

A Short Story by
SHERRY SHINDELAR AND
SARAH HANKS

A SILVER PROMISE

*A promise etched in silver brings
hope to two captive women*



A SILVER PROMISE

S H E R R Y S H I N D E L A R

A N D

S A R A H H A N K S

welcome



Thank you for taking the time to download this short story.

We're thrilled to be able to share this story with you. Sherry and I have been critique partners for years, but this is the first time we've collaborated on a story together. We wanted to weave our latest works together: Sherry's *Texas Forsaken* and my novel *Fall Back and Find Me*. But how to do so when Sherry's riveting novel focuses on a captive of the Comanches who doesn't want to be set free, and my split-time focuses on the guerillas of the Civil War?

The tie-in came in the form of a very important spoon. This spoon plays an integral roll in *Fall Back and Find Me*. Now you can see who had it before and what importance it had in those people's lives. Isn't it amazing how God lives outside of time and how He fits the pieces of our story together like an intricate puzzle? I hope you'll see His hand in this story collaboration, and that you see it in your life as well.

Happy reading!

Sarah Hanks

Sherry Shindelar

A Silver Promise

Comancheria, Western Oklahoma

1857

It was the *tue*, the child, who grabbed Eyes-Like-Sky's attention and drew her to slip toward the front of the gathering of buckskin-clad women, half-naked children, and bare-chested warriors. Chief Yellow Horse of the Nokoni Comanche village near the Pease River and wife had traveled here to show off their prize captives, a father and daughter who had great medicine.

The daughter, maybe nine or ten years, stood in the center of the square, wide-eyed, hands clasped, and dressed in tattered buckskin. She'd been with Yellow Horse's tribe long enough to have the Comanche-style fringe and beads. But her eyes were—blue. Eyes-Like-Sky froze.

This girl could have been her years ago, except this girl had a living father.

The fringes on Eyes-Like-Sky's sleeves rustled as she flicked her dark, wavy hair over her shoulders. Tonight, she'd smooth more bear grease over it, anything she could to blend in.

The last thing she wanted to do was remind the village she too was a captive. As if Old Owl and his wife Crooked Tree would ever forget. It'd been a year since Crooked Tree had struck her, not since Eyes-Like-Sky had used a piece of firewood to show the woman she would no longer stand to be beaten.



"They say he's from one of those weakling tribes back East." Willow Woman, hair cropped short for mourning, nudged up alongside of Eyes-Like-Sky. "You know, the ones the pony soldiers dragged onto the prairie, as if it isn't enough for the settlers to take our land. They want everyone's land."

Eyes-Like-Sky nodded. Thankful to not be considered a settler any longer. Willow Woman was one of the few who'd share her food or water or tipi as if Eyes-Like-Sky were an equal.

The low tum, tum of the drums sounded near the entrance of the chief's tent. The male captive, bare-footed, and clothed only in a red breechclout, joined his daughter in the center of the circle. A featherless headband held his black hair off his forehead, short hair, reaching just below the tops of his shoulders. He'd had a white man's cut before his capture. Half-healed cuts and scabs dotted his body.

She rubbed her thumb over the scar on her wrist. She knew more than she wanted to about cuts and scabs.

In front, the girl knelt on the packed dirt. Dressed in finely beaded doeskin, Yellow Horse's wife strode to the center of the circle, careful of the pillow she carried. Something gold and shiny on a chain lay atop the square of stuffed hide.

The chief's wife offered the pillow, and the girl carefully accepted the circular gold piece into her hands.

Willow Woman whispered, "They say it's magic from the Great Spirit. That the captive can use it to read the sun."

Eyes-Like-Sky frowned. Read the sun? A device to keep time? She knew it right away, even though the English words evaded her. Her—her father had once had one? Her father. A blurred memory. Face indistinguishable, kind hands.

The man in the center uttered foreign words, not English from the scraps she could recall, but something else, as he accepted the watch from his daughter. Face uplifted, he dropped to his knees and held the time piece up to the sky. An offering to the Creator?

The drums ceased. A hush fell over the crowd. In the silence, a tune, soft and sweet, swelled forth from the time piece. Oohs and aahs erupted from the onlookers.

"A message from the Creator." Willow Woman whispered.

The captive passed it to his daughter with an air of reverence. She held it up in her open palms, turning in a circle for all to see. Whispers trailed through the crowd. The man called out in a powerful voice, the words still foreign, his hand outstretched toward the heavens. The song ended. The girl knelt once more and laid the watch—that was the word—back on the pillow.

A watch. Not magic. The man risked his life on the awe he'd inspired in the faces and hearts of those gathered around the circle. His hands twitched as he held out the offering to the chief's wife. He knew it.



The girl's gaze searched the crowd. She knew it, too.

Nothing I can do about it. Eyes-Like-Sky slipped to the fringes of the gathered villagers as their own Chief Bull Elk called the captive to his tipi for further examination by the council.

Four rows of tipis beyond the village square, she planted her knees at the edge of a stretched and pegged buffalo hide. Pumice stone in hand, she poured her muscles into scraping the surface smooth. A jar of finely minced basswood bark and buffalo brains sat nearby. It didn't matter that this hide was destined to become a robe for Old Owl. When he wore it, everyone in the tribe would know she'd crafted it. The honor would be hers. They would know she was more than a slave.

She touched the rawhide string around her neck with its treasure buried beneath her buckskin blouse. If Dancing Eagle had his way, she'd be a slave no longer once he returned with horses from his raids. Despite the fact he was only a visitor to this village, he'd promised to buy her, set her free, wed her. The warmth and security of his arms, the glow in his eyes when he beheld her. She'd never dreamed such happiness could be hers. To be loved. Hardly imaginable after the horrible night long ago when she'd lost everything. She'd been treated like a dog ever since. But Dancing Eagle saw her, saw beyond the scars and the tatters. She would not risk losing the hope of that, no matter what.

A commotion erupted from the village square. Her hand stopped in mid-scrape. What if Chief Bull Elk had seen the captive for what he was, a trickster trying to save his and his daughter's lives? She swallowed hard. There was nothing she could do to help them. Her opinion was worth less than spit to the ruling council.

Besides, the girl was young enough that she would likely be adopted in the end, not enslaved.

Eyes-Like-Sky dropped the pumice stone. When had her heart become as calloused as her hands?

. When had
her heart
become as
calloused as
her hands?"

No concern of hers. But the thought rang hollow in her churning gut. Her head throbbed. Too many thoughts of the past.



###

Late into the night, Eyes-Like-Sky rolled over. Her mattress might as well have been made of stones instead of skins. She'd tossed and turned long after the warriors had finished their celebration and dance. They would not easily wake tonight.

At the beginning of the ceremony, the men tied the male captive to a pole in the center of the dancing ground. Thankfully, they'd forgone stretching him limb from limb and slicing his flesh with multiple kisses of their tomahawks. Still, she'd seen the doubt in the furrowed brows of the chief councilmen. They questioned the man's magic. Maybe tomorrow, they'd demand he prove his powers in some other way. Would he pass the test?

No concern of hers. But the thought rang hollow in her churning gut. Her head throbbed. Too many thoughts of the past.

She rolled onto her knees and tugged her skirt down. Flat on his back with his corpulent body only half covered by a buffalo robe, Old Owl filled the tipi with his snores. Her whole body tensed. Once Dancing Eagle returned, this brute would touch her no more. Ever.

With deer-like steps, she picked up the water pouch and headed out the hide-covered opening. The dusky light of the waxing moon shadowed the tipis in muted darkness. A stray dog slinked between the long poles.

Past the lodges, she made her way through the narrow cottonwood grove to the creek. She paused on the bank, wriggling her bare toes in the grass. The gurgling—

A whimper followed by hushed whispers carried from around the bend. Eyes-Like-Sky's hand closed over her knife hilt. It was probably nothing. Two lovers maybe? Still she kept low as she crept to the bushes, raised herself behind a cottonwood trunk, and peeked around the corner. She started.

The captive and his daughter stood by the bend in the creek, not tied up in makeshift tipi next to Yellow Horse's. A pinto waited nearby, its reins swishing against the reeds as it dipped its head for a drink.

The man cradled his daughter's face in his hands. Fierce whispers fired between them, the tongue foreign. The girl wrenched away and buried her face in her hands, her dark hair falling over her face. Muffled sobs sounded above the rustle of the leaves.

The girl's sorrow swept over Eyes-Like-Sky. Was she afraid her father would die?

Eyes-Like-Sky crept closer. A twig snapped. The man's head jerked up, and he shoved his daughter behind him.

His free hand closed over his sheathed knife hilt, a weapon he wasn't even supposed to have. His bare chest rose and fell hard. "Please." Comanche dripped from his tongue now. "Do not sound the alarm."

