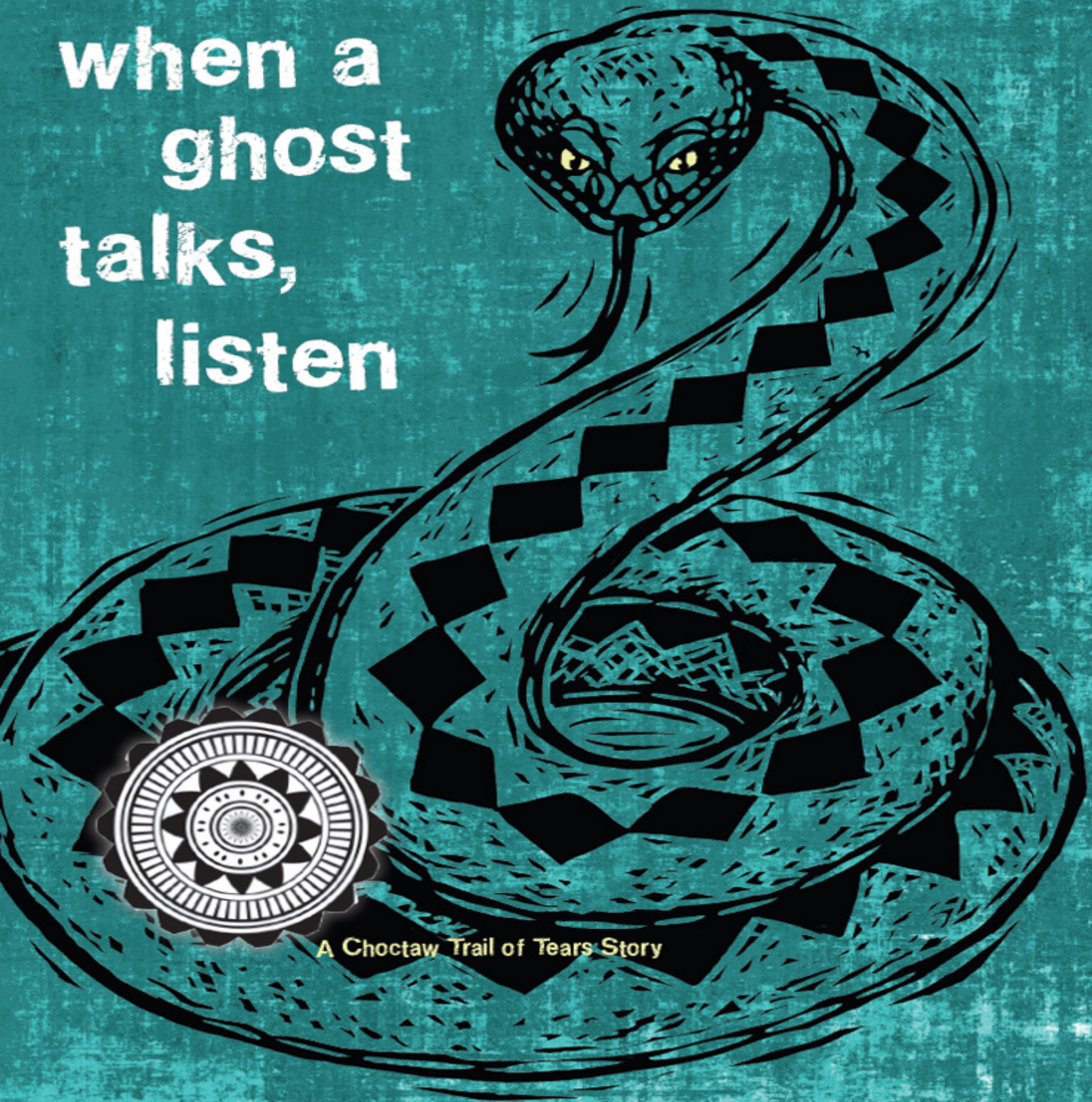


Tim Tingle

when a
ghost
talks,
listen



A Choctaw Trail of Tears Story

Published by The RoadRunner Press
Oklahoma City, Oklahoma
www.TheRoadRunnerPress.com

© 2018 by Tim Tingle
Cover Illustration © 2018 Thomas Hillery
Cover Copyright © 2018 The RoadRunner Press
Map Copyright © 2018 The RoadRunner Press

All rights reserved.

Map by Steven Walker / Cover design by Jeanne Devlin

This is a work of fiction. While the literary perceptions and insights are based on experience, all names, characters, places, and incidents are either products of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. No reference to any real person is intended or should be inferred.

First Edition: August 2018

Printed in the USA

Library of Congress Control Number: 2017952749

Publisher's Cataloging-In-Publication Data
(Prepared by The Donohue Group, Inc.)

