

Where the Deer Ran:
Events Leading to the Cherokee Removal

A draft historical drama
By Adam Russell

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Scene 1: DEER RUNNING'S cabin, late 1836.

(A wooden cabin made of un-hewn logs. There is a table with an oil-lamp on it.)

AGENT

But all of the other farmers have received plows and the women have received spinning wheels.

STANDING OAK

My husband says no.

AGENT

Your tiny garden will not last you the winter.

STANDING OAK

We will work harder.

AGENT

You should be inside, cooking, cleaning and sewing clothes for your family.

STANDING OAK

My husband hunts. I tend the garden.

(Daughter enters and Standing Oak places hands on girl's shoulders.)

AGENT

(Looking at hands)

Your hands are callused, your skin cracked from the cold and your back is sore and will not last forever.

STANDING OAK

You are a fair man, John Ashton, but the answer is no.

OCANOHOOCHEE

Daddy says not to let the whites into the house.

STANDING OAK

I know your father's wishes.

AGENT

I will speak with Deer Running.

STANDING OAK

He will not speak with you.

OCANOHOOCHEE

Do you really hate the Cherokee?

AGENT

(Kneeling down to daughter)

I'm here to help the Cherokee.

STANDING OAK

Child! Away with you.

*(Daughter leaves and plays with her doll.
Agent stands back up)*

AGENT

Look around you at the progress. Look at the rows of corn and beans in the fields, the fenced-in yards of horses and cattle. The sawmill cuts the logs for your homes. The old way of Cherokee life is over.

STANDING OAK

You can not convince my husband of such a statement.

AGENT

But I do not have to convince you. . .

*(Deer Running enters with a rifle and
notices Agent.)*

STANDING OAK

The agent was checking in on us.

(Agent nods head)

STANDING OAK (CONT'D)

He was just leaving, weren't you Mr. Ashton?

(Agent makes for door but Deer Running stands before it.)

DEER RUNNING

I forbid the white thief to enter my house.

OCANOHOOCHEE

(Running towards Deer Running)

I told the thief to leave but he wouldn't.

AGENT

I don't want to cause any trouble here.

DEER RUNNING

You do nothing but cause trouble for the Cherokee.

STANDING OAK

Enough!

DEER RUNNING

I will. . .

STANDING OAK

. . .you will listen to what the agent has to say.

DEER RUNNING

The agent can speak freely today because I allow him to.

AGENT

I came to offer you a plow.

DEER RUNNING

My wife wishes she were married to a farmer.

STANDING OAK

It is the last plow in the village and we will accept it.

OCANOHOOCHEE

Daddy! Daddy!

STANDING OAK

Little Foot! Come get your sister and read with her.

DEER RUNNING

(Laughing uncomfortably)

It seems my wife has already made a decision without me.

AGENT

Rebecca only wishes. . .

DEER RUNNING

There is no Rebecca here.

STANDING OAK

He speaks of my English name, nothing more.

(Little Foot arrives and takes Ocanohoochee to a table. He opens the Bible and guides his sister in reading from it. She reads softly, but her words can be heard interspersed through the conversation downstage.)

DEER RUNNING

My wife is named Standing Oak after the tree that does not break.

OCANOHOOCHEE

But I say unto you who hear, Love your enemies, do good to them who hate you.

AGENT

I meant no disrespect. . .

OCANOHOOCHEE

Bless them that curse you, and pray for them who despitefully use you.

STANDING OAK

The agent is offering to help us.

(Deer Running glances over at Standing Oak and back to Agent.)

OCANOHOOCHEE

And as ye would that men should do to you, do ye also to them likewise.

DEER RUNNING

The other day, a snake slithered into my house, under the door, unwelcomed. Do you know what I did to the snake?

(Agent nods head)

DEER RUNNING (CON'T)

I cut off its head and burned it in the fire.

OCANOHOCHEE

But Love ye your enemies, and do good, and lend, hoping for nothing again; and your reward shall be great.

AGENT

If you refuse the plow, I have several baby pigs I can offer you. You could raise them as livestock to sell for money or keep as food. I offer them to you as a gift.

DEER RUNNING

We have lived without the white man and his gifts since the water beetle created this land for the Cherokee.

OCANOHOOCHEE

Be ye merciful, as your father also is merciful.

