Mountain Windsong

A Novel of the Trail of Tears

ROBERT • J • CONLEY

Set against the tragic events of the Cherokees' removal from their traditional lands in North Carolina to Indian Territory between 1835 and 1838, *Mountain Windsong* is the moving tale of Waguli ("Whippoorill") and Oconeechee, a young Cherokee man and woman separated by the Trail of Tears. Just as they are about to be married Waguli is captured by federal soldiers and, along with thousands of other Cherokees, taken west, on foot and then by steamboat, to what is now eastern Oklahoma. Though many die along the way, Waguli survives, drowning his shame and sorrow in alcohol. Oconeechee, among the few Cherokees who remain behind, hidden in the mountains, embarks on a courageous search for Waguli. Robert J. Conley makes use of song, legend, and historical documents to weave the rich texture of this love story that brings to life the suffering and endurance of the Cherokee people.

"At last a Cherokee love story about two ordinary people caught up in an extraordinary period of time. In telling the love story of Oconeechee, Bob Conley takes the reader on a journey that allows one to feel the effects of the Trail of Tears on individual people and their families while weaving in solid historical information about all the external forces which forever changed the Cherokee Nation."
—Wilma P. Mankiller, Principal Chief of the Cherokee Nation

"*Mountain Windsong* deserves to become an American classic."—Tony Hillerman, author of *Coyote Waits*

"*Mountain Windsong* is a masterpiece. It is the most honest, deeply felt book of the American Indian I have ever read."—Max Evans, author of *Rounders Three*

Robert J. Conley, a member of the United Keetoowah Band of Cherokees, is the author of numerous works of fiction, including the Real People series and *The Witch of Goingsnake and Other Stories,* all published by the University of Oklahoma Press.

Cover illustration by Murv Jacob. Design by Whitehead and Whitehead.

University of Oklahoma Press

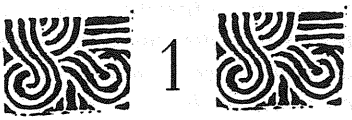
Norman oupress.com

RedRiver books

6 58804 02746 6

ISBN 0-8061-2746-5

9 780806 127460



1

I remember the first time ever I heard the windsong in those misty hills above Big Cove. The dogwood was in bloom. My belly was full of hickory-nut soup and chestnut bread that elisi, *my grandmother, had made. After we had eaten our fill, Grandpa had led me up the footpath behind the house that took us onto the top of the hill. There was no reason—no practical reason, I mean. We weren't gathering grapes or berries or wild onions. We weren't going hunting. We just climbed the path to the top of the hill and sat down in the sweetgrass among the passion flowers and thistles beneath the dogwood and sourwood trees. Grandpa took his corncob pipe and tobacco pouch out of a pocket of his baggy khaki trousers. He slowly filled the pipe bowl, folded up the pouch and stuffed it back into his pocket, and poked the pipestem in between his tight old-man lips. He reached into the breast pocket of his khaki shirt for a wooden kitchen match which he struck on the sole of his shoe. He held the flaming match cupped in his hands against the gentle breeze which was stirring the air around us. Then he puffed at his pipe, sucking the flame from the match down into the bowl until he had the tobacco lit. He broke the matchstick and shoved the pieces down into the earth, then he leaned back against the trunk of a big white oak and*

puffed contentedly, sending clouds of white, lovely looking smoke spiraling their way up into the heavens.

I stretched out on my back in the weeds and folded my hands behind my head. I was looking straight up into the sky, and I tried to imagine what it was like on the other side. Grandpa had told me that it was a gigantic vault over the earth—kind of like a cereal bowl turned upside-down over a saucer—and we were walking around on the saucer under the bowl. I couldn't see Grandpa, looking almost straight up the way I was, but his smoke kept drifting across my field of vision.

The smell of Grandpa's burning tobacco mingled with the fresh smells of the hills: the dogwood blossoms, the sweetgrass, the multitude of other aromas of the North Carolina Smoky Mountains, and I loved it. It was just about perfect—being up there on the hill, my favorite spot, with Grandpa, my favorite person in the whole world. So I was just laying there like that and enjoying the company of Grandpa and the smells and the sights and the sounds of the birds and the chattering squirrels, and it was just then that I heard the windsong. And it really was a song—or it was just like a song. I pushed myself up on my elbows and looked around. I guess I almost expected to see someone—whoever it was making the music, I guess. And then I looked at Grandpa, but he was just sitting there quietly smoking his pipe.

"Grandpa," I said.

He just kept puffing.

"What was that?"

