

Core Knowledge® Adventures in History™

THE CARLISLE SCHOOL

THE TEARING AWAY



by E. A. Hale



The Carlisle School

The Tearing Away

by

E. A. Hale

Illustrations by *Kailien Singson*

ADVENTURES IN HISTORY™

ISBN 979-8-88970-623-6

COPYRIGHT © 2026 CORE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION

ALL RIGHTS RESERVED

PRINTED IN CANADA

CORE KNOWLEDGE FOUNDATION

www.coreknowledge.org

TABLE OF CONTENTS

CHOCTAW WORDS & PHRASES.....	1
CHAPTER 1:	
Torn Apart.....	2
CHAPTER 2:	
All Aboard!.....	10
CHAPTER 3:	
The Long Train Ride	14
CHAPTER 4:	
The Military Academy.....	19
CHAPTER 5:	
Rules, Rules, and More Rules.....	34
CHAPTER 6:	
Two Lies and a Half-Truth.....	43
CHAPTER 7:	
More Worries.....	51
CHAPTER 8:	
Letter from Home.....	60
CHAPTER 9:	
Defiance.....	66

CHAPTER 10:	
Reflection.....	69
AFTERWORD.....	75
MEET THE AUTHOR.....	80
MEET THE ILLUSTRATOR.....	82

Choctaw Words & Phrases

pokni	grandmother
three sisters garden	an ancient American Indian garden consisting of three mutually beneficial crops—corn, beans, and squash—in a gardening method called companion planting
tanchi	corn
tobi	beans
isito	squash
ulla holba	doll; literally, to resemble a child, have a childlike appearance
Miti	Come here.
Chahta sia hoke	I am Choctaw.
Halito	Hello.
ishtaboli	Choctaw stickball
Chi pisa la chike	I will see you later. / Until we meet again.
Yakoke!	Thank you!
a tek	my sister

1

Torn Apart

Eleven-year-old Alice Folsom had never traveled outside of Indian Territory, let alone ridden a train across the country. Tears of frustration and anguish streamed down her face. “Pokni, please, please let me stay here with you,” she pleaded. “I can’t leave you. Don’t make me leave home!” It was unthinkable that adults would force her to travel halfway across the country.

Alice’s frail grandmother pulled her close and hugged her with surprising strength. “How can you be a teacher without an education?” asked Pokni, reminding her granddaughter of her dream to teach. She released Alice and dropped heavily into her rocking chair.

Standing at the screen door, the Indian agent cleared his throat to get their attention. He removed his pocket watch and made a show of checking the time before snapping it shut. “Time to go,” he said, tapping his booted toe against the flimsy screen door. *Kick, slam. Kick, slam. Kick, slam.*

The noise fueled Alice's resistance. Her salty tears blended with the bitter taste in her mouth, making her gag. She fell to her knees in front of Pokni's rocking chair and clasped her hands. She twisted around and shouted at the man, "I am not going!" Then she repeated it in Choctaw for Pokni.



Her grandmother had always refused to speak the white man's language. As a young child, Pokni had experienced the deaths of her older sister and father. They had perished on the forced march called the Trail of Tears and Death. For weeks, her family had suffered hardships and trauma as soldiers marched them from their tribe's Mississippi homelands to a heavily forested wilderness called Indian Territory.

The agent pulled Alice away from her grandmother's rocking chair just as Pokni let out her last "I love you." He forced her across the rough wooden porch. The brittle grass of late summer broke free of the parched earth as he dragged her through the yard. She railed against him while he hoisted her onto the wagon seat. Her final, tear-filled glimpse of home was of her grandmother in her rocking chair. Pokni's head lay on her forearms. A mix of sobs, coughs, and spasms wracked the woman's thin frame.

"Please, *please* let me stay with Pokni!" Alice cried, trying to shake free of the man's arm as the wagon rolled away. Soon, her home was swallowed up by the dense woods.

Silence reigned at the beginning of the journey. The team of mules pulling the wagon plodded along the tree-

lined dirt road. Alice swayed back and forth. With her right hand, she held tightly to the wooden bench seat. In her left, she cradled some food knotted inside Pokni's nicest dish towel.

Along a smooth patch of road, the man finally spoke. "As I was trying to say back at your cabin, my name is Mr. Shoenfelt. I'm the U.S. Indian agent for the Five Tribes in Indian Territory. My boss instructed me to deliver y'all safely to the McAlester depot."

Alice did not ask questions, fearing she might dissolve into tears.

Mr. Shoenfelt took off his hat and wiped perspiration from his brow. Despite her silence, he continued. "Yer headed to Carlisle Indian Industrial School. It's a boarding school for Indian boys and girls like you. They'll learn ya special trades . . . so y'all can earn money."

He'd hit on a sensitive topic. Pokni and Alice barely scraped by; there was no denying it. She had no shoes that fit, only too-small buckskin moccasins from last winter. She pulled back her feet, hiding the toes that poked through the holes.

He nodded toward her feet. "Carlisle even operates a shoemaking shop. You'll git a pair of real shoes, leather ones, as soon as you arrive."

depot: a bus or train station

trades: jobs that require manual or mechanical skill

buckskin moccasins: soft leather shoes made from deer hide

A question escaped before she could hold it back. “But why do I have to go to school in Pennsylvania?” She swiped at a fresh tear tracking down her dusty face. “Why can’t I go to school near our home?”

“Your grandmother’s very ill. She can’t pay for you to attend one of them subscription schools, let alone take care of yer basic needs, like food and clothing.”

Angry at his bluntness, she shifted away from the man. This stranger had no right to judge her life. *I already go to school. And shoes aren’t required*, she argued silently. To pay for her schooling, she and Pokni tended their vegetable garden, pulling weeds and hauling water. The three sisters—Tanchi, Tobi, and Isito—thived in the rich soil of the river bottoms. Pear and apple trees grew in their small orchard. They had very little money, but Pokni bartered food for other necessities. And to Pokni, Alice’s education was a necessity. Each Monday during the school year, Alice toted a basket of the finest fruits and vegetables to the teacher, trading fresh food for a week of school.

However, attending school this year wasn’t a certainty for Alice. In late July, only a month ago, a dry cough had afflicted Pokni. It rattled in her chest.

“When do I get to see my grandmother again?”
Worry laced her tone.

subscription schools: private schools that charged a fee for each day attended instead of a fixed fee for the year or semester

At first, the Indian agent said nothing. He clicked his tongue and flicked the reins, signaling to the mules. They picked up their pace. He chose his next words carefully. “Well . . . there be Christmas recess. But yer grandmother would have to send money for a train ticket. Expensive, ya ken? So most students spend the break at school. With their friends,” he added to soften the news.

Their wagon team approached a country church and stopped. Alice climbed out and stretched her legs. The church door opened, and a thick-bodied missionary lady wearing a feathered hat stepped across the threshold, holding a young girl’s hand. An adult-sized bonnet all but covered the child’s face. She hugged a soft-bodied vlla holba with black braids made of yarn. A smile made of red embroidery thread spread across the doll’s face. A small duffel bag sat at the entrance to the church. While the agent loaded the duffel into the back of his wagon, the lady addressed Alice.

“Come introduce yourself to Issi. She’s eight. She’s an orphan, so she’ll be attending Carlisle with you.”

Alice slowly approached the pair and stood a few feet away. The bonnet’s stiff brim hid Issi’s downcast face.

“Go on, talk to her,” insisted the lady.

missionary: someone who travels to spread their religion or do charitable work in the name of their religion

threshold: the bottom part of a doorway, or the doorway itself

In Choctaw, Alice told the girl her name and age. Issi's head shot up in recognition of the familiar and dear language, and Alice got a glimpse of a tear-stained but beautiful baby face. Alice knew someone had lied about this child's age. She looked more like the six-year-old twins at Alice's subscription school.

"Don't speak in your native tongue," scolded the lady. "At the boarding school, students must speak only English, or they—you—will be punished."

"Time fer us to get moving, ma'am," said the agent. "Girls, climb in the back of the wagon."

The lady pulled the child toward the wagon, but Issi dropped in a heap on the stone stoop. The woman wrenched Issi's arm, but she refused to budge. The oversized bonnet muffled the child's sobs. A lump formed in Alice's throat.

The agent pointed to Alice and then the wagon. "You. Git her up!" He checked his pocket watch. "Y'all be sorry if we miss the train," he threatened.

Alice hurried to Issi's side and held out her hand. Lip quivering, Issi stared up at her with watery brown eyes.

"Miti," whispered Alice in Choctaw, beckoning Issi to follow her. This time, the adults did not correct her language use. As they climbed into the wagon bed, one of Issi's boots slipped free of her bare foot. Like her bonnet, it was too large.

The agent picked up the worn-out boot and turned it over in his hand. “She’ll get a new pair, too,” he said, before tossing it in the wagon. Alice noticed the dirty, folded newsprint wedged into the leather layers of the sole, covering a large hole.

As the wagon pulled away from the church, Issi clung to Alice. Despite her own fears, she put on a brave front for Issi. She shared a chunk of buttered bread and a whole apple with the hungry girl. Then she knotted the dishcloth around the remaining bread, apples, and pears and tucked the bundle away.

