

Across the Great Water

July, 1738  
Chota, Principle Town  
of the Cherokee Nation

"Hester! Damme, there ye be, ye naked little heathen! Come give yer old Pa a hug!" My father roared. And with that invitation, I vaulted into his waiting arms. A burly, red-headed Scotsman, my father, Will Hatton, frequently made the perilous journey through the mountains of mist to Charles Town. This morning, he returned to the village of my mother's people, the Cherokee, with goods to trade for deer skins and pelts of other creatures.

His arrival was timely, for tomorrow is the biggest festival of the year, the Mature Green Corn Festival. Chota has been transformed in the past few days, and its population has swelled as hundreds of Cherokee traveled from other villages of the nation to attend the festival. The Tenna-see River is lined with log canoes laid neatly side by side on its rocky banks, and more are seen coming down the river, the late arrivals searching for a place to beach their canoes. There will be feasting and dancing for the next several days, and my heart swells with joy that my father will be with us, his Cherokee family.

After our joyful greeting, my father supervised the unburdening of the pack horses while my mother, Morning Dove, busily prepared a squirrel stew and hominy meal in her outdoor summer kitchen. I was tasked with looking after Terrapin, my little brother of three summers, a calico shift barely covering my behind.

Like other Cherokee children, I don't bother with clothes in the summer heat. But when Father is home, my mother encourages me to wear the shifts she sews with fabric he brings from Charles Town. Although he is glad to see me healthy and happy, Mother says that because he is a white man and a Pres-be-terian, it embarrasses him for me to run around naked. So, to honor him, I slipped on the scratchy garment; although I have grown so much, it barely serves its purpose.

As dusk settled upon the village, evening activities slowed, voices hushed, and children found their way to their sleeping pallets. Women clustered at first one cabin and then another to make plans for tomorrow's festival. My father's packmen and trade path horsemen had finished unloading the last of the trade goods, filling the storehouse. The hard-working horses, freed of their heavy burdens, grazed in the meadow under the watchful eye of eager young boys, hoping to coax one to allow them to ride upon its back.

Relieved of my duties as an elder sister, I sought my father and found him gathered with the men sheltered by towering Chestnut trees, a cooling breeze wafting from the river. The warriors settled on robes and blankets, their bellies full, to talk of hunts and battles and plan for tomorrow's ceremony. I curled next to my father, relishing his familiar male scent.

As was my usual ploy, I made myself still and quiet, even abstaining from tugging at the itchy tunic, pretending to sleep. Father was not fooled, of course, but went along with my little pretense. When Mother came looking for me, he motioned her away. Through slitted eyes, I saw them exchange a conspiratorial smile and knew I would once again be permitted to listen to the men's talk.

The Tellico trader Eleazar Wiggan joined the growing crowd of men. Like many who relaxed under the Chestnut tree that evening, he had come early for the Mature Green Corn Feast when he learned of the pack train's arrival laden with new goods. Locking his storehouse and mounting his horse, he had left for the short journey to the neighboring village, looking forward to seeing his old friend Will Patton.

The Cherokee warriors listened intently as the two European traders, my father and Wiggan, described the rapid growth of Charles Town each time they returned to the port city. The discussion became heated as the warriors complained that, although game is increasingly scarce, they receive fewer trade goods for each hide or pelt.

Gray Squirrel, an elder so old his eyes were barely visible in the creases of his face, cautioned about our ever-increasing dependence on the white man's manufactured goods.

"There was a time," he said, "when my father and my father's father, and others for more generations than you can count, lived from the bounty of Mother Earth. We did not need the white man's muskets or gunpowder to hunt. We killed only what game we needed to survive, thanking them first for giving their lives so that we may live. There was balance in the old ways. There was not the waste and greed that we have in the younger people." His voice grew peevish and quivered with emotion as he shook a bony finger at the young warriors who had joined the group of older men.

They, of course, were too polite to argue with or be disrespectful to an elder, but it was evident from the glances they exchanged that they thought him just an old fool who knew nothing of the world.

Who wanted to return to the old ways? The People had become accustomed to brass arrowheads, iron axes, hoes and kettles, and steel knives. Yes, young men still made bows and arrows, but muskets were a better weapon not only for defense against other tribes that were thus equipped but also for bringing in ever-increasing numbers of deer pelts for barter. No Cherokee warrior of merit would be content to arm himself with only a bow and arrow.

