



BLACK SMOKE

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By E. P. Hubbs

The port of Norfolk, Virginia was bustling with merchants unpacking their wares from the boats that had arrived in the early morning. The calls of hungry seabirds filled the air as the golden sun rose above the ocean to the East. A freshly painted white steam vessel named *Glory of Britannia* crept slowly through the murky water towards the dock. Its red wheelhouse paddles proudly spun, lifting the water briefly before dumping it into mist that quickly dissipated. It pulled close to the platform as the dock workers leapt aboard and tied it into place. Then, a wooden passenger ramp was extended and secured into grooves that had been worn into the old, gray boards. The air smelled of pipe tobacco and coal soot wafted through the air from the newly built refinery at the edge of town. Workers rushed onto the boat to begin unloading it. A dozen cats gathered around the ramp and began yowling for fish scraps.

From the boat door, three passengers exited onto the deck. Mrs. Rutherford and her husband, Mr. Rutherford, walked down the ramp and onto the large wooden dock. The Rutherford's servant, Ms. Elswood, followed in tow and carried several crates of luggage. Mrs. Rutherford wore a timely Victorian style dress of pale blue. It was lined with white wavy trim. She carried a closed black umbrella under her arm which she clasped tightly in her petite fingers. They were clad in soft, light blue satin gloves. In her other hand was a fan her husband had acquired while touring the orient, which she furiously whipped through the humid air.

“Come on Sammy,” she called out. “Let’s get away from this horrid ocean at once.”

Sammy Elswood wore a less flamboyant green dress made from wool with black trim and cuffed sleeves. “Right away ma’am,” she said as she struggled to balance the luggage.

Mr. Rutherford was a portly man with a black tuxedo jacket barely containing his middle section, and a silk top-hat with a blue ribbon around its base. He strode down the ramp with a shuffling urgency and spoke in a booming voice, “That was as pleasant of a ride as we could hope for my dear, and with room enough to stretch our legs.” Mr. Rutherford said.

“I don’t care for the smell of the ocean, or this port for that matter,” Mrs. Rutherford whined, pinching her nose delicately. “There’s the wagon. Sammy, you can put the baggage there.”

They walked over to a stagecoach-style carriage where Ms. Elswood loaded up their baggage. It had forest green wooden paneling and “Clarence’s Coach” painted in gold cursive lettering along the side. Mr. Rutherford approached the coachman who was perched on top of the carriage.

“Hello there, you are our coachman?” he asked while looking up at the driver and shading his eyes with one hand.

“If you’re going to Roanoke,” replied the driver, popping his suspender straps with his thumbs and grinning.

“That’s the ticket my boy. Are you quite sure we can find a guide there?”

“Yes sir, should be plenty of guides ‘round there.”

“Very well. Let us leave post haste, my boy.”

After she had loaded the luggage in the storage compartment, Sammy climbed atop the carriage next to the coachman. The Rutherfords sat in the cushy closed-door cabin with purple velvet seats and glass windows. The driver cracked the reins across both horses and the carriage started forward. He was dressed neatly in a black wool coat and bowler hat, with a white undershirt and a black bow tie. Ms. Elswood imagined him a dull man but allowed herself the opportunity to be surprised.

“What’s your name?” she asked, turning to look at him.

He glanced nervously sideways at her, then cracked a wide smile. “Clarence,” he said. “It’s nice to see a black woman round here with some fancy clothes on.” He held his right hand towards her.

She smiled back at him, took his hand and shook it. As she pulled it away, she noticed how smooth his palms were from the soft leather reins rubbing against them. She hoped he didn’t feel how rough hers were. “Name’s Sammy Elswood. May I ask you, Clarence, just what in the hell that is supposed to mean? Is that what you think is an appropriate way to greet a lady?”

He stared at her dumbfoundedly, then stuttered, “I didn’t mean it like that—Ms. Elswood please—”

“Relax, Clarence,” she laughed, “I’m just messin’ with you.”

Clarence sighed in relief, then smiled. “My, my, Ms. Elswood. You got me. I just meant that you seem...distinguished. That’s all.”

