

Alla Nakni/Boy

by Tanchi

I live on my granddaddy and my grammie's farm. All their children and grandchildren live here or close by. When one of the daughters gets married, her husband builds her a house close to my grammie's. Granddaddy and Grammie have lots of daughters. We raise tobacco, cotton, and corn to sell to our neighbors and to the new country called the United States.

In the evenings Sapokni, my grammie, sits on the long porch and tells us stories about how things came to be and how life was before the Oklatohbi, or the white people, came.

"*You remember how in the old days the animals and people still talked to each other?*", Sapokni begins quietly.

"Sapokni," one of the youngest pulls her apron.

"Yes, child, what is it?"

"I can still talk to ebryting and ebryting talks to me."

"Is that so," and Sapokni laughs and pats her on the head.

"Let's see, where was I? Hmmmm."

Well, one day a little girl was playing with a stick, and she wasn't playing very nice. She went right over and hit poor turtle on his head, and turtle wasn't doing anything at all to her.

Well, poor old turtle went to the pond and cried and cried. He looked back and saw that his shell was broken into a bunch of little pieces. That made him cry some more.

Well, what do you suppose happened then?

Yeah, that's right. A whole bunch of little bitty red ants came by to see what was the matter.

"Turtle, Turtle," they shouted. "What happened? Can we help?"

"Turtle looked sadly at the ants and said, "What can little ants do to help a big old turtle fix his cracked shell?"

"Here, we'll show you!"

"And guess what they did?", Sapokni always asks.

*"**They climbed on his back and sewed his shell together!**"* We all shout together.

"That's what they did, all right!" Sapokni laughs and leans back, taking a smoke on her pipe.

The Oklatohbi are the new people from the United States. They speak and act very strangely.

Mostly, they're always wanting me to wear more clothes. Sometimes they scare me because they talk so loud. Already they are moving into our nation and demanding we give them our land. There's talk going round that we might all have to move out West where wild Indians live.

Samafo, my granddaddy, says if they keep this up there won't be any Chahta left. This scares me too.

Sapokni tells him softly, "Shush, old man, you're scaring the child."

During the day, my brothers and sisters play together. In our way, all the grandchildren are brothers and sisters because we belong to the same clan, or iksa. The Chahta have six *iksas*. I belong to my mother's and grammie's clan. We are of the *Kunsh-a-he* people. Pushmataha, one of our famous warriors,

is also a *Kunsh-a-he*. He fought with Andrew Jackson to help push the English out of this land.

Pushmataha

asked the United States to help us build schools. Samafo says, "You'll never go to those schools."

Sapokni says, "We'll see."

When there's lots of work to do, we all work together. We have slaves that help us. The Oklatohbi brought these black-skinned people here from far away. They have their own houses and mostly keep to themselves. We don't whip or chain them like some of the Oklatohbi do. In the summers we work the fields,

and in the winters we go hunting. When I get older, I can even go with the men to hunt buffalo.

Long ago we used to live on the plains. I already know that story by heart.

Long, long ago there were two brothers--Chahta and Chikasa. During those days we lived with the Sioux and wore our hair long. We still wear our hair long and put our dead up on scaffolds.

The great spirit, Aba Iki, told Chahta and Chikasa to gather all the people and take them East toward the rising sun. They were to follow a great staff. Each night when they camped, the two brothers planted the great staff in the ground. Each morning it leaned in the direction they should follow.

Finally, they came to a great mound. They set the staff in the center of it. The following morning, it stood straight up. Then Chahta and his people knew they had come to their new home.

This great mound is called Nanih Waiya. Sometimes our people call it vshki chito, or great mother.

For some reason I forget, Chikasa and his people continued traveling East. Eventually, they came back, but now we are two nations, not one.

Samafo says the stories help us understand why things are and tell us how to act. Sapokni and Samafo are always telling stories. Samafo also says to respect all people, all animals, and all plants because we are all related. Then he tells me a story about how this happened.

"You remember how Chahta and his brother Chikasa came out of Nanih Waiya?"

Well, in those days all living things could still talk to each other.

After the first man and the first woman came, they held a big council. All the plants--tobacco, cotton, beans, sunflower,--no, not corn, that came later, and the trees and herbs in the forest--came. All the animals too--deer, possum, skunk, dog, and old man catfish, everything except bear--came. They all got together and had them a big talk.

Well, they all decided that all the plants would belong to woman and all the animals would belong to man. Yes, that's what they decided.

"What do you think of that?" Samafo always asks.

I never say anything because I don't know what I think yet. Sometimes I do go off wondering about all those plants and animals talking to each other. "What did it sound like?" I wonder.

Samafo is a powerful medicine man. Sapokni says that is why she lets him stay around, and then she laughs. In our way, women are very wealthy and important people. We respect them a lot.

Samafo says that is why so many Oklatohbi men want to marry them. "They envy us," he says and looks at Sapokni with a grin.

Samafo takes me with him when he gathers plants for medicine. He says to always ask each plant if I can have a little part of it. We always leave an offering of thanks too. Already I am learning to sing parts of the ceremonies. Everyday I rise at dawn with Samafo to say a prayer.

Samafo says that is why we do so well because we still practice the ways of the ancestors. He says, "I'm

going to make you a good medicine man so all the pretty women will want you." And then he grins.

Then I hug his knees and say, "No, Samafo, no, I just want to stay with you," and Sapokni."

Samafo laughs and lifts me to his shoulders. Then we go off to get us some medicines.