Issi gave in to the rocking motion of the wagon. She laid her head in Alice’s lap. The sobbing changed to hiccups, and soon the exhausted child slept. To the rhythm of the jingling harnesses and the team’s plodding, Alice counted her blessings like Pokni had taught her. *Oh, Pokni*. She regretted the anger she had directed toward her grandmother. She vowed to write an apology as soon as she got to school. Pokni would forgive her. She always did. Alice would promise to be a quick learner and master a trade, then return to Pokni next summer. One day, she would teach children at a school in Indian Territory and take care of Pokni in her old age. Planning for the future soothed her, and Alice dozed with her head against the rough burlap of a lumpy feed sack.

burlap: rough, heavy fabric made of plant fibers

feed sack: a cloth bag containing animal feed or other dry goods

2

All Aboard!

At the McAlester depot, the Indian agent left Alice and Issi in the care of two women and one man. “Y’all be okay if’n you obey them Presbyterian missionaries,” he said as he turned over his charges.

A gray-haired woman in a tailored, skirted suit and high-buttoned shoes passed out cheese sandwiches and well water that smelled of sulfur. “Finish eating quickly,” she instructed. “We will board the train for Topeka, Kansas, in ten minutes.”

Twenty girls from various tribes stood on the sooty platform, washing down dry sandwich bread with warm water. Alice held her nose to drink it after watching a pretty but sullen teenager do the same. The teen caught her eye and motioned for Alice to come nearer. Alice grasped Issi’s hand and approached.

“Chahta sia hoke,” whispered the teen when they neared her.

charges: people or things given to somebody to look after
sulfur: a chemical element that has a strong, unpleasant smell

“Halito.” Alice glanced around, fearful she’d be caught speaking Choctaw. “We are Choctaw, too,” she added in English.

“I’m Sarah,” the teen said, but before she could continue an ear-piercing train whistle interrupted.

Issi buried her face against Alice. A deep male voice added to the noise. “All aboard the train car. Girls, enter by age.” The speaker, wearing a brown suit and a brown hat, swept his long arms toward the steps. “Oldest first,” he commanded.

“Shhh. We’ll pretend we’re sisters so we can go together,” whispered Sarah. She bent close to Alice’s ear and added, “Let me do the talking.”

As a missionary approached their trio, Sarah stepped behind Issi and put her hands on the child’s shoulders. It was then that Alice noticed Sarah was not carrying any belongings, unlike the other children.

“You,” said the missionary as she pointed toward Sarah. “Get on board with the older children. We have a schedule to make.”

“My youngest sister has already tried to run away. She’ll do it again if I board without her. That’s why there are two of us holding her—so she won’t bolt.”

Sarah smiled sweetly at the woman. "I wouldn't want the train to wait while we searched for her."

The woman shook her head, but with more pressing concerns, she dismissed Alice's group with a wave of her hand. "Stay together if you must, but get in line."

"Move along, sisters," Sarah said. Now she sounded impatient, even abrupt. Then, without warning, she shoved Alice in the back, causing her to stumble into Issi and knock her off-balance. Issi's boot heel came down hard on Alice's exposed toes. The ones that poked through her thin moccasin.

"Owww!" Alice jerked her foot back.

Issi, already at her wit's end, wailed and clung to Alice. Alice, unsteadied by Issi, was unable to reach down to rub her sore foot. Those students not already on board noticed the scuffle and offered to help, but Alice waved them away. "I'll be OK," she mumbled.

After the pain subsided, Alice searched the crowd for their "older sister." By the time the girls returned to their places in line, Sarah had disappeared—and with her, so had Alice's precious food.



3

The Long Train Ride

“**M**y sister *must* stay with me. She doesn’t speak English,” Alice insisted to the first adult they encountered on board the train. Then she and Issi gripped hands and pushed their way to the middle of the railcar. The half-lie had worked well enough when Sarah made the claim. Alice hoped the missionaries wouldn’t ever find the teen—not because Alice cared about Sarah’s well-being, but because she never wanted to see the petty thief again.

The train ride was a new experience for Alice, Issi, and all the other girls in their car. As the engine roared and picked up speed, excited sounds and frightened whimpers rippled through the train car. But after several dusty hours of travel, with hot wind whipping through open windows, everyone was ready for still air and cooler temperatures.

Issi cried a little, but Alice was thankful she didn’t make a scene. The child was hungry and thirsty, and so was Alice. The thin sandwiches had done little to fill their bellies. Remembering Sarah’s behavior made Alice

wonder what kind of person would steal food from hungry children. How desperate would that person need to be? It brought another question to mind: Who would force children from their homes and put them on a train with strangers, only to desert them at a boarding school on the other side of the country? It was hard for Alice to blame Sarah for wanting to escape.

For the duration of the journey, the train made at least one stop each day during daylight hours. After the first stop in Topeka, Alice lost track of depots and towns. When time permitted, the children exited the train, stretching their legs and allowing their queasy stomachs to settle. On those occasions, church people delivered free food to the depot, like apples, pears, sliced bread, cheese, jerky, and hard-boiled eggs. The girls wasted no time during these meals, eating every morsel.

Nights on the train were especially hard. Small children cried for their mothers. The girls leaned against one another on the hard benches or slept on the dirty floor, curled around their few belongings. Issi hugged her rag doll and whimpered in her sleep. She quieted down when Alice whispered in Choctaw, "From now on, we're family. I promise to be your sister and take care of you."

Early Tuesday morning, after nearly a week of dusty travel, the newly acquired students and their chaperones arrived at the depot in Carlisle, Pennsylvania. Hungry, thirsty, dirty, and smelly, the girls unloaded their personal items onto the wooden platform beside their train car.

Alice, Issi, and the other girls stood close to the brick wall in the half-shade. The depot awning did little to protect them from the late afternoon sun. Issi leaned down, her small hands inspecting the contents of her duffel bag.

Without warning, shrill whistles, whoops and hollers, and waving hands and hats distracted Alice and the other girls as a group of boys disembarked from a car toward the back of the train. In leaps and bounds they spilled out onto the grass, some distance from the platform already overflowing with girls. Alice hadn't realized there were male students on the train—an orchestrated separation by the chaperones, she concluded.

Alice was drawn away from the distraction as, out of the corner of her eye, she noticed an empty space where Issi had just been standing. The duffel bag gaped open. But where was Issi?

chaperones: people who travel with younger people in order to look after them

awning: a rooflike cover, often made of fabric, that extends over a doorway or window

Alice scanned the platform as a range of possibilities raced through her frantic mind. Did Issi run away? Was she kidnapped? Maybe she went to the outhouse behind the depot. Alice rushed to the end of the brick building and looked around back. The door to the outhouse was wide open. No one was inside. She scanned a group of boys milling around beneath three elm trees a short distance from the platform. No Issi! She had wasted precious seconds. Wide-eyed, Alice dashed to the front edge of the platform and leaned over. Thankfully, only gravel and weeds lined the tracks. Still no Issi. Her chest heaved, and her palms grew damp. Had she already broken her promise to care for Issi?

An ear-piercing whistle rose up from the train. Now empty of riders, it was beginning to inch away from the station.

But the girls' car wasn't completely empty. A small hand, holding a rag doll, extended through one of the open windows.

Running with all her might, Alice screamed, "Issi! Get off that train!"

THE CARLISLE SCHOOL



4

The Military Academy

The wheels groaned and squealed as the locomotive lurched, jostling Issi inside the car. Her arm disappeared inside the window, and her doll dropped down beside the track. Alice pointed and yelled, “Please, someone, help my sister! She’s stuck on the train!”

Alice’s cry for help did not go unnoticed. A quick-thinking teenage boy sprinted forward. He leaped up onto the raised wooden platform where the group of girls were gathered, then long-jumped over at least a dozen of their satchels and bags. Alice watched in hopeful desperation as he flew by her. He reached Issi’s car and disappeared inside just as it crept away from the platform. Seconds later, he emerged with Issi clinging to his neck. He dashed down the train’s steps to the gravel beside the tracks and loped toward the platform. Without breaking stride, he did a one-handed scoop of Issi’s rag doll. A chorus of cheers followed.

satchels: small bags with shoulder straps

loped: ran in an easy, natural way

Alice ran toward Issi, passing the small, thin missionary lady who had ridden with them on the cross-country train. The young woman's slack-jawed face displayed a mix of confusion and amazement at the teenager's athletic feat.

Gently, the boy lowered Issi to the ground and handed her the doll. He tipped his hat to them and offered a shy smile. Alice fussed over Issi, alternating hugs of relief with scoldings in Choctaw. She didn't see Issi's champion slip away as she focused on keeping a firm grip on Issi's hand.

From the train depot, the girls walked a short distance along a busy main street, leaving the boys at the station. Alice carried Issi's duffel over her shoulder. A beautiful white stone church dominated the street corner. Alice wished she could step inside and see the colored glass windows with the sun shining through them, like glass bottles. She and Pokni collected yellow, blue, and green glass bottles and lined them up in their cabin window. Pokni even had a red bottle, Alice's favorite. When the morning sun was just right, the bottles glowed inside their little cabin.

Bells jingled, and a quiet little open-air one-car train stopped beside them. A sign on the front of the car read

“Indian School.” There was no train whistle, and no smokestack belched black soot and smoke.

