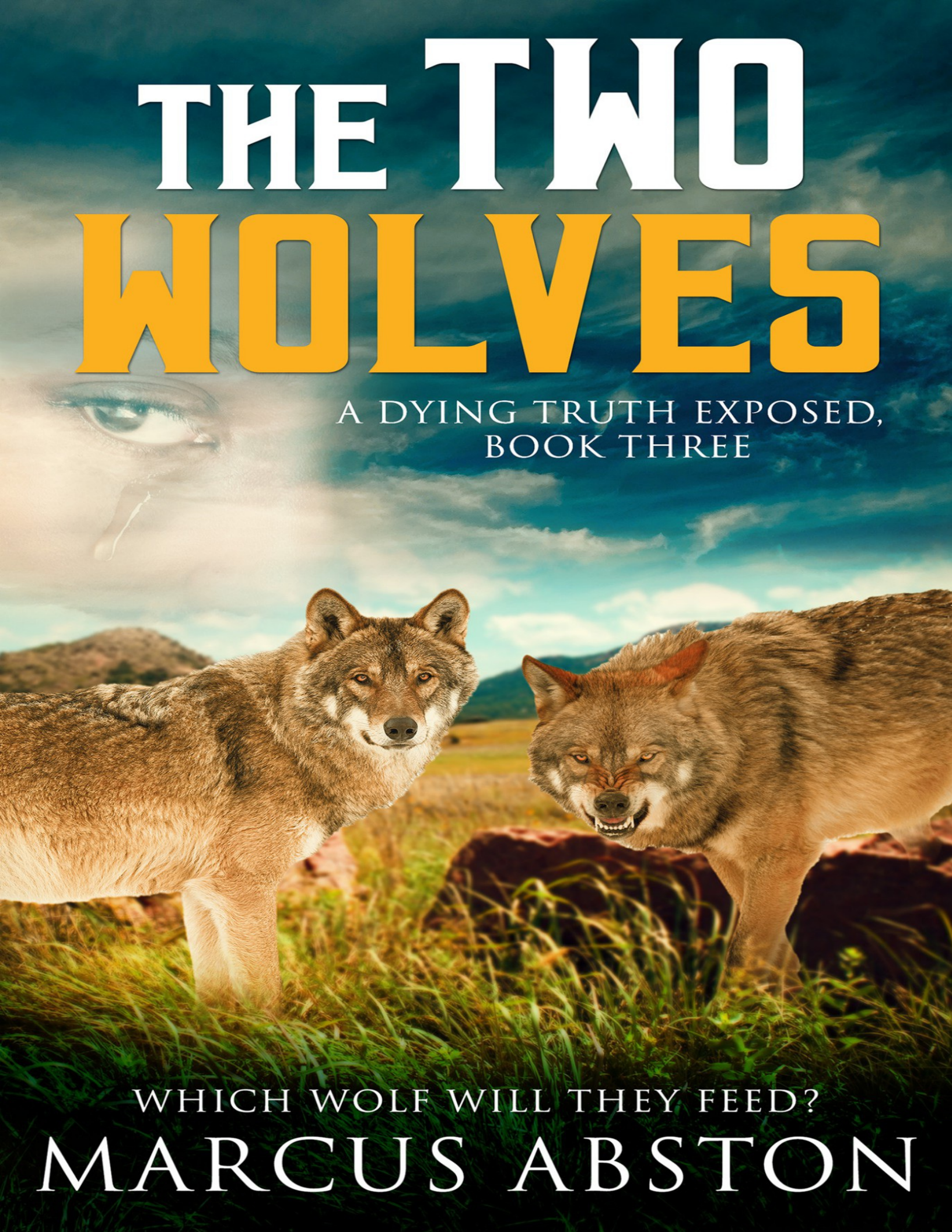
THE TWO WOLVES

A DYING TRUTH EXPOSED, BOOK THREE



WHICH WOLF WILL THEY FEED?