"What, chooj*?" he said.*

He often called me boy like that rather than call me by my right name, which is LeRoy, and sometimes he called me Sonny. Sonny is what Daddy usually called me, and Mom called me either Sonny or LeRoy, but most of the time Grandpa called me chooj, *boy.*

"That sound, Grandpa," I said. "It sounds like—like a song."

"Oh," he said, and a smile formed on his wrinkled old brown face, "it is a song. It's a love song."

"A love song?" I said.

"It's the love song of Oconeechee and Whippoorwill."

I don't think I said anything then, but I sat right up and stared at him. He had that smile on his face and the twinkle in his eyes that I knew so well, and I could see that he had a story to tell me. He always looked like that when he had a story to tell. He puffed his pipe, and the smoke rose up high before it dissipated and vanished on its way up to God's house on the other side of the Sky Vault.

"Have you heard about that story?" he said.

"No."

"Well, it was a long time ago," he said. "Back then the Cherokees had all this land. Not just our little reservation here that we have now. We had lots of land—in North Carolina, in Georgia, in Alabama, in Tennessee. The Cherokee Nation was real big back in those days."

He paused to puff on his pipe, and he pointed off to the north where the mountains got higher.

"There was a town off over there called Soco Gap," he said, "and there was a man who lived there. He was a chief. His name was Tsunu lahun ski. White men can't say that. They called him Junaluska. That wasn't his original name. He changed it to that, and I'll tell you why he changed it. His original name was Gul kala ski. That means something that's leaning over and it keeps falling. That was his first name. But here's why he changed it.

"When the United States Army went to war against the Creek Indians away back in eighteen-hundred-and-thirteen, and Andrew Jackson was the general, some of the Cherokees joined the U.S. Army. Sam Houston, he'd been living with a Cherokee family, and he joined up. So did this man I'm telling you about—this Gul kala ski. He joined the army. Well, there was a big fight at a place called Horseshoe Bend, down in the Creek country, down in Alabama."

Grandpa pointed south when he said that. Whenever he was telling a story, he always pointed off in the direction of any place he mentioned, like it was just down the road there and you could get up and go over and look at it if you took a mind to. He paused to take a few deep sucks on his pipe.

"There at Horseshoe Bend," he said finally, "this Cherokee man, He Keeps Falling Over, stepped in between General Jackson and a Creek who was just about to kill the general, and Falling Over All the Time saved Jackson's life. He killed that other Indian.

"Then the Creeks were hunkered down real good behind a strong wall of logs across the river from where Jackson's men were at, and Jackson couldn't get at them. This Cherokee man I'm talking about, he led some other Cherokees down into the river, and they swam across and sneaked up behind the Creeks and surprised them. Then Sam Houston was able to lead an attack from the front, from across the river, and they whipped the Creeks. So this Cherokee man, he not only saved the general's life that day, he also pretty much won the fight for him.

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"'Course Old Hickory, that's what they called Jackson, he got

all the credit. Probably that's what got him elected president later on. And he knew who did it for him. He knew what happened out there. After the fight was over, he went to this man, this Falling Over man, and he said, 'As long as the sun shines and the grass grows,' he said, 'you and me are going to be friends, and the feet of the Cherokees will be pointed East.' That's what he said.

"Well, later on, when Jackson was president, that's when they were trying to make all the Cherokees get out of here, move out west so the white people could have all our land, this man said he would go talk to Jackson. He said that Jackson was his friend and would help. He remembered what Jackson had said to him after the big fight at Horseshoe Bend, and he figured that the president would remember the man who had saved his life and helped to make him a big hero by winning the fight that day. He said the president would remember his promise and would help the Cherokees out. But Jackson wouldn't even let him come in. So that man told his friends, 'detsinu lahungu, *I tried and I failed.' And that was how he got his new name, Tsunu lahun ski, He Tried but Failed. Junaluska."*

The sound of the windsong grew louder just then, and it was beautiful, but it was also just a little bit eerie, and it made me shiver. Grandpa puffed at his pipe, but it had gone out. He took it out of his mouth and tapped it against his shoe.

"But this story's not about him—not about Junaluska," he said. "It's about that love song in the wind. It's about Junaluska's daughter. Her name was Oconeechee."

Grandpa stopped and took the time to refill his pipe and light it again, and I was so anxious to hear the story that I thought it was taking him an extra long time to attend to that ritual. I even suspected that he was purposefully dragging it out just to make me wait, to build up suspense, I guess, or to test my patience. Off in the distance the rapid pounding of a woodpecker suddenly disturbed the silence, and an urge to get up and search for it intruded into my anxiety over the unfinished tale. My indecision was resolved for me, however, when Grandpa resumed his story.

