

## Prologue

*If I had known that Jackson would drive us from our homes I  
would have killed him that day at the Horseshoe.*

Junaluska

Cherokee chief

Cherokee Territory: November 1, 1838

It was a typical fall morning in the Great Smoky Mountains—cool and damp, with slate-colored clouds hanging low in the sky. It seemed all-too-fitting that the rain couldn't decide whether to fall or sit suspended, so it hung motionless and heavy in the air. As a bugle commanded "Forward, March," the notes ripped through the misty hearts of the natives as surely and harshly as they did through the misty air. While the Indians didn't know exactly what the bugle call meant, their feet acknowledged that it probably meant to move out. And so the wagons creaked into motion, and hundreds of feet began to drag westward. Thus began the infamous Trail of Tears, the forced migration of the Cherokee Nation—and that of other Native Americans—from their native homeland for relocation in the Indian Territory to the west.

The lifeless bodies of the natives shuffled forward in the mist, their goods,

livestock, homes, clothes, blankets, and children having been dispassionately and, in many cases, violently stripped from them during the round-up weeks earlier. Their strength, health, and spirit had been further assaulted by the rancid conditions of the United States Army's holding pens.

A young brave, a seventeen-year-old named Red Hawk, clutched in his right hand a deerskin bag strapped across his chest, tilted his chin slightly skyward, and whispered, "Stay with me." His left hand held the trembling right hand of his eleven-year-old sister, Sunflower. In response to the bugle call, Red Hawk and Sunflower inched forward, hoping their movement might stir the feet of their father, Great Moose, who stood stoically, unable to look in the direction of the forced migration. He stood with his back facing south, a deliberate act of defiance signifying his contempt for Andrew Jackson.

Great Moose faced north, toward the land of his birth in the Great Smoky Mountains, where his wife had been buried two weeks earlier after being ravaged by cholera in the army stockade. Because in the time since he had eaten and drunk next to nothing, he was extremely weak. His heart had

been shattered first by President Jackson, then by the soldiers during the round-up, and finally by the loss of his wife. He could bear no more.

Red Hawk released his sister's hand, and with a nod and a gentle nudge sent her to retrieve their father. The girl slid her hand into her father's and squeezed and tugged it ever so softly. Instinctively, her father, returning her unspoken love, turned slowly to her, and looked down into her beautiful brown eyes—mirrors of her mother's. Seeing his wife's face in place of his daughter's, he found his reason to go on, and looked to the north one last time to honor her memory. He turned back to the girl, this time he looked *through* her eyes and into her soul. Complying with her unspoken plea, he stepped with her toward the land of the setting sun.

Understanding, if not entirely empathizing with the unspeakable affront the bugle call had sealed upon the natives, the soldiers, at least for now, were more tolerant of sluggish feet than they had been when they originally drove the helpless victims to the pens, and allowed them to set their own pace. As Red Hawk moved slowly ahead of his father and sister, a young army officer guided

his mount quietly into the view of the young warrior, allowing the boy the opportunity to make eye contact. Immediately Red Hawk recognized the man as the officer who had overridden the orders of two soldiers who had detained him as his mother was being dragged from the stockade for burial.

Of the dozen-or-so Cherokee who had perished in the stockade, only the family of the first to die, an old woman, had been permitted to leave the pen to render appropriate burial honors. Immediately after that burial, as the family made their way back under the guard of two army privates, three young men in the group broke and ran to hide in the hills. After a short and fruitless chase, the soldiers summarily beat the remaining family members and returned them to the stockade. All future mourners attempting to accompany their deceased loved ones were systematically thwarted by the guards with their bayonets, which they did not hesitate to use. The act of defiance of the three escapees had immediately and unequivocally established future policy.

Red Hawk had clung to his mother's body as it was being dragged by two army

privates toward the camp gate, while Sunflower cried as she watched from the arms of her mother's brother. When Red Hawk encountered resistance in the form of the bayonet, he had pleaded as best he could, "We will bury her! We will bury her!" True to their orders, however, the soldiers would have none of his defiance and had pushed Red Hawk and his father roughly away from his mother's corpse. Just as the boy had abandoned any hope of a proper burial, an officer quietly approached on horseback from outside the gate. While no words were spoken, the officer immediately accepted the plea in the boy's eyes, a silent promise guaranteeing he would not run if permitted to bury his mother.

The officer, who didn't seem much older than Red Hawk, intentionally allowed the sheath of his sword to clang against the heel of his boot, thus alerting the gate guards that an officer had just arrived; thereby eliciting a salute. The officer gently but firmly modified the standing order, "Let them take her. I will see to the situation."

"Yes, sir, lieutenant," one of the soldiers drawled for effect, "If you say so," and waved Red Hawk and Great Moose on with his rifle.

Red Hawk had carried his mother to the top of a nearby hill, and he began to dig her grave while his father stood and wept silently, his mind returning to Horseshoe Bend. For some three or four hours the lieutenant milled about on his mount a respectful distance away while Red Hawk and his father buried and prayed for his mother. Good to his unspoken pledge, Red Hawk escorted his grief-stricken father back to the stockade under the distant but trusting eye of the young lieutenant.

After the brief and silent exchange, the officer swung his horse with a snap on its bridle, thus departing as quietly and quickly as he had arrived not ten seconds before. Red Hawk and his family continued on their weary way.

*History is the mighty tower of experience,  
which time has built amidst the endless fields  
of bygone ages. It is no easy task to reach the  
top of this ancient structure and get the benefit  
of the full view. There is no elevator, but  
young feet are strong and it can be done.*

Hendrik Willem van Loon

*The Story of Mankind*