

Lizzie:
A Work of Historical Fiction

A Thesis Submitted to
The Faculty of the College of Arts and Sciences
In Candidacy for the Degree of
Master of Fine Arts in Creative Writing

By
Sandra Rouse
July 2024

Acknowledgements

I extend my deepest gratitude to my husband, Brando Todd Berry. When I shared my goal of writing and pursuit of another degree, Todd did not hesitate to offer his encouragement and support. Each day I have to share with him is a gift and a blessing.

To Alene Ingram Rouse, my mother and early reader, who offered valuable insights and feedback.

My deepest thanks to Dr. James Latta and Dr. Karen Dodson whose guidance led to the completion of this thesis and the beginning of my career as a writer.

To my classmates in Writing 690 for their notes and feedback on the opening chapters of my work: Emilee Day, Megan Jenkins, Morgan Moore, Elizabeth Girvan, Katie Smith Lopez, and Taraysha Swinea.

To Mary Stevens, Executive Director of the Talbot County Chamber of Commerce, for her knowledge, expertise and tour of Talbotton, GA.

To Marvin D. Byrd, MASS and Catiana Y. Foster, MASS, MA with the Tuskegee University Archives, whose enthusiasm, assistance, and conversations made research exciting.

Lastly, to my amazing family, thank you for your endless love, cheerleading, support, and laughs. I do it for you.

Table of Contents

Acknowledgements.....	2
Working Title	4
Artist Statement	4
Inspiration for <i>Lizzie</i>	5
Significance of the Topic as a Christian Scholar.....	7
Literary Context.....	9
Conclusion.....	12
Critical Paper: Historical Fiction.....	13
Definition.....	13
History.....	13
Significance.....	17
Criticism.....	17
Types.....	18
Trends.....	20
Conclusion.....	21
Thesis Project: <i>Lizzie</i>	22
Title Page.....	22
Copyright Page.....	23
Prologue.....	24
Works Cited.....	129

Working Title

The working title of my thesis topic and creative project is *Lizzie: A Work of Historical Fiction*. This will serve as the beginning of a novel.

Artist Statement

Artist Background

I had the privilege to know my great-great grandmother. She was born in 1890 and lived until 1990. She, like most of my family, was born and reared in rural South Carolina. During her lifetime, she was able to witness an incredible amount of United States and world history. A wonderful legacy she gave her family was her gift of storytelling. Through her, I learned the joys and sorrows of family, living in the South, and how significant events in history, such as World War I, World War II and the Civil Rights Movement, helped shape her life and the lives of those around her. She shared how society saw her versus how she saw herself. I began to write because of her. I wanted to document her stories to share with future generations of our family. She picked cotton and worked on farms to support her family. Society labeled her as a laborer. She saw herself and had a life that was so much more.

I am an avid reader. My fondest memories from childhood revolve around books. Over time, my reading preferences have changed. I loved romance novels as a young adult. Then I shifted to Christian fiction, then thrillers. Now I would define historical fiction as my favorite. I have found the mix of a great story and true elements of history a fascinating combination. I came to the realization during the MFA program in Creative Writing that my great-great grandmother's stories likely have a significant impact on why historical fiction are a pleasure for me to read today.

After reading dozens of novels of historical fiction, I have found that few have African-American women as protagonists. There are non-fiction books and stories on women like Harriett Tubman and Rosa Parks. There are works of fiction in the genres of romance and mystery with an African-American female protagonist. However, it is difficult to find works of historical fiction where the story is set in a different era with a main character who is an African-American female. If a character is an African-American female, the role tends to be minor and the character tends to lack a full life of her own. My goal is to write novels of historical fiction with an African-American female protagonist. I wish to set my novels in the South beyond the locations of Atlanta and Charleston. My great-great grandmother was more than a woman who picked cotton or cleaned houses to provide for her family. She had a rich life beyond any domestic or field work she performed. These are the stories I hope to tell as a writer.

My great-great grandmother was also a woman of faith. In each of her stories, she gave thanks to God for helping her “to come a mighty long way.” She reminded us that no matter how difficult life got, we were never alone. Faith in God and attendance at church were an expectation in our family. My family attended Baptist churches but the denomination wasn’t as important as attending a Christian church. Any absence from church was quickly mentioned and guilt followed. Because God saw the family through trials and tribulations, thankfulness through worship was essential. Because this is a major part of my family and in my DNA, elements of faith will be weaved within my work.

Inspiration for *Lizzie*

From 2007-2011, I had the privilege of working at Voorhees College (now Voorhees University) in Denmark, South Carolina. Voorhees is located in rural South Carolina. According to the United States Census Bureau, the city of Denmark has a total area of 3.8 square miles. In

this small town resides two institutions of higher education, Voorhees University and Denmark Technical College. While working at Voorhees, I first heard the name Elizabeth Evelyn Wright. Elizabeth was the founder of Voorhees College. The more I heard about her, the more intrigued I became with her story.

Elizabeth was called Lizzie by her family and friends. She was born in 1872 in the small town of Talbotton, Georgia. She did not have the opportunity to attend school until she was eight years old. This opportunity came when White missionaries from the North came to the South to educate former slaves and their children. From the first day, she loved school and learning. Her education was repeatedly interrupted due to illness, weather, and family obligations but she persevered. She learned of the Tuskegee Institute and Booker T. Washington by accident. After initial refusals, her family decided to allow her to travel 100 miles away from home to attend Tuskegee in Tuskegee, Alabama. Her education at Tuskegee was life changing but also had its challenges with stops and starts. Lizzie faced financial difficulties from the first day at Tuskegee. She would work multiple jobs while attending classes. This led to illness and a stop out of school for a while. Lizzie had a will and determination to complete her education. She ultimately went back to Tuskegee. She gained the support of the Washingtons and decided she was going to be like Booker T. Washington and open a school for her race. She chose South Carolina for the location. She walked for miles visiting churches, gaining support and fundraising. She faced harassment, and arson but was successful in achieving her goal of opening her school. Her school, The Denmark Industrial Institute, has thrived to become Voorhees University. Lizzie faced bouts of illness throughout her life and spent time at the Battle Creek Sanitarium in Battle Creek, Michigan on multiple occasions. Tragically, she died there in 1906 at the age of 34. I

believe her death at a young age led to her story being almost lost to history. Her story has remained with me for years.

Significance of the Topic as a Christian Scholar

As a Christian scholar, the significance of the work of historical fiction titled *Lizzie* is, it is an example of Philippians 4:13 (King James Version (KJV)) – I can do all things through Christ which strengthens me. The Apostle Paul experienced the spectrum of circumstances. In the varying circumstances, he learned to be satisfied regardless of whether the times were good or bad. I believe *Lizzie* lived this way. Her calling was to serve and educate. She faced trials and tribulations that would cause a person without God to give up; yet she persisted. In the moments of success, she celebrated. Regardless of the circumstances, she stayed true to her calling and leaned on her faith. In this way, she reminds me of my great-great grandmother, who would have been her contemporary. Both women had difficulties that were imposed upon them by society. Instead of keeping them down, they used faith to convey hope. In their faith, they found strength through all obstacles. Through obstacles, they were determined and persevered. They had hope for a better life for themselves, hope for those around them and hope for a better world.

As a Christian scholar, I will use hope, strength, determination and perseverance as the guiding forces in my work. In addition to Philippians 4:13, one of my favorite Bible verses is Isaiah 40:31 - But they that wait upon the LORD shall renew their strength; they shall mount up with wings as eagles; they shall run, and not be weary; and they shall walk, and not faint (KJV). My writing will have themes of hope and strength from the perspective of female protagonists who are determined and persist through life's challenges. The women who I am surrounded by have been faithful, hopeful, and determined. Through Christ's strength, I know all things are possible. Though, I have struggled at times. I am reminded through Isaiah 40:31 that patience is

essential as we rely on God's perfect timing. As I write, I want the words to come quickly and concisely. There are times when they do not come. I must believe the words will come and the work will be completed. They may not come when I wish but if I am patient the words do come. I have felt writing has been my calling since middle school but I have given numerous excuses for not pursuing writing that was not required of work or school. Now as I pursue the MFA and writing in my fifties, there is fear. I lean on Philippians 4:13 and Isaiah 40:31 as my guides as I navigate the Master's program and writing my novel. I know the timing is perfect in that I now have life experiences and focus that I did not have years ago. Hope, strength and determination would not have been the themes of my work. I would have written romance novels. My current path seems the correct fit at the right time in my life and in current affairs of the world.

During her life, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright displayed an unwavering determination and perseverance in her pursuit of an education. Then she showed the same determination and perseverance in her pursuit to establish a school for the African American youth in the late 1890s-early 1900s. The Bible implores us to persevere in James 1:12 (NIV) "Blessed is the one who perseveres under trial because, having stood the test, that person will receive the crown of life that the Lord has promised to those who love him." We are taught about determination from childhood with stories like Watty Piper's "The Little Engine that Could" and "Whistle for Willie" by Ezra Jack Keats. As we grow older, the theme continues in "The Little House on the Prairie" by Laura Ingalls Wilder and Ernest Hemingway's "Old Man and the Sea." As we enter the professional world, we are presented with books like "Grit: The Power of Passion and Perseverance" by Angela Duckworth and John C. Maxwell's "Failing Forward: Turning Mistakes into Stepping Stones for Success." From epics to folktales and fiction to non-fiction,

perseverance and determination are themes designed to encourage and inspire. These themes have stood the test of time as individuals all over the world strive to achieve and succeed.

Lizzie is a reminder to us all to follow our vocation and be content with both our trials and tribulations because we are not alone in our lives. We can do all things through Christ and we must also persist even when we are discouraged. This is the significance for me as a Christian scholar.

Literary Context

My thesis will be a work of historical fiction based upon a real person. The novel will tell the story of Elizabeth Evelyn Wright. The story will follow her youth, education, the people who impacted her life and what it took for her to establish her school in the rural South. There is biographical evidence, pictures, artifacts containing her writing and writings about her. But my goal is to bring her to life to a modern audience and share what I found to be an incredible story of persistence, perseverance, determination, and grit. These are traits I believe are needed today and can be inspirational.

Lizzie will serve as the protagonist for the novel. The supporting characters will be pivotal ones during each period of her life. Significant periods of her life were shaped by the setting and location. *Lizzie* was born in rural Talbotton, Georgia. In Georgia, her grandmother Lydia, Uncle Jus, and teacher, Mrs. Woods were the guiding forces. They guided her through her youth and became pivotal in her pursuing her education at Tuskegee.

The next setting is the Tuskegee Institute in Tuskegee, Alabama. Tuskegee was established in 1881 by Booker T. Washington to educate African American men and women and to promote racial uplift. When *Lizzie* enrolls, the campus is thriving and growing. During this period, *Lizzie* lives on-campus with roommates. Her roommates, Emma and Belinda, will

educate Lizzie on social norms. She will learn about the world and open herself up to possibilities beyond any she ever imagined for her life. Booker T. Washington and his wife, Olivia, will be characters who are instrumental in her setting the goal to build her own school.

Small towns in rural South Carolina will be the settings in which Lizzie struggles to establish her school. The character of Almira Steele will provide unwavering support and encouragement in person and through letters as Lizzie faces the trials, tribulations and successes on her path to educate the poor children of South Carolina.

Lizzie faced an undiagnosed illness throughout her life. The Battle Creek Sanitarium and its manager Dr. John Harvey Kellogg play a pivotal role in her health and well-being. The Sanitarium was founded on the health principles promoted by the Seventh-day Adventist Church. Through her time at the sanitarium, Lizzie learned about and followed the teachings of the church. The sanitarium will be the setting for recovery during her times of illness and her death.

The action of the novel occurs between the years 1880-1906. The post-Civil War era in the South was a time of tremendous change and challenge. Thousands of enslaved people were freed in 1865 into a nation that did not have a plan forward. Lizzie was born after emancipation but her life was impacted by the newly established freedom. Schooling for her in Georgia wasn't prescribed or funded by the state. It was only through the service of Northern missionaries that a rudimentary education was possible. When school was available for African American children, the demands of farm and family could take the opportunity for an education away. Education was sought after and considered a privilege. To provide uplift to their race, people like Booker T. Washington established schools. This gave another opportunity for education but this education required payment. While available, education was then cost-prohibitive for most; especially those in the rural South. State supported schools for African Americans in the South was still

decades away. Even when it was compulsory, the education received could be inadequate. This is the context in which Lizzie is educated and ultimately start her school.

The locations within the novel inform the plot. The South following the Civil War was a place where newly freed people were trying to establish their place in society amid opposition and hate from those who were not supportive or happy about the new societal circumstances. The way the characters behave and act would differ in a Southern setting than in a Northern one.

Lizzie's community, family, socioeconomic status and race are elements of the social context that will shape this work. Those who are supporters and detractors for the education of African Americans and their impact on Lizzie and her work will have a thread throughout the novel. Lizzie's family and their varying degrees of support for her education will shape how she views herself and her place in the world. Lizzie is reared by her grandmother and uncle because her parents have more children than they can support. Lizzie grew up away from her parents and without her siblings as a result. Being from a poor family allows for few luxuries, including an education. Lizzie sacrifices her comfort and well-being over the course of her life in lieu of others so their lives will be better.

Lizzie's race is part of the cultural impact of this literary work. Her lack of education in her youth, her enrollment at Tuskegee, her determination to start a school, and her resilience through the challenges of reaching her goal were all a result of her race. This element alters her decisions, behaviors, and actions. It also alters how people view her and their level of respect for her.

There are themes that permeate throughout the novel. Perseverance, Self-Sacrifice, Bravery, Faith, Innocence and Love will be the underlying truths that threads the novel. These truths guide Lizzie as she pursues her goals.

There are challenges I see in completing this work. Because *Lizzie* is based on real life events, I'm already experiencing the struggle of telling a story that is not a stagnant sequence of events. There is a timeline to Lizzie's life and the events that occurred. I want to stay true to the story without completing a novel that is a step-by-step checklist. I must also remember the novel is a work of fiction. This choice gives me the freedom to build well-rounded characters and relationships. The novel is based on real people and artifacts related to real people. However, these things do not give the feelings and emotions experienced. I can build unknown thoughts and tension that will strengthen the storytelling. As a writer of historical fiction, I must remember to keep as much of my modern-day lens out of the writing process. I must live within the story and the characters and allow them to be my guide. These challenges are what excites me about writing this novel.

Conclusion

As I considered the topics for my thesis project, Elizabeth Evelyn Wright's story kept coming to the forefront of my thoughts. I could not ignore the yearning to tell her story. She was an unlikely candidate to become the founder of what is now a university. An education was not an option for her until she was eight years old. From the beginning, Lizzie embraced learning. Her love of learning led her to provide opportunities for others. Lizzie did not have any money and owned little. Yet, she was able to purchase 365 acres of land to build her school. Her perseverance, dedication, and faith led to an institution that shaped the lives of thousands. I hope my completed work will serve to tell her story, be inspirational, and be a reminder that with God we are never alone and that all things are possible.

Critical Paper: Historical Fiction

My creative project is a work of historical fiction. The genre of historical fiction was chosen due to my love of story creation and interest in history. Researching a period in history and using it to create the setting and characters is exciting to me as I build my career as a writer. It will also add depth to my work. The definition of historical fiction, its history, significance, criticism, types and current trends in the genre will be explored.

Definition

Historical fiction is defined as a work set in a particular period of time and place “which reconstructs and recreates history imaginatively” (Cuddon 333). It mixes historical and real people/events with elements from the author’s imagination. Sheffer wrote “historically based novels sought to animate the emotional lives of long-dead people and long-past eras” (2). Writer Jessica Dukes states “historical fiction is the closest we’ll get to actual time travel” (Dukes, “What is Historical Fiction?”).

History

Historical fiction is a literary genre with an expansive lineage. Georg Lukács tied the emergence of the historical novel to the French Revolution (1963). However, author Margaret Anne Doody states “the ‘historical novel’ was with us from the very beginning” (27). *The Epic of Gilgamesh* is touted as the beginning of historical fiction (Brayfield & Sprott 61). Written around 1500 BC, *The Epic of Gilgamesh* (Schmidt 27-68) tells the story of Gilgamesh and his comrade Enkidu. The story is about relationships, discontentment, loss and redemption. Set during the 1500 BC time period, the reader learns about life and events during that period and the people and lives within.

The Story of Sinuhe was a significant work of fiction in ancient Egypt. This work, written in the years before Christ, is set in an earlier time period (Brayfield and Sprott 61). It is the story of a man who leaves his home in Egypt, spends his life away, returns home and reclaims his identity before his death. God divinely guides his life and journey throughout the story.

Greece also played a role in historical fiction. Homer's epics the *Iliad* and *Odyssey* are novel length epic poems. Because they are set along a historic backdrop, they are an integral part of the genre of historical fiction. The *Iliad* was written in the 8th century BC. It is set towards the end of the Trojan War, which occurred between the 12th and 13th century BC. It highlights the quarrel between King Agamemnon and the warrior, Achilles. The *Odyssey* was written around the 7th or 8th century. It follows the trials and tribulations of Odysseus after the Trojan War.

Brayfield and Sprott cite the work of Herodotus and Xenophon of Athens (64-66) as historical fiction. Herodotus was the first writer to use a systematic investigation of historical events in his work. He wrote between 484 and 425 BC. Herodotus was criticized for the entertainment value of his work that chronicled the Greco-Persian Wars. But the entertaining storytelling he used became part of his legacy (DeGroot 2010). The same is true of Xenophon of Athens. Xenophon's work covered the Peloponnesian War (431-404 BC) fought between Athens and Sparta. Though Xenophon is noted as taking "liberties with the facts of history," the significant event was chronicled in his writing (Sprott 66).

Greece further impacts historical fiction with the *Greek Alexander Romance*. *Greek Alexander Romance* was an entertaining departure from the standard story set in the past. Sprott notes "despite the overlay of fantastic legend, there are chunks of genuine history embedded in the text" (67). In the Roman culture, Virgil's work *Aeneid* written between 70-19 BC "indulges in the creation and transmutation of history" (Sprott 69).

As historical fiction continued to evolve the young Roman poet Lucan “freely manipulates the truth” (Sprott 70). Lucan wrote epic poems that were favored by Nero. Unfortunately, his relationship with Nero changed which led to his death at the age of twenty-five (Lukács 1963). Another manipulator of the truth was Plutarch. Plutarch who was writing in the early days following the birth of Christ used history to help people build better character. Plutarch filled historical gaps, engineered material, and deployed “creative reconstruction” to tell fascinating stories (Sprott 72). His best-known work *Pharsalia* detailed the civil war between Julius Caesar and Pompey the Great.

Beowulf is an epic poem whose timeline extends over a lifetime. While the date of origin is disputed, it is typically listed as between 700-1000 AD. The poem has elements of fiction, myth, legend, and history that have made the poem sustainable into modern times. The story is so great it has been reimagined over the years into movies, television and theatre (Gautam and Banerjee 22-29).

Other countries also played a role in the development of historical fiction. The Icelandic sagas were written in the 13th and 14th centuries (Sprott 74-75). These works were set in Iceland and placed between 900-1200 AD. The sagas not only focused on history but families and societal struggles as well (Phelpstead 2020). These family sagas formed the basis of numerous stories in Iceland and beyond. In China, three of the four classic Chinese novels are set in the past. These novels were written between the 14th and 16th centuries and were set during times between the 3rd, 7th, and 12th centuries. Subsequent novels used various periods of Chinese history as the backdrop for storytelling (Brayfield and Sprott 2014).

One of the early historical novels in Europe was published in France. *Le Princesses de Clèves* was published in 1678 (DeGroot 2010). The novel is set from 1558-1559 at the court of

Henry II of France. The unknown author uses historical figures and research to create a precise recreation of the court and events during the time.

While historical fiction has existed since the beginning of literature, there have been ebbs and flows in the genre based on country and population interest. During the 1700s, historical fiction lost its popularity in favor of novels that focused on intellect and progress.

Sir Walter Scott is credited with the resurgence of the historical novel in the early 1800s (Cudden 333). Twenty-six of his 27 novels had historical settings (Shaw 1983). Scott's work focused on "ordinary" people who exhibited ordinary (that is, flawed) morality (Sheffer 1). His notable works including *Ivanhoe* (1819) and *Rob Roy* (1817) were influential in American and European literature. The trend of historical fiction continued with Mary Shelley's work *Valperga* (1823) which follows a character back to the 1300s to conquer Florence to win a woman's heart. In the United States, James Fenimore Cooper's book *The Last of the Mohicans* (1826), defined as a historical romance novel set in 1757, became a defining work of the genre.