“Why thank you Clarence. You seem like a...distinguished...black gentleman yourself,” she said as she turned her shoulder. “How long have you had your stagecoach business?”

“Oh, since way back in fifty five. Before the war. I’ve been lucky enough to keep it running for thirty-five years, mind you.”

“You were never a slave then?”

“No ma’am,” Clarence said. I come from up North, luckily.”

“You are lucky. I was born into it--still a part of it, far as I’m concerned,” she said solemnly.

“Come on now, don’t be like that. Didn’t you hear? Slavery was outlawed a while back,” he said nudging her with his elbow.

“Shoot, not where I’m from. Down in Loosiana it’s still there alright. They just call it somethin’ else.”

“Whatchu mean?” Clarence replied. “Aren’t you just their servant?”

“That’s one way to look at it. I am subject to a sharecroppin’ agreement. I was freed from slavery, but they trapped me with their debt and contracts. You know how it is. It’s legal slavery far as I’m concerned.”

“Bet yer boots I’ve heard of it. My cousin married a girl from down there and the white folks got him borrowing from ‘em. He wrote me while back and said he owed ‘em a terrible sum on account of some medical problems. Seems he couldn’t afford his treatment, so he borrowed it.”

“That’s how I feel Clarence,” she rubbed the inside of his strong arm affectionately. Then she spoke just above a soft whisper. They got me workin’ off my debt doing housework, but the

work doesn't pay squat. Most of my pay is a share of the sugarcane that I harvest. I fear I'm in the same boat as that cousin of yours."

Clarence frowned at her and said, "I'm sorry Ms. Elswood. I had no idea about your circumstance. Shearin cane is brutal work. Since you were wearing that dress, I thought maybe you were a free woman. But, I don't make much money myself, so if this is some tupa ploy to get some money from me, I'm afraid I couldn't help ya."

She let go of his arm and quickly crossed hers. "It most certainly was not! I don't even know why I opened my big mouth. Here I was thinkin' you were a polite, trustworthy, businessman. I s'pose I was wrong about that!"

Mr. Rutherford poked his head out of the passenger window with a scowl across his face. "What is this racket going on? Sammy! Are you being hostile towards this negro? Explain yourself!"

Sammy did not turn to look, and replied tersely, "No, Mr. Rutherford, we were only kidding around."

"Well, I don't want you distracting the driver and having us careen off the road, so stop whatever it is you are doing now!" he shouted.

He then slid a paper out of his inside jacket pocket and held it there. "Hey! I'm speaking to you!" his voice boomed over the clapping of the horse's hooves on the road.

Sammy peeked over her shoulder with water pooling at the bottom of her big, brown eyes and saw him violently tapping the papers with his index finger.

"Remember your place my dear," he said with a sinister smile.

Sammy nodded quickly while trying to still her lower lip and responded, “Yes, Mr. Rutherford, you don’t need to remind me. I’m well aware of that contract.”

“Good. I’ll remind you it is better than living in the woods and surviving from only scraps! I’m quite sure that’s where you would be without my generosity,” he said as he swung his head back into the cabin. Sammy turned back to face the road. She let out an exasperated sigh and shrugged her shoulders in defeat.

Clarence glanced over to her and said, “I’m sorry for all that Ms. Elswood.”

She made no reaction and ignored his apology. They continued riding in silence. The carriage slowly made its way across the eastern forests of Virginia. The countryside was inundated with green forests of beautiful loblolly pines reaching up toward the heavens. She listened to the wind rustling the treetops and the rapid drilling of woodpeckers filled the air. She watched one as it bobbed its white head back and forth, poking holes in the trees as it searched for beetles beneath the pine bark. They arrived in Roanoke with the sun blaring in fiery red, cascading through the treetops, bathing the mosquitos in orange light as they drifted drunkenly toward the nearest warm blood.

The Rutherfords stayed in a high-class hotel called the Farnham Hotel for the night. Sammy refused a room there, knowing Mr. Rutherford would just add the cost of the room to her debt. After she helped them get situated, she went to a nearby hostel that was across town. She walked into the large, damp, open room filled with cots. After walking past half them she found an empty one that seemed clean enough and sat down on it. A man who was sitting on the cot beside her spun around and she noticed it was Clarence.