Weaving past the reeds, Eyes-Like-Sky stepped closer. Mud dampened her moccasins.

A snuffle came from behind the father as the girl peeped around his side, her pronunciation stilted. "Don't hurt Papa."

Eyes-Like-Sky glanced toward the silent village and sheathed her knife. Her heart thumped in her throat. If someone were to come upon them now, they'd assume she was helping these two get away. "What are you doing here? If they catch you—"

"They're going to kill me sooner or later. Better to try to escape than to wait for it." His eyes gleamed in the dark. "I saw you in the crowd today. You're a captive too. You could escape with my daughter Tayanita."

Escape? As likely as a rabbit tiptoeing past a wolf. Eyes-Like-Sky pressed her lips together. "Someone must have helped you get this far and provided a horse. I will not stop you. But neither will I go."

The girl latched onto his arm. "You must take me with you Papa."

He winced. Cuts and dried blood covered his arms and chest. The tomahawks at the evening's festivities had not been as silent as she'd supposed.. If he stayed, tomorrow would bring worse.

"Papa," the girl pleaded.

Arm around his daughter, the man stepped toward Eyes-Like-Sky. "My name is John Whitestone. I am Cherokee. All I want is to get my daughter away from here and safely back to her people."

"John Whitestone. She'd be better off staying. They'd enslave her or adopt her. It is you whose life is at risk."



"This you can guarantee? Her safety? After I've bewitched them with my watch?" He swiped a strand of black hair from his brow. "No. I have asked the Creator, God, for help. He granted us the kindness of the chief's first wife to cut our bonds, and now He has sent you."

Goosebumps shivered across Eyes-Like-Sky's arms. "No one sent me."

A wry smile flickered across his grave features. "So you say. But I need your help. Tayanita must not travel the same path as me."

The girl latched her arms around his waist. "I will follow you. You cannot stop me." Her voice quavered.

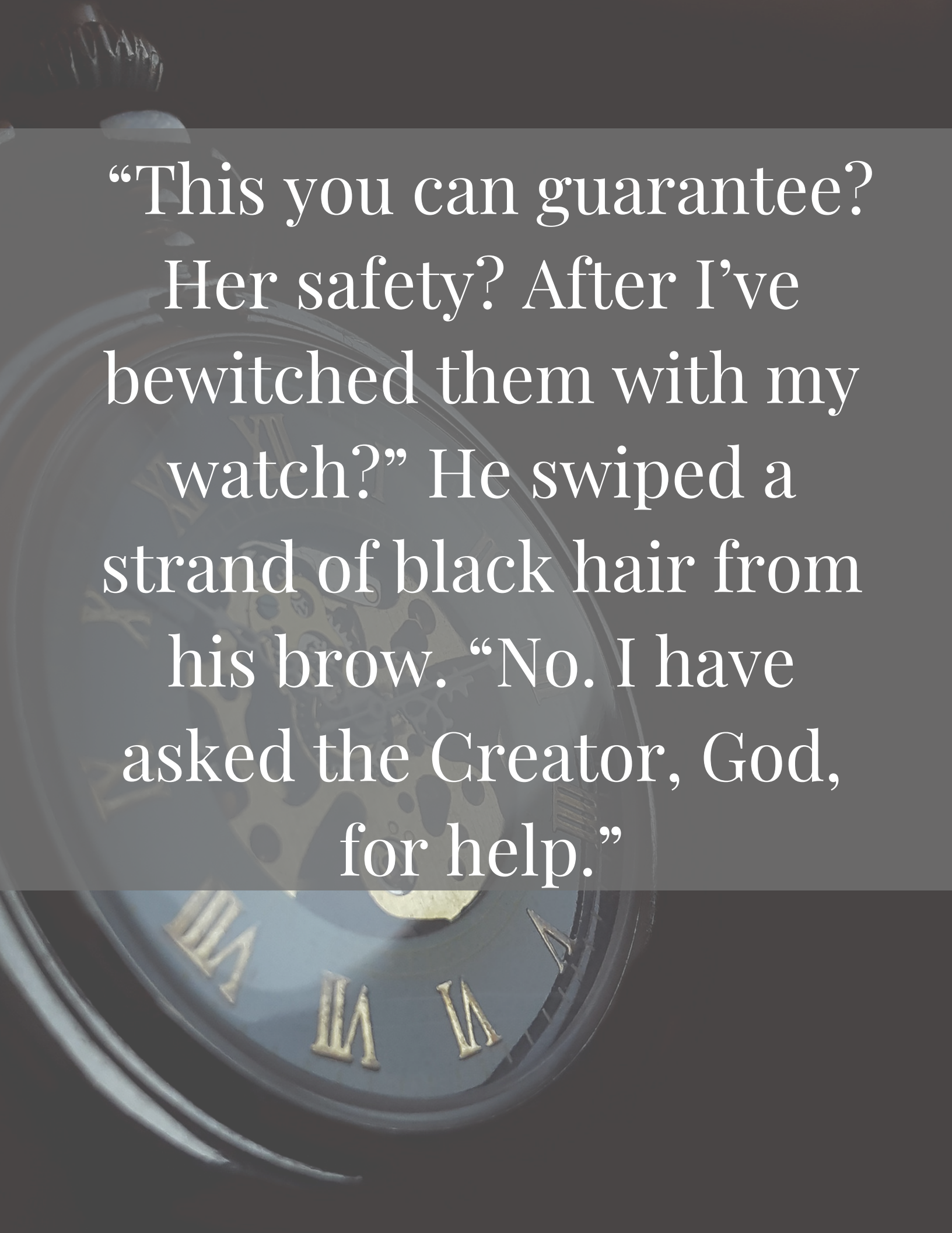
"Sweet girl." He tipped her face toward his. "We must travel two different paths. Me, tonight. You, two or three days from now once the camp has settled down. You'll hide. Miss Blue Eyes will help you—"

"I...I cannot—" Eyes-Like-Sky rubbed her fringed sleeves as if she could ward off the inward chill.

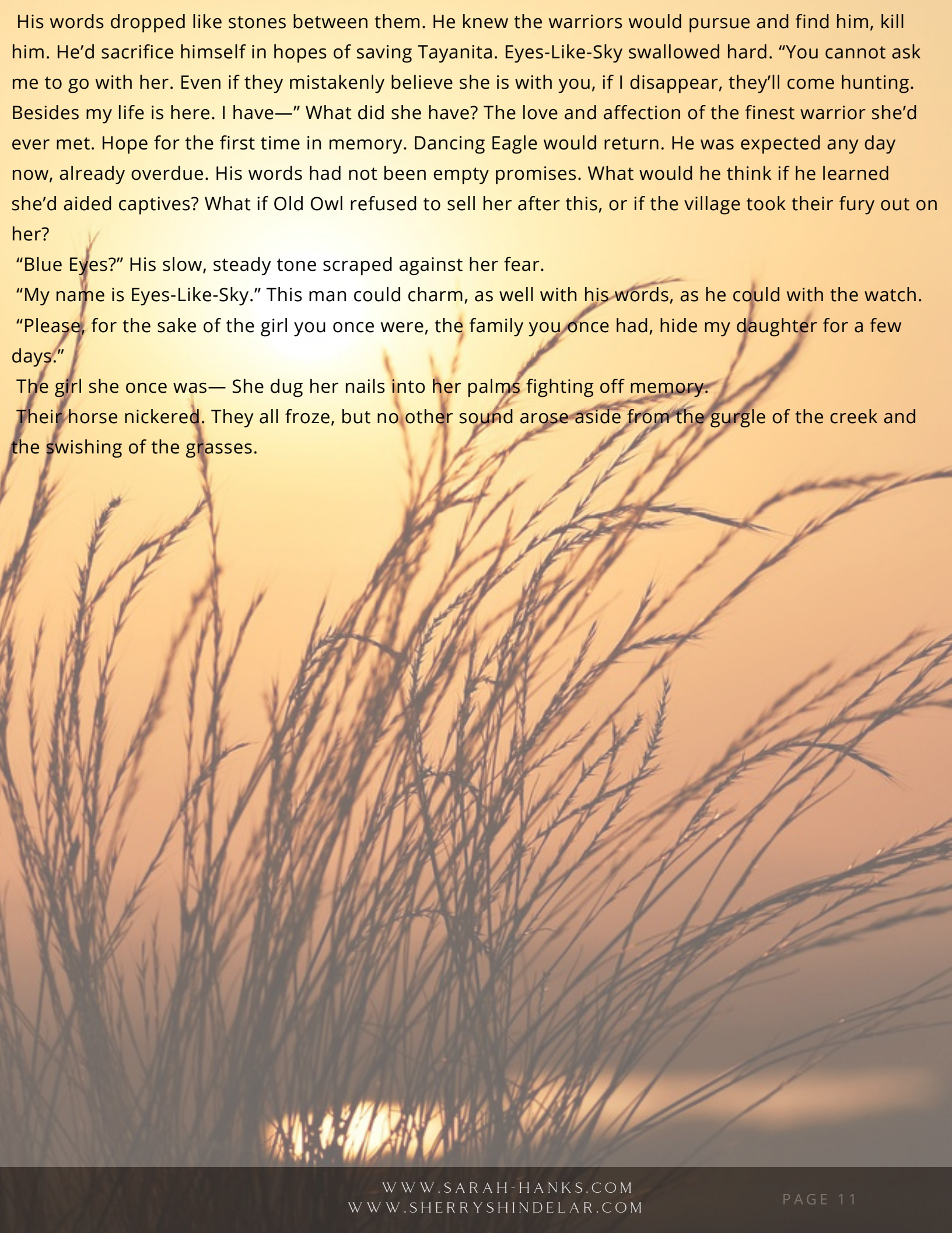
"And I will not be left." Tayanita tightened her grip.

