ONE

Captivity

O, come with me, my white girl fair,
O, come where Mobile’s sources flow;
With me my Indian blanket share,
and share with me my bark canoe;
We’ll build our cabin in the wild,
Beneath the forest’s lofty shade,
With logs on logs traversely piled,
And Barks on barks obliquely laid . . .

Then come with me, my white girl fair,
And thou a hunter’s bride shall be;
For thee I’ll chase the roebuck there,
And thou shalt dress the feast for me:
O, wild and sweet our feast shall be,
The feast of love and joy is ours;
Then come, my white girl fair, with me,
O, come and bless my sylvan bowers.

SILAS MCALPINE

“Ode to John Ridge and Sarah Northrup” (circa 1824)

AT THE TURN OF THE EIGHTEENTH CENTURY, the Cherokee man known as Shoe Boots was a warrior in exile. According to a report of John Howard Payne, a white American journalist, lay historian, and visitor to the Cherokee Nation, Shoe Boots fled his home after accidentally killing a man who refused to sing for him. An ardent music lover, Shoe Boots seems to have become enraged when a bystander would not sing to accompany Shoe Boots’s dancing. He then assaulted the man, pummeling him to death. Judging by this account and several others, Shoe Boots was an arresting figure, distinguished in his mode of dress, daring on the battlefield, quixotic
and even dangerous in character. Tall, dark, and self-possessed, Shoe Boots was described by one Cherokee contemporary as “about 6 feet 2 or 3 inches high, of slender build, erect, of very dark complexion, straight black hair, and... about 180 or 200 pounds.” The same acquaintance also said that “Shoe-boots was a very peculiar looking man, from the fact that he was a very tall man—his garb was that of a military officer’s style. He wore boots, the legs of which reached above his knees. His hat was that of a British military hat, with a red plume in front... His coat was a British military uniform coat, which was kipped with red scarlet cloth... he wore a strap across his shoulders, and on that strap swung a long sword.”

After fleeing his home in Cherokee country for fear of retribution, Shoe Boots traveled north to Shawnee territory and joined a band of young men who were incensed at the encroachment of white Kentucky settlers. It was here, in the rolling bluegrass hills, that the story of Shoe Boots’s successive “marriages,” first to a white woman, and next to a black woman, begins to unfold. The inception of Shoe Boots’s relationship with a young Kentuckian named Clarinda was later described by the couple’s grandson, William Stephens, as “somewhat romantic.” Stephens continued: “At an early day, about the year 1780... the Cherokees made an assault on the village where my grandmother lived at that time, she being then only sixteen years of age, and among others they took my grandmother into captivity, and subsequently one of the raiding band took her to be his wife according to the customs, usages and laws of the Cherokees.” Other sources give Clarinda Allington’s age as eleven or thirteen at the time of her abduction. The tenor of this episode, misinterpreted as romantic by Stephens, is better captured by Kentucky historian Harry Enoch, who reports that Clarinda’s story was an “unhappy” one that was nevertheless “told and retold for many years as part of the country’s lore.”

When Shoe Boots took up with the Shawnee men who would make their famous raid on Kentucky’s Morgan’s Station, he would not have been focused on the imminent capture of a young girl. Rather, Shoe Boots and his fellows were motivated by righteous indignation at the gall of white intruders who were pouring into Shawnee territory. By 1792 Kentucky had become a fast-growing state. Settlers were crowding in with their slaves, elevating the population of Lexington to nearly one thousand, clearing forests, depleting wild game, and engaging with Wyandots, Shawnees, Mingos, and Cherokees in armed skirmishes over territory, game, horses and livestock.
of the region. The settlement, called Morgan's Station, overlooked Slate Creek and was home to six families, many of which also had emigrated from Virginia in search of land and prosperity.\footnote{Because of its location as an outpost of Kentucky settlements, Morgan's Station was particularly vulnerable to Indian attacks, especially from Shawnees to the north and Cherokees from the south. Residents were constantly fearful of Indian raids in their first years of settlement, but by the time Kentucky achieved statehood, citizens of Morgan's Station had relaxed their vigilance. They became so comfortable in their new environment that they allowed defenses at the station to deteriorate. An entry gate that formerly had guarded the station was neglected, and fencing that had connected each of the buildings in a protective palisade had been removed for use as firewood.}{9}