“Well look who it is,” he said, beaming that smile again.

“Great,” Sammy said. “Look, I don’t need you feeling sorry for me. Your apology doesn’t matter. I am what I am. Ain’t nothing can change it.”

Clarence thought for a while and said, “Well, I am sorry that I am not the nice Virginian man you thought I was. I’m not from here, y’know. I’m from Connecticut.”

“My mistake.”

“Have you always been with them Rutherfords?”

“They came across from England to settle here. Bought me when I was four or so. That was when I was separated from my family. I don’t even remember them. Mr. Rutherford said that I had a momma but she was sick and couldn’t raise me. Said he rescued me. It sure didn’t feel that way. Stayed with them until I was seventeen and it was abolished.”

“Musta been hard, goin’ at it alone.”

“I wasn’t alone for long. I married a man, another slave,” she said somberly.

“Oh? Didn’t realize you were spoken for.”

“I’m not anymore. He passed away. Been almost twenty years now.”

“I’m sorry to hear that, ma’am. May I ask how he passed?”

Sammy breathed a deep sigh. “He kept telling me he couldn’t live on the plantation anymore. He wanted us to have a fightin’ chance and make it on our own. He was layin’ plans for an escape, but Mr. Rutherford caught wind of it. He came for my husband in the night and they hung him from an oak tree. He said he wasn’t worth the trouble of paying to get someone to track him and bring him back.” Sammy fought back the tears, but one managed to roll down her cheek.

“That’s terrible Ms. Elswood!”

“That’s life, Clarence. There’s terrible people out to get you at every turn,” she said, wiping the tear from her face. She turned and laid down on the cot facing away from him.

“Goodnight Clarence,” she said softly.

“Goodnight Ms. Elswood,” he said somberly.



Outside in the dark streets of Roanoke, Mr. Rutherford walked alone down the cold, stony sidewalk. The roads were cast in orange light which flickered rapidly as the electric current pulsed through the nest of wires running along the poles which lined the sidewalks. Loud buzzing came from the wires meeting the utility poles that bridged the telegraph and electrical lines overhead. He walked past rows and rows of brand-new buildings, built by the booming growth in population. Metallic clanking from the Roanoke Machine Works echoed down the streets. Mr. Rutherford arrived at the three-story brick building, a black painted sign above its swinging doors read: Virginia Brewing Company.

He walked through the doors and approached the bartender who had a greased moustache and a white buttoned-up shirt. He stood with both arms on the bar top as if he was ready to either draw a pistol or a bottle at a moment's notice. He looked at Mr. Rutherford with squinted eyes and a crease between his brows.

“Good evenin’ to ya,” the bartender said.

“Good evening my chap,” Mr. Rutherford addressed him loudly. “Do you own this fine establishment?”

The barkeep nodded. “Sure do. Had our grand opening last month.”

“It looks positively exquisite, I must say. I was to understand that I could procure a guide here that would take me west over the mountains—to Wolfcreek.”

“You sound like a limey,” he said.

“I may sound like one, but I haven’t lived in England for fifty years. I’ll have you know, I’m an American, tried and true.”

The bartender sighed and replied, “If you say so. There might be a guide here on the premises for ya, but dem services wouldn’t be rendered to non-customers, y’see?”

“Yes, yes of course. I’ll have one of your brews then,” he said as he held out a coin.

The bartender took the coin, then produced a glass bottle filled with golden, bubbling beer and popped the cap off, then slid it over to him. “Right this way.”

The men walked down a long hallway decorated in antlers and electric light fixtures, into one of the rooms in the back of the establishment. Inside were four men sitting around a poker table. Thick smoke filled the air from their cigars.

“Right there, the injun,” the bartender said, pointing to the player wearing a black cowboy hat and a gray woolen jacket. His face was shaded by the brim, faintly lit by the orange ember of his cigarette flaring up when he inhaled. He had long black hair past his shoulders and the fiery ember reflected through his dark eyes. The tobacco smoke slowly seeped from his mouth, billowing off his hat brim, keeping him in a smokey shroud of mystery.

