Chapter One
Meeting Digewi

Blue Jays, Cardinals, Finches, and Robins were singing beautiful melodies. The sky was a fabulous royal blue with white puffy clouds dancing across it. Peacefulness filled the air. The sweet smell of new grass mixed wonderfully with the fresh fruits coming into bloom.

Prycelia, now a mother Deer, has just given birth to a fine-looking young fawn this bright spring morning. His legs were strong and lanky, his tail as puffy and white as the clouds. His neck was lean. His coat was a sleek, soft almost-reddish brown, and he had tiny white spots scattered on his body. His face was adorable, yet very masculine. His nose was charcoal black, cold and wet, as it should have been. His oversized ears stood erect and alert. He was Prycelia's first child, so she gazed at him in amazement. The love she felt for him was so very deep. She was overjoyed, yet heartbroken at the same time. You see, the fawn's daddy was not there to see the beauty they created together.

This fawn's father was very important and respected by all of the forest animals. His name was Robert. In the forest, the bigger a buck's antlers are, the more respect he is given by the other animals. Robert had 36 points on his antler rack when he

died, and that made him very special. He was both experienced and wise in the ways of the forest. His only son looked a lot like him except that Robert's coat had turned a grayish brown. Strong, confident, and proud Robert had stood tall as a terrific leader.

Robert helped his many forest friends in times of need. When a forest fire broke out somewhere, he was the first to rush in and help guide the smaller animals out of the thick, dark cloud of choking smoke. If one of the forest animals were sick or injured, he and Prycelia would gather food and take it to them and their family. When a Hunter was after a younger deer, Robert would get his attention and distract the Hunter so the deer could escape. That is exactly what Robert was doing last season when he was killed and then taken away by a Hunter. Prycelia has been in mourning ever since. Today that all changed with their son's birth.

With her heart full of joy, Prycelia lovingly caressed her sweet boy. "What shall I call you?" she asked aloud, as she watched him drink some milk from her. "You are handsome, just like your father was. He was a very important part of the forest family. He would have been so proud of you. Being his son makes you very special, and people will look up to you to help them like your father did. Let me get you cleaned up. Company will be coming soon to meet you," his mother explained to her newborn.

Suddenly she noticed something odd. His eyes were a cloudy bluish white, but there weren't any other colors in them. Prycelia was confused and asked, "My son, can you see me?"

"What does *see* mean, Mommy?" asked the curious fawn.

"Seeing is what we do with our eyes. What do I look like to you?" she asked tenderly.

"My eyes don't work, Mommy," he said. Then he paused. "All I can see is a bright white light. I can't see you or anything else."

His mother took a deep breath and shed only a single tear. Then she calmly stated, "Well then, I guess you're even more special, aren't you?" She lay cuddling with him in the field of tall broom straw near their home.

After a while, Prycelia spoke in a soft whisper, "I will call you Digewi Deer. My very precious Digewi /Dee-gay-wee/." Mother nudged at Digewi to wake him up. Slowly and steadily she helped him to his feet.

"Smell me, Digewi," his mother told him. He sniffed and sniffed her. "You will need to remember my smell," his mother continued. "I need to lead you back to our home. It isn't far from here, but you need to stay close. I'm right with you."

It was a wobbly journey back to their home and poor little Digewi was exhausted. He lay in the soft pile of broom straw

that his mother had prepared for him, and he drifted off to sleep. Soon, their forest friends came to meet the new arrival. They brought gifts of apples, berries, and corn for Prycelia.

When the crowd seemed to gather around the young buck, Prycelia spoke up and said, "Thank you all so much for coming. My husband would have been so thankful to each of you. Now please allow me to introduce you to our son Digewi."

The fawn awoke to strange smells surrounding him, which startled him. He began to cry out, "Mommy, where are you? What are these strange smells?"

