

# **Carissa**

Carly Michelle

# Chapter 1

"Get up!" yelled Massa Graham. His boot jabbed into my side and I jumped up to my bare feet.

"I's sa sorry, Massa, it won't be happenin' again," I said. I held my side and tried to be brave but I knew the fear was showing through. Although I was only fifteen, I knew better to expect kindness or mercy from the Massa.

"Better not. If it does you can expect to be on the next wagon out of here to be sold," He sneered.

"Yes, Massa." I picked up my basket of cotton and went back to picking. I couldn't believe I had fallen asleep again. This was the second time this week and I knew Massa Graham was serious about selling me to some other plantation owner. I don't think that I could ever leave this place. I looked over at my poor Father having to pick cotton in this hot sun. My brother was next to him helping.

It hurt to think I would have to leave this place. This is where my family was.

The cotton was so rough on my fingers and the skin on my hands was broken open. The scorching sun beat down on my back and I started to feel exhaustion sweep over me again. I gave in.

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"Gittt up you good fer nothin' animal. That'ss it! On...on Monday when we go into town yer gonna be ssa-ssold and you ain't never gonna see this place or any of yerrr family agains yy-you can bet yer life on that," Massa yelled, stuttering and slurring his words.

I could tell he was drunk again and it scared me more than anything. When he got drunk he had no problem doing things he wouldn't normally do...especially to us slaves. Like a few months ago when we heard the echo of shots ring out in the night and a fresh grave being dug the next morning. It was little Jackson Freesley, my good friend's little brother. And just a few weeks ago, he and a few of the other plantation owners from around here went out to the big old tree about a mile west of here and hung a woman for no good reason. Although I did know where the tree was I never wanted to have to go there or to see it.

I finished picking another basket full of cotton just as the sun set. I hurried out of the fields and handed the two baskets to Christian. Then I went back to my cabin and lay down just for a little while before Father, Mamma Janny, Mary, Matthew, Noah, and Adelaide came back to the cabin. I wasn't going to try to sleep this late in the day though so I pulled out a book wedged between the mattress and the wall. It was one that my mother had taken a long time ago from the plantation owner she used to work for. The spine and cover were nearly gone and the pages were torn and brittle. The book had no pictures but I just loved to look at the words and try to see if I could spot any of the few that I knew. Only Mamma Janny and Adelaide knew that I had such a desire to learn to read although it is forbidden.

Matthew, my older brother, walked in looking like he had aged another twenty years from the time I saw him this morning. Worry etched his face and his eyes were dark.

"Matthew," I said quietly, "whas wrong? Did somethin' happen today?" I slid the book I had been looking at back down in its place and stood.

"No, but I did hear 'bouts you fallin' ta sleep again. Is Massa Graham gonna take ya ta be sold away from us now?" he stepped closer looking hurt.

"Yes, Matthew, on Monday...and I's real scared. Wut is I gonna do?" I said desperately.

"Listen, Carissa. Ya has ta come with me...tonight. I's finally twenty and I's gotta get outta here; gotta live my life the way I wants ta. It's time."

"Whatcha talkin' 'bout? Where ya goin'?"

"Ya knows that we gotta leave here. Ya can't be stayin' no longa and I's am finally ready ta go. It has ta be jes us though. Ain't no one else's ready or's able ta go with us now." I glanced at the window. No one was there but I knew we better keep our voice down or someone would hear and that would be bad news for us! I motioned for him to lower his voice and then answered quietly.

"No. I's am not goin' with ya. Is not safe and wud be betta ta be sold than ta be hunted down likes some kinda wild animal jes ta be brought back heres and killed. Besides we don't even know the way. Hows wud we survive the trip?"

"Yer sayin' that yer gonna give up ya only chance fer freedom?" I didn't know what to say to that really. He

started to pace and run his hands through his hair. He finally stopped pacing and looked me in the eyes, "That ya wanna be sold 'way from yer family and all thatcha have come ta know here? How cud ya seriously believe that cud be betta than runnin' and havin' somewhats of a chance ta live freely? I mean is yer choice but I think ya will be makin' a huge mistake if ya don't come with me tonight."

"Matthew, what 'bout if we ends up gettin' caught?"

He walked over and put his hands on my shoulders, "We ain't gotsta worry 'bout that if we hurry."

"I's sorry but I jes can't do it...and I can't even think of leavin' Noah and Mary here whiles I is livin' as a free person in the North. That wud jes feel sa wrong." I turned and walked away from him still sure my choice was best but upset that I couldn't go with him anyway.

"Is ya sure that is ya final decision?" He asked quietly.

"Yes, Matthew. It is." I said as I turned and looked him in the eyes.

"Well I's is gonna be leavin' soon sos this is gudbye. I'll miss ya all so much. I's hopein' that one day alls ya kin come and find me and we kin all be free togetha." He was still and looked at his feet.

"Ya knows we wud all love that. I hope sa much that one day that dream wills a be cummin' true fer all us. G'bye, Matthew." The tears stung my eyes but I wiped them away and tried to stay strong. I could tell he was having a hard time too. Trying to hide what he was feeling was too hard for him so he just turned and left the cabin.

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The dim light of a lantern coming in through the window danced on the walls. It had an eeriness to it and something felt wrong. I didn't know what time it was but I knew that it had to be pretty far into the night. Why was someone outside at this time of night and why were they right outside of our cabin? I couldn't see outside from where I was lying but I figured it was probably Massa Graham wandering around in a drunken stupor. My curiosity chewed at me and I finally got up to check it out. It was Massa Graham but it didn't seem like he was just wandering around. He seemed to be looking for something or someone. All of a sudden my heart jumped and I squinted to look across the room. It was still hard to see anything but I could tell that Matthew had already left. Did Massa Graham know? Was that why he was up looking around?

He finally moved on and the room went completely dark again. I stood there in that spot for what seemed like hours deciding what I should do. Then I finally decided to go outside and see what was really going on. Of course I wasn't exactly just going to go to Massa Graham and ask him what was up but I thought if I was quiet enough I could follow him undetected.

It took a while to find him again but I finally caught up and was just sure that I had been correct in my guess that he was looking for Matthew. It was a gut feeling but I was usually right about that kind of thing. My heart beat fast, not only from the feeling that he could find Matthew, but also that I could get caught outside following Massa right now. Who knows what horrible thing he would do to me if he found me out right now.

Just when I was feeling like turning back around to go to my cabin again, I saw someone coming down the trail at the edge of the woods on our property. I looked closer and caught a glimpse of his face. It was Chad Grayson. He owned a plantation about a mile north of here and was a good friend of Massa Graham's. He was dragging someone behind him. I swallowed hard trying not to allow the thoughts that the person could be Matthew come into my mind. I was

probably just being paranoid but I had to be sure it wasn't him. Mr. Grayson threw the person on the ground in the moonlight but his face was still hidden. He was definitely a slave and I could see from his build that he was a man. I heard Massa Graham yell and then he kicked the man. Then he picked him up and I saw his face. It was Matthew. His face had deep cuts and bruises and his clothes were just rags hanging loosely around his large frame. By now tears were running freely down my face and I wondered how he could ever get out of this mess. What would they do to him? Would they hand him or let him go? My heart was pounding as I pondered all the terrible thoughts that entered my head. I had to do something but it didn't look like there was any way out of what was coming.

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The noose hung tightly around a thick tree limb. It seemed to shout "this is the end" when you looked at it. Like, you have come so far in life just for this moment to take it all away from you. I knew Matthew was going to be going to a better place with no pain or suffering; to a place of freedom and love. But no matter how much I told myself that it still didn't change the fact that this was the last time I was ever going to see my brother and that

was the worst feeling. The deep hurt was almost all I could take and I held my stomach nearly doubling over. I thought I was going to be sick.

The cloud of dust kicked up by the horses announced the men's arrival before I could even see them. It seemed Massa Graham and Mr. Grayson hadn't wasted any time in letting the other men who lived nearby know there was going to be a hanging here soon. I counted at least 17 men there including Mr. Grayson's fifteen year old son. My crying was not silent but I was about twenty-five feet away from them so I was sure I would not be found. Matthew's fear was evident even in the way he sat on the horse. By now there were at least six more gashes on his skin and blood shone in the light of the lanterns. The rope that was used to tie his wrists together was digging deep into his skin and all I wanted to do at that moment was bring him back to our cabin and fix all of this but that wasn't possible now. I knew I should have talked him out of running earlier but I also knew that he was so stubborn he never would have listened anyway.

I knew I had to get out now or the memories would never leave my mind so I ran. I ran to get out my anger and to try and forget even what couldn't be forgotten. My lungs

burned and I finally slowed down. When I reached the cabin I sat outside for a little while so I could cry a little longer but not wake the family. They would have to find out in the morning so that Massa Graham would not know that I had been there. I got up and went inside, my heart heavy.

## Chapter 2

"Whas gonna happen now, Fatha?" I asked sheepishly.

"Ya knows that Massa Graham will be comin' afta our family now. Ya have ta be taken Mary and Noah and ya all gotta run. It is the only thing that'll save ya from bein' sold and us from bein' killed." Father whispered.

"But Fatha, whys wud they kill ya if ya weren't the one runnin'? None of us had anythin' ta do with Matthew's

runnin'. We kin tell that ta Massa Graham and yous kin be safe."

"Carissa, Massa Graham don't care none 'bouts what we's sayin'. He'll assume we helped Matthew 'scape and kill us all. In fact it'll most likely be happenin' right after he sells ya. He'll prolly figure that he kin git some money outta ya and then be killin' the rests of us. Ain't no way ta git outta this 'cept ta run. I's sorry but I's too old ta be makein' the trip and ya has ta git Mary and Noah outta here."

"Wud ya least give me some time ta think 'bout it and ta prepare?" I said sadly. Did that mean that once I left Father, Mamma Janny, and Adelaide would die? How could this be happening? I would never see them again. Although my heart was breaking I could not say anything to Fatha. He would just tell me not to worry. And besides I was sure it was already taking up a lot of his thoughts and he was probably scared. So I tried to push away all the terrible thoughts of what was coming until I could think and be alone.

"Yes, Carissa. But ya will need ta be gone by tomorra night at the latest if ya do plan ta be goin'. Please undastand why I kinnot go and why I is askin' ya."

