

## *A Cherokee Wedding*

*A Story By Gayle Mountain Dreamer*



**Above: traditional two stemmed Native America wedding vase.**

It was a cool breezy night in the month of the Planting Moon. Awinita (Fawn) was gazing up at the stars and thanking Grandmother Moon for this wonderful day. After all, this had been her wedding day. Her heart was full of memories of the day that she had met Onacona (White Owl). It was during the Green Corn Ceremony. He was 15 years old and so handsome in his ceremonial dress. She was 13 and had to stay with the younger children. Her heart welled up with love for him and she was glad he was from another clan as it was forbidden to court and marry within your own clan. They were both two years away from the age of consent. How happy she had been when two years later, as was tradition, he killed a deer and brought it to her door signifying his love for her and desire to wed. She proved her acceptance of his proposal by cooking the deer and offering him a meal. With the approval of both clans, courtship and wedding plans had begun.

Early this morning Awinita had risen with the sun, faced the four directions, given thanks and asked Creator for blessings on this special day. After bathing in the cool sparkling river she had spent the day in joyful preparation for the sunset wedding, with family and friends.

In the tradition of the Ancient Ones, the sacred place where the ceremony would take place was blessed for seven consecutive days prior to the wedding. Awinita and Onacona had chosen to include the Fire Ceremony on their special day. A large circle had been built of stones at the site of the ritual. Inside this circle, using the seven sacred woods, a large fire was prepared which represented the Creator and the union of the two people. This fire was blessed and kept lit till the time of the ceremony. To the north and south of this fire was prepared two unlit smaller fires. These represented the individual lives of the bride and groom.

At sunset it was time for the ceremony. All guests had been invited by word of mouth, were blessed and awaited the couple in a sacred circle around the fire. Since Cherokee people are matrilineal, the woman is the head of the clan. Awinita was accompanied into the ceremony by her mother. Her oldest brother also stood with her. During the ceremony he would take a vow of "responsibility" for teaching his sister's children in spiritual and religious matters. Awinita felt beautiful in her white tear dress, made from torn pieces of fabric, and her white moccasins. She carried with her a basket containing bread and corn which represented her promise to Onacona to nurture and support him.

Onacona entered the circle wearing a roe colored ribbon shirt, black pants and moccasins. He carried a basket for his new bride containing meat and skins. This traditionally represented his promise to feed and clothe his new bride. Awinita remembered how handsome and somewhat scared he looked. She warmed to the ceremony as the Holy Man wrapped each of them in a blue blanket representing their old single life. Prayers were said and songs

were sung for the couple. After that, the two small fires were lit and after burning for a few minutes the couple pushed their respective small fires into the larger one symbolizing unity. At the same time the Holy Man removed the blue blanket from each of them and wrapped the couple in one white blanket. They were now officially married and embraced and kissed under the blanket. Awinita and Onacona had decided that at this time they would participate in another ancient tradition, The Rite of the Seven Steps. Still under the shroud of their matrimonial white blanket, each took seven steps around the fire, one following the other. With each step they said a vow to each other thus making their marriage more personal and binding.

With the marriage ceremony now complete, the couple toasted each other in the Wedding Vase Ceremony. Using the traditional pottery vase with a handle on each side and two separate spouts, the couple sipped tea. They both drank first from one side and then from the other. Finally they both drank from the vase at the same time. Awinita was so glad when they both drank at once and didn't spill a drop. Traditionally that meant they would have a long happy marriage with much co-operation and mutual understanding.

A huge wedding feast had been provided by the community. Many stomp dances were performed to bless them. The celebrations lasted through the night but Awinita was glad that she and Onacona were able to slip away to a quiet lodge in the forest by the river. It had been lovingly prepared for them by members of their families. And now, outside that lodge for a moment, listening to the river flow, Awinita was thanking Grandmother Moon and Creator for the many blessings of this sacred day of her marriage to the man she loved.

*Gayle Mountain Dreamer*