His talk of the old ways fell upon ears that were closed to his words, for even if the men had been willing to live as their ancestors had, who was left to teach them? Besides, their women would never hear of it. They preferred labor-saving fabrics to traditional dressed hides and furs. Colorful glass beads were more ornamental than shells and carved bone. We depended upon the Europeans to furnish us with the goods we couldn't manufacture for ourselves, but we had only to trade deerskins to obtain them.

A born storyteller, Wiggan deftly turned their attention away from the rising conflict and began telling of the journey across the Great Water to negotiate better trade relations with the English merchants.

Several of the bold seven who had traveled over the Big Water to the court of the English King were there that night. In our midst were warriors from neighboring villages who knew of the journey, of course—for who in the Cherokee Nation did not?—but they hadn't heard the entire story from so many participants. So it was natural that the visitors encouraged them to tell of their adventure.

As the night deepened, I listened to the musical voices of the men of my Nation as they talked amongst themselves about the events eight years past when I was just a babe. I burrowed

closer to Will's warmth against the night chill, imitating a possum so as not to be noticed, for I had heard only parts of this story.

"It were May 4, 1730, I remember," began Wiggan, warming to the narrative, as he leaned forward, reaching for the jug of rum being passed around, "when I rode into Charles Town with that troop of fierce Cherokee warriors. My, my, but how those overdressed, tight-assed city folk scurried out of our way!"

Laughter greeted his statement, for all who were there that night could imagine what a show it must have been. Seven young Cherokee warriors bedecked in their loincloths and moccasins, colorful blankets draped over their muscular shoulders, and silver medallions and armbands glistening in the sun. What a sight they must have been to the citizens of Charles Town, for Indian visitors to the port city was still a rarity.

The warrior Attakullakulla, one of the bold seven who made that journey, seized the opportunity to tell of their adventure. "We boarded the ship, Fox, for the moon-long journey across the Great Water to London..."

"And I've never been so sick in my life!" Beaver Tail interrupted amidst great laughter. He and Tassel had been so ill aboard the ship that they had feared for their lives, certain they would not live to set foot on land again. And, once there, they said they could scarcely enjoy their visit because they were dreading the return voyage.

"It's true!" Tassel cried out to the amusement of the men. "I was so fearful of the return journey I thought of begging the Englishmen to allow me to stay. But, foolish men that they are, they would think I wanted to stay because I loved their stinking city. Hah! 'Twas only because I didn't want my bones tossed to the huge fish that live in the Great Water."

Attakullakulla sprang to his feet and took control of the storytelling. He held the entire gathering enthralled that night under the Chestnut trees, transporting us to that mysterious place across the Great Water. From my vantage point at Father's side, I could see his fellow travelers were as spellbound as the rest of us, reliving their incredible experience.

Perhaps it was that night Attakullakulla realized the full power of his eloquence. A small man and not particularly skillful hunter or fierce warrior, he grew in stature as he grabbed the attention of that unruly group of men and held them with the power of his words.

In groups of two and three, the women joined the men, their plans for tomorrow's festival complete, and the little ones bedded down for the night. My playmates ceased their rowdy games, quietly joining their parents, drawn by the drama unfolding under the rising moon. We were spellbound, held entranced as Attakullakulla described their adventures in London.

With his eloquence, I could see the harbor filled with ships of all sizes and shapes flying colorful flags from around the world. My nose twitched at the stench of open sewers; my ears hummed with the racket of street vendors and the babble of more people than I could imagine milling through crowded city streets.

We were amazed as he described streets lined with shops that bulged so full of manufactured goods that they spilled out onto tables leaning against the building's walls. We could envision tradesmen calling passersby to buy their goods.

Attacullaculla told us of being driven through London's cobblestoned lanes in tiny houses perched upon wheels pulled by four horses and how they were entertained at festivals, given gifts, and taken to fairs. A group of merchants interested in trade with the Cherokee entertained them with lavish dinners where they drank an intoxicating beverage made from a berry. They

competed with the King's archers, astonishing them with their skill with the bow and arrow. They attended plays where actors and acrobats performed to their amazement, visited a place where lunatics were chained to the walls, and heard the fantastic sounds emitting from an instrument called an organ. He described their visits to places named the Tower, St. James Park, Westminster Abbey, and the Houses of Parliament.

Attacullaculla grew expansive as he described the English-style garments His Majesty presented them with. Rich satin breeches in vivid colors and coats embellished with lace and trimmed in gold. How gorgeous they must have been! We were amazed as he described how they posed for the Duke of Montague, who, using only paint similar to that with which they decorated their bodies, created their images onto large canvases. What magic the English possess.