"I do Fatha, and I will seriously think 'bout this." I exited our cabin quietly and walked up to the house. I was going to see Mamma Janny. Even though I couldn't tell her what was going on right at that moment, I knew she would find out later and just talking to her helped. I knocked twice on the door and waited for a few seconds when the door swooshed open and there stood Adelaide.

"Hey Carissa, is ya doin' okay?" She waved me inside and continued to knead the dough she had left to answer the door. Fortunately she was not as perceptive as Mamma Janny so she would not be asking as many questions that I could not yet answer.

"Yeah I's alright. How's ya holdin' up?"

"I's okay too. Were ya here ta see Mamma Janny?"

"Yeah but that's 'kay if she's out. We kin jes talk."

I said as I smiled at her. We were best friends and I didn't want her to think I was ignoring her now when we both really needed each other.

"Great!" She exclaimed. We chatted for about twenty minutes and then I left. Even though I wasn't expected to do work anymore because I was going to be sold and Massa didn't want me to feel like working hard enough could earn me a place to stay again, I was still expected not to

bother the other slaves while they worked. I went back to the cabin and sat thinking about how I was going to escape. It would have to be in the night but I had no idea where to go or how to get there. This was so hard.

"Whas up?" I jumped as I hadn't even heard anyone come in.

"Oh, nothin'. How 'bout ya? Ya doin' 'kay, Mary?"

"Yeah, I went inta town with Mamma Janny today. We bought food fer the Massa and his family. We jes got back a few minutes ago and I's worn out!" She said with a tired sigh.

"Why don't ya take a nap. I think I'm gonna go and talk with Mamma Janny sa you kin have some peace n' quiet."

"Thanks, that sounds good," she smiled at me and then closed her eyes. She was going to need all the rest she could get before we left...if we decided to go.

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"There is too many things that cud go wrong. What if we git attacked by some wild animal? What if one of us gits sick and can't keep on goin'? And Mamma Janny, what 'bout if we gits caught?" I said desperately. The fear was now overwhelming as I had been thinking on this topic too much and was shaking. I could not do this on my own. I was so

glad Mamma Janny had come back to the cabin a little early. Now I could just spill everything that had been going through my head to her freely.

"Carissa, I know ya. I know how smart ya are and how fast ya kin think in hard situations. I also know that God is watchin' out fer ya. I pray he'll lead ya in the right direction everyday. While I kinnot guarantee easy travel or safety, I do know that God'll be with ya in every single moment of this and He will see ya through. Ya should definitely be seekin' guidance from Him right now. He knows betta than any of us. He'll show ya the right way and help ya 'long." I knew she was right. It helped to be reminded that God was in control of everything and He would be with me all the way no matter what my choice was.

"Memba the verse from the Bible I always used ta tell ya when ya were little and wud be gettin' scared, Psalm 23:4?" Mamma Janny asked.

"Oh is been such a long time since I last heard it but I still do memba it sa clearly, 'Yea, though I walk through the valley of the shadow of death, I will fear no evil: fer thou art with me; thy rod and thy staff they comfort me.' I love that verse. I should memba and think on it more often than I do." I needed to be strong for Mary and Noah but my

fear was still standing in the way. I had to get away and pray. God would give me the strength and courage I so desperately needed.

"Thanks Mamma Janny. I'll be seein' ya tonight and hopefully know what ta do by then."

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"Adelaide and Noah, wud ya mind takin' Mary 'long and goin' outside fer a little while. I really need ta talk ta father and Mamma Janny alone. I promise not ta be too long. Maybe y'all cud do some work in our garden as ta not make Massa Graham suspicious." They nodded and stepped outside. I waited until I heard their chatter fade away in the direction of the garden and then took a deep breath. I had made my decision and I had to tell them what I was going to do. Mamma Janny and Father pulled out chairs and sat while I remained standing. I was so nervous I couldn't think of sitting now.

"I know what I need ta do now and I have decided that Mary, Noah, and I need ta leave. Sa the night afta tomorrow night I'll be takin' 'em and we'll follow directions ya give us. We will need ta collect all the food and extra clothin' we kin by then. Do this sound..." My eyes dashed to the window but I could not see anything outside. The

heavy footsteps heard a few seconds ago were undoubtedly Massa Graham's coming to check up on all of us slaves. I thought it odd that he would choose to check up on us again since that would make it three times this week but I guessed that it was probably a result of Matthew's near successful escape. It had him worried that others would try the same and maybe actually get away with it.

I held my breath as I heard him take a few more step nearer the cabin. Noah always used to put his ear up to the door and try to listen in on Adelaide and my conversations and it always made the same soft squeak that I heard now. He was trying to listen to what we were saying. Beads of sweat started forming on my forehead and I had to think quickly. What could I say that would sound normal...like nothing out of the ordinary was going on?

"Wuz it very hot in the fields today, Fatha?" I asked a little too quickly as I motioned to the door with my thumb. Father still had a puzzled look on his face but responded to the question.

"Uh...yes it wuz pretty hot...we'll need ta be hurryin' ta pick the rest of the cotton if we wants there ta be any ta sell in town on Monday." Mamma Janny started to cough a harsh, deep cough and the door squeaked again

letting us know he had stepped back at least. I eyed the window and followed his head until it was completely out of sight. Then I started in again on my decision.

"So do ya think that plan sounds 'kay?" I asked anxiously.

"Yes, all except fer the part where ya leave two nights from tonight. You must leave tomorra night. Ya is gonna be sold on Monday if not, memba?" Father insisted.

"Yes, but I heard Massa Graham talkin' ta anotha slave who works in the fields and he told him we needed anotha day ta be pickin' cotton sa we would not make the trip inta town until Tuesday. I'll have more time ta git things we need around, also."

"I still don't think that's a gud idea. Ya should jes stick ta the night I told ya before. It wud be safa don't ya think."

"Fatha, I's sorry but that's wut I think is best sa we will be leavin' the night after tomorrow night. Is there anythin' else?" I was getting a little frustrated but tried to calm down and just breathe.

"No. If ya insist then we'll start ta gettin' prepared. Mamma Janny, is ya gonna be able ta get nuff food away from the kitchen 'thout bein' noticed?"

"I's gonna try my best. It should be easy nuff though. Right afta the family is done with lunch, Massa Graham, as ya know, goes out ta the fields ta make sure everythin' is goin' 'kay. His wife puts their two little daughters down fer a nap and then goes ta read in the library along with their son Jacob. Adelaide will probably not even notice but she won't say anythin' even if she do see. Now how much do ya think ya can carry? You'll got ta have some sort of basket or sack I'm assumin', ain't that right?"

"I think we will need a sack. That would probly be easier on the run. As fer how much food...I'm not too sure. Prolly a lot ta feed all three of us."

"I'll jes find a couple of sacks tomorrow in the kitchen and fill 'em up as full as they'll be goin'."

"Great!" I said.

I think this is gonna work out 'kay. But then again that wuz the easiest part of this whole thing and runnin'...that's the hardest. I mean how wuz I ever gonna make it when sa many had tried and failed before me...includin' Matthew.



## Chapter 3

"What!" Noah cried, "Ya can't do this. We can't leave. What if we gets caught? And besides, even if we didn't git caught we wud die jes from the weather or wild animals. What is ya thinkin'? Well I ain't goin' with ya." He set down his glass of water on the table hard and stormed out of the cabin. So much for trying to inform him quietly. I sat in the creaky chair and tried to think of a better explanation but none came. I knew I also had to tell Mary today...that was not going to be fun. I got up and started to pace a little. Now what?

"Fatha, what should I do? Noah has ta come with us. If not ya know what'll happen," My eyes were wet and I started to feel like this all was hopeless. Like nothing like this could work and we were just fooling ourselves thinking it could.

"Ya know this is what y'all have ta do." He sat up from his cot and looked at me, "There is no changin' yer mind now. Noah will come 'round...he has ta. Jes give him some time ta see that this is the only way ta stay alive."

He was silent for a few minutes then said, "Carissa, I believe ya kin do this. I wud never have asked ya if I

didn't. Now ya has ta believe. Please don't lose faith. Memba God'll be with ya no matta what," He picked up the basket he had been using to pick cotton today and left without another word.

But what kin I do? I is only fifteen and I have hardly even been off the plantation and never alone. Life, even on another plantation, wud be betta than bein' found and hung.

The doubts that were creeping into my mind were so overwhelming I nearly fell off my old chair. I looked down to see my knuckles whitening as I grasped the table's edge.

Oh Lord, what should I do? Please help me see where ta go next. I know that I have asked ya sa much but I jes can't seem ta understand yer will.

I dried my eyes and drank the rest of my water. Then I stood and left. A walk would be nice right now.

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I twirled the flower stem in my hands and blew. The seeds scattered all around me and fell to the ground. I felt the warm sun on my back and the wind whispering a soft song through the trees.

Why cudn't life stay like this? Why did bad things have ta happen?

"CARISSA!!!! CARISSSSSAAAAAA!" I heard the voice but couldn't see anyone around. Then I heard the voice call my name again. I looked in the direction of the cotton fields and saw my brother, Noah, emerge from them. He was out of breath and looked like he was deep in thought.

"Noah, whas wrong? Did somethin' happen ta fatha?" My heart pounded as I waited for bad news. I dropped the flower and gave him my full attention.

"No, nothin's wrong I jes wanted ta tell ya that I talked ta Fatha and Mamma Janny and they talked me inta goin'...well not really, they jes let me know what's really goin' on here and why we has ta leave and that ya are jes tryin' ta do what's best fer all us," he took a deep breath and continued, "anyway I's jes wanted ya ta know that I's sorry for givin' ya such a hard time before and that I will do whatever ya tell me now. I promise." He looked up at me with a big grin. I was so happy that he had changed his mind.

"Thanks Noah. I is jes trying ta do what Fatha tol' me. I'm not really all that excited 'bout this trip eitha but it is the only way. I am glad ya know that now." I whispered and smiled back at him.

"Well, I'll see ya tonight! Right now I has ta go see if I kin find that bird I wuz chasin'." And like that he was off running away again. That boy was always running! I laughed to myself and picked another flower feeling a whole lot better about this whole thing.

