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Massacre at Tugaloo

I'm an old woman now—content to sit in my rocking chair, a quilt draped over my lap, as my grandchildren run and play with the innocence of youth. It was not so long ago that I was such a child, growing to adulthood as the Cherokee Nation was split asunder by land-starved Europeans and their diseases. I close my eyes and allow memories of my childhood to surface. A lifetime lived, and yet it seems like only yesterday…

My earliest remembrance is of my father's trading post at Tugaloo, the southernmost Cherokee town. A redheaded, burley-chested Scotsman, my father, William Hatton, was among the first adventurous white men to venture into the mountain home of the People. As a young man, he set upon the trade path from Charles Town, escorting a train of Indian burdeners loaded with trade goods across the mountains deep into Cherokee country. But soon, he established a permanent trading post.

Seldom returning to the clangorous city, my father lived among the Cherokee year-round, becoming a trusted friend and adopting many of our ways. He used to tell me and my brother, Johnny, that he had become more Cherokee than we, a boast that never failed to reduce us to peals of laughter. True, he dressed in buckskin and calico like our kinfolk, but his shock of bright red, curly hair could not have been more different than our glossy black locks. His round face was fringed with a fulsome beard that battled for attention with the hairs on his head, unlike our warriors with their high cheekbones and smooth, beardless faces. Naked, his sun-starved backside was as white as the winter snow, and we would cover our eyes, pretending to be blinded by the glare. But, the most incredible difference that never failed to impress us was the pelt of hair that grew upon his body, pinkish red and curling, covering him from head to toe.

More Cherokee than us, indeed! For he was a Scotsman, Presbyterian born and bred, and love him as much as we did, we took pride in knowing that we were indeed Cherokee—the Real People.

As a young man, Will lived among the People, gaining a reputation as an honest man who did not lie and cheat as some traders did. Pack horses eventually replaced the burdeners to bring goods inland from the coast to trade for the furs and deer hide his Cherokee neighbors had hunted throughout the hunting season.

A practical man, he knew we were vulnerable because the borderlands where we lived were often sites of conflict. Therefore he had caused the woods for some distance around the trading post to be cleared so that it sat in the middle of a large meadow but within shouting distance of the enclosure surrounding Tugaloo Town.

A cast iron stove, a rare novelty he had transported in pieces from the coastal city of Charles Town, sat in the middle of the storeroom. Sitting beside it, he would warm himself in the wintertime. At the rear of the store was the door leading to our living quarters, two rooms, and a loft above. The hearth in the main room was the heart of our home.

A barn, smokehouse, slave quarters, corncrib, and other outbuildings clustered around the post, for our home was as much farm as a trading post. My father kept a few Negro slaves cultivating the fields and tending the livestock he had imported from the coastal cities.

My father was well into middle age when he fell hopelessly in love with a beautiful young Cherokee girl. He had been unaware of her growing up, not knowing that she had chosen him as her mate while little more than a child. And once my mother had reached maturity and set

about ensnaring him in earnest, People watched, amused, as she entangled him, knowing he didn't stand a chance.

I remember little of my mother except for the warmth of her careworn hands and the softness of her lap as she soothed a childish hurt. The shape of her face is lost to me forever though I have tried to recall it many times. Sometimes I study the faces of my children and grandchildren, searching for a resemblance—a clue that will trigger long-buried memories—but to no avail.

I remember her long, glossy black hair that hung nearly to her waist and swung with her movements. But when memories of her hair surface, I have learned to quickly push them back, for they are too painful and still bring tears to my eyes even after all these years.

My mother had quickly borne several children, and the rooms behind the post were full to bursting. But she and my father watched helplessly one winter when the spotted disease swept through the Town like a brush fire, snuffing out lives despite the potions and incantations of our medicine man. The People had no defense against this strange illness called smallpox. One by one, villagers fell ill and quickly died. The loss to my parents was enormous: all their children except one, my brother Johnny, were buried on the hillside behind my father's trading post.

I'm sure it was a great joy to them when my mother once again felt the fluttering of a new life in her womb. I was born when her grief was still a raw wound, and she loved me with a fierceness that had a sharp edge of fear: fear of losing me as she had lost her other children.

My father had gone on an inland-trading venture, taking along young Johnny, when a party of Creek warriors raided our Town.

I remember it was a lovely afternoon, bright with sunshine and smelling fresh after spring rain that morning. We were returning from Tugaloo, my mother and I, crossing the meadow to the trading post. We had stopped to examine some wildflowers that had burst into bloom, a butterfly flitting from one blossom to another, enchanting me. My mother laughed at my antics as I tried to capture the little creature in my childish hands, but the butterfly continued on its mission, paying no heed to a rambunctious little girl of not yet four summers.

