
AMEHKOONSIHKWA

The General Harrison



SCOTT FLACK

THE STOREHOUSE'S SECOND READING

PRINTED UPON THE MAUMEE · MMXXVI

For the women the maps kept on nothing.

*m. (1st) Mary Wells, dau. of Capt. William Wells, of Fort Wayne,
Ind.*

— *THE WOLCOTT GENEALOGY*, 1912

The nineteenth century had passed its meridian before any public agitation had taken place in the Maumee Valley relative to the equal rights of woman.

— ROSA L. SEGUR, 1905

PROLOGUE — WHAT THE RECORD SAYS

ELEVEN WORDS. THAT IS THE WHOLE OF HER IN THE FAMILY BOOK: A wife, a father, a fort. The record gives her a captain for a father and a county for a birthplace and a husband for a destiny, and it spells all three correctly, and it is not lying. It is only doing what records do, which is to keep what the keeper valued and let the rest go down under the ink.

It does not say that her father had another name, which was Apekonit — Eepiihkanita, as the nation writes it now — the wild carrot, for the red of his hair, given to him by the people who took him as a boy and loved him as a son. It does not say that her mother was Wanangapeth, Sweet Breeze, daughter of Mihšihkinaahkwa — the war chief the frightened young republic rated the ablest soldier on the continent — or that her own first name, older than Mary, was Amehkoonsihkwa. It does not say what she watched from her white veranda above the rapids, or what she heard in the name her husband painted on his boat, or why, fifty-one years after her death, her son would go to the government with a petition asking to be written back into a nation the family book had already written out.

There is no portrait of her in any book the Republic printed. The house survives — fourteen rooms of it, white above the rapids — but in all that record's long keeping, no face; it kept the property and let the woman go. Of her mother there was never anything at all.

The general is on the counties. Her grandmother is on nothing.
This book is the nothing, written down.



PART ONE

The House

CHAPTER ONE

The Boat

Maumee, Ohio. April 1839.

THE FISH CAME UP BEFORE THE BOAT DID.

They came the way her mother had said they always came, since before there were people to watch them come — up out of the lake and into the broken water, against the current, thousands upon thousands under the brown spring flood, so many that the river above the town seemed to be swimming in its own bed. From the veranda Mary could see the men standing to their thighs in the rapids with dip nets and spears, whooping when they lifted a walleye the size of a stove-length into the light. White men now, mostly, in wool trousers rolled to the knee. Her mother had told her the old people took them with their bare hands, laughing, in the years when the river had belonged to the laughing. Her mother had been dead thirty-four years. The fish still came. Mary had arrived at the age when a woman keeps a private ledger of what still comes and what does not, and the fish were on the first page of it.

The house at her back was three years old and smelled still, in the newest rooms, of lime and paint, fourteen rooms of white timber set on the bluff with its columns facing the water, and it was called — she had heard a boatman say it to another, not knowing she could hear — *the finest house between Buffalo and Detroit*. Her husband had built it the way he did everything, patiently and in writing, and she had chosen the wallpapers from a book of samples that came up from Cincinnati, and there were days she walked its long upstairs hall and counted doors the way a woman counts children, and there were other days the house sat on her chest like a stone she had agreed to carry and could not now remember agreeing to.

Below the bluff, at the wharf, her sons were waiting for the boat.

She could see the two of them from where she stood — William Wells Wolcott, seventeen this year, named for her father, standing very straight with his hands behind him because he had decided this spring that he was a man of business; and Henry Clay Wolcott, eight, named for a senator in Kentucky her husband admired, hopping from plank to plank on the theory that the spaces between them were rivers full of snakes. A daughter slept in the house behind her. Two more sons were at their letters in the parlor with the door open, and she could hear the young one chanting his alphabet with the fury of a war song, the way children make everything into the thing they need it to be.

Her children had a grandmother no map would ever carry and a great-grandfather the maps could not stop carrying, and none of them knew it yet, not really, not as more than a story told at bedtime with the candle low. She had not decided when she would make them know it. That was a page in the private ledger too.

The boat showed first as smoke above the cottonwoods on the lower bend, then as a white bow wading up the channel with the current combing hard against it. She watched it make the crossing below the island, small against the width of the water, dogged, ugly, hers. Her husband owned two steamboats and a wharf and a warehouse and the good opinion of every man of accounts from here to Detroit, and he was not aboard — he was downriver at Toledo, at the land office, where all of him that was not kind went to be exercised — and so the boat came up the river alone with its name run out along the paddle-box in letters a yard high, gold on black, the hull new that winter out of the yard at the foot of the town and back now from the lake with her first freight, and her son Henry Clay stopped hopping and stood on the wharf and read the letters aloud slowly, the way he was learning to, sounding each one, proud of himself, his voice carrying up the bluff on the spring air as clear as a struck glass:

“G — E — N. *General!*” A pause, working at it. “*General HARRISON!*”

A mile above her veranda, in the timber behind the town, there was ground where the sumac grew up through old fallen trunks gone soft as cake, and nobody plowed it though it was good bottom land, and boys found gun flints there and traded them at school. Her grandfather's thousand men had stood in that timber forty-five years ago come August, fasting, waiting for an army. The plan of the battle that broke them — she had been told this by a man who thought it a fine thing to tell her, at her own table, over her own china — the plan of the battle had been sketched for the general by his aide-de-camp, a young Virginia lieutenant of good family who would go on to burn Prophetstown and kill the last hope of her mother's world at a river in Canada and be, it was now confidently said in the newspapers her husband took, President one day. Harrison. The boat brought up flour and dry goods and window glass, and took down wheat and staves and potash, and paid for the wallpapers and the columns and the senator's name on her second son, and it was called the *General Harrison*, and her husband had named it, and he had not been cruel to name it, which was somehow the part she could not put down. Cruelty she would have known how to hold. It was only that it had never once occurred to him that there was anything in the name at all. It was a good name for business. It was a name that meant, to the men on the wharves, *reliability*.

"Mother!" Henry called up the bluff. "The *General's* come!"

"I see him," she called back, and her voice was steady and pleasant and belonged to Mrs. James Wolcott of Maumee, Ohio, and she waved to her son, and her son waved back, ferociously happy, and the boat blew off steam like a whale.

She went in through the river door to see about dinner. On the desk in her husband's office, squared to the blotter's corner because he squared everything, lay the papers he had had drawn before he left — she had watched the copying clerk at it two days together — instruments, he called them, that was the word, *instruments*, by which certain of her mother's people up at the reserves, her own cousins by blood and older kinships the English language had no words for and so declined to believe in, made James Wolcott, Esquire, late judge, attorney-in-fact over the sections of land the

treaties had let them keep. So that it could be *managed*, he said. So that it could be *protected*, he said, and he believed it, and — this was the second thing she could not put down — he was not altogether wrong: she had seen what became of allotments that no white man of accounts stood in front of. The wolves took less when a dog stood in the yard. You fed the dog. In time the dog owned the yard. She had turned that over many nights while the house ticked and her husband slept the sleep of the justified beside her, and she had never yet found the flaw in it, and she had never yet stopped looking.

At the bottom of the first paper, above her husband's seal, one of the cousins had signed. The clerk had written the name out fair — *his mark* — and beside the words stood the mark itself, a small firm X, and she had stood in the doorway when it was made and had said nothing, and the cousin had looked at her once on his way out, not unkindly, and had said, in the language her mother had sung to her before the fevers took her, four words she did not translate for the clerk, and had gone.

She was five when her mother died. She had the songs but not the grammar; enough to be wounded in it, not enough to answer.

Dinner was to be whitefish, and the first greens, and a pudding. She stood a moment more in the cool of the office where she did not customarily go, one hand on the squared papers, not moving them — in eighteen years of marriage she had never once moved a paper in that room, and something in her had lately begun to keep count of that too — and out the window, down the silver reach of her grandfather's river, the boat with the general's name on it warped in against her family's wharf, and her sons ran along the gunwale shouting, and the lines went taut, and held.



CHAPTER TWO

The Paper That Said I Was Lost

Deaf Man's Village, the Mississinewa, Indiana. September 1837.

THEY CAME IN THE NINTH MONTH WITH A PAPER THAT SAID I WAS lost.

Two old men and an old woman, in a hired wagon, with an interpreter from the trading house whose Miami is poor but polite. The old woman wept before the horses had fully stopped. The old men were graver; they had brought the paper. It was a newspaper from the East with a letter printed in it, and the letter was about me — a trader had sat in my house two winters past and heard my story and written it to the towns where I was born, the way white men cannot carry a thing in the heart but must set it somewhere outside themselves to be sure it is real. The paper said that a white child carried off by the Delaware in the war of their revolution, from a valley called Wyoming, in the fifth year of her age, was believed to be living yet as an Indian woman on the Mississinewa, and that her name had been Frances, and that her people had never ceased to look for her.