Georgette Heyer was one of the most successful authors of the 20th century. Her novels were touted for their "meticulous historical detail" (Cuddon 334). Heyer was 19 years old when she published her first novel, *The Black Moth*. Heyer published regularly and averaged two novels per year. She wrote one romance and one thriller. She is most known for creating the historical romance genre with a focus on Regency romance (O'Brien 1). Heyer's romance novels were set between 1752 and 1825. These novels were published between 1921 and 1972 (O'Brien 2). Her novels inspired untold imitators and set the foundation for novels and movies created around the world today.

In the late 20th century, the postmodern historical novel developed (Bewes 5). These novels were written after World War II. These novels challenged known truths in history (Cuddon 334) and told stories in honest ways, tackling subjects previously considered taboo.

Since the beginning of literary work, historical fiction has been present. Authors have re-imagined stories of the past in ways to fill gaps, remind readers of past people, places and things, and to entertain. Works of historical fiction have continued to evolve as people, time, and cultures changed. As time continues, so will the fodder for future works of historical fiction.

Significance

Historical fiction can transport readers to different times and eras. Additionally, gaps in information about people, places, and things can be imagined. In his March 5, 2023 blog post, Steven Mintz wrote “historical fiction isn’t history, but it can reveal the historical truths that lie beyond the evidentiary.” Historical Fiction can help answer questions, understand the past, expand our understanding of human history and help us to avoid past mistakes in the future.

Criticism

While historical fiction is a fictional account of past events, there are those who criticize the genre (Addey 421). Authenticity is one area of criticism. Anne Stevens (2010) argues that historical accuracy is a general rule for this type of fiction. Authenticity is used as a “measure of quality” of historical fiction (Stoker 309). Saxton (128) agrees that authenticity is “integral to their perceived success.” There are those who believe that as works of fiction this gives the writer license to be creative with their stories. The creativity some argue makes history more accessible to wider audiences (Stocker 309). Unlike other genres, historical fiction is “more concerned with realism and authenticity than other genres” (Stocker 310). However, in being authentic, there are those who wonder if true accuracy is possible.

Language is another place of criticism in historical fiction. In terms of language, the author is able to interpret from writings how writers wrote. Saxton (132) acknowledges that speaking versus writing is different as the nuisances of spoken language can only be assumed. Stocker says the writer “can focus on producing dialogue that meets the needs of the story and the reader” (316) but true spoken language of a time will never be known.

As language has changed over time, writers have used the techniques of Immersion and Hybridization to set the tone for the time period and make the language easier to comprehend. Immersion focuses on reproducing the language and structure of a certain age (Stocker 311). Hybridization combines the nuances of past language with modern language to make it accessible to a modern audience (Saxton 313). Either way, the story must be believable to ensure its success. In addition to language, the cultural norms, environmental aspects, clothing, and the like must all be accurately depicted to be considered authentic.

One prominent feature of current historical fiction is the author’s note. Saxton states “one common technique for delineating between fact and fiction” is the author’s note (127). In order to reduce criticism, authors are explaining their choices by writing notes as an addition to their novels (Stocker 332). While author’s notes are not a requirement of other genres, they are seen as paramount for success in the genre of historical fiction.

Types

Like other genres, historical fiction has been classified into sub-categories. The main idea of historical fiction is a work set in a different time and place. Over time, the following sub-categories have developed due to the various interests of writers (Brayfield and Sprott 2013; Cuddon 2014).

- **Biographical Historical Fiction** is a fictionalized story of a real person. An example of biographical historical fiction is Sue Monk Kidd's *Invention of Wings* written in 2014. This book tells the story of one of the first female abolitionists, Sarah Grimke, and her slave, Handful.
- **Historical Epics** cover a broad scope of time and multiple challenges to the human condition. *War and Peace* (1867) by Leo Tolstoy, *Gone with the Wind* (1936) by Margaret Mitchell and *Lonesome Dove* (1985) by Larry McMurtry are considered historical epics.
- **Historical Mystery** is a mystery in a past setting. Anne Perry's *The Face of a Stranger* (1990) has a detective as a lead character who investigates the murder of a Crimean War hero.
- **Historical Thrillers** are novels that give a feeling of suspense and excitement while set in an historical era. Examples of historical thrillers are Kurt Vonnegut's *Slaughter House-Five* (1969) and John Steinbeck's *East of Eden* (1952).
- **Historical Romance** tells a love story in a bygone era (de Groot 52). The *Bridgerton* series written by Julia Quinn is a current example of historical romance. Georgette Heyer is credited with establishing this genre (O'Brien 2).
- **Historical Adventure** take the reader on a journey that is atypical of everyday life. Herman Melville's *Moby Dick* (1851) and Joseph Conrad's *Heart of Darkness* (1899) are examples of historical adventures (Bewes 6).
- **Historical Fantasy** takes the reader into a magical or secondary world. Diana Gabaldon author of the popular *Outlander* series and L. Frank Baum's *The Wonderful Wizard of Oz* and subsequent novels are examples of historical fantasy.

Trends

While historical fiction is typically set in the past, there has been an increase in the number of historical novels set in recent history (Manshel 205). At the beginning of the coronavirus pandemic, *New York Times* writer Sloane Crosley wrote an essay that forecast the future of numerous novels set during the time of COVID-19 (2020). Manshel (206) believes “contemporary novelists not only can but will and should transcribe the events of recent history into literary fiction.” It is true that recent history has become a popular topic in new publications. The events of September 11, the war in Iraq, the 2008 financial crisis, international terrorism, mass shootings, the 2008 financial crisis and the presidencies of Barack Obama and Donald Trump have all been used for the setting and background of historical fiction (Manshel 2023). There is a trend of using history that is still being written.

Historical fiction has also seen a rise in writers who have been considered marginalized voices. Sheffer writes ethnic American writers “have been rethinking, reimagining, and redefining the genre and US history to make sense of our present and to imagine different futures for the nation” (2). Authors of African American, Asian American, and Native American ancestry are writing from their cultural perspective (Sheffer 4-8; Young and Ward 2). This gives new breath to the histories previously written from a majority perspective.

Adding to the growing body of historical fiction is the voice of women. *The Tale of Genji*, the epic story of 11th-Century Japan, was written 1000 years ago by Murasaki Shikibu, a woman. While women have continued to write, men have dominated the spectrum of authorship. In the realm of historical fiction, women now dominate (Sheffer 5). There are increased views of history from the female standpoint. This was lacking in earlier literary periods.

Historical fiction is now being used in pedagogy. History professors, who may have shunned historical fiction in the past, are now embracing the genre. Scholars like history professor Jessica S. Hower are using the popular works (Hower uses *The Tudors*) to teach history in innovative new ways (82). Indeed, novels, television series, and movies have made history popular. *The Tudors*, *Wolf Hall*, and *The Bridgertons* among others have younger generations excited about history and periods in history (Hower 79; Saxton 138). To engage students, pedagogy is shifting to compare popular culture and actual history. By using these resources, faculty members are able to teach about historical people, places and events in new and exciting ways.

Conclusion

Historical fiction is a genre that has existed since the beginning of the written word. Set in various places and times, historical fiction seeks to re-tell history by filling in gaps and imagining the emotions involved in past eras. Countries around the world have historical fiction as part of their literary culture.

While historical fiction can be controversial due to debates with historians on accuracy, use of language during the time the work is set versus modern language, and use of recent history, it continues to be a popular genre. Historical fiction has branched into sub-genres from historical romance to historical fantasy. Stories within historical fiction are now being told by the diversity of humanity. The use of historical fiction in the classroom and popular culture will continue to evolve the form. This is especially true with the addition of contemporary history as the background of recent novels. There is more historical fiction that will be written as it continues to evolve in the future.

Lizzie

Sandra Rouse

Copyright © 2024 Sandra Rouse. All rights reserved.

No part of this publication may be reproduced, distributed,
or transmitted in any form or by any means, including
photocopying, recording, or other electronic or mechanical methods, without the prior written
permission of the publisher.

Prologue

October 1877

Lizzie's eyes darted back and forth as the girls arrived. They assembled from every direction by carriage, by wagon, and on foot. No one arrived alone. Their dresses were cinched at the waist and tied with bows. There were calicos, silks and satins. Cords and lace trimmed sleeves, bodices and hems. Each dress danced as the girls made their way up the concrete steps. Their dresses moved in a way hers did not. Her fingers ached to touch the fabric. Her hands touched the sides of her own. Surely, their dresses were softer than the rough cotton beneath her fingertips.

"Uncle Jus, why can't I go to the school with the girls over there?" Lizzie pointed with her chin. Uncle Jus glanced down at Lizzie then at the girls and kneeled. His hands wrapped around Lizzie's waist. His fingers met at the back of the five-year-old.

"Lizzie, remember when Grandma Lydia tol' you 'bout slavery time?" Lizzie nodded.

"Well, now even after slavery, people 'round here haven't given much thought to schools for negro people."

"When they gon' think 'bout it?" Lizzie implored with wide brown eyes. Uncle Jus' heart turned to a pool of jelly.

"I don't know but I hope one day soon."

"Me, too. I'd like to go to that school."

"I doubt you'll be able to go to that one but there'll be one just as good for you. You jus' wait and see," Uncle Jus wiggled his fingers and Lizzie laughed. She glanced over to LeVert College, a school founded to educate and refine young ladies, as the teacher rang the bell. One day, she thought, one day.

PART I

Chapter 1

October 1880

It happened in church. What a great place to be for one's life to change. She was a scrawny eight-year-old. Though her family was God-fearing, she, Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus didn't attend church on a regular basis. Truth be told, Uncle Jus didn't attend at all, but no one ever mentioned that. On that magical Sunday, Lizzie was sitting next to her Grandma on a roughhewn pew at St. Phillips African Methodist Episcopal Church. She was careful not to rub her hands or legs along the pew to avoid a splinter. Grandma Lydia was holding the Bible no one in the family was able to read when Rev. Thomas walked from behind the pulpit.

"Ladies and Gentlemen, I would like to introduce you to the newest members of the Talbotton community." Two white folks stood. They were simply dressed. Lizzie glanced up at her grandmother. Unless there was a funeral, she hadn't seen too many white folks in the congregation of brown faces. Grandma Lydia hadn't moved.

"This is Reverend and Mrs. Woods," Rev. Thomas gestured with open palms as the couple smiled and nodded. Rev. Woods wore a black suit and sported a full head of hair and beard of silver and brown. Mrs. Woods appeared to be in her early forties and equal to her husband in height and slender build.

"The good Reverend and his misses are here all the way from New York in the north. They are missionaries. They are here to provide education for the Negro children of the South. They will be starting school here in the church basement in two weeks. Our children will have the opportunity to learn to read and write." Murmurs started around the church.

Lizzie immediately looked up at her grandmother whose jaw was set as usual. She wanted to learn to write her name. Her neighbor, Lawrence, told her their names started with the same letter but she had never seen it in writing.

“It is my sincere hope that each of you consider the opportunity set before us,” Rev. Thomas continued, “the gift of an education is key to the future of our people and our children. Mrs. Woods will lead the teaching of reading, writing, and arithmetic. Any necessary materials will be provided by the church. Those seeking further information should remain after today’s service.”

Grandma Lydia didn’t stay after the service. As they made their way back up Smith Hill, the determined little girl looked up at her grandmother, looked at the ground and then back at her grandmother.

“Say what’s on yo’ mind, chil’,” her grandmother stated. Lizzie chewed her top lip. She glanced at Grandma Lydia out of the corner of her eye. Grandma Lydia stopped walking and raised her eyebrow.

“You know the school Rev. Thomas talked about?” Lizzie swallowed.

“I want to go,” she whispered as her eyes took in the dirt at her feet.

“What?” Grandma barked.

Lizzie inhaled and with all the energy in her body said, “I want to go to school.”

Grandma met her eyes. The three seconds felt like a year.

“We’ll have to see what your uncle says about this.” Grandma reached for her hand swiftly.

She smiled. Uncle Jus loved her; she was going to school. Lizzie wondered if she would receive books on the first day. She had to make a bag for her books like the girls at the LeVert

school. She had to shine her shoes. Oh, what else did she need to do! She picked up her pace. There were only two weeks to get ready.

Uncle Jus asked around and learned Reverend and Mrs. Woods were in the community to serve. They were missionaries who had pledged to teach poor, uneducated negro children in the South. Lizzie didn't know what a missionary was but if they were teachers, who would help her learn, she knew she'd like these missionaries. As she expected, her grandmother had discussed the school with Uncle Jus and he granted her permission to attend.

The first day she walked to school with her neighbor, Lawrence. Lawrence was ten years old. He didn't want to mark an X to represent his name as his parents did. He wanted to write his own name. Lawrence talked incessantly as they walked. Lizzie wanted to think about school.

The church building loomed before them. The white painted boards dazzled in the morning light. Usually, entering the church was through the front door with her grandmother. This time she would enter the side door with Lawrence. She wanted to laugh, to cry, to scream and to run towards the church but she stayed quietly at Lawrence's side.

Lawrence opened the door. Both their faces wore grins that stretched to their ears. Lizzie stepped across the threshold and down the wooden stairs. They were directed to seats by Rev. Woods. As she was escorted down a short aisle and directed to a front bench on the left, she saw three young children were already seated. Lawrence stayed at the back of the room with a few older students. Lizzie climbed on the seat. Her feet dangled below her.

The room was lit by four small rectangular windows. Mrs. Woods was writing on a black painted sheet with a piece of chalk. The furnishings consisted of six benches, a desk and a chair. Lizzie was in school.

“Good morning, children. I am Mrs. Woods. I will be your teacher. I hope you are as excited to learn as I am to teach you. I have written my name on our modified blackboard. Now, tell me your names and we will start our lesson.” Mrs. Woods had her brown hair pinned elegantly into a bun. The fitted navy-blue dress she wore had lace on the bodice and cuffs of her sleeves. Lizzie arched her neck but couldn’t see the hem to see if it were also edged in lace. How beautiful.

As the students stated their names, Lizzie watched Mrs. Woods’ hand as she wrote each name twice. Once in a book and the other on a slip of paper. When Mrs. Woods handed her the paper, she told her it held her name. She cradled the paper in her hands and smiled. She had her name. She looked up and Mrs. Woods smiled back.

Lizzie and Lawrence ran to school each day during the three weeks they had at school. They hadn’t gotten through the entire alphabet before freezing weather set in. The decision was made to close the school until Spring. Mrs. Woods gave them each a sheet of paper with all the letters and their full name written on it. The students promised to practice while they were away.

Lizzie practiced her letters on pieces of newspaper and in the ashes of the fireplace. Lizzie and Lawrence would practice writing in the dirt every chance they got. She was going to master the letters and her name.

Lawrence had access to books from the family he and his father worked for. He would borrow a book and they would write the words on each page. Lawrence would take the book they were copying words from home, which Lizzie didn’t like one bit. But he would bring the book back so they could write more words. There were words she worked on writing for days. When the weather turned, she and Lawrence could form their letters well. Now they had to learn to read them.

Chapter 2

Fall 1886

Dust swirled around her feet as she trudged down Smith Hill. Walking through the dew-laden grass was not a good idea. At least with the dirt road, she could wipe off her ankle boots when she reached the building. The church beckoned to her and drew her in. It was downhill but her hand was beginning to cramp. When she made the selection, the choice was for the best of the crop. She hadn't given any thought to whether it would fit into her apron pocket. She briefly thought about putting it in the bodice of her dress. Imagine what someone would think if they saw her. Getting it out of her bodice would also be a challenge. Unluckily for her, she had to carry it the full mile. A few more minutes, that's all she had left. Lizzie was determined to give Mrs. Woods the biggest and best apple she could find. She deserved it.

In seven short years, Mrs. Woods had taught her to read, write and cipher. She knew about places in America and the World. While her grandmother thought herself too old to learn, her uncle asked about reading. Lizzie taught him the alphabet when she was ten. Now, she enjoyed their weekly lessons. They took turns reading sections of the newspaper and the Bible. From time to time, she would read correspondence and write letters for their neighbors. Occasionally, folks paid her for it.

Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus disagreed about her education. Grandma figured the ability to read, write and cipher was enough. She argued that at fifteen, Lizzie should start working to bring more money into the house. Uncle Jus thought she should learn as much as humanly possible and that she had a lifetime to work. Her uncle had given her a gift she didn't have a clue how to repay.

Lawrence was in the school yard with the older boys. He lifted his hand to wave. She waved back and continued to watch him. Lizzie missed the close relationship they had when they were kids. He started playing ball with the other boys and she became an afterthought. Uncle Jus picked about Lawrence becoming her husband. She thought of him often but not as her husband.

As Lizzie entered the classroom, she placed the apple on Mrs. Woods' desk. She sat at her assigned table.

“Good morning, Class!” Mrs. Woods exclaimed as she entered the room.

“Good morning Mrs. Woods!” the enthusiastic students responded. Mrs. Woods glanced down and saw the apple. She smiled.

“Thank you to the wonderful student who was so kind to think of me. Class, this morning we will work on reading.” Mrs. Woods turned to write on the wall-mounted chalkboard. Lizzie watched her with rapt attention.

Chapter 3

The brown clapboard house stood majestically in the setting sun. A big grin spread across Lizzie's face as she skipped up to the house. The rocking chairs on the porch were empty. A quick glance towards the chicken coop; No Grandma. Lizzie bounced up the steps to the lockless door.

"Hi Grandma! Mmm, smells good!" Lizzie inhaled as she entered the house. Her grandmother was standing over their heavy iron, wood-burning stove. She was a slender woman, more gristle than fat. Her shoulders were slightly hunched from years of working in fields. Her black hair slightly streaked with silver was pinned at the back of her head.

Lizzie was thin like her grandmother but not as strong. Extra helpings of biscuits and eggs hadn't added any meat on her bones. She figured the sickness she had caused her to be so skinny. The times when she was poorly, she never ate much. Granny would place cold cloths on her head, give her Castor Oil and pray. When she recovered, she would always eat more than her share. No eating wasn't the issue. Her frail body was the issue.

"Hi Lizzie. How was school?" Grandma Lydia asked over her shoulder.

"It was wonderful! Look at the book Mrs. Woods let me borrow. It's called *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain."

Grandma Lydia glanced at the book and nodded.

"Fetch water and feed the chickens. You can read after suppa'."

"Yes, ma'am," Lizzie left the book on the table and ran outside to the well.

As Lizzie drew the bucket out of the well, she was grabbed around the waist by two large hands and lifted into the air. Her scream echoed through the trees.

“Didn’t I tell you to stop trying to scare me?” Lizzie said with her finger pointed at Uncle Jus. He smiled. The slight gap between his front teeth, his wavy hair and his warm brown eyes made him the handsomest man. But at thirty-five, he was still a bachelor.

“I couldn’t scare you if I tried,” Uncle Jus said as he lifted the bucket and turned toward the house. Lizzie matched him stride for stride.

“I saw Miz Rose Ann today. She looked mighty fine,” Lizzie chuckled.

“And what does that have to do with me?” Jus stopped to stare at Lizzie.

“I’m just saying!”

“I have enough ladies with you and Mama. I don’t need another,” Jus said matter-of-factly.

Lizzie shrugged. Her uncle was single by choice. Older women had been trying to tie him down with their daughters for years. She was glad she only had to share him with one other.

“Then Lawrence untied her ribbon and she was hoppin’ mad.” Lizzie laughed at the image over her dinner of ham, green beans and cornbread.

“It sounds like Lawrence has taken a likin’ to Shirley,” Uncle Jus said as he took a bite. Grandma Lydia nodded in agreement. Lizzie frowned.

“No, he doesn’t like Shirley. He just likes picking on her,” Lizzie pushed the green beans around her plate with her mouth twisted to the right.

Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus looked at each other with raised eyebrows.

“Look at what I found for you today,” Uncle Jus pulled a piece of newspaper out of his pocket and handed it to Lizzie.

Lizzie unfolded it. “Oh, Uncle Jus! It's about a stagecoach robbery,” Lizzie exclaimed as her eyes quickly scanned the article.

“Let's hear it,” Uncle Jus said. Lizzie took a breath and read it with gusto.

“There was a stagecoach robbery in a place called Mammoth Cave, Kentucky. Two men with guns had their heads covered with sacks with eye holes cut out. They robbed seven passengers of cash and jewelry. The men wished the passengers ‘better luck next time’ before they ran away. No one was hurt in the robbery.”