"Well," he said, "like I told you, that Junaluska, he lived over there at Soco Gap. He was a chief—a town chief—a town war chief. You see, back in those days, we didn't have one big chief like now. Each town had its own government, and they had two chiefs—a war chief and a peace chief. The peace chief, he was the guy in charge of things at home when there wasn't any fighting going on. The war chief's job was to deal with outsiders and to take over any

time there was a war. It was the white man that caused us to get one big chief over all the Cherokees, and because each town already had two chiefs, when we did get that big chief, we called him the principal chief, you know, like the main chief over all the other chiefs.

"Even with the white man pushing for it, it took a long time for the Cherokees to agree to have one big chief and one government for all the Cherokees. The reason for that is that a long time ago we had that. Or something like that. We had priests who had all the power. They made the people build mounds and temples, and they got carried around wherever they went. They could do just about anything to anybody. Then one time a man had been out hunting, and when he came home, he couldn't find his wife. He went around to his neighbors, and for awhile nobody would tell him anything. Finally one of his neighbors said that while he was gone, the priests came and took his wife away. So the man got some of his friends and neighbors together, and he said to them, 'We've taken just about enough from these priests,' and they all agreed with him. So they killed all the priests. They had themselves a revolution right then. That all probably happened not too long before the first English colony was set up in these parts. Anyhow, the Cherokees wouldn't allow a strong, central government to develop after that. They let each town have its own government with two chiefs and a council and advisors. They had democracy. And that's the kind of town government that this guy Junaluska was a war chief in."

Just about there, Grandpa took a breather to puff on his pipe and to watch the smoke rise, and the way he was watching it, he made it look so interesting that I just sat back and watched it too. Then pretty soon he started talking again.

"This Junaluska had a wife. Her name was Qualla, same as the name they call our reservation here sometimes. And they were very much in love with each other, Junaluska and Qualla. They were happy there in Soco Gap. They were real happy together. You know, chooj, *sometimes it seems like a man and a woman are just meant for each other. They belong together. It's like God made them for each other, and He kind of pushed them together. I don't know if it's like that for everyone. If it is, then I guess some folks never find out who it is they're supposed to be with. Maybe that's why the world is so crazy these days. Maybe most people are just running around crazy looking for the one they belong with, and they don't even know they're looking or what it is that's wrong with them. The ones who do find each other, they're the lucky ones. They're*

the ones who know what life's all about. I feel that way about me and your grandma. And that's how it was with Junaluska and Qualla. They were just the right people for each other.

"Well, they had a little baby, a girl, and her name was Oconeechee. I don't know what that word means, because it's not a Cherokee word, but there used to be a small Indian tribe in these parts with a name that sounded like that same word. I think maybe Qualla came from that tribe, and so when they had their usdi, *their little one, they gave her that name—the name of her momma's people. But that's just my guess. Anyhow, she was a pretty little baby, and Junaluska and Qualla were just about as happy as they could be. But it didn't last long. Qualla took sick, and she died while Oconeechee was still just a baby. Junaluska, he was so lost and lonely without his Qualla that he wanted to die and go with her. He wanted to find her there on the other side of the big Sky Vault. He knew that she was up there somewhere just waiting for him to come along. He cried and he called out toward the Sky Vault that he wanted to go. He didn't want to stay on this world any longer—not alone, not without Qualla. But one night when he was sleeping, he had a dream. Or maybe it wasn't a dream. Maybe it was real. Qualla came down and talked to him. 'You can't come with me,' she said. 'Not yet. Our baby has lost her mother. You have to stay for her sake. When she's grown and has found her own man to look after her, then you can come to me. I'll be waiting for you.'*

"So Junaluska stayed on this world to raise his little girl, and even though he missed Qualla so bad that it hurt him, and he never stopped thinking about her, not for a minute, he loved little Oconeechee very much. And she was a lot like her mother. She was the only thing old Junaluska was living for. And it was hard times when he had to raise this little girl. The state governments all around us and the U.S. government were all ganged up on the Cherokees and the other Indians. They wanted all Indians to get out west—to move west of the big river—the Mississippi River."

"Why did they want that, Grandpa?" I said.

"Well, it's kind of hard to say. They thought that a white man was better than an Indian. They thought we were savages. I'm not too sure what that word means, that savage, *but I guess it just means that we didn't live the same way they did. They said savages steal and kill people. But they stole from us and they killed our people. So I don't really know what they meant by that. But they said that Indians were savage, and they didn't want savage neigh-*

bors. But mostly, I think, they just wanted all our land. I think that's why they wanted to kick us out.