The man looked up through the smoke and glanced between the bartender and Mr. Rutherford, then smiled broadly. “What did I do now?” he asked.

Mr. Rutherford turned towards the bartender and nodded ‘thank you’ towards him, then the bartender walked back into the hallway. Mr. Rutherford turned to address the man.

“I’m looking for someone to take me to my property across the Appalachians. Just to help me and my wagon along the way. I heard you were good for it.”

The native was focused only on his cards, his eyes darted between them and then he quickly threw in some coins to the pool in the middle of the table.

He replied, “Whereabouts?”

“Wolfcreek,” replied Mr. Rutherford. “Across the mountains.”

“Ha! And you said it was your land? That is the land of the Shawnee. I lived there long ago as a young brave.” He never looked up from his cards.

“Perhaps... it once was. I purchased it from the United States government. I have the deed if you need to see it,” he said as he shuffled through the papers in his jacket pocket.

The Shawnee man laughed briefly. “Keep your paper. I know how they tricked my people out of it. I learned to hunt on those grounds. I wouldn’t mind visiting them again, but what does the job pay?” he asked.

“I could part with seventy dollars for our safe journey there,” Mr. Rutherford offered.

“Make it one hundred,” he said, finally looking up to lock eyes with him.

“As you wish,” Mr. Rutherford said.

“We will leave at first daylight if that is suitable.” Mr. Rutherford said as he stepped back towards the doorway.

The man nodded in agreement, then played a card on the table. The other men reeled and threw down their cards as he slid his winnings to his side of the table

“Well done!” Mr. Rutherford beamed. “We’ll be outside the Farnham Hotel in the morning. I will see you then, Mr.--?”

“My name is Mato,” he said.

“Very good. I bid you a good evening, Mr. Mato,” Mr. Rutherford said, then exited into the hallway.



The dual-horse green carriage sat parked outside the Farnham Hotel, bathed in the white light of the early morning. Clarence fussed with the horse harnesses as Sammy approached from the sidewalk.

“Mornin to ya!” she called out to Clarence and waved her gloved hand.

“Well good morning Ms. Elswood. How’re you doing this mornin?”

She curtsied and replied, “I’m doin finer than a frog hair split four ways.”

“I’m guessin that’s a good thing. Are you ready for our journey?” Clarence said while patting the bay horse on the neck.

“I reckon so,” she said. “What’re their names?”

“This here is Sue, and the gray one is Lucius.”

“They sure are beautiful.” The clacking of horse hooves approaching on the road caught Sammy’s ear. She turned to see Mato in the saddle of a white and brown paint horse. He wore his black cowboy hat and a brown leather jacket, and a long rifle and bow were slung across his broad chest.

“Well hi there,” Sammy said. She walked closer to him and pat his horse on the side of its long head. “Who’s this?”

“This is Kisowa,” Mato replied. “Where is the fat white man?”

Sammy laughed and covered her mouth with a closed fist to compose herself. “He’ll be right out, after Mrs. Rutherford gets herself presentable that is. She’s slower than molasses in the winter. I’m guessin’ you’re the one taking us yonder to Wolfcreek?”

“Yes, my name is Mato,” he replied.

“Well this here is Clarence, Lucius, and Sue,” she said as she pointed to each of them. “I’m Sammy. It’s a pleasure to meet you.”

Mato nodded but said nothing. Sammy shrugged and walked back over to the carriage. Mr. Rutherford walked out of the hotel carrying his luggage and set it on the ground exhaustedly.

“Sammy! Come take this luggage and put it in the carriage.”

Sammy walked over and picked up the luggage. As she walked back to the carriage, Mr. Rutherford said, “Why were you not helping dress my wife? You know that is expected of you.”

Sammy replied, “I was in there earlier, sir. She told me she didn’t want my help.” She started lifting the luggage and placing it in the rear compartment of the carriage. “She said—erm—the sight of me made her sick. I believe that was the way she put it.” She slapped her hands together to dust them off, then walked around the side of the carriage and hopped up onto the front seat.

“I see,” Mr. Rutherford said skeptically. Clarence climbed to the front seat of the carriage next to Sammy.