Suddenly, we heard bloodthirsty war whoops announcing the attack. Gunfire, followed by screams and outcries of pain and rage, split our ears as Creek warriors descended upon the Town.

My mother scooped me into her arms and began running to the safety of the trading post. Clutching me tightly, my legs wrapped around her waist, she ran as fast as she could, her calico skirts twisting and slowing her stride.

I hung on tight, feeling her heart pounding, smelling the scent of fear, my bottom bouncing on the little mound that was the new life in her womb. Then, looking over her shoulder, I saw a Creek warrior swing his war club, smacking it into one of our Cherokee neighbor's skulls. He fell, the back of his head crushed like an overripe pumpkin.

The warrior paused, sweat glistening on his muscular chest. He caught sight of my mother just as she cleared the meadow approaching our trading post, safety within reach.

Her steps faltered and slowed as she gasped for air, my weight dragging at her arms, her strength waning. The warrior's teeth flashed, his head thrown back, as he let loose a piercing war cry and came after us. My mother held me even tighter as she burst forth with renewed energy, but it was too late. The Creek closed the gap quickly, raised his war club, and sank it into my mother's skull.

I'll never forget the sickening crunch of crushed bone as my mother fell in a heap, covering my body with her own as she died. The warrior stood over us, looking at me appraisingly, deciding if I was old enough for the slave market. If not, then it was best to kill me as well. It was his indecision that cost him his life and spared mine.

In the seconds it took him to decide, then raise his war club again, an arrow from a defending Cherokee warrior found its mark, piercing his chest. He grunted in surprise, his war club dropped to the earth, and the light left his eyes as he fell, his body covering my mother and me, his blood mingling with hers.

Mercifully, I lost consciousness. When I regained my senses, I first became aware of the stickiness of drying blood on my face and arms and then of the weight of their bodies on mine. The battle was over; the Creeks victorious, the Town in flames. Turning my head, I could see that familiar villagers had been taken prisoner, tied to one another. Among them were the surviving enslaved people from our household. The stench of blood and death was overpowering, and I swallowed the bile that rose up in my throat.

Creek warriors emptied my father's store, loading goods and furs upon their horses. Some were moving among the dead and wounded, finishing those Cherokee who still held a breath of life by sinking war clubs into their skulls.

I must have looked as though I were dead, having lain motionless in my faint and covered with blood and brains as I was. But as they moved toward me, it became apparent that they would soon discover I was still alive.

I swallowed a scream of panic, my eyes searching wildly, looking for an escape route, the weight of my dead mother and the warrior suddenly more than I could bear. My eyes darted past,

then returned to meet those of Hannah, the old slave woman who had helped my mother with household chores.

Our eyes locked, and the intensity of her look calmed my panic. Her hands were bound behind her, but she pursed her lips into the familiar *Sssh* shape she and my mother had used to quiet me when I became cranky or noisy.

Calming, I lay still, not knowing what I should do. Then Hannah jerked her head to her right, staring intently at me. Confused, I questioned her with my eyes. She closed hers, despair plain to see on her face. Then, with renewed determination, she glared at me and jerked her head to her right again. This time my eyes followed her direction, and I saw the corncrib a short distance away, its door slightly ajar. Comprehension dawning, I looked back at her, eyes bright with hope.

"Get ready!" she mouthed. Then, brave old soul that she was, she screamed obscenities at the Creek warriors heading my direction, causing them to turn away from me.

In the minute or so that she held their attention while they brutally snuffed out her life, I managed to free myself, and half ran, half crawled to the small storage building. It was built off the ground, chest high for a child like me. I struggled to get my knee up, thrusting my body into its darkness and pulling the door closed behind me. Then, finally, I lay quietly as the Creeks celebrated the murder of Hannah, who had sacrificed her life for mine.

Carefully, slowly, I worked my way to the darkest recess of the corncrib and burrowed in until only my head was exposed. The walls were made of wide wooden slats spaced three finger-breadths apart, giving me a full view of the yard in front of our trading post.

Thus, I watched the Creek warriors complete the sacking of the trading post, trying to avoid looking at my mother's body lying directly in front of me. They had found the liquor stores and quickly became intoxicated despite their leaders' warnings. My father's rum saved my life for, drunken; they were not as thorough as they might have been.