"But that's what was going on. Junaluska knew that it was hard times, and he knew that his little girl would need him, so he stayed here. And now that's the place where the story really starts—the story about the windsong."

spread throughout the town. They watched it burn, and then they left.

Waguli was back inside the stockade, his hands still tied behind his back, the wounds to his flesh festering along with the bitterness in his heart. He was seated as before, leaning against the logs, his knees drawn up, his head hanging. This time, though, the guard in the tower had been instructed to watch Waguli. He had been identified as a troublemaker. No one was to go near him. If anyone approached too near, the guard would shout and aim his rifle. Then they would move away to a safe distance. When mealtime came, a soldier would come inside the compound and give Waguli's nearly raw salt pork to another prisoner to feed to him. Waguli refused to eat the white man's meat, and soon they didn't even bother to try anymore. His insides growled their hunger at him, but the gnawing pain in his stomach was somehow satisfying to Waguli. He decided that he would starve himself to death.

They broke his noble spirit,
Filled his heart so full of pain,
He would not give Oconeechee
Only half a man.
Whippoorwill, Whippoorwill,
Don't you know how she's searched all these hills?
She's searched every glen and glade
Not knowing why you went away.
Can't you feel she loves you still, Whippoorwill?

He tried to concentrate on his own pain and hunger. He kept his head down and his eyes closed. He tried to shut out the sights and sounds and smells of the stockade, and the visions in his mind and the ache in his heart that had been left there by the beautiful daughter of old Tsunalahuski, the lovely Oconeechee, the only love of his life. None of it worked. A screaming child would force him to open his eyes, and he would see the human misery all around him. He saw the soldier bring the bottle of whiskey and entice the young Cherokee woman outside the compound. He saw her return later, too long gone to have satisfied just one man, staggering drunk from the white man's crazy water and the white man's

lust. He saw the child sick with dysentery screaming in its helpless mother's arms, and he later saw it dead. He saw the young woman who had drunk the whiskey in a pathetic attempt to escape the pain lying passed out in her own vomit. And when he closed his eyes, he still saw them. The images swam in his mind, and they only grew stronger the tighter he squeezed his eyelids shut.

He heard the crying children, and he heard the mothers' wailing because they could do nothing to ease the pain and hunger and fear felt by their little ones. He heard the groans of the old men and old women as they valiantly attempted to suffer with patience. And he heard the laughter and the cursing of the soldiers, and he thought that he would swell and burst with his fermenting rage. But of all the physical horror, the pain of his wounds, the clangor of terror in his ears, the ghastly sights before his eyes, the worst were the smells. Fetid odors of human waste, the stench of sickness, the scent of death, the rank smell of rotten meat, the general rankness of unwashed bodies crowded together in too close proximity, all combined to produce a suffocating, mephitic assault on his nostrils and lungs and a savage and virulent affront to the dignity of humankind.

Yet the deepest pain of all came with thoughts of Oconeechee. Where could she be, he wondered. Was she in a camp like this? Or was she dead? He tried to recall her beauty, and then he tried to drive the image from his mind. If only he knew she was safe somewhere, then perhaps he could endure this white man's hell. Or if he knew that she was dead, he could feed on his hatred, nurture it and let it grow. He longed for the ability to weep—or to vomit. He could do neither. His whole being, physical, mental, spiritual, was one massive, dull ache. Slowly, complete realization of the total significance of all these things came into Waguli's mind, and it was cataclysmic, earth shattering. It was more than the unhappiness of Waguli and Oconeechee, more than the cruel, needless suffering of the wretches around him in the stockade, more than the thefts and the deaths. All of these were bad enough, but it was more than all of them combined. It was like the crack of doom.

They had gone to the water, and they had done everything right. The old men had seen to that. They should have been

saved. The ceremony had always worked in the past. The People had always prospered. It had never failed them before. Waguli couldn't understand why it had failed this time. If the going to the water couldn't save them, nothing could. There was no hope. None. Nothing but defeat, disaster, despair, and death.

Then he remembered the old prophet he had heard at Red Clay. He tried to recall the old man's exact words. What had he said? It came to him as if in a vision. He saw the old man materialize as before, saw the two black wolves at his sides, heard him speak the prophetic words of warning, of impending doom.

> I see Cherokees turning into whites. I see white man's clothes, white man's weapons. I heard white man's talk. To maintain our balance, we must remain Cherokee. If you keep these things you have from white men, the Cherokees will all be driven to the west, to the edge of the world, to the Darkening Land. Do you want to stay here where you belong? Then listen to me.
>
> Throw away your steel knives and iron pots and guns. Burn the white man's clothes you wear. Throw away the glass beads you use for decoration and learn again how to prepare the quills of the porcupine for use as decoration. Kill your cats and pigs and horses. Be Cherokees. That is the only way to be saved.