“Ah!” Mr. Rutherford said when he noticed Mato. “I see you have made it.”

Then Mrs. Rutherford walked out of the hotel entryway in an extravagant mint green gown and matching umbrella, which she promptly opened to shield her from the harsh sunlight overhead.

She walked fiercely towards the carriage and said, “Let’s get moving. I am not looking forward to the bumpy drive and I’d like to get it over with as quickly as possible.”

Mr. Rutherford rushed to open the carriage door and said, “Of course my dear. In you go.” He got in after her and closed the door. He peeked his head out of the window and barked, “Lead on, negro! Follow the Indian fellow,” then pulled his head back into the cabin. Mato spun his horse slowly around and started down the road. Clarence shook his head and cracked the reins across the hides of the horses.



They rode west across from Roanoke towards the Appalachians. Soon the hills inclined gradually as they entered the vast mountain range. There were thick green forests as far as the eye could see, and the vast wide blue overhead. The kicked dust into the air behind them as it crawled through the narrow dirt path that had been cut through the trees. A hundred feet ahead was Mato, scouting the route and watching for predators or the small chance of outlaws setting an ambush. The Rutherford's muffled bickering could be heard faintly now and then, but the sounds of nature and the songs of the birds drowned them out. Sammy and Clarence watched Mato weaving his horse from side to side, hugging the right side of the trail for a while and then the left.

“What do you suppose he is doin’ up there?” Sammy asked. “We aren’t going to get ambushed.”

“Happens more often than you think, Ms. Elswood,” Clarence said.

“Hush yer mouth. He could be talking with us to pass the time,” she said.

“He doesn’t have to talk with us. We were havin’ great conversations without him,” he smiled.

“It’s rude. I don’t like it,” she thought for a moment and then called out, “Mato!” and waved her hand in the air. Clarence sighed in protest.

He turned and trotted up to them, then positioned his horse to ride alongside the carriage.

“What is it?” he asked.

“We were thinking it would make for a more pleasant journey if you’d talk with us,” she said. “Why’re you up there all by yourself?”

Clarence interjected, “Oh would you leave the man alone?”

Mato replied, “It’s important to keep a forward position. The wagon is very loud.”

“We aren’t in a battle, y’know?” she replied.

“I know that. The noise scares away the animals.”

“I see. Well why don’t you take a little break from hunting and tell us about yourself? Where ya from?” she asked interestedly.

“I wasn’t hunting. I like to watch the animals--talk to them and listen to them speak. It is rarer now with all of the time I’ve spent in the cities. This area used to be pristine; untouched by the railways. My home was in Wolfcreek. I have not seen it in many years.”

The breath ran away from Sammy and she brought her hand to her chest. She regained herself and tried to think of something to say. She asked, “Do you have any family that still live there?”

“No,” he said solemnly. “I was only a small boy when I lived there. I will tell you what my elders have told me. There were white men in our tribe that told us we had to leave behind the ways of our tribe. The All Spirit helped us prosper and live in peace for so long, why would we turn our back on him? They told us to accept Jesus as our savior and come live in the city. It was obvious to our chief that this was just a way to drive us from our land. Many tribes had given up their land willingly in this way. But the chief knew better, and we stood our ground. This went on for a few years, and some of our Shawnee decided to leave and went to Christian

school to learn about their religion. I went to this school as a boy and learned English, but was quick to return to my people. One day, a group of men came into my village and shot everyone they could. My elders said they came from the west, from Charleston. They were citizens...greedy...there to take the land from us. The government had said any land they took from us they could keep for themselves. They were told to remove us in any way they could, even by killing us.”

Sammy’s eyes were welling up. Clarence cleared his throat and said, “Was that the Indian Removal Act?”

“That is what President Jackson called it. Our braves killed many men in the battle, but we were captured and defeated. My father was killed. They made our tribe move from the beautiful valleys of Wolfcreek out to Kansas, and that is where I grew into a man.”

“How did you end up back in Virginia?” Sammy asked weakly.