“All aboard the trolley, ladies,” shouted the conductor. “I’m on a tight schedule. Gotta come back and get the boys!” The portly man perspired in a dark blue suit with shiny brass buttons that pulled at every buttonhole. He waved a navy cap back and forth, signaling *Hurry, hurry!*

Issi and Alice were first and second to get on the trolley because of their ages. Issi couldn’t decide where to sit. She slid into the seat behind the conductor’s chair, then ran to the back of the trolley, where she lay on the longest bench seat.

“Get up, you!” barked a missionary chaperone. She glared at Issi.

Issi’s lower lip trembled, and she ducked her head, once again hiding her face in the oversized bonnet. It seemed that with a younger sister, Alice would be getting in trouble twice as often.

The quiet trolley ride was more pleasant than the train ride. As the town ended, the land sprawled. Alice’s first glimpse of the school was a tall chimney stack towering over rooftops and spewing light gray smoke. No trees blocked the view. How different it was

smokestack: a large pipe that carries smoke away from an enclosed space
belched: expelled or released something with force

from the leafy oak trees, towering pine trees, and heavy underbrush crowding the wild woods around her home. Homesickness for Pokni and their woods filled her with renewed dread. This foreign place could never be home away from home. Instinctively, she reached for Issi's small hand and squeezed it.

The trolley moved slowly, approaching a wooden bridge over marshy ground. Alice smelled water before she saw it. A hand-painted sign read "Le Tort Creek." The water ran low, like the creek behind Pokni's cabin. If Alice closed her eyes, she could transport herself to that babbling brook. How she longed to wade in and soak her tired feet.

"Good day to you, ladies!" Alice's eyes shot open at the sound of a male voice, booming from somewhere nearby. The trolley slowed while girls craned their necks to see who and what lay ahead: a two-story white house and a wagon waiting in front of it.

"As soon as we stop, please gather your belongings and exit the trolley," instructed the familiar voice of the missionary lady. Alice and Issi had been following the woman's curt orders since they had pulled away from the McAlester depot in Indian Territory. Alice would be glad when they parted company. "Toss your bags in the

underbrush: shrubs and small trees that grow amid larger trees

teamster's wagon and follow behind. He will lead the way.”

Alice quickly lifted Issi's duffel. She knew Issi would throw a fit if she realized she would be separated from her belongings. It was easier to take action than try to explain or reason with Issi.

But Issi didn't notice. Alice followed her gaze to a huge, dark-skinned man sitting tall on the seat of the wagon. His hat was pushed back on his head. With his sleeves rolled to his forearms, his muscles looked as powerful as the two mules hitched to his wagon.

“Halloo, Coach Warner!” called the teamster. “Welcome back! You waiting on some players?”

“Good day to you, George,” returned the coach, the owner of the voice that had greeted them, who now came into view on the shady porch of the white house. “It's good to be back at Carlisle! I'm waiting on Pete there to bring back the trolley with a load of young Indian men.” As the coach pointed, the trolley conductor was already driving back across Le Tort Creek, heading to town for the load of boys. “There's quite an athlete headed our way. The superintendent brought him to Carlisle earlier this summer to pre-enroll.”

“Oh yes, I heard him talking about that boy,” the

teamster: someone who drives a team of animals

superintendent: someone who oversees a school or school district

pre-enroll: to take steps to sign up for something before the sign-up period officially begins

teamster replied, flicking the reins. "So long, then," he called over his shoulder as the mules moved forward past the white house. As the girls followed the wagon, Alice glanced back to see the coach lean over the porch rail and spit a stream of tobacco that landed squarely on the grass.

"The school's football coach," whispered an older girl. "My cousin is coming on the next trolley. He told me he sat next to a star recruit on the train."

"I think I know which one he is," Alice whispered back. When a curious Issi tugged on her sleeve for a translation of their conversation, Alice whispered the most likely Choctaw word Issi would understand. "Ishtaboli." She doubted Issi knew of football, but certainly she knew of stickball, the aggressive Choctaw sport known as "little brother of war." Issi nodded in excited understanding. She skipped ahead, dashing and spinning as she wielded an imaginary stickball stick.

Along the dirt road, they followed the wagon, Issi with her imaginary stick in hand. At the top of a low hill, the girls got the full effect of the school grounds. Huge two-story wooden buildings, all similar in style and painted white, were scattered in every direction. One or two brick buildings rose even higher and could be seen behind the wooden ones.



Except for Alice's group, there seemed to be no one else around. Alice had imagined a large stone schoolhouse with several steps leading to the entrance. It would be surrounded by shady oak trees, with swings hanging from thick branches. She thought she'd see children running and laughing during recess. After school, she had assumed, they would eat and sleep in small cabins, not so different from Pokni's cabin.

But Carlisle School was as big as a town. Judging by the silence among her group, the other girls were equally overwhelmed.

“Where are the other children?” Issi asked in their Choctaw language.

Alice shook her head. She didn’t know why the school grounds were empty of people. Was their group the very first to arrive at Carlisle School? And what if Issi got lost in these buildings, where each one looked like another?

There was one open-air structure that stood out from the rest. It was circular, and possibly bigger than Pokni’s cabin. It sat on a white foundation decorated with wood lattice in the middle of a big grassy area, surrounded by all the school buildings. It was pretty and inviting, with steps leading up to it and a painted rail encircling it.

“If you ever are lost, go there,” Alice whispered to Issi, pointing to the circular structure. “I’ll find you.”

The door of a building opened, and a pale woman emerged, clamping a large hat down on her silvery-white hair. She shielded her eyes from the bright sunshine as she walked purposefully across the grass. As she neared the group, she pursed her lips and narrowed her eyes at the missionary chaperone. “What a ragtag group you’ve brought us.”

Alice bristled at the hurtful words. Did she think they didn’t understand English?

wood lattice: thin strips of wood arranged in a crisscross pattern

“My name is Miss Crawford,” the woman said as she lifted her chin to look down her nose. Even her eyebrows were white. “I teach domestic science classes, such as cooking and sewing.”

Alice decided she would never take those classes. Besides, her mending skills were sorely lacking, or at least that’s what Pokni told her.

“Every one of you needs a good shower, clean clothes, and new shoes,” Miss Crawford chided. “Until then, you’ll have to remain outside. Our first stop will be Le Tort Creek.” For a fleeting second, Alice rejoiced. They were going wading!

In an instant, Miss Crawford dashed her hopes. She handed each child a chunk of moldy bread. “This is to feed the ducks we have here at Carlisle.”

They hiked to the water, the girls pointing out to each other whatever they noticed in their new surroundings. Miss Crawford stopped them on the sunny creek bank as she stepped into the shade of the only tree. “Quiet, everyone!” she called and clapped her hands. “At Carlisle Indian Industrial School, English is the only language. Any student speaking their mother tongue will be punished. Do you understand?” She clapped her hands. “Do. You. Understand?”

chided: scolded or expressed disapproval

The sharpness of her voice caught the new students off guard. They looked up in surprise.

“Repeat after me. Say, *Yes, ma’am.*” Miss Crawford clapped again and waited for them to repeat it.

“Yes, ma’am,” shouted the English speakers. Issi looked up at Alice for translation, but Alice shook her head. Issi did not understand.

On the way to the creek, the hungriest of children—Issi included—had pinched off bite after bite of their bread. When the group reached the water’s edge, the hungry ducks were quacking and waddling on land. But Issi’s bread was already gone. Unable to understand the English instructions, she had eaten the chunk, mold and all.

Miss Crawford pulled a wooden ruler from her skirt pocket. Then she inspected each girl’s outstretched hand for the chunk of bread. Those without bread were punished. Before Miss Crawford got to them, Alice palmed her own chunk into Issi’s hand. When Alice held out her empty palm, the teacher slapped it hard with the ruler.

The woman rounded on the whole group. “The bread was not meant for children. It is for the ducks. Don’t be so foolish next time, girls!” At her raised voice, the ducks scattered to safety on the water.

Alice's palm stung, and she fumed at the unfairness. The hateful woman had intended for this to happen.

Not long after their tour, Alice and Issi watched in awe as students, boys and girls in uniforms, finally emerged from the buildings and marched like soldiers across the lawn. At this school, there was order everywhere. Students wore identical clothing and walked in straight lines among identical buildings. How different Carlisle School was from her life back home, where she ran barefoot and free, where differences weren't just tolerated but celebrated.

"Pay attention, girls. As you can see, at Carlisle, we expect conformity, comportment, and self-discipline," Miss Crawford explained. "Those students are headed to the dining hall for lunch." She pointed to one of the many big white buildings. "When you're cleaned up, you'll eat supper there, but lunch today is on the bandstand."

Alice had no idea where the bandstand was, or even *what* a bandstand was, but she didn't care. She couldn't focus on anything except her own stomach. Poor Issi was in worse shape, drooping and stumbling with hunger.

fumed: felt or expressed great anger

conformity: the state of acting and appearing the same as others or obeying rules for behavior and appearance

comportment: behavior, usually referring to proper or expected behavior

bandstand: a raised outdoor platform where bands perform

The bandstand, they learned, was in fact the lovely circular structure in the middle of the school grounds. It wasn't long before baskets of food and pails of milk were delivered by some older male students. The food was plentiful. Large metal cups—enough for every girl to have her own—were filled with milk. They learned the cups were made by male students in the school's tin shop. Alice and Issi each wolfed down a boiled egg sandwich.

“Egg salad sandwiches,” said Miss Crawford. “And I don't know why they brought out so much food. But you can have seconds, if you want.” Issi and Alice split a second sandwich.