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"Mary, kin I talk ta ya?" I wrung my hands as I tried to remember what I had gone over so many times in my head earlier today. This would be so hard. Mary was so close to this family and she would never want to leave here no matter how bad things got. Mary sat there, unsuspecting, playing in the dirt with a stick she had found. She drew our family and the cabin. It was going to be so hard; maybe I should have just let Mamma Janny tell her but it was my responsibility. I had to get this over with.

"I'm gonna tell ya somethin' that may be hard ta hear but I want ya ta try and be strong, 'kay Mary? Kin ya do that fer me?" She looked up but said nothing. Then she slowly nodded her head.

Her eyes were big as I told her what had to happen. That she would have to leave here and never come back. Never get to see Father or Mamma Janny or Adelaide ever again. When I was done she sat there hands no longer

playing in the dirt just still in her lap. Her eyes were focused on mine still but now held a hurt that was understandable. Never being able to see the people you love or to be where it was home, well it was almost unbearable. I knew. I was feeling the same exact way but I had been warned long before now. This was all new to Mary.

She looked down, about to cry and said, "Carissa, I will do whatever we have ta and I trust ya. If ya say that we need ta get outta here then I will go with ya." I couldn't believe what I was hearing. Mary being only seven and understanding so well...even better than Noah who was ten. Maybe it was all going to be okay.

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"Hey Fatha, do ya know if Mamma Janny ended up bein' able ta find any bags?" I whispered to him as I was passing through the open fields. No one was nearby so I figured we could talk right now.

"Yes, I jes talked ta her and she said that she found two perfect, big bags and a smalla bag fer Mary. And she had already placed some food inta the bags and said that she wud prolly have 'nough ta fill them all the way up. I is sa pleased with the way this is workin' out, Carissa. Thank ya again," He patted my shoulder with his rough hand

and then turned around again to pick more cotton. He was such a hard worker and I was scared that someday he would just push himself too hard. Oh well, he did know how to take care of himself; at least I knew he could get along here fine without me. I just didn't know if I could ever get along fine without him.

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"Hurry, we don't have much time left. Massa Graham jes did his routine checkup of everythin' but I am sure he will be back again in a little while," I said.

"Why do ya say that? I thought he usually jes came around once a night." Adelaide asked as she helped Mary with her bag of food.

"No, Adelaide. Ever since Matthew's attempted escape he has also been comin' around 'bout three hours later and checkin' up on us again. I don't want ta be anywhere around here when he finds out we is gone."

"Yeah that wud not be good." Adelaide picked up Noah's bag now and helped him with it. His was much bigger than Mary's. At first he acted like it might be too heavy but finally got it adjusted and was fine.

"Now Mary and Noah ya know that there is no turnin' back now right?" They both nodded and their faces were

somewhat sad with a bit of a quiet fear. Like they knew this was so dangerous and crazy but would not allow themselves to show it on their face too much or to let their minds to dwell on it too long.

Now came the goodbyes. This was so hard and I had only ever said goodbye once...to Matthew. First there was Mamma Janny, my favorite person. She was so full of life and never let anything or anyone bring her down. She loved the Lord and I knew that she really loved me. I was going to miss her so much.

"Carissa, I don't know what we'll do withoutcha here. I want ya ta know that I love ya and I will miss ya sa much. And memba Psalm 23:4." She hugged me for a long time then finally let go. With tears in her eyes and her hands around mine she began to sing in her deep, smooth voice. It was an old, old song that my mother also used to sing to me right before I went to bed. It was called "Steal Away to Jesus" and it was so comforting. My heart felt heavy as I thought about this. It was the last time I would probably ever hear Mamma Janny's voice or see her again.

Her voice softened as the song ended and she let my hands go. She moved back and sat on her chair. Her hands

mindlessly tugged at the frayed end of her apron. I had never seen her like this.

I moved to Adelaide next, my best friend. She was so good and honest. We had so much in common and she was always there for me no matter what.

"I don't really know what ta say right now, Adelaide, but I know I's gonna miss ya sa much!" She hugged me as we both sobbed and finally I moved on to Father.

It felt like my heart was going to shatter just looking at Fatha. What could I even say to him? He was the best Father anyone could ever ask for and I loved him more than anyone else in the world. This was too hard. As I moved to hug him the tears spilled over even more and I couldn't speak.

"Carissa...ya know that I love ya. And I will be prayin' fer ya every minute. Hurry and memba everythin' that Mamma Janny and I have told ya."

"'kay, Fatha, I will. I love ya too." This was all too much to take in right now. I backed up and sat down trying to put together a metal checklist.

*Okay we have food, a little extra clothing...*

"Father, what 'bout the map?"

"Oh honey that's what I fergot...here it is," Mamma Janny pulled out a wrinkled, partially torn map and handed it to me. It smelled and was hardly readable but it would work. I folded it back up and put it in my pocket.

"Thank ya all for everythin' and I love ya and will miss ya. Com'on Mary and Noah. It's time ta go."

We slipped out the door and I felt the wind whip my hair around. Although it was a cool evening, I started to sweat and my heart was in my throat. Mary and Noah followed me quietly to the edge of the forest. We had already made it off the plantation. Now we just had to make it all the way to the North.

## Chapter 4

"Carissa, when is we gonna stop fer the night?" Mary whined. She took another slow step and sighed, her shoulders slumping.

"We ain't goin' ta," I said, thinking back to what Mamma Janny had told me. I looked away from Mary.

"What? Ya can't be serious? We'll die with no sleep," She pouted, her feet dragging.

I looked back to her and said, "No, we ain't gonna go 'thout sleep. We'll jes have ta sleep in the day time. That's what Mamma Janny told me ta do. That way we kin move

at night and not be seen. Do ya think ya kin go ahead and do that, Mary?" We both stopped and I looked at her. We weren't too far away from the plantation and she was already getting tired. How was she ever going to make it?

"Yeah Carissa, I kin do that," She shot me a tired smile and we kept walking, with just a little hint of a spring in her step again.

"Noah, is ya gonna be okay with that?" I asked.

"Yeah Carissa whateva ya say. I jes want ta know when we's gonna be eatin'. I's already sa hungry!"

"Well we kin only eat a small bit everyday sa I think that we should eat right when we git up from sleepin' an' then also sometime in the middle of when we is travelin'. Do ya think that's okay?"

"That sounds gud but eitha way I'm thinkin' we's gonna be runnin' outta food pretty quickly," he said.

"I know, and then we'll jes have ta be eatin' plants and berries. I'm hopein' we ain't gotta come ta that fer a while though."

"Sa kin we go ahead and eat right now or not?"

I stopped walking, "Yeah we kin eat right now. But not too much, 'kay." I sat on the warm dirt and leaves and took off my bag. Mary and Noah sat too and took off their bags.

"Uh...Mary, why does yer bag look sa empty?" asked Noah.

"What?" Mary looked down at her bag. It did seem to be much fuller when we left. She opened it and looked inside.

"Maybe 'cause it is. I only have 'bout a forth of the food I had before." She looked up at me and tears almost immediately began to fall off her long eyelashes onto her cheeks. She quickly closed to bag and walked a few feet back the way we had come from.

"Aw Mary, what is ya doin'?" Noah asked.

She answered, her voice shaky, "I is jes gonna follow our trail back a little ways and try ta find where it cud have fallen out. I will be back in jes a little while, 'kay?" She didn't wait for a response but kept on walking. My stomach growled as I closed my bag. With most of Mary's food gone we needed to keep all the food we could. That would mean only eating one small meal a day for me.

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"Gud job Mary!" yelled Noah.

"Thanks," she said as she grinned up at him. She had a large pile of food in her hands. Not nearly as much as she had started with back at home but she had recovered a good part of it and I had never been more proud of her. I opened

my bag a pulled off a small piece of bread. Maybe it was okay to eat tonight.

We walked for what I thought was about two more hours and then decided to stop and sleep. The sun was just peeking over the tree tops ahead of us and my feet would barely take me any farther. Mary and Noah both looked like they were going to fall asleep right where they were standing.

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"Carissa, cud ya pass the butter, please." Mamma Janny asked.

"Sure!" I said as I passed it to her, "Sa wat have ya fixed fer dessert today? I hope ya made a big apple pie. Ya make 'em the best."

She smiled at me. "How did ya know?"

We laughed as she cleared the plates and brought out the pie. Mmmmmmm, did it smell good! She cut us all a huge piece and we sat around talking and laughing all day.

Then all of a sudden darkness came and everything started to change.

"What's happenin', Fatha?" I asked, shaking with fear and trying to figure out what was going on. Everything was fine just a second ago.

"Carissa, jes try and stay calm. Please take gud care of Noah and Mary. I love ya all," he said desperately.

"No, Fatha. Please come back. We need ya...I need ya ta stay here with us." I tried to reach him, tried to get him to come back but it was like something dark kept pulling him farther away from me into complete darkness. And no one else around me seemed to notice or care. Then, Mamma Janny and Matthew started to be pulled away too.

"Mamma Janny...Matthew...NO! Come back, please." I screamed. I tried to run towards them and bring them back too but I couldn't move no matter how hard I tried. I kept on screaming but it did no good. They were gone now. The darkness left as quickly as it had come and everything returned to normal only now it was just Mary, Noah, and Me.

"NOOOOOOOOOOO! Please come back. Please come...We need ya. What happened ta Adelaide?" The tears streamed down my face as I awoke and realized I was yelling.

Noah ran over to me and kneeled down close, "Whas wrong? Did somethin' happen ta ya?" Obviously I had woken him and he still looked tired but full of adrenaline at the moment.

I didn't know what to say. I couldn't tell him about the dream but he would want to know what had happened.

"Uh...yeah I'm fine I jes thought I saw a wild animal," I lied. "Nothin' ta worry 'bout now."

He gave me a disbelieving look but accepted the explanation. I knew it would come up again but I was just glad it was over with for now.

"Ya know someone prolly heard yer screamin' and carryin' on and has gotten closer. Don't ya think we should git a move on now?" We both looked over to Mary as she stood a few feet away, bag on her back, all ready to get going again. She looked scared and with good reason. If someone had heard this could be the end for us.

"Yeah you's probably right Mary, gud thinkin'." I said. I got up off the ground and picked up my bag. Noah and Mary started to walk off ahead of me very quickly.