He hugged her close, but his gaze fixed on Eyes-Like-Sky. "She cannot come with me."





“This you can guarantee?
Her safety? After I’ve
bewitched them with my
watch?” He swiped a
strand of black hair from
his brow. “No. I have
asked the Creator, God,
for help.”



His words dropped like stones between them. He knew the warriors would pursue and find him, kill him. He'd sacrifice himself in hopes of saving Tayanita. Eyes-Like-Sky swallowed hard. "You cannot ask me to go with her. Even if they mistakenly believe she is with you, if I disappear, they'll come hunting. Besides my life is here. I have—" What did she have? The love and affection of the finest warrior she'd ever met. Hope for the first time in memory. Dancing Eagle would return. He was expected any day now, already overdue. His words had not been empty promises. What would he think if he learned she'd aided captives? What if Old Owl refused to sell her after this, or if the village took their fury out on her?

"Blue Eyes?" His slow, steady tone scraped against her fear.

"My name is Eyes-Like-Sky." This man could charm, as well with his words, as he could with the watch.

"Please, for the sake of the girl you once were, the family you once had, hide my daughter for a few days."

The girl she once was— She dug her nails into her palms fighting off memory.

Their horse nickered. They all froze, but no other sound arose aside from the gurgle of the creek and the swishing of the grasses.

He whispered once more, "After a few days, sneak away with her. A Kiowa trader came through the last village. He has a kind heart. He said if we could escape he'd help us find our way back to the Cherokee lands. Said he'd wait at the northern bend of the Washita River from the quarter moon to the half. Even if you just ride with her halfway, as far as you can go in a night, I believe she could find the rest of the way on her own."

Tayanita buried her head against her father's ribs.

He smoothed a hand over her hair. "Sweet daughter, I'll lead the warriors away, then circle around to meet you and our Kiowa friend. Eyes-Like-Sky will help. We will meet again."

The girl's shoulders shook.

He kissed the top of her head. "I love you. Don't ever forget that." He hugged her tight, then released her. "I must go."

The girl wilted.

Eyes-Like-Sky placed a hand on Tayanita's back.

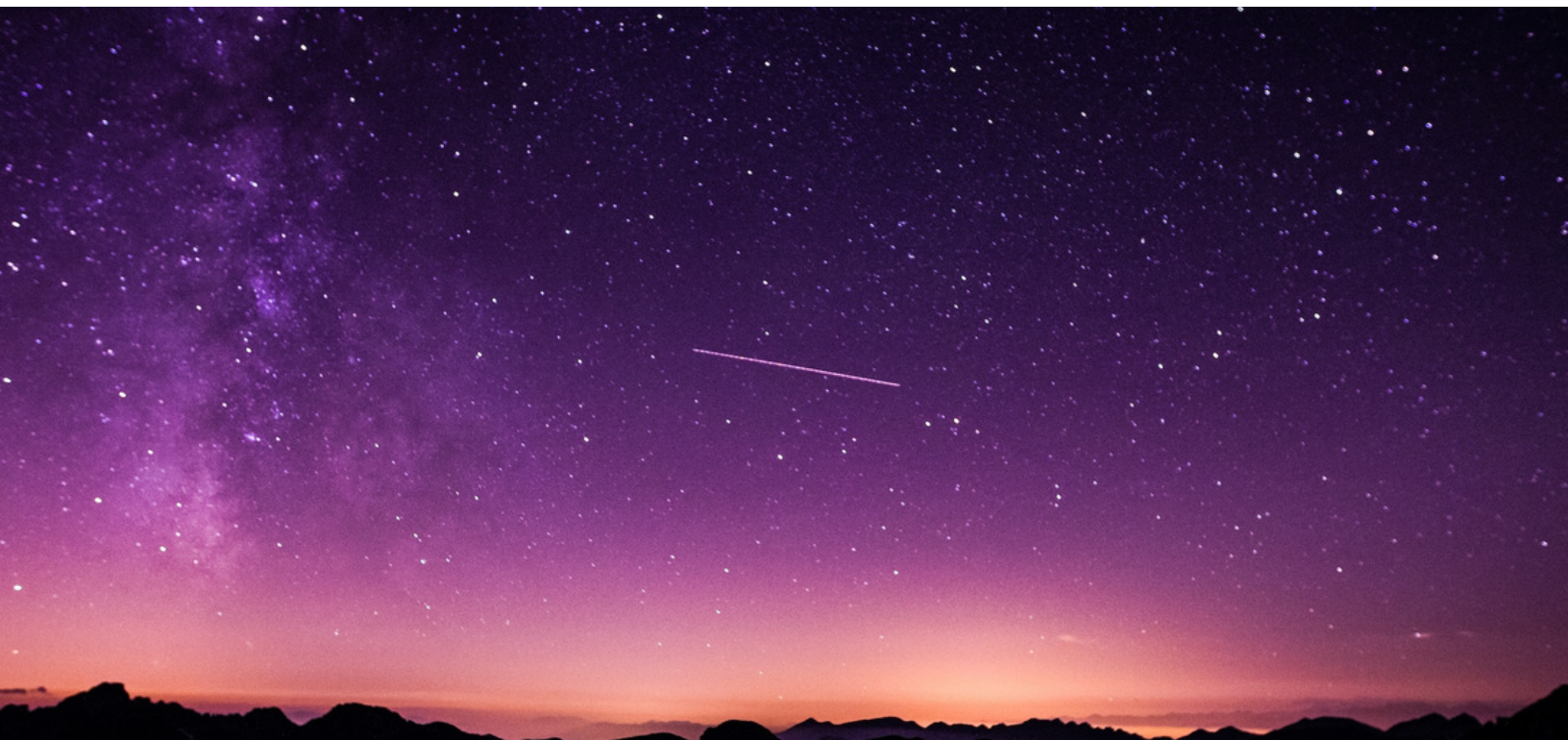
John swung up onto the pinto. His gaze locked on Eyes-Like-Sky. "I'm counting on you."

A shudder ran through her as she nodded. He would give his life. She would risk hers.

"I love you," Tayanita whispered as he turned the pinto into the stream and snapped the reins.

The song of a blackbird trilled overhead. Dawn would be coming. They had to hurry. Eyes-Like-Sky took the girl by the hand and started the opposite way down the creek. Water seeped into her moccasins and slowed their pace, but it would cover their tracks.

There was a cave about a mile away on the other side toward the canyon. She'd leave her and come back the next night with food. Undiscovered? Easier said than done.



Beneath the fading stars, Eyes-Like-Sky's pulse pounded in her temples. The gurgle of the creek muffled the slosh of their steps, but was it enough? Cicadas joined the pre-sunrise chorus. A light flickered somewhere beyond the grove, an early riser stirring up a fire for a morning meal.

Gnarled branches from a downed tree stretched halfway across the creek. They were almost to the cave. She tugged Tayanita up the slippery bank, over the fallen trunk, and through a web of brush. Thorns snagged her clothing and scratched her hand. On the backside of an outcropping of rocks, the ground sloped toward a pucker in the stone, a yawning that opened into a dark hole.

Tayanita stuttered to a stop. "I can't go in there." Wide, tearful eyes gazed up at Eyes-Like-Sky. Pink glowed on the horizon. They were running out of time. Eyes-Like-Sky had to sweep the creek bank and get back into the village. If they discovered she'd been out on the night of the escape—Tayanita trembled. "Please don't leave me." Shoulders hunched, she clutched her arms to her chest. Eyes-Like-Sky dropped to her knees. This girl was so much like her sister Beth four years ago that it ripped at the seams of her tattered heart. "I'll return tomorrow night with food. If I don't get back to the village, they'll come looking for me and you. We've got to make them think you left with your father."

"My poor papa..."