That was the answer. If only the people had listened to the old man. He thought about the people in Soco Gap, how they wore their hair, the way they dressed, how he, himself, had thought they looked and acted like whites. He told himself they were to blame. But then he remembered his own steel knife, and he recalled how proud of it he had been when he first acquired it. He considered all the steel pots in Old Town and all the glass beads on even his own clothing. We are all to blame, he told himself. None of us heeded the warning. Now it is too late.

Waguli's rage began to cool. It was displaced by an abject heaviness of heart and mournful regret. Then he saw that a white man was beginning to move among the Cherokees there in the compound. He appeared to be concerned and compassionate. He was not a soldier, but soon soldiers joined

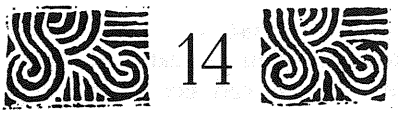
him, and they opened the gates and accompanied a small number of women and children to the outside. Waguli wondered where they were being taken. He wondered if others would be taken later. Soon they returned, and others were taken out.

"They are taking them to the river to bathe," he heard someone say in Cherokee. "The preacher is making them do it."

When all the women with children had been allowed to go to the river, the old people were taken out, those who were not too sick to be moved. Finally younger men were allowed to go. The preacher and soldiers came to Waguli, and the preacher said something to the soldiers. The soldiers seemed to protest, but the preacher became more firm. Waguli was pulled to his feet, and his hands were untied.

"Come, my son," said the preacher, and Waguli was surprised to hear Cherokee words spoken by a white man. He allowed himself to be conducted, along with the others, to the river, and he waded into the soothing waters and bathed his wounds. He bathed, but he felt filthy again as soon as he was back inside the stockade, and as soon as he was back inside, the soldiers bound his wrists again. Again the ropes chaffed his still raw and tender flesh. This time, however, the bonds were not pulled so cruelly tight. At the next mealtime, the preacher returned again with the soldiers, and Waguli was again released.

"You must eat," said the preacher, and Waguli, lacking the strength to resist and the will to refuse, accepted the food. He no longer worried about whether or not it was fit to eat. He could not taste. He did not care. He ate.



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Not knowing why you went away.
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Finally they stopped. The soldiers gathered the long line of Cherokees together beside a big river, and there they camped. Waguli did not know the river. He did not know where he was. He was west of his home, on the trail west. He knew no more. Fires were built, and the soldiers distributed food: corn, a little bacon, corn meal, and coffee. The Cherokees cooked their own food. Waguli was untied so that he could cook and eat, but he did not cook. Another Cherokee man saw him sitting listlessly and approached him.

"You're not cooking," said the man.

Waguli handed the man his food ration.

"You take it," he said.

He thought that he had given his food away, but a short while later, he was surprised when the man brought it back to him prepared to eat. Waguli stared for a moment, then accepted the food.

"*Wado,*" he said.

"My name is Pheasant," said the man. "My wife cooked your food."

"I am Waguli. I am alone."

Waguli thought for a fleeting moment of his lost Oconeechee. He hoped that she was safe somewhere. He was glad that she had not become his wife. If she had, she would be here on this trail to the Darkening Land with him, sharing his misery.

"When they give us food to cook," said Pheasant, "my wife will cook for you. You can eat with us."

Waguli nodded. He picked up the tin cup Pheasant had brought him and slurped some of the hot coffee. He had developed a taste for the white man's black drink.

"Waguli," said Pheasant, "they keep you tied. Why?"

"I fought them," Waguli answered, "when they came to my town, and when they put me in their prison, I tried to escape."

"Will you try to escape again?"

Waguli thought long and hard. He recalled the beatings he had received from the white soldiers. He reminded himself that he had no idea where he was, and he thought that even if he did manage to escape, he would find himself in strange country surrounded by white people. He thought of Oconeechee. He did not know where she was or whether she was safe or even alive. He did not want to share this kind of life with her. It was not even a kind of life, he thought. It was a kind of death. He remembered the old Cherokee prophet and the things he had said, and then he looked at the white man's tin cup in his hand which contained the white man's *kawhi*.

"No," he said. "It's useless. Already I tried, and I failed."

Waguli nearly chuckled at himself when he realized how close he had just come to saying the name of the man who had almost become his father-in-law. He sensed the chuckle, a kind of wry reaction somewhere inside him, but it did not surface.