Names: Tingle, Tim. | Walker, Steven (Illustrator), illustrator.

Title: When a ghost talks, listen : a Choctaw Trail of Tears story / Tim Tingle ; map by Steven Walker.

Description: Oklahoma City : The RoadRunner Press, [2018] | Series: The how I became a ghost series ; book 2 | Interest age level: 9 and up. | Includes bibliographical references. | Summary: "Ten-year-old Isaac, now a ghost, continues with his people as they walk the Choctaw Trail of Tears headed to Indian Territory in what will one day become Oklahoma. There have been surprises aplenty on their trek, but now Isaac and his three Choctaw comrades learn they can time travel--making for an unexpected adventure. The foursome heads back in time to Washington, D.C., to bear witness for Choctaw Chief Pushmataha who has come to the nation's capital at the invitation of Andrew Jackson."--Provided by publisher.

Identifiers: ISBN 978-1-937054-51-9 | ISBN 978-1-937054-65-6 (ebook)

Subjects: LCSH: Choctaw Indians--Relocation--Juvenile fiction. | Indian Removal, 1813-1903--Juvenile fiction. | Ghosts--Juvenile fiction. | Time travel--Juvenile fiction. | Choctaw Nation of Oklahoma--Juvenile fiction. | CYAC: Choctaw Indians--Fiction. | Ghosts--Fiction. | Time travel--Fiction. | LCGFT: Historical fiction.

Classification: LCC PZ7.T489 Wh 2017 (print) | LCC PZ7.T489 (ebook) | DDC [Fic]--dc23

10 9 8 7 6 5 4 3 2 1



Chapter 1

Choctaw Ghosts are Everywhere *Leaving Choctaw Nation, 1830*

SINCE YOU'RE READING my second book, you already know who I am. You know my name is Isaac, that I'm ten years old, soon to be eleven, and you know I am a ghost. I am not dead, not in the usual way. I am not buried and gone, but I am a ghost.

I have learned to travel by closing my eyes and thinking where I want to be. That's how ghosts do it. I can disappear so no one can see me or I can gradually float into sight, as you will recall. But I didn't tell you everything about being a ghost. I didn't want to terrify you. But you're older now—you can handle it.

Do not be afraid of what I am about to say.

Whenever you read a book about Choctaw ghosts, Choctaw ghosts are always with you, surrounding you and sometimes even reading over your shoulder. Yes, even now, a Choctaw ghost is peering over your shoulder. Whatever you do, **DO NOT LOOK OVER YOUR RIGHT SHOULDER.**

Don't be afraid. The ghosts are there to protect you. Just say halito ("hello" in Choctaw) and keep reading. If a ghost taps you on the shoulder, simply smile and wave backwards.

Hoke, I still have friends who are ghosts and friends who are people. Like Joseph. He's a real teenager, but sometimes he can be a panther, and sometimes he can be a sixteen-year-old. If you think that sounds crazy, trust me—it's even crazier than you think. But he's still my best friend.

Nita is another friend of mine. She rolled out of her blanket one night and froze in the snow, so she's a ghost like me, even though she's only five

years old. Her mother and father, Ruth and Gabe, are my parents' best friends.

Nita's older sister, Naomi, is a teenager like Joseph, but she's not a panther and she's not a ghost. She feels the cold and walks the trail with a thousand other Choctaws.

And before I forget, my dog Jumper still walks the trail, though having a dog has become a little complicated since I became a ghost, as Jumper is quick to remind me.

"We need to talk," Jumper said one morning.

We were following a winding road through the forest, an hour after breakfast.

"What's up?"

"I liked you better when you were a boy," Jumper said.

"Why?" I asked him. "Now that I'm invisible, I can sneak up on the soldiers. I can watch what they do, listen to what they say, and they never even know I'm around."

"Yeah," Jumper said. "That's hoke." (Jumper speaks English and Choctaw.)

"Then what's the problem?"

"Well," said Jumper, "now that you're a ghost you never eat anymore. I don't want to complain, but when you ate breakfast along with everybody else, you always made sure I had plenty to eat."

Jumper was right. Now that I wasn't eating anymore, I never stayed around to watch everybody else eat at mealtime. My mother and dad, my big brother Luke, and little Nita's family always ate together around the same campfire.

"I'm sorry, Jumper," I said. "You know ghosts don't eat, and I just forget sometimes."

"I forgive you," Jumper said, "but I am still hungry."

"Why don't you ask Luke to give you something to eat?"

Jumper didn't say a word. He just tilted his head and rolled his eyes back. That's dog talk for *I think you know the answer to that one*.

"Oh, right," I said. Luke was a great big brother, but he couldn't understand dog talk. "I'll mention it to Luke and remind him to feed you."

"Yakoke," Jumper said. ("Thank you" in Choctaw.)