“Lordy, what's the world comin' to? Folks just tryin' to get from one place to another robbed,” Grandma Lydia said as she shook her head.

“Folks don't want to work anymo'. It's much easier to rob from others than to work hard and earn it yo'self” Uncle Jus said with nod.

“Yea, but over time it don't end well fo' the thieves. They end up killed or in prison. It don't seem worth it,” Grandma Lydia stated.

“None of 'um believe they'll get caught, you know. They see themselves as smarter than most,” Uncle Jus said as he waved his fork and poked the air.

“Yes, 'til they get shot or arrested,” Grandma Lydia chuckled. Lizzie smiled as she looked from Grandma to Uncle.

Lizzie loved her Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus. She didn't miss having her parents or siblings in her life at all.

When she was born, she was her mother's seventh child. Her mother was now expecting baby number fifteen. Even after they were free, her mother and father lived and worked on the plantation they grew up on. She saw her sisters and brothers on occasion but they were now scattered between work and their disbursement with family. Her life was with her Grandma

Lydia and Uncle Jus. Lizzie was four years old when she moved in with them. Uncle Jus had been determined to get his mama away from the plantation. The day they found the cabin was their day of celebration. They lived in a one room cabin but they were the lord and lady of their own castle.

Lizzie worked beside her grandmother before school. They had the house to themselves and her uncle joined them for supper and sleep at night. Her grandmother had made rugs from sewing scraps so they didn't have to walk on the dirt floors. Granny often spoke about the time before and after the war. During that time, most all negro folks in Talbotton were held in bondage and worked expansive plantations. There were thousands more people and wealth on top of wealth. After the war, Negro people were free. There were those who left to seek a new life, find lost family or to get away from past traumas. Plenty of the folks Granny knew had decided to stay as they didn't know where to go, chose the safety of the known versus the unknown, or feared the greater world, no matter how terrible the treatment they lived with each day. The white folks suffered loss of wealth, their homes, and crops. Many moved away, especially after their homes and fields were ransacked by both Confederate and Union soldiers. There were those who didn't want to live in the area after the horrors of war. There were those who didn't know how to proceed once their land and those who worked it were gone. Others moved to find work or to simply start over. Even if they'd lost everything, there were contacts in other places to lean on. Talbotton and all the South had suffered. Now over twenty years later, the once thriving city was a sliver of its former self. Now hatred in more ugly forms had risen its head over the bitterness of the losses. Granny said there were folks who blamed the former slaves for all the damage done and would stop at nothing to seek revenge. Lizzie was careful to mind her manners and to give

humble respect. She'd heard stories and didn't want to be hurt if all it took was keeping quiet with her head down.

Lizzie's job was to stack their straw mattresses along the wall each morning. Stacking gave them space to sit in front of the fire on cold nights and room to sit and talk by candlelight when it got dark. Lizzie learned about plants from her grandmother and animals from her uncle. Nature was her classroom and she had the most patient and loving of teachers. The three of them have built a nice life together.

When she was old enough to talk, Lizzie's favorite words were 'What's that?' She liked her brothers and sisters but the older ones were always working and the little ones were too little to do much other than cry. As the babies kept coming, the children were sent to other family members or to work. Lucky for Lizzie, her Granny and Uncle gave her a home.

Chapter 4

Spring 1887

It was a sunny March day. There was still a chill in the air but it was nice to be outside after being forced indoors all winter. Lizzie's nose was in *Alice's Adventures in Wonderland* when she heard screams. She lifted her eyes and saw the cause of the uproar. A whirling mass of dirt was whipping its way across the school yard. Her schoolmates were running like loose chickens to get out of its path. Lizzie watched the dirt devil, enthralled by its very existence. There was a breeze but nothing of significance. How did this act of nature come to be? What propelled it along its journey? She watched as dust, leaves and pieces of trash were stirred into a frenzy in the rotating spiral. It picked up and dropped its cargo along the way. It dropped a piece of newspaper. Seeing this, she thought to go pick it up. Instead, her eyes refocused on the lines of the page.

Lizzie had finished her lunch of an apple and had consumed twenty pages of the book when Mrs. Woods rang the bell to end her pleasure. As she rose, she saw the piece of newspaper lying where it came to rest. She ran over to pick it up. She stuffed it in her pocket as she ran back for class. It may be something of interest to read after dinner tonight.

Lizzie hung her dress on the peg and slipped into her nightdress. After she tied on her head scarf, she checked her dress pockets and pulled out the scrap of newspaper. They'd talked up a storm during supper so Lizzie forgot about the newspaper. She had about thirty minutes before her grandma told her to blow out her candle. She could see better by the lantern but lamp oil was only to be used when absolutely necessary. She got close to the candle but turned slightly away to avoid the candle's flame.

Lizzie read a portion of an obituary. It was obviously that of a woman. Her name was gone but she had been a Sunday School teacher and grandmother of five. The remainder of the story was made up in Lizzie's mind. Then she turned the scrap over to see an advertisement. A large building was pictured. Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute, it read. For the education of Negro boys and girls. Tuskegee, Alabama.

Tuskegee Institute. A big school for Negro children? Lizzie did not know of such a place. Talbotton had schools. The LeVert Female College had merged with the Collinsworth School for Boys when she was younger. One hundred-fifty students paid two hundred dollars a year for their education. She would see LeVert students walking home with books under their arms each day. She had prayed for their light, bright skin a few times so she could go to school. She'd been bold and asked her grandmother about it one time. Asking had been a mistake. Then Reverend and Mrs. Woods moved to Talbotton. But now this picture of Tuskegee. It was big, like the LeVert School and for Negro children. She wondered if missionaries and ministers had started it, too. They were exceptional at establishing schools for black children.

"Lizzie, you feeling all right?" her grandma asked with her head tilted.

"Yes, um, why you ask?" Lizzie said in response.

"Well, you're breathing funny?"

She hadn't realized but her heart was racing. She rubbed her brow to rid herself of the sweat she found there. What was wrong with her?

"I'm fine, Grandma." Lizzie looked down at the paper. Tuskegee. Could this be part of a make-believe story? She had to be brave to ask Mrs. Woods about it. There was no sleeping that night. There was a great deal of thinking to do.

Chapter 5

Lizzie walked to school in half the time the next morning. She had to ask Mrs. Woods about this school in Alabama.

As luck would have it, Mrs. Woods was writing the day's lesson on the board when she walked in. The chalkboard was purchased by the church a couple of years before and had a thousand uses. The table and chair filled room was otherwise empty.

"Cuse, me Mrs. Woods," Lizzie said to get her attention.

"Good morning, Miss Wright. You're here early," she said with a bright smile. Mrs. Woods was a sweet woman. At a young age, she had been widowed during her first marriage as a result of the war. As they hadn't had children, she moved back into the house with her parents until her father invited Rev. Woods to supper. She thought it would be a while before another man turned her head until he came along. They were engaged to be married within three months of that enchanted dinner. He was a minister and a missionary who dreamed of traveling the world. By default, she would become a missionary, too. Teaching was the profession she chose when she was a girl but had to give up when she first married. Though it had been years since the war, education was still either withheld or non-existent for poor, Negro children. With her husband, Joy Woods had found her calling. In this role, she could do God's work and change lives at the same time.

"Mrs. Woods, have you heard of Tusk-kay-gee Institute?" Lizzie asked.

"You mean Tuskegee Institute?" Mrs. Woods corrected with her eyebrows raised.

"Yes, ma'am. Tuskegee Institute."

Mrs. Woods nodded. "I have heard of it. A gentleman named Booker T. Washington is the principal. How did you hear about it?"

Lizzie exhaled lightly. Tuskegee existed.

She reached into her pocket to produce the newspaper and handed it to Mrs. Woods. She scanned the paper. “I see,” was her response.

Lizzie’s heart was in her throat. She swallowed.

“I think I would like a school like Tuskegee. Don’t get me wrong, I love our school,” she said quickly, “but I think I can learn a great amount at Tuskegee and can maybe become a teacher, like you.”

Mrs. Woods stared at her for a moment. Lizzie instantly felt bad for asking. She hadn’t thought about hurting Mrs. Woods when she developed this plan. If only the floor would open so she could vanish. What had she been thinking?

“Well, I think we should write a letter to learn more about Tuskegee,” Mrs. Woods said.

Lizzie’s breath caught in her throat. Had she heard correctly?

“What?” was her gasping response.

“If you want to attend this school, we need to learn more about it. You’d need to know what you’d learn, when the school year begins and where you’d live, correct?” With this, Mrs. Woods gave Lizzie a smile and handed her the newspaper back.

A frozen Lizzie stood silently before she smiled back. “Yes, um. I think I should write a letter.”

Mrs. Woods nodded, “You best get to work. I’ll look it over when you finish.”

Lizzie nodded and floated to her table to start her letter. She had to take a deep breath to focus so she could write. This was going to be the best letter she’d ever written.

Chapter 6

Two weeks. It had been two weeks since Lizzie wrote the letter to Tuskegee and Mrs. Woods had mailed it. Surely, it would have reached Tuskegee by now. They'd estimated another two weeks before she received word. Each day she'd run to school, slow her pace to enter the building and look at Mrs. Woods. Each day, Mrs. Woods did a slight shake of her head. Lizzie's entire body would shrink just a little. She didn't know what it was about that slip of paper but she looked at it every night and every morning.

As Lizzie walked to school during week five, her excitement had waned. Mrs. Woods was standing at the side door with her hands behind her back. No other students were walking towards the school. Her heart sank. The last time Mrs. Woods stood outside, the school was closing due to an outbreak of measles. Lizzie walked slower as she got closer. Mrs. Woods' face was blank. The desire to run was overwhelming.

"Lizzie, it came," she said as her eyes danced. Mrs. Woods brought her hands in front of her. They held a brown packet.

Mrs. Woods extended her arms more towards Lizzie. It came. There was no movement. Mrs. Woods took her by the arm.

"Let's go inside and open it," she said as she carried Lizzie along into the classroom.

Mrs. Woods sat them both at one of the back tables. Lizzie's surroundings disappeared. Her hands shook as she palpated the packet. She breathed slowly as if the wrong breath would cause the precious paper in her hand to disappear.

"Are you going to open it?" Mrs. Woods inquired with her head tilted and eyes raised. Lizzie nodded and turned the packet over. She slipped her fingers under the corner of the flap. She gently pulled the paper away, careful not to make any unnecessary tears. The flap released.

Lizzie gazed into Mrs. Woods' eyes and reached inside the envelope. Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. She couldn't believe it.

Mr. Booker T. Washington signed the cover letter. Mrs. Woods watched Lizzie's smile grow as she read. Lizzie read his letter and with each word got more excited about his school. Her options for work in Talbotton were limited. Tuskegee was designed to teach skills beyond fieldwork. Training was available for work in nursing, teaching, hotels and more. This would give her the opportunity to train to do something different. Lizzie finished reading the first page and handed it over to Mrs. Woods. Lizzie was confused by the second page that had the words dormitory and board. She recognized dollar signs and immediately knew that wasn't good.

"Mrs. Woods, what does this mean?" she asked while turning the paper towards her.

"The cost to attend the school, the tuition, is free. Room and board, to live and eat on-campus, is \$8.00/month but you can work to offset the costs. The first month must be paid upon arrival at Tuskegee."

"Oh," Lizzie said biting the inside of her lower lip as her eyes filled with water. Her uncle worked hard but she knew money was scarce and hard to come by. She wouldn't be able to go. She tried to keep the tears from falling but failed.

"Lizzie, please don't cry," Mrs. Woods said reaching for her hands.

"Listen, I figured there might be a cost for this school so I've been thinking. I think there's a way," Mrs. Woods lowered her head to get Lizzie to look up. Tears continued to fall.

"How?" she said so quietly Mrs. Woods interpreted rather than heard her words.

"Good old' fashioned hard work," Mrs. Woods responded squeezing Lizzie's hands.

"What?" Lizzie sniffed.

“You earn it! I know a few people who may be willing to hire a smart and capable young woman for small jobs. We might also be able to raise some funds. If this is your dream, then nothing should stop you. Money can be earned. What do you think?” Mrs. Woods exclaimed, double pumping her hands.

Lizzie wiped her face. She could work and earn money. The chance to attend Tuskegee wasn't over.

“Yes, yes I can earn it!” Lizzie said with renewed enthusiasm.

“I thought so. Their next school year starts in September so we have six months to raise the money and get you prepared.” Mrs. Woods said clapping her hands.

Lizzie tingled from head to toe. She'd work harder than she'd ever worked before. She was going to Tuskegee and the great state of Alabama.

“I'll get to work on securing work for you and you have to talk with your grandmother and uncle.” With a smile, Mrs. Woods turned and walked back to her desk. Lizzie scanned the papers in her hand. She hadn't said a word about Tuskegee to either of them. What in the world would they say? Her thoughts turned to Lawrence. Her excitement disappeared.

Chapter 7

The day's lessons were a blur. During lunch, Lizzie reread the same page of her book over and over. She looked over the top of it to see Lawrence playing catch with a group of boys. By the time school was dismissed, her stomach was in knots. The dream only known to herself and Mrs. Woods was within reach. Yet, the dream had two major obstacles. She was going home to face it. Both Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus wanted her to learn. Grandma Lydia did most of the housework while Lizzie was in school. Lizzie had to fetch water but her grandma did the dishes after supper so she could get to her lessons. One of the best parts of their lives was when she and Uncle Jus were able to read together and to Grandma Lydia. But the idea of going away for school. All the way to Alabama. She didn't know if any of her family had been to Alabama. She imagined their reactions. She was hopeful, yet fearful at the same time.

Grandma was at the stove when she walked in. Other than canning vegetables for people, she no longer worked. Uncle Jus thought his mama had worked enough while a slave and shouldn't have to work anymore. They had a roof over their heads and food to eat so anything else was gravy. Lizzie thought she'd wait until supper to talk to them both.

"How was school?" Grandma Lydia asked.

"Fine," she responded. Grandma Lydia cut her eyes towards her. Lizzie usually came in talking about the lessons of the day. Both Grandma and Uncle Jus looked forward to hearing about it. Lizzie didn't even mind telling the same story twice – once to Grandma and again to her Uncle. Today, only one word. Her grandmother decided to let it go. For now.

"Well, get to your chores."

"Yes, 'um," Lizzie said as she washed her hands in the ceramic basin she and her grandma shared. She was on the verge of vomiting. Get it together, she urged herself. She turned

to pick up the bucket so she could fetch the water. She rushed out the door. Lydia watched her the entire time. She wondered if Lizzie had gotten bitten by the lovebug. She was the right age but hadn't shown any interest in boys to this point. Lydia was both relieved and terrified at the same time. She had delayed having any in-depth conversations about boys. Lizzie knew to stay away from those of the male persuasion and to this point had heeded her warnings. Boys added complications she didn't know if she was ready for. She wondered what Jus would have to say about this new development.

Jus said the blessing and they dug into dinner. The only sound was the scraping of their spoons on the tin plate. Lydia and Jus caught each other's eye.

"You ain't tell us about school today," Jus said. Lizzie's uncle eyed her. His eyes were the color of honey. The contrast between his skin, the color of the bark of a pine tree and his eyes, made for a captivating face.

"Not much happened today," Lizzie lifted her shoulders. Jus blinked. Lydia had been right. Something was going on.

"You mean you spent all day in school and didn't learn a thing?" Jus said, raising his voice at the end.

Lizzie hesitated. Her grandmother and uncle stared holes through her soul. Each held their spoon at the side of their plate.

"I have a story to tell you," she began. She placed her hands in her lap so they couldn't see them shaking. She licked her lips and exhaled.

“One day I was sitting under the tree in the school yard and I saw this piece of newspaper. The paper talked about a school called Tuskegee. The principal is a man by the name of Booker T. Washington.”

Jus and Lydia frowned at each other. This wasn't what they expected to hear. Each wondered where this was going.

“Principal Washington has built a school for Negro children. I showed the paper to Mrs. Woods and we sent for information. The information came today. Wait, I'll get it,” Lizzie said as she jumped up.

Lydia cut her eyes at Jus. Lydia and Jus resumed eating while waiting for her to return. With her few words, they had a general idea of what might be coming next. Lydia thought she might be illiterate but she weren't stupid. They ate as Lizzie re-sat herself at the table.

“It's a good school where the students become teachers and train for better jobs so they can make their lives better. I think I could do well at a school like Tuskegee. Mrs. Woods says so and she's willing to help me get work to pay for it,” Lizzie vomited this information and stopped. She was panting when she finished. She looked at her lap.

Lydia and Jus kept eating in silence. After a spell, Lizzie raised her eyes and watched them finish their meal. Her heart thumped against her breastbone.

“Where is this school?” Grandma asked.

“In Alabama,” Lizzie whispered so softly she barely heard herself say it.

“Where? Speak up!” Jus said a little more harshly than he intended.

“The school is in Tuskegee, Alabama,” she said a little louder this time.

“Alabama?! That's almost a hundred miles from here,” Jus shouted as he stared at Lizzie.

“Yes, sir,” Lizzie wrung her hands.

“No,” Jus said.

“No, what?” Lizzie asked.

“No, you can’t go,” Uncle responded.

“But Unk, this would be a great opportunity. Not just for me, but for all of us. Just think if I can be a teacher or learn skills to earn more money; we’ll be better off.

Lizzie placed her hands on her Grandma’s arm imploringly.

“Grandma, I could buy material and we can make nice dresses.”

“Unk, you wouldn’t have to work so hard to take care of us,” Lizzie pleaded.

“What I’ve provided for you is not good enough?” Jus asked.

“No, I’m incredibly grateful to you for taking me in and raising me. But, by going to a good school, I can make our lives even better.”

Jus looked into Lizzie’s eyes. They reminded him of the yearning eyes of a hungry puppy.

“Grandma, what do you think?” Lizzie’s forehead was creased as she waited for a response.

“A woman’s place is in the home. We want you to get an education. Your learning to read has been good for all of us. Mrs. Woods is a fine teacher who has taught you a lot. You continue to learn what she knows and one day you’ll know as much as she does. You’ll be able to teach your chillen’ more than just farming and caring for a home. Your schoolin’ is more than I could have ever asked for. I’m proud of what you’ve learned and know you’ll make a good life right here in Talbotton.” Grandma nodded her head to emphasize her words.

“But, Grandma...,” Lizzie pleaded.

“No buts. This is final. You belong here,” her grandmother said, her words clipped.

Lizzie's chin fell to her chest. The dam broke and tears burst free, flowing ceaselessly down her cheeks. She wanted to run but in a small house with dark consuming the outdoors, she had nowhere to go. She just sat and cried. Her grandmother got up to clear the table; her uncle went out the back door.

Chapter 8

Mrs. Woods was leaning over papers on her desk as Lizzie entered the school door. She stood as soon as she saw swollen eyes. Mrs. Woods knew the conversation with Lizzie's grandmother and uncle had not gone well.

"What happened?" Mrs. Woods inquired. Lizzie fell to her knees with her face in her hands. Mrs. Woods ran to her and joined her on the floor. She held Lizzie as a torrent of tears and spasms racked her body.

"I'm guessing they said no," Mrs. Woods said.

Lizzie hiccuped and rubbed her nose on her sleeve. Mrs. Woods pulled her lace handkerchief out of hers.

"Blow your nose," she instructed. Lizzie did as she was told.

"They wouldn't even let me tell them about the classes I could study. Grandma said a woman's place is in the home and my uncle thought I was ungrateful for all he's provided for me," she sniffed.

"Please don't cry. My mother thought the same thing. A woman's duty is to take care of the home and family but the world is changing. I thought my world had ended but then she changed her mind. When my mother considered it, she imagined how different my life would be if I had an education and opportunities, she wasn't able to consider. Your family may change their mind as well. I can talk to them," Mrs. Woods said. Lizzie was shaking her head doubtfully before she finished.

"They don't care. They want me here and that's it. It's over. I won't be going to Tuskegee," Lizzie said while she hiccuped and wiped her eyes.

“Lizzie, I’m part of this now. You are a smart girl and you deserve this chance. This really could change your life. I think it may help if I talk to them, to help them understand the gift this is.”

As she shook her head and opened her mouth to speak, Mrs. Woods shushed her. “No more protests. You’re determined. So am I. Reverend Woods and I will plan to come by your house after church on Sunday. Will you tell your grandmother?”

Lizzie gazed at Mrs. Woods and knew she was serious about this. She simply nodded.

“Good because I’ve already lined up some work for you.”

“What?” Lizzie questioned.