The settlers now viewed their Indian neighbors as a contained threat, even as they adopted Indian ways to help them survive in the Kentucky wilderness. Like their countryman, the famed Daniel Boone, Kentucky settlers “not only understood [the Indians], they virtually adopted their lifestyle... Early Kentuckians wore buckskin shirts, breechcloths, leggings and moccasins; assumed the nomadic existence of hunter-gatherers; could endure incredible hardship and were capable of extreme brutality to their enemies.”\footnote{Thus, the frontiersmen described by Enoch above became part of a process of Americanization analyzed by scholars Richard Slotkin and Rayna Green, in which white men adopted a unique identity and means of subsistence that depended on the employment of Native ways and the simultaneous extermination of Indians.}{11}

In the spring of 1793, a group of thirty to forty Shawnee and Cherokee warriors stunned the residents of Kentucky by launching what would later be described as “the last Indian raid in Kentucky.”\footnote{Much of what we know of that raid is based on the eyewitness accounts of early residents of Morgan's Station who were interviewed by a lay oral historian, Reverend John Shane, in the 1840s and 1850s.}{13}

Thirty-six-year-old Shoe Boots was among the warriors who camped along the banks of Little Slate Creek on Easter Sunday, 1793.\footnote{The Indian men are said to have entered Morgan's Station from the south and then to have divided their ranks, with one group entering an isolated cabin to take prisoners and another continuing on to attack the heart of the station. Inside the targeted cabin the woman of the house, Rachel Becraft, and several of her children were visiting with two neighbor girls, Polly Baker and Clarinda Allington. All were taken captive and carried away, while most of the station's residents tried in vain to fend off the second group of raiders. The party of warriors inside the station attacked men, women, and}{15}
children with muskets and tomahawks. In the words of one eyewitness, James Wade, a small girl was shot by a warrior aiming for her father, and “the women and children were flying in all directions.” Only one family, the Martins, was able to flee. Clarinda Allington’s grandmother narrowly escaped by running with the Martins as far as she could and hiding inside a hollow fallen tree. By the end of the raid, two settlers would be killed inside the settlement and eleven out of nineteen prisoners would be killed outside the station. The warriors burned the station to the ground, killed livestock, and are said to have captured a few black slaves before taking their leave of the place.

Meanwhile, the small party of bedraggled prisoners was making its way along the Little Sandy River at the command of its captors. As a posse to pursue the Indians formed back at the station, the raiders began killing captives who were slowing the pace of their retreat. At times the raiders even left their captives alone on the long trek toward the territory of present-day Michigan. Clarinda Allington, an adolescent girl who has been described as a “plucky” child, thought that she could find her way back to the Ohio River and urged the other captives to escape with her. They refused to follow Clarinda, however, and also refused to let her go alone. With her bid for escape thwarted, Clarinda, along with her neighbor Polly Baker, was taken south into Cherokee country, while most of the remaining captives were taken north to Detroit. After the raid, President George Washington appointed General “Mad Anthony” Wayne to raise a militia to suppress the midwestern tribes. Wayne’s army prevailed in the Battle of Fallen Timbers, and in 1795, a treaty signed by several tribes, including the Shawnee, secured the release of many of the captives from Morgan’s Station. Clarinda Allington, then confined in the home of Shoe Boots, was “the last of the captives still being held.”

Snatched from her neighbor’s home and witness to the killing of friends, Clarinda must have been terrified when she first reached Cherokee country. But she was known as a girl of fortitude and was able to adapt to her new conditions. For a time Clarinda seems to have lived platonically with Shoe Boots, who may have had a Cherokee wife. Within a few years, however, she became Shoe Boots’s sexual partner. Sometime between 1794 and 1803, the couple had three children: William, Sarah (or Sally), and John. They also had at least two African slaves—including a teenaged girl named Doll who was not much younger than Clarinda.