"I'll make sure you get something special for supper," I said. "Fried squirrel, how would you like that?"

“Sounds hoke to me,” Jumper said, with a wag of his tail.

“Now, you want to help me find Joseph?” I asked. “I haven’t seen him since yesterday morning. When he’s gone that long, he’s usually Panther Joseph, climbing trees and exploring.”

Jumper wagged his tail hoke, and we turned to the woods. Before I took another step, a white cloud appeared in front of me and General Pushmataha stepped from it.

“Isaac,” Pushmataha said, “you are a smart young man and a quick learner. I have chosen a task for you and your friends.”

I knew better than to ask what task. Choctaw elders will tell you what they want you to know when they are ready and not before. General Pushmataha smiled at my patience.

“You still have much to learn about being a ghost,” he said. “I would like to take you on a long trip into the past. And even though they are among the living, I would like Naomi and Joseph to join us later. And someone else with strange powers will help us as well.”

He stared at me once more, knowing the question was burning in my chest.

“Nita?” I finally asked.

“No,” he said. “Nita needs to stay with her family. They need her more than ever now that she’s a ghost.”

I clinched my lips together tight. I rocked back and forth. Hoke, I could already see this was going to be a game General Pushmataha played. He knows the answer and I have to shut up and wait. Maybe he was trying to teach me something about listening rather than talking all the time. I put one hand under my chin and the other on top of my head and pushed. Hard. It was impossible to talk. Go ahead; try it if you don’t believe me.

General Pushmataha laughed so hard he almost fell over backwards. He even put his hands on his own chin and head, making fun of me! Generals aren’t supposed to make fun of little kid ghosts, are they?

“Isaac,” he said, “I knew I liked you the first time I saw you.”

“When was that?”

“When you stuffed your shirt with snow and icicles, pretending to be a Snow Monster to scare your dog.”

“You saw that? You were there?”

“Of course, Isaac,” Pushmataha said. “A good Choctaw leader has to know how to laugh, and you make it easy.”

“Yakoke,” I said. “I guess.”

“Do you remember Stella?” he asked. “The Choctaw councilwoman?”

I nodded.

“Achukma (‘good’ in Choctaw),” he said. “Remember the day the Nahullos were so mean to everyone? Leader blasted a tree branch with his shotgun, and it fell on Stella. He would not allow anyone to help her.”

I saw what happened that day as if it were in front of my eyes. Joseph and I were hiding deep in the woods. Joseph was so mad he wanted to turn into a panther and knock Leader from his horse.

“Isaac, you never want to make an elder Choctaw woman your enemy. Never. Do you understand me?”

“Yes,” I whispered.

“Achukma,” he continued. “Especially Stella. Do you remember the rattlesnake that protected Nita, after she died? Leader wanted to harm her body in front of her grieving parents. Remember?”

“The rattlesnake? That was Stella?” I asked.

“That’s right,” General Pushmataha said. “That was Stella.”

Pushmataha shook his head and laughed. He was enjoying this game way too much.

“Don’t you think Stella the Rattlesnake is a good person to have around?”

“Ummmm,” I said, determined to use as few words as possible.

“Isaac,” he said, with a serious look of wrinkled brows and tight lips. “Even a sound is talking. When that dog of yours growls and barks, that is his way of talking.”

“No!” I shouted. “General Pushmataha, Jumper does talk. He can talk in Choctaw and English and dog talk, too. He makes more sense than most of the people I know. Jumper does not growl and bark, he says people words.”

The general never changed his expression. “I think I just tricked you into talking, Little Isaac.”

“That’s not funny,” I said. “Hoke, that was a little bit funny.”

“Achukma,” he said. “Now that we have had our laugh, it’s time to make our plans.”

I folded my arms across my knees and leaned in close to listen.



Chapter 2

Rattlesnake Stella

BEFORE GENERAL PUSHMATAHA could say a word, I heard the rustling of dried leaves. I was too scared to look, but I finally realized that whatever it was, it couldn't hurt me now. I'm a ghost. I glanced to my right and there she sat, curled up with her fangs drooping and her head resting on her rattles. I looked to Pushmataha and pointed to the snake. He read the question in my eyes.

"Yes, Isaac. That is Stella."

As if in response, the rattlesnake wriggled her tail and a soft *whirrrr* filled the silence.

"I have invited Stella to be a guardian while you and I travel," said Pushmataha.

I puffed my chest and smiled a big smile. General Pushmataha, maybe the most famous Choctaw of all time, had chosen me to join him on a dangerous journey. Then—as quick as a firefly—I hung my head in shame. This was no time for me to be proud. Yes, I am a tushka shilombish, a spirit warrior, but I will never be a great one like him, General Pushmataha. "I will do my best," I said.

General Pushmataha touched my shoulder. "You will do fine, Isaac. I have been watching you for longer than you know."