Suddenly I felt something crawling up my back. It felt really big and fast. I tried to reach it on my back and when I couldn't, I started to scream again. Noah ran back and covered my mouth with his hand. Mary hurried around behind me and started to look for the bug. It took her a long time but she finally found it and knocked it to the ground. The bug had six long, spindly legs and a think body. It scurried under a pile of leaves and was gone faster than anything I had seen before back on the

plantation. This was definitely a strange and frightening new place we were in.

We didn't take our time but started out again in a sprint. We were defiantly going to be very tired by the end of tonight.

## Chapter 5

"Is ya sure ya know where we's goin'?" Noah gave me a questioning glance but kept walking through the thick piles of leaves and dirt.

"Course...as long as I have this map with me I will know 'zactly which way we need ta go. We'll be fine. Besides I think we jes follow the riva from here anyways."

"I don't know 'bout that, Carissa. Look on up ahead," he pointed to a field up ahead.

"Yeah, what 'bout it?"

"Well did ya notice there is no riva cuttin' through that field?"

"Oh...yous right. Let me look at the map again. I hope we is goin' the right way. I's sure this is where it said ta go though." I checked the map over and over again and that was the direction it said to go. That was weird though because I always thought you had to follow the river. Oh well, I guess there was more than one way and the river was just one of them.

I made sure I knew where we were going to be going the rest of the time tonight and put the map away securely in my bag. I thanked God for the map because if I didn't have it I would never be able to find my way.

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"Carissa do ya hear that?" Mary leaned over from where she was sleeping to whisper in my ear.

"No jes go on back ta sleep; yous were probably jes dreami..."

Then I heard it. Dogs barking.

"Mary...Noah git up now! Grab your bags and run! NOW!" I yelled as I stood and grabbed what little I had.

Mary and Noah jumped up and we all started to run. I had no idea how long we had been asleep but it seemed like

it was just about the time we should have been waking up anyway. My feet started to feel like lead bricks in my torn shoes. My heart was beating rapidly and adrenaline coursed through my veins. I wasn't even sure we were heading the right way but we just had to get away from the dogs and the men that were after us. If we didn't that was the end for us...literally.

"Mary...hurry...we don't have much time...please Mary jes keep runnin'," I cried as she fell down. She got right back up but I wasn't sure she was going to make it. Noah quickly pulled the bag she was carrying off her back and threw it on his back. Now with him carrying Mary's bag she suddenly got a burst of energy and ran ahead of us.

I heard the barking getting closer and pushed myself to run faster also. I could hardly even think and my stomach was aching. It was so hard and every part of me wanted to stop and rest but that wasn't an option right now. I knew the dogs had our scent and it was easy for them to follow our trail through that. I had to figure out a way to get them off our trail. I saw Mary out of the corner of my eye starting to lag behind again. I knew she would have to stop soon. She was so much younger and none of us were really used to running so hard like we had to right now.

We passed many cabins on the way and I wondered if they knew that we were on the run. Had Massa Graham let everyone know that he had a few slaves on the loose? I was almost positive that he had but I could only hope that they would not try to be heroes and catch us for Massa Graham.

I looked for a river or lake or even a stream but I couldn't find one in what was becoming an intense and overwhelming darkness. I stumbled over a thick log blocking the path and started to fall down a small hill. I felt cool come over me head and I jumped up. Water!

I quietly called to Mary and Noah and they hurried to find me in the dark. From what I could see, it was a huge lake so we were sure to lose them if we could just be swift. We were soaking and most of our food would be no good now but it was the only way.

They were getting so close I could even hear the men's shouts now. By the way they talked and all the barking I could hear they were still coming in the right direction...right toward us. We were still in the middle of crossing the lake but we were moving fairly fast so I hoped they would hold off at least until we were out of the water. Luckily if they did find us before then we were so

deep down in the water they would hopefully move on without a second glance.

I stuck my head out of the water to try and see Mary and Noah and make sure they were still with me but I couldn't seem to find Noah. I called quietly to him but heard nothing back. Then I felt something against my foot. I hit it again and went under to try to see what it was. I felt around and then came up for air. Nothing.

There it was again. Something kept hitting my foot. I tried to look down into the water and finally saw something. I couldn't make it out completely but I went under again and felt around. Then I felt a foot. I came up for air once again and saw Mary floating in the water close to where I was. That foot had to be Noah's.

I tried to pull him up but something was wrong. I went up for air one more time and then hurried to get Noah. I pulled and pulled but he wouldn't budge. I reached down to pull on his leg which seemed to be the problem and then I realized that it was his foot. It was stuck in a huge clump of mud at the bottom of the pond and would not come lose. He was going to drown if I couldn't get his foot lose. I came up for air again.

"Mary! Come here and help me pull Noah up. He's stuck," I said, almost screaming it. My heart pounded and I felt panic start to rise in my chest. I dove down again this time with Mary and we both pulled as hard as we could. His foot came out and I pulled him to the top as I jumped out of the water. He gasped for air and choked up water.

"I'm fine. We have to keep going now!" I shot him a questioning look but he insisted he was fine so we kept moving.

We continued to cross the lake quietly and waited at the water's edge but heard nothing. Now I had no idea where they were or if they were just waiting for us up ahead.

Lord, please help us. We need ya ta guide us in which way ta go. The map is now soaked and we'll probably not be able ta use it 'til it completely dries out. Jes please, please guide us. Thank ya fer helpin' us sa much this far.

I strained to listen but still could hear nothing.

"Noah, do ya hear anythin'?"

"No, Carissa. I think we's lost 'em." He gave a little smile and let out a sigh. He was still out of breath and I could tell he was very scared still.

"Is ya okay? That wuz pretty scary back there."

"Yeah I's fine. I jes kinda panicked and wuzn't thinkin' and my foot slipped into the deep mud." Noah said.

"Carissa, whas we gonna do? We jes gonna stay here fer now or keep on goin' ahead?" Mary asked.

"I think we kin move ahead. They is probably a little ways ahead of us by now. We won't be able ta use the map right now but we kin jes go straight 'til tomorrow when I kin let it dry in the sun whiles we sleep.

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"'kay, I think we kin be stoppin' now." We found a somewhat dry, clear spot on the ground and sat down. It was cold but I was guessing that food was the only thing on all our minds. "Do eitha of ya have any food left? I salvaged a few of pieces a bread and a piece of fruit."

"No, I don't have nothin' left but I do still have the extra pair of pants fer me and I have a pair fer Mary too," said Noah.

"'kay good. Yous kin change into those whenever ya want but be careful with them. These is the only clothes we will have when we get ta the North. Mary do ya have any food left?" I asked.

"Yeah, I have three pieces of fruit and one piece of bread."

"Okay. Do ya still have the extra shirt for ya?" I asked Mary.

"Yes, it didn't fall out."

"Okay. I lost my extra pants but I's still have my change of shirt. I's so glad Mamma Janny was able ta find all the extra clothin' fer us. I miss her and Fatha sa much." I said. The mood suddenly changed. Mary started to cry and I knew I had said the wrong thing but I couldn't help what I was feeling because the truth was, I wanted to break down and cry right then too. But I had to be strong for Mary and Noah. Right now we had too much going on and I didn't want to worry them more than they already were. Besides I had to figure out what we could eat because at this rate we would be out of food by tomorrow night.

## Chapter 6

"Okay, I think we kin go ta the left here and then there should be a cabin up ahead that will be okay fer us ta stay at." I said to Mary and Noah, still trying to find out exactly where we were.

We walked for about a mile to where the cabin should have been and looked around. There was nothing anywhere in sight but trees. My heart sank. What were we going to do? I guess we would just have to save the two pieces of bread we had left until we were absolutely starving and then we would just have to try and find some berries along the way. And we would have to keep sleeping on the hard, bug infested ground.

"Okay, les jes go ta where this stream runs. We kin wash up and then we kin git some sleep. It is almost light out and I is tired." I dragged my feet as we walked along and kept yawning. This had been kind of a disappointing day as far as trying to find a place to stay and food to eat.

We walked on for a little less than a mile and then stopped. We put our limp bags down and then went over to the stream. The cool water swirled quickly around my feet. It was moving so fast that I almost fell a couple of times but finally got my footing back and was fine. The rocks were sharp but we just watched our step and didn't get cut.

The day was already here and we were still up. We finally got out of the water after a little while and lay down. This had been a really long day! Sleep came very fast.

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"Please help me!!! Carissa...Noah...Someone please help!" Mary shrieked. I tried to get up from the ground where I lay but for some reason I couldn't move. I turned my head to look at her. My vision was fading fast and all I saw was Massa Graham and three other men tying Mary up with thick ropes and then pulling her after them. She was bleeding and had a look of terror on her face as she screamed my name one last time. Then everything went black.

I awoke in a cold sweat trying to catch my breath. My heart pounded in my chest as I looked around. Everything seemed to be fine. I reached over and patted both Mary and Noah on the arm just to make sure they were still okay. They were still sleeping soundly and my heart started to calm down. Nothing seemed to be out of place. That was sure an awful dream. Just the thought of that all really happening scared me to death.

I knew that if I didn't get some more sleep I wouldn't be able to go on tomorrow and that really wasn't an option. I lay back down and closed my eyes.

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"Mary...Noah...where is ya? Kin ya hear me?...please someone say somethin'...anythin'!" I screamed. A blindfold was covering my eyes and I had no idea where I was or what was going on. My hands were also tied and I could feel that I was riding a horse.

"Carissa! I's here...but I don't know where Mary is," said Noah.

Someone was behind me now. They slid off the cloth over my face and everything was now clear...we were about to be hung. I could tell...we were right next to the old tree about a mile away from the plantation. Mary was no where in sight and I figured that was better. Maybe she hadn't gotten caught. I looked all around and saw many familiar faces: Massa Graham, Mr. Grayson and his son, another neighbor that lived about two miles away-Mr. Vincent, and a couple others from this area.

"Massa Graham...please let us go!" I cried as I tried to get the rope untied from my wrists.

"Shut up! I don't want ta hear no more talk outta you!" He said, pulling me from the horse to the ground. I felt my wrist snap and I screamed. The pain shot up through

my arm and I felt light headed. He roughly pulled me to my feet and put me back on the horse.

"Talk again and it will be yer stupid little brother getting hurt. Understand!" he screamed.

I just nodded. I could hear all the other men laughing as Massa Graham pulled the horse I was on over the noose. It was still in hanging in the same place as it had been when Matthew was hung here. Massa Graham slid the noose around my neck and tightened it. This was the end. Noah's screams pierced the night air and I felt my horse move out from underneath me.