It is not clear how Clarinda came to feel about her predicament, since written accounts of her experience were kept by and between white men.
Did she accept Shoe Boots as her husband, or would she always view him as her captor? Did she enjoy living at what must have been a greater level of material comfort in Cherokee country, with a slave of her own? Or did material circumstances have no impact on her experience of forced exile? Though many white people captured by Indians in the eighteenth century later told tales of their difficult adjustment to Native culture, many also came to prefer life among the Indians and chose to remain in Native communities, even when presented with the opportunity to return to their families of origin. According to Indian Agent Silas Dinsmoor, Clarinda was content to live with Shoe Boots; according to his successor, Return Jonathan Meigs, she wanted to return home but could not for fear that she would be compelled to leave her children behind.

Clarinda’s Kentucky family was devastated by her capture and tried for years to bring about her return. Payne notes that they even hired local hero William Whitley to track her down and rescue her. Whitley, who had been appointed a major in the Kentucky militia by Governor Isaac Shelby, had gained renown for his zest in fighting Indians. A history of Kentucky published in 1882 recorded how Whitley had acquired his fame, reporting that in 1794, “aggravated by continued Indian raids, [he] led two hundred men against Chickamauga [a Cherokee] village in Tennessee. After resoundingly defeating the Indians, Whitley gave a barbeque at his newly completed home, Sportsman Hill.” Now a lieutenant colonel, Whitley traveled to Cherokee country to meet with federal Indian Agent Dinsmoor to discuss Clarinda Allington’s return. As Dinsmoor noted in the Cherokee Agency records, “relative to the business of Col. Whitely I am of opinion that the woman who lives with Tuskingo [Shoe Boots] will not be willing to leave him ... she has three fine children by the man and I believe is well satisfied with her situation.” Dinsmoor’s successor, Agent Return Meigs, inherited the problem. In October 1803, when Clarinda’s relatives appeared at the agency, Meigs called in Shoe Boots to ascertain the details of the case. Meigs reported:

This Cherokee man named Tuskingo or Shoeboots being brought before the agent with the said three children and questions being first put to the woman. Do you wish to return to your friends in Kentucky?—Answered Yes if I can carry my children—and the following questions being put to the Cherokee man—Are you willing to let Clarinda Ellington the woman you call your wife go with her children to see her friends in Kentucky? Answered No. If my children are taken away I shall look on it the same as if
they were dead. And the said Clarinda therefore declines going to see her friends as she cannot leave her children. The said Tuskingo says that he saved her life at the time she was taken, and therefore thinks he has a right to keep her as his wife. It appears that Tuskingo is a man of very considerable property.30

Clarinda Allington, discussed in this report as if she were property, had remained in Cherokee territory for the sake of her children in the view of Agent Meigs. Because Clarinda left no account of her own, we cannot know whether she actively chose to stay with Shoe Boots or whether she was content, as Agent Dinsmoor believed. Perhaps Clarinda was relieved and even elated when a year after this meeting her relatives made an arrangement with Agent Meigs for her and the children to visit Kentucky.31 According to Payne, Shoe Boots agreed to the trip only on the condition that his family would return to Cherokee country. Payne noted that after an agreement was reached, Clarinda and her children departed from Shoe Boots’s home in high style: “Captain Shoe Boots fitted out his wife and children as became his dignity and his wealth. He gave them several fine horses, and abundance of clothes and silver money, and a negro slave, besides a hired servant, to attend them.”32

This leave-taking is an essential part of the Shoeboots family story not only because of what it would mean for Clarinda’s servant, Doll, who was left behind, but also because of what it suggests about the symbolic meaning of idealized (white) womanhood in Cherokee country and how this meaning gets bound up with the practice of owning black slaves. In the lavish description quoted above, Payne highlights Shoe Boots’s gentlemanly behavior toward his beloved wife, who had transformed him from a marauding warrior into a man of gentility. However, Clarinda’s relationship with Shoe Boots would be represented quite differently in the public forums of her home community, revealing ambivalence about intermarriage between white women and Native men among white Americans, an ambivalence sometimes influenced by the presence of black slaves in these multiracial households.33