Not a sound could be heard in the crowd as Attakullakulla described the military power of the English: More warships than could be counted in London's harbor, the incredible accuracy of their firearms, and the power of enormous cannons. And the soldiers. Red-coated English soldiers, everywhere they went—far more than we had people in our Nation.

My favorite part was when, with his powerful eloquence, Attacullaculla transported me to an enormous stone building called Windsor Castle. And with a cooling breeze drifting down our remote mountain valley, I, too, witnessed the ceremonial knighting of three noblemen.

That night, he told us, they dressed as they wished but behaved as Cuming had coached them. Beaver Tail wore a scarlet jacket, knee-length satin trousers and carried a musket. The rest of the warriors wore only their loincloths with a horse's tail hanging down behind, and Tassle carried a bow. Their faces and upper bodies were painted red, blue, and green, and their shaved heads were adorned with colorful feathers. Our hearts were stirred with pride to think of what an

impressive sight our Cherokee warriors must have been when they pranced into the great hall of that imposing castle and knelt before King George, kissing his hand and those of his two sons.

"King George seemed pleased enough with our gifts," Otter Tail added, breaking in on a disgruntled Attakullakulla who did not take kindly to the interruption of his narrative. "but then, they told us to stand near the King while he was at dinner so he could look at us when he wanted, but we were never once offered anything to eat. So we had to stand on display while those fat Englishmen gorged themselves."

We were amazed at such rudeness, for a Cherokee would only eat after first offering food to his guest. Such details of their adventure validated our opinion of the strange ways of the English. They were like rude children in so many ways.

After their leisurely dinner, still not offering the hungry Cherokee so much as a morsel to eat, the King and his court went for a walk on the gallery overlooking the castle terrace. Spotting a huge elk grazing in the park, Tassel pulled an arrow from his quiver and, fitting it in his bow, prepared to shoot the stag for the warriors' evening meal.

"Our Tassel put a scare in those nobles, nearly causing me to die of fright." Wiggan declared. He doubled over with laughter as he described the flurry of excitement among the King's entourage as the angry, nearly naked warrior drew the bowstring, the elk in his sights.

"I had to do some fast talking that time, let me tell you!" he declared. And thank God nary a one of those fancy dukes and lords could understand what Tassel was really saying. I convinced them he just wanted to show off to the King. It's a wonder the King's guards didn't run us through with their swords before I could get us out of that mess."



A sheepish Tassel grinned, scratching the back of his neck as his companions had a good laugh at his expense. But then, defending his actions, he added: "Well, after that, they took us to a fancy place and fed us the flesh of that stupid animal they call a sheep. It didn't taste nearly as good as that elk would have, but I was so hungry I didn't care."

"And, thanks to Tassel, we never missed another meal!" Otter Tail chimed in.

But, after four moons or so, the young men grew weary of the English. The novelty had worn off for them and their hosts. They longed to return to the blue mountains of their homeland in time for hunting season as promised. But their sponsor had lost favor with the King and was nowhere to be found. Wiggan used all his powers of persuasion to arrange an audience with the Lord's Commissioners.

Attacullaculla stood before us that night, once more commanding our full attention. As the representative of the seven warriors, he used the little English he had acquired to address the bewigged Lords. With great dignity, he repeated his farewell speech to us:

"We have come hither from a dark and mountainous country," he said, "but we are now in a place of light. Our Nation's crown is different from that which our father, King George, wears, but it is all one. The chain of friendship shall be carried to our people. We look upon King George as the sun, our father, and ourselves as his children, for though you are white and we are brown, our hands and hearts are joined together. When we have acquainted our people with what we have seen, our children, from generation to generation, will remember it. In war, we shall always be as one with you. The great King's enemies shall be our enemies. His people and ours shall always be as one, and we shall die together."

Dramatically, Attakullakulla pantomimed how he laid the eagle feathers they had brought on the table before the King's representatives. "This is our way of talking," he said, "which is the same thing to us as your letters in a book are to you. And to your beloved men, we deliver these feathers to confirm all we have said."

The young men had taken their leave of the English with a dignified manner that made our hearts swell with pride.

But then, before they could be permitted sail from England, the Lord's Commissioners presented them with a document they called The Articles of Agreement and demanded that each of the young warriors sign as representatives of the People.

"I was struck dumb," Wiggan said. "Damme, but I thought we were just bidding them farewell, and then we'd board a ship for home. But they had this bedamned document for the fellers to sign. And they made it clear that nobody was leaving fer home until they did!"