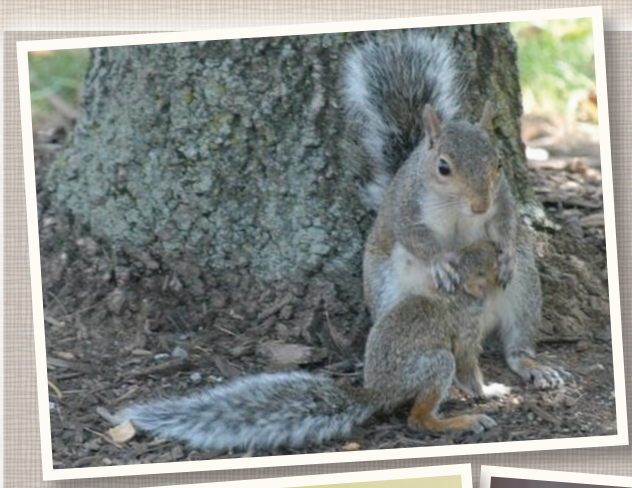
"It's all right, my son," she assured him as she nuzzled his neck.

Their visitors all sat very still because they were a bit confused. Prycelia continued, "Digewi is very special. I will need the help of all our friends to keep him safe. He needs to smell all of you to know whom he can trust."

Wyatt and Joy Squirrel scurried up front. "What kind of name is Digewi? What's wrong with his eyes? Why does he need to smell us? What makes him so special?" Wyatt Squirrel chattered as he quickly ran circles around Digewi.

"He is blind," Prycelia said. She paused and went on. "That is what his special name means. My great-grandmother taught me the old Cherokee language when I was small. *Digewi* means 'blind,' " Prycelia explained.

A hush fell over the crowd.



Liam Squirrel
mother and
baby squirrel

robin

cardinal

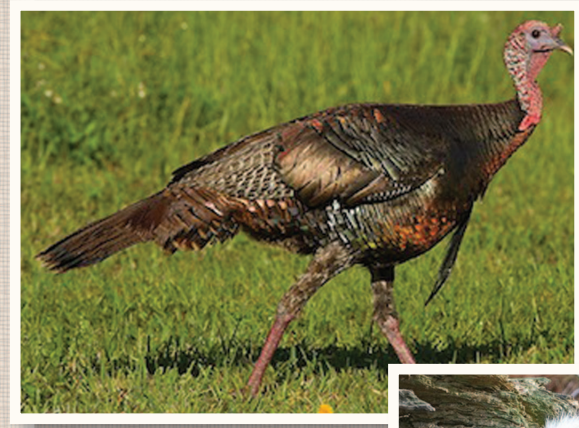
finches

blue jay

mourning dove

Tom (Papa Turkey)
old male wild turkey

turkey buzzard



Jake (Jake Turkey)
young male wild turkey

skunk

The Turkey family slowly drew closer. "You can smell me," young Jake Turkey said as he strutted forward.

Digewi sniffed Jake and started to sniff the rest of the Turkey family when he heard Lauren Rabbit ask, "Well, well, well! What do we have here?" as she hopped closer. She sniffed him as he sniffed her.

"He looks very handsome. He reminds me of his father at that age," added Old Erica Skunk. Digewi sniffed her and almost threw up.

"Looks like a strong young fawn to me!" wise Doctor Owl exclaimed as he inspected Digewi. The doctor lifted his tail, brushed his coat, and opened his mouth, checking every inch of Digewi.

Suddenly a loud, eerie voice came from a nearby tree. "A blind deer won't even survive one season," Mr. Turkey Vulture shouted. "Why don't you just let me go ahead and have him for supper?" he added with an evil chuckle.

Prycelia stood up, stomped the ground, and grunted loudly at him.

"Calm down, Missy. I'm leaving, but mark my words. He'll never make it. He's nothing like his father. Easy pickings, I say," Mr. Turkey Vulture squawked as he flew away.

Digewi was frightened and began to cry.

"Shhh, it's all right," Mother Deer said, comforting him. "You're going to be just fine."