"I'll talk to the soldier chief," said Pheasant. "I'll tell him that you won't try to escape again. Maybe he won't tie you up anymore."

"You talk the white man's language?" said Waguli.

"Yes. Enough."

Pheasant did talk to the soldier chief. Waguli saw them talking together. And the soldiers did not bind Waguli again that night. He did sense that they continued to watch him closely. It was more comfortable sleeping without the ropes,

even though he could still hear the children weeping throughout the night.

In the morning there were six big, flat white man's boats in the water. Waguli had seen white men in boats like these on the rivers near his home. They were not like the Cherokee dugout canoes. They were larger, and they were made of planks. Big rectangular things which lay flat on the water, they carried large oars, and the boatmen also used long poles with which to push and guide them down the river. These boats, though, were larger than the ones Waguli had seen before, and he had never seen so many at once. Each boat had its own crew of white boatmen, a rugged-looking bunch. They reminded Waguli of the Georgians he had encountered. They wore no shoes or boots and had their trousers rolled up to just under their knees.

The soldiers began shouting, and the Cherokees were soon herded onto the six rocking platforms. Some of the children began to scream in fear. It was chaotic, but soon the boats were loaded, and they began to float downriver. They floated most of the day, then stopped and unloaded again. Another camp was made. More food was distributed. Again Pheasant's wife prepared Waguli's ration for him, and for the first time in days, he could not say how many days, Waguli looked around himself. He saw Pheasant and his wife and child, and knew he would remember them. As dull as his senses had become, he was not yet insensitive to simple kindness.

Again they slept on the bank of the river. Waguli expected the soldiers to begin yelling early the next morning and to load them once more onto the flat boats. He was surprised. He slept late. When he sat up and looked around, he saw that some were still sleeping. The soldiers stood around casually watching the Cherokees, and some of the people were bathing in the river. Except for the usual distribution of rations, nothing else happened that day.

The next day was almost the same. Waguli did talk a little to Pheasant, and he learned the names of Pheasant's wife—Sally, a white woman's name, and child—Yudi, a small boy. In the afternoon a wagon came. It was loaded with new clothes, white men's clothes. Pheasant told Waguli that the soldiers wanted to give the new clothes to the Cherokees and at the same time to get the names of all the Cherokees written

down in their book. The Cherokees refused the clothes and would not give their names. The rest of the day passed much as had the previous one.

On the morning of the third day at the camp, more wagons came. These brought more captive Cherokees, unloaded them, and left again, and then two more of the flat boats came. The boatmen tied the eight boats into four pairs, and the soldiers began to shout. The Cherokees were all loaded onto the boats again, along with the clothes they had refused, and the journey down the river was resumed.

Waguli soon noticed that the river was getting wider and deeper and the current more swift. The children began to be frightened again. Some cried, and some screamed in fear. The current grew faster, and soon the boats raced wildly down the river. Women and children screamed, and men shouted. The people clutched one another for safety. Waguli began to feel ill. The soldiers and boatmen called out in futile attempts to maintain order on the recklessly careening boats. Waguli wondered if maybe this would be the end. Maybe, he thought, we will be rushed headlong riding on these flat white-man boats to the far western edge of the world and then tossed screaming into the Darkening Land.

But no. The rapids slowed, the waters calmed, and the boats stopped once more and unloaded. Another camp was made. More rations were passed out, and the people, as soon as they had calmed down enough from their frenzied ride through the rapids, cooked and ate. What now? The question repeated itself over and over again in Waguli's head as he drifted off into a troubled sleep. What now?

Waguli was awakened the following morning by a loud, raucous clamor. There were shouts and screams and crying, and there were shrill whistles and puffings and chuggings, and strident, reverberating splashes. He jumped up from the ground, expecting at any moment to be hurled precipitously into the Darkening Land, and then he saw the big boat. He had seen one once before from the safety of a high hilltop. Someone had told him that the white men burned wood on them, and used the burning wood to boil water and produce steam. Somehow the steam made the big boats go. He had never seen one at such close range, and it was a dreadful sight

to behold. Great clouds of ugly black smoke billowed from its two tall horns. The big boat had three levels and a giant wheel at its rear. In spite of his numbness, Waguli felt twinges of fright deep in his bowels. A hand touched his shoulder, and he jumped. It was Pheasant.

"Have you ever seen one before?" asked Pheasant.

"Once," said Waguli.

"Have you ever ridden on one?"

"No."

"I did. Once. It's not so bad. Don't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid," said Waguli. "It doesn't matter anymore."

The supplies were loaded on the big boat, and four of the flat boats were lashed to it on each side.