I bolted up, hand on my neck. There was nothing there and no one around. I checked both wrists but everything seemed to be fine. I shook my head trying to clear the terrifying thoughts that clouded my mind. Darkness was descending upon our small group and I stood up. Mary and Noah were sleeping soundly and I hated to wake them. I decided to let them sleep for a little while longer.

As I walked over to get a drink of water from the stream my stomach growled. I remembered that I hadn't had anything to eat for a couple of days. I turned back and picked up my bag. I brought it back to the stream and sat putting my feet in the cool water. I pulled off a small

piece of the dry bread and ate it slowly, savoring the little bit that was left. It was getting a little cold so I pulled my feet out of the water and reached into my bag for my extra shirt to put on over this one. Just as I pulled it out the map the wind caught hold of it and it slew from my hands. It flew over my head as I jumped to get it. I screamed for Mary and Noah to come help me and they hurried over. It was just in my grasp when the strong wind whisked it away again. We followed it for some time but it was just too far. Finally the wind calmed some but the map then fell into the stream. All three of us jumped into the river as the map swirled by us, pulled by the strong current. It was taken fast and by the time we all got up on our feet again it wasn't even in sight any longer. We climbed out of the water and Mary and Noah turned around to head back to where we had been sleeping.

"I's jes gonna follow the stream a little longer and try ta find the map," I told them feeling like a complete failure. They had been counting on me. Now how was I going to be able to find the map and lead them all the way to the North?

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I dragged my feet slowly through the mixture of dirt, leaves, and grass covering the uneven ground. We had all been walking in silence for just about the whole night, not having the slightest clue where we were going or if we were even walking in the right direction. Tears streamed down my face and my heart was heavy.

God, why did this have ta happen? I thought ya were here with me...sa why can't ya bring the map back? Ya know we will die out here if we can't git it back. I had faith that we cud make it before but now I's jes not sure I kin go on anymore. We have pretty much run out of food and have not seen any plants we knew were edible this whole trip. I am terribly homesick and I can't stop thinkin' 'bout how it cud have been if I jes wud have stayed back at the plantation and been sold. It would have had ta be betta than this.

I's sorry Lord, I know I should know betta than ta be questionin' ya but I jes feel like ya can't hear me anymore. Please God, bring back our map or guide us outta this mess. I's sa scared and I feel like I is a complete failure. Thank ya fer bein' there even when it feels like I's all alone.

I looked over at Mary and Noah. Their lives could never, ever be the same again and their lives were completely in my hands.

All I could think about doing right now was lying down and getting some rest. I saw the sun peeking through the trees. It was nearly time for us to be going to bed anyway so I stopped Mary and Noah and we all lay down to sleep.

## Chapter 7

I sat up wondering how I was going to get us anywhere without that map. The troubles yesterday had presented me with were almost too much for me to handle. My head ached and although I was been very tired, I had gotten almost no sleep at all today. Darkness was descending all around us and I felt it in my heart too. I stood and walked over near the stream still hoping that somehow I would find the map again.

I dipped my feet in the cool water and sat, thinking about what to do. Nothing came and I got back up. I walked the short distance back to the place we had been sleeping and found that Mary and Noah had also woken up.

"G'mornin'," I said trying to seem calm and stay positive in front of them.

"Mornin'," Mary said in a quiet voice. She seemed okay and I felt a little wave of relief come over me. At least she still had faith in me even if I didn't have any in myself.

"Mornin' Carissa," Noah said. "Did ya happen ta see any food on the way ta the stream this mornin'? I mean we ain't got no more bread and it wud be good if ya could find somethin' that we cud eat."

I looked down at my dirty feet and shook my head. Just one more thing I could not provide for them...I felt like such a failure.

"Carissa," He said stepping closer but still looking down. "Look, it's not yer fault. Wasn't yer fault that map got lost and it ain't yer fault that we no longa have any food." He started stuttering over his words and wrung his hands. "Jes happened and now we need ta forget 'bout it. We need ya. Jes focus on findin' food and rememberin' anythin' that ya might've seen on the map to where we could go now."

He stepped away and picked up his bag. Mary looked at me and nodded her agreement with Noah. His words had been harsh but were said lovingly and I took them that way only. I knew that he also only wanted what was best for us.

I took a deep breath and let it out slowly. Eyes closed, I thought back to every part of the map that I had seen before we lost it. I saw in my mind the stream joining with our path from a few miles back until about twelve miles ahead of us and then veering off of the way we were

going. So if we just followed the stream for another twelve miles we would be that much closer. We would have to guess the way from there but that was something to worry about later.

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“‘Kay, I wud guess we gots jes ‘bout a mile left an’ then we’re on our own again,” It was getting to be very light out now but we had to keep going on until we reached the end of the stream. I paused in my slow walk to look over at the gloomy looks on Mary and Noah’s faces. We all needed something to help lift our spirits. I thought back to when we had left home and remembered the song Mamma Janny had sung as we were preparing to leave; I think it was called *Steal Away to Jesus*.

This thought took me back in my memories even farther, back to when my mother was still alive. I was only ten, laying down on one of the two stiff cots cramped into our small cabin. Mother came to tuck me in and she would always sing a song to me as I feel asleep. One night in particular though, she woke me back up and said, “Carissa, I jes want ya ta know that the song I was singin’ tonight, well it could be somethin’ ta ya someday. When yous olda ya may need ta know what this song means and if that day comes ya

will know. Jes memba that. And also that I love ya." Those were her last words to me as the next day I found her to be sold away from me. My Massa said that it was for the betta...that she didn't really love me. But I knew better and I would never forget all that she had told me just that past night.

Tears streamed down from my eyes but I wiped them away quickly and focused on the song again. I hadn't come to a point in my life where I needed the song or even had to know what it said but I was always looking for a time when I might need it and I still loved to hear and sing the song.

I mouthed the words to myself in a mere whisper at first but gradually I let my voice grow a little louder and soon Mary and Noah were also singing with me. While we were singing I took in everything around me. We had just walked into a very strange area of the forest unlike any of the rest I had seen before now.

Normally the forest was pretty dull looking with different shades of green covering most of the ground and all around. But here the trees grew lower to the ground, almost bent over, curved every which way, and weather beaten. They were a light shade of green and the leaves

were thick as were the trunks. They seemed strong like they could stand up to anything and I liked the look of them.

As we stepped into the clearing I saw also that there were Sinner flowers filling the entire area. Us slaves, being that we were usually uneducated, just used the names our ancestors came up to call the flowers and trees we saw. I thought this a proper name for this flower because it was very prickly looking and blood red. I always thought it might have looked like the crown of thorns Jesus wore on the cross. I figured that he did that for the sinner so this would probably be a good, fitting name for the beautiful plant. The wind suddenly picked up and the flowers seemed to bend just as far down as the trees were already bent. It looked like their stems would break but the strong plants held into the ground and the wind slowed.

I looked all around as we sang our song over and over again and noticed a bird chipping in to help us out. His voice was like nothing I had heard before. It was so melodious and it was like an instrument being played. I closed my eyes and for a moment stopped thinking about all the bad and just listened. Just then I quickly opened my eyes and nearly fell down. Mary and Noah had just gotten to the end of the song and it all became clear. They sang:

Green trees is bending

Po' sinner stand a-tremblin'

The trumpet sounds within-a my soul

I ain't got long ta stay here

The trees were bending and the Sinner plants were trembling in the wind. The bird sang with the preciseness and beautifulness of a trumpet and I then knew that the cabin we had to try to get to was only a little ways away.

Thank ya so much God! I can't begin ta tell ya all the despair I wuz feelin' up 'til now. The song wuz the answer...thank ya so much for helping me ta 'mamba.

I wonder who wrote that song. I mean who could have brought it back to the plantations to start singing and how did my mamma know I was going to need to know that exact song?

"Carissa...is ya feelin' aright? Yous look like ya ain't feelin' sa good. Whas wrong?" Noah asked.

"Noah, I figured it out. What the song means and how ta get ta where wes goin'. Don't ya see. The trees is bent, the Sinners tremblin' in the wind...the bird singin' like a trumpet. We ain't got much longa here cuz we gonna find that cabin soon. Isn't this jes crazy?!" I said. Tears streamed down my face as I began to walk quickly towards

the direction we had been going. Mary and Noah followed closely behind. And there I saw it. The cabin. A small curl of smoke rose out of the chimney and there were a few candles light by the tiny windows. It looked cozy and warm and inviting. Mary and Noah finally caught up to me and stopped in their tracks when they saw the cabin. I lost all fear of being turned in as I ran to the door. Then I realized my appearance but it was too late for someone was coming to the door. They must have heard my feet hitting hard against the steps. The door creaked open. There stood a tall, older looking man. At first I wondered if this might be a trap but when his wife came to the door and they both started smiling and worrying over us being out in the cold, I knew they were friends. We walked into the warm cabin and Mary collapsed onto the hard floor, completely unmoving.

A million thoughts went through my head at that moment. Like How could she collapse when she was fine just a second ago. I also thought What am I gonna do I can't get her medicine and I am scared. Even though we were safe I was still very scared.

## Chapter 8

"Mary! Mary kin ya hear me? Please Mary...wake up...please jes wake up," I pleaded. Tears streamed down my face as I kneeled next to her on the cold wood floor. The old man walked over calmly and started to pick Mary up. Noah rushed over and helped carry her to the straw mattress lying on the floor in the other room. The old man came back into the main room carrying a small cloth and went over the water basin. He dabbed the cloth into the clear water, wrung it out a little, and then went back into the other room. I followed him and saw him place it on Mary's forehead.

He turned to me and said, "She has a very high fever and it looks like she has just fainted from lack of food,

water, and rest. She should rest for now and we can check up on her in a little while." I stood there keeping my eyes on Mary hoping that somehow she would just get up and get better right now.

"If it helps you any I was a physician and I know how to help this young lady. She will be fine." He said trying to be comforting. I looked up and nodded. I knew now that at least Mary would be in good hands. We all walked back into the main room that served as a living room and a kitchen. The small house was quaint and I felt like I was safe for the first time since I left home. The old lady was sitting in a wooden chair with a blanket wrapped around her at the table when we walked back in.