Fifty-nine years they had looked. I will say that of them, and it is not a small thing to say. Their mother — my mother — went twice into the towns in her life looking, and died with my name in her mouth. The old woman in the wagon was my sister. The old men were my brothers. The youngest of them had been in the yard when the warriors took me, and remembered my red hair going over his father's fence, and he was seventy now, and when he said this — the interpreter going slowly, choosing — he put his hand flat on his own breast like a man swearing something, or holding something in.

Then the eldest did the thing they had carried sixty years for. He asked, might he see my left hand. I gave it to him — I knew by then what he want-

ed of it; my own eldest daughter is named Kekesequa, Cut Finger, for what her mother's hand carries — and he led me by it to the door where the light was, an old man leading an old woman like a figure in a dance neither had been taught, and he looked a long time at the forefinger where there is no nail and has been no nail since a boy hammered it in our father's shop when the finger was four years old. *How came that finger injured?* — the interpreter barely above breath. I said: my brother struck it with a hammer, in the shop, a long time ago, before I was carried away. And the old man stood holding my one hand in his two as though it were the paper itself, the deed, the proof recorded, the only entry in all their books that could not be forged or amended or lost, because it was written in me. For once their kind of proof and my kind were the same thing. He did not weep the way my sister wept. It went harder with him than that.

I gave them the seats of honor. I fed them.

What they had come for they said gently, and more than once, and each time as if it had newly occurred to them: that I should go home.

I am four years a widow. My husband was Shepoconah, who the whites called Deaf Man, a chief of the Myaamia, and this village bears his name and I keep it. I have two daughters living, and horses — more horses than any of my white brothers' neighbors, I came to understand, which changed something small in the younger one's eyes when he took it in — and cattle, and fields, and women who work them with me, and the respect that is owed to the widow of a chief and owed also, separately, to me. I sat with my hands in my lap while the interpreter walked their words across to me, and I looked at my sister's face, which had our mother somewhere in it, in the set of the chin, like a face seen deep in a river; and in their language, which I had not spoken in fifty-nine years and which lay in me not dead but sleeping, like the fish under winter ice, I heard, before he had englished it, the word *lost*.

They kept saying I had been lost.

I thought of everything I might say to it. That the child they buried in their minds had died and been mourned rightly, and a Miami woman raised in her place by hands as kind as our mother's. That I had been wife twice, and the second time well; that I had stood in this doorway and traded

sharply with men of three nations; that my daughters were here, and my husband's grave was here, and my dead child's grave was here, and that a woman is not lost who knows where her dead are. That among the people I was called Maconaquah, and had been called it far longer than I had been called Frances, and that a name is not a garment; after enough winters it is the skin.

I said, through the interpreter, that I was glad they had lived, and glad our mother had not died in the war, and that I would not go.

They stayed three days. They were good people; I saw why the child I had been was loved. My brothers walked my fields and priced my horses without knowing they did it, the way their kind price everything, gently, in the back room of the eye. My sister sat with my daughters and wept and laughed in the same hour and taught the little ones a game with a string. When they left, the old woman held on to me a long time, and said — the interpreter murmuring it — that she would come again in the spring, and she did, and brought calico and a Bible I cannot read, and I gave her moc-casins my daughter worked, and this is what we are to each other now, two old women trading gifts across sixty years of dark water, and it is not nothing. I do not say it is nothing.

But before the wagon was off my land, the eldest brother had taken out a little book and a pencil. I watched him from the dooryard. He was writing me down — the day, the words, the horses, the X of my house against the trees, I could not tell — writing with the terrible tenderness they save for it, because it is how they keep from losing things, because it is the only way they know.

They wrote me down. I let them.

Paper is how their kind grieves.



CHAPTER THREE

The Telling

Deaf Man's Village. September 1837.

ON THE SECOND DAY THEY ASKED FOR MY STORY, AND I GAVE THEM what I chose of it, the interpreter carrying the words across like a man carrying water in his two hands, losing some at every step.

I told them the taking. That the warriors came suddenly, in the daylight; that they killed a man near the door and took his scalp with them; that the boy was pushed in through the door and we hid together under the staircase; that they went up and rifled the house and carried away, of everything in it, some loaf sugar and some bundles. I have wondered all my life what was in the bundles. I have never once wondered about the sugar; it was a fort town in a war; sugar was worth carrying. Then over the man's back, through the bushes, over the mountain, to a cave where their blankets were, and I lay down on the ground and cried until I was asleep, five years old, and that is the last crying over it that I can remember doing.

And I told them the march, because the march is the part their kind never asks about, believing they already know it. That the men cut hemlock boughs each night for our sleeping and built the log fire at our feet; that meat was cooked on a stick, and we drank at the brooks and the springs; and that because a child of five cannot drink well from a stream, one of the men who had burned my valley stopped, and cut white birch bark, and folded me a little cup. I drank from it the whole way into my second life. The scalp at the door and the cup at the spring — both true, both carried by the same hands, and any telling that keeps only the one is a lie of the kind their newspapers are made of. My brothers heard this and held it the way a man holds a coal.

I told them of the chief called Tuck Horse — a great name among the Delaware; I never learned its meaning, being too young to ask when the asking was possible, and after that it was only his name — who dressed my hair in the way of the people, and painted my face, and hung me with wampum until I thought myself very fine. I told them I thought myself very fine. My sister smiled. The old men did not; they wanted the child to have wept more than the child wept.

Then he led me by the hand down to a house by the river where an old man and an old woman lived who had had children and now had none — the war my father's people and their British were making had taken some, and the young dying had taken the rest — and I stood in their doorway in my paint and my beads while Tuck Horse talked, and the old woman looked at me a long while, and they took me. And they gave me the name of their youngest daughter, whom they had lately buried: We-let-a-wash. I answered to a dead child's name until the name stopped being hers and became mine.

I told my brothers that plainly and watched the interpreter walk it across, and my sister put her hand over her mouth. Because they understood it then, I think, for one clean moment, before the comfort of their own telling closed back over them: that this is what was done with grief in that country — not letters, not notices in the papers, not sixty years of asking travelers. The two old people took their dead girl's name and set a living child inside it, and raised the child as kindly as ever my first mother would have raised me. Their kind writes the lost down. The people set the lost's name walking again on living feet. I have been both — I have worn the names of the dead from both sides of that war — and of the two griefs I will say only this: one of them fed me.

The rest I gave as I chose. The great fort where the remnants of the nations wintered on British bread; a summer at Sandusky; the spring we built bark canoes on the Detroit, and the three years there, because word came south to us that the Long Knives had burned the villages and the corn. Then Kekionga, at the head of the Maumee, which was home for nearly thirty years — I was grown there; I was there when Harmar came, and the women and children were all made to run north, and I ran with them, a white

woman running north from the white army with her people, which sentence I did not give the interpreter, there being no room in my brothers for it yet. I married there, a Delaware; he left, and went west of the Mississippi, and his leaving cost me nothing I had not already counted. Then Shepoconah, of the Myaamia, who was losing his hearing even then, and the four children, and the two small graves, and my daughters sitting in the room hearing their mother's life go across the water-carrier's hands into English.

At the end they asked me questions in the way of men completing a form. Was I ever tired of living with the Indians. No, I said: I have always had enough, and have lived well; the Indians have used me kindly, always. Did I know that my white relations had never ceased seeking me. No, I said. No one told me. And I did not think of my white relations — unless it was a little while, after I was taken.

That was the true answer, and I watched what it did to them, and I was sorry, and I would not unsay it.

The questions went on past what any of it was worth, as their questions do. So I did what an old woman may do in her own village: I went out quietly and lay down on my own stoop with my blanket pulled over my head, and went to sleep. They found me there. It is written down now in their books, that sleep — someone recorded it, tenderly, as everything about me is now recorded. Let them have it. Of all the entries their kind has ever made of me, it is the only one in which I am doing exactly as I pleased.



Logansport, Indiana, Jan. 20th, 1835. — Dear Sir: In the hope that some good may result from it, I have taken this means of giving to your fellow citizens — say the descendants of the early settlers of the Susquehanna — the following information... There is now living near this place, an aged white woman, who a few days ago told me, while I lodged in the camp one night, that she was taken away from her father's house, on or near the Susquehanna River, when she was very young... by the Delaware Indians, who were then hostile toward the whites. She says her father's name was Slocum; that he was a Quaker, rather small in stature, and wore a large brimmed hat... and if there be any now living whose name is Slocum, to them, I hope, the following may be communicated through the public prints of your place...