"Ha. Waguli," said Pheasant.

"What?"

"White men name their boats. Do you know what this one's name is?"

"No."

"It's called the *George Guess.*"

"How do you know that?" said Waguli.

"My woman reads the white man's writing. The name is there on its side. *George Guess.* Do you know who that is?"

"No."

"That's Sequoyah's white man name. George Guess. They're making Sequoyah take us to the west."

"Sequoyah?" said Waguli. "He's the Cherokee who gave us the writing, isn't he?"

"Yes," said Pheasant, "and now the white men are making Sequoyah take his own people to the west. The *George Guess.* Ha."

The loading of supplies and securing of the flat boats were accomplished, and the soldiers began to herd the Cherokees onto the boats like so many cattle. Waguli found himself on the third deck of the big boat, far above the water. He had lied to Pheasant. He was afraid. And when the great boat began to move, so did Waguli's insides. Pheasant had been right. The ride was not so frightening as the ride in the small boats through the rapids, but the motion was of a different kind, and it was that motion which made Waguli ill. He felt the need to vomit, yet he did not.

The chuffing and banging, the hissing and clanking, the

occasional loud, explosive blasts soon actually became a comfort to Waguli. For the first time since his incarceration in the stockade, he could not hear the crying of the children. He curled himself up on the boards of the upper deck and pressed himself against the railing at the edge. He closed his eyes. All the misery was shut out of his senses, and even though he had slept the night before and even though his stomach still churned from the motions of the big boat, he soon slept, and in his dreams he found himself back home at Old Town. It was the time of the busk, the green corn festival, the celebration of the beginning of a new year.

They had played the four sacred ball games, the men against the women, and the women had won them all, of course. Waguli had scored a point, though. He had reached out with his two ballsticks and caught the ball in flight. Then, still using the sticks, he had tossed the ball high into the air, and it had struck the carved wooden fish perched high atop the pole and it had made the fish spin. And they had danced the four dances, the stomp dances that lasted all night long. All this had taken place over a period of several weeks. Then came the four days together with the cleansing of the arbors and the stomp ground, the feasting and the fasting, the dancing of the special dances and the preparation of the sacred black drink, and the scratching. Waguli had been scratched, and he had bled, but he knew that the scratching and the bleeding would help to purify his body. Then came the time to drink the special drink. The men all drank, and then one at a time when they felt the urge, they went into the woods to vomit. When the ceremony was done, all the impurities gathered over the past year, all the pollution in the bodies of the people, would be gone. Everything and everybody would be clean and pure, and the balance and harmony of the world would be restored. Waguli drank, and he felt the uprising deep within. He went to the woods and fell to his knees, and he gagged, and there were spasms and convulsions in his guts that twisted his body grotesquely, and the tears ran down his face, but he could not vomit.

Suddenly he was awake. The boat had stopped, as had its noises. Waguli decided that he had been awakened by the silence. He could hear the crying again. The Cherokees were urged ashore to camp again beside the river. They built their

small cooking fires, and the soldiers began to distribute food. The boatmen were gathering wood for their ravenous vessel. Waguli's stomach felt queasy. When his rations were handed to him, he put them on the ground. Pheasant came over to him and picked them up. He started to go back to his wife's cooking fire, but changed his mind. He squatted down beside Waguli.

"While you slept," he said, "a child died on the boat."

Waguli looked at Pheasant, but he didn't respond. His stomach churned. He wanted to vomit.

"And another was born," said Pheasant. "I'll take this to cook."

While the Cherokees were eating, the soldier chief began to talk to them again. Waguli paid no attention. He couldn't understand anyway. When the soldier stopped talking, Pheasant interpreted for Waguli.

"They are offering us the clothes again," he said. "Look. Some are going to take them."

Waguli shrugged.

"It doesn't matter, I guess," he said.

Soon Pheasant, with Sally and Yudi, was in line. Everyone was in line except Waguli. Pheasant looked back at him from his place in line.

"Waguli," he said. "Come on."

Waguli stood up then and took his place in line. After he had been handed the new clothes, he went to the river and stripped. He bathed himself, then put on the white man's clothing. Looking down, he couldn't recognize his own body. He put his hands to his head and rubbed them over what had been his slick-shaven head. He found it rough with stubble. He felt a convulsion in his guts, and he walked back to his spot near Pheasant's fire.

They rode the big boats again the next day, and then they camped again, and in the camp an old woman died. They buried her there, and some Cherokees sang a few strange songs over the grave. They sang in Cherokee, but Waguli didn't know the songs. Pheasant told him that they were Christian songs. White man songs, thought Waguli. By this time he had simply learned to live with the constant uneasiness in his stomach. They slept there by the river, by the fresh grave of the old woman.

