.”

So I tell him of my walking back from the mission school, hearing the four soldier horses approaching, the comments, the chase, the attack, this discovery of my brother, the final comments and my departure. I even go so far as to tell him that I’d decided to say nothing, fearful of how my mate would react but that proved impossible.

Can I identify my attackers? I’m asked like I’ve just described to him the pattern of footprints that an annoying raccoon has left behind.

“One is named Henry Graves,” I say, growing somewhat impatient at his manner. “I also heard the names ‘Steven’ and ‘Jimmy’ and of course, there is the one who is missing part of an ear,” I finish sure that he has heard the account that I’ve told earlier to the other soldiers at Miss Rebecca’s house.

First Lieutenant William Dawes looks up at me sitting across from him holding my baby and looking Indian, but relatively innocent, I suspect. “Missing part of an ear?” he asks puzzled.

“Yes,” I say ever so politely. “I bit it off.”

“Oh ... hmmm, I see,” he says and goes back to scribbling his notes.

The entire visit takes very little time and then we are politely but firmly dismissed. I feel a spark of anger as things resume within the tent as if we have already left.

“Excuse me,” I say after a moment. “What will happen now?”

First Lieutenant Dawes looks at me confused at my meaning and my continual presence it seems. “Why, we will question the officers involved and should their stories match yours they will receive suitable punishment.”

“And what if the stories do not match?” I ask feeling the growing sparks of anger grow high in my chest.

“My dear Miss ...” he looks down at the papers he has already set aside and obviously forgotten, “Miss *Graves*,” he says clearly dismissing my Indian name in favor of my white one. “Army soldiers under my command never, ever lie.”

The anger grows bright and hot in me. I stand, handing Storm to Bright Feather. “I *see*,” I hear myself say in angry but carefully controlled tones. “But the words of a white woman who has taken up with an Indian brave would *always be suspect* it seems.”

His face assumes a careful blank look as I continue. “It also makes perfect sense that I’m in the habit of *biting someone’s ear off* in the course of normal polite conversation.” I look around the tent at the soldiers now standing carefully alert watching me and my Indian mate and baby. “It is *so reassuring* to know that the United States Government and its army are protecting the interests of its *citizens*.”

I turn to walk out of the tent with Bright Feather behind me and I hear First Lieutenant Dawes say, “Your citizenship and the rights and privileges that go with it are no longer at the top of my priority list from the moment you *married* your Indian brave there and aligned yourself with the *Nation of the Cherokees* rather than the United States of America.” He does not suspect, I realize, that Bright Feather understands him as he has been quiet through this entire visit.

I turn and smile at First Lieutenant Dawes and he seems puzzled by my reaction. “My Pa told me one time that it is unfair and downright unkind to expect more than a body is capable of. My life so far has taught me that there are many different kinds of people: brutal, loving, idiot, smart, hateful, and kind. I will give you some sound advice, but all things considered what I’ve heard and seen so far from you, I doubt that you will take it: *things are not always what they seem*.”

Three days later, the great council meeting that we have traveled all this way for convenes. Because the crowd is so tremendous, it’s held outdoors in front of the council house. As part of the crowd, we find space to sit as best we can in the shelter of trees to escape the bright summer sun. We search and search the crowd but there’s no sign of Beaver that any of us can see. The meeting begins at high noon and will go all day and into the night. Those that speak stand on the front steps of the Council House. We listen to the military speak, offering a sum of money – *three million, two hundred and fifty thousand dollars* – that is so large that my head cannot even understand it. We hear the

promises that have been made many times before: assistance in travel, safety, and assurances of defense from future white invasions by the military. I look at First Lieutenant Dawes and the other officers as he speaks and I think, *Do you realize how often these people have heard these things and how often your promises have not been kept?*

Tensions increase as the temperature rises. Having heard all the proposals the military can offer, Young Snakes stands and speaks favorably of this treaty. He argues strongly for the decision that'll give up all claims to land east of the Mississippi and move the entire Nation of The Real People west. He's well spoken and obviously educated. And he's called by the white name *John Ridge* when he's introduced. I watch closely the look on John Ross' face as Young Snake gives his eloquent speech. As Young Snake names those leaders who favor the treaty, it's only *Elias Boudinot's* name that causes Ross to look pained. Even the name *Andrew Ross*, whom Great Elk confirms is John Ross' brother when I ask does not cause a reaction. Dark Cloud sits silent through all the discussions. It's powerful obvious which son has been chosen to be his successor.

In the late afternoon, John Ross stands and addresses the council. After such a long day of speech after speech, some have fallen fast asleep in the heat, lulled by the endless drone of the voices, the heat and the flies. But as John Ross stands to speak, you can feel the shift in the mood. It seems as if everyone takes a mental splash of cold water and prepares to listen to the best and final show.