— *Geo. W. Ewing, of the Indian trade, to the postmaster of Lancaster, Pennsylvania*
 — *a town picked off a map, a stranger addressed on a guess*

THE LOST SISTER. — The public will remember the touching account, first printed in the papers of Lancaster, of a female child carried off by the savages from the Wyoming settlement in the year 1778, in the fifth year of her age. It is now ascertained beyond doubting that this person is living, in circumstances of comfort and even of property, among the Miamies of the Mississinewa country, Indiana; that she has utterly forgot our tongue; that she was twice married among them, and is the widow of a chief; and that upon being visited this autumn by her surviving brothers and sister, and entreated with tears to return to her kindred and the habits of civilized life, she refused, saying (as rendered by the interpreter) that she was an old tree, and could not be moved. Her friends have reluctantly relinquished the hope of her recovery. She was born FRANCES SLOCUM, of a respectable Quaker family, and is called by the Indians Mo-con-no-qua.

— reprinted in the western papers, winter 1837

The letter slept two years between those two dates. The postmistress at Lancaster read it, judged it nothing, and threw it among the papers deemed worthless — and the postmistress owned the town newspaper, both offices of paper in the one pair of hands. A new editor found it and printed it in 1837; it went out, by chance, in a temperance extra mailed to the clergy of the state; and the one minister who had grown up beside the Slocums of Wilkes-Barre opened his copy, and mailed it to her brother, and the brothers went west. Five links, every one of them paper, any one of them enough to fail.

Nor was it the record's first chance. In 1791 an officer of the Republic, passing among the Seneca towns on the Allegheny, met her, paid her a small sum, and wrote her name in his journal — three weeks after her brother, met upon the road, had begged him to search for exactly her. He told no one. The record is a faithful keeper and a poor messenger: it held her in its hand forty-six years before it gave her back.

CHAPTER FOUR

The County

Maumee. Winter 1837–38.

HER HUSBAND READ THE NEWSPAPERS ALOUD IN THE EVENINGS, BY the good lamp, in the voice he used for facts.

It was a habit she had loved in him once and had then stopped noticing for fifteen years and had lately begun to notice again, the way you notice a clock when you cannot sleep. James read the markets first, always — wheat at Buffalo, the wretched state of the banks, which men in New York had failed and which had only appeared to — and then the Congress, and then the territory news, and he read it all in the same level irrigating tone, water going along a ditch, because to James Wolcott the world was a single connected ledger and every column of it touched his own, which was, she had come at last to understand, not greed in him but a kind of faith. The failure of a house in New Orleans would reach Maumee by spring like weather. He was rarely wrong. It was an honest church.

In the winter after the panic he read her the story of the lost sister.

He read it because it was remarkable, and because it was from Indiana where they had both been young, and because — she watched this cross his face as he arrived at it — a woman of property was in it. He read it straight through, the capture, the fifty-nine years, the brothers with their tears, the refusal, and at the words *she was an old tree, and could not be moved* his voice did the small respectful dip it did at deaths and great sums, and he laid the paper down and said, “Extraordinary,” and looked over his spectacles to share it with her, because he was not a cold man, her husband, that was never it; and she said, “Yes,” in the voice of Mrs. Wolcott, and asked whether

there was more coffee, and inside her something stood at a window it had not known was there, looking through.

A white woman who had been made Miami, and stayed. Sixty miles from the rooms where a Miami child had been made — what? Made Mrs. Wolcott. Made mother of Henry Clay. Made the woman who asked about coffee. Nobody had carried her off; that was the trick of it; her captivity had come to her the way James's weather came, by connected columns — a mother dead of fever when she was five, a father shot down when she was twelve, a war that took every alternative away one house at a time until marriage to a kind man of accounts stood in the doorway like the last dry ground in a flood. She had walked to it on her own feet. They would say — the papers, if they ever troubled to write her down — *she was not lost*.

The same winter, further down the same column, James read that the legislature of Indiana had organized a new county in the upper Wabash country, and had named it Wells, for the celebrated Captain William Wells who fell at Chicago in the late war.

"Why," James said, pleased, laying down the paper again, "there is your father on the map, my dear," and the children looked up, and William Wells Wolcott, sixteen and grave, sat visibly straighter under the name, and it was a fine moment in the history of the family, and she smiled at it and was proud, and that was true; and it was also true that a cold clear voice inside her, in the mother-tongue she had lost the grammar of, said something for which she had only the feeling and not the words, and the feeling was: *they have written down the man they killed, and not the woman who bore me*.

Her father was on a county now. Her great-grandmother, her grandmother's mothers, all the women running back along that line like a river running dark under another river — on nothing. Her mother was on nothing. Wanangapeth. Sweet Breeze. She said the name to herself in the parlor, silently, twice, while her husband read the price of staves, because if she did not say it there was no place left in Indiana or Ohio or the hurrying Republic where it was written, and a name not said anywhere is not lost, it is worse than lost; it is spent.

She had been five in the year the name went out of the world. She kept of her mother: two songs, most of a third; a way of splitting a porcupine quill; the exact weight of a hand on the crown of her head; and the rows of small silver brooches down a blouse-front, cool under a child's one finger, counted in the firelight like coins that bought nothing and outshone everything that could be bought. Of the year itself she kept almost nothing — 1805; they told her later it had been fevers along the rivers that season — and of the great summer of ruin, 1812, when she was twelve, she kept everything, in the too-bright too-still way of things seen through the palisade of a fort under siege: Major Stickney the agent moving among the families with his terrible energy — the same Stickney, it made her nearly laugh now, who was grown old and famous downriver for baiting Michigan, who had named his own sons One and Two as if children were ledger lines — the smoke of the burned town beyond the walls; the news coming in July that her grandfather had died in his bed in the government's house, of the gout, like any beaten old white general, with the President's doctor's medicines on the table; and the news coming in August, in pieces, each piece worse, that her father had ridden for Chicago to bring off the garrison, and had painted his face black before the fight in the way of a Miami who does not expect to return, and had not returned.

What was done to her father's body afterward she had been told twice in her life: once, by a schoolfellow in Kentucky, as an obscenity; and once, years on, by an old Miami man at the Fort Wayne payments, as a reverence — *they honored his courage; they wished to carry some of it away inside themselves* — and she had understood, sitting very still between her two languages, that both tellings were faithful, that the one fact could be an atrocity in English and a communion in Miami, and that she was the only person at that table — perhaps in Ohio, perhaps alive — who was obliged to hold it both ways at once, forever. That was what she was. Not lost. Not found. The place where the two tellings met.

Somewhere there had been a pair of pistols. That was the other thing she kept, uselessly: her grandfather in the porch shade at Fort Wayne, very old, very amused, showing them small and heavy across his palms — a gift, he

said, from a Polish general who had fought for the Americans and been disappointed in them, sent with the charge that he fire them on the first man who ever came to rob his people of their rights. Her grandfather had never fired them. She did not know where the pistols had gone. That was the summer everything went somewhere.

There had been a painting, too. Her grandfather had sat for it in Philadelphia, in the American clothes he wore in the East, at the order of the first President himself, and by the same hand that painted the President — the Republic hanging the face of the man who had beaten it twice beside the faces of the men he had beaten. Then the British came in the next war and burned the Capitol, and the painting burned in it. She used to think about that in church, in the long sermons: that the record could keep a county forever and could not keep a face for seventeen years; that of the ablest soldier the frontier ever raised there remained, by his enemies' own doing, no likeness on this earth — only the pistols, gone; the counties, standing; and whatever looked out, now and again, from the eyes of his granddaughter's children, whom the record would call white.

There had been four of them once — Wells children, sent down to Kentucky to their father's white kin to be finished, which was the word used, as though children were furniture. Her sisters had gone back up to Fort Wayne when the finishing was done and married there, and were Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Hackley now; and two of them had stood up in the Baptist meeting at the fort in the year twenty, when the missionary McCoy took their hands, and been entered on one more roll — this one kept, she supposed, by God — and the church would remember them kindly forever after in five words, *ladies of refinement and intelligent piety*, which was the record doing its patient work again: every word true, and the whole life between the words let go down under the ink. And there had been the boy, their brother, named Wayne — her father had named his one son for the general he scouted for against his wife's own nation, which was the sort of knot that family tied for a cradle-gift — and Wayne Wells grew up and went out onto Lake Erie in the year twenty-three, and the lake kept him. Of the

four who went down to Kentucky, three came back up. Of the names, one lay at the bottom of the lake, wearing the conqueror's name like a stone.

When the house was asleep she came down in her wrapper, turned up the lamp a quarter, and cut the lost-sister column out of the paper with her sewing scissors, neatly, squaring the corners, the way her husband would have. She put it under the false silk floor of her workbox where the letters from no one were kept. Then she sat a while with her hands in her lap, hearing the ice go on the river like far-off wagons.

Paper is how they grieve, she thought — not knowing she shared the sentence, word for word, with an old woman on the Mississinewa she would never meet.

She was, after all — the record said so — one of them.



CHAPTER FIVE

The Relief

Fort Wayne, 1812. Maumee, 1826.