When Shoe Boots first brought Clarinda to his home in the 1790s, few white women lived with Cherokee families. The majority of interracial marriages took place between white men—often traders—and Cherokee women. For
a white man seeking to do business with Indians, marrying an Indian woman was a wise investment, since it allowed him to become more familiar with Cherokee language and culture and offered the added advantage of family and community ties. In 1819 the Cherokee National Council mediated these relationships, passing a resolution meant to protect Cherokee women, requiring that white men legally marry the Cherokee women they called their wives and making it illegal for a white man to have more than one Cherokee wife. The law also dictated that intermarried white men would not have the right to control their Cherokee wives’ property, in keeping with Cherokee understanding that women, not men, owned the homes in which they lived.34 In an 1825 law the Cherokee Council referred to the 1819 act, broadening its provision on polygamy by making it illegal for anyone in the Cherokee Nation to have more than one wife. In addition, the 1825 law was the first to acknowledge the presence of intermarried white women in the Nation. Because the Cherokees were a matrilineal tribe in which clan membership, and thus Cherokee belonging, had customarily passed from Cherokee mother to child, the government had to address whether and by what means the children of white women would be considered citizens. The Council thus enacted a special provision for these children, granting them automatic Cherokee citizenship.35 In essence, the Cherokee government sanctioned marriages between white women and Cherokee men by promising their children an equal place in the nation.

By the time this law legitimating the children of white women and Cherokee men was passed, dominant American definitions of proper feminine virtues, embodied in the idealized type of the white, middle-class “true woman,” had begun to influence the thinking of some Cherokees.36 Members of the Cherokee elite urged their daughters to model themselves after the gentle, chaste, pious women represented in American mass culture.37 The newspaper Cherokee Phoenix reprinted a series of articles on the feminine ideal that defined the goal of female education as “the formation of moral principles and sound affections,” raised the query, “Who is a Beautiful Woman,” and answered it: “Wherever there is most bosom tranquility, most domestic happiness, there beauty reigns in all its strength.” Another article listed the “Qualifications for a Wife” as “Piety, Person, Parts, Patience, Prudence, Providence, Privilege, Parentage, and Portion.”38 The presence of white female missionaries who modeled as well as taught these values further reinforced this notion of womanhood.39 And a marriage announcement printed in the Cherokee Phoenix in 1828 illustrates the ways in which elite Cherokee women were assessed in accordance with a popular-
ized white gender ideal: “The Bride is a quarter white, possesses a fine figure, somewhat tall, beautiful complexion, with dark hair and eyes: her features bear the evidence of amiability and good nature; and on the whole she is an interesting woman. She is a member of the Methodist Church.” This wedding story also notes the class standing of the bride, indicated by her parents’ property holdings, which “consist[ed] of four log cabins, with a farm.”

In a period when the Cherokee Nation was trying to remake itself in the image of the United States to prove its level of civilization, entertaining the complex set of ideas and social practices known today as the ideology of “true womanhood” or “domesticity” represented a pathway to civilized society. For this nascent connection between female virtue and Cherokee civilization echoed a similar relationship between female virtue and American civilization. Properly enacted femininity represented the nobility of the American republic in the nineteenth century, and white women were charged with strengthening the nation’s moral fiber through their possession and performance of a series of qualities: piety, purity, deference, and domesticity. White women’s spiritual faith and decorum in the home were believed to temper white men’s necessary engagement in the defiling world of commerce and politics. White women’s tutelage of young children was thought to shape the morality of future statesmen, thus affecting the course of national events. It follows that as these notions filtered into Cherokee communities, some Cherokees would come to believe that Cherokee women exhibiting these characteristics of “true womanhood” could do as much for Cherokee men and the Cherokee Nation. And if Cherokee women could have such an impact, how might the growing number of actual white women marrying Cherokee men help elevate Cherokee society?