"Your papa wants you to be a brave girl for him." Eyes-Like-Sky touched a hand to the rawhide strap around her neck. Beneath her buckskin blouse, swung the silver spoon, secured in a small, weathered pouch. Dancing Eagle's gift from one of his raids. A touch of civilization, a civilization he hated, but which he feared she might still long for. It was a gift of love.

Tayanita knelt beside her and tugged on her sleeve. "W-what if the warriors catch Papa?"

Eyes-Like-Sky shuddered. How could she answer such a question? She needed to distract the child, comfort her, give her hope. What if she loaned her the spoon? "Tayanita, I have something for you." She drew the pouch from her blouse, rubbing the soft leather against the hidden outline of silver. Biting her lip, she lifted the rawhide strip over her head. Would Dancing Eagle understand? "This is a special treasure. My love gave it to me in case I got lonesome for home." She lowered the makeshift necklace over the girl's hair and spoke the truth she hadn't known until this moment. "What he doesn't know is that he is my home." What if helping this captive cost her his love? But how could she do otherwise? "I'll let you keep it for me until I get you safely to the Kiowa."

The girl wrapped her hand around the leather pouch and sniffled. "What is it?"



“A treasure. A silver spoon with a secret message. Your papa can read it to you when you see him.” She squeezed her hand over the girl’s. “Your papa talked to you about the Creator. Your papa believes He will watch over you.”

“What do you believe?” The girl clasped the treasure as if it were a talisman.

Eyes-Like-Sky turned her gaze toward the stars. Did the Creator hear their pleas, or was He as distant as the stars? Not a question to trouble a scared, young girl with. Nor a young woman with a beaten down faith as shriveled as a wild-flower in the merciless heat of July. “I believe you should pray as your father would do. He is wise.”

###

A half-moon lit the swaying white-capped buffalo grass as Eyes-Like-Sky galloped across the prairie atop a sturdy black mare five nights later. Tayanita rode behind her, gripping the sides of Eyes-Like-Sky’s doleskin blouse with all of her might.

Riding closer to the river bank amongst the groves would have offered more cover, but time was of essence. She had to deliver the girl to the Kiowa if he was still waiting by the bend of the Washita and return before the village had time to embark on a lengthy search. It’d be even better if she returned before Old Owl discovered she was gone. But that wouldn’t happen, not since she’d made the decision to take Tayanita beyond the halfway mark.

“What if Papa’s not there?” Tayanita leaned against her, mouth close to Eyes-Like-Sky’s ear. “Will the Kiowa wait?”

Eyes-Like-Sky shuddered. The girl’s papa would not be there, ever. Why had she not brought herself to tell her that? The warriors had dragged his body back into camp three days after the escape. When Tayanita asked about the shouts she’d heard from the village, Eyes-Like-Sky had lied. She could not risk delivering news that might devastate Tayanita beyond hope.

“Your father would want you to go on without him.” Eyes-Like-Sky pressed her calves to the mare’s sides.

“I cannot.” Tayanita shivered. “You said he would read the secret message on the spoon to me.”

“What if
Papa is not
there?”

“Eyes-Like-Sky turned her gaze toward the stars. Did the Creator hear their pleas, or was He as distant as the stars?”



Eyes-Like-Sky's stomach clenched. "When we get to the rendezvous point, you and the Kiowa must not wait. Your father will meet you in the Cherokee lands." The girl needed tangible hope. "There, he'll read the message. The spoon is yours to keep for the journey home."

Would Dancing Eagle forgive her for giving away his gift? But how could she do any less?

###

The black mare wobbled, struggling to maintain a lope. Eyes-Like-Sky gripped the reins and slowed the pace to a walk. She rode alone now, having dropped Tayanita off with Running Fox, the massive Kiowa who stood over six feet with arms as thick as oak limbs. The man's foreign words had fallen short, but his kind, weathered face assured her he would take good care of the child.

Patches of juniper and sage gave way to willowing grasses as she neared the creek. Her village, a hundred tipi-spread between the canyons and the cottonwoods, lay ahead overshadowed by the glow of the setting sun. She'd been gone a night and a day. Tension stiffened every muscle in her body. There'd be consequences. The only question was: How severe?

The mare stumbled, pitching Eyes-Like-Sky forward, before regaining its footing. Sweat coated the animal's neck. The poor creature needed water and rest.

Eyes-Like-Sky rubbed the mare's withers. "Almost there girl."

Horse hooves sounded behind her.

She started and shifted in her saddle to catch a glimpse.

Two warriors dressed in nothing but breechclouts and leggings loped toward her on pintos. Their braids flapped against their chests.

How long had they been following? Her skin prickled.

They rode up along either side of her, each carrying a lance.

The squat, older one with a lightning-shaped scar on his bicep narrowed his eyes at her. "Good thing you came back. I didn't want to have to find you and slit your throat." Bear Claw was not one for mincing words.

She lowered her eyes to her horse's mane. "I didn't intend to be gone so long. I only went for a ride. Got lost."

Walks-His-Horse, who rode on the other side of her, snorted. "Keep your tongue in your mouth if you can't come up with a better story than that. We've been watching you."

For how long? If they'd seen Running Fox and Tayanita, they wouldn't be here now, not this quickly. She ventured a side glance at the tomahawks that swung from the rawhide strips, girding their breechclouts. No blood. No sign of recent use.

She exhaled a shaky breath. "I came back of my own free will."

Bear Claw raised his powerful arm and struck her. *Whamm.*

She tumbled from her horse and hit the ground with a thud and a grunt. Pain seared her side, her upper arm. Pebbles and needles bit into her skin.

Walks-His-Horse shifted his pinto out of the way. "Serves you right for running off and making us ride all day to find you."

Eyes-Like-Sky pushed up on her elbow and swiped the back of her hand across her mouth. A coppery-taste coated her tongue. She must have bitten her lip. Her whole body shook. What she wouldn't give to yank that man off his horse and dig her nails into his flesh.

Bear Claw drew his pinto close to her drifting mare and snatched the reins. He rubbed the horse's lathered neck with his thick palm. "You've ruined her. Old Owl will make you pay." He looked down his arrogant nose at her. "You can walk the rest of the way."

Glaring at him, Eyes-Like-Sky pushed up to stand and brushed sand from her throbbing arm. Fire pulsed through her hip and ankle. By morning, she'd be covered with bruises on her left side. It was foolish to hope that would be the only pain she'd have to deal with by the time Old Owl was finished with her.

A crowd had gathered along the main lane between the tipis by the time she plodded into the village.

Willow Woman, ever faithful, stepped from among the women and mouthed, "They found the cave."

There'd be
consequences.
The only
question was:
How severe?

Dread filled the pit of Eyes-Like-Sky's stomach as the grumbles and whispers grew. They knew she'd helped the girl.

Old Owl, his belly flopping over his rawhide belt, charged her, his face locked in a scowl. She braced herself. Best not to strike back. His wife was a different story. She'd taken that woman more than once in a fight.

The blow from the back of his hand came hard to her face. *Smack*, as flesh met flesh. She collapsed.

He towered over her. "You helped the captives escape. And you ruined my mare."

Captives? Plural? They were going to blame her for everything?

Old Owl kicked at her.

She sprang out of the way.

His foot contacted nothing but air. He wobbled backward.

Bear Claw grabbed his arm and saved him from a fall.

Blood dripping from her nose, Eyes-Like-Sky scurried to her feet. She yanked her knife from its sheath. Her heart thudded. She would not be beaten further without a fight. "I found the girl after she escaped. Helped her. I had nothing to do with her father."

"You dirty, no good dog." Old Owl clenched his fists and angled toward her.

Warriors hovered on either side of her. Would they grab her or stand back and watch? Her hand shook as she hunched ready to strike. Dear God, help me. The unexpected, ancient words of her childhood sprang forth from the shadowed past.

Old Owl lunged.

She ducked low.

"Stop." The commanding voice of Chief Bull Elk quelled the crowd.

Warrior hands grabbed Old Owl. Others latched onto her. Her knife fell to the ground.

"This will be decided by the council." Bull Elk tapped the end of his feathered lance to the ground. "Eyes-Like-Sky's fighting spirit has earned her the right to be heard before her punishment is determined."

"She's a slave." Old Owl protested and jerked away from the hands that held him.

"The council will hear her side." Bull Elk swept his buffalo-robe covered arm toward the center of the encampment.

Voices clashing in agreement and protest trailed behind her as the warriors propelled her forward. They thrust her into the village square in front of Bull Elk's tipi. The crowd filed around her, leaving room at the head of the circle for Bull Elk and the lesser chiefs of the council.

Old Owl pushed his way through to take his place next to War Chief Three Bears.

Bull Elk raised his hand. The crowd fell silent and sat.

“Speak, girl. What do you have to say for yourself?” Abrupt and to the point, absent the usual preliminary speeches, he raised the pipe his favored wife had retrieved from his tipi. “You have robbed this band of the child captive. She would have taken the place of one of our lost children. Children dead at the hands of the pony soldiers and the Rangers. They owe us, and you stole that from us.”