STANDING OAK

The Cherokee have killed all of the deer--you told me this yourself.

DEER RUNNING

The white thief drives them away so I can not have skins to trade.

AGENT

A family can not depend on hunting anymore. Going Snake owns a herd of cattle, four goats and many hogs. He respects the animals, as you do, but his family is prosperous.

DEER RUNNING

Once, you told the Cherokee to hunt deer and trade and sell skins to traders so Cherokee can have clothes and guns like the Europeans. Now you tell us to farm the land so we can live and eat like the white thieves. But now the deer are gone and soon the earth must dry up and what have the Cherokee then?

AGENT

We will teach you to live off the land for as long as the earth remains.

STANDING OAK

I refuse to sit by and do nothing while my family starves..

OCANOHOOCHEE

(Pawing at his legs)

I want to be a hunter too, Daddy.

(Deer Running kisses her head.)

DEER RUNNING

Of course you do.

(He kneels down and kisses her on the cheek)

DEER RUNNING (CON'T)

The United States says farm like the white man and you will be happy.

STANDING OAK

Farming honors the land and our ancestors.

DEER RUNNING

I used to walk the forests in the season of the brown grass, never seeing another man. Now the trees are cut down and made for houses and fences block off the land where I used to hunt.

AGENT

I have given my word to help the Cherokee assimilate into the United States and I mean to keep my word.

DEER RUNNING

My father hunted deer and traded skins. His father was a hunter and traded skins. I am a hunter, but I no have skins to trade.

STANDING OAK

We can raise livestock. Pigs and cows. . .

DEER RUNNING

We are Cherokee, not cow-hands.

AGENT

The Cherokee. . .

DEER RUNNING

. . .want to be left alone. You will leave.

*(Standing Oak opens the door and Agent
nods head to her and Deer Running as he exits.)*

STANDING OAK

Thank you, John Ashton.

DEER RUNNING

Toward the black coffin of the Darkening Land your paths
shall stretch out. When darkness comes, your spirit shall
grow less and dwindle away, never to reappear. Listen!

STANDING OAK

Your curses are nothing more than words that fall to the
ground and hurt no one.

DEER RUNNING

The white thief wants us to give up hunting so we will not
miss our lands when they steal them from us.

STANDING OAK

The other husbands are all farmers now and do not have to
leave their families to hunt.

DEER RUNNING

What will Little Foot think of his father doing the work of
the white man?

STANDING OAK

Your children grow taller with each season, but you are not
here to see them.

DEER RUNNING

Our children understand that I must hunt.

STANDING OAK

I can not talk to our son, and our daughter is as stubborn
as you. She refuses to do her work at the schools and makes
trouble for the missionaries.

DEER RUNNING

As a boy, I would go with my father on hunts and watch him.
I watched him become silent and deadly, like the wolf,
watching the prey before him.

(Deer Running crouches down low and acts as if he is stringing a bow)

DEER RUNNING (CON'T)

I did not know my father then, like the wolf he was, at one with the Great Spirit. I watched my father and learned much from him.

STANDING OAK

This year the winter will grow cold and I am afraid.

(Deer Running looks over to table where Ocanohoochee and Little Foot are still reading)

DEER RUNNING

I ask Little Foot to follow me during the hunts, but he does not. He remains with you, his face pushed inside a book.

STANDING OAK

There is much talk that he will go to the university.

DEER RUNNING

His teachers have taught him to hate the Cherokee people.

STANDING OAK

(Coming to place her hand on Deer Running's face)

Our son has been blessed. Little Foot. Come here please.

DEER RUNNING

(Brushing her hand away)

Their God sees only white.

LITTLE FOOT

(Reading from newspaper)

It says here that Elias Boudinot and Major Ridge submitted a false treaty signing over Cherokee land but fortunately the United States Senate refused to sign the clearly fraudulent document.

STANDING OAK

Boudinot and Ridge will not stop until they sell the Cherokee land, and their souls, to Andrew Jackson.

LITTLE FOOT

The Treaty Party, led by Boudinot and Ridge, and the Anti-Treaty Party, led by John Ross, have both left for Washington to work out an acceptable agreement.

(Both Deer Running and Standing Oak bow heads in despair)

DEER RUNNING

The penalty for any Cherokee who sells the land is death.