“I left Kansas to fight in the war. Many braves from my tribe fought for the Union in ‘61. They convinced us to join the fighting with more lies. After the war, I returned to Kansas and more white settlers had taken my home for themselves...again. When Kansas became a state, they decided they wanted to ban us from it, and my people were driven out to Cherokee territory in Oklahoma.”

“That’s awful,” Sammy said. “I’m so sorry, Mato.”

“Don’t be. My heart is not angry anymore. I got my revenge on the white man during the war. Those white men from the South that fought to rule over another through slavery, they were the worst. I killed hundreds of them and took their scalps.” He smiled broadly upon recollecting them begging for their lives.

Sammy's eyes widened. "Well, I think in certain instances violence c-can be necessary." Her voice dropped to the quietest whisper. "It's just too bad you didn't get Mr. Rutherford."

"He owned slaves?" Mato asked with fire rising in his throat.

"Yours truly," she said.

Mato looked at her with sadness in his eyes, then kicked his heels into his horse. It trotted faster and left the wagon behind. Clarence and Sammy looked at each other.

"Well, that went well," Clarence said.



After some time, the wagon crossed into the Blue Ridge mountains. Sammy was in awe of the majestic, rolling blue hills that extended into the distance all around her like enormous waves frozen in time. Mato led them onto the dirt road that ran through the mountain pass. He kept his scouting position a hundred feet ahead of the wagon, and Sammy was glad for it. She felt safe with him up there, confronting any potential danger head-on. They rolled along the winding path down the slope, then turned to travel alongside the base of the mountain.

When the sun was beating down from straight overhead, Mato rode closer to the wagon and said, "We are getting close. Wolfcreek is just around the next bend. Something in the air smells different, like something foul is in the air." Then he rode further ahead again.

"I don't smell nothin'," Clarence said.

They continued down the road as it curved around the hill. Suddenly, Mato signaled for the wagon to stop. Clarence did so and they watched him on his horse ahead of them. He was completely still.

Mr. Rutherford slithered his head out of the window and looked forward.

“Why have we stopped? We must make good time here, boy. Get a move on!” he ordered.

Clarence responded, “Scout says somethin’s up. Told us to stop. See?” he pointed ahead.

Mr. Rutherford shifted his head to the side and spotted Mato up ahead. “Go over there to him,” he said.

“Yes sir,” Clarence said and lightly tapped the horses. The wagon crawled forward until they reached him. By then, they all heard the sound. It was an animal of some kind, crying out in a loud, boorish wail.

“What is it?” Sammy whispered at Mato.

He glanced over his shoulder at her. “Mato. A bear, like me. Sounds like it stepped on a trap.”

“Your name means *bear*?” Sammy asked.

Mato nodded.

“We have to free it,” she said, pleading with her eyes at Mato.

“Nonsense!” Mr. Rutherford said as he opened the carriage door and stepped out. “This is an opportunity. The trapper trapped the thing, now we can keep it for ourselves! If the pelt is in

good enough condition, I'll have a new rug for the entryway!" He cocked his head towards the carriage again and said, "Linda my darling, wouldn't you like a great bear skin rug for the entryway?"

"Ooooh!" she squealed, "Yes I think that would be marvelous! Make the guide go kill it. If it's a cub I can wear it as a mantle." She batted her long eyelashes as she imagined herself wearing the fur.

Sammy and Clarence looked back to Mato. Anger rushed across his face. Then he shrugged and said, "Better to end its suffering."

Sammy and Clarence hopped off the driver seat and followed behind Mato. Mr. Rutherford removed his jacket and handed it to Clarence. He walked to the rear and procured a bolt-action rifle from the weapon rack on the carriage, then marched after Mato like he was headed to war. Mrs. Rutherford stayed behind in the carriage and locked the doors. They started crossing a small meadow full of Blue Toadflax flowers that bobbed in the faint breeze. Mato scanned the ground attentively as if following the bear's trail. Its cries grew louder and after a short distance further, they could see the black bear collapsed on a large granite outcropping ahead of them.

Kisowa began to spook so Mato dismounted and lashed her reins to a small tree. They continued towards the bear and Mr. Rutherford shouldered his rifle, then clicked the hammer back into firing position. Mato shouldered his rifle as he quietly prowled through the grass towards the bear. Sammy held both hands over her ears as she tried to muffle the terrible cries the bear was making.