“Chief Bull Elk, Tayanita was as a baby fawn trembling with fear.” Eyes-Like-Sky dropped to her knees. “Afraid that after the trickery of her father you would kill her too. She was innocent.”

“That was the council’s right to decide.” Bull Elk’s wizened eyes narrowed.

No good answer, only the truth. “She begged me to help. Her eyes reminded me of my sister’s.”

Three Bears stood. “This girl is a weakling. Putting tears before the good of the tribe.”

Old Owl threw back his shoulders. “She stole my horse. And ran off. Worthless, troublesome slave is what she is.”

“Wiseman of the council, may I speak?” Willow Woman stepped into the circle, standing tall. The wind fluttered through her gray-streaked hair. “Eyes-Like-Sky is one of us. She can tan a hide as good as any woman of the People, set up a tipi, dry meat. You name it, she can do it.” She jutted her finger toward Old Owl. “She could have kept on running today. Instead, she returned to us.”

“My husband and I wanted to adopt the girl captive.” Another woman pushed forward, voice shaking. “She would have taken the place of the daughter we lost to fever two winters ago. Fever brought to our land by the whites.”

“The Cherokee girl was a trickster like her father.” Three Bears folded his arms. “Not to be trusted. And Eyes-Like-Sky has proven to be the same.” Scars dotted his tall frame. “I say that we string her between the poles and let her hang there until she tells us where she took the girl.”

Eyes-Like-Sky steeled herself. “I want to be part of the People.” Not a slave, but a respected member of the tribe, the wife of Dancing Eagle. For that she’d pay almost any price.

Bull Elk leaned back in his folding chair. “Then tell us where you took the girl.” His gaze gripped her. “Save my warriors the trouble of scouring the prairie. Do you expect her to make it out there on her own? If the wolves don’t eat her first, the sun will dry the life out of her. If you are one of us, you’ll do what is best for the band. You will tell us.”



TELL US WHERE
YOU TOOK THE
GIRL.

Murmurs of assent spread around the council circle.

Old Owl stuck out his chest. "This girl is my property, a reward for a battle well-fought. Mine to do with as I please."

Three Bears scowled. "For all we know she is the one who also helped the father escape. This slave deserves to be staked out spread-eagle on the prairie without a drop of water or food until she's willing to show us exactly where she left the captive. Then, maybe she'll have earned a drink."

More murmurs. The headmen and chiefs spoke quietly among themselves.

Sweat dampened Eyes-Like-Sky's buckskin garment, plastering it to her back and underarms as day faded from the sky. Hopefully, Tayanita and Running Fox had ridden like the wind, far and away.

Bull Elk stood. "The majority of the council has decided. Eyes-Like-Sky will be harmed no further and given her freedom if she takes our warriors to where she left the girl."

Her heart sank. She could not, would not. Tayanita trusted her. John Whitestone had given his life to provide his daughter a chance at freedom. The Kiowa, Running Fox, was risking his for the same cause.

She wrung her scraped hands against her fringed skirt. Dried blood from her face coated her knuckles. Her left hip and arm throbbed from her being knocked off the horse, and her right jaw and cheekbone still stung from the force of Old Owl's blow. How much more would she suffer if she refused Bull Elk's offer?

Throat dry, she gazed up at the heavens. Dared she hope that the Creator might hear her plea? "Eyes-Like-Sky? Your answer?" Bull Elk stretched to his full height.

"Chief, please understand. I gave my word to Tayanita. I cannot break it."

His frown deepened. "A person's word is not to be broken. But in giving your word, you betrayed your band. Each member cannot do as they see fit in their own eyes without consequences. Your deed cannot go unpunished."

Three Bears pointed his knife toward the canyon beyond the rows of tipis. "Stake her out. No water until she talks."

"If she dies, I've lost a slave." Old Owl bemoaned.

Bull Elk held up his staff. "Three days only. If she survives, her debt of wrongdoing is paid."

Hands grabbed her and yanked her to her feet. Pain shot through her left arm. Her stomach rolled as if she might throw up what little moisture she possessed. She'd been in such a hurry to return to the village she hadn't detoured to refill her water pouch.

Willow Woman and others cried out in protest, but the warriors pivoted and drug Eyes-Like-Sky from the circle, her uncooperative feet dragging across the sand.

A war whoop echoed through camp, bouncing off the canyon walls.

"The raiding party has returned." A bystander cheered. Riders poured down the distant lane.

Eyes-Like-Sky's heart exploded in hope, even as the rough hands of Three Bears' loyal men yanked her onward.

"Wait," a familiar voice called out.

Her head jerked up as horse hooves pounded toward the circle, parting the crowd. Dancing Eagle astride a painted mustang.

People moved aside.

Dressed in a red breechclout and tan leggings, his chest muscles flexed beneath the strings of his bow and quiver. Golden armbands hugged his biceps. A single eagle feather hung from his scalp lock.

She reeled as relief coursed through her. He had returned. Her heart swelled. But what would he think of her once he learned the truth. A shadow crept across her smile.

He swung down off his horse, fists clenched. "Get your hands off of her. What has she done?"

Bull Elk stepped forward and nodded to his men. "Do as he asks, for now."

Dancing Eagle pivoted toward the chief and exhaled slowly as if reining in his temper. "Ma-Da-Way. Greetings." He touched the chief's hand. "What has happened?"

Eyes-Like-Sky cringed as Bull Elk explained.

Dancing Eagle turned to her. A furrow deepened across his brow. He pressed his lips together as his gaze scoured every inch of her.

"I came back." Her voice faltered. "To be yours." She hugged herself, seeking to quell the hollowness that seeped down to her toes. What if her words shamed him? They'd hidden their love from the village, a village where he was but a visitor, not a man of the council. Would he shun the love of a traitor?

Understanding flickered in his eyes.

Hope poured through her.

Jutting out his chin, he removed his bow and quiver and handed them to Bull Elk. "I will take her place."

"You'll what?" Bull Elk placed a hand on his shoulder. "She's a slave."



Dancing Eagle hooked a thumb over his knife sheath. "I will take her punishment. At the end of the three days, her price will be paid. Her guilt removed. She'll leave this village and return with me to my band as my wife."

Eyes-Like-Sky rushed forth and grabbed her love's hands. "I cannot allow you to do that."

He cupped her jaw, a gentle thumb to her swollen lip. "What kind of man would I be if I allowed my wife-to-be to suffer and risk death when I can bear it and live?"

If she hadn't already loved him with every piece of her heart, his sacrifice would have won the remaining corners. She lifted her silent plea to the heavens that Dancing Eagle would survive the punishment. If he did, she would be his wife. If not, she would die with him.

###

Tayanita's steps dragged with exhaustion by the time Running Fox led her up the dirt path to what looked to be a newly built building made of logs with a brick fireplace on the side. The wooden porch made a hollow sound as she stepped up to the door. He said it was a school. Though she'd heard of such a thing, she'd never been to one. What exactly went on inside such a building?

Desire to eat and sleep battled within her, snuffing out all but a flicker of curiosity. She rubbed her sore back. The journey had been so long, so tiring. And besides, she best not make herself at home here. Papa would come for her soon.

Running Fox pushed open the door, and dozens of bronze faces turned to her. The man at the front of the room tilted his head, then lifted a smile. His fair hair flopped over his ears, giving him a friendly appearance. Tayanita instantly liked the man, though she couldn't manage to smile back, her stomach knotted as it was.

"Who do we have here?" The man spoke in Cherokee and sounded happy to have them there, to have her.

Running Fox gave a slight bow of his head. He spoke in his foreign tongue, but followed up with Cherokee. "Word?"

IF SHE HADNT
ALREADY LOVED HIM
WITH EVERY PIECE
OF HER HEART, HIS
SACRIFICE WOULD
HAVE WON THE
REMAINING CORNERS

She dug into her pouch, fingers searching the corners until they clasped the cool metal of the spoon Eyes-Like-Sky had given her. A silver spoon with a secret message. A message Papa would read to her when he came. He had to come.



“Of course. You may have a word. Pupils, work on your sums. I’ll be just a moment.”

The man motioned for Running Fox to follow him. Tayanita clung to the fringe of his vest, sticking close to this near stranger who had been her guide throughout the long journey. They stopped in front of a small room with a simple desk inside.

The school man bent low to meet her eyes. “My name is Brother Ward. Don’t let the light hair fool you. I’m Cherokee. I’m also a Moravian missionary and the teacher at this school. This is New Springplace Mission. Did you know that?”

She shook her head.

“I’m going to talk with your papa for a minute—”

“He’s not my papa.”



