June Fifteenth

Chapter 1

June 15, 1855. It's my birthday. My first birthday. The day that I enter the world. The first day of the rest of my life. I will celebrate this day for many, many years before I say goodbye to this life and slip away until I return to a new place and time. But, today is my birthday in this life. It will not be an easy one. Today is already tough.

A big colored woman picks me up from the bed where I lie next to my dying mother. She wraps me in a blanket that scratches my new skin and tries to hand me to a man who is big and dirty. He shakes his head and walks away. I am placed in a little basket. I scream and try to let everyone know that I am here. A man with a black bag comes into the dark little house where my basket is and walks over to the place where my mother is lying. The once white sheets are now mostly red. He pulls the red and white sheet over my mother's face, shakes his head and calls for the big dirty man.

I scream and scream for my mother. A kind black face leans down and talks to me. She picks me up and carries me out of the dark house and sits in a chair that rocks. She holds me and rocks me and puts a breast that is dripping with wonderful milk into my mouth.

I look into her face and see tears dripping from her eyes. There is a little boy and a bigger girl next to the chair. They touch my hands and smile at me. The dirty man walks by and doesn't even look at me. The kind woman talks to me. “Po' little thing. Your life sho' won't be a easy one.” I fall asleep and never forget that today is the day of my

birth. It is the day that I will celebrate one hundred times. June 15, 1855. The day that Bessie Mae Daniels made her debut to this planet.

I live in the dark little house. The dirty man lives here, too. He never picks me up or talks to me. The kind lady with the boy and girl comes to the house in the morning when I wake up. She lets me drink her warm milk until I am full and fall back asleep. She comes again in the afternoon and when it is dark outside. She gives food to the dirty man and milk to me. The little girl washes my face and puts clothes on me.

Every day is the same. I lie in my basket after the kind lady leaves in the morning. The little girl stays with me during the day. She takes care of her little brother and sometimes some other little boys and girls from the cabins. I sleep and cry because I am hungry. I wait all day for food. I wait for the kind lady to feed me warm wonderful milk.

Danger is lurking for me. It is waiting for me to get big enough. It is waiting around every corner of the dark house. It is waiting, waiting to strike.

June 15, 1855. Today is my birthday. It is a wonderful day. It is the day that I enter the world for the first time. There is so much excitement. My mother holds my naked body against hers and her tears of joy fall on my face. She kisses the tears away and whispers to me. “Mama loves you, angel.”

A man with a black bag picks me up and hands me to a lady in white clothes. She puts me on a table and washes my face and body. She talks to me in a gentle voice and puts a lacy dress on me. After she wraps me in a soft little pink blanket she hands me back to my mother.

The man with the black bag and the lady in white leave the room and a handsome man runs in. He kisses my mother and strokes my cheek. Mother holds me up and he takes me in his arms. He walks

around the room holding me. He talks gently to me until I feel the pangs of hunger and begin to scream. He laughs and places me back into the silky arms of my mother.

I am taken from her arms by a black woman with a kind face. She holds me so that my mother and the handsome man can kiss me. “Goodnight, my angel,” they say. I am taken out of my mother's room and into a room that is bright and has pictures of flowers and butterflies on the walls. The kind lady sits in a chair that rocks. There is a large window with white lace curtains. She opens her blouse and offers me a large breast that is dripping with warm luscious milk. I drink until I am full.

She rocks me and hums a beautiful tune. She walks with me and places me in a golden crib. It is warm and soft. She pulls a frilly blanket over me and says, “sleep well lil' angel. You sho be lucky little girl.” I fall asleep thinking that it my birthday. I will have many, many others before I say goodbye to this life.

Everyone will believe that my life is perfect. Everyone that I meet will believe that no other little girl has ever led such a life of perfection as mine. Everyone will only be partly right. They will only see what I want for them to see. They will never know what happens in the darkness. They will never know what secrets I keep hidden.

Today is my birthday, June 15, 1855. Hannah Elizabeth Wellington is welcomed into her charmed life. I sleep peacefully in my crib of gold, wrapped in luxury. Today there are no secrets, but they will come. One day soon, they will come.

Every day is the same. A lady dressed in white comes in to my room and picks me up out of my golden crib. She washes me in warm water and puts me in a new beautiful dress. She hands me to the lady with the kind face who sits with me in the chair that rocks and feeds me warm milk. Then the lady in white comes in and takes me downstairs where my mother is waiting.

My mother holds me and talks and sings to me. She walks with me into the bright sunshine and the lady in white puts me in my carriage and takes me for a walk. The lady with the kind face comes

to feed me. I sleep and play with my mother and then the handsome man, my father, comes home. He holds me and plays with me. Then I am taken upstairs to my room. I am fed and dressed for the night and I sleep in my crib of gold until the sun shines through the white lace curtains.

"How come you be feedin' the little white baby, mama?" asks the little girl who belongs to the lady with the kind face.

"It be my job, Livia," the kind lady says as she puts me over her shoulder.

"Come, here," she says to her little girl.

"Pat the baby on her back, honey. Right here," she says and shows the little girl where to pat my back.

"That's right, honey," says the lady, "you doin' just fine, Livia." The little girl smiles at me and says, "Sure is a purty little one, ain't she mama? Not like Bessie. She be ugly."

"That's not kind, Livia. Bessie don't have the things like this one has."

"Sorry, mama. Can I rocks Hannah fo' you?" The kind lady stands up and hands me to Livia.

"That's fine, Livia. Yo' goin' make a good mama someday."

The little girl holds me with child hands and rocks me. "Smells better than Bessie, too."

Sometimes when I am in my carriage I can hear Livia and her little brother playing. I can hear the voices of other children, too. They play all day long.

We walk along the path that circle around the pond. I can hear ducks and geese and the sound of water. Sometimes I can hear the children splashing in the water and I hear Livia yelling at her brother and the other children as she warns them to be careful.

I also hear the screams of the other baby, Bessie. I wonder where her mother is and why someone isn't feeding her. Her screams are the screams of hunger. Her cries echo in the trees, but fall on deaf ears.