"How is she, Hank? Will she be alright?" She looked very concerned and I had never seen such worry over one of us by a white person before. It made me immediately start to like this lady and I had just met her. She made me feel important like a white person and she was worried over my sister.

"She is going to be fine. She just needs lots of rest and some of your good cooking." He smiled at her and the worry etching her face was replaced with a kind smile.

The old women stood, looked at me, and said, "Well I guess we haven't gotten around to introductions yet. My name is Marie and this is my husband, Hank. And what are your names?" She asked.

"My name is Carissa and this is Noah," I said placing a hand on my brother's shoulder.

"So nice to meet you," Marie said sincerely.

"Yes, I am very glad you have come here. I know it is not much but I think that it will do," Hank said smiling down at Noah and me.

"Thank ya sa much for lettin' us stay 'ere with ya. I hope we will not be too much of a hassle fer ya." Hank dismissed that thought with a sweep of his hand in the air.

"You will be no problem at all. It is a joy to have some people stay here at the cabin. Usually it is just Marie and I. Sometimes our son comes to visit but he is all grown now and his visits are rare and usually short."

"Well let me show you where everything is so that if you need anything you will know where it is, okay?" I nodded and followed her around the small cabin while she showed us where we would be sleeping and everything.

"You all must be very tired and hungry. Why don't you go ahead and get some sleep and Marie will have a meal

ready for you when you get up. And you don't need to worry about Mary. I will check up on her every once in a while and make sure she is still sleeping and everything."

"Thank ya. I think that some sleep wud prolly be very good fer me and Noah right now."

I lay down on the small cot and drifted right to sleep.

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I awoke to the rich smell of biscuits and gravy. I couldn't believe I had slept half of the day and all through the night. And with not one nightmare like I had had every night since I left home. I sat up and walked to the kitchen area.

"Ah good, you are up! I made fresh biscuits and gravy. I can also make an egg if you would like. We have a hen out back and Hank just brought in a few more eggs this morning."

I ate so much I felt a little sick after but it was a good feeling. Finally knowing what the word "full" meant.

I went to check on Mary and found that she was awake.

"Mary ya is up! How is ya? Ya feelin' betta?" I asked.

She smiled up at me weakly and said, "Yes, I's feelin' much betta. These is some very nice people we is stayin'

with, Carissa. They let me eat 'til I felt like I cudn't eat no more and I get ta sleep in this nice comfy bed."

"I knows ain't they great?!" I said.

"Yes, they is." And with that last sentence she fell back asleep.

**\*\* \*\* \* \* \***

"Carissa, would you like to come help me with the garden. I don't want to put you to work while you are here but you can at least come and just talk to me while I garden if you would like. I have always enjoyed gardening and I thought maybe you would like to learn some of the plant names and pick some of the vegetable that might be ready now." Marie said.

"Sure that sounds gud. I do need ta learn what plants is edible cause we is outta food. I saw sa many plants up ta this point but I had no idea if they was okay ta eat and I was not gonna try any ta find out." I said as we walked outside.

I was a little nervous being out in the open but I got used to it after we had been outside for a little while. I helped Marie pick the vegetables that were ready and learned the name of many plants that I had never seen before. It was a really fun experience. We took the food

inside and then set out in the forest. She showed me all kinds of plants such as the Arctic Willow plant which contains 7 to 8 times more vitamin C than an orange does, all kinds of berry plants such as the blackberry, raspberry, crowberry, bearberry, blackberry, and huckleberry. She also showed me the Juniper tree, Lotus plant, some types of mushrooms that were edible, and even the Pineapple weed which is edible and also when broken up can act as a bug repellent on your skin.

We walked back to the cabin after being gone for what I thought was almost two hours. I had such a good time and I learned so much about plants and trees. I was excited that I would actually be able to find food for us once we left Marie and Hank's.

"Noah, I have to tell you about all the plants I found. Well I didn't find them, Marie did but now we will be able to find food when we are back in the forest. Isn't that great! I am so happy that we are here."

"That's great!" He said smiling.

## Chapter 9

We walked away from Marie and Hank's house in silence. All three of us had really started to enjoy staying there and Marie and Hank treated us so well. We would all miss them a lot. I knew they would miss us too. Marie sent us with a loaf of bread and a few carrots and cucumbers from her garden. She also gave me exact directions to get to the North.

As we walked through the forest I started to try and look for some plants I recognized. There were many and I

felt hope once again rise within me. Another reason for my hope is that I was scared Mary was not going to be able to go on with us back at the house but she seemed to make a very full and quick recovery and we all were feeling much better now.

We had walked for a long time when Mary said, "Carissa, do ya think we cud stop in a little while? I...I's gettin' real tired." Her voice was weak and tired. She looked pale and her eyelids dropped even as she continued walking. She looked sick again but there was no turning back to Marie and Hank's now. We were already too far away and we had to keep moving. I looked over at Noah who was looking at Mary. He looked up at me and nodded that we should stop.

"Yeah Mary, we kin stop but we will have ta keep movin' again soon, okay?" She nodded and sat down quickly. I pulled out the loaf of bread from Marie and pulled off a large chunk for Mary and then Noah. They both took it quickly and it was gone very soon after. Mary got a little bit of her color back but she still looked so tired that I thought it might be better to just stop for the day here. We would have to make up the distance tomorrow night but at least Mary would be feeling better.

"I think it wud be best if we stopped here fer now so jes try and git some sleep, okay?" I told Mary and Noah and then lay down. Although the ground was not nearly as comfortable as the cot back at the cabin, it felt good to get some rest.

**\*\* \*\* \* \* \*\* \***

"Mary...Noah...please hurry. They is right behind us! Hurry!" I screamed back to them.

Just then I saw it. The sign read: You are now leaving Kentucky and entering Illinois.

"Look! Look over there...at that sign. It says we is almost there...almost ta the North!" I said, out of breath. Adrenaline surged through me at the sight of the sign. We would finally be free. Something must have clicked with Mary and Noah as well because they were caught up to me now and running like I had never seen them run before.

We were so close now. We crossed over and slowed our run to a jog. Massa Graham was still behind us but he wasn't that close. We were finally free and that was such a good feeling.

Then I felt a hand grab my arm suddenly. Massa Graham had me. How did he catch up that fast? Fear and panic gripped me and I fell to my knees, tears already coming

quickly. He had won. I could never, ever be free. It was over.

**\*\* \*\* \* \* \***

"Carissa...Carissa wake up," Noah said, tapping my arm. It wasn't even dark out or time to get up so I didn't have any idea why he was waking me up now.

"What is it, Noah?"

"Mary looks real bad. She won't git up and her forehead feels real warm. I think she is sick again." He said, his face showing his worry.

I jumped up and ran to Mary. Kneeling in the dirt I looked at her and felt her forehead. It was burning up. I called her name and shook her shoulders lightly to try and wake her but she just lay there still sleeping. I tried to remember exactly what Hank had done back at the cabin but only a few things came back to my mind. And plus she looked a lot worse than she had back there.

"Noah, cud ya check around a little and see if ya kin find a stream or lake or anythin' with water in it?" I searched my bag desperately and found a piece of cloth. I put it in Noah's hands saying, "If ya do find any water could ya dip the rag in it and then bring it back here. Please hurry Noah." He ran off into the woods and I said a

silent prayer for Mary as I sat holding her hand in mine and with the other had trying to push the hair back from her forehead to make her cooler.

**\*\* \*\***

"'kay, here it is, Carissa. How is Mary doin'? Did she wake up yet?" Noah asked.

"Thanks Noah." I placed the wet cloth on her forehead and stood to stretch my legs. I was sore from sitting on the ground next to Mary so long.

"She woke up a little once while ya were gone but jes went right back ta sleep before I cud say anythin'. I think she is gonna be 'kay though. We jes need ta keep her here fer a while and not try ta move her. She might even be well by the mornin'."

"But Carissa we have ta keep movin' like ya've told me before." He said still looking even more worried than he had before.

"Noah we's gonna be fine. I's sure she will be okay ta keep goin' by tomorrow. Just pray fer her, 'kay?" He nodded and sat down next to her.

I lay down next to her and fell asleep.

"Mary is awake but she threw up and is lookin' worse than ever." Noah said harshly in my ear shaking my shoulders, breathing heavily, and crying.

My heart nearly pounded out of my chest as I sat up and looked at Mary next to me. She was lying perfectly still now and I sat her up. She started coughing and choking. I lay her back down thinking that would help but she just coughed more and looked like she couldn't breathe. Her lips were blue and she stopped coughing. She went limp in my arms her head falling back hard against my arm.

"Mary...kin ya hear me? Mary please wake up!" I shook her shoulders gently. I just kept shaking her and calling her name. She never got up or responded but I knew she would. She had to live. I wasn't going to let her go.

"Carissa, Stop!" Noah yelled, "Mary is...Mary's dead Carissa!" He stormed off into the woods sobbing. My heart felt as if it had been torn out and stomped on. I sunk lower to the ground and just wept.

## Chapter 10

"Noah...Noah is ya ready ta go on? I think I heard somethin' and I wud like ta be gone when it or...he gits here." I looked around into the darkness, trying to spot anything that would show a sign that something or someone was near but there was nothing but the rustling of the

leaves in the trees and the occasional small animal scurrying along in the dark. I felt a chill run up my spine...I had an odd feeling that something wasn't quite right but I shook the feeling off and glanced back at Noah waiting for an answer.

"Fine, but I don't know how much more of this I kin take Carissa."

"I know it's hard, Noah, but if what Marie and Hank told us wuz right we should reach the North very soon. Maybe even today."

"How kin ya even think 'bout goin' ta the North without Mary?!" He said with tears coming swiftly to his eyes.

"Look, I know this is hard but we jest have ta keep goin'. I loved her too, Noah, but we have ta focus on gettin' ta the North. Let's do this fer Mary. She wanted ta git there and since she cudn't, we'll finish this fer her, 'kay?" He just nodded his head and stood, walking quickly ahead of me.

We kept walking all night with no breaks and Noah and I hadn't said a thing to each other. Things seemed so different now that Mary was gone. So sad and hopeless. She

was so confident even when weak, so strong...even when I wasn't.

Why did ya take her from me, God? I loved my sista and now she is gone. Jest like that she wuz ripped away from us. She wuz sa kind and good. Did she really have ta die? I wish this whole thing cud have played out differently. I know ya have a plan fer me and Noah but I jest wish things cud go a little easier fer us. Please help me ta remember that yer in control of all and ya love me and Noah.