After eating, some of the girls collapsed on the cool wooden floor of the bandstand or on the steps, as exhaustion and full stomachs made it hard to stay awake. Issi slept with her head in Alice's lap, while Alice rested her own head against the railing. She watched Miss Crawford disappear into the dining hall.

While the girls rested, the boys from the train depot arrived at Carlisle School, having been transported on the same trolley. They, too, had been rounded up and shepherded about by a teacher. Alice spotted them as the girls were now led from the bandstand to a classroom building, where all new students would be photographed in their clothing from home. While Alice and Issi both

wore patched and frayed homespun dresses, other students wore their finest Native regalia. As they waited in line for their turn with the photographer, they studied the faded images posted on the hallway bulletin board.

A girl stood beside the line, watching them file in. “Move forward in line, please.” She leaned toward Alice as she passed and whispered in a friendlier tone, “Hi, I’m Mary Miller. What’s your name?”

“I’m Alice Folsom, and this is my sister, Issi.” She added in a whisper, “We’re Choctaw.”

“I’m Eastern Band of Cherokee,” whispered the pretty girl, who looked a couple years older than Alice. Then, in a normal voice, Mary said, “I’m serving as the line monitor for new students.”

“How long have you been here?” Alice asked.

“I came to Carlisle two years ago.” Pointing to the bulletin board images, Mary lowered her voice. “That one in the top left is me. I hate those old pictures. Look how they show off the most dramatic changes in appearances.”

Admittedly, the before and after photographs were nothing short of amazing. One group of three Sioux boys

homespun: loosely woven fabric made at home or made of yarn spun at home

regalia: traditional, official, or otherwise special clothing

line monitor: someone who makes sure students behave properly and know where to go while walking or waiting in line

had arrived at Carlisle wearing fur and suede garments and moccasins. Their hair was braided with black-and-white eagle feathers. Beads, buttons, fringe, and other symbolic ornaments adorned their clothing. In the after photograph, the same boys, six months older, wore matching military academy clothing and leather boots. Like every other young man at the Indian school, their hair was cut short.

Mary rattled on, clearly happy to share what she knew. “General Pratt, the superintendent who just resigned, used these photographs to get funding.”

“Why?”

“I heard that important folks think the country has an ‘Indian problem.’ They say the only way to get rid of the problem is to get rid of Indian culture.” She tapped Issi on her head. “It’s easiest for young children to forget their language, traditions, food, and family if they are removed from their homes.” Mary shrugged. “So here we are.”

“But we were taken against our will!” Alice’s voice quivered. She wasn’t ready to accept the removal, even if Mary did. Several children looked her way. She lowered her voice, adding, “Well, it’s true. We didn’t want to come here.”

“Shhh. Don’t speak like that. You’ll get in trouble. Besides, someone from your family had to give permission for you to come here, unless you’re orphans.”

“No!” said Alice a little too quickly. “We live with our grandmother.”

“Well, she had to sign a consent form,” insisted Mary.

Alice pondered Mary’s statement. She now remembered paperwork sitting on Pokni’s table, but she had not paid attention to it. Had her grandmother intended to send her away? Why? What secret was Pokni keeping?

consent form: a legal document someone signs to show that they agree (or that somebody they are legally responsible for is allowed) to participate in something

5

Rules, Rules, and More Rules

The photography session was over in an hour. In the afternoon, Miss Crawford escorted the group of girls down the hall to another classroom, where they met with the school records clerk, Miss Mackey. The new boys were already there.

Miss Mackey was a big-boned woman who towered over the children, even the older boys. Her upswept frizzy hair, knotted in a pompadour, added even more height. Her black dress reached high on her neck and skimmed the floor. So glum was her expression that Alice wondered if she might be in mourning. But her opinion changed when the woman opened her mouth.

Addressing the line of new students in a voice as loud as a sounding horn, Miss Mackey shouted, “From this day forward, you will be stripped of your native language and culture. English is the only language allowed at Carlisle.”

pompadour: a hairstyle in which hair is combed into a rounded shape high above the forehead

mourning: a period of time in which a person publicly shows sadness over somebody who died

sounding horn: a loud horn used to communicate with somebody far away

She paused dramatically to let her words sink in, but the children had heard it before. It was the woman's next statement that was more alarming.

"If you have an Indian name, you will need to select a new one from the chalkboard."

Behind Miss Mackey, dozens of names in white chalk covered the blackboard—names like Della, Eva, Florence, Ida, Lena, and Martha.

Alice knew she could keep her English-sounding name, but her new sister's name did not sound English at all. In fact, *issi* was the Choctaw word for deer. The lady would force her to change it. The poor child had lost her parents and her home, and now she was seconds away from losing her real name.

As the last boy in line stood in front of Alice, he told the woman his name was Red Eagle. Alice guessed him to be only eight or nine. "I can't read," he admitted.

"Step to the blackboard and pick a new name from the boy column," she ordered. "Be quick. We don't have all day."

"But I can't read the names," he insisted. "And I don't want to change it because my father named me."

“Pick a name, or I will pick one for you.”

His lip quivered, and he shook his head.

“Hurry!” she barked.

Reluctantly, Red Eagle pointed to a cursive word.
“What did I choose?”

“Thomas.” She waved her hand at him. “Now, move along. Next!”

Miss Mackey motioned for Issi to step forward. Issi stiffened. Alice gave the child a gentle nudge.

“What is your name, child?”

When Issi did not answer, the woman looked heavenward and blew out a noisy sigh. She muttered, “Another one.” To Issi, the lady spoke sharply. “Who. Are. You?”

“Issi,” whispered the child.

“That will not do,” said Miss Mackey. She picked up a pencil and began to write on an enrollment card. “From now on, your name will be Helen.”

“Wait!” Alice bit her lip, knowing she had spoken without permission. Although the woman’s deepening scowl intimidated her, Alice let the lies roll off her tongue.

“My sister’s name is Missy, but she can’t say her *M*’s very well. She’s Missy Folsom, age six.” Alice had learned Issi’s true age on the long train ride. “And I’m Alice Folsom, age eleven.” Because she knew the question was coming and she didn’t know Issi’s date of birth, she added, “We even have the same birthdate, May 15.” She beamed up at the old grouch.

After asking a few more questions, Miss Mackey completed their enrollment cards and slapped them face down in the completed pile. “Next!”

And just like that, Alice and Issi became sisters.

They followed the line of girls moving to the front steps of the building. Once outside, Alice squatted until she was eye to eye with Issi. She pointed at her sister and whispered in their Choctaw language, “Missy-Issi. Missy-Issi. Missy. We will call you *M*-issi. Missy.”

Issi smiled at her and repeated, “Missy.”

Tears clouded Alice’s vision. The image of Pokni’s smiling face blurred with Issi’s smiling face. Before the image evaporated, she hugged the child.

Alice and Missy-Issi stood in line to get new lace-up leather boots. Tables and shelves of shoes in every size

grouch: someone who is usually grumpy or irritable

occupied space in the shoe shop. Never had Alice seen a place where shoes were made. She learned the shop served as a classroom for learning a trade.

Several boys sat or stood at workbenches with tools for making boots. One of them said something in a low voice about a very pretty older girl at the front of the line, and the boys around him chuckled. The girl quickly looked away and pretended not to notice. The teacher heard, though. Yanking on the teenage boy's ear, he pulled him from the treadle sewing machine station and marched him out the back door. A moment later, they heard a yelp of pain, and then the student followed the teacher back into the classroom with his head bowed.

When it was Alice's turn to be fitted for a pair of boots, she flattened her feet and spread her toes, hoping for a slightly larger size—one that would fit her grandmother's slightly longer feet. When she returned home the following summer, she would give them to Pokni as a gift.

The line of new students silently made their way across the lawn to a high-roofed gymnasium. Each girl was issued a dark dress with a high collar, long sleeves, and a white cotton apron called a pinafore, which had ribbon ties knotted at each shoulder. Missy-Issi glowed

treadle sewing machine: a machine used for sewing that is powered by a treadle, or foot pedal, instead of electricity

over the new clothing. Having outgrown her own dress, Alice was also eager to get new clothing. She didn't recall ever having something new to wear. Of the few hand-me-downs she had received, some were better than others, but all were pre-worn.

The girls carried their uniforms to a corner of the gymnasium. A row of fabric-covered screens provided a private changing room.

"Once you're dressed, bundle your old clothes and shoes and carry them to the tables out front," said the dressing room monitor. Alice took Issi's hand and exited the curtained area. Older students staffed the tables.

Captain Mercer, the new superintendent, spoke into a megaphone near the entrance to the gym. "This school will teach you to behave as model Carlisle students," he boomed.

At the tables, the student helpers sorted through the meager belongings of incoming children as Captain Mercer continued his public address. "You are Carlisle students now. You must leave behind your heathen ways and Indian notions. They will not be tolerated at this school."

megaphone: a cone-shaped device used to make a person's voice louder and aim it in a specific direction

heathen: not following a certain religion

A staff member directed Alice and Missy-Issi to a table with no line. There, a plain-faced teenage girl gave Alice and her younger sister an apologetic half-smile and said, "Put your old clothing in that bin."