THE SUMMER SHE WAS TWELVE, HER WORLD ENDED IN THE ORDER OF its founding: the grandfather first, then the father, then the town.

Her grandfather died in July. The tellings would differ on the room — a lodge in his own yard, some would later say, or the government's house — but the account the family kept, and that she kept, laid him in the agent's house, in a bed: the war chief who had broken two armies of the Republic dying under the Republic's roof, of the gout, with the President's own doctor's medicines on the table at his elbow, which was either an honor or a captivity and was in fact both, that being the lesson of his last twenty years, and he knew it better than any man living, and was amused by it, because he had arrived at the age and the altitude where amusement is what wisdom does to keep from weeping. That was the same summer as the porch shade and the pistols across his palms. She did not know, being twelve, that she was being handed the estate entire in those slow afternoons — a pair of pistols she would never touch again, a joke too large to get out of the country, a name the maps would keep and the paintings would not. She thought she was keeping an old man company. That is how such bequests are always made.

In August came Chicago, in pieces, each piece worse, and the black paint, and she has set that account down elsewhere in this book and it will not be made to run twice.

In September her mother's nations came for the fort.

Twenty days. The town outside the pickets burned in the first of them — she watched the smoke stand up over the walls and lean, and did not know for years that smoke had already become her family's weather, that she

would watch it again over an island at Maumee from a veranda not yet built. Inside were the garrison and the families and Major Stickney with his terrible energy, moving among them like a man winding clocks. And outside — this was the thing she carried longest, the thing that had no place to be put down in either of her languages — outside were people she knew. Faces from the payments. Women who had known her mother. The siege was her whole blood quarreling in the dark beyond the walls, and she stood inside it, twelve years old, the granddaughter of the man who could have ended it with a word and was two months dead.

The besiegers had two cannon, which was impossible, until it explained itself: traders of the British had made them cannon out of wood. She heard the first one burst on its first fire — a sound like a barrel going over the falls — and the second on its second. She was old enough to understand that men had died at those guns, and not for years old enough to understand the rest of it: that this was the confederacy's whole war in one figure — an empire's promises, bored hollow, painted to look like iron, bursting in the hands of the men who had been told to trust them.

In the second week of September an army came up out of the south, and the siege lifted off the fort the way weather lifts. The warriors gathered at a swamp five miles below to give it battle, and looked at its size a long while, and went away. At the head of that army rode the Virginia lieutenant grown into a general — the man who had drawn the plan at the fallen timbers, who had burned Prophetstown the autumn before, who would burn the towns on the Thames the autumn after.

Harrison.

The first thing that name ever did in her life was save it. She was the rest of her life learning what else the name had done, and the learning never once made the first fact less true. That is how the valley taught its arithmetic: no sum ever came out clean.

Afterward, Kentucky, and the finishing; and then the westering kin at St. Charles, out on the Missouri, where the kind man of accounts stood in the doorway, and she was married in the March of the year twenty-one, aged twenty-one. By then the Republic had already written her down once, on its

own motion: at the great treaty at St. Mary's, in the year eighteen, the commissioners entered a section of land on the Wabash to the daughter of Wells — six hundred and forty acres to a Miami girl of eighteen; the same instrument of survey and grant that would follow her mother's people to Kansas was handed to her, once, face up. She kept the paper. She understood it better later. And in the year twenty-six the household came down her grandfather's river from Fort Wayne on a great raft — beds, barrels, children, the whole movable estate afloat on the Maumee, drifting past Kekionga's emptied ground at the speed of the current, which is the speed the river had always preferred — and it set them ashore at the foot of the rapids, on the north bank, below a bluff. She knew what ground it was. Her husband knew what ground it was — it was excellent ground, that was the point of it; the rapids were water-power and the bluff was frontage — and both of them were right about it, and only one of them lay awake the first night listening to the river run over the stones in the dark like a voice going over names. The house went up on the bluff with its columns facing the water. She planted lilacs. She had children and taught them their letters and learned to pour coffee in the voice of Mrs. Wolcott of Maumee; and thirteen years on, a boat came up the reach with gold letters a yard high on its paddle-box, and her son stood on the wharf in the spring light, sounding them out.



CHAPTER SIX

Buttonwood

Maumee, June 1838.

THE WORD RAN UP THE VALLEY AHEAD OF THE WAGONS, THE WAY word does.

The government's agent that season was a man the country liked — Howard, a trader's son, valley-raised, who had the languages and was welcome at the fires, which was of course precisely why he had been engaged, kindness being, in the ledger's long experience, the cheapest of all instruments — and through the early summer he gathered them in: the last bands, the leavings of seven nations, off the reserves at the Auglaize forks and the oak openings and the marsh edges where they had held on twenty years past the treaties by the simple violence of staying. They came in by families. They camped on the island above the ruined fort — Buttonwood, the boatmen called it, for the sycamores — with the river on both sides of them like a parenthesis, and the smoke of their fires stood up over the water and leaned, every evening, whichever way the weather meant to go, and from her veranda Mary Wolcott could see it. Eight hundred people. Two miles of August-colored water between her columns and theirs.

The *General Harrison* took the contract for part of the flour.

She learned it from the wharf-book, which she was not in the habit of reading, and stood with her finger on the entry a long time. It was good business, and it was even mercy of a kind — someone's flour would feed that camp, and her husband's was unswept and honestly weighed — and she thought of the dog in the yard again, her old unanswerable catechism, and got nowhere with it again, and closed the book. The boat went up light and

came back empty and the name on the paddle-box passed the island going both ways.

She went over on a Thursday, with the reverend's wife and two baskets, in the ferry skiff.

It was a thing the town's women had begun doing that fortnight — the camp had become, God forgive the word she could not stop her own mind from supplying, an *attraction* — and most brought bread and stayed twenty minutes upwind and were not wrong to come, charity being no less charity for being clumsy. She brought thread, needles, a ham, dried cherries, and a paper of fishhooks for the boys, and she did not stay upwind. She walked in among the fires with her bonnet in her hand. Dogs, kettles, the good smell of parched corn; a girl running a hoop of barrel iron between the shelters exactly as her own sons did between the lilacs; two old men playing at mocasin-and-bullet on a blanket, betting twists of tobacco, laughing low; and everywhere the terrible ordinary tidiness of people who have packed.

An old woman by the third fire looked up at her and did not look away.

She was small and upright, with eyes like creek stones, and she studied Mary's face the way you read weather, at leisure, and then said something quiet to the woman beside her, and the word went along the fires ahead of Mary's own steps so that she walked the length of that camp inside a hush of her grandfather's name. *Mihšihkinaahkwa*. Not spoken to her. Spoken about her, over her, around her — the name settling on her shoulders from all sides like the first snow of a hard winter, and she could not answer it, and she did not pretend to, and when she had given out the last of the fishhooks the old woman was standing at her elbow, no higher than her collarbone, holding up one dried cherry taken from the paper as if it were a coin she meant to test, and the old woman said, in English, kindly, with a griever's terrible economy:

"His girl's girl."

"Yes," Mary said.

The old woman nodded, looked at the cherry, ate it, and patted Mary once on the forearm — the pat you give a child who cannot be blamed for the storm but was born in it — and turned back to her packing.

That was all. That was everything. She was rowed home over her grandfather's river by a boy who whistled a minstrel tune, and paid him, and went up her lawn between her columns, and dressed for dinner.

On the twenty-fourth of June the camp went. They were taken off the island at first light onto flatboats and keelboats and driven west by way of the road the government had built through the swamp — she heard the order of march for weeks afterward, in pieces, at her own table, from men who had sold to it: so many wagons, so many hundred on foot, dust and psalms, an agent's outriders — bound for a river in the far country called the Neosho, which her atlas, when she looked, rendered in the smallest type it carried. By noon the smoke over Buttonwood was out. By July the island was only an island, green as ever, keeping like every other acre of that valley no visible memorandum of anything.

A few old chiefs remained — suffered to stay, the phrase went, on this ground or that, by grace of paper — a scattering of old men in the emptied country, like the standing trees the loggers leave to show where the forest stood.

"Where did they all go?" Henry Clay asked her at supper — eight now, sunburnt, kind, hers.

"West," she said.

The word did its work upon him the way it did upon everyone in that Republic: he nodded, satisfied, seeing (she could watch him see it) a direction, an adventure, a sunset the color of the maps. He went back to his pudding. She looked down the white cloth at her husband, who was happy, at her children, who were safe, in the finest house between Buffalo and Detroit, on the highest ground above the massacre, and she ate what was before her, and it had no taste at all, and she thought: *west is not a place. West is what they call it when the ledger closes an account.*



RETURN of Indians emigrated from the encampment on the Maumee, June 24th, 1838, under the direction of the subscriber: souls, eight hundred, of the Ottawa and sundry remnant bands, seven nations in all; with baggage, kettles, and 74 horses; commenced the march for the country assigned them on the waters of the Osage and Neosho, and proceeded without disorder. A few of the old chiefs, by permission, remain.