LITTLE FOOT

But our Council has been outlawed--its laws no longer exist.

STANDING OAK

John McCoy could not even testify in court when his horses were stolen last week.

DEER RUNNING

A way of life can not be shot down like a rabbit.

LITTLE FOOT

Their constitution says that all men are created equal.

DEER RUNNING

Their constitution does not consider us men.

LITTLE FOOT

(Speaking for himself, not from newspaper)

Despite our progress, our teacher says that many people believe that the Cherokee can never be like the whites and can never be citizens of the United States.

STANDING OAK

We have learned the English alphabet, made a council and have built our homes like the white settlers.

LITTLE FOOT

They say the Cherokee are not, and never will be, capable of being civilized, at any costs.

STANDING OAK

Our men have been educated in their finest universities and you yourself have hopes of going too.

DEER RUNNING

My son will not be a soldier for those murderers and thieves!

LITTLE FOOT

The Cherokee will have to work harder to assimilate into the white culture and be accepted.

(Deer Coming stalks up to Little Foot and grabs the paper from his hands and crumbles it as he speaks.)

DEER RUNNING

You speak of the Cherokee as if you are not one of us!

LITTLE FOOT

I state an opinion common among the citizens of the United States, nothing more.

DEER RUNNING

It was a mistake sending you to those schools.

LITTLE FOOT

They have made me a well-educated, civilized man.

DEER RUNNING

Civilized! They lie and steal and cheat the Cherokee, all while hiding behind their God, and they teach us how to be civilized!

STANDING OAK

I will not stand for this kind of arguing in my house!

DEER RUNNING

I will not be made a fool in my house.

LITTLE FOOT

Do you not listen to the people laugh at you as you return from your trips, no skins and no meat in your hands, and no food for your family!

DEER RUNNING

Enough! Have the missionaries also taught you to defy your father?

(Deer Running goes to the fireplace and throws the paper in and watches it burn.)

LITTLE FOOT

A father is supposed to provide for his family.

STANDING OAK

Quiet, Little Foot.

LITTLE FOOT

My name is Edward.

(DEER RUNNING runs up to Little Foot and slaps him across the face. Little Foot only stares back at him while refusing to move.)

LITTLE FOOT (CON'T)

And unto him that smiteth thee on the one cheek offer also the other.

(Little Foot offers his other cheek and Deer Running strikes him again.)

DEER RUNNING

It is you who have betrayed me. My own flesh and blood. It is you who sends the white thief to my house when I am gone. You go behind me and dishonor my wishes.

(Standing Oak runs up between Little Foot and Deer Running.)

STANDING OAK

I told him to speak to the agent.

DEER RUNNING

He is part of the problem. He acts like them and takes their name and speaks their language, but he is not a white man or a Cherokee. He is a traitor.

STANDING OAK

He spoke to the agent because you would not.

(Deer Running turns around, breathing heavily.)

STANDING OAK (CONT'D)

The ceremony of the Green Corn is soon upon us and we have little to harvest. The other husbands have offered to help me, because you will not, but I will not take their pity. We still have time to make a good harvest for ourselves or else we will surely starve in the winter ahead.

DEER RUNNING

Long ago, I have heard stories of forests and caves filled with deer, so many deer that all a man has to do is reach his hand out to touch one.

STANDING OAK

You do not listen to what I say.

DEER RUNNING

It is far away, but if I can find it--we will never know hunger again.

LITTLE FOOT

How can you rely on bedtime stories at a time like this!

(Deer Running is subdued and calm.)

DEER RUNNING

I will find the deer.

STANDING OAK

Little Foot. Find Mr. Ashton. We will take the plow if it is not too late. Take your sister with you.

DEER RUNNING

My fathers must be laughing at me from their graves.

STANDING OAK

We need to plant more beans, greens and corn. Little Foot can help us. Little Foot will help us with the planting and harvesting.

LITTLE FOOT

An educated man should not do the work of a slave.

(Little Foot looks away at first and then stares at his father until Ocanohoochee walks up and holds his hand. They both exit.)

STANDING OAK

He is angry, nothing more. Together we will build a bond stronger than the land itself.

DEER RUNNING

Why build a future on the sand along the river?

STANDING OAK

There is the present time and for now, this must be enough.