John Ross stands for many moments, looking through the crowd, acknowledging his supporters with subtle nods, staring pointedly at his critics unblinkingly, and respectfully bowing to the military officers present. When he begins to speak, there's not a sound to be heard in the vast crowd, and small though he is, his voice is powerful, strong and sure. "It is known to all of us, that the history of the Cherokee Nation up to the present, has been one of repeated, continued, unavailing struggle. The cruel policy of Georgia, on the part of that State, has been one of unparalleled aggravated acts of oppression upon the Nation. The Cherokee Nation is depending implicitly on the good faith of the American Government. Believing that the Government prides itself as it does upon its justice and humanity, we must trust that it would not disregard the plight of our Nation, but would eventually interpose to prevent it from being disregarded and trampled into the dust by the State of Georgia. We further shall appeal to the Executive, Legislative and Judiciary Departments of this United States Government for redress of all wrongs committed and security against injuries apprehended.

"In defiance of Acts of Congress, decisions of the Supreme Court, and of solemn treaties, Georgia has gone on to despoil the Nation of their laws and Government and impose upon them laws the most obnoxious. Georgia has distributed lands unbought to her own citizens by lottery. Lastly she has driven our people out to hunger and perish in the wild forests through use of armed bands of her citizens who are now parading proudly through Cherokee lands.

"All those who share a love and concern for the Nation are deeply affected with this deplorable condition of The Real People. It is our responsibility to remind those who still rest upon the comforts and enjoyments of life which have been so profusely scattered around us that hundreds of Our People, many of whom are women and children, may now be homeless wanderers, suffering with cold and hunger, for no crime, but, *because they did not love their Country less.*

“The crisis of the fate of the Cherokee people, seems to be rapidly approaching – and the time has come when they must be relieved of their sufferings. Being fully convinced in our own judgment that we could not prosper as well any where else as upon this native land, the Cherokees will and shall decline all offers extended them for purchase or trade of these sacred lands which we have and always will call *ours*. We must be fully determined against a removal to Arkansas.

“A delegation must, with great haste, be sent to his Excellency, President Andrew Jackson, to most respectfully and earnestly ask to be informed, upon what terms will the President negotiate for a final termination of these sufferings put upon us by this State of Georgia. We must be able to reassure our people that they may repose in peace and comfort on the land of their nativity, under the enjoyment of such rights and privileges as belongs to free men.

“The will of the Cherokee people will be expressed and their wishes will be carried to Washington. The Treaties entered into between us and the United States Government are very strong and will protect us in our right of soil. United together and of one mind, there is no danger of our rights being taken from us.”

“I am finished speaking.”

Silence follows John Ross’ talking for many moments and then finally a lone person begins to clap. Gradually more and more join in and the square in front of the Council House seems to fill with the sounds of enthusiastic agreement. Voices are added to hands, shouts, whistles, war whoops. I study the expressions on all those who carry importance in this meeting: First Lieutenant William Dawes, Dark Cloud, Young Snake and even John Ross. I find it amazing that all have the same carefully controlled blank expression.

A vote is called and it’s overwhelmingly decided that any treaty supporting removal across the Mississippi should be rejected. There are just eight who vote for the removal acceptance: Elias Boudinot, Young Snake, and John Ross’ brother Andrew among the group. Those in our group are surprised to see that Dark Cloud is not part of that group, however.

As the crowd disburses, I’m called and I turn to see First Lieutenant Dawes as he makes his way towards us against the press of bodies. He removes his hat respectfully, “Miss Graves,” he says. He turns to look at Bright Feather who shows a fierce unresponsive face and he nods briefly. Bright Feather does not respond in word or movement, just continues to stare at him.

“First Lieutenant Dawes,” I say by way of answer. I chose not to make conversation easy as I’ve no desire to have one.

Still with his hat in his hand, First Lieutenant Dawes says to me, “I wanted you to know that I spoke with all four soldiers and they are most sincerely sorry for any fright they may have caused you with their mischief. Seems you misunderstood their humor, interpreting it for harm, when they only meant some tomfoolery. I have reprimanded them severely for causing you any upset and they have assured me that in the future they will be more careful with *who* and *how* they speak to those who may not have the same take on their fun.”

We stare at each other for a moment. “Do you have any children, First Lieutenant?” I ask and I watch him struggle to shift his head to this path of the conversation.

“Why yes, yes I do, Miss Graves. I am the proud father of two daughters, Sarah, age 13, and Anna, age 12,” he says and he seems to relax some at what seems to now be a pleasant social conversation.

“It will be my greatest hope that both of your daughters might find the *harmless intentions* of these four soldiers or any of the remainder of your fine company of *truthful* militia, within the scope of their sense of humor and good fun. Far be it for your men to suffer for the lack of enough suitable women to *enjoy their type of wit.*”

Bright Feather’s hand tightens on my arm and we turn to depart into the still milling crowd.

“Miss Graves!” I hear and I turn to see First Lieutenant Dawes standing still where we have left him. We stop and I look at him, waiting. “Why did your husband and those in your party not vote tonight in this important council decision?”