— *return of the conducting agent, D. W. H., filed with the Superintendency*

The old times on the river were the best times, and no man that boated them will tell you different. I mind the summer the Indians lay camped on Buttonwood before they went west — a pretty sight of an evening, their fires strung along the island and the ponies swimming the channel; the boys of the town rowed over of a Sunday to trade for moccasins, and the fishing below the camp was never better before nor since. And the boats we built in those years! The Miami in '38; the Gen. Harrison, two hundred and ninety-three tons, in '39, the pride of the river she was; the Jas. Wolcott in '40. Judge Wolcott's white house stood above the rapids then as it stands now — the finest between Buffalo and Detroit, they called it; his lady was a daughter of the famous Capt. Wells. All gone now, boats and judge and lady alike, and the wheat goes by the cars and never sees the water at all.

— *an old boatman's telling, at a pioneer meeting of the Maumee valley, 1888*

Eight hundred souls; a pretty sight of an evening.

CHAPTER SEVEN

The Section

Deaf Man's Village, the Mississinewa. Winter 1838–39.

IN THE ELEVENTH MONTH THE CHIEFS SIGNED ANOTHER TREATY, AND inside that treaty, folded small, like a knife carried to a parley, was a piece of paper with my daughters' names in it.

A section of land — that is their word, *section*, they have cut the world into a checkerboard and a section is one square of it — six hundred and forty of their acres, on this river, at this village, confirmed to my daughters and their heirs. Ours not by the old title, the only true one, which is the title of the dead who lie in it; ours now also by the new title, the paper one, the kind their courts can see. My white brothers had a hand in it, and the trader Godfroy's people, and men in Washington I will never see who know me only as a story in a newspaper — the Lost Sister — and who were moved, they wrote, by the peculiar hardness of my case.

I have thought a long time about the peculiar hardness of my case.

When the Ohio bands went last summer — we heard it here within the month; the moccasin telegraph outruns their post — an old woman of the Ottawa was on the boats who had traded dried fish to my husband thirty years, and she is gone now to a river whose name I do not know how to say, and no paper stood at her door, because no white child had ever been carried over her fence, because no trader had ever found her story quaint enough to print. That is the whole of the difference between us. Not virtue. Not wisdom. A newspaper. My whiteness, which I have not used in sixty years, which I set down in the dooryard of a Delaware town before this country had a name — it seems I never lost the title to it. It has lain all this time in

their records like money in a strongbox, drawing their kind of interest, and now my daughters draw it out.

The trader's wife at Godfroy's says I should be glad, and I am glad. Do not mistake me. I am as glad as a woman is glad of the dog that keeps the wolf from her lambs, knowing what the dog is, knowing whose kennel it comes home to. Mary's husband downriver — the merchant the Miamis of the reserves speak of, who holds their papers *in his strong hand*, they say, some bitterly, some not — he would understand me perfectly, and that is exactly the trouble with the world as it has been arranged.

When the wagons come for the Myaamia of this river — and they will come; I have watched this Republic sixty years from inside its blind spot, and it does not tire, and it does not forget an acre — the paper with my daughters' names inside it will stand at their door like a dog. The graves of my husband and my child will stay whole under their own grass because of ink. The same pencil that grieves can fence.

So I have decided, and let it be recorded here in the only book I will ever keep, which is the dark under my own breastbone: I was five years old the last time being white was ever done to me. I am sixty-five now. I will let it be done once more — this once, in ink, at a distance, to buy the ground my dead sleep in.

Maconaquah signs nothing.

But Frances — Frances they will believe.



PART TWO

The Name

CHAPTER EIGHT

The Likeness

Deaf Man's Village. Autumn 1839.

NOW THEY WANTED THE FACE.

It was my brothers' asking, and my sister's — *prevailed upon*, the interpreter said, their word, a word with hands in it that press and do not push — and what they asked was that I sit still in the light of my own dooryard while a painter from Logansport made a likeness of me. The whites cannot leave a thing where it lives. A story must go into a letter, a woman into a name, a name onto a roll; and when the woman will not go, the face must go and stand for her. I understood it before the interpreter had finished walking it across to me — better, I think, than my brothers understood it themselves, for they believe they have honored me, and what they have done, I say it without anger, is take me east after all.

I sat. Let it be written in this book under my breastbone that I chose it. I had let them write me down in the little book, and the little book had brought my sister back in the spring with calico; there are worse dogs than paper, and I am old enough to whistle this one to my own door and feed it what I decide it may have.

The painter set his frame in the dooryard for the light. He was quiet with his hands the way a good trader is quiet, and he looked at me in small honest takings, a spoonful and away, a spoonful and away, laying what he took onto the cloth. I wore the blue calico and the broadcloth and my blanket, which is what I wear; if the woman was to travel, she would travel dressed for her own house. My daughters stood where my eyes could rest on them. Their children ran the dooryard as children do, and the horses came up along the rail to watch, because horses are curious about stillness, and

somewhere in the middle of that morning it stopped being a white thing that was happening to me and became a fall day at my own place with all of mine around me — which is, I suppose, the thing the man was painting.

Kekesequa would not sit with me. My eldest — she carries my mark in her very name, Cut Finger, the hammered hand made into a person — had said the whole of this matter two years ago, in the councils, when the persuasions were new, better than all my speeches together: *the deer cannot live out of the forest*. She said it and sat down. It is the best sentence anyone has made in this business in either language, and I notice it is the one sentence their newspapers did not print. It is an answer. Their papers prefer the questions that keep.

They asked again later, and there was a second picture, and the painter made one besides of the house itself, my husband's house, the double cabin with the chimney at the end. All of it went east. So there is a Maconaquah now in Wilkes-Barre — she hangs in the valley I was carried out of, in the town of my brothers, among the kin who could not fetch the woman home and have hung the likeness where the woman should have stood. I have thought about her often this winter, that other Frances, flat and still and facing out, keeping their kind of time. She does not eat. She has not forgotten their English. She will not die at a wrong season. She is everything they wanted of me, and she asks nothing, and I begrudge her none of it: let her do the being-found. Somebody in that family had to.

The face travels better than the woman. That is the whole of what their keeping is. I set it down here so that whoever reads this will know that I knew.



GRAND RALLY OF THE PEOPLE! — FORT MEIGS, JUNE

10th & 11th. The freemen of the Maumee country and of all the West will assemble on the ground OLD TIPPECANOE defended, to greet the HERO OF FORT MEIGS in person. A LOG CABIN will be raised upon the old works. Steam boats will run from Toledo, Perrysburgh and the lower landings at half fare. Bring your canteens. HARD CIDER for the multitude. — *One flag upon the old fort will bear the General's answer to the British summons: TELL GENERAL PROCTOR, WHEN THE FORT IS TAKEN THERE WILL BE NONE LEFT TO SURRENDER.*

— *campaign broadside, spring 1840*

CHAPTER NINE

The Candidate

Maumee, June 1840.

THE YEAR THEY RAN HER BOAT FOR PRESIDENT, THE RIVER COULD BE walked on shoes-dry from wharf to wharf, so thick the steamers lay.

That is how she would tell it, if she were ever to tell it, which she would not: that they ran the boat. Because the men who managed these things in the East had reached down into the country for a story, and the story they had chosen — out of all the stories this valley could have furnished them — was the old general, the Hero of the Maumee, Old Tippecanoe, reborn for the occasion as a plain man of the log cabin and the cider barrel; and so for one delirious summer the name her husband had painted on a paddle-box for reliability's sake became the loudest word in the Republic, and the *General Harrison* steamed up and down the lake trade dressed in bunting like a bride, and made money, James said, hand over fist, carrying Whigs.

That same season the yard put a second hull into the water for him, a small quick one, eighty tons against the *Harrison's* near three hundred, and this one he named the *James Wolcott*; so that in the year the whole country was roaring the general's name, the merchant quietly set his own beside it on the river, and the two boats passed each other loaded in the channel all that summer — the name that took the valley and the name that kept its books — and if her husband ever heard the sentence they made, passing, he never said so.

In June they came to the fort itself. It had stood empty her whole marriage, a grassed ruin across the water from her windows, the pickets long since carried off by settlers for barn-sills — she knew a smokehouse in town built of Fort Meigs oak, and so did the smokehouse's owner, who men-

tioned it the way men mention a famous ancestor. Now for two days in June the ruin held more people than had ever stood on that ground in its life — more than the sieges, more than both armies together, the papers said twenty thousand and the Whigs said forty and her husband, counting fares, said the truth was glory enough. They raised a log cabin on the old parade. They set three flagstaffs on the works, and on one they ran up the old answer to the old surrender demand — *tell General Proctor there will be none left to surrender* — and the crowd roared it across the water all day like surf, and the cider went around in tin cups dipped from barrels with the heads knocked in, and at night the fireworks stood up over the ruin and lit the river reach by reach, and from her veranda Mary Wolcott watched the burning flowers open and fall over the ground where the gauntlet had run, and held her shawl at the throat, and could not have said one true whole thing about what she felt, because there was no language on the continent that held all of it at once. Her mother's had come closest. It was in Kansas now.