Certainly Cherokees living in the 1800s would have answered this query in various and contradicting ways. But Payne seems to have thought that the presence of white women could have uplifting effects, as evidenced by his descriptions of Clarinda Allington, “whose charms, it may be conjectured, had already made a captive of her captor.” Shoe Boots, the once-wild Indian, had become a proper gentleman in her presence, evidencing gentleness and commitment, and “ingratiat[ing] himself, by his devotedness and delicacy and decorum still more and more with his captive.” Clarinda, in Payne’s view, had made her savage husband into a noble man. In his history of the Cherokee Nation, Cherokee historian Emmet Starr clearly espouses the benefits of intermarriage with whites, male or female. In a section titled “Character of the Cherokees” Starr reports that “the Cherokees
married more freely with the whites than did the other tribes, and with ex-
ceptional results.”  

Daniel Butrick, a Protestant missionary stationed in Cherokee country, not only supported these marriages but also indicated that the federal government did so as well. Butrick made reference to former president Thomas Jefferson, an advocate of white-Indian coupleings: “If I am not mistaken the President, or Secretary of War, but a few years since, recommended intermarriages with the Indians as a means of promoting their improvement, but if they had not, I can see no evil in it.”

At the same time that white intermarriage represented transformation and civilization for Indians, the means of that transformation proved inherently compromising for white women. By becoming the wives of Indian men and having sexual relations with them, white women forfeited their purity and honor in the eyes of white society. For the salvation of Indian men by intimate association with white women was at the same time a desecration of virtuous white womanhood. Clarinda Allington’s reception in Kentucky after her return from Cherokee territory demonstrates this irony. Clarinda’s family members, who worked mainly as subsistence farmers and tanners, were unable to bear the cost of care for Clarinda and her three children. The family therefore submitted a petition to the Kentucky assembly, seeking aid for Clarinda:

When the Treaty of Greenville came on, she was detained by a Cherokee chief . . . and was conducted by a secret route to the Cherokee nation. That her situation there has been extremely distressing owing to the cruelty of her tyrant. For four years after her captivity she was constantly in danger of her life by refusing to become his wife. Self-preservation, however, at length induced her to yield to the embraces of the savage, by whom she has had three children, all now very young. That she has, within a few days since, found means to escape with her children and throwing herself upon the bosom of an aged mother and other relations, who are unfortunately too poor to afford any support to her and her children, and is unable from her long captivity—which induces an ignorance of the manners and employments of white people—to produce any kind of sustenance for herself and her children. Therefore praying that an Act may pass for her relief.

The legislature accepted this narrative of Clarinda’s circumstances and awarded her a pension.

The representation here of Clarinda’s eventual submission to the sexual appetites of a savage, and her own descent into savagery by virtue of her loss of white ways and adoption of Indian ways, shows the danger of in-
termarriage for white women. Once sullied by her sexual relations with a Native man, Clarinda's character continued to worsen in the eyes of her community members. James Wade, who had been present at the raid on Morgan's Station, recalled that Clarinda “again married . . . a great deal worse husband than the Indian had made.” Wade notes further that Clarinda married a third time, to a “trifling fellow” who was promised on a bet, presumably made with male friends, that he would receive “a cow and calf, perhaps other things, if he wod go and marry her.”

While Payne, writing in the 1830s as a visitor to the Cherokees, sees Clarinda as Shoe Boots's moral salvation, the white people of Clarinda's hometown see Shoe Boots as the vehicle of her degradation and moral decline. Because she is already tainted by her sexual relationship with an Indian, each successive marriage reveals the depth of Clarinda's ruin, until finally, she can only find a husband if he is paid to take her. Clarinda's dire circumstances in Kentucky were relieved only slightly by the sixteen-year-old slave Mingo, whom Shoe Boots had sent along with her. Too poor to maintain Mingo as her servant, Clarinda bartered him for childcare and “left her children with her brother and gave him the little Negro boy to pay for raising them.” If Clarinda was unable to redeem herself in life, perhaps she did so in death. Her grandson recalled that she passed away in 1840, “surrounded by white relatives.”