With a whoop, one of the warriors ran from the Town with a firebrand and, jumping high in the air, tossed it upon the roof of the trading post. Others soon followed suit, the burning of the sturdy building becoming a great sport until it was wholly inflamed, sparks flying. The heat from its destruction was intense, and I thought I would suffocate in the corncrib. However, the trading post so completely occupied them that the insignificant corncrib and the other outbuildings of the farm were left standing, thus saving me from roasting like a chicken in the oven.

My terror was so complete that I feared that they could hear the thudding of my heart, or my muffled sobs, as I burrowed deeper into the ears of corn, the dry husks scratching my skin.

I watched helplessly as one of the intoxicated warriors pulled his knife from its sheath and swooped upon my mother's body. With a war whoop, he swiftly removed her beautiful hair from her body. Then, clenching the bloody knife in his teeth and swinging her scalp in an arc above him, he danced around her body, chanting a victory song.

His companions had stopped what they were doing to watch and laugh with him. There was some talk among them, with much gesturing and some disagreement. Others moved from body to body, scalping the Cherokee as they went. Hannah was mercifully spared, her nappy head not a suitable trophy for the warriors.

With their dirty work done, the Creek warriors gathered the captives, preparing to depart. Their hands were bound behind them, tied one to another, forming a chain of pain and misery.

Tears coursed down my blood-smeared cheeks. Furtive glances toward the corncrib indicated some had witnessed Hannah's heroism and knew my whereabouts. They hoped that I, at least, would survive this outrage.

Finally, the Creeks left, taking their loot and captives with them. Suddenly, it was quiet. Deathly quiet. The only sound was that of burning buildings, snapping and sizzling in the early evening's damp air.

I don't know how long I remained in that corncrib, for I lost all sense of time. I recall sharing my space with field mice that awakened me by nibbling on the pieces of bone and brain dried into the strands of my hair. I gasped and brushed them aside, suddenly awake but not fearful of such little creatures as they. It was the two-legged creatures I feared. And it was fear of them returning that caused me to stay huddled in the safety of the corncrib.

I became hungry and thirsty but was too frightened to leave my sanctuary. The morning came, then a blazingly hot noontime that caused the temperature inside the corncrib to rise until I thought I would surely die from it. I must have lost consciousness, for the next I knew, it was fully dark. Only then did I leave, cautiously opening the door and crawling out. My legs were so weak I could scarcely walk to the spring, where I sated my thirst and fell asleep, resting my cheek on the cool grass that lined its edge.

I awakened with the dawn and, gripped once again with the fear of returning marauders, made my way back to the safety of the corn crib. I carefully avoided my mother's body, still lying aheap in our yard, now with a peculiar stench emanating from it. Her scalp glistened in the early light, the buzz of flies disturbing the otherwise quiet yard.

And yet another day passed, or several for all I know, as I huddled within the corncrib. At one point, wild dogs and vultures came to feast upon the bodies. I left my safe haven long enough to throw ears of corn at those ravaging my mother's body until, discouraged, they moved on. I could not muffle the horrible sounds of their gorging on the villagers, even with fingers stuffed tightly in my ears. When they were finally done, what remained of poor Hannah's body was recognizable only by the dress she had worn.

And still, I waited. I did not know where to go even if I were to think of leaving, so I waited for I knew not what. I just knew I could not leave my mother or my slat-walled shelter.

A bellowing roar and a wail of heartbreaking anguish roused me from a deep stupor. Looking through the slats of my refuge, I saw my father had arrived.

What a sight that must have been for him. His beloved wife was dead and mutilated, his prosperous farm and trading post a pile of smoldering rubble, and the Town of Tugaloo in ruins. He screamed his impotent rage while Johnny wailed his confusion and anguish. Others who had come with him milled around, uncertain what to do.

I knew there was safety with my father, but I could not move from the corncrib. Weak from hunger and thirst, exhausted from my vigil, I could not make an effort to go to him. The men began digging graves and gathered the dead villagers' remains for burial while my father sat numbly on the stone steps that had once led into his home. The cast iron stove stood as a silent sentinel amid the smoldering ruins of the trading post.

Johnny saw me first as I tentatively pushed the corncrib door ajar and poked my head from its confines. He screamed with fear, pointing, and my father jumped to his feet, staring at the apparition that was his daughter. What a sight I must have been, still wearing the blood of the

warrior who had slain my mother, my face streaked with their blood and my snot and tears, my hair stiff with the filth that had been my mother's brains.

Recognition was slow to come to my father's eyes, and when it did, he was incredulous, for he thought me dead or captive of the Creeks. He cleared the space that separated us in great strides and scooped me into his arms, gripping me in an embrace that took my breath away. Sobbing uncontrollably, the great bear of a man wept with relief to see his baby girl still alive.