“I’m a woman of my word. I talked to the teachers living in the single women’s house and they would love to hire you to clean and straighten the house. They are going to pay you weekly until you leave for Tuskegee.”

Lizzie’s mouth moved but no words came out. Mrs. Woods had found her a job. She would be able to earn the money. She could go.

Her feet did not touch the floor as she floated to her seat. Mrs. Woods had found her work. She could earn money to attend Tuskegee. She was closer than she wanted to believe. However, her major obstacle from the day before was still the obstacle today. Her grandmother and uncle had denied her request. Maybe Mrs. Woods talking to them about Tuskegee and her job would have an impact on their decision. Lizzie was in one moment excited for Reverend and Mrs. Woods’ visit then her heart would pound at the very idea. She didn’t know what her family would say but she was sure they would not like it. Even worse, Mrs. Woods would see their meager holdings. Lizzie hoped Mrs. Woods wouldn’t change her mind when she saw how she lived. She still needed to talk to Lawrence. Oh, so many worries.

Another school day was spent with Lizzie physically present but not mentally present. She was going to have to tell her family at dinner that her beloved teacher wanted to come talk to them. This was going to be one of the longest weeks of her life. She began a prayer, both thankful and pleading, for these efforts to work in her favor.

“Dear Lord, I thank you for leading me to learn about Tuskegee. I haven’t been able to think about much else in the past few weeks. Lord, I really would like to go. Please help Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus see this as something wonderful that will help us all. If I can go, I will dedicate my life to education and building the lives of negro children, just like Mrs. Woods. Please Lord. Thank you for watching over us all and giving me the opportunity. Please help me to get there. Thank you, Lord, Amen!”

Chapter 9

“We don’ said no and that is final!” Jus slammed his tin cup down onto the table. Lizzie watched the big blood vessel throbbing in his neck.

“You think some white woman gon’ come in and tell us how to raise you. We’re closer to town so you could go to school year-round. We clothe you and you haven’t gon’ one day hungry. Not one,” Lydia said through clenched teeth. “Now, you don’ got some ideas in your head about some school miles away in Alabama. You can read, write and do figures. That’s more than most people we know. Now you don’ got too big for your britches and for us. Alabama!” Lydia harrumphed and folded her arms.

Lizzie sat biting the inside of her lip, squeezing her eyelids together making the effort not to cry. She opened her mouth.

“Grandma, I...”

“Hush up, just hush up, you don’ said ‘enuff,” Lydia said. Lizzie ran out of the back door.

Lydia and Jus could hear Lizzie sobbing and after several minutes passed, Jus couldn’t stand it any longer. “Mama, you think we’re wrong?”

“No. We’re not wrong. She belongs here. She wants to leave here to do God knows what with God knows who. She’s learning reading, writing, and figuring from Mrs. Woods. What is she going to learn in Alabama that’s different? We moved here so she could get good schooling and be better off than we were. I know pride is a sin but I’m proud of that. Being able to read and write, we gave her that. I hope she won’t ever have to spend days on end hoeing somebody’s field or picking cotton. But if she did, she’d still know what the words say on paper and can do figures.

I remember knowin' I picked more than a hundred pounds of cotton and the man saying I only picked ninety. He figured the numbers and I knew; I just knew they were wrong. But I didn't know how to figure. I couldn't show him he was wrong. She can read. She won't have to rely on what people tell her and what blows in the wind. She can find out for herself. These are the gifts I spent years in slavery, hoping and praying for. When Freedom came, if I could read and write, I could have looked for my other chillen. I'd know where your brothers and sisters are. Instead, I can only dream about them and pray they are alive and well. I know who they were sold off to are in those books in Mr. Rolfe's house but what good are they to me. Just marks on paper."

Lydia's mind took her back to that day. She was still a slave. The Rolfes were having a big Thanksgiving celebration. Their house staff was running thin due to a cold that hit the cabins. Because she was decent looking, Lydia was one of the field hands to be moved into the Big House when the household was busy. They'd given her a dress and apron made of the finest cotton. It wasn't like the cotton her other clothes were made from. This cotton lay softly against her skin. Lydia would touch it every chance she got. Her apron was crisp and shockingly white, just like her kerchief. Lydia loved working in the house, just for the sheer pleasure of wearing such fine material.

Lydia held a crate of spirits as Benjamin, the head house slave, restocked Mr. Rolfe's cabinet. Her eyes consumed the room. She had never seen so many books. They were lined up like rows of corn on bookshelves. They were piled on a side table in an uneven tower. She longed to touch one but knew she might get thrown out of the house if she got caught.

"Pay attention, girl," Benjamin barked. Lydia held the crate higher. Mr. Rolfe's desk was covered in disorganized papers and thick books. There was even a statue of a bull sitting atop

some of them. She couldn't wait until she got back to the cabins, she'd regale everyone with the tales of what she saw. Lydia had held her tongue long enough.

"What's all that?" she asked, nodding towards the desk.

Benjamin froze and looked at her. She shrunk back into herself. Surprisingly, Benjamin answered.

"Mr. Rolfe's work. Papers and ledgers. He keeps records of all the comings and goings on the plantation. He's tight. He knows what he owns to the tiniest kernel of corn. I like to watch him work," Benjamin smiled.

"Comings and goings" was what Lydia heard. Her babies and their whereabouts were probably in one of the books – ledgers.

She'd given birth to five strong, fat babies. She had her first when she was about thirteen years old. She didn't know the name of her firstborn's daddy. There had been a party then too and the men were given their choice of the women and the girls. Lydia only remembered he smelled like tobacco. The next thing she knew, she had a big belly and a baby was coming out. He was a beautiful boy with a headful of curly, black hair. He would smile so big when she bounced him on her knee at the end of the workday. He was such a happy baby. When he became a big brother, he'd touch and play with his brothers and sisters ever so gently. He was nine when she last saw him. He got on the back of a wagon with the other boys. She thought they were going to unload hay for the day. When they learned the boys had been sold away that day, the mamas all wept. Lydia wept the longest. He was her first.

Now all she had was her baby, Jus. She loved him. Sho', she loved him. But she knew to keep her heart at a distance. Then later on, it wouldn't be so hard.

“Alright, let’s go,” Benjamin said and Lydia followed him out of the room. She stared over her shoulder at the ledgers.

Thanksgiving had arrived. The house had people in every bedroom. Each room had a team catering to the guests’ every need. A Mrs. Jewell had brought her own slave to dress her hair “as no other could do her locks justice.” The slaves would laugh at this later. Every plantation had expert hairdressers.

Lydia had scrubbed and oiled dark wood floors, ironed yards of clothes, and was now refilling water glasses. Her time in the house was coming to an end. When twelve different desserts, including Miz Isabella’s prize-winning pumpkin pie and coconut cake, were brought out for a table of twenty, all the guests clapped. The baker might receive any leftovers tonight. The slaves would meet outside the cabins to each get a tiny piece of what was left.

Lydia’s thoughts kept turning to the ledgers. She knew she had to get to them, just to look. There was a small break from now until the desserts were finished. Lydia walked out of the dining room.

“Where you going?” the long-time house slave, Dorothy asked.

“I have to let some water,” Lydia said as she wrung her hands at her waist.

Dorothy nodded. “Go ahead, I have to go myself but I can’t stop just yet,” she said with a turn.

Lydia swiftly left and scanned the dark hallway for Benjamin or others. No one was present. She scurried to the door and let herself into Mr. Rolfe’s office.

The room was dimly lit with candles as all rooms were during a party. Lydia held her breath as she touched the green and black spines of the ledgers. Even the books felt luxurious. Lydia looked over her shoulder before pulling the first one out. Holding her breath, she opened

it. Black squiggles and dots filled the paper. She turned the page to see more squiggles and dots. She put that ledger back and pulled out the next - more squiggles and dots. Something splotched on the page, blurring the ink. Nothing but squiggles and dots. She had her babies in her hands and couldn't decipher any of it.

Lydia felt a pain in her chest. Her babies. Lizzie had more book learning than she'd ever had. She didn't need to go to Alabama for any more education. No, she had excelled and would continue to do so right in Talbotton, Georgia.

Chapter 10

Lizzie swept debris onto a piece of paper and took it outside. She shook the dust from the paper and the wind carried it away, just like her dreams of Tuskegee. She'd been cleaning the teachers' house for three weeks and had finally stopped crying over the loss. Her grandmother and uncle hadn't changed their minds about Tuskegee but they allowed her to work. Grandma Lydia thought with the simple chores at home, Lizzie wasn't appreciative of the blessings. So, Lizzie took the job working and cleaning for the single teachers. When she handed her Grandma her weekly earnings, she promptly returned a dime to Lizzie.

"You've earned it," she said, "you should keep a little something for yourself."

Lizzie only nodded. She hadn't had much to say during the last few weeks. She was polite as always, did her chores without being told as usual but she had lost her spark. She read but she'd close the book and stare out the window, the spark in her eye was no longer visible. She would sit and look at the trees.

After their initial attempt, Reverend and Mrs. Woods stopped by the following Sunday with a pound cake. It didn't work. Lydia and Jus weren't budging. Their decision from day one had been final.

Mrs. Woods promised to get her books about every subject under the sun. She told Lizzie she might not have Tuskegee but if she had anything to do with it, she would be the most knowledgeable girl in town.

Lizzie was grateful to Mrs. Woods for trying to cheer her up. Her disappointment made her even more thankful for the job. It gave her something more to do after school than being at home. It was too painful to be around the house now. Maybe if she did a good enough job, they would keep her on. There would be a point when she'd be too old to attend school. When school

was no longer an option, she could think of worse jobs than cleaning for the teachers. If they continued to be nice, she'd always have access to books. With no Tuskegee and the inability to enter the library because of her race, this would be an excellent compromise. Still, with these decisions made, she wasn't able to pull herself out of the dark hole.

"You need to perk up," Lydia finally said. Lizzie glanced at her grandmother and water began to pool on her lower eyelids.

"I can't help it," Lizzie said as tears rolled. She grabbed the bucket. Lydia rolled her eyes and threw her head back. They already had more water fetched than they needed.

After four weeks, Lydia met Jus at the barn. She watched him unhitch the horse. He reminded her so much of his father. He has his father's solid build and stance. They both stood with their feet slightly wider than their shoulders. His father was the only man she ever loved; the only man she missed. They had stolen moments between work and sleep. The other slaves didn't express opposition to their sneaking off together. Most felt it wise to grab any piece of joy one could find. If she ended up in the family way, no one would question a thing. Slave women were often in the family way. Only they knew who the father might be. She knew he was the father of two of her babies. She was certain she would have more of his babies.

He had often talked of freedom but hadn't said a word of any intention to leave. She was both proud and angry when she learned he had gotten away. The Overseer was somehow aware of their connection so he and Mr. Rolfe pulled her into the barn to question her about his whereabouts.

The Overseer's son was also in the dark, stinking barn. There was no one else around.

“Lydia, we don’t want to hurt you but we need to know where David is,” Mr. Rolfe stated.

“I don’t know. I heard he was missin’ from the others,” Lydia spoke to the ground. The Overseer’s son chuckled. Lydia’s stomach clenched.

“When did you last see him?” Mr. Rolfe leaned down and tilted his head back up to look her directly in the eye.

Lydia glanced at the Overseer and his son. They had the same sneer.

“L-Last night at suppa time,” she responded while staring at the ground.

“No late-night visit last night?” the Overseer questioned. Mr. Rolfe stared at her. Lydia shook her head in short shakes.

“Where was he headed?” Mr. Rolfe asked.

“I don’t know,” Mr. Rolfe moved so swiftly, Lydia froze. His hands were vice grips on her biceps.

“Last chance to give us something. We know about your dalliances. Neal here has even observed you a time or two.” Lydia cut her eyes towards the Overseer. He was stroking his chin.

“I don’t know where he is. He told me nothing. I learned he was gone from the others,” Lizzie repeated. She swallowed to clear the bile from her throat. Mr. Rolfe got nose-to-nose with her. She smelled the foul odor of tobacco, whiskey and sweat.

“I doubt a man wouldn’t want to say good-bye to his sweet piece. I think you’re lying.”

Lizzie shook her head violently. Mr. Rolfe threw her to the ground. Her left hip hit the ground hard.

“See if you can get anything out of her,” Mr. Rolfe said to the two men. The son chuckled again and began to unbuckle his belt. His father reached her first. They strapped her to a stall.

She didn't know a thing about David's leaving but the punishment she received took weeks to heal. Her body recovered. Her heart had not.

She had hoped David would return to Talbotton when freedom came; she stayed when others had left. She kept waiting. Now twenty-three years on, there was still no sign of him. He probably had a wife and family now, a whole new life. Either that or he was dead. She would never know.

"You come to talk to me 'bout Lizzie." Her focus returned to Jus. He had read her mind.

"I thought we did the right thing by sayin' no about the Alabama school. Now, I'm not sho," the words flowed out of her mouth as she stared at the ground.

"Me, too. I've been thinkin' on it for a while now. I thought she'd be mad for a minute and get back to her old self. She hasn't," Jus shook his head.

"We want the best for her. Home and family is what's best for her. This world is a dark and scary place. Especially with the Klan riding every night through the county. From what I hear, they are worse in Alabama than they are in Georgia. Even when we were slaves, we didn't have to be scared all the time. It's worse now that we are free."

"Yea, I think 'bout that sometimes. As slaves, we worried 'bout one man, Masta's overseer. He could inflict pain but he wasn't goin' to kill us. The cost to him would have been too high. Now, you don't know who to trust and who might be lurking in the trees," Jus said looking around as he spoke.

"Right," Lydia said looking at her remaining son as she inhaled deeply. She continued, "but are we keeping her here because we are scared?"

Jus stopped moving, his muscles tensed. Lydia could see the conflict in his face. It was quiet as a graveyard in the barn.

She continued. "If she left, we'd have to fetch our own water, feed the chickens and milk the cow. This work we know how to do. We'd have no one to excite us with stories and books. Are we thinkin' 'bout ourself and not her?"

Jus lifted his eyes and nodded slightly. Lydia nodded back. "You never know. She might be the next Harriett Tubman or Sojourner Truth," she said. Jus walked around to his mother and placed a hand on her shoulder.

"You always said she was going to be somebody one day," he said looking down at his beautiful mama. "You had to imagine it was somewhere outside of Talbotton," he continued with his eyebrows raised.

"Yes, to New York or Chicago, maybe. But Alabama?!" she with one side of her face scrunched.

"Alabama!" Jus said with a smirk.

"It's hard but I think we know what we should do," Lydia put her hand on Jus's shoulder. Jus inhaled and forced the exhalation out.

"Let's go tell our girl she's headed to this school in Alabama," Jus said as he offered his arm to escort his mama out of the barn.

Lizzie pushed the potatoes and green beans around her plate. Jus and Lydia smiled at each other. Uncle Jus lifted a package from his lap and pushed it towards Lizzie. She studied the brown wrapped package and went back to pushing the food around her plate.

"When someone gives you a gift, you're suppose' to be delighted and open it," Uncle Jus folded his arms and stared at her. Lizzie slowly reached for the package. She pulled one end of the twine and the bow released. She turned the package over and opened the folds. The cover of a red leather notebook shined in the lantern light. Lizzie frowned at it.

“What’s this?” she muttered.

“What does it look like? A notebook. It’s for your writing,” Uncle Jus stated matter-of-factly.

“It’s too nice for my schoolwork. You shouldn’t have spent the money,” Lizzie began to fold the notebook back into the paper.

“It may be too nice for Talbotton but I doubt it’ll be too nice fo’ Tuskegee,” Jus said as he leaned towards Lizzie. Lizzie jerked her head up and looked from Uncle Jus to Grandma Lydia and back again. They both smiled.

“I can go?” she exclaimed.

“Yes, you can go,” Grandma Lydia said.

Lizzie jumped up and knocked her chair over. She hugged her Uncle and Grandmother.

“Oh my! I can’t wait to tell Mrs. Woods. Oh, I have so much to do!” Lizzie picked up her chair and sat down then immediately stood up. Uncle Jus laughed.

“I need to make a list of everything I need to do,” Lizzie ran to get her pencil. She sat again and started to write. Grandma Lydia bit the inside of her cheek to keep a flurry of emotions at bay.

Chapter 11

Lizzie worked harder that summer than she'd ever worked in her life. And she enjoyed every minute of it. In addition to working for the teachers, she got work cutting patterns for the seamstress and shucking summer corn. She made a list of things she'd need for Tuskegee with Mrs. Woods. Each week, she'd buy something from her list and put the remaining funds in a jar. Mrs. Woods had kept her word and was taking a collection from church members and people in the community. Later, they would hold a bake sale. It wouldn't be long now. She was heading to Tuskegee. She'd have a new school, live in another state and meet new friends. They would all be students – learning and growing together. Lizzie had to force herself not to think about it as she lay in bed at night. Thinking about it at night, made for a miserable morning.

Grandma had Miss Mamie to make Lizzie a blue full-length dress with a lace collar. It would be her first full-length dress. She imagined she would look like Mrs. Woods. She would also have a new skirt and shirtwaist in a lovely chocolate brown.

Reading had become a chore. Lizzie would start to read and her mind would drift to her future and her new school. She hoped this Principal Booker T. Washington was a kind man. He had to be wonderful to have started a school for negro children. In August, she started to count down the days to meeting him. School would begin the Tuesday after Labor Day. Labor Day was a new holiday Talbotton had started celebrating a year earlier. It was different because it didn't honor a sacred time or significant event; but it was one greatly appreciated by those who worked in the fields and factories. Other than Christmas, it was the only day some people didn't have to work.

By mid-August, her enthusiasm and joy turned to fear. What if she hated it? What if they hated her? She was from small town Georgia. She was a nobody from nowhere. She was the

smartest person in her school but what if she wasn't as smart as the students at Tuskegee? What if she failed? Mrs. Woods had warned her about the rules. What if she broke a rule and they sent her back home? She would never be able to raise her head in Talbotton again.

The Saturday before Lizzie's departure, Grandma Lydia and Mrs. Woods held a going-away social at the church. Rev. and Mrs. Thomas were the first to arrive.

"Miss Lizzie, you have exceeded my hopes and dreams of our bringing education to our children. You are a model for all of Talbotton. We're immensely proud," he embraced her and Mrs. Thomas followed. A line formed behind them.

Miss Rose Ann held a small bag up to Lizzie. Lizzie reached for it.

"Your uncle shared you had a love of jelly beans. I thought you would like to have a selection to share with your new friends at school." Lizzie lifted the bag to her chest.

"Thank you, Miss Rose Ann. That is so thoughtful of you." While they embraced, Lizzie made eye contact with her uncle. How did Miss Rose Ann know about her love for jelly beans?

Lawrence stood face-to-face with Shirley before walking up by himself. Lizzie couldn't meet his eyes.

"Lizzie, I would have lost money if I gambled on which of us would leave Talbotton first," he paused as Lizzie continued to explore the floorboards. She hadn't spoken to him in weeks.

"Lizzie, I hope you will write and tell me about everything you're learning in Alabama," he said as he clasped her hands, not caring who saw him. She lifted her eyes.

"I will write," she said as she squeezed Lawrence's hands. Lawrence let go and wrapped his arms around her.

“Good-bye ol’ friend. Good luck,” he said into her hair. Lizzie’s pressed her face into his shirt and said goodbye. He let go and smiled down at her. He nodded and turned away. Lizzie swallowed hard.

The mayor, church members, neighbors, and folks she had seen in town who had never spoken to her filed by. All to say good luck and they were delighted for her. Her face hurt from the exercise gained through her smiles. The room was packed when Rev. Thomas requested everyone’s attention.

“Thank each and every one of you for coming to send off one of our own,” he scanned the room. “Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, we know you are going to do wonderful work at Tuskegee and make all of Talbotton look good. Remember, you always have a home and church here. So, you don’t forget us, we have an extra special gift for you,” Rev. Thomas said as he handed her a wrapped package.

Lizzie cradled it in her hands. It was heavy.

“Please open it,” Rev. Thomas said with amens of support from the room. She placed the gift on the table and untied the ribbon slowly. As she folded the paper back, her breath caught in the throat and a warmth spread over her ears and down her neck.

“Well?” Rev. Thomas requested. Lizzie lifted her head and glanced into the eyes of those staring back at her. She picked up the book and turned the cover to the crowd.

“Thank you all,” Lizzie choked out as she embraced the Webster’s Dictionary. A single tear fell. The room burst into applause.

After the final handshake, one person remained in their classroom.

“Lizzie,” Mrs. Woods started, “your dream is about to come true. How does it feel?”