On the second day she was presented to the candidate.

It was her husband's doing, and proudly meant: the committee's dinner, the leading families, Mrs. Wolcott of the white columns in her gray silk. The general was old — sixty-seven that year, though the songs had him younger — a small-boned, courteous, tired Virginia gentleman got up as a frontiersman, with a face like a folded letter, and he took her hand as one more hand in a day of a thousand hands; and then the committee-man leaned to his ear and said the sentence that was always said, the sentence that was her passport and her cage in every room in that valley — *daughter of Captain Wells, General* — and she watched forty years fall off the man in one clean drop, like ice off a roof in thaw.

"Wells's daughter," he said. Not to the room. To her.

"Yes, General."

He held her hand now as if it were the hand of the year 1812. "I knew your father, madam," he said. "I knew him well. A braver man never lived — and I have known all the brave men of my time." His eyes had filled, easily, the way old men's do, and she understood that it was perfectly sincere and cost him nothing, a coin from a purse that refilled itself. "He died trying to

bring off women and children. I said so at the time. I have said so for thirty years. Wells should have a monument.”

He is on a county, she did not say.

“You honor him, General,” she said, in the gray-silk voice, and the general pressed her hand and said that this — meeting her, here, upon this ground, on this happy occasion — that history was a remarkable thing; and then the committee turned him, gently, the way you turn a ship, toward a senator’s cousin; and that was all. He had known her father well. He had fought her great-grandfather’s war and drawn the plan at the timbers a mile from her nursery and burned the towns her mother was born among and priced the whole world of her grandmothers by the acre at his treaty tables — she knew the list; the list was not the point; the point was smaller and colder and she carried it home across the water that night in the skiff like a stone in the mouth:

He had asked nothing about her mother. It had not occurred to him that there was anything to ask. The half of her that came down from the beaten had passed before his filling eyes entire, in gray silk, unseen — and this was the man the Republic had chosen, out of all its men, to remember the frontier *for* it.

They roared his name — the fort’s name, the boat’s name, the buffalo-fish word underneath it that nobody roaring it could hear — until two in the morning. In November he carried every county she had ever lived in. In March he stood bareheaded in a cold rain in Washington and gave the longest speech ever given by a President of the United States, and caught his death in it, and in April he was gone — one month in the office it had taken the whole valley to buy him.

They did not repaint the boat. It ran all that summer of mourning with the dead man’s name in gold on both boxes, and made money, her husband said — the phrase had stopped meaning anything in the house by then, it was only the sound the house made — hand over fist.



CAPTAIN WILLIAM WELLS. — The services and melancholy fate of this celebrated partisan are known to all readers of the history of the late war. By his first wife, Captain Wells had three daughters and one son. The daughters were Mrs. Judge Wolcott, of Maumee City, Mrs. Turner and Mrs. Hackley, of Fort Wayne; educated in Kentucky, they are kindly remembered in this community as ladies of refinement and intelligent piety. The son, Wayne, died when a young man, while crossing Lake Erie, in 1823.

— *a county history*, 1872

By his first wife. The record was offered Sweet Breeze, daughter of Little Turtle, and entered an ordinal.

CHAPTER TEN

The Five Years

Deaf Man's Village. 1841.

THEIR GREAT CHIEF TALKED HIMSELF TO DEATH IN THE RAIN.

The trader's son brought the news up the river in April as a wonder, and it is a wonder, but not the kind he meant. Among us a man who had taken that office would have known the speech is for the people and the rain is for everyone, and would have put on the blanket his wife handed him, because among us a chief that age has a wife of that age, whose word outranks eloquence. But the Big Knives do not keep old women near the fire of power, which is the strangest thing about them, stranger than the writing, stranger than the fences — a people who will take advice from paper and not from their grandmothers — and so their whitest-haired chief stood a March morning in his shirt to prove to them he was strong, and the rain, which cannot read, wrote him down.

I did not rejoice. I am asked — my daughters ask, gently, for they know the list too, Tippecanoe, the burned towns, the treaty tables — and I answer them what I answer here: the man was the arm, not the will. The will is the whole people of them together, the hunger that no one of them owns or can call off, and against a will of that kind the death of one old man in the rain signifies exactly what the death of one bee signifies to the swarm's direction, and the swarm's direction is west, and has been west since before my white mother bore me.

The proof came the autumn before, in ink, as their proofs come.

In the eleventh month of 1840 the chiefs signed away the last of it — the Big Reserve, the last great whole piece of my nation's country under my nation's own name — and the paper gives them five years. Five years, and then

the wagons and the boats for every Myaamia soul the paper does not except by name. The men who signed did what the beaten do at the end, they carried out of the fire what could be carried: the annuities, the private sections, the exceptions — Godfroy's people excepted, the Richardville line excepted, the Meshingomesia band excepted — a nation reduced to a list of families the ink agrees to see, and every family not on the list already, in the law's eyes, halfway to Kansas.

The same year the rain took their white-haired chief, death took ours, in the late summer: Peshewa, the Wildcat, Richardville, the portage chief — Roman-nosed, blue-eyed, a Frenchman's face on a Miami mother's son, the one man of the nation who had learned their arithmetic so deep in the bone that he died, the traders say, the richest man in their whole state of Indiana. I did not love him. But mark what he did with the numbers: it is his line, and Godfroy's, and Meshingomesia's, standing excepted on that treaty paper — he played their own ledger against them to the last line, and bought his people's ground back out of it with its own ink. A chief owes his people a shield. He made one of the only metal the Big Knives cannot melt.

And mark where the wealth began: at the portage of the three rivers, in the carrying trade — and his right to the portage ran to him through his mother. Tacumwah, of the chiefly line. Say it while there is a page to say it on, because their treaties will not: the Big Knives sat forty years across the table from a chief whose standing came down through a woman, and wrote the woman nowhere, and never once smelled the joke. A people who will take advice from paper and not from their grandmothers — and the richest paper in Indiana signed itself, every time, with a grandmother's name folded shut inside it.

My daughters are on the list. My white brothers are seeing to the rest of it — there is talk of a paper from the Congress itself, with my born name in it, to fix us to this ground past any agent's argument — and it will pass, I think, in a year or three, because the story of the Lost Sister is beloved in the East, and the Republic dearly loves to make one exception. It proves their largeness to themselves. One old white woman spared upon her ancestral riv-

er: they will frame it. Eight thousand of my neighbors driven off theirs: that is policy, and goes on the other page.

Five years. I sit in my doorway in the evenings now and count what the paper cannot see. The graves, first. The bend of this river, which my husband could read like the whites read their letters. The bee trees. The place on the bank where my first daughter took her first fish, laughing, under a sky I could draw for you still. All of it on nothing, as their maps would say. All of it, in the only ledger I keep, on everything.



The Richardville of those days is well remembered: about five feet ten inches in height, with broad shoulders, weighing near one hundred and eighty pounds; graceful in carriage, and never given to levity; his nose was Roman, his eyes were of a lightish blue, and slightly protruding; he preserved his dignity under all circumstances. He died at his brick residence near Fort Wayne in the summer of 1841, accounted the richest man in Indiana.

— *a county history, 1889*

Inches, pounds, the color of his eyes, the Roman nose. Of Tacumwah, through whom the standing and the portage came down to him, the same history keeps not one measurement.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

The Song

Maumee. February 1843.

THE RECORD DOES NOT SAY WHAT TOOK HER. IT SAYS THE DATE — the nineteenth of February, 1843 — and it says *consort of*, and it spells the county right, and lets the rest go down under the ink. She was forty-three years old. It had been, that winter, thirty-one years since Chicago, thirty-eight since the fevers on the St. Marys; the last summer's news had been the Wyandots at Upper Sandusky voting, in a purpose-built hut, with an English novelist passing through to breakfast nearby, to sell the last Indian acre in Ohio and go; they would start west in the coming July, and she would not see it, and she knew both of these things, the way the dying know the calendar better than the well.

The novelist's book of the tour had reached Maumee by the new year, and James read it aloud in the voice he used for facts. The most famous pen alive, come over from England in waistcoats the papers could not stop describing, had breakfasted at Upper Sandusky with the government's old Colonel Johnston — the agent at Fort Wayne in her father's day, a man who had grown up among the nations and grown white-haired removing them, and called it the saddest duty of his life, and did it — and the famous eye, which missed nothing between two oceans, took down the breakfast, the mud of the roads, and the vote: the minority, it recorded, cheerfully yielded. Then it traveled on. And that — a paragraph in a book of travels, between the corduroy road and the next inn's bill of fare — was the going of the last nation of Ohio, as the wide world would receive it. She had the passage read twice. It was, she said, in the gray-silk voice, very finely written.