MARCUS ABSTON

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The Two Wolves (A Dying Truth Exposed, Book Three)
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Editing by The Pro Book Editor
Interior and Cover Design by IAPS.rocks

eBook ISBN: 979-8986596518
paperback ISBN: 979-8986596501

Main category—Fiction
Other category—Historical Fiction

First Edition

CHAPTER 1

The Power of Words

In Albert Brooks's living room, his family sat before him. His daughter Liz, whose six-year-old daughter, Elisa, lay against her chest, held onto several old letters incased in plastic film. She stared at the written history of her ancestors, her eyes big as she looked up at her father.

"Daddy, I don't deserve to read these," Liz said. The sunlight outlined her mouth, which curved down, expressing her shame.

Albert's eyebrows lowered. "Why would you say that?"

Liz bit her lip, then looked at Albert and shook her head. "I'm ashamed. I forgot so much, and I shouldn't have. Christina and Elisa should've at least known which tribe we descended from. I couldn't do the one thing you asked of me. To pass on the truth." She handed the letters to Albert.

Albert looked at Liz, his face blank. "I'm pretty sure I've asked several things from you, including to keep your GPA above a 3.5."

Liz grinned.

Albert's wife Coney cocked her head, side-eyeing Albert. "Albert."

Albert shrugged with a half-smile. "What?"

Liz grinned. "Daddy, I was being serious. I'd rather you tell us the rest."

Liz's daughter Christina sat down next to her and lay her head on Liz's shoulder.

"Annabelle really fought for her freedom," Liz said. "She escaped the Brown plantation, leaving behind her family, Judy Mays, and her sisters. She made it to Mercy, Missouri, with the help of Ruthanne and Elizabeth. Made new friends and fell in love for the first time with Benjamin. Then all of that was destroyed by Mr. Hildebrand murdering Benjamin and her unborn daughter Benita. She didn't even get time to mourn with Ruthanne's and Elizabeth's brothers finding out about the bounty on her. If it wasn't for John and Samuel taking her to Indian Territory, who knows what would've happened."

Albert nodded. "It must've been hard for her. Though she had Aunt Grace and Aunt Lizzie, she had to take her own steps to heal. She had to deal with Nancy Hicks, other Cherokee, and Indian agents. Despite this she still pushed to live her life, and even fell in love again. I know this much from her writings.

Her marriage to John even surprised her. She didn't believe she would fall in love again so quickly." He looked around the sunlit living room at the faces of his other children, who sat before him on a couch and chairs. "Liz asked me what happened to Annabelle and the others. Our family was entering a war they didn't see coming. At this time, Annabelle's faith had been strengthened by the help of Elder Joyce. David was now her full responsibility, and she was now Momma A to him. I believe the letters from her friends Elizabeth, Marilyn, Rebecca, and Ruthanne helped her as well.

"Annabelle and John were married December 9, 1849 and gifted with Grace's room. The next day, Annabelle went to work at the supply store, smiling the entire day. An olive-skinned woman named Victoria Coleman, one of Lizzie's childhood friends, entered the store. She was half Cherokee and French. Being Tsula's height, she was shorter than the other women, except Lizzie, and she had her wavy shoulder-length hair put into two braids."

"Good afternoon, I hope you're enjoying this weather. It is warm for this time of year," Victoria said in Cherokee.

Lisa replied, "Hello, Victoria. How have you been? I haven't seen you in a few weeks."

"I've been sick, but I'm feeling well now. I was here to get a few supplies and to see Lizzie, but I see you're working today."

"Yes, Lizzie is at home helping Tsula sew some new clothes for David. He's growing fast."

"I will have to come by your home and see that sweet boy. He reminds me so much of Camille."

Annabelle walked out of the storage closet with Grace.

"Ah, there she is, the new Lightning family member!"

Annabelle replied, "Hi, Victoria. It is good to see you."

Victoria displayed her dimpled smile and said, "It's always good to see you too. Lizzie was excited you and John were allowed to get your marriage license."

Annabelle and Grace looked at her, their eyes wide.