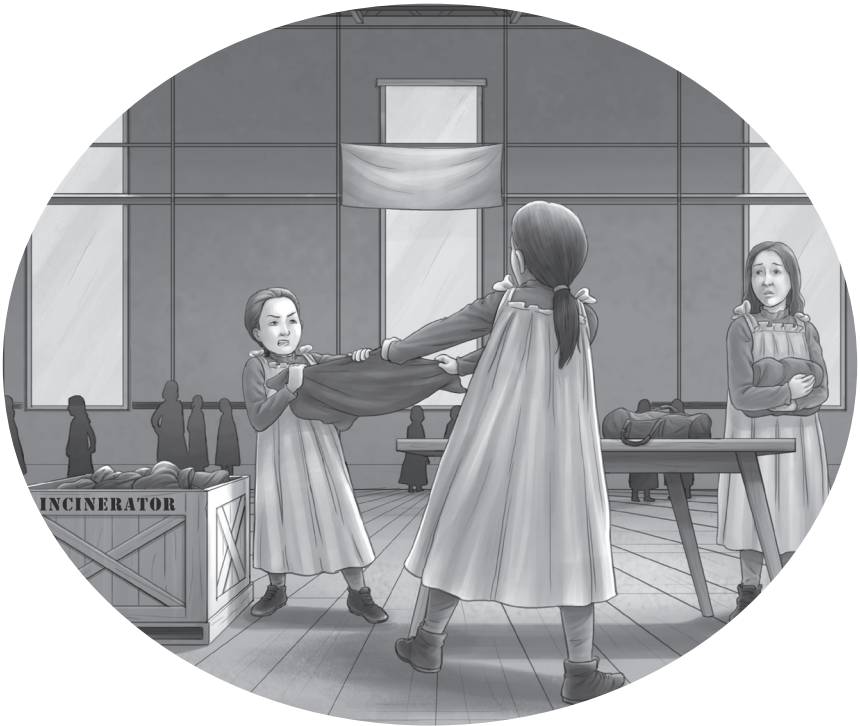
The teen indicated a wooden crate on the polished gym floor. Stenciled on it in capital letters was the word *INCINERATOR*. As Alice and Issi approached it, they saw heaps of clothing, woolen wraps and blankets, calico print dresses, and deerskin suede. Alice looked wistfully at a like-new pair of moccasins in the crate that would certainly have fit Pokni. She imagined the supple suede and toe-spreading comfort of a new pair of moccasins.

The teenager interrupted her thoughts. "Any other personal items, bring to me and set them on my table."

Alice held out her empty hands. "I have nothing." When the teenager motioned for Issi to open her duffel, Alice said, "My sister has only her bonnet, a torn baby blanket, and a doll made by Pokni."

"She can't keep any of those items. Keepsakes and reminders of home cause discipline problems at school. Students must cut ties with their previous life." The teenage inspector lifted the items out, one by one. Without a backward glance, she tossed Issi's bonnet in the trash barrel behind the table. A tug-of-war ensued

over the blanket, with Issi's strength surprising the older girl. "You'd better get a handle on your little sister!" warned the teen, glancing around nervously at the other inspectors. But Issi was no match for the older girl. With a hard yank, the blanket came away in the teen's hand. Issi stared in horror as a few frayed yarns sifted through her fingers.



By then, Issi knew what was coming. She lunged for her duffel, and the doll it contained, just as the teen grabbed it away from her. Alice pinned Issi's arms to her side while Issi shrieked in fury.

“Get her out of here, now,” hissed the teen. “Or you’ll end up separated.”

“What’s going on?” shouted the superintendent as he wove through the lines of children, tables, and trash barrels.

Issi threw herself on the polished wood floor and screamed and kicked. Alice dragged Issi across the floor toward a side door, putting distance between them and Captain Mercer. Despite his fleshy body, he was gaining on them. Frantically, Alice resorted to the forbidden Choctaw language. “Miti! Miti!”

But Issi wailed for her doll. “Ulla holba! Ulla holba!” The little girl writhed on the floor, kicking out at Alice.

6

Two Lies and a Half-Truth

“I’ll get her calmed down, Captain, sir,” rang out a male voice. When Alice saw the voice’s owner, she recognized the teenager who had rescued Issi from the train. He sprinted through the maze of tables, hurdling those in his direct path. His feet barely touched the floor before they cleared the next table, then the next, like he had wings on his shoes.

Mercifully, another issue demanded Captain Mercer’s attention. He signaled for the teenager to handle Issi’s outburst. Reaching the sisters, the runner lifted Issi. The child melted into him. Relieved, Alice wanted to burst into tears.

The three of them hurried out of the gym, with Alice looking over her shoulder. But no one followed as they crossed the lawn to the bandstand. Alice was the first to collapse. She glanced anxiously toward the gymnasium. Would the superintendent send someone to discipline Issi? She wanted to keep Issi—her new sister—safe.

The boy kneeled and lowered Issi beside Alice. He ran his fingers through his thick hair, but he wasn't even winded. Like calming a horse, he spoke gently to Issi. "I should learn your name, since we keep crossing paths."

Out of breath, Alice panted, "Her . . . name . . . is . . . Missy." After another deep inhale, Alice added, "She doesn't speak English."

"Missy-Issi," corrected the child. The six-year-old's understanding surprised Alice.

The boy smiled and gave Alice a knowing look. "Maybe she knows a little?" He returned his attention to Issi. "Well, Missy-Issi. I'm James, but my friends call me Jim. It seems something slipped from your grasp." From inside his buttoned-up uniform jacket, he extracted something topped in black yarn. Black yarn braids. Then two embroidered eyes.

This time, Issi's shriek was one of pure delight.

Instead of returning to the gymnasium, James pointed to the girls' quarters. "That's where you need to report now. I've got track practice starting today, and I'm late. Keep that doll under your apron until you find it a permanent hiding place."

He patted Issi's head, took two steps, and vaulted over the bandstand railing, running like the wind.



Around dusk, Alice told more lies. Under the shade trees by the girls' quarters, the female students lined up like rows of soldiers awaiting orders. Several female staff members perched on the railing around each level of the three-story brick building. They watched with the bored look of prison guards as the head matron recited the students' schedule for the next day.

She clapped three times to gain their attention. "For those of you who are new, morning inspections are at seven a.m. When you make your bed, pull the bedding so tightly, a penny will bounce on the flat surface. When your section passes inspection, your group will proceed to breakfast."

Issi fidgeted and patted the puffy spot under her pinafore where the rag doll was pinned. Alice stilled the child's hand and gave her a look of warning.

Alice's thoughts drifted to her beloved teacher back home. Miss Shaw's subscription school was held in the tack room of a barn. It was nothing compared to Carlisle, but Miss Shaw welcomed and loved her students. At Carlisle, it seemed there were harsh punishments for just about everything.

matron: a woman who supervises other women, children, or the domestic areas of an organization

tack room: a room used to store equipment for riding horses, such as saddles and bridles

After describing the English classes that began the next day, the matron conducted evening roll call. “Katie Adams.” The matron waited until Katie answered “Here,” then asked, “Did you speak your native language today? Respond with Indian or No Indian.”

“No Indian,” said Katie. And the matron moved down the line until Alice was next.

“Alice Folsom,” said the matron.

“Here.”

“Did you speak your native language today?”

After a slight hesitation, Alice replied, “No.” Her lying eyes shifted, a sure giveaway, but the matron didn’t notice. However, Alice caught the eye of an older student. The plain-faced, rotund girl stood near the end of their line. She winked at Alice’s deception. The girl had been directly in front of Alice when Issi’s doll was confiscated. Had she heard Alice use a non-English word when wrangling Issi in the gymnasium? There wasn’t time to dwell on it, because Issi was next.

“Missy Folsom.” The matron looked expectantly at the younger Folsom sister.

confiscated: taken away by somebody in authority

Alice nudged Issi, who remained silent. The matron stared at them.

Louder, the woman repeated, “Missy Folsom.”

“Here,” squeaked Alice, faking a little girl’s voice. Either it didn’t reach the matron’s ears, or the woman knew it was a ploy.

The matron tapped the toe of her shoe. “Missy Folsom,” she repeated a third time.

“Heh,” Issi called out.

A wave of relief washed over Alice. Issi understood! She’d been paying attention. Alice side-squeezed her smart little sister. But there was one more question in roll call.

“Did you speak your native language today?”

This time, Issi stared at her new boots. She remained silent for several seconds. Panic seized Alice’s heart.

The matron rolled her eyes and asked Alice in an accusing tone, “Does your sister even speak English?”

Alice shook her head.

“Don’t be disrespectful, Miss Folsom. Say *No ma’am*.”

“No ma’am.”

“You’d best get busy teaching her the rules.”

And with that, the matron continued down the list. Roll call continued smoothly. The girls whose names appeared on the list were present. None had run away yet, it seemed, but Alice had overheard two older girls whispering about it at supper.

“Lucy Spaulding.”

“Here,” answered the plain-faced girl who had winked at Alice.

Alice intended to find Lucy Who Winks after roll call and introduce herself. She hoped they could become friends.

“Did you speak your native language today?”

“No.”

This time, Alice winked at Lucy.

“Mabel Stack,” called out the matron.

“Heh.” The girl cleared her throat and coughed before she tried again. “Here,” came her weak response.

Alice swiveled to stare at Mabel. Perspiration beaded on the girl’s flushed face.

Standing next to Mabel, Lucy noticed it, too. Her expression grew alarmed, and she eased away from the sick student.