She looked into Mrs. Woods' kind eyes.

"It doesn't feel real," she replied. "In spring, I thought this wasn't going to happen. Now, I'm leaving on Monday. I'm excited and scared, all at the same time."

Mrs. Woods smiled. "You remind me of myself before I went to Mount Holyoke Female Seminary. I was at once thrilled about continuing my education but feared the unknown. I soon learned my worries were for naught. I was surrounded by caring faculty and quickly made friends with the other women. You will, too."

"I hope so," Lizzie responded.

"I have something for you," Mrs. Woods walked towards the door where Rev. Woods was waiting with a box. Mrs. Woods collected the box from him and he turned to leave.

"Life can be short so in case we don't see each other again, I wanted to give you something to remember me by.

Lizzie accepted the box and shook the top off. As she peeled the layers of paper back, she lifted her hand to her chest.

"Oh, Mrs. Woods!" Lizzie said breathlessly. Inside was a satchel. The light brown tapestry was stitched in a darker brown with a whirling pattern. She lifted the bag by its leather handles. It was the finest gift from the finest teacher.

Mrs. Woods reached for Lizzie's shoulders. "I'm so proud of you. You're my best student and I know you will continue to work hard. I think you'll succeed beyond anything either of us could dream. Go, study hard, read all you can but also remember to have a little fun. The fun times are where your greatest memories will be made."

"Thank you, Mrs. Woods. This wouldn't have been possible without you. I will make you proud."

Mrs. Woods opened her arms and Lizzie nearly jumped into them.

The opportunity at Tuskegee was another debt Lizzie feared she'd never be able to repay. She would write to her regularly and study hard. It was all she knew to do. She wouldn't be able to rest otherwise.

TUSKEGEE

Chapter 12

September 1888

The announcement of “All Aboard” reverberated on the platform of the train station. Lizzie quickly hugged her grandmother and uncle and boarded the train. Lydia dabbed at her eyes and Jus stood with his hands in his suspenders at his chest. It seemed his breastbone had doubled in size overnight.

Lizzie placed her foot on the first step and warmth filled her entire body. Air expanded her lungs as she continued up. Her eyes sought a place by a window, which she quickly found. Grandma glanced from window to window. She waved. Grandma nudged Uncle Jus and pointed with her handkerchief. They waved back. All her teeth shown to ease any worry. She absorbed every nuance of their faces and clothing. Lizzie hoped they would be okay in her absence. In her few years of education, she had taught her uncle the alphabet and reading basics. During the summer, they’d intensified their study so Lizzie would be able to write to tell them about Tuskegee. Her uncle promised to write her back. She’d prepared them as best she could. It was her time now. The train’s whistle blew. Lizzie watched her family as long as she could as the train pulled away.

The train ride was two hours long but to Lizzie it lasted mere moments. Her thoughts bounced from one subject to the next. The world flew by on this her first train ride. The fields, tiny towns, and woods appeared and disappeared. She wanted to remember it all. Lizzie saw her heartbeat when she happened to glance down at her chest. If she could jump in the aisle and sing praises, she would. She didn’t want to be dragged off at the next stop so she stayed put.

Mrs. Woods had given her lessons on how to sit properly and to behave like a lady. Lizzie sat with her stomach in and head erect. She had even learned how to drink tea out of a delicate

china cup. Can you imagine? Little Lizzie drinking out of china. She was so scared she would break the cup, she slouched tea all over the saucer during her first lesson. Mrs. Woods told her not to worry and she soon got the hang of it. Now, her practice would be put to the test. She had her mind set. She would be serious and focused and quickly correct any shortcomings.

Her grandmother had warned her about men and gave the terrible details of what could happen. She promised to be cautious and to never get caught alone with one. Lizzie confirmed the sole focus of her time would be her education. Teaching was an area of study at Tuskegee and she wanted to be the best. Work was a required part of attendance at the institution so she would attend classes, do her assigned work and study. Nothing and no one else would get in her way. She was going to make sure Mrs. Woods, her grandmother and uncle would not be disappointed in anything she would do.

She had been daydreaming when the announcement of “Next stop, Tuskegee” came. Tuskegee! Her stomach danced. She had eaten a little of her breakfast and was glad she did. Otherwise, she might embarrass herself.

As the train pulled into the station, Lizzie took in the sights of her new home. The depot was smaller than the one in Columbus but was crawling with people. She collected her beautiful satchel. The satchel along with a handmade bag from her grandmother constituted her luggage. She hoped she had all she needed. After her expenses were paid, she’d only have a dollar left for the remainder of the academic year. She had to guard it with her life. She lifted her bag and her chin and stepped off the train.

As the sole of her new leather shoe touched the platform, Lizzie felt a smile burst across her face and spread to the soles of her feet. She had done something her grandmother had never done. She’d stepped foot into another state. She was officially in Alabama!

A kind face was sought for directions to Tuskegee. Her uncle suggested a porter or an accompanied laborer as her best chances. She saw a colored man dressed in a dark uniform and approached him.

“Cuse, me sir,” she asked. He turned and gave her a once over.

“Yes,” was the only word he said. Lizzie’s heart skipped a beat.

“Sir, I need to get to Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute,” she stated. She swallowed and asked, “can you help me?”

He looked at her again, this time there was a light in his eyes. “So, you going to be one of Mr. Washington’s pupils?”

“Yes, sir. I hope so.”

The porter raised his hand towards the wagons off to the side of the depot. “Stay away from the carriages out front. They’re not for negro folks.” Lizzie nodded in understanding.

“You can hire a wagon to take you over there,” he stated.

“How far a walk is it?” she inquired.

“It’s about five miles.”

“If you’d point me in the right direction, then I’ll be on my way,” Lizzie stated with her head erect on her neck. The porter gave her simple directions. Tuskegee would be easy to find.

“Thank you, sir,” were her parting words.

“Good luck to you,” he said before returning to his work. She was one of the poor ones, he thought. If they had any money, they would never waste it for a ride if they could walk. He hoped she would make it. He had a young son and daughter at home he hoped would one day follow in her footsteps. He lifted his head and caught a glimpse of her walking down the road with her head held high and skirts flapping. He grinned. Yea, she would do all right.

Chapter 13

An arched gate marked the entrance to the Tuskegee Normal and Industrial Institute. Lizzie read the name five times before daring to walk under it. The property was expansive. Buildings made of brick and lumber filled her vision. It was a mix of the old and the new. People of all shades were milling around. She stopped dead in her tracks when she saw a man of color exiting a carriage. The man was in a suit of charcoal grey. He handed a black case off to the young man who had opened his door. He reached back and out came a beauty. She wore a dress of beautiful lilac. People gathered around them like the kings and queens she'd read about. Who were they?

"You have set your eyes upon our saviors." Lizzie turned to see a thin-faced girl grinning at her. The girl nodded in the direction of the carriage.

"That's the man himself, Mr. Booker Taliaferro Washington and our first lady, Mrs. Olivia Davidson Washington."

Lizzie's heart leapt. They were negro! In all her dreaming, she did not once imagine the Principal of Tuskegee being a man of color. He and his wife ran the institution. Her head swirled with thoughts and questions. How was this possible? She wanted to get closer to see this man. Lizzie took a step but the girl encircled her arm.

"You best get checked in. You'll have a chance. He makes a point to greet every new student." Lizzie nodded as she watched the procession enter the building. She didn't want to turn away.

"I'm Vinetta Davis," the girl said extending her hand. "It's my third year here and I'm now an official greeter," the girl said with a smile.

“I know all the new people by sight. You’re the ones who are looking from place to place trying to determine what was what. A little dazed, a little amazed and a little lost.”

Vinetta had described her feelings perfectly. Lizzie liked her instantly. She was certainly different. She’d seen white folks with freckles but never a black person. Vinetta Davis was covered with them. Her hair was pinned up but unlike hers, Lizzie could see it had a beautiful shine.

“I’m from Selma, Alabama. Not too far from here. Who are you and where are you from?”

“I’m Elizabeth Evelyn Wright from Talbotton, Georgia. But everyone calls me Lizzie.”

“Talbotton? I’ve never heard of it.”

“It’s a small town. I doubt many people have heard of it.”

“Well, Lizzie. Welcome to Tuskegee Institute in the city of Tuskegee in the great state of Alabama,” Vinetta said with a flourish. Lizzie smiled and they started to walk.

“We are heading to the beautiful Porter Hall. Porter was built five years ago by our students and teachers. Porter is wood-frame but all other buildings will be brick. Tuskegee students make the bricks for the buildings. Porter is three stories tall and one of the largest buildings in the entire town!” Vinetta said with great enthusiasm. Lizzie peered at the massive building in front of her. The panes of glass sparkled in the sunshine. The most beautiful green grass surround the building and walkways on all sides. She needed to keep her lips pressed together.

“This is for us?”

Vinetta nodded with a smile. She loved these moments of awe from the small-town girls. Many hadn't seen anything like it. Even more, nothing like it just for people of their race like them. "Yes, inside there's a library, chapel, recitation rooms, laundry and offices."

"A library?" Lizzie stopped in her tracks. Breathless with just the thought of it. "For us?"

"Yes, a library with 2000 books and all, just for us!" Vinetta said clapping her hands. She stared at Lizzie with her mouth opened.

"You must love to read, too! I just love books. There are books on all subjects and the collection is growing every day! When there's time, you can choose a book and read for hours."

Lizzie couldn't believe it. There were thousands of books and she could choose to read what she wanted when she wanted. She was thrilled. Books and she had already met a character. She thought she was really going to love this school. She breathed a sigh of relief.

Lizzie walked to Porter Hall with Vinetta. They were surrounded by a sea of brown humanity. Men and women were smartly dressed in crisp beautiful clothes. Their heads were erect and backs ramrod straight. Lizzie pressed her belly button to her backbone to be as straight and erect as they.

"You will need to stand in this line. They'll take your name and get you checked-in and registered. Another greeter will escort you to your room. There'll be a welcome and social at 5:00pm and supper at 6:00pm," Vinetta instructed. "I'm going to leave you now. I hope to see you at the welcome. Good luck Lizzie and again welcome to Tuskegee!" With that, Vinetta gave a shallow curtsy and was gone.

She turned to take in her surroundings; this was her new home. She had not been in such a fine building. The walls were covered in paint, not a crack to be found. The wood trimming had

a shine unlike any she had ever seen. She wondered how they did that. She had to tell her uncle about it. She didn't have words for all the things she saw. She would make it a point to learn them all.

When it was her turn in line, she gave her name to the Lady Principal, Miss Rosa Mason. "Miss Elizabeth Evelyn Wright of Talbotton GA?" she asked.

"Yes, ma'am," Lizzie responded. She quickly found her name and handed her a small stack of papers. Lizzie sat her satchel down to look at them.

"Miss Wright, please go into the next room and complete these forms to the best of your ability. Then submit them to me with your fees." Lizzie nodded. Picking up her bag, she walked into the next room. The library! She paused in the doorway. Books – short ones, tall ones, slim and thick ones. Shelves and shelves of books. There were books above her head and near her feet. Books, books, glorious books. She wanted to jump up and down and peruse the shelves but controlled herself and sat down to complete her paperwork. She looked up and saw books. Her lower lip began to tremble. She tucked it in and cleared her eyes of the pending tears to complete the task at hand. She had become a water-bag in recent months.

Tuskegee wanted to know everything about her. They asked about everything from her previous education to health and whom to contact in the event of illness. This was the first document she had completed for Tuskegee so she made careful strokes and used her finest penmanship.

She was on the last page when she read something that stopped her cold. The final page had the room and board fee as \$8.00/month with the ability to work off \$2.00-\$3.00/month. She didn't understand. She had \$9.00. Mrs. Woods had written and inquired about answers to their questions. They had responded with \$8.00 due immediately and the ability to work off the rest. It

was outlined on one of the pamphlets from the institution. The pamphlets stated the remainder of expenses could be covered through work on-campus. She thought she had had enough. Lizzie swallowed back the lump in her throat to finish the forms. She didn't have the money for a trip back home. If this wasn't an error, what was she going to do?

She collected her bags and forms to see Miss Mason. While students and families were still in other lines, Miss Mason had no one in front of her. Lizzie gripped her papers and slowly walked up to the lady with a warm smile.

"Do you have your forms complete?" Miss Mason said. Lizzie did a slow nod and handed Miss Mason the forms.

"These forms look to be in order. Now I'll need to collect your fees of \$8.00," Miss Mason said as she rested her fingertips on the table in front of her. Lizzie's sad eyes found Miss Mason's. Lizzie reached into her shoulder bag to find the handkerchief her money was tied in. Miss Mason watched as she undid the knot. Lizzie pulled out \$8.00 and carefully tied the \$1.00 back into the handkerchief.

"Miss Mason," Lizzie started.

"Yes, Miss Wright," she said with questioning eyes.

"I have the \$8.00 for this month but understood students can work to pay the costs for the following months."

"Yes, work on-campus can assist with covering up to \$3.00 of monthly costs," Miss Mason responded. Lizzie bit the inside of her cheek.

"What's wrong, Miss Wright?" Miss Mason frowned.

"I, I thought students could work to pay all the costs after the first month," Lizzie looked at her forms on the table.

“Oh, I see,” Miss Mason remarked. Lizzie tried to swallow the now cantaloupe sized lump in her throat. “I’m sorry to say, the cost for the day program with room and board is \$72.00 for the year. After the initial \$8.00 payment, students can earn up to \$24.00 each academic year. This leaves \$40.00 due for the year. Payment of at least \$5.00 are due on the 15th of each subsequent month,” she explained.

Lizzie found her voice as tears welled. My teacher, Mrs. Woods, was the one who wrote to ask last year. Then I worked and she fundraised so I could come here. I thought I’d have a dollar left,” she said with tears attempting to break her lids. She tried to blink them back but her attempts were fruitless. She quickly wiped them away hoping no one would see her lack of dignity. Miss Mason stood.

“Miss Wright, this is not the first time I’ve seen this. Miss Wright, please collect your bags and follow me,” Lizzie obeyed. She would hold her head up as she was escorted out.

“We’re going to see Mr. Warren Logan. He’s our Treasurer. Let’s see if we can get something worked out, shall we?” Miss Mason paused so Lizzie could walk by her side. Lizzie was too afraid to hope.

Miss Mason knocked on the semi-open office door. Mr. Logan invited them in. This was the first professional office Lizzie had seen. She took in the enormity of his desk. It was covered with neat piles of paper. She knew the treasurer of the church. He didn’t have an office. No one she knew had an office like this. Mr. Logan watched her absorb his office. “Mr. Logan, let me present Miss Elizabeth Evelyn Wright, of Talbotton, GA.”

“It’s the nicest one I’ve seen as well,” he said as he stood up and extended his hand. Lizzie started but then extended her own. This man had shaken her hand.

“I’m Warren Logan, the money man of this fine institution,” he said chuckling at his own words. This man was tall and lanky. A darker brown skin tone, he had full lips that stood out on his chiseled face. He had a light, jovial nature. He was pleasant. Miss Mason outlined the problem.

Mr. Logan responded, “Yes, this is a problem. A problem indeed.” After a moment he continued, “Miss Wright, do you desire to be enrolled at this magnificent institution?”

“Yes, sir. More than anything. I’ve worked hard to earn the money to come here. I’m smart and know Tuskegee is the place for me to learn,” Lizzie said with all the conviction her tiny body could muster.

“You don’t have the funds to complete day classes. Would you be willing to work to remain?”

“Oh, yes sir. I’ll do whatever it takes. I can cook, do any type of housework, and I can learn. I can learn to do any task you place before me.” Mr. Logan raised his hand.

“I think you will. We have a night program. You have enough funds to cover your enrollment in that program. If you work during the day and attend classes at night, you can earn the money to cover your room and board. Are you willing to do that?”

“Yes, sir,” Lizzie said enthusiastically.

“Then, we will have you work in the kitchen to prepare breakfast, luncheon and supper daily. Then you’ll attend classes from 6pm-9pm during the week. Does that sound good to you?”

“Yes, sir. I thank you sir.” Mr. Logan nodded.

“Miss Mason, please show Miss Wright to her room. She’ll attend the opening chapel this afternoon and meet Mrs. Pindle in the kitchen at five o’clock in the morning.”

“Thank you, Mr. Logan,” Miss Mason said as she escorted Lizzie out the door. As they entered the hallway, she dropped her bag and hugged Miss Mason. At first startled, Miss Mason hugged her back.

“Welcome home, Elizabeth.”

Chapter 14

Lizzie followed Miss Maria Benson, the Dormitory Mother and Mathematics teacher, down the corridor of Alabama Hall to her room. Lizzie was even more in awe that her dormitory was a brick mansion. She would have to say extra prayers before bed tonight.

What would her roommates think of her? She'd have two of them. She'd spent most of her life with her grandmother and uncle. She rarely spent time with her siblings and had few friendships with her schoolmates. She hadn't spent any significant time with anyone her age. Now she'd be spending hours on end with two strangers.

They arrived in front of door number 3. Miss Benson knocked and entered the slightly jar door. The young woman sitting on the bed jumped up.

"Hello, Miss Benson," the young woman said as her eyes darted towards the bed.

"Sitting on the bed in the middle of the day will make you lazy," Miss Benson responded knowingly.

"Yes, ma'am," the girl said looking down.

"Now that you've set a bad example, let me introduce you to your new roommate. Miss Emma Lou Stanley met Miss Elizabeth Evelyn Wright."

"Lizzie, please. My family calls me Lizzie," she held out her hand as Emma curtsied. They both stood awkwardly for a moment then laughed.

"Emma is a member of the Junior class. I trust you'll show Lizzie around and make sure she finds her way to our opening Convocation," Miss Benson directly. Emma nodded and with one look from Miss Benson said, "Yes, ma'am."

"Alright then, I'll leave you to get acquainted," Miss Benson exited the room and Lizzie turned to her new roommate.

“What is the Junior class?” she asked Emma. Emma looked at Lizzie like she had two heads before answering.

“It’s my second year here at Tuskegee. The four years start with where I assume you are with the Preparatory Class, then the Junior Year, continues with the Middle Year and finally the Senior Year. Following a successful Senior year, you graduate and go out into the big, wide world to teach in the great State of Alabama for at least two years as our matriculation requires.”

Lizzie had read this but wanted more than anything to be able to go back home to teach in Georgia. Her home needed her as much or more than Alabama. Her anticipated four years in Alabama might extend into six but she decided to tackle that matter later. She’d take this one step at a time.

“Welcome to our room,” Emma said as she spread her arms wide. The room had three beds. Next to each was a small chest of drawers with a simple white pitcher and basin on top. On the opposite side of the bed stood a single-drawer desk with a sturdy wooden chair.

“This will be your bed,” Emma stated as she walked to the last one closest to the window.

“I always pick the one closest to the stove because I’m cold-natured. I freeze even in the middle of the summer,” Emma stated.

There was a pot-bellied stove on the opposite side of the room. Lizzie’s heart thumped at the beauty of it all. They had their own stove. She wouldn’t have to have five quilts on the bed in winter to stay warm. She placed her satchel on the bed along with her bag.

“This will be your chest and basin set. Do you have a trunk coming?” Lizzie shook her head and touched the chest of drawers. She had one of her own.

“Oh, are you poor then?” Emma asked. Lizzie stared at her. Not quite sure how to respond.

“I mean, the girls who are poor don’t tend to come with much.” Emma started to wring her hands. “I mean there’s nothing wrong with being poor. I mean, I was just going to tell you to put your trunk at the foot of the bed.” Lizzie held up her hand.

“It’s okay. I am poor. I’m not ashamed of that. I’ve come here to get an education, just like everyone else here. I hope you won’t think less of me because of it.” She looked straight at Emma with no hint of emotion in her face.

“No, of course not,” Emma responded with a quick swipe of her hand.

Lizzie turned to open her satchel. She paused, wondering about her garments. She took her simple cotton socks, stockings and undergarments and held them to her chest. She turned to find Emma watching her. She placed them in the top drawer. Her everyday dress, new skirt and blouse went in the second drawer. She laid her extra pair of shoes, toilet supplies and other items in the third. Next, she took her shoulder bag to the desk and placed her pencils in the drawer. Her quill and ink were placed neatly on top with her red notebook, paper tablet and the beautiful new Webster’s Dictionary presented to her by the church. Placing her reticule in her top drawer, she finished unpacking in less than ten minutes. Lizzie slid her bags under the bed.

“All finished?” Emma asked.

“Yes, not much to it,” Lizzie shrugged.