Victoria's brow drew together. "Did I say something wrong?"

Grace answered in her native tongue, "Oh, no…you said nothing wrong. So you came here for Lizzie?"

Victoria sighed. "Yes, I did, but I will see her later. I also came to buy a small sack of cornmeal."

"I can go get a sack for you." Grace went into the storage closet while the other women continued talking.

Annabelle enjoyed Victoria's visit. She was almost the complete opposite of

Lizzie. Grace brought Victoria the small sack of cornmeal, and Victoria said her goodbyes.

When Victoria left, Annabelle hummed and thought, *Wow, Lizzie actually approved of our marriage.*

February 1850 arrived with a lighter snow, giving the Lightning-Strongman men opportunity to hunt for turkey and deer. Much to George's dislike, Lizzie joined them on several hunts. George and Lizzie argued every time she joined the men. During the end of February, the family went on another hunt and found a flock of turkey. The family slowly approached the flock, and as Lizzie took aim, the men fired their rifles at the flock. Two of the turkeys fell, one killed by Michael and the other killed by Lizzie.

Lizzie ran toward the dead birds and picked them up, giving one to Michael. She kissed Michael on his forehead and walked back toward the house. George and the other men followed her across the snow-peppered prairie.

"Whoever marries Lizzie will need nine lives like a cat," George said in Cherokee.

Samuel cackled, and John shook his head. The men followed Lizzie closely.

As she approached the house she heard a horse nay. She moved onto the main dirt road and looked to her left at Brock and Hunter.

"Ah, Miss Lizzie Lightning," Brock said. "I see you're taking advantage of the land."

"I'd rather be inside near a fire, but I have a family to feed, Mr. Jackson," Lizzie said. As she stood before the two men, George and the others walked up behind her.

"Well, look what we have here, the whole family," Hunter said.

"When do you ever see just one Indian?" Brock asked.

The two men cackled.

George replied, "Mr. Jackson, Mr. Sawyer, nice to see you. We're on our way home. As you can see, we had a good hunt today."

Brock replied, "I see, now which one of you gentlemen here made the kills?"

"My son Michael took one of the good shots, and my niece made a good shot with her bow."

The men signaled their horses to move past the family and mockingly huffed. "It must be embarrassing for a woman to have to make kills for you men. She should be at home cooking, cleaning, sewing, or nursing. Though I doubt she'll be nursing anything soon."

Lizzie's nose scrunched, her brow furrowed, and she side-eyed the white men.

"My niece is talented with weapons like her sister and my daughter. I'd be a

weak man to kill their talent because it's more common with men. Something you white men are so quick to do."

Brock stopped his horse and turned. "Careful now, Mr. Strongman. Your niece is a rarity, but even women like her get domesticated. Or they die a lonely death. It would be a shame for such beauty to go untouched."

Lizzie's grip tightened on the dead turkey she carried. She turned toward the family house with her eyes locked on Brock and stomped away.

"I like my cousin's idea," Samuel said.

Samuel jogged slowly to Lizzie, and the two walked together. The others remained silent as they walked past Brock and Hunter, the two men leering at them.

"I see what you mean, Brock. She wanted to take a shot at you," Hunter said. "What a dangerous breed."

"She is quite the specimen, but eventually she'll get the message," Brock said. "You either become a part of the greatest civilization in the world or risk being erased from history. I'm interested in seeing what the redskin chooses." The men rode off on their horses.

Later in the day, John exited the kitchen as Annabelle picked out some grass caught in David's hair. She tapped the little boy on his shoulder once she finished, and he ran outside smiling. She noticed the slight furrow of John's brow. "What's on your mind?" she asked.

"We ran into the Indian agents before we came home," John said. "Those men test my spirit."

Annabelle slowly rubbed her hands. "What did they do?"

"Insulted us and told us Lizzie needs to be domesticated. I'm proud of her, though. She didn't let her temper rule her."

Annabelle could hear Grace and Tsula enter into the kitchen through the back door.