"Noah, I think we kin stop here fer the day. Are ya getting' really hungry? We kin look fer some plants 'round here before goin' ta sleep if ya want."

He lay down and didn't respond. I walked around a little feeling pretty hungry and found a few berries to eat. I lay down and fell asleep after that.

**\*\* \*\***

"Noah, time ta get up." I said to him as I shook his arm trying to wake him.

"Okay...Okay I's up." He rubbed his eyes and stood, stretching.

"Hey, do ya think we cud eat somethin' now? I's sa hungry."

"Yeah sure, bring yer bag and come with me. I found a couple of gud plants back a little ways."

We walked back to the place I had found the berries yesterday and Noah and I ate almost all that was left on the plant.

"Carissa I'm sorry fer the way I have been actin'."

Noah said suddenly.

"What do ya mean, Noah? You haven't been any problem ta me at all."

"I just mean how I treated ya afta Mary...well how I had been treatin' ya yesterday and everythin'. I's jest sorry fer all that."

"It's okay. I understand how ya were feelin' 'cause, ta be honest, I wuz feelin' the same way. Not wantin' ta talk and not wantin' ta keep on goin'. I wanted Mary ta be back with us again and I was questionin' why she had ta die. But I know we will git through this and we jest have ta keep on goin'...fer Mary."

After that we sat and ate in silence and I studied the ground. I was sitting on a rock and looking out over the grass when something caught my attention. It looked like the print of a boot in a patch of mud. But how could that be...no one else was anywhere near here. I scooted off the

rock and stepped closer to the print. It had definitely been left there recently. My heart thudded in my chest as I called Noah over to where I was. I didn't know what to do as he looked at the print then back up at me. He looked shocked and scared...just how I was feeling.

"Wat does this mean Carissa? Is they close now?"

"I don't know. Maybe they had been through here earlia...like back when we were at Marie and Hank's. I guess we should just keep going right now." I knew this was recent and it wasn't from when we were at Marie and Hank's but there was no good in scaring Noah even more than he already was. We just had to leave now. Hopefully we would reach the North before the person that belonged to the boot print caught up with us.

We walked on at a faster pace than normal and zigzagged around just to be sure no one was able to follow us. We stopped for the night and I felt pretty sure that whoever was out there was gone now and would not be able to find us.

"Okay, let's find some berries ta eat and then we kin go ahead and git some rest." I told Noah when it finally got light out.

I found a good plant and picked off the edible leaves. We ate all of them and then went to sleep.

**\*\* \*\***

I heard the heavy footsteps getting closer in my dream. They were pounding now...like someone was running right at me. But I couldn't see anything or anyone. Where was I? Should I be scared of whoever was running towards me? I then heard a familiar voice calling to me.

"Carissa...Carissa, git up now! Hurry up...Massa Graham found us. Git up now." I now realized this was no longer just a dream. This was real and Massa Graham was not too far off. He had finally caught up with us again and we were so close. My heart felt like it was in my throat and I jumped up and started to run.

I ran with all I had in me. The ground became uneven though and we had to start running in a different direction...veered off facing west. How were we going to get to the North if we were going in a different direction?

I was following Noah and they were close behind. I turned to look at exactly how close they were and how many of them were there. Just then Noah yelled something but I didn't make out the words until it was too late. I fell with a loud thud that shook my bones. Especially my right

leg as I heard a snap and felt severe pain shoot through it. I knew right at that moment it had to be broken but there was no time to sit around and wait for it to heal so I got back up and hobbled along behind Noah. The pain only got worse until I nearly passed out. The world was spinning all around me and I fell again.

"Carissa, ya has ta git up. I heard the snap and I know yer leg hurts but ya have ta come on now. This is life or death!" He helped me up as I heard the thudding footsteps growing closer.

Noah talked as we ran saying, "Okay, our only hope now is ta actually reach the North before they get ta us. Let's start headin' that way 'gain." I knew what he was saying was right but there was no way I was going to be able to make it all that way in this condition.

My leg was shooting pain and I was growing weaker.

"Noah, ya are gonna have ta go on without me. I am gonna try and make it but I is sure I will be caught and when that comes I want ya ta run and don't stop. Do not try and save me or ta come back and git me when I fall. Jest keep goin' and do not look back." Just then I saw it. My heart felt like it stopped in those few seconds and I felt more hope spring up inside me than I had in a long time.

There it was. The sign read: You are now leaving Kentucky and entering Illinois.

"Noah...look," I shouted to him.

Then I felt both my legs give out and I tumbled to the ground. I struggled to get up but it was no use. Massa Graham had already made sure he pinned me down so there was no way to even move to get up.

# Chapter 11

I lay on the ground helpless as the men surrounded me, their heavy boots stomping and crowding all around my head. The dogs with them were vicious and started biting at me. They scratched me and all the men did was laugh. I couldn't see Noah anywhere and I hoped he had listened to me when I said to not wait for me when I got caught. At least one of us had made it.

Just then I felt my heart jump into my throat at the sight of Noah in the tight grasp of Mr. Grayson. There was no way Noah was going to be able to escape and I knew this would be the end for both of us. This had all been for nothing and now Noah would pay the price for my mistakes. I had failed.

Massa Graham kicked me and I screamed out in pain.

"Look at that little good fer nothin'!" He spit on me and kicked me in the leg that was broken again. This brought indescribable pain and for a few moments everything went black. I woke up looking into the cold, evil eyes of Massa Graham. He just sneered down at me and kicked me again.

Everything went black again and when I woke up again I was being hauled off like some kind of animal; Upside down, slung over the shoulder of a man I didn't know. I was terrified. I looked to my left at my surroundings but couldn't remember anything I was seeing from before. At least I knew we were in the North now even if this was not the way I wanted to start my life here.

My leg was shooting pain and the rest of my body felt numb and unmovable. I tried to think of any way to get out of this but nothing came. So this was going to be my fate? Where ever they were taking me I was sure they were going to kill me there.

Jesus, please help me. I need ya. I know that Noah and I is gonna be killed soon but cud ya help us find a way outta this. The pain shot through my leg as he jossled me around so much that I blacked out again but when I regained consciousness I continued. I love ya Lord and I know that ya have a plan fer my life and if this is the end of the plan then I will accept that. It was hard to focus on anything but I knew God was the only one who could help us out of this one so I had to talk to Him and trust in Him. But please Lord jest give me peace. I need peace that only ya kin grant and I pray ya wud also give Noah peace.

As I was silently praying I heard Mr. Grayson start yelling. Then I heard Noah's voice yelling back at Mr. Grayson. It was so good to know that Noah was still alive. I had not heard or seen him since before I had blacked out.

"Hey Graham, whatta ya want me to do with this kid. He's starting to act up." Mr. Grayson yelled back to Massa.

"Just try to hold him a little longer. We are almost there." He said. I could hear the smile in his voice. Whatever was coming was going to make him happy...and that would most likely not be pleasant for Noah and me.

The man carrying me stopped. I looked to my left again and then to my right but wherever we were going must have been straight ahead of us because I couldn't see anything anywhere. Suddenly he swung me back onto my feet and I sunk down to the ground. He pulled me up roughly and kept his grip tight on my arm digging his nails in. But this was nothing compared to the pain of trying to keep standing.

I finally looked up at what was supposed to be so great and why we were stopping. It was just an old creaky barn. It looked like hadn't been used in a very long time and no one was in or around it. The man looked down at me and just laughed. I had no idea what to expect. Was this

for real? I mean they brought us all this way just to a barn.

Then I saw Massa Graham pull out a large pack of matches and another man was carrying what seemed to be some kind of containers containing what I assumed to be kerosene. Terror struck as I could only think of one possible need for those. I tried to pull away from the man holding me but I knew even if I did get away from his grip I would not get far.

Noah started yelling again and I turned to see Mr. Grayson tying a dirty gag around his head quieting him a little. His eyes expressed his panic as I was sure mine did. This was going to end very badly and there was nothing I could do. I had never felt so helpless as I did in that moment. It hurt that I could not save Noah from this terrible fate.

The man holding my arm called another man over to hold me and tied a thick sturdy rope around my wrists and ankles. He then picked me back up and carried me straight into the barn. I coughed from all the dust and my eyes burned. He threw me down on the cold floor next to where Noah was sitting. His hands and ankles were tied then in addition to the gag in his mouth.

Massa Graham strutted in. "Do ya know what? I think it would have been better for you if you would have let me sell ya back at the plantation. But no, ya had to run. Now look where that has gotten you. Do ya really think you can actually live like us white people do? You are nothin'. You will never be anything and you never were." He laughed in my face again and I just glared right back at him. He slapped me hard across the face.

"You know you are going to die here. You were born worthless and you will die that way. What a shame." He got up and walked back outside.

My eyes burned with hot tears, clouding my vision. But I could still see one of the men pouring the kerosene all over the barn. Pouring it on all the walls and splashing it high into the rafters above.

"Done, Graham. You got the matches?" He shouted out the door.

"Yeah I got 'em. Just come on out and close the doors. I can go around and set it." Massa Graham shouted back.

"Alright."

I heard the barn creak as the big doors swung closed. Noah huddled closer to my back. I felt his sobs before I even heard them. I didn't even know what to say to calm him

so I didn't say anything. But I was not ready to give up now. Although I knew it was useless, I tried to stand. Of course I didn't get up but I had an idea if I could just reach the back of the barn. The fire started in the corner right in front of where I was and was soon covering that whole wall.

I turned back around to face the doors and started to work on the ropes tying my hands. It didn't help much so I grabbed the ropes on Noah's wrists and started to work on them. It was difficult especially as the fire started to burn higher. It was getting hard to breathe but I just kept trying to untie his. Suddenly, the rope snapped and his hands were free. He started working quickly on the ones around his feet and took the gag out of his mouth. Then he turned to me and untied all the ropes. I felt like screaming for joy but the hardest part was still ahead. Getting out of the barn. I crawled, pain still shooting down my leg, to the back of the barn and Noah followed. If I could just find something to hit though the wall where the fire was smaller. I coughed hard then looked around but there was absolutely nothing in sight that we could use. I had to push through the wall myself. I motioned for Noah to follow me out then I rammed up against the wall. It barely

made a dent and a small piece of burning wood fell on Noah. He yelled out in pain but we quickly got it off of him and he could still move to get out.