“Did you speak your native language today?” The matron seemed oblivious to Mabel’s health struggle and the discomfort of nearby students.

“No,” Mabel croaked, before a wracking cough overtook her.

Alice watched the girl sway, unable to steady herself. Then Mabel fainted. Girls screamed as she crumpled to the ground.

7

More Worries

At breakfast the next morning, word spread through the dining hall like wildfire. Eleven-year-old Mabel Stack from Alaska had died in the infirmary in the wee hours of the morning.

“It was tuberculosis,” whispered Lucy. “Contagious.”

The chatty Cherokee girl, Mary Miller, drew a crowd as she shared the details. “The staff made a huge mistake waiting so long to release her,” she said with a dramatic flair. “Last week, they were supposed to send Mabel to the hospital in Philly for special treatment and *decent* food.” To emphasize the contrast, Mary pointed toward the plates of food in the dining room, then gave a thumbs-down. “Anyway, the paperwork got messed up, so they kept her at the school hospital until they supposedly got her travel sorted out. They sent Mabel to get her belongings, but at the evening roll call, she was *still* waiting to leave. The staff had missed the departure time, and no one caught the mistake.”

tuberculosis: a bacterial infection of the lungs that causes fever and difficulty breathing

More chatter followed, until the dining matron stood, arms crossed, behind Mary. They ate the remainder of the meal in silence.

Mabel Stack was buried that day in the Carlisle Indian School Cemetery. The first long row was already filled with student graves, and the second was nearly full. Mabel was buried in a spot near the end of the second row.

Classes began. Issi was sent to beginners' English class, while Lucy Spaulding and Alice were sent to a more advanced class. Alice was amazed at the classroom: entire sets of books, blackboards lining the walls, and paper and pencils. Best of all, each student got their own desk.

After class, the teacher asked for a volunteer to clean the chalk erasers. Alice and Lucy volunteered. They stood in the shade of the classroom building, hitting erasers together as chalk dust blew away in the wind. Lucy talked of her faraway home in Alaska Territory. Alice shared stories of Pokni and their cabin in Indian Territory. Safely away from the eyes and ears of Carlisle staff, the girls compared words in their own native languages. They became fast friends.

After a few days of moving sleeping spaces, the new girls were given permanent rooms on the second floor

of the girls' quarters. Four girls were assigned to each room, with one preexisting Carlisle student in each foursome. Alice was thrilled with her three roommates: Mary Miller, Lucy Spaulding, and Issi (she had once again insisted that she not be separated from her little sister who didn't yet speak English). The room was larger than the entire cabin she shared with her grandmother. Judging by Issi's expression, it was nicer than her home, too. The shiny wood floor was polished and slippery like a frozen pond. They slid in stockinged feet, laughing until they collapsed breathlessly on the beds. Alice and Issi chose beds by the door. Their new roommates, Mary Miller and Lucy Spaulding, took the beds nearest to the window.

A happy Issi crawled into bed, and Alice pulled a woolen blanket from her things and draped it over Issi. Issi let out her familiar shriek of glee. Stitched to the underside was the *vlla holba*, embroidered face smiling and black braids hanging freely. Alice had removed its stuffing and sewn the flat doll to the underside of an extra blanket she'd managed to get her hands on. Alice knew that when Issi climbed into bed each night, her rag doll would comfort her.

It rained steadily through that first night in their new room. The girls fell asleep listening to the soft patter of rain falling. It was still raining the next morning.

The head matron's morning roll call was held in the spacious common area of the girls' quarters. The girls waited a few extra minutes for the rain to let up before they ran to the dining hall for breakfast. They were laughing and patting down their damp hair as they entered the large room filled with tables and benches.

A commotion at the far end of the hall caught their attention. A teenage boy, about fifteen, was telling a story to his laughing tablemates. As he flailed his arms, he knocked over a pitcher of milk, shattering the glass and sending milk everywhere. After a collective gasp from across the dining hall, all fell silent. The only sound was milk dripping off the table.



A large male teacher yanked a wooden paddle as long as Issi's arm from a hook on the wall. It had holes drilled along the length of it. Everyone understood what the teacher intended to do with the paddle. He marched to the table and roughly escorted the worried boy out of the dining hall.

As the door slammed shut, the entire dining hall seemed to exhale. An eerie quiet floated in the air. But then, a single cup of milk clattered to the floor. Another one followed. One by one, every boy in the dining hall pushed their tin cups to the floor in an act of protest.

The girls, who had yet to be seated, stood silently as the boys were forced to clean up their mess. None of them were allowed to finish their breakfast.

It was a somber meal when the girls were finally seated. They were given a bowl and spoon, but no cups. It seemed they, too, were being punished, but none of the girls cared.

“We’re not crying over spilt milk,” said Mary defiantly.

This comment, so like something Pokni would say, made Alice smile. But she was caught off guard when the dining matron walked up behind her and said flatly,

somber: serious and sad

“Alice Folsom, you are to report to Captain Mercer’s office immediately following breakfast.” The woman handed Alice a slip of paper to give to the superintendent.

Had someone discovered Issi’s rag doll? At breakfast, every spoonful of oatmeal with stewed prunes churned in Alice’s stomach. She tried to imagine breakfast as grape dumplings made by Pokni. But it was no use. Prunes were awful.

She forced her mind in another direction. “Look for the positive” was Pokni’s favorite phrase. Had Pokni decided it was a mistake to send Alice away? Perhaps a return train ticket waited for her at the superintendent’s office!

But what about Issi? Pokni did not know of Alice’s new little sister. How would she leave Issi? She wouldn’t. She couldn’t. Captain Mercer would ask, *Why would your grandmother only send one train ticket for you and not one for your sister?* Alice would have to lie again. It was a heavy burden, this responsibility for another person. She stared into her breakfast bowl and thought she might be sick.

She returned to the girl’s dormitory with the rest of her group. While she waited for the rain to taper off a little, she dug through the closet in the common area.

dormitory: a building where lots of people sleep, usually in shared rooms

She found a rubber-coated cape, although the rubber was cracked in several places due to age. Then she headed out toward Captain Mercer's office.

After just a few seconds out in the rain, the ink on the slip of paper that was the summons became illegible. Most of it transferred to Alice's fingertips. She thought of the purple stains from picking baskets of ripe blackberries. The sweetest and juiciest berries sometimes fell apart when she plucked them from thorny thickets. Those required eating without delay. Would she be home next week to eat Pokni's blackberry jam?

Alice stopped in front of the administration building. She shivered as much from nervousness as from the rain. It was a pretty building with a wraparound porch and second-story balcony. Rain dripped on her head as she walked up the steps to the main entrance, but she hardly noticed. Mentally, she rehearsed what she would say to Issi. *I'm so sorry, little sister, but I must return home. Pokni needs me. I'll study at my school back home, and you must learn all there is to know at this big boarding school. You'll end up smarter than me. In a couple of years, I'll be old enough to teach little children. Then I'll earn money and buy you a train ticket, too. You will live with Pokni and me. You can be my teaching assistant.*

illegible: impossible to read

thickets: dense patches of shrubs or other plants

They would both be brokenhearted, but Missy-Issi was a Folsom now. They would always be sisters, even if they were separated for a while.

“Come In,” read the sign on the glass-fronted door. A little bell tinkled as Alice pushed on the doorknob and entered the reception area. Fresh flowers, like the ones she saw on the campus tour, filled a cut crystal vase.

“Please hang your cape on the coat tree,” a voice called from a side doorway.

Behind the door, two umbrellas dangled from a coat tree. Alice slipped off the cape and tried to hang it without letting droplets of rain dampen her uniform. An attractive lady in a shirtwaist dress with puffy sleeves emerged from the office. Alice held out the limp note with smeared ink.

“My note said to report to Captain Mercer, but it got wet.”

The lady accepted the note, walked to a large oak desk, and opened a leather binder. “Alice Folsom?”

“Yes, ma’am.” Alice clasped and unclasped her fingers.

The lady’s expression was unreadable. Alice had the sinking feeling she’d been caught in a lie. Had they found out Issi’s last name wasn’t Folsom and they weren’t

truly sisters? The matron would move Issi to a different room with girls her own age. Alice didn't think Issi could bear the separation. Or perhaps it was Alice who couldn't bear it. Even though they reported to different classrooms during the day, at least they shared a bedroom every evening.

"You may go in and see Superintendent Mercer." The lady gently touched Alice's arm.

Alice wanted to run away. Even though she'd just rehearsed in her head what she would say to Issi, the fear of leaving her behind was unthinkable. Holding her breath, she stepped over the threshold and entered the big office. Her steps were in sync with the ticking of a grandfather clock across the room. The raised window blinds shone watery sunlight on Captain Mercer's tidy workspace. An Edison bulb hung over rectangular woven baskets filled with tidy stacks of paper. A single letter lay face up on his desk.

"Please sit down, Miss Folsom." Captain Mercer motioned toward the chair in front of his desk. "You are not in trouble." As Alice slowly sat, he pressed his lips together and pinched the bridge of his nose. "I have news from Indian Territory."

Edison bulb: a light bulb with a long filament, or wire, that produces warm yellow light

8

Letter from Home

Captain Mercer sighed. "I received a letter from the Indian agent for the Choctaw Nation. I regret to inform you that your grandmother has passed." He slid the letter across the polished wooden surface of his desk.