Brother Ward's mouth dipped in a frown. His shoulders sagged a little. "I see. Well, I'm going to speak with the man who brought you here for a bit while you wait here. All right?"

She nodded, though her lip trembled. Why did they have to leave her alone?

Running Fox tugged on her braid as he stepped in the room. Brother Ward closed the door. She pressed her back against the wall, needing to be as close as she could get to the only familiar person here. But even he was mostly a stranger.

She'd lost everything.

But not forever. Papa would come and get her soon. Take her home. Maybe Mama was already there. Things would go back to how they used to be. The three of them, happy together.

"Orphan." Running Fox's singular word seeped through the wall and through her skin, chilling her bones. An orphan? No. It wasn't true. An orphan was someone with no parents. She didn't know where Mama was, but Papa was on his way to find her even now. Running Fox was bluffing. But why?

Brother Ward spoke as if Running Fox could understand him. Perhaps he was talking more to himself. "I see. We've come across this before. Most of our pupils have families who take them home over breaks, but occasionally someone drops an orphan off. We adopt them, of course, but we don't let them know. We wouldn't want the others to feel like one pupil gets preferential treatment."

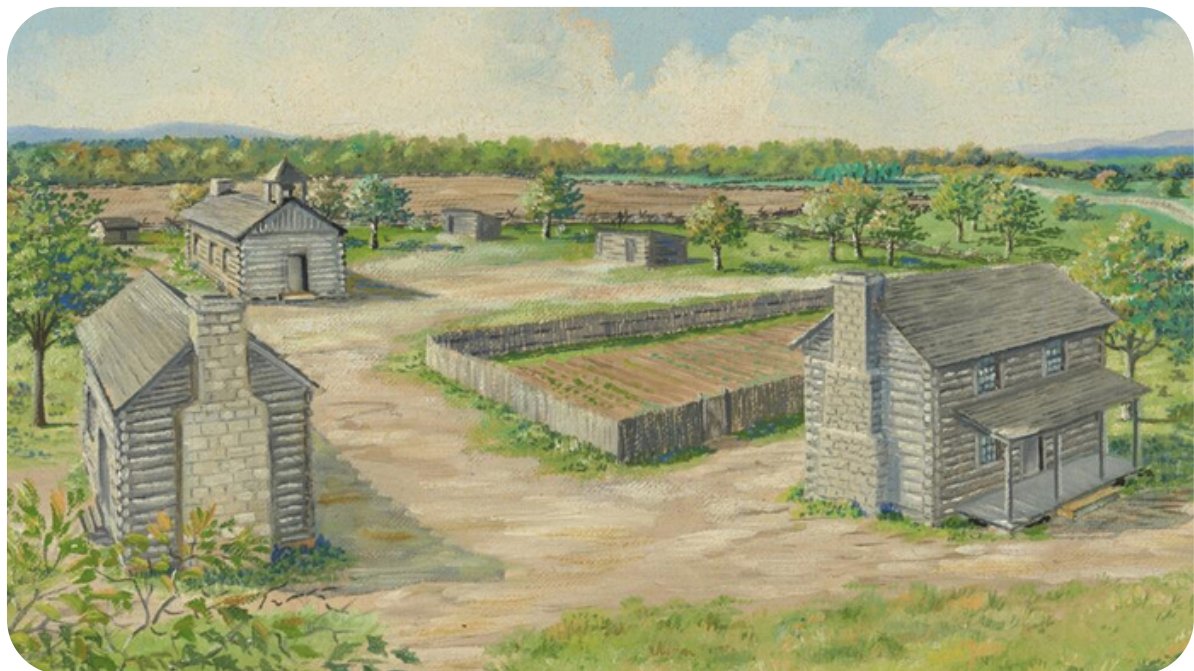
"Care? Girl?" Running Fox sounded relieved.

Behind her came the hushed chatter of children. She had to strain to hear Brother Ward's response.

"Yes, I suppose we have room for one more student. During breaks she can stay with my family. The government will give us a twenty-dollar allotment for the care of any orphan. That will pay for clothing, at least."

Prickles broke out on her arms. They were talking as if she was here to stay. As if Papa wasn't coming back. Why? Why would they speak that way? Hot tears burned her eyes. She dug into her pouch, fingers searching the corners until they clasped the cool metal of the spoon Eyes-Like-Sky had given her. A silver spoon with a secret message. A message Papa would read to her when he came. He had to come.

He had to come.



1858

Tayanita's heart sank as the last pupil left the church with her family. Sophia beamed up at her mother, prattling on about all she'd learned at school over the past few months. Her father's chest puffed out with pride. Her mother couldn't seem to stop touching her shoulder, head, arm. As if ensuring her daughter were truly within her reach. A beautiful family. Something Tayanita had once had. Something she had no longer.

It had been a year, and Papa had not come for her.

Perhaps he didn't know where she was? She turned the silver spoon in her hand, tracing the ornate flower pattern with her fingertips. Even that tenuous hope was fading. What if Running Fox was right? What if she was an orphan?

During this break, she'd join the Wards in their home, mixing among their four children as if she belonged. As if she were one of them. Though she secretly knew they'd adopted her, they wouldn't admit to as much. They treated her as a welcome guest in their home. Nothing more. Not a daughter. Never a daughter. To do so would be to show favoritism to a student, and that they couldn't abide. It made sense, but still, it left a hollow spot in her chest.

Brother Ward came to stand next to her, hands in his pockets. "Are you ready to tell me the story about that spoon? It must be important to you. You're always holding onto it."

Would Brother Ward know about the secret message? Maybe he could tell her what it meant. But that was Papa's job. Papa was supposed to explain it to her. All this time, she'd held onto this secret that was supposed to be for the two of them.

Only she was still alone.

"It has a secret message." She slowly handed it over, wincing as it left her grasp.

He turned it over in his hand and nodded. "Yes, indeed. A very special message." He ran his finger over the mysterious inscription etched into the silver. Isaiah 40:29.

She narrowed her eyes at him. "Do you know what it means?"

His mouth twitched as if he were trying to hide a smile. "It's a Scripture reference. Now that you've learned to read, you can find out yourself."

"How?"

"I'll show you."

He led her to a pew and pulled out a Bible. He flipped pages, then placed it into her hands. She'd seen him read from one before but had never held the book herself. The weight of it surprised her. He pointed to a line of text. "Read here."

"He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength."

"Good reading."

"But what does it mean?"

“It means, when we are weak, God is strong. He gives us His strength when we don’t think we can go on.”

She wilted like a flower without water in the blazing sun. That was the secret message? The one she’d been waiting a year for? What about promises of happiness? What about a prosperous future? Oh, how she ached for her father.

The silence yawned between them. Brother Ward handed the spoon back to her. “I was an orphan, you know.”

She straightened, peering at him.

“I was only thirteen when I traveled with my parents over the Trail of Tears in the winter of ’38. They both died along the way.” He sighed heavy and long. “I felt bereft. I’d lost everything. My home. My family. All I’d ever known. I was a stranger in a strange land without my father or mother to lean on for support.” He tapped the head of her spoon. “I could have used that message right about then.”

“What happened?”

He smiled. “After I steeped in my grief for a while, I looked to the cross and saw in our Savior a love so perfect and pure it covered my every need for love and belonging. Then I looked for a way to spread that love to others.”



“

After I steeped in my
grief for a while, I
looked to the cross
and saw in our Savior
a love so perfect and
pure it covered my
every need for love
and belonging. Then I
looked for a way to
spread that love to
others.

She looked up at the cross standing tall at the front of the church. After a year of sermons, she still didn't understand it. "My papa believed in the Creator."

"Wise man."

"He said the Creator would help us. But I'm still here. Without him."

"Yet you're alive. You're breathing. The Lord spared your life for a reason. You remember the story of Esther, don't you? 'Who knoweth whether thou art come to the kingdom for such a time as this?'"

She squinted at that cross, willing it to take on greater meaning in her mind. In church, many people wept during service. Their hearts were moved while hers remained like a small, cold stone. Was she dead inside?

"Do you believe in Christ's sacrifice for you?"

She nodded. She'd memorized the catechisms. She knew all that Brother Ward taught, and she believed it was true.

"Are you ready to be baptized?"

Again, she nodded. Maybe if she were baptized, something would happen inside her. Hadn't Brother Ward spoken of hearts of stone being turned into flesh.

His face lit up. "Excellent! You've proven yourself a devout pupil, good natured and honest. What do you think of the new name Margaret Mary?"

Her stomach soured. When one was baptized, they took on a new name. A Christian name to replace their Cherokee one. Tayanita was a beautiful name. The name Papa had called her. The name last heard from Mama's lips. But she swallowed and said, "Okay."

Brother Ward patted her shoulder. "Welcome to the family of God."

Too bad she still felt like an orphan.