Clarence suddenly stopped in his tracks and whispered, “Oh you can go on without me, I’m just gonna wait right here.” The three others continued towards the felled beast and could see it thrashing its great paws in the air. When Mato got about ten feet from the animal, he stopped.

“What is that?” he asked.

The bear suddenly rolled to its feet and began pacing in front of them. It was alarmed by their presence and cried out a warning. They realized that the bear was not caught in a trap and was moving freely. Its frame was nearly skeletal and appeared to be starving to death. After a few roars it collapsed again and laid still. It breathed heavily as its chest rose and fell in strained wheezes. From this close they could tell that it wasn’t a black bear. Its light brown fur was visible along its backside, but most of its body, including its head, was covered in deep black oil.

Sammy said. “The poor creature. How’d it get into this mess?”

Mato crouched a short distance from the beast and watched it. He winced as if feeling its pain himself.

Mr. Rutherford approached it and let his rifle hang from his side. He walked in a circle around it to get a good look at its face. Its tongue flapped out of its panting mouth onto the ground, bone-dry but caked with black, oily dirt. Its eyes were puffy and swollen closed by infection.

“Stupid oaf, look at it! Blind as a bat he is,” Mr. Rutherford said as he prodded its head with his finger. At that moment, the bear swung at him ferociously. Its long claws cut deep into his throat back to his spine. Sammy screamed. Mr. Rutherford stumbled backwards, gripping his gaping wound with one hand and aiming the rifle with the other. Mato leapt towards Sammy,

grabbing her around the waist and pulling her away towards Clarence. She watched as the blood flowed from his throat and down his arm. His white shirt was quickly overtaken by red.

His panicked face contorted into a shocked grimace. The bear rose, ran a half circle around him and charged. He lifted his arm to aim and the sound of the gunshot exploded through the air, scattering hundreds of birds out of the trees around them. Mr. Rutherford fell backwards across a log onto the ground. The bear, gravely wounded, slumped across his feet and quickly fell motionless.

Mr. Rutherford kicked his legs erratically and pushed away from the beast, still gripping his neck and his rifle. Mrs. Rutherford was shouting and running towards them now. Clarence was fear-stricken and unable to move. Mato slowly approached the man and looked into his eyes as he gurgled and choked on his last breath.

Mrs. Rutherford ran over to him and began weeping frantically over the body of her husband.

Mato stood over them and said, "There is nothing you can do for him now. His wound is too great."

She was short of breath and said between sobs, "What happened to him?! You were supposed to protect him!"

Mato smirked and said, "Your husband's foolishness got him killed. He thought he was in control of this bear, just as he controlled everything else. Like he controlled you. And like he controlled Sammy."

She rose to her feet and glared at Mato with bloodshot eyes. "What do you mean?"

“No person should be enslaved.” Mato said, pointing his hand towards Sammy. “Your husband killed Sammy’s husband, and kept her trapped in this contract as if he enjoyed watching her suffer. End it now.”

Mrs. Rutherford looked bewildered. “Is this true Sammy?” she said as she turned towards her. “Do you not want to work in the house anymore?”

Sammy bucked up and said, “No ma’am. I don’t. I can’t stand it, frankly. I would like the contract voided.”

Mrs. Rutherford wept for a few moments, still shaken by her husband’s death. “No”, she replied. “I couldn’t manage without you, Sammy. Not now. My husband wanted to keep you around and I must honor his wishes.”

Sammy’s breath was knocked out of her lungs. She shrugged her shoulders in sadness. Mato turned and stormed off without another word. He walked along the turning overlooks that followed the side of the mountain and scanned the ground as he went. Sammy stood up and chased after him. Clarence walked along after them, shaking his head at Mrs. Rutherford as he went.

“Where are you going?” Mrs. Rutherford called out.

“I think he’s seeing where this bear came from!” Clarence called back.

Mrs. Rutherford rose, scooped up the sides of her heavy dress in both of her clenched fists, and shuffled after them.