My heart pounded as I started to get lightheaded. Sweat was pouring down my face and back. I had to get out of here. Adrenaline surged through my veins and I pushed the scorching wall with all I had left in me and then some. The wall fell out just as the roof caved in on us. I pulled Noah behind me and crawled out. Thank goodness there were no men on this side of the barn. We started coughing and continued to lie on the ground.

We were out! Now we just had to get away from here...from Massa Graham. He would never know that we had even escaped and we could live our lives in the North as free people. Somehow I found the strength to get back up to my burnt hands and splintered knees. Noah followed what I did and we started to head back into the deep forest.

Once I thought we were far enough out of the way of the old barn and Massa Graham, I collapsed back onto the ground. I was exhausted and I let the much needed sleep come.

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"Noah, is ya 'kay?" I asked looking at him sleeping quietly. I had to make sure he was okay before we went on.

"Hey, Carissa. Yeah I's 'kay. I still feel tired but otha than that and the burns I's good. Thanks fer savin' me. I don't know what I wud have done withouchya!" He said smiling. But I was worried about his burn. The big mark on his back was enflamed and did not look good at all.

"Of course, Noah but it wuz God who saved us. I don't even know where I found the energy ta push though that wall."

"I think we should move on now, Noah. We need ta git ta town and get checked out. I think my leg is pretty bad but I kin maybe walk on it some. We jest have ta walk pretty slowly."

**\*\* \*\* \* \* \***

We walked into the small town about ten miles later. People walked around and didn't even seem to notice us. What a strange feeling! A lady brushed by me and I looked up into her kind face.

"Ma'am do ya think ya cud tell me where the doctor's office is? I need ta git help fer my leg and our burns." I explained to her.

"Sure, honey. Jest follow me a little ways. It isn't too far from here."

We walked down the street to a little office next to the sheriff's office. The kind lady knocked on the window and he motioned for us to come in. He seemed nice and looked at my leg and the burns. He moved to get something from his cabinet but I was not going to be able to pay him and I had to let him know that before he started really working.

"Sir, I's sorry but I can't pay ya fer yer services or fer the medicine or whatever you are giving us. I's sorry."

He continued working as though he had not heard me. He put a thick cast on my leg and gave us both some cream to put on our burns.

"Just think of it as a gift. And someday if I ever need anything I will be sure to let you know." He said smiling and Noah and me.

We thanked him and walked outside. The lady was sitting on the rocking chair right outside the office waiting for us.

"Well, I was just wondering if you were here with your parents or anything. I can tell you are not really from

around here. I am guessing here but are you from the South. And did you come alone?" She asked, standing up.

"Actually, our dad stayed back at home. And our motha died when we wuz jest young. We came here fer freedom by ourselves from the South." I said quietly suddenly feeling shy.

"Well, I know it's not much but if you would like you could stay with me, Lucy Cobbs, and my husband, Maxwell, at our house. We would feed you and make sure you were cared for well." She said.

"Oh, no. We cudn't do that to ya. We have nothin' ta offa. No money or anythin'. But thank ya fer the kind offa ma'am." I said turning to go.

"Oh, but we would love to have you come anyway. Maybe your brother here could help do a little work around the house or help Maxwell out in the field. Even jest having the company if he didn't want to help would be great." She said looking very excited but still reserved. She tugged at the end of her sleeves and bit her lip waiting for our response. I was speechless that a white person would want us to stay with them so I said nothing but just looked at her.

"I know that this is all a little sudden but I figure there are some pretty awful people living round here and I would not want for you to have to stay with any of them. I just really want to help you all out. We love kids and we never had any of our own so having a couple of them stay with us would be great. What do you say?"

"Ya really think it's 'kay? We really could use a good place to stay. We wudn't be botherin' ya at all?" I said getting a little excited too.

"Of course not. We would love for you to come. I can take you there right now! This is going to be so great!" She smiled at us and we followed her down the steps.

## Chapter 12

The past week had flown by so quickly. Living here with the Cobbs was more than I could have ever hoped for once we reached the North. This was home right now and I was so thankful for it.

**\*\* \*\* \* \* \*\* \*\***

"Carissa, would you like to come out and plant some flowers with me? I have got some beautiful roses I would like to plant and you can plant some of your own if you

would like. They could be yours and you could take care of them." Mrs. Cobbs said.

"I cud really have my own rose bushes?" I felt my jaw drop as I said the words. It was taking a while to get used to the fact that I was finally free for good now.

"Sure you could. I am sure they would grow strong and pretty with you taking care of them. Come with me and we can get started if you would like to." She opened the door and we stepped outside together. Even though sometimes I would get scared going outside and being in the open for fear that maybe Massa Graham would be there I still knew that I was safe and didn't have to worry so much here. Here I was loved and I could be me.

Thank ya, Jesus. This is more than I cud have ever dreamed fer. Even though I kinnot have fatha and Mamma Janny here with me I pray that ya wud keep them safe. Please let them know I's okay and give them the peace ya have given ta me. Thank ya, Lord, fer bein' with me the whole way and never leavin' me.

I felt his great love and peace and that moment and I knew that everything was okay. I didn't have to be scared anymore.

"Okay, I think that we can just use this bed right over here on the side of the house. It would provide the perfect amount of sun each day for the roses and I have already mixed the soil with fertilizer. What do you think?" Mrs. Cobbs asked.

"Well, I don't know much 'bout gardenin' but I think that sounds fine ta me." I said.

She smiled down at me and started looking over the small rose bushes as she got down to her knees. She seemed pleased with the selection she has chosen to put in her garden and I thought they were absolutely amazing. All the stems and leaves looked perfect and there were already some buds starting to appear.

She carefully tugged on the plant and soil around it to get it out of the container it was in. It came out still molded to the shape of the temporary pot and the roots looked tangled and waiting to spread deep into the rich soil in our garden. She carefully unraveled some of the roots and made sure they were free to spread out in the dirt. She had already made one depression in the soil to show me how deep it was to be and then she leaned over and carefully placed the bush in the ground. Mrs. Cobbs pushed

surrounding dirt to the stem of the plant and then added a little water.

"There, that it all there is to it. Of course we will have to water them and prune them every day but it will be fun. Especially when all the pretty buds start opening up and you can see all the colors. That is my favorite part of summer. Seeing the spectrum of colors all around us. It is breathtaking." She said as she gazed off into the distance. She stood for a while just looking at everything around us.

I smiled as I thought about how much she reminded me of my own motha. Absolutely amazed by all the beauty around us. It felt good to be able to remember some things about my Motha. I wanted to hold onto all the things I could remember and never forget them. It was all I had left of her and I was not going to lose it.

We planted and planted until the sun was almost hidden behind the huge White pines that served as a fence around the edge of the back yard.

Although I was tired I had had more fun than I can remember having in a very long time.

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"Carissa, Noah...time for dinner." Mrs. Cobs called outside to us. We ran inside and sat down. Mr. Cobbs offered a prayer and then we started eating.

"So Noah, are you having fun here?" Mrs. Cobbs asked with a smile.

"Yes, I is. This is the funnest place I has ever been ta. Thank ya fer lettin' us stay here." He said.

"I am so glad you have chosen to stay. I have enjoyed spending time with you both so much."

"Carissa, thank you so much for helping me with the garden this afternoon. Maybe after supper we can read up on how to care for all those plants. I remember some things about it but I would like to look at some more books and maybe teach you some about the garden. Would you like that?"

My heart started pounding and I wrung my hands together. What was she going to think of me? Would she look down on me because I wasn't educated like she was? Saying nothing was my first choice to the question but I had to answer somehow. "Well, I think that wud be 'kay...'cept I don't know how ta read." I looked down feeling even more embarrassed.

"Oh, I'm sorry. I didn't know." She looked a little frazzled as she ran her thin fingers through her hair but then her face brightened again.

"Well then I will just have to teach you. I have lots of books in my room we can use and it would be fun. I think you will catch on real fast."

This was too good to be true. I was going to learn how to read. I smiled wide and nodded that I would like to learn how. Thankful does not even describe how I was feeling at that moment. It was intense gratitude and I could never repay these wonderful people. But I knew this was God's way of taking care of Noah and me right now so I was not going to argue. I hurried through my supper and cleared all the plates right away.

We walked to her room and I just stood in the doorway looking on in astonishment. There were four towering bookcases all along one of the walls. Thick books lined the shelves and all were in perfect order and perfectly dusted. I must have had an astonished, funny kind of look on my face because Mrs. Cobbs just laughed a lighthearted laugh and stepped over to the second bookcase. She seemed to search for a while and then she pulled off one of the thinner books on the shelf.

"Aha, there it is. This is the book I bought for the children I was going to have someday. I never ended up having any so it has just been sitting on the shelf for years. I am so pleased I am able to use it to help you learn to read! Are you ready to get started now?" She asked. I could tell sometimes she felt sad or hurt about not having any kids of her own but then she would just cheer right back up.

I nodded and we walked out to the old, creaky swing on the porch and I started to learn. It was harder than I thought it would be but it was still so fun. We first went through the alphabet and then started learning how to pronounce certain things.

"You are going to be reading on your own in no time! You are so far along already. I think we better turn in for the night though. We can continue tomorrow, okay?" She said as she stood.

"Sure, I can't wait!"

**\*\* \*\* \* \* \***

**--Six Weeks Later--**

The cool wind swept through my hair as I sat on the porch swing. I pulled the blanket around me a little tighter. I looked out over the yard and all the wonderful

things Mrs. Cobbs and I had planted. I now had much more than just a couple of rose plants. I also took care of the Blue violets, White Turtleheads, Winged Monkeyflowers, and the Black Chokeberries. Everything was starting to bloom and it looked magnificent. I felt so overwhelmed and happy at that moment.

Noah came running across the lawn and jumped onto the swing next to me. We laughed and talked for a long time and then he ran off again. It gave me such joy to see him be able to run and act like a kid here. That could never have happened back at the plantation. He was even able to start taking reading lessons with Mrs. Cobbs.

I glanced over at the small table next to me and picked up my book. I was right at the end and I had to find out what happened next. Jane Austen did have a way with words.

**THE END!!!!!!**