Bless his soul, Wiggan could read, and taking up the document, he had read it to the warrior as they gathered around.

He told us that the treaty decreed the Cherokee would be subservient to the English in their homeland and trade exclusively with English merchants. They would be subject to English law, not Cherokee law. They were to go to battle against any who opposed the English. Most importantly, the treaty called for the English to increase their lands further.

The seven men refused to place their marks on the document, for they knew they had no authority to make agreements for the Real People. Nevertheless, Wiggan said, the treaty was written as if the whole Cherokee Nation were present.

They returned to their living quarters to await their journey across the Great Water. But arrangements had yet to be made to pay for their passage. They had no money, and their sponsor refused to take responsibility for their expenses. The warriors were increasingly apprehensive because they had been told they would be home by the end of summer or fall. Now, it was September, the month of falling leaves, and hunting season was upon them.

The eight of them waited in their living quarters, the flood of invitations having suddenly ceased. In the blink of an eye, their status had changed from visiting nobility to that of beggars. The innkeeper began to badger them for payment for their rooms, threatening to force them to leave if he did not receive the money due him. The tavern keepers would no longer extend them credit for meals, and they often found themselves hungry and threatened with starvation. They were stranded in a foreign land, dependent upon an indifferent monarch to return to their home and families.

Weeks went by, and their situation grew more desperate by the day. Then, their sponsor came tapping on their doorway, asking them to sign the agreement and promising them passage home if they would do so. What else could they do but make their mark where they were told? And so, sign they did. Within days, they were aboard a ship, once again sailing across the Great Water, eager to return to the mountains and valleys they loved.

The night had grown late, the moon rising full above. Many of the women and all the children, except me, had drifted off to their sleeping pallets. Several of the men were reluctant to leave just yet, and they lingered under the Chestnut tree, thinking of all they had been told that evening. My eyes grew heavy as I curled into a ball, drawing warmth from my father's bulk

against the evening chill. But then, in the quietness of the late hour, someone called out, "Tell us about your adventure, Tassel!"

Through slitted eyes, I saw Tassel grin and duck his head, pretending embarrassment, although he probably had been waiting for just such an opportunity.

"Come, tell us!" The chorus of men encouraged him.

As he began his story and I realized its direction, all drowsiness left me. I feigned a deep sleep but kept my ears wide open so as not to miss anything. My Presbyterian father tended toward prudishness in matters of men and women, much to the amusement of the Cherokee. I knew how men and women gave pleasure to each other and that if the woman chose, a baby could result from their joining.

I quickly became aware that I had yet to hear this part of the journey. It was not told in the formal setting of the Council House. And I could tell it was a story I did not want to miss.

A master storyteller, Tassel began building his story by picking up where Attakullakulla had left off in his description of London. Having never seen an English town, I could hardly imagine the dwelling places he described. Broad cobblestone avenues filled with horse-drawn carriages of all sizes and shapes were lined with houses rising three and four stories high. Narrow alleys that twisted and turned through a maze of such houses led to the Inn at Covent Garden. Their lodgings were on the third floor in three adjoining rooms overlooking the courtyard below.

My nose curled as he described the filth and stench of the city with horse droppings and human waste aswim in the streets' gutters. There were no clear running rivers for them to go to water as we did every morning, for the Thames was far away and so nasty they would not have

dared to dip their foot in, much less to bathe in it. Dark brown with an oil slick, dead animals and human waste swirled in its eddies. At their insistence to bathe, they were given a basin of water each morning, and all seven were expected to cleanse themselves in it, one after the other.

I was embarrassed for them and could not imagine such a thing. But worse than that was when he described how the Englishmen expected them to deal with their waste. They were given a handled pot with an ill-fitting lid and instructed to dump the contents out the window after making water or emptying their bowels into it—hopefully, most of it falling into the gutter below rather than an unfortunate passerby.

They were mortified, he said, refusing to do such a foul thing. So, instead, they would sneak into the stable behind the Inn whenever possible. Poor Otter Tail was the most fastidious of the seven, and the men laughed as he told of his bowels becoming so locked he could not empty them. An English medicine man was finally summoned, and Otter Tail was given a physic that turned his bowels to water. After that, even upon his return to the Blue Mountains, he suffered with his bowels and swore that the Englishmen had ruined him.