“We can talk for a few minutes,” Emma said plopping herself down on the bed. Lizzie looked at the door and back at Emma. She apparently wasn’t scared of Miss Benson returning and catching her.

“Sit down,” Emma gestured with her hand. She sat on the edge of the bed, ready to leap if the door opened. Emma smirked.

“We all sit or lay on the bed. They can’t expect us to sit in chairs all day when we have these warm, fluffy beds. Besides, Miss Benson’s not as strict as she pretends to be.”

“You know the boys make the furniture,” Emma said with a lilt. Lizzie reached out to touch the bedpost.

“Really? It’s nice,” she offered.

“It’s one of the areas they can study. They make the beds, desks, chairs and chests. They even make the bricks that create all the buildings,” Emma said knowingly. “The men and boys have the opportunity to build things that will last forever,” Emma says with a slight frown then lifts her shoulders and drops them.

“Everyone learns a bit of horticulture. Principal Washington believes no matter who you are, learning to raise your own crops and animals is the best way not to starve, especially if another war breaks out.”

Eating was essential, that made sense to her.

“Have you seen the boys yet? There are a few fine specimens around,” Emma inquired. Lizzie shook her head.

Emma continued, “the prospects for a husband are better here than anywhere else. At least, these will have an education and skills. I absolutely intend to find my husband among those here at Tuskegee.”

“That’s nice but I intend to teach. I want to learn all I can and go back to my home in Georgia to make the lives better for our community,” Lizzie said with conviction and strength.

Emma again stared at her like she had two heads. This was becoming the norm.

“Don’t you want a husband and a home?” she asked.

“One day, those may be of interest. For now, I’m here for my education.” Emma opened her mouth to speak again when the door flew open. Emma and Lizzie both jumped up.

“Did I scare you?” a beautiful, young woman said as she swept into the room. Lizzie gawked. The girl was the best-looking person she had ever set her eyes upon. It was clear there was some white in her family line. She carried herself with a confidence Lizzie wished she had more than a pinch of.

“Since you’re in room three, the same I’m assigned to, I guess you’re my roommates,” the goddess said as she took in her room and roommates. “Well since you both are the silent-types, I guess I’ll introduce myself. I’m Belinda Green from Nashville, Tennessee. My father is a professor at Fisk University but sent me here to get an education.”

Emma was the first to speak. “Your father is a professor and sent you here? Belinda nodded.

“He said, I was too much of a distraction in Nashville. He and Principal Washington know each other so he shipped me off to Alabama to be placed under a watchful eye.”

“Wow, that’s says a great deal about the respect your father must have for Principal Washington and Tuskegee,” Lizzie said.

“He wanted to get me out of town more like it,” Belinda said matter-of-factly.

Emma and Lizzie glanced at each other. Emma walked over to Belinda and introduced herself and Lizzie. Two boys were standing outside the threshold.

“Come on in boys,” Belinda said as she waved them into the room. Emma pointed to the bed on the opposite wall and stared after the boys. The boys sat the truck and suitcase down by Belinda’s bed.

“Thank you, boys!” she said with a bright, beautiful smile. They both said you’re welcome. One nearly ran into a bed looking back over his shoulder in an effort to maintain eye contact with her. They watched Belinda until Emma shooed them out the door and closed the door behind them. Boys only crossed the threshold when assisting with move-in and move-out. Never at any other time. Emma would have to savor the memory.

“I don’t think you’ll have any problem finding a husband,” Emma said her voice dripping with sarcasm.

“Oh them,” Belinda said flicking her hand.

“They asked me if they could help while I was talking to the carriage driver. I’d be a fool to turn down good help. That trunk is heavy,” she said with a chuckle.

“Must be nice,” Emma said.

“What?” Belinda asked.

“Men falling at your feet to do anything for you.”

“Oh, please. They are just being polite.”

“They may be polite but I didn’t have anyone running up to me asking to carry my trunk or bags.”

“Me, either,” was the first thing Lizzie said to Belinda. Belinda laughed.

“I guess I have a way about me. It may sound vain but I do love the attention.” Emma shook her head as Belinda hugged herself.

“Tell me about yourselves, while I unpack. I have to figure out what to wear to Convocation.”

Belinda threw her other things on the bed and went to her trunk. As she pulled out dress after dress, Lizzie thought that she may be a sad disappointment to her roommates. Emma had

joined Belinda as they talked about the fine fabrics. She only had one other dress to choose from. She'd alternate her everyday dress with her blouse and skirt. She'd have to figure out which would be best in the kitchen. She'd have to be careful not to burn or stain either.

As they decided on dresses, Lizzie walked over to her desk to look up the new word. Convocation. She quickly learned it was a large gathering or formal assembly of a group of people. Based on the excitement in the room, she gathered this was a big deal. Belinda and Emma had decided on which dresses to wear to Convocation. Lizzie decided to keep on the blue dress she had traveled in as it was her best. Mrs. Woods had not discussed this event with her. Since her roommates seemed to know all about it, she would follow their actions. She hoped she wouldn't make a mistake.

What if she made a mistake? Would they laugh at her? What if Principal Washington quickly realized had a bad pupil in his midst? Could she be sent home today? She had to be careful as she still had to work to pay to stay. One of the items Lizzie had been given was a handbook. She really wished she had time to read it. Oh no!

She shyly glanced at Emma and Belinda as they chose dresses. She hoped everyone wasn't as well off as her roommates. She figured everyone would be like her from a small town seeking a better education and life. What would they think when she had to go to work in the morning when they went to class? She had not anticipated this. Had Tuskegee been a good idea? It was time to get ready for her first Opening Convocation. She prayed it wouldn't be her last.

Chapter 15

The array of smartly dressed people of color before her took her breath away. The women and girls wore dresses and skirts in a variety of patterns and styles. Lizzie hadn't realized there was more than a couple of ways a dress could be made. One girl even had her hand in pockets at her hips. She believed her favorite was a skirt patterned with alternating blue and white boxes. She ran her hands over her own clothes. The men and boys were no different. The only man of color in Talbotton to wear a suit of clothes with a waistcoat was the minister. Yet, before her, were dozens of them. Some boys wore suits, while others wore collared shirts with a tie around their necks.

They were splitting the boys and girls into groups then into two lines. The students were to march into the chapel by class with the Senior students bringing up the rear. Emma said this was an honor and they got to applaud this group as they began their final journey at Tuskegee. Lizzie continued to take in the beauty of it all as Emma and Belinda eyed the men.

"Are you ready?" Miss Mason asked, startling Lizzie. Lizzie gave a smile that displayed her lack of confidence.

"You will be fine. Once it gets underway, you'll see how easy it all is," Miss Mason patted her on the shoulder and turned to finish organizing the group.

"Yes, ma'am," she replied to her back.

A bell began to clang and everyone came to attention. Lizzie froze. Afraid to move, she looked around with her eyes.

"That's the bell signaling the start of a new year. Once it's finished, we'll process in," Emma whispered. Lizzie nodded and shifted to face the chapel as the others in the yard had done. Almost at once, people started to walk. Lizzie walked as she had been taught with her

shoulders back. She held her head high with arms moving gently by her hands. As she reached the steps, she lifted her skirt slightly, careful not to reveal her ankles, and flawlessly climbed each step. When she crossed the chapel threshold, her eyes were filled with color. Stained glass windows. She had only read about their beauty. They surrounded her. She picked up the program that was in her place on the pew. She read the order of service. Until the ceremony began, Lizzie just stared at the windows. What a sight to behold.

Chapter 16

The Senior Class was announced and they made their way to the front of the chapel. Boy, did they look fine. All were nicely dressed with their heads held high. They were envied by all the other students as they had preserved and could see the finish line. Lizzie imagined they felt a certain pride. She couldn't wait to be a part of the Senior Class.

As they were seated, a singer led them in the first hymn. Lizzie's body swelled with the greatness of the hundreds of voices. Each note made her want to fly. She wanted to close her eyes but feared she would miss an important cue. Then the moment she had dreamed about. The man himself stepped up to the podium. Mr. Booker T. Washington. An applause rose and Lizzie joined in. She clapped harder and with more enthusiasm than she had in her entire life. There he was, the man who would change her life.

"Welcome One, Welcome All to the greatest institution of learning in the world! Welcome to Tus-kee-Gee!" Principal Washington enunciated every syllable as another cheer arose. She thought this would be a somber affair but she was wrong. The energy in the room was palpable. Emma squeezed her arm. Lizzie was doing all she could to stay seated and be still. She was so lucky. As Principal Washington spoke, Lizzie's mind didn't drift for a moment. He was a fine man, who spoke with an eloquence she had not heard. He took in the entire audience when his eyes rested in her direction, Lizzie sat up a little taller. The stained-glass windows were a distant memory.

As Convocation ended, the Seniors followed the Faculty as each processed out of the chapel. They would be the first to partake in the Opening Picnic. Lizzie wished she had a writing instrument to make note of the fine words she heard. She would try to remember as much as she could so she could record it in her notebook. She hadn't kept a diary before but Mrs. Woods

thought it would be good for her to write her thoughts and later review her progress. Lizzie had so much to write down and had no idea how to start her first letter home.

If Lizzie could draw she would have sent an image of the spread before her to her family. Her grandmother and uncle would not believe their eyes. Platters of chicken, beef and ham were followed by bowls of greens, beans, and squash. The faculty and seniors were eating on china seated at cloth covered tables. Lizzie was handed a tin plate but she didn't care, she wanted to pile mountains of food on her plate. She knew Mrs. Woods and her grandmother would be disappointed in her gluttony so she chose to get a little of the items she wanted and looked for a place to sit.

She quickly found Emma and Belinda sitting on a bench. Emma eyed Lizzie's plate.

"You don't eat much," was her response. Lizzie took in both Emma and Belinda's plates and realized she had scrimped on the amount of the offerings compared to them.

"I didn't know how much to get and with so many people, I wanted to make sure there was enough."

"Aren't you the sweet and thoughtful one," Belinda said with sass. Lizzie forked some lima beans and put them in her mouth. They melted. She could taste the pork used to season the beans. They were delicious.

"Don't you worry about food around here. The poor stiffs that work in the kitchen will keep it coming. Since Tuskegee grows most of the food, there hasn't been a shortage since the institution opened from what I hear," Emma said with an all-knowing air. Lizzie swallowed hard. She was about to be one of the poor stiffs working in the kitchen. If only she had money, what would they think when they found out?

“Classes start tomorrow,” Belinda said, then paused. “I wonder which of these handsome professors I’ll have the privilege of learning from.” Belinda chewed slowly as she perused the crowd.

“Belinda, do you think of anything else?” Emma asked.

“Of course, I do. But thinking about the men gives me something nice to think on.”

“You have a few looking at you,” Lizzie said as she watched some of the younger men, watch Belinda. Belinda harrumphed.

“Those are boys. They may be nice to look at but I’m looking for a man with a career, a passion and something to offer.” Emma looked at Belinda up and down with her eyebrows lifted. “Belinda, you better stop talking like that, you might get more than you bargained for.”

“I need to find a fine man like my father. I don’t plan to work my fingers to the bone every day of my life. I firmly intend to be well-taken care of.” Lizzie was amazed at this girl. She had this opportunity for an education better than most negro people but she was plotting to find herself a husband. Even worse, amongst one of the faculty. This would be an adventure. This story was one she wanted to watch from beginning to end. Lizzie was now sure Belinda’s ways were what got her shipped from Tennessee to Alabama. Her grandmother has warned her about men and she knew it was best to stay away from them. Nothing good would come from her involvement with boys or men now. She has plans. Though, Belinda fascinated Lizzie. She feared Emma would learn bad habits from Belinda. Lizzie was certain Belinda and Emma would give her a number of diary entries to write. At least she wouldn’t be bored with this pair.

After they had eaten, they had free time to walk the property. The sun was going down so Emma gave Belinda and Lizzie a tour of the surrounding buildings before it was time to go inside. Lizzie listened as Emma told the short history of the buildings and conveyed the plans

Principal Washington had laid out for the institution. Lizzie had gathered a plethora of information and hoped none of it would leak out of her memory before she had the chance to put pen to paper. As they walked back to their dormitory, she reflected on the day. Just that morning, she had boarded a train to an unknown city, in an unknown state. Now she had heard the most amazing negro educator she'd ever set eyes upon, she had made new friends, and this night, she would sleep in her own real bed. Her world was already bigger than she could have imagined. The next day, she would start her work and education. Yes, she thought. She had made the right choice.

Chapter 17

Lizzie woke promptly at 4:00am. Her body clock was infallible. She poured water from the pitcher into the basin careful not to make noise to wake her roommates. They were able to sleep a couple more hours. She had to go to work. She quickly washed and got dressed in the near darkness. She crept out of the room looking at the lumps in each bed. Neither lump moved as she gently closed the door.

The hall creaked as Lizzie tried to move quickly and quietly down it. She was lucky the kitchen and dining hall were in the basement of Alabama Hall but she didn't want to be late on her first day. As she reached the kitchen, she found it was already bustling with activity. Girls and boys, men and women were carrying big pots. One boy was carrying a crate of eggs. Everyone looked as though they had their place and knew exactly what to do. A voluminous woman walked up to her.

"Are you the new girl?" Lizzie nodded assuming she was the only new girl within earshot.

"Follow me," the woman said. "I'm Mrs. Eliza Pindle, the Matron of Cookery for Tuskegee. Your job will be with these ladies." Lizzie had followed Mrs. Pindle to a long table filled with potatoes and carrots. The ladies all looked at her. A few nodded. Others gave her the once over.

"Mrs. Washington and I plan the weekly menu on Fridays and then we prep and serve three meals a day. We try to make sure stomachs are full so minds are ready to learn and bodies are ready to work. There's nothing worse than trying to learn and work when your stomach is talking to you." Mrs. Pindle sounded like she spoke from experience.

“You will work on one task until that task is done. If you run out of something to do, then see me. There’s always work to be done.” One of the girls chuckled and was elbowed by another. Mrs. Pindle gave them both a pointed look. Each had the decency to look ashamed.

“You know how to peel potatoes?” Mrs. Pindle asked.

“Yes, ma’am,” Lizzie replied looking at the mound of potatoes on the table and at the sacks sitting along the wall. Even with the six of them peeling potatoes and carrots, this was going to take a while.

“Good,” Mrs. Pindle said and handed her a knife.

“Oh, I forgot, the aprons are on the pegs around the corner.” Lizzie followed the direction of Mrs. Pindle’s finger point. She tied the apron at her waist.

“Let me know if you need anything.” Mrs. Pindle said and turned away. Lizzie perused the women and picked up her first potato.

“Mrs. Pindle never fully introduces anyone. I’m Dinah,” said the girl with an expressive face. Lizzie knew she had to be at least fifteen but she looked no more than twelve or thirteen. She introduced herself and got the names of her table mates. They immediately went back to work. No one seemed to want to talk. Lizzie wondered if Mrs. Pindle was a mean manager.

Two hours later, with an ache in her shoulder and cramps in her hands, all the potatoes and carrots were peeled and cut up.

“Time for breakfast service,” Dinah said as Lizzie was sighing with relief at her perceived break. It must be near seven o’clock.

“Follow me Lizzie, we need to set up the dining line on the other side.” Lizzie followed Dinah to another table. This one had rows of pans lined up. Dinah effortlessly lifted one.

“Take one.” She did as she was instructed and followed Dinah into the dining room. The room was filled with wooden tables and chairs. Dinah led Lizzie to a row of tables that were a few inches higher than those for dining. Other pans were already in place. After placing their pans on the table, Dinah walked away and returned with a cap. Dinah extended her hand.

“We have to wear these during food service so no hair or flakes fall in the food.” Lizzie raised her eyes and put the cap on as Dinah had.

“Once the others come in, we give them a heaping spoonful of what they ask for.”

The other women joined them on the line and they uncovered the food. Lizzie learned what had happened to the eggs. They were now scrambled mounds in front of her.

Mrs. Pindle went to the double doors at the entrance of the dining hall. With ceremony, she opened one door, then the next. Lizzie recognized some of the faculty members at the front of the line. Each picked up a plate and started down the line. Lizzie stood and dished a heaping spoonful of eggs to anyone who held their plate out to her. When one pan was empty, another was immediately sat in its place. Lizzie repeated the same motion, almost without thinking about it. That was until Emma walked up.

“Lizzie, Lizzie!” Emma cried. Lizzie wished she could have worn a mask.

“We wondered where you snuck off to this morning,” Emma said.

“I have a job working in Dining,” Lizzie said without looking Emma in the eye.

“That’s good. How soon will you be finished and ready for class?” Emma asked innocently. Lizzie slowly responded as she lifted her eyes.

“I won’t be attending the day program. My work here ends at 5:00pm then my first class is at 6:00pm.”

“Oh,” Emma looked crestfallen. “Belinda and I talked about going to hear the history lecture this evening and wondered if you might like to go.”

“I’ll be in class until 9:00pm,” Lizzie said flatly.

“All right, then I guess we’ll see you tonight?”

“I’ll be here at luncheon,” Lizzie responded with a smile.

“See you then,” Emma said as she lifted her tray. Lizzie watched her take a seat beside a girl she didn’t know.

Lizzie kept serving but with each spoonful of eggs, it sank in further that she would not have the same experience as her roommates. She wouldn’t be able to attend classes with them. She wouldn’t be able to attend the lectures and socials. Her day would be spent working. After a full twelve-hour workday, she would take her classes for three hours, then have to read, do homework and study. She guesstimated she’d get about four hours of sleep per night. On the Saturdays she didn’t have to work, she could spend time in the library. It would be a challenge but she knew she could do it. It wasn’t what she had dreamed but it was an opportunity that she was lucky to have.

After breakfast, she wiped down the tables, helped wash the pots and pans, and sliced tomatoes for the luncheon service. By the time the first faculty member marched in for the midday meal, Lizzie was exhausted. She still had half the day left.

Chapter 18

The bed looked so inviting. Lizzie wanted nothing more than to lay down and fall asleep. Instead, she went to the basin and washed her face. Her clothes bore the odors of the kitchen. Since it was the first class she'd take at Tuskegee, she decided to change into her dress. The rest of the week, she'd wear the same clothes she wore to the kitchen. Tonight was special. She quickly undressed and washed. She was fairly confident her roommates wouldn't walk in on her in her state undress. They were eating supper before their lecture. Lizzie decided to take a glance at herself in Belinda's mirror. Her hair was unkempt. She took the time to remove the pins, comb her hair and re-pin it. Lizzie smiled at the face she saw in the mirror. She felt renewed and just a little bit proud of herself.

Lizzie put her paper tablet in her bag along with her pencil. Putting her bag on her shoulder, she was ready for her educational adventure and to soak up knowledge.

The schedule in her hand shook slightly as she searched the numbers for the correct room. Her first class was Elementary Geography. During the week, she would also have Language, which included reading, spelling, and writing, Mathematics, and Vocal Music.

There were others in the hall of the classroom building searching for rooms and numbers. Lizzie found the correct room and paused before crossing into the classroom. She inhaled and stepped through the doorway. The male students were on one side and the female students were on the other. There were students of a wide range of ages in the room. There were young as well as old. Lizzie chastised herself for being surprised. Some of the older people were probably former slaves who were seeking an education after a life of being denied this privilege. She

imagined all had dreams and aspirations as she did - to possibly make a better life for themselves and their families.

There was an empty seat next to a girl wearing a dress covered in flowers. Lizzie leaned towards the girl.

“Is this seat taken?” The girl turned abruptly towards Lizzie causing her to take a step back.

“I’m sorry,” the girl said with something like fear in her eyes. She held her palms up in offering of the seat. Lizzie sat down.

“I’m sorry,” the girl said again.

“It’s alright,” she replied.

“I’m just a ball of nerves. This is my first time in a real classroom, you see,” the girl said as she stroked the wood of the desk.

“My name is Lizzie Wright, Lizzie.” The girl nodded but didn’t offer her name back in return. Lizzie searched for words to calm her but nothing came to mind. She instead absorbed the classroom. There were real blackboards on the walls. Each had a tray below with white sticks of chalk and neatly folding rags.

There was a picture of the man himself. President Abraham Lincoln. He was the one responsible for their freedom. He was a man she would always hold in esteem. There were some good white people in the world. He was one of them. There was also a picture of the current President Grover Cleveland. Lizzie smiled to herself, she wouldn’t be completely lost,

There were charts – the United States and the World. Lizzie saw the shape of the 38 states of America and its numerous territories. She hoped she’d have time to study the charts in depth.