(Deer Running walks towards Standing Oak and holds out his hand to her. She takes it and smiles back at him as he slowly drops to his knees.)

DEER RUNNING

It was the season of the sleeping bear then, when the Cherokee fought alongside Andrew Jackson against the Red Stick Creeks. Jackson told us the Creeks were savages who would steal our land and kill our families.

STANDING OAK

Little Foot was just a baby then.

DEER RUNNING

The soldiers were rounding up the Creek men when a woman ran up to her husband, carrying his rifle and their child. The baby was screaming and the husband reached out to calm it, but a soldier thought he was reaching for his gun and shot the woman.

STANDING OAK

You have never spoken about the war.

DEER RUNNING

The woman fell to the ground, but the baby still cried. The husband kneeled down to pick up the baby and when he did, he too was shot by the soldier. The other soldiers laughed and made fun while the baby still cried. I thought of Little Foot, back home with you, and I picked up the baby and wiped off the blood from his face.

STANDING OAK

Do not tell me more. I have heard enough.

DEER RUNNING

A white soldier took the baby from me and laid it on the ground. They said the baby would cause trouble one day and seek revenge against the whites for the murder of its parents. The soldier gave me a rifle.

STANDING OAK

The things which happened in those times can not be carried inside us. They must remain in that horrible moment and be forgotten and buried. You could not have disobeyed the white soldiers.

DEER RUNNING

The baby cried again and I raised the rifle. I told myself the baby would not survive without its mother and father. The baby cried louder until all we could hear was a scream.

STANDING OAK

No.

DEER RUNNING

(Raising arms as if holding a rifle)

I fired the rifle and the scream was no more.

(Standing Oak stumbles back several feet.)

DEER RUNNING (CON'T)

A Creek man called out to the Spirits of the Sky Vault and cursed me for what I had done. He said that as I had taken a son away from the Creek, so too would a son be taken from me.

STANDING OAK

I do not believe in such curses.

DEER RUNNING

I only believe in what I see before me.

STANDING OAK

Little Foot loves you more than you could imagine. I see the admiration he holds in you.

DEER RUNNING

I see a son who desires to be nothing that his father is.

(Standing Oak kneels down beside DEER RUNNING)

STANDING OAK

Now is not the time to fight your son. He is young and confused, nothing more.

(The two remain quiet until a knock is heard at

the door. Neither moves. Another knock, louder than the first, and the door opens to reveal ANN and JASON SMITH, a white family carrying a small baby.)

JASON

This here lot 47?

ANN

It's tinier then I expected.

JASON

Yes, it's tiny all right, but none too small to start a family up with.

STANDING OAK

You must be lost.

JASON

This ain't lot 47?

ANN

God-willing I can't walk another step. Show her them papers and let her see for herself.

JASON

We's won this here lot in the land lottery.

(Jason walks over to her and hands some paper to her.)

JASON (CONT'D)

You Injuns can read English?

STANDING OAK

My son teaches me to read and write.

(Deer Running turns and stares at Standing Oak)

ANN

The newspapers say y'all ain't nothing but savages, but you's mild-mannered and speak good enough.

DEER RUNNING

Why are you here?

JASON

(Singing)

All I want in this here creation
Is a pretty little wife and a big plantation
Way up north in the Cherokee Nation.

STANDING OAK

I can not read the handwriting on this paper.

ANN

Well, them soldiers outside told us this was the one.

DEER RUNNING

Soldiers. This is a time of peace.

JASON

Said they here to make sure none of you Injuns raise up and
cause a ruckus.

STANDING OAK

Maybe my son can read this paper for us.

(Little Foot comes in the door, nodding his head.)

STANDING OAK (CONT'D)

You could not find John Ashton?

LITTLE FOOT

No. We found him, but he had already given away the plow
to another family. It was the last plow in the village.

STANDING OAK

We will have to make do then. I want you to read this
paper.

*(She hands the paper to him. Little Foot begins
reading it. Ocanohoochee looks the new people
over and goes to the table to play with her
doll.)*

DEER RUNNING

The Cherokee are peaceful people, unlike the white thieves
who take our land.

JASON

It's you all who stole this land from Georgia.

DEER RUNNING

We have laws and courts just as you do.

(Little Foot reads over the paper.)

LITTLE FOOT

You are Jason and Ann Smith?