I would not leave my father's side. Deep anger controlled him now, his grief and pain put aside momentarily. All his movements he did with me wrapped around his leg, hanging on for dear life, or carrying me on his hip, for I would not be parted from him, nor him from me. Johnny kept us always within sight, never far from what was left of his family, his young face tear-streaked, his chin jutted in anger.

Finally, the men rested in the cool beside the spring, taking what food they had brought or had scavenged from the ruins. My father fed me like a baby, with small bites and sips of cool spring water. I had difficulty chewing, I was so weak, so my father would take the food into his mouth, chew it until it was soft enough for me, then push it into my mouth with his thick, callused fingers, tenderly encouraging me to chew and then to swallow. Somehow, I managed to please him, my savior, for there was only a deep emptiness where there had once been an aching hunger.

He rested against an oak tree with me cradled in his arms, and I closed my eyes, his heartbeat against my ear soothing me into a contented sleep. I dozed intermittently, the rumble of his deep voice rousing me, and listened as he and the men made plans.

They knew the Creek had a few days' head start on them, but their tracks indicated the heavily loaded horses and the captives would slow them. The Cherokee who accompanied my father were anxious to start after the Creek. They felt they could make good time and wanted to free their kinsmen.

The Cherokee were enflamed because they knew the fate that awaited the captives, for they had sold captives of their own to the slavers in the port cities. Word had somehow filtered back to the high, cool mountains, and they knew that enslaved Indians were transported to Caribbean sugar plantations to live the rest of their short lives in unimaginable misery.

My father was furious, for he had seen the mutilation done to my mother. The French had introduced a bounty for Indian scalps while waging war with the northern tribes. *Redskins,* they called them, those gruesome trophies for which they paid in the same manner as they paid for a beaver skin or a deerskin. Their Indian allies were paid the same price for any Indian scalp, no matter its source, for the French could not tell the difference, nor did they care. Young warrior or old woman, revered leader or defenseless child, the price was the same for a *redskin*. Thus, my mother's scalp, bearing the long black hair he had lovingly caressed in the night, would be worn on the belt of a Creek warrior, bartered from one to another, and finally, make its way north to be sold to a Frenchman for the price of a jug of rum.

Thoughts of it made my father's voice quake with rage. He was determined to track the Creek who had taken it from her, to kill him as slowly and painfully as possible, and then to return with the treasure, burying it beside my mother's grave.

My father and his companions were of one mind; they would move hurriedly, overtake the Creek, and seek vengeance. But there was one small problem and she was asleep in her father's arms.

Theirs was a complex dilemma: They could not overtake the Creek if they took me with them, and yet they could not leave me alone in the ruins of Tugaloo. But, on the other hand, if they took me to safety, they would lose valuable time and be unable to catch up with the Creek. What to do? I stirred against my father, snuggling closer yet, not fully understanding the problem but somehow knowing I was the cause.

Finally, a solution was found. My brother Johnny would take me to the safety of our mother's brother in the nearby village of Estatoe. Considering himself a man, although he was a few years shy of such, Johnny protested loudly but to no avail. My father was relieved with this plan for, although the journey from Tugaloo to Estatoe was fraught with danger for two youngsters traveling alone, it not only took care of the issue of what to do with me, but it removed Johnny from danger as well. He had lost too much already and was relieved that his remaining family would be relatively safe. Johnny's wails and protests did him no good. My father turned a deaf ear to him, and preparations were quickly made to waste no more time.

Johnny was mounted upon a trustworthy horse with what few provisions we needed tied behind him. I clung to my father and cried out when he tried to hand me up to my brother's arms. Finally, he had to pry my fingers from their grip as one of the Cherokee warriors pulled me away from him, lifting me high and settling me on the horse behind Johnny.

"It'll be all right, Hester," my father soothed me, "I'll come for ye and Johnny in a fortnight." He was not ashamed to wipe tears from his eyes with his buckskin sleeve as Johnny

took the reins and signaled the horse to move onto the path leading toward the north. I clung to Johnny, watching my father as long as I could until the trail dipped into the forest, losing him from view.

Avoiding the main trading path, Johnny guided our mount through lesser-known footpaths and game trails. There were times when the way through the dark forest was so faint that we had to dismount, and, holding the reins firmly in his grasp, Johnny would scour the dense undergrowth for the barely detectable trail. At other times it was so narrow we had to make our bodies as small as possible as the sturdy horse pushed her way through a track meant for much smaller creatures.