###

September 2, 1862

Tayanita's breath came in hot bursts as she peeked out the Wards' window. They were here again, scouts from the Cherokee Pins on behalf of the Union out to intimidate anyone they deemed a menace to the Northern cause. This time they'd painted their faces. Scoundrels. Why couldn't they leave the Mission alone? They'd already stolen several horses. Brother Ward may have come from a Southern family. He might be the son of a late plantation owner. Perhaps he even secretly sided with the Confederates. But he surely wasn't a threat to the Union. Not here. Not Now.

"Lucinda?" Her voice trembled as she called the Negro maid. "Come here, please. Come see."

Guerrilla bands tromped throughout their beloved countryside, stirring up trouble. Bushwhackers for the South. Cherokee Pins for the North. Let them fight each other until no one was left standing. Fine with her. But the Moravians were neutral in the War Between the States. New Springplace Mission had been her haven for years. It had become her still waters of safety. How dare anyone strip that from her. She had lost so much already.

Lucinda rushed to the window, her eyes growing wide as she took in the scene before her. Her hand flew to her chest. "Oh, Sweet Jesus, be with us now, Lord."

When Lucinda's gaze scurried around the room, Tayanita answered her unasked question. Five children was a lot to keep track of. Five children plus an extra border. Her. "Sister Ward is nursing the twins in her bedroom. Lydia and Clara were out back, last I saw. But Darius said he was going to try to persuade his Pa to take him along to bring in the milk cows."

Shots sounded forth from the direction of the creek. The direction Brother Ward had gone? Tayanita clutched her hands to her stomach. Oh no. Oh Lord. Not him too. I can't lose him too. Her body went rigid, every muscle taut.

Lucinda squeezed her shoulder. "Get the girls." But Tayanita couldn't move. Couldn't force her feet to step forward.

The front door banged open, and Darius barged inside, his hair mussed, and his cheeks bright red. "Pa—" He stopped to hunch over, placing his hands on his knees, and catching his breath. "Pa went to get the cows and—"

Lucinda wrapped him in a soft embrace, cutting off his words. Sister Ward rushed into the room with a baby on each hip just as the girls stumbled inside from the back.

Sister Ward worked her jaw back and forth, something she seemed to do when she needed to be strong and not give way to tears. "Is it...?"

Lucinda simply nodded.

Tayanita ventured another glance out the window, and her knees went weak. There had to be twenty or thirty Cherokee Pins and they were converging on the house now. Each second brought them closer. Rage glimmered off their eyes in the setting sun. What would those men do to this peaceful family? They did not seem to care that the Wards hailed from the same tribe as them. Or that the school aided Cherokee children.

Sister Ward tilted up her quavering chin. "Let's meet them on the front porch. No need for them to burn the house down. If they want us to go, we'll go peaceably."

"Go?" If only she could be strong like Mrs. Ward and fight back the tears, but her voice came out watery. "Go where?" She squeezed her eyes shut, trying to block out the memories of the last time she was taken from her home, the last time all that was familiar was snatched from her grasp.

She might as well have said his death. That's what she meant, isn't it? Those shots meant they'd killed him, just as they'd been threatening to do for weeks. Those Cherokees killed one of their own, a man with Cherokee blood, because of his alleged sympathies in a war he didn't fight or participate in. He'd had many opportunities to flee, but he'd taken none of them. Why not? He said he was a picture of the gospel. Perhaps this was a gospel she would never fully understand.

The family filed onto the front porch, the children whimpering and clinging to their mother's skirt. Tayanita moved to follow, then paused. They were leaving, of that she was fairly certain. And she couldn't leave this place without one thing.

She rushed to the bedroom she shared with the girls and rifled through her trunk. There, hidden in the bottom underneath her change of clothes was the silver spoon Eyes-Like-Sky had given her on that fateful day years ago. The last day she had seen her father.

She clutched it with a shaking hand, then traced the etched Scripture reference with her forefinger. Isaiah 40:29. She whispered the verse into the encroaching night. "He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength." Would He do it now? For her? Indistinguishable shouts from outside prompted her to hurry and snatch the satchel from her trunk. She placed the spoon inside and buried it underneath her change of clothes. Best that no one spied silver during such a time of scarcity. What would she do if a scallywag stole her precious spoon?

She bounded down the steps, intent on joining the family on the porch, but the tremble in Sister Ward's voice halted her steps. She pressed her ear to the door and listened instead. They spoke in Cherokee.

"You won't even allow me the dignity of taking along my maid?"

The familiar sound of spitting tobacco was the only reply for several seconds. "You will go with my men. The negro stays behind."

Lucinda pushed through the door. Tayanita stumbled backward, ear throbbing. The maid grabbed her wrist, her hushed voice laced with urgency. "He's about to come in and rob this place blind. Hate to think what those men would do to a pretty girl like you."

Tayanita's face heated. At nearly sixteen and near marriageable age, she had a pretty good idea.

Lucinda's fingernails bit into Tayanita's wrist. "You best make a run for it. Get as far away from here as you can."

"Run?" Her throat tightened. "Run where?"

"Away." Lucinda's eyes held a sternness that brokered no argument. "You can return when it's safe."

How would she know when that would be?

“He giveth power to the faint; and to them that have no might he increaseth strength.”
Would He do it now? For her?



She caught Sister Ward’s frightened gaze through the window. The matron of the home narrowed her eyes toward the back door, a clear signal for Tayanita to exit that way. Heavy footsteps thudded in her direction. She had no time to consider options, no time to debate her course. She needed to flee. Now.

With steps as swift as a gazelle, she sprinted through the house and out the back door, satchel bouncing against her hip with each stride. Leaves crunched beneath her moccasins as she ran, and autumn colors blurred before her eyes. Flashes of memories chased her. Her mother’s death. The Comanche’s raid. Her and her father’s capture. Her father befuddling them with his watch. Eyes-Like-Sky hiding her in a cave. Giving her the spoon. Sending her off. Her father was supposed to meet her, but he never came. He never came.

Could she outrun these memories? This history?

The tears that blurred her vision confused her course. Where was she? She couldn’t get far enough away from the pain. Loss sliced into her heart and left her breathless. She was an orphan. All alone in the world.

Purposeless, she kept running until clouds obscured the moonlight and darkness encroached with a tangible thickness. She huddled up against a tree trunk, shivering and praying for morning. When dawn came, she continued in that same direction. North? East? She could only hope the threat of Pin Indians was far past. But now would finding her way back to the Mission be impossible? Maybe that was for the best. What was left there for her anyway? Certainly not her almost-family.

After three days of traveling, she dropped beside an oak and leaned against its thick trunk, utterly spent. Her upbringing had at least made her adept at foraging for food and water. She wouldn't starve. But where would she go? What would she do? The country was at war, as was her soul. Her people were unwanted in this land, and she was unwanted in the midst of it. Unwanted. Unnoticed. Invisible.

With a sigh, she pulled the silver spoon out from her satchel, studying it in the glimmer of light that poked through the trees. Why had the Lord spared her from the life of a Comanche slave? Brother Ward had spouted important sounding words from the book of Esther. She had been born for such a time as this. But why? What was the point of her life? Why didn't she perish with her father all those years ago?

Surely that's what had happened. She'd never wanted to admit it, but deep down she'd always known. Her father had sacrificed his life for hers. He had died that she might live. Her chest burned at the thought. Oh, that he would not have died in vain.

His sacrifice mirrored the one Brother Ward so often spoke about, the sacrifice of Jesus Christ. She'd heard of it in hundreds of sermons over her time at New Springplace Mission. Over and over, he and Brother Bishop proclaimed it to a congregation moved to tears. She'd said the correct catechisms, bowed her head when appropriate, was even baptized for forgiveness of her sins. Brother Ward had commended her for her faith, and yet her heart had never been moved by this Savior. By His sacrifice. It had never seemed real to her.

Here, surrounded by half-barren branches and sitting in a bed of dried leaves, stomach cramping with hunger, she had nothing left of herself. She'd spent every ounce of her own strength. She had no ideas of where to go or what to do. Her high marks in school couldn't help her now. Her beauty would get her nowhere good. If she were to peer in a looking glass now, all she would see would be weakness.

On the cross, Jesus traded her weakness for His strength? How could that be? If He really saw this poor, lost orphan girl, and if he not only saw but cared ... even loved... so much that He sacrificed His life for hers, exchanged His riches for her rags, His strength for her paltry, pathetic attempts ... If this was true, how could she continue to wall off her heart from Him?

She wiped a tear from her face, then used the moisture to shine the spoon, rubbing it with her hem. He giveth strength. Please, Lord. I need Your strength now. I can't go on without it. She couldn't go on without ... Him. Without truly surrendering to the one she had known about for years. *Jesus, my heart is hurting. Come be my healer. Show me that You see me, that You know me. Lead the way.*

A twig snapped behind her. She startled, and jumped to her feet. At the sound of voices, she melted around the tree trunk, molding her form to the rough bark. A group of men trounced by, some wearing blue coats, all touting hats and long beards. She inhaled sharply.