The shape of the world was more of a surprise as she had only seen it once at the Rolfe plantation, on an occasion when she was visiting her mother. It was an orb that spun but she hadn't had a moment to inspect it closely. But this map was flat and the land masses displayed, she quickly identified America but the other locations were a mystery. She identified Canada and was sounding out the names of its boundaries when "Good evening, Class," came in a light-hearted voice followed by rapid footsteps. Lizzie turned her head to see a familiar face—Mr. Logan.

Her anxiety instantly dissolved. She had guessed Mr. Logan was an intelligent and accomplished man from their first meeting. Now she knew he was a man of business, history and geography. She wondered how much of the country and world he had traveled. She hoped she'd learn during the class. She was at once delighted to be learning from him.

The night's class went by fast. After each member had introduced themselves, Mr. Logan started their lessons. The first hour covered history. Lizzie had written names and dates. She had learned a few of them in lessons with Mrs. Woods. Others were completely new. The second hour covered the Continents with an in-depth examination of North America. After a review and assignment of homework, the class was over. Lizzie was stunned at all she learned in the first class. She couldn't wait to get back to her room and look over her notes. As she planned her week, she decided to complete her assignments each night so she wouldn't get behind. When she didn't work or wasn't attending Chapel Services on the weekends, she'd read and prepare for the following week. She was tired as she walked back to Alabama Hall but was thrilled about all she'd learned in just one day.

Chapter 19

Emma and Belinda were sitting in the middle of their beds chatting away when Lizzie returned to the room. They both turned to her as she entered.

“How was your first day of class?” Emma was curious to know. Lizzie broke into a full grin.

“We learned about the continents and hemispheres. It was wonderful, just wonderful! I loved every minute of it!” She turned in a full circle as her bag swung around her.

“What about Professor Logan?” they asked at the same time.

“Oh, I like him. He’s very smart. I’m going to learn so much from him.” Emma and Belinda gave each other a knowing look.

“No, silly. What about him? Isn’t he handsome?” Emma said clasping her hands and looking at the ceiling.

“I don’t know,” Lizzie. She didn’t look at him that closely. Why would she care what he looked like? Belinda rolled her eyes.

“Lizzie, I’m beginning to wonder about you,” Belinda remarked.

What had she said that was wrong?

“What do you mean?” Belinda and Emma’s eyes meet and after a moment’s pause, both fall back laughing. It was Lizzie’s turn to roll her eyes. She walked over to her desk and pulled out the chair. They had time to laugh at her and she still had her work to do. She felt a tightness in her chest but willing it away. There was so much she didn’t know or understand. The room got quiet. Lizzie thought it best to focus on the work in front of her.

She felt Belinda’s presence and turned to look up at her.

“Lizzie, we’re sorry. We didn’t intend to hurt your feelings. It’s just most girls talk about how handsome their professors are.”

“Or not,” Emma chimed in.

“You talk about how intelligent they are or what you would learn from them. It’s different is all,” Belinda managed to look a little contrite. Lizzie was uncertain as to how to respond. So, she decided to simply accept their apology.

“I accept your apology,” with first a look to Belinda and then to Emma.

“How was your day?” she added not really wanting to extend the conversation but understanding it was the polite thing to do.

“We had our classes and then went to the dulllest lecture on Earth,” Emma said. “I don’t know how they expect us to be delighted and enthralled when we have monotone speakers.” Belinda nodded and said, “I was half asleep the first ten minutes in. I’ve definitely heard better.”

“Me, too,” echoed Emma. Lizzie nodded but had nothing to compare it to as she had yet to attend her first lecture. She wanted to ask them more but decided against it. Emma and Belinda didn’t seem to excited but she still wished for the experience. In four years, she knew she would have more opportunities. Lizzie gazed down at the assignment in front of her.

“I’d like to keep talking but I have at least two hours of work ahead of me. I’d best get to it.” Belinda turned the paper for a better look.

“Interesting,” she said. “Let us know if you need any help. We’ve been where you are.” Lizzie uttered her thanks and got to work. Morning would be there before she knew it.

Chapter 20

As Lizzie woke on Friday morning, a tomato-sized lump formed in her throat. She had peeled more potatoes and carrots than she thought existed. Tuskegee was all that occupied her thoughts just a few weeks ago. Now, she was present and accounted for.

Oh, how foolish she had been dreaming of books and learning. She had anticipated academic challenges but the present circumstances she had not foreseen. She had to keep extending her hands to keep them from cramping. Between the kitchen and writing, her hands were in constant use and ached all the time. Emma realized her hands were bothering her and lent Lizzie her kettle so she could soak her hands in warm water. Lizzie almost wept from the pleasure of the water. Now when she came to the room, the kettle was waiting. Lizzie was grateful for this small kindness. Lizzie would also soak a wash rag in the water and apply it to her neck. This was another lesson she didn't realize she needed to learn. She held her head down while cutting. As a result, her neck and shoulders would ache. Now she held her head up and looked down. She figured she'd get used to the cutting and peeling. It was just the first week. Those around her worked with what seemed like joy. When Matron Pindle walked away after giving the morning instructions, one of the older ladies would start to hum. Soon, the entire kitchen would be humming to a ubiquitous gospel tune. Lizzie was surprised to feel vibration in her own throat as she involuntarily joined the sounds. Lizzie found she liked working with the noise. There was something pleasant about the way it made the work seem to melt away.

Emma and Belinda were becoming wonderful friends to her. Each night they would fill her in on the day's activities. They wanted to make her feel a part and as though she wasn't missing anything. But she envied the time they had together to walk, talk, and to attend lectures and events. She still felt inadequate and tried to hide her belongings. Both girls had nicer things

than she, though they hadn't said a thing, she still felt they watched her every move. She would adjust. She didn't have a choice. Lizzie swallowed the lump and willed herself out of bed. She had a job to get to.

She needed to gather her laundry, write home and go to the room for a bath before Tuskegee's weekend activities. Though Lizzie wanted to stay in bed a bit longer, she chose to get up early so she could find the time to peruse the library collection. Every moment seemed filled. Emma said it was to keep everyone out of devilment. The day students who were able to cover their room and board were required to complete six hours of service each month. Belinda liked to complete hers in one day, so she had her weekends to do as she pleased. Well, at least her Saturdays as Sundays consisted of required chapel service and prayer. Belinda needed to be in chapel. Though Lizzie wasn't in the church as much as others, she had begun to pray for Belinda's soul.

As she rose and lit her candle, Belinda lifted her head from her pillow.

"Lizzie, you're not working today. Are you?"

"No, I'm going to bathe and go to the library," Lizzie replied as she poured the lukewarm water from the pitcher to the basin.

"Lizzie, you should rest a while longer. I'm tired and I have nothing like your excuse," Belinda whispered. "Besides, the library doesn't open until 8:00am. It's probably only 6:00am."

"No, this is the first day I can do what I like."

"And you're going to spend it in the library?"

"Of course, what else is there?"

Belinda scoffed and turned over. Lizzie dressed, blew out the candle, collected her things and slowly closed the door. She gave a smile at the two lumps in the bed.

She still looked forward to her classes each evening. Though on one occasion, she found her eyelids drooping. She shook her head to revive herself and tried to remain focused. Working twelve hours a day, attending classes for three hours and then putting in another few hours for additional reading and study was more than Lizzie had anticipated. She ate and slept and did it all over again. In a moment of weakness, she thought about packing up and going home. She quickly pulled herself together. Her grandmother had been a slave for goodness sake. She worked day and night and would be woken up at all hours for this or that. She had to work outdoors in the coldest and hottest weather. Lizzie was at least indoors and was working towards something. Her education and a better life. Plus, she had her freedom. There was no greater gift.

Chapter 21

The double vision had come back. That coupled with the legs filled with jelly that barely kept her erect scared her. The sickness was coming back. She had been managing for weeks. If she had a major illness or a contagious disease, they might send her home. She found walls to lean on and water to drink which helped her get through the worst episodes. The double vision came with pain and nausea which made trying to cut and read a significant challenge. She figured after a few days she would feel better but each day, she felt progressively worse. She was beginning to feel people watching her. She hoped they weren't beginning to suspect. She had started to slice tomatoes when it happened. One moment, she was slicing and the next minute, her world went black.

She awoke to Matron Pindle calling her name. She lifted her lids to see her. On her right was Dinah, with a worried look on face. Someone was fanning her with a heavy piece of paper.

“What happened?” Lizzie asked.

“Stay still child, help is coming,” Matron Pindle said as she mopped her forehead with a cool cloth. Lizzie tried to sit up but felt a hand on each shoulder.

“Stay still. You hit your head hard when you fell,” someone said. Lizzie looked around and everyone had stopped working to look down at her. She closed her eyes as water rolled down her ears to the floor. She could no longer deny it, she was sick. She hoped they wouldn't send her home. She said a silent prayer that she would recover quickly.

“Clear a path,” came a male voice from above her head. She tried to look in the direction of his voice but a wave of dizziness swept over her. She swallowed hard to keep anything from coming up. The next thing she knew, she was lifted onto a canvas stretcher. She was carried

roughly from the dining hall and lifted onto the back of a wagon. Another person pulled her further up into the wagon. Then she was alone. The air was cold but the sky was a clear blue.

“Giddy up,” said the driver and she was bounced with every step of the horse. She didn’t know where she was going but she hoped they would get there quick. She closed her eyes and willed her head and stomach to cooperate. She managed to make it to their stopping point without losing what little she had eaten that morning. More men were there as she was pulled from the wagon and carried into another building. She was lifted from the stretcher onto a bed. She watched the men fold the stretcher and walk out of the room without a word.

Her eyes adjusted to the light in the room. This room was a new one. Though it was daylight, lanterns were lit and made the room brighter. Dizziness kept skewing her vision but she kept visually exploring her surroundings. She was in the middle of three beds. A screen was folded off to one side of the room. There was a table with all kinds of instruments. If she had felt better, she would have taken a closer look. Right now, all she wanted was to feel normal again.

A woman in a white dress and cap entered the room.

“Hello, my dear,” she said with a smile.

Lizzie started to smile back and nausea stopped her.

“You don’t feel good, do you?” she asked. A quiet no was all Lizzie could manage.

“I’m Nurse Kidd. I’m going to take good care of you,” she said as she placed her cool hand on her forehead.

“How long have you been feeling bad?”

“Almost two weeks.”

“Two weeks and you didn’t tell anyone?” Nurse Kidd asked sounding incredulous.

“Do you hurt anywhere?”

She hurt and ached everywhere. She thought of her grandmother. When she first became ill, her grandmother diagnosed influenza but this type came year-round without rhyme or reason. Then would go away until the next bout. Lizzie told Nurse Kidd as much.

“How many hours are you working per day?” Nurse Kidd inquired as she nodded and wrote notes.

“Twelve hours,” she answered.

“Then you’re going to classes at night?” Nurse Kidd asked but Lizzie could tell in her voice, she already knew the answer.

“And how many hours are you studying and doing homework after?”

“Usually two or three hours”

“So, you’re working all day, working all night, getting a few hours of sleep and by the looks of you, eating a whole lot of nothing. Am I right?” Nurse Kidd said with her forehead lifted.

“Yes,” Lizzie responded quietly.

“Figures, you’re working yourself to death, not eating, and managing some kind of chronic illness. No wonder you fainted dead away,” Nurse Kidd said in an attempt to make her laugh. Lizzie just didn’t feel like it.

Chronic illness? Lizzie had been sick but she hadn’t thought that she had an illness. She needed to find a medical book in the library. For the first time, she wondered if she was going to die.

“You’ll stay here today. The doctor is scheduled to visit tomorrow but if you get worse, we’ll summon him right quick,” said Nurse Kidd.

“I can’t stay. I need to get back to work,” Lizzie pushed herself up. Nurse Kidd placed her hands on Lizzie’s shoulders and gently pushed her back to the bed.

“Not today, my dear. You’ll be spending a little more time with me.”

“Ma’am, I have to work to pay for my schooling. I don’t want to have to leave. I’ll be fine,” Lizzie exclaimed.

Nurse Kidd peered directly into her eyes. The warmth and compassion Lizzie saw took the fight out of her; that and her lids were threatening to close.

“You have to rest now. You’ve been burning the candle at both ends. Your body is telling you to stop. If you don’t, school may be the least of your worries. It’ll all work out.”

Lizzie nodded. She felt sicker than she ever had. A day or two of rest might be what she needed. She could work on weekends when she got well to make up the time.

Chapter 22

When Lizzie woke again, it was dark. A single lantern lit the space. A quick perusal and she realized she was alone. She touched her temple. The headache was light but it was there. Her mouth felt as dry as a ball of cotton. She turned to look for a pitcher. There wasn't one. The cup Nurse Kidd had given her water in earlier was gone. She exhaled. She needed to get up. Move, she told her left foot. Yet, she stayed exactly where she had been. She could call out but wasn't sure if there was anyone in the building. Surely, they wouldn't leave a sick person by themselves. Would they?

When she willed her foot to move the second time, it obeyed. Five seconds later, her right foot joined the left one. She rose to her left elbow then pushed herself up. Only the dull ache in her head. She scooted herself to the edge of the bed and allowed her feet to touch the floor. She stood erect. No jelly. She was weak but her legs held her up. Her stocking feet made their way to the doorway. A different nurse was sitting at a desk reading a book. Lizzie stood watching her for a moment before saying anything.

"Excuse me?" Lizzie said in a thin voice. The nurse lifted her head and smiled.

"Lizzie, you're awake. How do you feel?" she asked. She had a sweet face. Her skin was incredibly smooth. There wasn't a single mark or blemish. Lizzie was immediately jealous. Her face started bumping up over a year ago and it was a daily battle to keep her full face from being infested each day. At least her uncle wasn't there to squeeze them. She was constantly avoiding his pinchers. He was merciless. He didn't seem to realize all that squeezing hurt. Granny had told him on more than one occasion to let the bumps get ripe before he tackled them. Ripe or not, mattered nothing to him. He couldn't wait to torture her with his squeezers.

"Better, thirsty."

“Of course, you are. You’ve only had a few sips of water and broth over the last few days. You’ll probably be hungry before long.”

Lizzie froze. Last few days?

“How long have I been here?”

“Four days.”

She stared at the nurse. Four days. Oh Lord, she thought. She’d be so far behind. Would she be allowed to make up for work or would she receive failing grades for everything she missed? She’d have to work in the kitchen every day for the rest of the month.

The nurse placed her hand on her shoulder. Lizzie hadn’t realized she had moved.

“You shouldn’t worry. The school works with students. We all want every student to be successful.” Lizzie nodded. The nurse had read her mind. How terrible, but there was little she could do about it now. She needed to recover quickly so she could get back to her lessons and work.

“Come on. Let’s get you back into bed. Then I’ll get you some tea and a piece of bread. That should tide you over until breakfast. Then you can try some eggs,” the nurse said with a smile.

“I’m sorry but I don’t remember your name,” Lizzie asked sheepishly. This nurse must have been there as she knew Lizzie by name.

“Mrs. Washington. I’m Mrs. Booker T. Washington,” the lady smiled.

Lizzie froze. After a closer look, it was indeed Mrs. Washington. She thought she was a nurse.

“Ma’am, I’m sorry. I didn’t realize,” Lizzie stuttered.

“My dear, you’ve been sick. There is no need to apologize. Besides, we all pitch in where needed at Tuskegee,” Mrs. Washington took Lizzie’s arm and escorted her back to bed.

The willow bark tea she sipped on had eased the pain more than any other medicinal treatment she’d received. Lizzie couldn’t remember feeling so bad. Between sleep and spoonfuls of broth, she had spent more hours sleep than she had in ages.

Dr. Mingo was a humorless man. He examined her head, bent her joints and palpated her stomach. He prescribed a diet rich in protein and vegetables. He reported he had seen this illness before in the area. He didn’t know the cause and wasn’t aware of a cure. Though he was fairly certain, lack of rest aggravated the condition.

Lizzie wanted her schoolwork but Nurse Kidd was adamant about her resting. Lizzie only thought about how much more she was getting behind each day she was in the Infirmary. Belinda and Emma had written her notes as Lizzie was also denied visitors. Their worlds were perfect as usual. She envied their ability to attend classes by day and social activities by night. Oh, how she wanted to do the same. For a moment, she hated them both.

She was going to have to work so many extra hours, she didn’t know if she could catch up. Every waking hour was going to be used to make up work, so she would be able to pay off her charges. She wondered if she could somehow get additional work to help her recover the hours and payments faster. Maybe during the holidays. Meals needed to be prepared at all times. With her experience working with the teachers, she might get work cleaning houses. She could do this. She knew she could. She didn’t have a choice.

Chapter 23

Eight days. After eight days, Dr. Mingo decided to let her resume her normal activities. He asked her multiple times if she had pain or dizziness. She confirmed she had none of the above. Even if she had, she was fairly certain, she would have kept it to herself. Nurse Kidd made her promise to limit study after classes and to get at least five hours of sleep each night. She had hoped she could keep her promise. She would need to focus completely in her classes and not wonder about the maps and pictures on the wall. If she could learn as much as possible during each class, she could spend less hours after class during homework and reading. The adjustment might be a challenge but she had to change. If she didn't, back to Talbotton she'd go.

Lizzie exited the infirmary slowly and waved back at Nurse Kidd. She had been the nurse's only full-time patient during her stay. Others had stopped in with minor ailments and returned to their regular days. Lizzie didn't like being sick but she did enjoy getting to know the nurse. She also got to sleep in a room by herself for the first time in the whole of her life. It was a quiet experience.

When Nurse Kidd went back inside, Lizzie picked up the pace. She needed to get to her room. She needed to write out her plan for catching up.

As she entered her room, there was a jar of flowers sitting next to her pitcher. Someone was thoughtful. Her uncle had been the only person to give her flowers. He made a point to pick her a bouquet each year on her birthday. She smiled as she thought of home. There were papers on her desk. Lizzie flipped through them. There were notes from each class that she had missed and the readings and work she needed to complete. Oh, my goodness, she thought. Someone had made sure she had everything she needed to catch up. Emma and Belinda weren't in the same classes as she so who could have worked this out for her?

As the Doctor had instructed her not to go to work for the remainder of the week. She figured if her body couldn't work, her brain could. She sat at her desk and got to work.

Her neck was tight from holding over her work when her roommates walked in. Belinda's clock had 9:00pm. It was even late for her night owl roommates to be out.

"Oh, look Emma, she's alive!" Belinda said with her eyes dancing.

"I'm glad she's well cause I'm tired of attending day classes and night classes," Emma said.

"You may be sick of classes, I'm sick of cutting vegetables. I was not cut out for domestic work," Belinda said looking at both sides of her hands.

Lizzie could do nothing but stare at her roommates. Had they attended her classes and taken notes? And what was Belinda talking about cutting vegetables?

She stood up. "Belinda, what do you mean cutting vegetables? You don't work in the kitchen?"

"For some reason, I like you enough to want to keep you around. So, I lowered my standards and worked your hours in the dining hall. Well, complete disclosure, Emma and I split them." Emma nodded. "We figured it would be one less thing for you to worry about when you got better."

Belinda and Emma had worked in her stead so she wouldn't have to make them up when she recovered. She ran to them and put an arm around each of their necks. They embraced her. The agonizing sound came from deep in her gut. They wrapped her tighter as she cried from the very depths of her soul.

Chapter 24

The shadowed beams and dark spots in the wood came into focus as she awakened. She wondered where the scars had come from and how they got there. Her eyes started to close. She shook her head to wake herself. She had work to do.

Lizzie moved one foot then the other until they were both on the side of the bed. She closed her eyes and sat for a moment. Time to go to work. Lizzie put her weight on her feet and pushed up. She willed herself to keep moving.

She entered the kitchen and the room burst into applause. Lizzie gazed upon all the smiling faces. Mrs. Pindle patted her on the shoulder. “How you feeling?” she asked.

Lizzie replied, “Much better.”

“Good, good. There’s a table and seat over yonder where you can work,” Mrs. Pindle lifted her chin to point out a place behind Lizzie. She turned to see a table piled with greens and a chair. Lizzie looked back at Mrs. Pindle to protest but she stopped short. She saw something in Mrs. Pindle’s eyes. Compassion? Lizzie took a step backwards.

“You best get to work. The greens need to be picked and cleaned so we can cook them for dinner,” she turned and started barking orders to the other staff. There were smiles and nods as she seated herself by the table. She reached for a handful of greens and got to work.