Two highly publicized marriages of Cherokee men to white Christian women in the 1820s also illustrate the contradictory dynamic of white women's symbolic presence in Cherokee communities, as viewed both by Cherokees and whites. Cousins John Ridge and Elias Boudinot (formerly called Buck Watie) of the prominent Ridge family were sent as children to the Moravian Mission School that had been established in Cherokee territory. The boys' acquisition of English literacy and biblical knowledge so exceeded expectations that they were chosen to continue their education in New England. They traveled to the Foreign Mission School in Cornwall, Connecticut, where they lived for almost five years. During their stay in Cornwall, both men, now in their late teens, met the young women they wished to marry. Sarah Northrup (age fourteen) and Harriet Gold (age nineteen) returned their suitors' affections, Harriet's reason being that “she was determined to become a missionary to the Cherokees and knew no better way than as the wife of a leading man of the nation.” The parents of both women were undone upon hearing their daughters' intentions and attempted to dissuade them. However, Sarah and Harriet fell ill at the thought of losing their beloveds, and both sets of parents relented in order to re-
store their daughters’ fragile health. The families of Ridge and Boudinot, who preferred that the cousins marry Cherokee women, were also convinced by the entreaties of the young men.\textsuperscript{54}

The vitriolic response of white New Englanders to the news of the impending weddings came as a shock and an affront to Ridge and Boudinot, who had been educated to believe in the generosity of Christian values and the particularly liberal nature of white northerners. Local newspapers printed editorials expressing the sentiment that Ridge’s fiancée, Sarah, “was to be a squaw with a grubby papoose on her back.”\textsuperscript{55} Boudinot and his fiancée, Harriet, faced a more graphic, violent protest. Cornwall citizens, led by Harriet’s brother, burned images of Elias, Harriet, and Harriet’s mother on the town green and threatened to lynch the dark-skinned Elias should he go through with the ceremony. In a letter to her sister and brother-in-law, Harriet recounted the macabre scene that she witnessed from a friend’s window: “A painting had before been prepared representing a beautiful young Lady and an Indian. . . . The church bell began to toll . . . Brother Stephen set fire to the barrel of tar, or rather, the funeral pile, the flames rose high and the smoke ascended. . . . My heart truly sung with anguish at the dreadful scene.”\textsuperscript{56} The scandal was so extreme that the Foreign Mission School closed its doors after the Boudinot-Gold wedding, explaining that “it was best to train youths in their own lands.”\textsuperscript{57}

In the aftermath of the protests, however, the people of Cornwall, who saw Sarah Northrup in a new light, had a change of heart. Cornwall citizens came to realize that Sarah had married into a prominent Cherokee family with wealth, slaves, and even a famous Indian chief. John Ridge’s father, Major Ridge (sometimes called “The Ridge”), was a Cherokee war hero and political leader, making John Ridge something of a prince and thus redeeming Sarah for white womanhood. Historian Marion Starkey writes about the town’s changing impression: “The Ridge had come to visit John dressed in broadcloth and driving a coach-and-four. . . . His state was kingly. Cornwall decided to make an Indian princess of Sarah after all.”\textsuperscript{58} Biographer Thurman Wilkins further explains that “the townspeople even came to think of Sarah Northrup Ridge as a kind of princess who dressed in silk every day and had fifty servants to wait on her.” Wilkins quotes from a history of Cornwall in which Sarah was remembered: “She simply said to this [slave], go, and he goeth, and to another one Come, and he did so.”\textsuperscript{59}

Sarah Northrup Ridge’s transformation from squaw to princess depended on a triangular relationship among white women, Cherokee men, and black slaves. Possessing a bevy of slaves to wait on her made Sarah’s life
with an Indian husband acceptable and even enviable, just as wealth derived from slave labor made Major Ridge worthy of respect. In his description of Clarinda Allington’s departure from Shoe Boots’s home, Payne successfully reproduces this formula, representing Clarinda as a white-Indian princess by his reference to her finery and slaves.

The early marriage of Shoe Boots to a young white woman serves as a precursor to the saga that unfolds here, and the portrayal of this marriage by Payne can be read as a metaphor for the role of blacks in the Cherokee Nation. Though much of nineteenth-century Cherokee history has been written as a story about Cherokees and whites, it was an invisible third element, the presence of black people, on which the story often turned.