"I've never trusted any of the Indian agents before, but those two have a lot of darkness in them," John said.

"Annabelle, I know you're out there," Grace shouted. "Come on in and help us cook. John isn't that special." Annabelle grinned.

"I better go before Tsula starts talking too," Annabelle said.

John smiled and kissed his wife. "I'll have you tonight."

"Mm-hmm." Annabelle then giggled and walked around John to enter the kitchen, where she saw two dead turkeys on the large kitchen table. She noticed Lizzie's eyes were fixed on one of the dead birds as she prepared it.

Grace handed her a wooden bowl filled with spices to prepare to cook the turkey.

"Maria is getting slowed down by Lisa, so let's get most of supper done to make them feel guilty," Tsula said.

Grace frowned. "Tsula."

"What? I'm just picking on them…nothing wrong with a little fun."

"We're making cornbread too. So first help Annabelle and Lizzie with the turkey and then help them with the beans and cornbread."

"You changed the menu to slow us down."

Grace leered. "Maybe that'll teach you a lesson. Now, get started."

Tsula smacked her lips and walked over to Annabelle, who smiled. As the women prepared supper Lizzie's frustration was felt while she focused on one of the turkeys with hard swings of a cleaver slicing into the dead bird.

Even now Lizzie is unintimidated by the agents…she's something else, Annabelle thought.

Two days later Annabelle, Grace, and Lisa traveled toward the supply store, but Annabelle abruptly felt nauseous and vomited on the dirt road.

"Annabelle, what's wrong with you?" Grace said.

"I don't know. I've been a little ill the past few days," Annabelle said, and she vomited again.

"We need to take her back home," Lisa said in Cherokee. "It must've been what she ate this morning."

Grace replied, "That can't be. We ate the same thing. I should also be feeling sick. Annabelle, Lisa will walk home with you and see if you feel better throughout the day."

When Annabelle and Lisa returned home, Annabelle said, "I'm so confused. I don't become sick like this."

Lisa replied, "Maybe your body didn't like the food even though it was good. Don't worry about it. You'll be fine."

The two women walked to the supply store once Annabelle felt well a few hours later. Annabelle and Lisa entered the store to hear a humming Grace. "Oh, good…are you feeling well, Annabelle?" Grace asked.

Annabelle answered, "I'm feeling much better now."

Grace smiled at Annabelle as she hummed.

"Why are you smiling like that?"

Grace's mouth curved higher. "I think I know why you were sick and why you feel well now."

Annabelle's brows drew together, and she side-eyed the other woman. "What do you know?"

“When did you have your last bleeding?”

Annabelle’s mouth dropped. “I don’t know. I’ve been so focused on all the chores, David, John, and customers. No, no, I can’t be pregnant. I have never become sick during a pregnancy.”

“Sometimes it happens, and sometimes the sickness doesn’t happen. Doesn’t change that you’re carrying a baby now.”

Annabelle shook her head. “I need more time.”

Grace giggled. “We will see as your belly starts to grow.” Annabelle rolled her eyes at Grace as she pressed a hand against her stomach.

“This is exciting!” Lisa said. “When are you going to tell John?”

Annabelle replied, “I need more time. I think I’ll tell John in a week.”

Lisa gasped. “A week, I’ve never been able to keep a secret for that long.”

Grace replied, “Lisa, you will keep your mouth shut. It’s not like the baby is coming out soon.” Grace looked at Annabelle, who looked at her fingers still trying to count back and laughed to herself. Grace mumbled, “I’m sure David will be excited to finally have a brother or sister.”

During that night, Annabelle lay next to John filled with excitement, but unsure how to tell him.

Days passed as Annabelle discussed her pregnancy with Grace and Lisa. A week passed and the planting season began. She soon started to show, making her question if she was showing earlier than her past two pregnancies, or if the pregnancy were farther along than she’d originally thought. Annabelle waited for John outside of the large house while he finished planting. John walked from the barn alongside Samuel as they said their farewells to Jacob and approached Annabelle.