"What a relief it was," Otter Tail said, "when finally we returned home and could bathe in the cool, clear waters of our mountain streams. And we could go to the woods to empty our bowels properly!"

A giggle bubbled up and almost escaped, threatening to give away my pretense at sleep. I sensed Father turning to look at me, reminded of his young daughter curled beside him. I sighed deeply, burrowing deeper into the shadow of his girth as though disturbed by a dream. Satisfied, he turned his attention back to Tassel's story, and I was free to eavesdrop a little longer.

One evening, he continued, four elaborately dressed men came to their lodgings, engaging Wiggan in a lively discussion. Reluctant at first, then incredulous and finally amused, Wiggan approached Tassel, the fierce warrior who had threatened to shoot King George's elk, with a grin and told him he was to accompany the men.

Tassel was alarmed at first, for the seven had not been separated since leaving Charles Town. So why was he being singled out?

"Well, lad," Wiggan told him, "it seems that some well-born lady has a fancy to see what's in your loincloth."

Appalled at first and then curious, Tassel agreed to go with the men, for young and lusty as he was, he had not been with a woman for a long time.

He described being taken through ever narrower and darker alleys and then through a concealed door where a uniformed guard deliberately turned his back. His escorts led him through torchlit stone passages and up twisting stairs to a narrow landing where another concealed door opened. A wall tapestry was pulled aside, and he was pushed into an elaborately furnished but dimly lit bedchamber, the door closing firmly behind him.

Coming toward him with hands outstretched was the beautiful, yellow haired woman he had seen near the King's dais when he had been presented at Court. Their eyes had locked briefly, and he had felt a stirring in his loins as she had looked upon him through downcast eyes.

That night, her hair was braided and curled and piled upon her head in the English fashion, and she was wearing a long, soft gown that clung to her body, outlining the shape of her legs and hips as she moved toward him, a pleased smile on her pink lips. The gown was cut so

low it exposed her breasts to just above the nipples, which he could see were erect, pushing into the filmy fabric of her bodice.

The men were quiet, holding their breath and struck with the wonder of this experience Tassel was sharing with them.

He told his friends that they didn't speak each other's language, but the language of a man and woman who desire to mate with each other needs no speech to be understood. They were soon engaged in exploring each other with their hands and mouths, his maleness having quickly responded. Her woman attendants appeared from the room's shadows and, as they continued their embrace, let down her hair and removed her gown. Two of them began tugging at his unfamiliar fastenings, but he shrugged them away, not about to be disrobed by a gaggle of strange women.

Amused, his partner said something that caused them to leave the room, closing the door quietly behind them. And then, deep within the castle where King George slept, Tassel and the yellow haired English woman spent a night of passionate lovemaking.

Toward dawn, having fallen into a deep slumber, a tap on his shoulder awakened him. Her ladies stood beside their bed, holding his discarded clothing, indicating he was to dress. His lover continued sleeping soundly, her naked limbs entangled in the bedding as he clothed himself. The tapestry was drawn aside, the concealed door opened, and awaiting him were the four escorts of the night before, ready to guide him back to his lodgings before the light of day.

After that, he said, they shared several nights of passion in her bedchamber. He saw her among the royal attendants at regal events, often seated near King George. But, of course, they did not allow their eyes to meet or acknowledge their passion for each other on those occasions.

Each of the other young Cherokee warriors soon found themselves engaged in similar liaisons with curious English women. Even Wiggan was in great demand. It was a rare night when more than one or two travelers slept in their chambers in the Covent Garden Inn.

As they sailed back to Charles Town, Wiggan told them the innkeeper had reported coming upon Attakullakulla asleep on the table in the center room. The Englishman had supposed he slept there because he considered himself of a higher station than his traveling companions. They enjoyed a good laugh at that, slapping an embarrassed Attakullakulla on the back and holding their sides as they laughed at his expense.

The truth of the matter was that the previous evening had been spent in the eager embrace of a love-starved woman of generous proportions. She had exhausted the diminutive Attakullakulla so that his back pained him to lie upon the soft beds of the bedchamber. He walked bent over for several days after that and could sleep only on the hard tabletop.

The talk grew even more ribald as the young warriors pressed for more details. Unfortunately, try as I might, my pretense became a reality, and I drifted into a deep slumber.

I was scarcely aware of strong arms lifting me from the mat and carrying me to my sleeping furs. The next thing I knew, Mother was calling me to hurry. It was time to go to water on the banks of the Tan-a-see and welcome the sun that was already turning the eastern sky a rosy pink as it began its journey across the sky.