No! This can't be happening! Alice fixed her gaze on a framed photograph of President Theodore Roosevelt on a side table. She refused to set eyes on the letter. Without the horrid letter, Pokni would still be alive. It was a mean trick by the Indian agent. He'd forced her away from her grandmother, and now he was lying. *Pokni can't be gone, her brain screamed. She can't be!*

The superintendent slid the letter closer to her. "You can read English, correct?"

She nodded as rainwater, or a tear, dripped on her pinafore. With shaking hands, Alice picked up the letter that presented two distinct messages. The first was in spidery handwriting and signed by a Presbyterian missionary from back home. Once a month, he visited



their backwoods cabin to call on her and Pokni. He sometimes bartered pork for Pokni's apple cider or fresh produce. His handwriting was difficult to read.

Miss Alice Folsom,

It is with a heavy heart that I write to you about your grandmother, God rest her soul. She died September 3 of what we suspect was tuberculosis. She was buried in the churchyard the next day. A neighbor (Mrs. Williams) checked on her the day you departed for school.

bartered: traded

Your Pokni told her how proud she was of you and asked for your forgiveness for sending you away. She only wanted you safe and with purpose in your life. Mrs. Wms relayed that you've always been a brave girl. She also told me she was at your grandmother's bedside until the end. Mrs. Wms has stored your grandmother's personal effects in a trunk until you return for them.

Chi pisa la chike,

Alfred McCurtain, Presby. Mission

The lower section of the letter was typed and businesslike. Pokni's death is not business, she thought angrily.

Dear Captain Mercer,

I have the honor to report the death of Inez Folsom, Alice Folsom's grandmother. Alice is a student at Carlisle Indian School. Please ensure this letter from home reaches the student.

Very respectfully,

J. Blair Shoenfelt, U.S. Indian
Agent, Indian Territory

Alice looked up at the superintendent with watery eyes. "Am I to go home now?" There was no emotion in her voice.

He shook his head.

One letter had changed her life's course. Her old way of life had disappeared. Though she tried to control her emotions, they threatened to overcome her. Alice pulled up her pinafore and wept into the starched cotton. Wept for herself. Wept that she would never again feel the loving touch of Pokni's gnarled hands. Wept that her beloved home—the only one she'd ever known—was no more than four empty walls and a cold hearth. And maybe, she wept a little in relief that she would not have to abandon Issi.

"Ahem. Miss Folsom?"

He'd asked something, but she hadn't heard the question.

"Your sister, Missy? Do you want to tell her, or would you prefer that I break the news?"

Alice shook her head before he finished the question. "No sir. I'll break the news to her."

"Alright then. You may return to your first class.

It will do you good to focus on lessons instead of sorrow.”

Stemming the flow of tears, Alice donned the cape and hiked across the wet grass. *I'm an orphan now, too. There is no one for me.* An image of a smiling six-year-old invaded her thoughts. As her feet pressed down on the wet grass, she became lost in a cold silence. *An orphan. An orphan,* her mind repeated.

Deep in thought, and enveloped by the cold silence, Alice suddenly heard a soft whisper. “Alice, Issi is your sister,” came Pokni’s familiar voice. Alice, startled, spun around to see who had spoken. There were male students jogging single file across the lawn, but they were far away. The voice had been directly beside her. She hadn’t imagined it. She’d clearly heard Pokni.

Alice slowed as she came upon the classroom building housing her morning lesson. The steps loomed, awaiting her entrance. “I can’t go back to class,” she whispered. “Not now, anyway.” She skirted around the building, heading for the sanctuary of her shared dormitory room. Removing her damp shoes, she climbed into Issi’s bed and pulled the blanket over her, clutching her adopted sister’s rag doll in her cold hands. She silently vowed to her grandmother that she would care for her new sister

sanctuary: a place that is safe or protected

in a way Alice was not able to care for Pokni. Exhausted and overwhelmed, Alice cried herself to sleep.

A few hours later, she was shaken awake. Groggy and disoriented, she opened her eyes. A scowling matron with arms akimbo loomed over Alice.

9

Defiance

“Do you think we allow students to lounge in bed during daytime hours?” demanded the matron. “We have a school to run.” She reached down to uncover Alice, who quickly wriggled out and sat atop the blanket, pinning Issi’s doll beneath her. Behind the matron stood a scared Issi, probably worried about the same thing. Behind Issi hovered Mary and Lucy, their hands clasped.

“My . . . I wasn’t feeling well. I guess I fell asleep.”

“Students who break rules are punished,” the matron said, pointing a finger at her.

Alice stared at to the woman’s hands, noting with relief that they were empty of a ruler or paddle. “I’m sorry, ma’am.” Alice bowed her head. “It won’t happen again.”

The matron turned on her heels and nearly knocked Issi off her feet. “Move, child!” she barked. Issi squeaked and jumped from the woman’s path. “You,” she swept her finger toward Alice’s roommates, “come with me. You’re late for supper.”

When Alice rose from the bed, the woman halted her with a stern expression. "No. You will go without supper tonight. Hunger is a reminder not to skip class." With a rustle of her long skirts, she bustled Issi, Mary, and Lucy out of their room.

Alice sank onto the bed and cradled her head in her hands. *Oh, Pokni. How I miss you.*

By the time Alice's roommates returned from supper and evening roll call, Alice had remade Issi's bed and crawled into her own. The roommates sat on their beds, reading or relaxing. Mary, whose bed was under the window, suddenly dropped the library book she was reading. She sat up with a start. "Listen," she hissed.

Alice looked up with concern. "What is it, Mary?"

Issi scrambled onto Alice's bed and crouched behind her. Movement in the room ceased as the four waited for the unexpected.

"Something hit the window," Mary whispered.

"A bat?" offered Lucy.

"A branch?" asked Alice.

Plink. Plink.

Mary knelt on her bed beside the window.

“Don’t open the blinds, Mary,” hissed Lucy, sitting up. “Do you want a bat tangled in your hair? It happens, you know.” Lucy pulled her blanket up to protect her own hair.

Plink! Something larger hit the window.

“There must be someone out there on a ladder,” said Mary. She pulled the cord and lifted the blinds a couple of inches.

“No, Mary! It’s probably a whole cloud of bats!” shrieked Lucy. She dropped face down on the bed, protecting herself with covers.

With her hand on the cord, Mary looked at Alice for approval. “Should I?”

“Yes, open the blinds,” said Alice, not in the mood for drama. “Whatever it is, we have a windowpane to keep it out.” Even so, Alice clasped Issi’s hand.

Plink. Plink. Plunk!

With a hard yank on the cord, Mary drew up the blinds. Together, they would face whatever waited for them in the darkness of night.

10

Reflection

The light from the dormitory room illuminated the leafy elm tree, its heavy branches reaching a few feet beyond the window. Perched astride the nearest branch was James Thorpe. Or Jim, Alice remembered, as his friends called him. Grinning, he dropped the pebbles from one hand and jiggled a long stick in the other. A bundled dish towel hung from the end of the stick.

Mary quickly lifted the window. Her voice filled with surprise. "What are you doing? You're gonna get in big trouble."

He shook his head. "No, I won't, because Cook likes me," he countered in a stage whisper. "Around here, athletes get more to eat," he added with a wry smile.

Lucy threw back the covers and sat up. Her hair was a mess. She spent several seconds finger-combing and then re-braiding her dark hair. Alice noticed she also pinched some color into her cheeks when she thought no one was looking.

“Ji-me!” called Issi, a smile spreading across her face. She sprang from Alice’s bed and climbed onto Mary’s. Lucy followed suit once she was presentable. With three girls on Mary’s bed, the woven wire bedstead creaked under their combined weight.

“Hey, Missy-Issi.” Jim grinned and waggled the bundle. “This is for Alice. She should eat.” He spoke slowly and gave a hand signal for eating.

Issi reached her arms through the window as Jim lowered the bundle into her waiting hands. Mary and Lucy helped her untie the cloth and open it on the bed. Inside were cold slices of ham wrapped in butcher paper, several yeasty rolls, and slices of cheese. Cinnamon sugar cookies topped off the bounty. The girls would feast before lights out.

“Yakoke!” exclaimed Issi.

“Yakoke, thank you!” echoed Alice. Hurrying to the foot of Mary’s bed, she leaned toward the window so she could see Jim. “I’m starving.”

“Sorry about your grandma,” he said. When he saw the confused look on Alice’s face, he added, “Us guys on the way to the track saw you walking from the administration building. I asked Coach about it. He asked around and said you’d gotten a letter from home about her passing.”



Tears welled in her eyes, so Alice only nodded her appreciation. She was too choked up to respond.

“Well, I’d better git goin’,” Jim said quickly. He dropped the stick to the ground and, like a monkey, free-fell into a hanging position before releasing his grip. He dropped several feet, crouched and rolled on the grass, then dashed into the darkness.

Alice looked at her grinning roommates. “Amazing,” she said, referring to Jim’s kindness, the food, and his athleticism.

“He’s strong and handsome, don’t you think?” Lucy mused in a dreamy voice as she returned to her bed and plopped back on her pillow.

Mary nodded in agreement. “I bet my younger sister, Iva, would have a major crush on him. She loves athletes.”

The girls all giggled at this as they enjoyed rolls stuffed with slices of ham. They laughed and chatted until they drifted off to sleep, bellies full.