"Will Nita be hoke?" I asked.

"Isaac," he said, "Nita will not be alone. She is such a cute little girl; she'll have a thousand Choctaw ohoyos (ohoyo is "woman" in Choctaw) scrambling to take care of her. But that task will fall on one very special ohoyo, our Choctaw councilwoman."

The snake lifted her head and tail at the same time. She gave a rattle, pointed her pointy-head in my direction, and waved her fangs at me.

Hoke, ghost or not, I was afraid.

“It’s only Stella,” said Pushmataha, trying not to laugh.

I did my best to smile at her, but I had been trained from childhood to make no sudden movements around a rattlesnake. Even though this was Stella, she was still a snake. “Maybe my brother, Luke, can look out for Nita,” I suggested.

This did not please Rattlesnake Stella. Her head froze, and she stared at me with unblinking eyes. The whole world froze, for just a moment, and then Stella drew her head back as if to strike.

Maybe I didn’t stay as still as I thought. Maybe I flinched. Maybe. But that does not excuse what Stella did. She flung her fangs at me, dripping with rattlesnake venom.

“Noooo!” I shouted, expecting the worst pain in the world, the pain of poison fangs sinking into my skin. Of course, I had no skin and could feel no pain. Rattlesnake Stella and General Pushmataha just laughed. At me!

Stella slithered into the general’s lap. I tried my best to be mad, watching the most honored of all Choctaw chiefs, now a ghost, and a Choctaw councilwoman, now a rattlesnake, share laughter at my expense. Finally, I did what any good Choctaw would do. I joined them. We all had a good laugh, a good Choctaw laugh.

“I think that settles it,” Pushmataha said. “Stella will look out for Nita while we travel. That hoke, Isaac?”

“Achukma, good,” I said.

He nodded at Stella, and she slipped down to the ground and wriggled away in the tall grass.

I still don’t know where we are going, I thought.

“Glad you asked, Isaac,” said Pushmataha. He brushed a mosquito from his nose and glanced to the treetops.

How does he do that? I wondered. I’d given up trying to swat mosquitoes as a ghost a long time ago.

“You ready to go, Isaac?”

Before I could open my mouth to answer, I was floating a hundred feet above the trees. I didn’t close my eyes; I didn’t even blink. I wanted to see everything. The world and sky and everything turned dark, but not a black lights-out dark.

No, this dark swirled with color. Yellow and red and blinding white, then briefly black as night. I felt neither dizzy nor strange as I sat and watched the kaleidoscope of flashing colors, green and purple and sky blue, too.

“Halito,” I whispered. “Hello.”

“I’m here,” Pushmataha said. “We are hoke, Isaac.”

I could no longer feel the wind, but I knew it was blowing. My body tumbled like a leaf in a tornado, upside down and around and around. I put my hand to my mouth to keep from throwing up and sending regurgitated corn like yellow raindrops on the walkers below. *That’s dumb*, I thought. *Ghosts don’t eat, so ghost can’t vomit!*

And then, for the first time in several days, I felt the shiver. I closed my eyes, but when I opened them I saw nothing I hadn’t seen before. Yet something was different. I heard a voice, as soft as a songbird in the roar of the storm.

Soon whispering voices came from all directions, surrounding me. The singing settled everything. I smiled to hear the song “Shilombish Holitopama,” “Amazing Grace” in Choctaw.

Through the mist, older men and women circled all around me. Their heads were bowed, and their palms were lifted to the high heavens as they sang.

Shilombish Holitopama
Ish minti pullacha
Hattak lbasha iyaha
Ishpi yukpa lashki

How could I feel afraid? The wind blew gently and I stopped rolling.

I opened my eyes and saw the earth below, through fleeting holes in a cloud. We sailed over mountains covered in tall pine trees. Sometimes we flew high above the mountaintops and other times so close to the forests below that I could have leapt onto a tree limb.

We slowed down as a sparkling river came into view, winding like a snake through the forest. Small canoes and fishing boats floated up and down the river.

So this is what it’s like to be a hawk, I thought. Soaring up and diving down, from clouds to earth and back again. I wonder what it’s like at night?

Suddenly a ball of fire dropped from the sky. I expected the woods to explode in flames and to see foxes and squirrels flee from the fire. But nothing burned. Nothing. Instead, everything turned dark. A yellow moon glowed on deep blue waters, surrounded by twinkling silver stars.

I realized I had just watched a sunset, the fastest sunset ever. Wait till I tell Joseph.

I had never seen a world so beautiful. I was beginning to understand why ghosts are so much happier than people. Even though death surrounds us, so does life, and life is an adventure—one exciting moment after another.

You've Just Finished your Free Sample

Enjoyed the preview?

Buy: <http://www.ebooks2go.com>