I look at him. I realize that he truly believes his men and truly *does not* believe me. He shows no anger over my comment that wishes both his precious daughters to experience the same brutal treatment that I’ve experienced. I realize that the comment I made to him the other day about *things not always being the way they seem* has made no mark on him whatsoever. *Can’t teach a cow to drive a plow, Elle*, I hear Pa say. I’ve a strong desire to just walk away from this soldier, empty of smarts or the ability, it seems, to acquire any, but I fight against it. “Why did you not vote, First Lieutenant?”

He frowns. “Why, the vote was not opened to United States Citizens, it was open only to those who consider themselves members of the Nation of the Cherokee.”

I see Great Elk emerge from the crowd. He sees us and makes his way towards us. I cannot help myself as I look up at Bright Feather and he looks at me. He reaches out and touches my cheek. I walk slowly back to First Lieutenant Dawes, still standing waiting for an answer from me. We reach him just as Great Elk does.

“My name is *Bear*,” I say to him loud and clear over the noise of the talking and laughter of the disbursing crowd. “I am the daughter of One Who Knows of the Elk Clan. This is my mate, Bright Feather, son of War Woman of the Wolf Clan and this is Great Elk, my mate’s father and chief of the Real People of The Maple Forest. All of the people of my village are *citizens of the United States of America*. We could not vote tonight for the same reason that you could not.

“But do you know what I think? I think that you will not believe this white woman who has chosen to love and live with an Indian brave and his people. Her words will always be *suspect*, especially when judged by someone who can only see the *outside* of a person and never anything deeper.”

We leave him then, standing confused and no smarter in the crowd out in front of the council house.

All of us are eager to leave New Echota, Georgia and preparations begin the next day. Miss Rebecca does a powerful reenactment of my last departure, sobbing loudly. “At least your skirts will be clean after we go,” and that causes her to laugh through her tears, for there has not been one day since our arrival that she has not carried some dirty, sticky mark of Storm’s love and affection somewhere on her.

“Your visit has been so good for me, Bear,” she says at last. “I do not know what the future holds for either of us, but it is certainly better for our time spent together, isn’t it?”

I answer her with a tight embrace. “I need to ask a favor of you,” I say to her in our last moments. “Would you seek out my brother, Henry Graves, and give him this?” and I hand her the deed that I took back from Cornelius Cooper over two years ago. “It is the deed to our family farm. He thought he had lost it to unpaid debt, but he was mistaken. When he finishes his time with the army, I would like him to know that there is something for him to go back to.”

Bright Feather comes up to stand beside me. I cannot hear him, silent as he is, but I see her look up and I know. “It is a decision that we both feel is best,” he says to Miss Rebecca. “It should not be ours, but his.”

“I will do as you *both* wish, then,” she says. She reaches out to Bright Feather and takes both of his dark strong hands in her plump white one’s. “This thing you have with Bear, this love and cherishing, is a gift from the Almighty. It is *rare* and *precious* and something few people understand.” She smiles a sad smile. “James and I share it, too. *Set me as a seal upon thine heart, as a seal upon thine arm; for love is strong as death; jealousy is cruel as the grave; the coals thereof are coals of fire, which hath a most vehement flame. Many waters cannot quench love, neither can the floods drown it; if a man would give all the substance of his house for love, it would utterly be condemned*ⁱ I believe God gives this great gift to couples that He knows will be of great positive change in this world. You and Bear are such a couple and I am pleased to know you.

“You will be in my prayers at all times, and just like my James, though you will not be close enough to touch, I can still hold you in that precious embrace.” She hugs Bright Feather and it’s a unique sight to see the two of them standing there.

“Now go, *quickly*, before I cause such a flood with these tears of mine that you will be unable to depart for the downpour!”

We wave and wave until we round the bend and then hurry to the place we call *home*.

Portions in the book that tell of stories from the Cherokee: Beaver’s story of the Ceremony of Life, One Who Knows story of The Beginning of Time, Bright Feather’s story of the Four Sacred Directions, and War Woman’s story of Grandmother Corn and her song that she sings are based on the descriptions of these stories given in the book *Meditations with The Cherokee, Prayers, Songs, and Stories of Healing and Harmony*, by J.T. Garret, Ed.D., Bear and Company Publishers, Rochester, Vermont, 2001.

ⁱ *The Cherokees*, By Virginia Driving Hawk Sneve, Holiday House, New York, 1996, p. 22

ⁱⁱ Romans 8:28, King James Version

ⁱⁱⁱ Preserve Me Lord, In Time of Need, Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

^{iv} 'Twas In the Watches of the Night, Isaac Watts, 1674-1748

^v John Ross’ speech is an amalgamation of three separate written documents: Papers of John Ross, Volume I, page 166, John Ross’ letter to President Andrew Jackson, dated January 23, 1835 and John Ross’ letter to

Secretary of War, Lewis Cass, dated February 29, 1836. They are not direct quotes as tenses were changed to fit the text.

^{vi} Song of Solomon 8:6-7, King James Version