“Annabelle, can you teach this man how to work harder?” Samuel asked.

Annabelle giggled. “I can try.”

John playfully hit Samuel with his hat when Samuel walked off into the family house.

“You look tired and hungry,” she said.

John responded, “Your smile gives me strength. Were you waiting for me?”

Annabelle grinned. “There was something I wanted to tell you before supper.”

John smirked. “It must be good; your smile is telling a story. Did the Indian agents die?”

Annabelle laughed and slapped John on his chest. “No, silly. I have something a lot better to tell you. I’m pregnant.”

John’s jaw dropped, his eyes widened, and he shouted with joy. He picked Annabelle up and twirled her around. “How long have you known?”

Annabelle giggled. “Not too long. I wanted to wait and make sure. Grace and Lisa know, I couldn’t hide it from them.”

John grabbed Annabelle's hand and kissed it. "Then it's time to tell the others." He ran to the house, much to Annabelle's shock, while she held his hand. John excitedly opened the door and shouted, "I'm going to be a father again!"

Tsula shouted with excitement, giving Annabelle a hug. She placed a hand on Annabelle's stomach, continuing to shriek. "David, come here! Come feel your new baby brother or sister."

David excitedly ran over and touched Annabelle's stomach. "There is a baby coming?" he asked.

"Yes, there's a baby coming," Annabelle said.

David hugged Annabelle and asked, "Can I name him?"

The family chuckled as Annabelle knelt down and rubbed David's cheek. "Maybe, and I see you want a brother."

David grinned and shook his head.

"Later in the year, we will find out if the baby is a boy or girl."

Samuel patted John on his shoulder. "If we're lucky it will be a boy. There are enough women around here."

John chuckled as he hugged his cousin.

"Well, we better make sure the crop this year is as strong as before," George said. "I'm happy for you, boy."

John replied, "Thank you, Uncle George."

As the family ate supper, Annabelle's pregnancy was the main topic of excited conversation. Lizzie even showed great interest. When Annabelle ate, Lizzie abruptly placed another corncob on her plate.

"Don't hold back on your eating. I want to have a strong niece," Lizzie said.

Annabelle was surprised by Lizzie's loving gesture. The family laughed as Lizzie continued eating.

Speaking Cherokee, Michael said, "We need another boy around here."

The men cheered, but the women booed him. The cheerful conversations reminded Annabelle of her second pregnancy. However, she could also feel fear building up in her. The fear made her feel determined to protect her baby. She would rather die than to lose another baby.

The news of her pregnancy spread quickly among the family's friends. Two months passed as Annabelle enjoyed the changes that came with her pregnancy. Soon the family decided not to allow her to walk alone. To her surprise, Lizzie volunteered to walk with Annabelle. They were sometimes joined by Victoria.

Her visits remained focused on bringing water to the slaves on the Thompson farm and the Tate farm. Jacob's father, Mr. Tate, always greeted Annabelle, Lizzie, and Victoria with a welcoming voice. His daughters, Florence and Piper,

were thrilled to see Annabelle's pregnancy progress. For Annabelle, visiting the Thompson farm was the most rewarding for her. Mr. and Mrs. Thompson welcomed Annabelle with open arms. Annabelle was more excited to see Doll, one of the Thompson's field slaves she'd befriended. The older woman eagerly welcomed the young women, and she was excited for Annabelle. Seeing Doll carry around her eight-month-old daughter made Annabelle anxious. The father of the baby girl remained a secret, to Mrs. Thompson's displeasure; she was angered when another Cherokee man approached Doll, and she became protective of Doll.

The situation gave Annabelle mixed feelings, though Doll was happy. Annabelle encouraged her not to bear any more children. The beautiful Georgia was another baby barely resembling Doll. This fact increased Annabelle's fear that Mrs. Thompson's suspicions might turn onto Mr. Thompson, exposing the truth.