Bushwhackers?

Her foot slipped and leaves crunched beneath her. Gazes snapped in her direction and pistols cocked. Like a deer in the path of a hunter, she fled, bounding over tree roots and logs. Behind her, one of the men said, "Don't shoot, she's a dame." But she didn't stop.

Heart pounding in her ears, she ran until she came to a cottage nestled in a grove of oaks. The trees reminded her a bit of Springplace, beckoning her with a comforting finger as her feet flew toward them. It wasn't until she pounded on the door that she realized she no longer held the spoon. She must have dropped it in her haste. Maybe she could go back and search for it later? She waited for yet another feeling of loss to pummel her, but it didn't come. Maybe she didn't need the tangible reminder from the spoon any longer. Maybe she carried the message within her now.

A woman, slightly older than Sister Ward by the looks of the few silver streaks in her hair, cracked open the door. Her eyes bugged out as they traveled over Tayanita.

"Goodness, child. What's wrong?"

"Guerrillas. I met them in the woods."

"Say no more. Come in." The woman waved her inside, closing and locking the door behind her. "I'm Margaret. And you are?"

She almost said she was Margaret too. Her name after baptism was Mary Margaret, but she could never call herself by such. "Tayanita." She offered a small smile. "I was running from Union guerrillas and fear I ran straight into Confederate ones."

"Where's your family?" Margaret's brow pinched as she frowned.

Best to give a simple answer. "Dead."

Margaret sighed. "Mine too."

They stared at each other for a few moments. The woman's kind face softened with each breath exhaled. Slowly, her mouth curved upward. "Well, Tayanita, it seems the Lord sent you here at just the right time. I've been lonely out here all by myself, and I was praying for a companion to lighten the load."

Tayanita bit back a grin. "It seems, then, you've been praying for me."

*The
End*

WANT MORE OF EYES-LIKE-SKY?

Read more of her story in

TEXAS FORSAKEN
BY SHERRY SHINDELAR

THE MAN WHO KILLED HER HUSBAND IS THE ONLY ONE WHO CAN SAVE HER BABY. HIS PLEDGE TO PROTECT HER AND THE CHILD COULD COST HIM EVERYTHING.

TEXAS 1860. SEVEN YEARS AGO, MAGGIE LOGAN (EYES-LIKE-SKY) LOST EVERYTHING SHE KNEW WHEN A RAID ON A WAGON TRAIN TORE HER FROM HER FAMILY. BUT SHE SURVIVED AND ADAPTED, MARRIED A COMANCHE WARRIOR AND HAD A BABY. ENGLISH AND HER PAST LIFE ARE VAGUE SHADOWS. IN ONE TERRIBLE BATTLE, THE U.S. CAVALRY DESTROYS HER WORLD. SHE IS TAKEN CAPTIVE AGAIN, THIS TIME BY THOSE WHO CALL THEMSELVES HER PEOPLE BUT WHO ARE NOT. FORCED INTO A WORLD, SHE WANTS NOTHING TO DO WITH, EYES-LIKE-SKY FIGHTS TO KEEP HER CHILD. HER ONLY HOPE IS AN ENGAGEMENT WITH THE MAN WHO KILLED HER HUSBAND.

CAPTAIN GARRET RAMSEY ENROLLED IN WEST POINT TO ESCAPE HIS OVERBEARING FATHER. ASSIGNED TO THE TEXAS FRONTIER, GARRET FINDS HIMSELF CAUGHT UP IN AN INDIAN WAR IN WHICH BOTH SIDES COMMIT ATROCITIES. PLAGUED BY GUILT FOR HIS OWN ROLE, HE SEEKS REDEMPTION BY TAKING RESPONSIBILITY FOR EYES-LIKE-SKY AND HER BABY. HE IS DETERMINED TO DO WHATEVER IT TAKES TO PROTECT THEM. BUT WILL HE REALLY RISK EVERYTHING FOR A WOMAN WHOSE HEART IS BURIED IN A GRAVE?

COMING MAY 2024

What will the silver spoon mean to the next person who finds it? Find out in **FALL BACK AND FIND ME** By Sarah Hanks

Two resilient women separated by over 150 years are linked forever by their challenges, values, and determination.

Amber Prichard is thriving in her role as pastor's wife, mom, and indispensable church volunteer—until chronic illness threatens to upend everything. Now unable to prove her value, she is forced to reevaluate how she defines herself. Inspired by an ancestor's faded journal and heirlooms, she must work with her arch-nemesis if she wants to accomplish what is now impossible on her own.

Faced with the turmoil of the civil war, Willow Forrester didn't intend to illegally enlist in the Union army as a secret female soldier. She only wanted to escape her father's tyranny and follow her brother into the throes of adventure. When she comes face to face with the leader of a guerilla army, her health and insecurities threaten to shatter her heroism and render her powerless.

As their opposition threatens to overtake them, these two women must find their strength and identity to defeat impossible odds.



[Purchase Now](#)

ABOUT THE AUTHORS

Sherry Shindelar



Originally from Tennessee, Sherry loves to take her readers into the past. She is an avid student of the Civil War and the Old West. When she is not busy writing, she is an English professor working to pass on her love of writing to her students. Sherry is an award-winning writer: Genesis Finalist, Maggie Finalist, and Crown Finalist. She currently resides in Minnesota with her husband of thirty-eight years. She has three grown children and three grandchildren. Connect with Sherry at <https://sherryshindelar.com/>.

Sarah Hanks

Sarah Hanks is an award-winning author of Christian fiction in both the contemporary and historical genres. After spending over a decade mostly writing and teaching Sunday school curricula for churches in her community, she finally jumped into writing fiction full time. She and her husband have nine children of their own, a couple of whom seem to have inherited their mother's love for playing with words and crafting stories. Though Sarah dreams of a cabin by the beach, the family lives jammed together in beautiful chaos near St. Louis, Missouri. She buys ear plugs in bulk.



COPYRIGHT NOTICE

Copyright © 2023 by Sherry Shindlear and Sarah Hanks

All rights reserved. No part of this book may be reproduced in any form or by any electronic or mechanical means, including information storage and retrieval systems, without permission in writing from the publisher, except by reviewers, who may quote brief passages in a review.

Characters in this book are fictitious. Any similarity to real persons, living or dead, is coincidental and not intended by the authors.

Sarah Hanks
&
Sherry Shindlear
AUTHORS

OTHER BOOKS BY SARAH HANKS

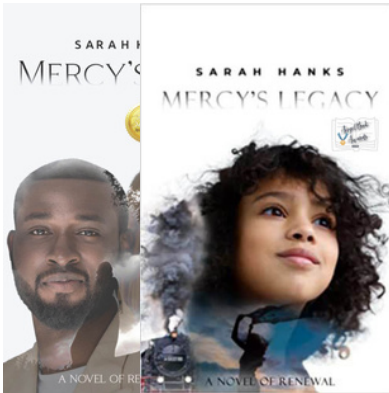


Mercy Will Follow Me

Book 1 in the Mercy Series

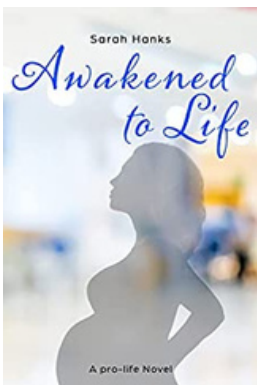
Mercy's Song and Mercy's Legacy

Books 2 & 3 in the Mercy Series



A Battle Worth Fighting

Book 3 in The Mercy Series



Awakened to Life

Standalone pro-life novel

OTHER GREAT RESOURCES

01

*COMANCHES: LORDS OF THE
SOUTH PLAINS*

by Earnest Wallace and E.
Adamson Hoebel, 1987.

02

*EMPIRE OF THE SUMMER MOON:
QUANAH PARKER AND THE
RISE AND FALL OF THE
COMANCHES*

by S.C. Gwynne, 2011.

03

*THREE YEARS AMONG THE
COMANCHES: THE NARRATIVE
OF NELSON LEE, TEXAS RANGER*

by Nelson Lee, 1859. Reprinted
2016.

04

*RECORDS OF THE MORAVIANS
AMONG THE CHEROKEES*

C. Daniel Crews, Richard W.
Starbuck, editors



Your time is valuable and we don't take it for granted.
We hope you enjoyed meeting Eyes-Like-Sky and Tayanita in
A SILVER PROMISE.

Thank You

WANT MORE GREAT
CONTENT?

Make sure to check out our websites for stellar
bonuses and updates.

SHERRYSHINDELAR.COM

WWW.SARAH-HANKS.COM