Their forest friends drew closer to Digewi and tried to calm his fears. "Don't pay any attention to that mean old buzzard," replied Tom Turkey, Jake's dad. "He never stood a chance against your father, and we won't let him get anywhere near you, Boy."

Tom Turkey stood proud and tall. He looked around at all of the caring friends gathered there and continued, "Robert protected and helped each and every one of us at some point. Do we not owe it to *him* to do the same for his only son?"

Tyler Mouse stood up and proclaimed in a giant whine, "We can barely protect ourselves now that Robert isn't around. Just how do you suppose all of us small creatures, like the Squirrels over there," pointing to the Squirrels standing at Digewi's feet, "or the Moles or the...," he said as he flung his tiny arm in their direction.

Old wise Doctor Owl interrupted and spoke up. "Tom is right. Tyler is also right. They can't stand up to that mean old buzzard or many other dangers, but we can all help Prycelia and Digewi. Prycelia can teach us Cherokee words that we can use as code words when danger is near. In the winter, we can help by bringing food to keep Digewi away from the Hunters. There are many ways that we can all help and teach him different and important things. We shouldn't look at this as a burden but as an honorable duty to two—now three—very good friends!"

Everyone stood silent for a few moments. Then they agreed

that cooperation was best for all.

At dusk, Digewi sensed something different. He curiously asked, "Mommy, I'm getting cold. What happened to the warm feeling I felt on my face and body?"

"Ah...you were feeling the warmth of the sun. Let me explain," Prycelia continued, as Digewi's ears stood straight up listening attentively to her every word. "The sun is a giant ball of fire that floats high in the sky above us, heating and lighting our land. Each morning it rises from behind the trees in the east. It continues overhead until it reaches the trees in the west. We call this daytime. When the sun goes down and sleeps, nighttime begins. In its place, the moon rises. The moon is a smaller ball not nearly as bright or hot as the sun. It lights the darkness of nighttime. The night is a much cooler time than the day is. This is also the time when you will sleep."

Digewi nodded and sniffed his way to the soft pile of broom straw. There he curled up and drifted peacefully off to sleep.

Digewi awoke the next morning eager to start the new day. The sun warmed him. Sounds burst out all around him. He could hear the birds talking to each other and flying from the ground to the trees and back, as if they were playing a game of tag. He enjoyed the sounds of the Chipmunks and Squirrels playfully fighting over the nuts that were scattered on the ground.

Digewi carefully sniffed his area. He followed the sweet smell of grass back to the soft, dry broom straw. Pausing, he cocked his head toward his mother's scent and asked, "What will you teach me today, Mommy?"

Prycelia questioned, "What would you like to learn?"

Excitedly, Digewi responded, "Please teach me more words from the language my name comes from."

Prycelia smiled and asked, "Do you mean Cherokee Indian words?"

He quickly blurted out, "Yes...that's it...Cher-o-kee."

She moved closer to her son and offered, "If I teach you the words, will you teach them to your children someday, like my great-grandmother taught me?"

Bouncing wildly all around her, he kept repeating, "Yes, yes, yes."

Prycelia stood proudly and pronounced, "*Food...agisti*...a gi sti."

Digewi repeated it perfectly.

"Very good. Next word. *Friend...kola*...ko la," she said.

Again, he repeated it perfectly.

Prycelia spoke very sweetly, as she said, "You're doing great! Now try this. *I love you...techila*...te chi la."

Digewi giggled and nuzzled her neck with his cold wet nose. He said, "Techila, Mommy." Digewi suddenly looked right in the direction of his mother's face as if he could see her and

continued, "How do you say *Mommy?"*

Caught totally off guard, Prycelia laughed and lovingly said, "*Etsi*…,"

Digewi blurted it out before Prycelia could even slowly pronounce it. In no time, they were in the middle of their first Code Word Class. They spent most of the morning learning new words. Then they listened to and identified the sounds surrounding them.