On May 9, 1850, the Lightning-Strongman family welcomed David's sixth birthday. Though David was excited about his birthday, he cared more about spending time with Annabelle. Seeing Annabelle change over time excited the little boy. As the family sat outside enjoying the weather, Tsula sat down next to Annabelle.

"You're getting huge. Are you sure you're not carrying twins?" Tsula asked.

Annabelle looked at Tsula with narrowing eyes, but then her eyes enlarged, and her gaze went down her stomach.

"Annabelle, I was joking."

"You made my heart race," Annabelle said.

The two women snickered as Tsula patted Annabelle's back.

"I'm happy for you and John, but I'm happier for David," Tsula said. "There are so few children here around David's age. It'll be good for him to have someone to love and play with."

Annabelle smiled. "I think he'll make a good older brother."

"I think he will too. If it is a girl, though, let's teach her how to sew before Lizzie throws a bow and arrow at the child."

The two women laughed as they watched David play catch with Grace and Lizzie.

August 1850 arrived with intense heat. Annabelle hated the timing of her pregnancy. Though Annabelle felt spoiled throughout her pregnancy, she often wondered if her happiness was temporary. Nancy, John's ex, who had attempted to harm Annabelle with a rattlesnake, showed obvious envy, but Annabelle purposely tried to avoid the woman, whose father was white and

mother was Cherokee and white. Even in church while she sang hymns Nancy gave Annabelle evil stares. Nancy's attitude increased Annabelle's determination to protect her unborn child.

Nancy's envious behavior toward Annabelle prompted Pastor Bluebird to scold Nancy. However, the greatest threat to Annabelle's family was Brock and Hunter. The Indian agents showed great interest in Annabelle once they noticed her pregnancy. One day when Annabelle, Lizzie, and Grace helped a Cherokee man put supplies on his wagon, Brock and Hunter walked into the store. The Cherokee man said nothing to the Indian agents.

"It seems your store is doing well as usual," Brock said.

"Mr. Jackson, what brings you here?" Grace asked. "Shouldn't you and Mr. Sawyer be out keeping the peace between us and the encroaching white men?"

"What a nice vocabulary you have, Miss Lightning, impressive. But please keep in mind it was the white man that taught you how to speak properly instead of your indigenous gibberish."

Grace replied with a smart tone, "My momma taught me how to speak properly, whether it's Cherokee or the lesser English."

"My, my, you and Miss Lizzie are certainly sisters. How can the peace last when Indians like yourself are so disobedient?"

"Maybe if you and Mr. Sawyer left, y'all could tell your Secretary of Interior that we're doing fine here in Indian Country."

Annabelle came through the back door with a basket of eggs and Lizzie behind her. She abruptly stopped, and Lizzie stepped in front of her.

"Miss Annabelle, Miss Lizzie, always a pleasure," Hunter said.

"Mr. Sawyer and Mr. Jackson, are you here out of kindness or avoiding the heat?" Lizzie asked.

The men laughed as Lizzie and Annabelle walked to the counter.

"So even brave men like yourselves can only take so much heat…what a shame," Lizzie said.

Brock replied, "Miss Lizzie, you always have something to say. If you keep this up, you'll never learn how to actually be a lady. You should learn from your Cousin Lisa with her interesting accent. Even though I'm sure your savage language twisted her tongue, at least she shows some capacity to become a lady."

"You keep telling me how to be a lady. I think it's clear you have never had a lady. Tell me, why isn't your wife living with you anymore, Mr. Jackson? I can't imagine why not."

The two men looked at Lizzie with pressed lips. "Careful now, slave shackles can't tell the difference between a nigger and a prairie nigger," Hunter said.

"I think Miss Annabelle even understands that. You know, after you have

that child you could sell it for a high value," Brock said.

Staring at Brock, Annabelle's eyes narrowed.

He continued, his voice filled with sarcasm, "Looks like I said something I shouldn't have, but it's reality. How safe do you think that half-breed will be?"

Annabelle responded, her voice now deep and her brow furrowed, "Safer than the Negroes in the South, that much I can say."