ANN

(Simultaneously with Jason.)

We are.

DEER RUNNING

Who are these people Little Foot?

LITTLE FOOT

This paper claims they're the new owners of this land.

STANDING OAK

This land is our birthright.

LITTLE FOOT

Georgia has divided up the Cherokee land and given it away to white settlers willing to move on the land.

DEER RUNNING

They will take the land over my dead body.

JASON

Hold on there, Chief. We's won this property fair and square and we's sold everything we owned back in Gainesville to come up here.

STANDING OAK

There are treaties that protect our land from being taken.

ANN

Y'all aim to get better treatment than the whites do. Nobody offered to pay our expenses to move here.

DEER RUNNING

We do not ask to move.

LITTLE FOOT

Only the missionaries and agents are allowed on the Cherokee land.

DEER RUNNING

You are trained in the ways of the white man. You must know some way to get around this.

LITTLE FOOT

The color of our skin prevents us from doing anything.

STANDING OAK

We must speak to John Ross.

JASON

You can speak to Andrew Jackson if you like. It won't change nothing.

LITTLE FOOT

Boudinot warned us that Georgia would unleash settlers into our Nation to force us into leaving.

DEER RUNNING

The white man thinks he can steal land from the Cherokee. He is wrong.

JASON

All you Cherokee related ain't you? I'm sure some other Injuns don't mind sharing a room with you.

LITTLE FOOT

It is too late to find a place to stay tonight.

DEER RUNNING

I will not give my home to a thief.

JASON

You ain't giving it away. Georgia give it to us. Now take what's yours and get out of here.

(Ocanohoochee takes an interest in Ann and her baby.)

OCANOHOOCHEE

How old is your baby?

ANN

She's nine months. How old are you?

OCANOHOOCHEE

I'm six, but my momma says I'm too big for my britches.

ANN

(Kneeling down to Ocanohochee)

She does? Why I can't image a pretty girl like you getting into trouble.

OCANOHOOCHEE

My name is Ocanohoochee.

ANN

I'm Ann, this is Jason and this here is Kaitlin.

(Everyone quiets down and watches Oconohoochee lead Ann to the table.)

OCANOHOOCHEE

Momma says it's good to make strangers feel at home.

ANN

(Noticing Bible on table)

What's this you're reading child?

OCANOHOOCHEE

That's the Bible. It's all about God and Jesus and the Holy Spirit.

JASON

Well, you can take the Bible with you on your way out.

ANN

Stop it!

(Ann looks the family over, really seeing them for the first time.)

This is no Christian way to treat these people.

JASON

They ain't Christian! They just a bunch of savages praying to the moon and stars and such.

(There is silence as all look around)

JASON (CONT'D)

They's nothing but ignorant savages.

LITTLE FOOT

We are Cherokee and we are civilized.

ANN

As Christian people, we must treat them as our brothers and sisters.

JASON

Red and white people can't be related!

ANN

We were told the land would be empty.

DEER RUNNING

This is the home of my ancestors.

STANDING OAK

Perhaps the paper is wrong?

ANN

We are strangers here with no place to sleep the night.

DEER RUNNING

The white man is not. . .

STANDING OAK

There is room in back, for you to sleep.

ANN

We will rest tonight until the matter can be cleared in the morning.

JASON

I ain't sleeping under the same roof as an Injun. Either he goes or I go.

STANDING OAK

My husband means you no harm.

ANN

No harm is taken. We thank you for your hospitality.

(Agent enters the room and looks around.)

STANDING OAK

John Ashton, has Georgia given away our land?

LITTLE FOOT

We have signed no removal treaty.

AGENT

The settlers were not supposed to come yet.

DEER RUNNING

You knew they were coming and you said nothing.

AGENT

Please gather your things. The jail is full of Cherokee who have tried to cause trouble tonight.

STANDING OAK

We wish to cause no trouble. DEER RUNNING, we must do as John Ashton says.

DEER RUNNING

You ask us to leave our home tonight, but if we have no right to our own land, how can we have any right to land that is given to us?

AGENT

I'm sorry. Please gather what you can carry and follow me out.

(Ocanohoochee takes her doll, Little Foot takes his Bible, Standing Oak takes a pan and Deer Running grabs his gun as he stares at Jason. They all exit, followed by Agent.)

END OF SCENE