What the record does not say, this book may: that in the last fortnight, in the river bedroom with the curtains ordered open — she wanted the ice; James thought it morbid and obeyed her, which was their whole marriage in six words — she called her children to her one at a time, in order of age, and did the accounts.

To William Wells Wolcott, twenty-one, grave, good, her merchant son, she gave the pistols' story, having no pistols — told him of the Polish general's gift and the charge that came with it, fire these on the first man who comes to rob your people of their rights, and watched her father's name doing its work in the boy's straight back, and did not tell him — there was not time, there was never going to be time, there had not been time in her whole life — which people the charge had meant.

To Mary Ann she gave the workbox, silk floor and all, and what was under it.

To Henry Clay Wolcott, twelve, sunburnt, kind, hers — the one the river had chosen somehow, the one who fished the spring run with the town boys and came home smelling of it — she gave the song.

She was three days deciding which one; she had two whole and most of a third; she chose the one her own mother had sung last, not because she remembered choosing but because the body chooses. She had him sit on the bed's edge with the ice-light on him and she sang it through once, small, the fever making the low notes swim, and the boy watched her mouth the way children watch a thing they know is being given to them before they know what it is. It was not English and he did not ask what it was, which is why the river had chosen him.

"Now you," she said.

He got it wrong twice, the vowels skidding — the sounds were not in his mouth's country; his mouth was Ohio's — and the third time he got it nearly, and the fourth time he got it, all of it, the whole verse riding on that clear unbroken boy's voice out over the counterpane, over the squared furniture of the finest house between Buffalo and Detroit, and for the length of it there was one more place in the world where the thing existed.

"Whose is it?" he asked — not *what is it*: whose. Hers, the river's boy.

“Wanangapeth,” she said. “Say it.”

“Wanangapeth.”

“Again.”

“*Wanangapeth.*”

She did not explain, and he did not ask, and she was not able, that far down the cold river of it, to tell whether this was wisdom or only the last of her cowardice — whether a name planted without its story is a seed or just a stone. He would carry it, she knew, the way children carry such deposits, underground, for decades, unspent — and past that her lamp did not reach, and she let it go, at last, with everything else that had ever been hers to carry: the songs, the quill-work, the grammarless wound, the cousin’s X, the hush at Buttonwood laying her grandfather’s name across her shoulders like first snow, the whole unwritten testament of Amehkoonsihkwa — Mrs. James Wolcott — Mary — down all her names to the first one, her mother’s hand on the crown of her head, the exact and now at last returning weight of it.

The fish came up seven weeks later, on time, past the empty veranda.



DIED — At Maumee City, on the 19th ultimo, after a lingering illness, borne with Christian patience, MARY, consort of the Hon. James Wolcott, in the 43d year of her age; a lady of refinement and benevolence, daughter of the late Capt. WILLIAM WELLS, of Fort Wayne, whose services and melancholy fate are known to all readers of the history of the late war. The funeral was attended from the family mansion by a large concourse of citizens.

— *the valley press*, March 1843

PART THREE

The Rolls

CHAPTER TWELVE

The Portage

The Wabash & Erie Canal. October 1846.

THE RECORD KEEPS THE ROUTE EXACTLY, MILE FOR MILE, AND THE route is the cruelest document in this book.

On the sixth of October the three boats were loaded at the basin the whites call Peru and the nation calls Iihkipihsinonki, the straight place — straight being what the diggers made of the water there, the ditch running beside the crooked living river like a corrected proof. The boats went east, up the Wabash line, against the fall of the land. At Fort Wayne more of the nation was put aboard — five boats onward from there — and it was at Fort Wayne, which is Kekionga, that the route did the thing no author would dare invent.

Because Kekionga is the carrying-place. The head of the Maumee, the low notch between the waters that run to the northern lakes and the waters that run to the southern gulf; the one gate on the whole continent's inland crossing, and the Miami had kept that gate for two hundred years — kept it, taxed it, grown great on it; it was the keeping of that portage that made them a power, and it was the portage trade that built the chief's brick house, and the right to it ran down through the mothers, as such things ran. The canal was cut straight down the line of the old carrying-path. There was nowhere else to cut it; the land permits what it permits. So the boats crossed the summit at Kekionga, and the nation that had taken toll at that gate since before the French was itself carried through it, at the pace of a walking mule, itemized, at the government's charge.

Below Fort Wayne the canal runs with the Maumee, and for a day the boats went down that valley — the nation's own river, the river that wears its

name — as far as the junction where the southern line breaks away for the Ohio. The boats took the turn. Four days down the Miami canal to Cincinnati; a steamboat there, called the *Colorado*; and on the first day of November, at a landing on the Missouri frontier, three hundred and twenty-five souls were counted ashore — counted, always counted; it is the one attention the ledger never omits — and were at the Sugar Creek agency by the fifth.

Mark what the route never touched. The lower river. The rapids. The wharves at Maumee and the white house on the bluff above them. The boats turned south a long day's travel short of the veranda, and so the going of the nation and the house of the general's granddaughter never came within sight of each other — no Wolcott child stood on a dock to watch, and none could have. Whoever wants the two of them in one frame must build the frame himself, as this book has done; the country that arranged them both never had to look at them together. That, too, is how a ledger works. The accounts are kept in separate books, so that no single page ever has to carry the whole sum.



CHAPTER THIRTEEN

The Sparing

Deaf Man's Village. October 1846.

THE PAPER FROM THE CONGRESS CAME, AS I SAID IT WOULD: A RESOLUTION of their two councils with my born name inside it, Frances Slocum, and the names of my daughters and their families, twenty-one souls fixed to this river past any agent's argument. My white brothers carried it like men carrying fire indoors, so proud, so careful, and I thanked them, and meant it, and I record here what I have told no one: it is the heaviest paper I have ever held. It weighs twenty-one souls exactly. It weighs also everything it does not say.

In the tenth month, at the falling of the leaves, they took the nation.

Not mine to see — Peru is a half-day's ride, and I did not ride it; I am old, and there are things it is not required of a woman to look at with her own eyes to know forever — but the telegraph of the fires told it as it happened, and the trader's son filled in the whites' half afterward, and between the two tellings I have it whole, and give it here to the only book I keep. On the sixth day of October the soldiers and the agents brought them down to the canal basin at Iihkipihsinonki — the whites say Peru — and put them onto three canal boats, my nation, the ones the lists did not except: the young men sitting on the cabin roofs with their faces shut, the grandmothers below among the bundles, the children — the children at the windows, because children will look at anything, it is their work — and the mules took up the slack, and the boats went east along the ditch the whites had cut through the middle of our country to carry their wheat, and the water in that ditch does not run, it only lies there and is pulled; and my nation went

out of its own land at the pace of a walking mule, down a dead river their enemies had made, toward the boats for Kansas.

They went by Godfroy's, where the excepted stood along the bank. I am told the boats and the bank called back and forth as long as voice could carry — names, mostly. Just names.

To be spared, I have learned this winter, is its own kind of removal. They did not remove us; they removed the world from around us, and left us standing on our little islands of ink — the Slocum section, the Godfroy sections, the Meshingomesia grant — a scattering of families in an emptied country, like the standing trees the loggers leave, that show where the forest stood and cannot themselves make shade enough for a child. The village is quiet in a way it has never been in the sixty years I have kept it. The paper held. I would sign it again; hear me, whoever reads this in whatever world: I would sign it again, twenty-one souls is twenty-one souls. But no one warned me that the price of the wall would be the view from it.



CHAPTER FOURTEEN

The Ground

Deaf Man's Village. Winter 1847.

THE SECOND WINTER OF THE QUIET, AND I KEEP THE OLD COUNT, THE way a woman keeps a private ledger of what still comes and what does not.

The geese still come. The maple run will come; the trees do not read treaties. The excepted fires of this river can be counted now on the fingers of two hands, and I have counted them, from my doorway, in the blue of the evenings — Godfroy's, Meshingomesia's, my daughters', the little scattering the ink agreed to see — the standing trees, as I said once in this book, that show where the forest stood. What I did not say then, and say now, winter being the season for finishing accounts: a standing tree is not spared. It is *left*. The loggers have a use for it — it marks the section corner. We mark theirs.

My daughters are strong, and their children make noise enough that on good days the village sounds, for an hour, the way it sounded. The trader's wife from Godfroy's brings me coffee beans and asks after my health in her slow kind Miami, and my health is what it is: I am seventy-three years old, or seventy-four; even I keep two answers to some questions now, which I suppose is the record finally teaching me its ways.