The Sun was just peeking out from under the far eastern edge of the Sky Vault when Waguli was startled out of his sleep by the noise of the big boat. He sat up and saw that the boat was leaving. The other Cherokees were looking at the boat and at each other in confusion. The soldiers were standing around, some watching the Cherokees, some watching the boat. Then the soldier chief turned away from the boat to face the Cherokees, and he yelled some orders.

"We're going," said Pheasant.

Waguli stood up, and it was only then that he noticed the crowd of white people up on the hill watching them. They must want to watch us die, he thought. On up the hillside was a white man's town. They had spent the night just beside a white man's town, and he had not even known it. When the direction of their march became apparent, Waguli saw that they were going right into the town. They walked past the crowd of whites on the hillside, and Waguli could hear them talking. He didn't know what they were saying. He had no idea what their attitudes were. He wouldn't look at them. But as they walked into the town, he did look. He looked long enough to see that the streets were lined with the curious whites. He didn't look long enough to discover the expressions on their faces. The crowds of whites became a blur in his mind, another vague image of horror to add to those which already swirled inside his head. They walked through the town, and then they stopped. Up ahead, over the crying, Waguli could hear the surprised murmurs of the Cherokees at the head of the line. A child began to scream.

"They're loading us onto *ajila-dihyeg,*" said Pheasant.

Waguli had heard about these fire-carriers that hauled white people long distances over iron roads, but he had never seen one. He had never before been sure he really believed in their existence. And now he was about to ride in one. He still couldn't see it for the hordes of people ahead of him. The crowd of Cherokees, urged on by the soldiers, began to inch forward. Soon Waguli found himself up close to *ujana,* the thing one gets into. Pheasant was climbing up, going inside, and Waguli was next. He hesitated. Pheasant looked back at him, just as a soldier standing nearby shouted.

"Come on, Waguli," said Pheasant. "It's all right. It's better than walking."

Waguli crawled into the great iron thing, and he found that it was like a house. It was a house on wheels, and it was tied to other houses, and somewhere up ahead there was a monstrous, smoke-belching engine that pulled all of them along the iron road. When all of the people were crowded onto the fire-carrier, Waguli heard a long and shrill whistle that nearly pierced his soul. Then there was a loud, inhuman coughing, followed by a great lurch forward. Mothers clutched their crying, terrified children. Even Pheasant's Sally was hugging little Yudi to her breast, little Yudi, who was always so brave, who did his best to imitate the manly behavior of his father. Yudi was coughing, but he did not cry. Waguli's stomach turned over, but nothing came up. He thought he heard a hideous scream from somewhere, but the noise of the fire-carrier and the crying of the children was too much. He couldn't be sure. Soon the house-pulling monster picked up speed, and it was racing across the face of the earth like a giant iron snake. Waguli closed his eyes. He tried to sleep. Something was crawling inside his stomach.

The fire-carrier filled with Cherokees raced on, but for Waguli time seemed to stand still. Now and then Pheasant tried to engage him in conversation, but Waguli's answers were always brief, terse, dissuading, and when Yudi's coughing grew worse, Pheasant turned all his attention to his wife and child. Waguli spent the day drifting in and out of sleep.

He had been sleeping again when he was jarred back to the waking world by the sound of a woman's scream close by, so close that it seemed the woman had screamed right into his ear. He came awake, but everything was black. He could see nothing in the darkness around him, but he could feel the forward, mad rush of the fire-carrier. Again he had the powerful sensation that he was being hurled into the Darkening Land. Perhaps they were already there. Slowly his eyes adjusted to the darkness, and he saw Pheasant and Sally beside him, wrapped in each other's arms, wailing in despair and grief, and he saw that they were holding between them the lifeless body of their young son. Yudi was dead. Waguli felt a great heaving surge from deep down inside him. He leaned forward and gagged and gasped for air, but he did not vomit.

They buried Yudi by the light of the following morning there in a strange land, not far from the iron road of the

fire-carrier. They had kept racing forward all through the night, and shortly after the appearance of daylight the fire-carrier had slowed, then stopped. The soldiers had ordered the Cherokees off, and they had discovered that Yudi and another child had died during the night. And Waguli had overheard bits of a conversation that explained the hideous scream he had heard back at the beginning of the journey on the iron road. Somehow, it seemed, a man had fallen under the wheels of the fire-carrier. Waguli never heard anything more about the man, never heard his name, never heard where he had been buried or when or even if he had been buried. How much more, he wondered, must they endure?