After the lights were out and soft snores came from her roommates, Alice lay awake thinking of Pokni, of the words she had heard in her head earlier that day. Pokni had spoken to her, she was sure of it. Despite the heavy heart she felt with Pokni’s passing, Alice felt a glimmer

of hope in her evolving future. It was nothing like the one she'd planned. For as long as she could remember, her world had revolved around scrabbling for bare necessities. Education had been Pokni's dream for her granddaughter. Yet Alice received a simple education at the local subscription school. The books were old and worn, and she mainly learned the three R's—reading, 'riting, and 'rithmetic. Alice's world in Indian Territory had been small. On the classroom globe, Indian Territory was no bigger than a kernel of tanchi. But if she learned all there was to know, she could take her knowledge home and scatter it across her reservation.

Thinking of the Choctaw Nation made her homesick. Since arriving at Carlisle, she'd heard one staff member after another criticize their "Indian ways." She didn't understand them. What was wrong with being Indian?

Alice reflected on the rich culture of her home life. She had relied on the wisdom and teachings of her grandmother and other Choctaw elders. Her people treated children with respect—not telling them what to do, but showing them how to do it. If only Carlisle staff could see the value of embracing, not erasing, Indian ways of knowing. From the time she first began going to school, she had wanted to become a teacher. She would embrace all she could learn from Carlisle, but she would

hold tight to the knowledge of her childhood. She would provide her students with the best of both cultures.

Issi tossed and turned in her bed, mumbling, “A tek.” *My sister.* The child became more agitated, crying out in her sleep.

Alice gathered the blanket and pillow from her own bed. She padded to Issi’s bed and patted her shoulder. “Sister is here,” she said in English, then repeated it in Choctaw. The words and small gesture settled the child’s restlessness. Alice climbed in beside her and draped her arm protectively around Missy-Issi.

Pokni would be thrilled to know Alice would return to teach other Choctaw children, opening up their world, too. But most of all, Pokni would have been delighted to gain a second granddaughter. Of that, Alice was certain.

Afterword

Despite the belief of the school's founder, Richard Henry Pratt, who stated, "Kill the Indian in him, and save the man," students like Alice often went on to help their people become stronger, not weaker. Many used their education to help their tribes improve their lives and go from surviving to thriving. They became agents of change. They used their education and influence to make tribal nations a better place for future generations. As a proud citizen of Choctaw Nation and a Native Oklahoman, I've witnessed countless examples of Choctaw resilience.

I enriched this story by taking liberties with characters, places, and timelines. For example, Alice, Issi, and the majority of characters are fictional. By 1904, young students like Issi were no longer sent to Carlisle, although photographs from 1896 depict very young students. Only a few adults in the story were real. These were Indian agent J. Blair Shoenfelt, superintendents Richard Pratt and William Mercer, athletic coach Glenn Warner, and the teamster, George Foulk. The real-life students who spent time at Carlisle were Jim Thorpe, Mabel Stack, and Lucy Spaulding. Photographs ranging from the late 1800s to 1910 and a visit to Carlisle,

Pennsylvania, set the stage for the Carlisle campus described in this book. To place all the characters at Carlisle School in September 1904, timelines were slightly stretched.

People, Places, and Things in 1904

Indian Territory

Although the name “Indian Territory” originally referred to a broad, undefined area west of the Mississippi River, by 1904, it had been reduced to the eastern half of what is now Oklahoma. Indian Territory joined with Oklahoma Territory in 1907 to make the state of Oklahoma. Within the state are tribal reservations like the Choctaw Nation, which is the opening setting for this historical fiction story.

Indian Agents

The position of a United States Indian agent was a federal appointment. J. Blair Shoenfelt served as one of these federal officials, working with the Five Tribes in Indian Territory.

Federal Indian Boarding Schools

These educational institutions were intentionally established far from the homes of American Indian children. Choctaw tribal families had been relocated on the Trail of Tears, but traditional lifestyles persisted even after their removal. The boarding

schools' purpose was to separate children from their tribal traditions by denying them access to their families and cultures. Through these schools, the U.S. government assimilated American Indian and Alaska Native children into mainstream society. Despite historical efforts that led to tragedies like loss of tribal culture, physical and emotional cruelties, and even death, this story also explores positive themes of found families, resilience, and the power of cultural memory.

Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative

In 2021, the United States Department of the Interior undertook an investigation into federal boarding schools operating from 1819 through 1969. A document called the *Federal Indian Boarding School Initiative Investigative Report*, published in 2022, shed light on harm done to students at 408 boarding schools across thirty-seven states and territories. Volume 2 of the report, published in 2024, expanded the number of schools investigated to 417 and confirmed the deaths of nearly one thousand students.

assimilated: absorbed into and made to follow the culture of a larger group

Carlisle Indian Industrial School

The Carlisle Indian Industrial School—also referred to in school records from 1904 as Carlisle Indian School, or simply Carlisle School, or sometimes the Indian Industrial School of Carlisle, Pennsylvania—operated from 1879 to 1918. American Indian and Alaska Native students from across the United States attended the school. The boarding school land and a few of the original buildings are now encompassed by the United States Army War College.

Jim Thorpe

The Folsom sisters' fleet-footed champion character is Jim Thorpe, Olympic gold medal winner and member of the Sac and Fox Nation. He attended Carlisle Indian Industrial School from February 1904 to June 1909 and again from 1911 to 1913. He participated in track and field, football, and other sports, earning widespread recognition as America's first multi-sport star athlete. Thorpe married Iva Miller in 1913. She was a citizen of the Eastern Band of Cherokee and attended Carlisle from 1909 to 1912. One of the story's fictional characters, Mary Miller, predicted that her younger sister would show an interest in Jim Thorpe.

Mabel Stack

Mabel Stack, age eleven, was a Carlisle student from the Tsimshian Nation (Alaska) who died of tuberculosis in August 1904. Although most school records list her last name as *Stack*, both her death records and her tombstone spell it *Stock*.

Lucy Spaulding

Lucy Spaulding was an Alaskan student at Carlisle who died in March 1905 at age sixteen. School records indicate that she had been in the hospital with tuberculosis since November 1904—not long after this story takes place.

General Richard Henry Pratt

General Pratt was the founder of Carlisle Indian Industrial School and its superintendent from 1879 to 1904. He began his tenure with the rank of first lieutenant and was promoted to general shortly before his resignation from Carlisle in the summer of 1904.

Captain William A. Mercer

Captain Mercer was appointed superintendent of Carlisle Indian Industrial School after General Pratt, officially succeeding him on July 1, 1904.

Meet the Author



E. A. Hale is a Native Oklahoman and proud member of the Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma. She appreciates the endless opportunities for creativity and imagination that come with fiction writing. Due to her tribal immersion, her books and stories are written through an Indigenous lens. She spent time researching Indigenous boarding schools before writing *The Carlisle School: The Tearing Away*. Visits to Carlisle, Pennsylvania, and sites of other historic boarding schools provided inspiration and facts for the setting and events of this story. Currently, she is knee-deep in researching and writing a young adult ghost story set at another Indigenous boarding school.

E. A. Hale began writing children's literature with a six-volume series on Indigenous history for middle grade students. Since then, she's written for several publishers in the educational market. Her fiction story "Buffalo on the Loose" was featured in the September 2025 issue of *Highlights* magazine. She also authored two middle grade biographies for the Choctaw Nation. One of them, *Dr. Clara Sue Kidwell, Teacher and Mentor* (2023), was a finalist for the 2024 Oklahoma Book Awards.

In her spare time, E. A. Hale enjoys spending time with her grandchildren, reading novels, and working in her flower gardens. She and her husband live in Tulsa, Oklahoma.

Meet the Illustrator



Kailien Singson. A born artist, Kailien hails from the northeastern region of India known for its rich natural beauty that serves as a constant inspiration in his work. His passion for art began at a young age with artistic scribbles in notebooks at school and gradually developed into a serious career that led him to pursue a degree in arts. Having explored several techniques in art through his education and professional years in publishing, Kailien specializes in using striking colors and depicting realistic forms in his work. He is equally adept at traditional art styles, taking inspiration from everyday life.

Credits

Cover Illustration by

Kailien Singson & Ivan Pesic

Title Page Illustration by

Kailien Singson

Text Illustrations by

Courtesy of Kailien Singson / 82

Courtesy of E. A. Hale / 80

Kailien Singson / 3, 13, 18, 25, 41, 45, 54, 61, 71

EDITORIAL DIRECTOR:

ROSIE McCORMICK

MANAGING EDITOR:

SOPHIE NUNNALLY

DESIGN:

IVAN PESIC

Core Knowledge® Adventures in History™

Eleven-year-old Alice Folsom must be brave. She has no choice. Not only for her grandmother's sake, but now for the sake of her newly adopted six-year-old sister, Issi. They both survived being torn away from the homes and the people they love. They survived a seemingly endless journey by train across lands that were unfamiliar to them.

At the Carlisle School, a boarding school for American Indian children and teenagers, they have learned that they must speak a language not their own and live according to other people's rules—or else they will be punished. No matter what happens, Alice and Issi, and their new friends Jim, Lucy, and Mary, will show those in charge what true bravery looks like.

These books are suitable for readers aged 8 and up.

ISBN: 979-8-88970-623-6