I was Frances five years. I was We-let-a-wash while the old people lived, a dead girl's name set walking. I have been Maconaquah the whole rest — wife, widow, keeper of this village, Little Bear Woman, sixty winters and more under a name that fits like the skin because it is the skin. When I go under this grass, between my husband and my children, the stone-cutters

may chisel whichever of the three the living need. The ground will know which one it holds.

The fish will be starting up the rivers soon. Let this book under my breastbone close on that: on the fish, who were here before all the names, and will run the spring flood long after the last of them wears off the stones.

She died at Deaf Man's Village in the first days of March, 1847, and was buried beside Shepoconah and her children. Asked for the day, the record gives two answers, three days apart — the sixth and the ninth — as though the hand that had held her fast since a letter went east in 1835 loosened at the last and could not say exactly when she left it. The ground, as she said, knows which name it holds. The ground has never yet been asked for a date.



Miami Aboriginal Descendants at Reserve, Indiana, 17th May, 1900, interspersed with people of Caucasian blood; at the Unveiling of the Monument to the memory of Frances Slocum, who was a Captive with the Aborigines nearly all her life. Seated at the left, Mrs. William Peconga, who cannot speak English; the two old men with long hair, William and Gabriel Godfrey; the younger men and boys seated on the ground.

— *photograph caption, 1900*

A captive nearly all her life: the stone-raisers' verdict on the sixty-nine years she chose. And filed inside the caption, unnoticed, its own refutation — an old woman on that ground, half a century after the boats, who cannot speak English. The record set it down as a shortcoming. It was a survival.

CHAPTER FIFTEEN

The Petition

Maumee. 1894.

AN OLD MAN SITS AT A DESK OF THE MODERN KIND, OAK WITH A rolling top, in a river town the railroads have passed by, writing in a good clear merchant's hand that shakes now on the downstrokes, and every few lines he stops and reads what he has and once, aloud, alone in the room, he says: *restored*.

William Wells Wolcott is seventy-two years old — thirty years older than his mother got, though he has to work the sum now to believe it, she has been forty years the age of his own daughters; his father the judge outlived her by three decades and a second wife, and died full of years and offices, which is what the ledger gives its own — and he is the last of the accounts. The house on the bluff passed out of mourning long ago into the family's second era, the one with a stepmother in it; the boat's engines are two generations gone to scrap, though he can summon the exact tone of her whistle off Presque Isle the way other men summon hymns; the town's water-power dreams died with the canal; and the fraction the clerk's form requires of him — *state the degree of Indian blood* — sits on the page in his own handwriting, one quarter, the first time in his long American life that the arithmetic of what his mother was has ever been worth one cent on any paper in the Republic, and he is ashamed of the occasion, and proud of the fact, and old enough at last to hold both without dropping either, being his mother's son.

The family was struck from the rolls years since — *removed therefrom*, the record says, by reason of separation from the nation — which is the ledger's way of saying: you moved into the big white house, you named your sons for senators, you passed. The ledger is not wrong. That is the worst of

the ledger, he has found, and he a ledger-man his whole life; it is so rarely wrong about the things it consents to see.

He writes the petition anyway. Not for the annuity, whatever his nephews think — he has money; money, to him, is of no value, and he smiles the old family smile at the sentence without knowing down what long water it has come to him — but because a man at the end wants the record right, and the record, for fifty years, has had him down as the son of Captain Wells and a blank. His brother Henry, who died with the name their mother planted in him still underground and unspent — he had sung the song once only in William's hearing, drunk and weeping, aged sixty, at their sister's funeral, and could not say whose it was, only WHOSE, in the old exact voice, "hers, hers" — Henry is four years gone. There is no one left who was at the wharf the day the boy spelled the boat's name out. There is only the paper, and what a man chooses to make it carry.

So he dips the pen, and where the form says *derivation of claim*, the old merchant writes the account through, in full, for the first time in the family's history — debits, credits, and the name.



To the Honorable the Commissioner of Indian Affairs: The undersigned respectfully represents: that he is the eldest son of MARY WELLS WOLCOTT, deceased, late of Maumee, Ohio; that his said mother was the daughter of Captain WILLIAM WELLS, killed at Chicago in 1812, and of WAH-NAH-GA-PETH, called SWEET BREEZE, daughter of ME-SHE-KIN-NO-QUAH, the LITTLE TURTLE, principal war chief of the Miami nation; and that the names of your petitioner and his family, formerly borne upon the rolls of said nation, were stricken therefrom; wherefore he prays that they may be RESTORED.

— *filed 1894*

It is the first paper in this book that says her name.

C O D A — W H A T T H E R E C O R D S A Y S N O W

THE GENEALOGY CAME OUT IN 1912 AND GAVE HER ELEVEN WORDS, and the ledger seemed, as it always seems, to have closed. Five years later a county history, pausing to admire the Wolcott Building at Maumee, remembered her generously and got her wrong — *Mrs. Wolcott was a daughter of Little Turtle* — a generation folded shut like a fan, the mother skipped over by the very act of remembering. Even reaching for Sweet Breeze, the record could not hold her.

But records have descendants too. The white house on the bluff stayed in the family until 1957, when the last of the line gave it to the public, and it stands today as a museum above the rapids, dusted, docented, its fourteen rooms smelling of other people's history; and in one of those rooms there is now a bronze bust of the judge — the record still keeping his face, a century and a half on, in the house that was hers. And for fifty years the museum's shop, in the little house beside the mansion, has traded in antiques and gifts under an arrow-shaped sign reading THE TALKING TURTLE — whether anyone ever heard the name inside the name, the record, as usual, does not say. The fish still come up past it every April, on time. The nation that went down the ditch at a mule's pace kept its government alive through Kansas and the lost years and the second removal, and governs today from a town in Oklahoma that carries its name — and when, in a new century, that nation wrote itself a constitution, it built its citizenship upon the very census rolls the old ledger had made to divide it: the instrument of the taking, turned at last, in the nation's own hands, to the instrument of the remaining. The language the fevers and the boats and the boarding schools put to sleep has been wakened from the old word-lists — one of them taken down in Philadelphia, by a French savant, from the mouth of Mihšihkinaahkwa himself, the same eastern winter he sat for the portrait that burned, so that the record lost the face and kept the tongue — the paper grief of soldiers and missionaries become, of all things on this earth, seed — and there are children now, in Oklahoma and in Ohio both, who can say correctly, without

being taught by a dying woman in an ice-lit room, the name this book was written to say.

And the family that had wept for its lost sister produced, in the end, the river's own historian: a Slocum wrote the standard history of the Maumee basin, two heavy volumes, the valley she was carried into entered at last in the family's book — the grief and the refusal reconciled the only way records reconcile anything, by outliving everyone concerned.

The ledger's other daughters took longer than the nation did. In the campaign year of 1840 — the half-fare steamers running to the fort, the valley roaring the general's name — a seven-year-old girl from Hesse arrived with her emigrant family in the new city at the river's mouth. She grew up in Toledo writing English for the newspapers, and in 1869, a quarter-century after Mary Wells Wolcott died with her songs unexplained, Rosa Segur and a handful of Toledo women founded the valley's first society for the suffrage of women — the valley's white women asking the ledger, at last, for a standing it had never entered for any daughter of any nation. At seventy-two she wrote the movement's history herself, and set down the sentence that stands at this book's front door — that the century had passed its meridian before any public agitation for the equal rights of woman had taken place in the Maumee Valley. The other sentence at the door is eleven words long. Between the two of them lies the whole case.

The maps have not much changed. The general is still on the sixteen counties. The candidate is still on the town by the fort. The scout is still on his county in Indiana, and the men who priced the valley are on its schools and its streets and its money.

And the face the Republic's books never kept was kept after all — not by the genealogy, not by the county histories: by the nation. In the Myaamia Center's own archive, beside a biography entered in this century in the community's records, there is a photograph of her — seated, in a dark dress and a pale shawl, her hair parted in the fashion of the forties, a vase of flowers on the table at her side. The entry gives her name in the living orthography, Amehkoonsihkwa, and gives the name her family used, which no county history ever printed: Polly. It records the section the treaty of 1818 granted

her at eighteen; it records the raft; and it closes with the sentence the whole settler record never managed — that her descendants are many, and near, and active in the nation. The ledger kept the property. Her people kept her.

But go to the rolls — the living rolls, the nation's own, kept now in the nation's own hand — and there, current, carried forward, drawing the only interest that ever mattered, you will find what the counties never carried:

Wanangapeth.

Amehkoonsihkwa.

Maconaquah.

Written down, at last, by their own.

— E N D —





Here ends *Amebkoonsibkwa* — the second reading of the Maumee Valley storehouse, told beside the history it shares every date, name, deed, boat, and petition with. The women are real; where the record is silent, the book says so.

SET IN EB GARAMOND · THE MAUMEE VALLEY · MMXXVI

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