Finally, we came upon the familiar sight of Estatoe Town. Overcome with relief and fatigue, Johnny loosened his grip on the reins, but the horse knew her way to the Council House and, beside it, the house where our mother's brother Saluy lived with his wife, Morning Dove.

Morning Dove pried me from Johnny's arms and took me into her house, where she stripped me of the clothes that still bore such an awful burden. Heating a water kettle, she wrapped me in a soft deerskin and sat with me cradled in her arms, crooning softly and rocking back and forth, quieting my sobs. She stood me before her and washed my body in the warm, sudsy water, cleansing me of the filth that caked my body and my hair, carefully scrubbing off the dried blood and bits of bone and tissue. Lifting me, she wrapped me in a soft trade blanket and lay me upon her sleeping pallet while she dumped that filthy water far away from the cabin. Then, filling the tub with fresh soapy water, she cleansed me again, this time with scented soap that left my skin feeling clean and soft.

Someone had brought clothes for me, and Morning Dove dressed me tenderly like a new baby. Then, placing me between her legs, she brushed my hair, picking out debris that still clung to its strands.

The fire crackled in the fireplace, and her humming soothed me as she spooned a warm broth into my waiting mouth, chin uptilted like a young bird in the nest. Then, finally, my eyes grew heavy, and sleep overcame me as she lifted me and carried me to her bed, where I slept a healing sleep.

Johnny and I stayed at Estatoe until our father came for us as promised, grim-faced with a determined scowl. The Creek had dawdled too long. Feeling the effects of my father's rum, burdened with their loot and captives and thinking they were safe from retribution, they had moved too slowly. The swiftly moving, vengeful Cherokee had overtaken them, surprising them at camp, killing those who could not escape into the woods, and freeing the captives.

Will Hatton was, I think, relieved that he was not expected to provide care for his children. His wife was dead, his Tugaloo trading post and home burned to the ground, and caring for a half-grown son and a young daughter must have seemed an overwhelming problem for the aging white trader.

Traditionally our mother's clan would assume responsibility for her children, not her husband. As members of the Paint clan, Johnny and I had extended family throughout the Cherokee nation, any of whom would have cared for us in the absence of our mother.

A council was called, and it was decided that Johnny would stay in Estatoe with Saluy. In Cherokee tradition, a mother's closest male relative provides guidance and discipline for her sons as they mature into adulthood. Will Hatton could take an interest and even have some

involvement if he chose, but the responsibility was not his—it lay with Johnny's uncle, Saluy. Always a pragmatic people, we Cherokee know that while husbands and lovers may come and go, a woman's male relatives will always remain a part of her life.

Once again, what to do with me posed the most significant dilemma. Saluy and Morning Dove wanted to adopt me too. Morning Dove begged not to separate Johnny and me. But my mother had two sisters who also wished to take me into their homes. Quatsis, the youngest sister, had married Oconostota, Young Warrior of Chota. Two moons past messengers reported their child was stillborn. The elder sister Cornsilk's home was brimming with healthy children while Quatsis' arms ached for a child to nurture.

In their wise and deliberate way, and with my best interests in mind, the elders of my Paint clan determined Quatsis' home was a better choice.

So once again, I was lifted into the arms of a waiting horseman. This time it was my father who cradled me in front of him as we made the long trek from Estatoe to the Overhill town of Chota, deep in the mountains of blue mist.

When we arrived, Quatsis took me from my father's arms and held me tight as my legs grasped her waist. Her tears mingled with mine as we bewailed our grief for my mother, her sister. And as she clasped me, she once again felt the sharp edge of pain for the child who had never drawn a breath. Oconostoda and Will stood aside as we keened our grief, Quatsis dropping to her knees and rocking back and forth with me clasped in a tight embrace.

Then Oconostoda came and, kneeling from his great height, embraced the two of us in his massive arms. Quatsis' wails diminished to sobs, and I, too, quieted as we welcomed the strength and comfort he brought us. Will helped Oconostoda draw Quatsis to her feet, for she would not

release the burden that was her new daughter. Then, with me clinging to her, Quatsis leaned into the supportive embrace of her warrior husband. Finally, with Will following close behind, the three of us made our way through the crowd of well-wishers to my new home.

The following day Will mounted his horse and headed down the trading path to Charles Town. His shoulders squared and his chin set, he never looked back at his daughter, Hester, who stood in the doorway of her new home clutching the hand of her new mother.

Thus, I became known as Pra-chi, She-Who-Waits, adopted daughter of Quatsis and Oconostoda, Great Warrior of the Cherokee.