Brock cocked his head and leered. "Ain't nothing like a mother's wrath. Your kind is suited for separation. Very different when you see a white mother separated from a child than a Negro woman. You Negroes move on and make another and another, but a white woman. The connection is so strong she don't want a man to touch her after having a child taken away."

Annabelle scowled. "You have twisted words for a so-called Christian man, Mr. Jackson. I would say there is much you still need to learn, if that's what you believe."

"I think it's time for you and Mr. Sawyer to leave, Mr. Jackson," Grace stated.

"Well, my apologies if my words hurt. We can't change the roles we are meant to play in this world," Brock said. "Let's continue our rounds, Mr. Sawyer."

"Indeed," Hunter said.

Annabelle's anger boiled over when the men left the store. Abruptly Annabelle started to cry. Grace and Lizzie attempted to calm Annabelle as she wept.

"I'm sorry. I shouldn't be crying, but that man really upset me," Annabelle said in Cherokee. "To say I should sell my baby. I'm tired of these evil men."

Lizzie replied, "Don't worry about it; that will never happen. Those men have nothing better to do but to try to kill our spirits. We won't give them the pleasure."

Grace half-smiled while listening to her sister.

Annabelle held onto what Lizzie had said throughout the day.

As Annabelle put on her nightgown and sat in bed with John that evening, she told him what had happened in the supply store. John became furious with what the men had said. Annabelle had never seen John angry like that, but she told him what Lizzie had told her. John sat in the bed with his arm around Annabelle and kissed her on the cheek.

Later that night, John watched Annabelle sleep. "We don't have everything, but I'm happy we have each other," John whispered. "Thank you Jesus for directing my spirit."

As time went on September arrived, and the family maintained their ways. During this time Annabelle's involvement at the supply store became

infrequent, and to her dislike she stopped her water runs. Annabelle also spent a lot of time looking at the letter Ruthanne had written her announcing Marilyn had given birth to a son in April.

"It's almost time, isn't it, little one?" Annabelle spoke to herself.

In late September, Annabelle, Grace, and Lisa had just closed the store when Buck Scott entered.

Buck's chest stuck out, and he kept his chin uplifted as he stopped in front of the counter. "Good evening, ladies, I needed a whole chicken," he said.

"Good evening, Buck," Grace said. "Lisa can go get the chicken for you quickly."

Lisa went out to the chicken coops as Buck stood before Annabelle and Grace holding his walking cane.

Buck replied, "Miss Annabelle, I imagine you're ready to have your child."

Annabelle replied, "Yes, I am. It would be nice to have my body back."

Annabelle and Buck lightly chuckled.

"I hear you and Nancy have decided to see each other," Grace said. "How is giving your time to Nancy going?"

Buck boastfully replied, "I believe things are going quite well. She is a respectable lady. She seeks a husband who treats her well, and I believe I could be such a man. I believe she'd say the same about me."

A smirk arose on Grace's face while she looked at Buck. "You seem sure of yourself. I would say that's a good thing about you," she said. "It is a sad thing seeing a man with no confidence."

The hazel-eyed man shifted his gaze from Grace. "Why, yes, I also believe that's important for a man to be. Maybe if—"

Lisa abruptly plopped a sack with the dead chicken in it on the counter. "Here is your chicken, Buck," Lisa said. "He was the one chicken we've been waiting to get rid of."

"Thank you," Buck said. "Well, here is my payment. I guess I need to be off now, or I will be late. Enjoy the evening, ladies."

Buck walked out of the store with the chicken, and the women cleaned the store before they left.

"I'm surprised by Buck's attitude toward me," Annabelle said in Cherokee. "I hope others will change like him."

Grace replied, "I don't believe Buck has let go some of the beliefs he was taught by his father, but it is nice to see him treat you with more respect. Let us hope the hearts of others continue to change. Breaking the wrongful beliefs of others takes more than the words of a truthful man…it takes the Father changing the hearts of people. That's what I believe."