Sammy pushed the branches out of her path and peered ahead for Mato. Clarence walked next to her, and Mrs. Rutherford was following behind them sobbing. Suddenly, Mato cried out ahead of them. It was a deep, bellowing howl. Sammy had never heard a sound of such anguish. It startled her and she began to race forward through the trees to find him. She broke out of the forest in a full sprint and onto a vast overlook. Mato was there, kneeling on a giant granite overlook. She ran to him and touched his shoulder. He was baring his teeth, sobbing, with tears streaming down his face. She followed his gaze out into the plains, far below the overlook. There she saw a vast oil field. The ground was completely blackened by the sludgy overflow. Several wooden structures used to pump the oil rose out of the sludge like tombstones in a pitch-black graveyard.

Clarence and Mrs. Rutherford joined them.

“Rutherford & Company Oil,” Clarence said, reading the white printed lettering on the largest building in the valley. “You own the oil fields?”

“Yes...we were coming to check on the operation,” she said meekly.

Mato stood up and walked into the forest, the muscles across his whole body burst with adrenaline and anger. He began slamming dead logs onto rocks and shouting at the top of his lungs in Shawnee. He came back to the overlook and threw an armful of splintered wood on the ground. With some flint and steel, he quickly started a fire.

“What are you doing?” Mrs. Rutherford asked with a puzzled look on her face.

He looked at her with a burning anger on his face as he ripped a piece of cloth from his horse blanket and wrapped it around the head of an arrow. He thrust the arrowhead into the

flames and the cloth set alight. He drew the arrow back in his bow and aimed it high in the sky above the oil fields.

“Listen to me! If you do not free this woman right now, I will burn everything to the ground!” he shouted.

Mrs. Rutherford gasped and held her gloves over her mouth, her eyes bulging with worry. “You wouldn’t!” she said. “If you do, I will have you hanged!”

“You people have ruined my homeland—sacred lands of the Shawnee!—to get more money than you would ever need. Free this girl from your clutches right now, or I will destroy it all. Then what will you do? With no money?”

She became frantic and said, “Alright, anything you want! Please!”

Clarence turned over Mr. Rutherford’s jacket that he was still carrying and pulled out the piece of paper from his pocket. He handed it to her along with a quill he was carrying.

“I know a bit about business, Mrs. Rutherford,” He said as he held out the small jar of ink and she dipped the quill in it. “The last part of the contract has a void agreement. Sign here to agree that all debts are fulfilled,” he said, pointing to the paper.” She signed it quickly and handed it to Sammy. Sammy took the paper and opened it in complete bewilderment. Her freedom was something she used to dream about but had long since given up on. She carefully put it into the pocket of her dress as if it were the most sacred of treasures.

“Are you satisfied?” Mrs. Rutherford asked, looking up at Mato.

He glared at her and spoke while the fire from the arrow danced in his eyes, “The All Spirit will not allow you to take anything you want from the Earth. We must exist in balance

with the dirt, the trees, and animals. You are destroying all of it and giving nothing to the Earth in return. The All Spirit demands that I stop this. The bear was a sign of the suffering that will come to many creatures if things continue this way. The purpose of my life is now to prevent it.”

He released the arrow and it soared high into the sky before arcing downwards and planting itself in the wood siding of one of the drilling structures far below. It burned there for a few seconds before the wood set alight. The tower was quickly washed over in flames that flowed down the siding like molten lava. When the flames reached the ground, the entire field exploded into a devastating plume of fire. It quickly spread to all of the structures. Many men cried out from below as it spread. None could escape the flames.

Mrs. Rutherford fell to her knees and began crying with her face buried in her hands. Mato left her there and walked towards his horse. Clarence and Sammy followed him back through the forest towards the horse carriage.

“Hey!” Clarence called to him. “Why did you do that? Why did you go back on your word?”

Mato crawled up onto Kisowa and took the reins in his hand. He looked down and Clarence said, “Something I learned from the white man.”

Clarence turned and took the reins of his carriage. Slowly, darkness crept over the forest as the sun dimmed in the sky. Sammy hopped up next to Clarence and looked worried. The three of them started down the path again, continuing in the same direction away from Roanoke. As they rode, the entire forest was enveloped in thick black smoke.