Lizzie scurried back to her room to freshen up before her class. She paused when she saw an envelope on her pillow. She had gotten letters from Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus and from Mrs. Woods but they had been delivered to the mailroom. This one was on her bed. Lizzie reached for the letter. Only her name was on the front. She should wait until after class but curiosity got the best of her. She opened and removed a card. Lizzie did a sharp intake of breath.

It was an invitation to Sunday tea. With not just anyone, it was an invitation from Mrs. Olivia Washington! Lizzie stared at the card. The kind woman, who she'd mistaken for a nurse, was now inviting her to tea. The tea was in the home of the President and Mrs. Washington. Lizzie felt slightly faint and then remembered to breathe. What a wonderful surprise. A tea. She scanned Belinda and Emma's beds and desks but didn't see similar envelopes. Of course, they could have already opened theirs and put them away.

Mrs. Woods had taught her etiquette for introductions and meals but tea was different. It had to be different. You didn't eat at a tea. Did you? She'd have to ask Belinda about what to do at a tea, then follow her lead while there. Belinda had been hostess for her father on several occasions so she would know exactly what to do. Lizzie had spent so much time thinking about the tea, she had to grab her things and run to class.

Though she tried to focus, especially since she'd been out of class for a while, she couldn't help but think about the invitation. She had received her first formal invitation. The fact the invitation had come from the First Lady herself made it even more special. What was she going to wear? She had two choices. The times she'd seen Mrs. Washington, she was so poised and elegant. Her attire was so crisp and beautiful. No matter what she did Lizzie knew she would pale in comparison. She wished she were elegant and refined like Belinda. She didn't want to make a fool of herself in front of Mrs. Washington. Oh, what to do. Lizzie shook her head.

"Miss Wright, do you disagree with my assessment?" Professor Logan asked. Lizzie stared at him with her mouth open. She stood.

"No, sir," Lizzie responded. Mr. Logan squinted at Lizzie. He nodded. Lizzie's face burned. She sat and forced herself to pay attention. The invitation could wait. She best not get caught daydreaming again. She might be embarrassed more the next time.

Chapter 25

Emma held her yellow dress up in front of Lizzie. Emma was right, the yellow looked lovely against her dark skin.

“I don’t know Emma. I couldn’t pay you for it if something happened to it,” Lizzie said both excited and concerned about the loan.

“Woman, please. I’m not worried about one dress. I can always get another.” Lizzie smiled. She could only imagine what it was like to not worry about where your next dress or funds would come from.

“Remember to hold your saucer under your teacup if you are drinking from your lap,” Belinda said. Belinda had been giving advice all week. Lizzie was trying to keep it all straight in her head. She didn’t want to look like the country bumpkin she was sure they thought she was. She was even more concerned after learning she was the only one of the girls invited to the tea. They were all aware of Mrs. Washington’s teas but neither had been invited. She was the first. Belinda said Mrs. Washington must have heard Lizzie was sick and felt sorry for her. In Belinda’s eyes this was the only way Lizzie would be invited before her. She hadn’t told her Mrs. Washington had nursed her one night. It didn’t seem important and besides Mrs. Washington may not want people to know she worked in the infirmary.

“Now sit Lizzie so I can fix your hair,” Emma said almost as excited about the tea as Lizzie was. At least she wasn’t being hateful about or making snide remarks about it like Belinda. Her heart thumped hard against her ribcage. This was one of the best days of her life.

“You look great,” both Emma and Belinda exclaimed as Lizzie did a little circle. She felt like a queen in Emma’s dress. The material was so soft and lovely against her skin. Emma had pulled her kinky hair back into a stunning roll. The giddiness she felt extended from the top of

her head to the pads of her toes. Emma tucked a handkerchief under Lizzie's sleeve and stepped back.

"It looks like you're ready to go!" One final view in the looking glass with a smile and she was indeed ready to go.

"Thanks for all your help!" Lizzie said as she and Emma hugged. Belinda smiled tightly, still smarting a little about not getting her own invite. Lizzie didn't care. She was going to enjoy this experience.

Lizzie lifted the knocker and gently tapped the metal plate. She wasn't sure if she had hit it hard enough. When she was about to lift it again the door opened. A young man in a wool suit held the door open for Lizzie to walk through.

"Please follow me," he said as he turned. Lizzie held her hands in an attempt to stop their shaking as she followed. This was such an elegant home. She was walking on the softest carpet. She wished she had nice slippers instead of her hard boots. She also wished she could take her shoes off and run her toes through it.

There were three other ladies in the parlor as they entered. None of these ladies could be students at Tuskegee. Mrs. Washington stepped forward.

"Hello Miss Lizzie. Welcome to our home!" she said with the warmest smile and a quick clasp of her hand. "Let me introduce you to my friends. Mrs. Rice, Miss Johnston, and Miss Odom." The ladies nodded and they were asked to have a seat.

"Lizzie, how have you been enjoying your time at our fair school?" Her body heated up as all eyes swung in her direction.

“Fine, I’m enjoying it fine,” Lizzie said. She paused immediately, searching for something better to say. “It’s my first time outside of Georgia. I really like Alabama.”

“Mrs. Washington tells us you’ve been sick,” the one named Mrs. Rice stated while at the same time asking the question.

“Yes, I was in the infirmary for eight days but I’m better now.” Mrs. Washington joined in.

“Lizzie is one of our hardest working students. She’s in our night program.” The ladies nodded. Lizzie wanted to sink into the floor. Everyone knew the night program wasn’t seen in the prestigious light like the day program. Now they knew she was less. Even worse, Mrs. Washington continued. “She works in the kitchen all day and then attends classes half the night.”

Mrs. Johnston knitted her eyebrows together and asked. “Then when do you get to your lessons?”

“After I finish classes, I read and study for a few hours.”

“A few hours?” Mrs. Odom chimed in, “when do you sleep?”

“As soon as I’ve completed my studies,” Lizzie responded.

“No wonder you’ve been sick. You’re working day and night,” Mrs. Rice said.

“Yes, which is why I’ve invited Lizzie to our Ladies’ tea. She hasn’t had time for leisure activities and I thought she might enjoy our little tea,” Mrs. Washington said with a smile.

“Well, welcome to our little circle,” said Mrs. Odom. Lizzie thanked her and didn’t know what else to say so she looked at her hands.

Tea was served in the most beautiful china. The china had beautiful pink roses with light green leaves painted on each side. The rim of each were trimmed in gold. As Lizzie was handed the cup and saucer, she said a little prayer in hopes of not chipping or breaking them. Mini cakes

were served from platters by a young woman. Lizzie recognized her. She was a student. The Washingtons were employing students at their home. Lizzie wondered if it was a job like hers. If she had a moment, she would ask the girl. Lizzie smiled; the girl didn't smile back. For some reason, Lizzie felt sad.

The ladies made small talk first about the school then about the latest fashions. Lizzie enjoyed the conversation. The ladies talked about Tuskegee's current enrollment and plans for the future. She hadn't known how much the school had grown in a few short years. The Washingtons had major plans for their institution. Lizzie was amazed at how much Mrs. Washington engaged in the school and its plans.

"Lizzie, are you aware of Mrs. Washington's speaking engagements?" Lizzie shook her head then realized her mistake.

"No, ma'am," Lizzie responded to Mrs. Odom.

"Mrs. Washington is the most eloquent of speakers. She's been traveling to tout the advantages of education for women. She has been quite effective in her messages." Lizzie observed Mrs. Washington's soft smile.

"Oh, Geraldine. I am just doing my part." Mrs. Washington said in earnest. Then placed her hand on her belly. "I am taking a break now but will be back at it after the baby is born."

Lizzie had not noticed she was with child. She stared at Mrs. Washington.

"Miss Lizzie, it appears you are going to need a Patron," Mrs. Rice said as a matter of fact. Lizzie snapped out of her trance. Lizzie must have had a puzzled look on her face as Mrs. Rice expounded. "A patron, someone who will offset your education expenses and help you along the way. This way you won't have to work so hard in your fragile state of health." The other ladies nodded.

“Would I need to work for him?” The ladies laughed.

“There are women with means as well, so don’t assume it would be a man.” Lizzie had made another mistake. She searched for disappointment in the eyes of her companions but none was reflected back.

“I’m sorry. I just thought...” Lizzie was stopped mid-sentence.

“No need to apologize my dear but we need to keep our options open,” everyone nodded in agreement.

“A patron would support you out of the goodness of their heart and your achievement and success would serve as payment for their contribution to your education.”

If she could attend classes and not have to work hours on end, then she could get through Tuskegee Institute quicker and find work immediately. If she found a wealthy patron maybe he or she, would be able to provide enough funds for her to attend the day program. How wonderful that would be. She could attend classes during the day and attend lectures and events with Belinda and Emma. She might be able to enjoy her time at Tuskegee and in Alabama. The ladies have produced a wonderful idea.

“So, how do I get a patron?” Lizzie smiled at the group. Mrs. Washington sat up even straighter and smiled back.

“I think we first need to compose a list of potential patrons then start soliciting,” Mrs. Washington said.

Mrs. Odom confirmed and added, “If we exhaust our initial list, then we seek friends of those patrons. We can seek assistance from our contacts here and in the North.”

“Yes, we’ll just keep moving forward,” Mrs. Johnston said catching the wave of enthusiasm that swept through the parlor. Mrs. Washington sent the young girl for pen and ink as

the ladies started rattling off names. Lizzie didn't know what to do or to say. These ladies, these strangers were excited about helping her. She was stunned. In fact, she was so stunned she had a hard time pulling all the talk and activity together in her head. She was a stranger to all of them, yet they were now abuzz with talk of helping her. Lizzie felt a ping of nostalgia. They reminded her of Mrs. Woods. Lizzie would have to make a list- Mrs. Woods, Mr. Logan, now Mrs. Washington and her friends. She would have more debt to repay. Lord willing, she'd be able to do so.

"Miss Lizzie, it was indeed a pleasure to meet you," Mrs. Odom offered as the tea ended. Lizzie smiled shyly.

"And you as well, Mrs. Odom,"

"We all have our assignments, let's gather next week and report our progress," Mrs. Washington said.

"I will look forward to it," said Mrs. Johnston.

"Then Miss Lizzie, we'll see you back next week, same time?" Mrs. Odom asked. A slow smile spread across Lizzie's face.

"Yes, ma'am," she responded. The ladies nodded with approval. Lizzie said her good-byes and was escorted to the door. She walked back to her dormitory as the ladies were helped into their carriages. Lizzie looked back and Mrs. Johnston lifted her hand in a gentle wave. Lizzie waved back. She had been invited for tea again next week. She couldn't wait to tell Belinda and Emma. Belinda was going to be so jealous. Lizzie picked up her step. She was thrilled.

Chapter 26

Matron Pindle marched towards Lizzie as she had not done before. All eyes in the kitchen followed Matron Pindle as she approached. Lizzie held her breath. What offense had she been guilty of? She quickly went through the work she had completed and couldn't remember a mistake she had made. She balled her hands into fists as she waited for the onslaught.

"Lizzie, Mrs. Washington seeks an audience with you immediately," she said. Eyes shifted to Lizzie. One staff member openly gasped.

Lizzie nodded, "Yes, ma'am."

She reached behind herself to untie her apron. Mrs. Pindle stood wringing her hands as Lizzie hung her apron on the rack. Lizzie gave her a slight smile as she lifted her chin to exit the kitchen. No one said a word but eyes followed her out the door. Voices erupted as the door closed.

Lizzie walked as quickly as her legs would carry her. If Mrs. Washington was summoning her during the week, it had to be of the utmost importance. Lizzie didn't have a chance to knock on the door. Mrs. Washington met her there.

"Lizzie, come in," Mrs. Washington had the biggest, brightest smile. Her eyes sparkled. Lizzie didn't resist the smile that spread over her face. Mrs. Washington wrapped her hand around Lizzie's elbow and almost dragged her into the parlor. There Mrs. Odom stood. She too had a smile on her face. She stepped forward to grasp her hands. The ladies exchanged glances. They both inhaled and started to speak. Mrs. Odom nodded, giving Mrs. Washington the floor.

"Lizzie, my dear husband reached out to an acquaintance he had met during his travels, a Judge George W. Kelley of Rockland, Massachusetts. He told him about you, your intelligence and your challenges with school and health. He was thoroughly moved," Mrs. Washington

paused, looking at Mrs. Odom. "Lizzie, he has agreed to serve as your patron!" Mrs. Washington lifted her voice and her shoulders. Mrs. Odom clapped her hands. Lizzie stared into Mrs. Washington's face. Could it be true?

"What?" was the only word Lizzie was able to muster.

"Lizzie, you have been granted the most wonderful of gifts. There is someone who has pledged to support you through your education. You can enroll in the day program. You won't have to work as hard. All your expenses will be covered."

Lizzie shook her head. A patron for her. Elizabeth Evelyn Wright the small girl from a small Georgia town had a patron. Lizzie wrapped her arms around Mrs. Washington.

"Oh," Mrs. Washington exclaimed as she wrapped her arms around Lizzie's tiny body. Mrs. Odom and Mrs. Washington let the tears roll. Pretty soon they are a mass of arms and tears. Something on Lizzie's shoulders lifted.

Chapter 27

January 1889

The second trip to the infirmary was worse than the first. Much worse. Dr. Mingo had a cot brought in after two days. Lizzie wasn't getting any better. Nurse Kidd had also taken up residence in the infirmary. She had twenty-four-hour care yet a diagnosis had not been determined. The nearest hospital for her was a two-hour wagon ride away. Her survival could not be assured so the trip was delayed. Mr. Washington and the Institute Chaplain had visited. Mrs. Washington was too far along in her pregnancy to visit. Her roommates were banned from entering but the flowers they left were a reminder they were thinking of her.

Liquids were all she could tolerate. She heard Dr. Mingo say she'd loss at least ten pounds. Pounds she could not afford to lose. She had planned to write to Grandma Lydia and Uncle Jus but Nurse Kidd wrote them and Judge Kelley for her as she could barely grip the pencil. Reading caused her head to swim. It didn't matter as sitting up made her feel worse. She just lay there. If she were going to die, she hoped death would not tarry as she hated being sick. If only they could put a name to her illness, perhaps they could give her the right combination of herbs and medicines to make her better. Lizzie had watched Dr. Mingo bring in a stack of books. Lizzie glimpsed him hunched over them by candlelight when Nurse brought him coffee. He was smart but seemed stumped by what plagued her.

On day seven, Principal Washington entered with a white man at his side. They walked up to Dr. Mingo and shook hands. After a brief conversation, they walked over to her bed.

"Lizzie?" Dr. Washington asked gently. Lizzie shifted her eyes to look at him.

“Lizzie, this is Dr. Barrows. He’s the head of the hospital. I’ve asked him to come to examine you. Would that be fine?” Dr. Washington asked. Lizzie lowered her chin ever so slightly. Dr. Barrows moved to the primary position next to her bed.

“Lizzie, are you able to turn to your back?” Dr. Barrows asked in a near whisper. Lizzie willed herself onto her back. Dr. Barrows placed his hand on her forehead. Then her neck. His hands were the softest Lizzie had ever felt. His were softer than Mrs. Washington’s. This slightly startled Lizzie. She followed instructions as he palpated and manipulated her entire body. He asked what hurt and what didn’t.

“Lizzie, I’m going to take a vial of blood from your arm. I’m going to take a look at it under the microscope,” Dr. Barrows said as he lifted a glass tube from his bag. He inserted a needle in one end of it. Lizzie had not seen anything like it. She watched as he straightened her arm. She felt the urge to close her eyes but wanted to see what he would do next. He put the needle on her arm and pushed. Lizzie clenched her buttocks as the needle pierced her skin.

“Just relax. It will be over soon,” Dr. Barrows pulled the top of the needle as her blood flowed in. Dr. Mingo, Mr. Washington and Nurse Kidd watched as the doctor filled the vial with her blood. Lizzie was fascinated. Seeing her blood flow into the tube made her feel better than she had in weeks.

“That is truly amazing,” Nurse said before catching herself.

“Indeed, it is. There’s talk that blood draw will become a normal aspect of medical examination. There are many ailments that can be diagnosed from looking at blood through a microscope,” Dr. Barrows said as he withdrew the needle and placed a cloth over the hole. He bent her arm to stem the flow. Lizzie watched him put the syringe in a case. If only she could see

what he might see when he looked under the microscope. She had seen one in the science lab but had not yet had the opportunity to use it. She hoped she survived the sickness for the chance.

“I’ll return with my diagnosis as soon as I can get the blood analyzed and review my notes and those of Dr. Mingo,” Dr. Barrows said as he acknowledged Dr. Mingo with a nod.

“Thank you, Leland,” Mr. Washington said. “We want to make sure she has the best care. As she is like a daughter to Mrs. Washington and I.” The men shook hands and Dr. Barrows was escorted out. Lizzie’s heart soared.

Lizzie woke to see the sky. Nurse Kidd had opened the curtains. She didn’t feel as poorly as she had when she went to sleep but she still didn’t feel great. Nurse Kidd replaced the cloth on her head with another then seated herself at Lizzie’s side.

“Young lady, you have perplexed even the great Dr. Barrows. He’s the best doctor around. There’s more talk about you than any other patient or student I’ve ever seen at Tuskegee. The doctors will be coming to see you again today.” Nurse Kidd lifted the brush Lizzie hadn’t seen in her hand.

“Best make you more presentable,” she said and got to work.

Mrs. Washington led Dr. Barrows and Principal Washington to her bed. Principal Washington evaluated Lizzie. Lizzie shifted her gaze to the floor. If he saw something he didn’t like, he might send her home. The sheer weight of the thought made her stomach hurt.

“Lizzie, I have the pleasure to meet and seek treatment from one of the most renowned physicians in the country. His name is Dr. John Harvey Kellogg. Dr. Kellogg runs the Battle Creek Sanitorium. I sent him a telegraph about you and your condition and he believes he can treat you,” Principal Washington said.

Lizzie's eyes widened. A doctor who could treat her. Her lips stretched into a smile.

"Thank you, Principal Washington."

"Lizzie, you're going to get the best care and you won't have to worry about a thing.

Everyone is pitching in so you can make the trip and have all you need." Trip, Lizzie thought. Dr. Kellogg wasn't coming to Tuskegee?

"Trip? Where?" Lizzie asked with furrowed brows.

"Dr. Kellogg and his sanitorium are in Michigan," Principal Washington said.

"Michigan?" Lizzie remembered the map of America. Michigan was at the top and Georgia was at the bottom. "How?"

"As we said, not to worry about a thing. We'll make sure you get there in good order. We're making the arrangements now and you'll be on your way before you know it," Principal Washington smiled and told her to get some rest. As he walked away, Lizzie lifted up on her elbows. What about her grandmother and uncle? What about school? How was she going to get there? How long would she be gone?

Mrs. Kidd closed the door behind the men. Lizzie buried her face in her hands.

"Come now, this is good news. You're going to be seen by the best doctor in the country. One Dr. Washington has been treated by."

"Michigan?" Lizzie choked out.

"Just think of the stories you'll be able to tell. Shucks, I haven't been out of Alabama much and you as a teen will be traveling half the country," Nurse Kidd said with enthusiasm.

Michigan. She would have a story to tell as long as she lived and she'd be able to discuss her travels. Nurse Kidd was right. Most people she knew hadn't been outside of Georgia and now Alabama. When folks were working all the time, there wasn't time to go anywhere. Where

would you go anyway? Especially if you didn't know anybody. Yes, she'd have quite the story to tell.

She needed to write to Uncle Jus and have him tell her grandmother. What would they think? It was bad enough that she went to school in Alabama. Now Michigan. She'd have to ask Emma to check the library for any books on Michigan. If Principal Washington wanted to send her to Michigan to the best doctor, one who had treated him, too, then she would go. She'd take whatever treatment given so she'd make Principal Washington proud. After getting to know him and Mrs. Washington, she wanted to open a school for those of her race, just like them.

Works Cited

- Addey, Melissa. "Beyond 'is it True?': The 'Playframe' in Historical Fiction." *New Writing (Clevedon, England)*, vol. 18, no. 4, 2021, pp. 421-433.
- Bewes, Timothy. "The Novel as an Absence: Lukács and the Event of Postmodern Fiction." *Novel: A Forum on Fiction*, vol. 38, no. 1, 2004, pp. 5-20.
- Brayfield, Celia, and Duncan Sprott. *Writing Historical Fiction: A Writers' and Artists' Companion*. 1st ed., Bloomsbury, 2014.
- Crosley, Sloane. *Someday, We'll Look Back on all of this and Write a Novel: Essay*. New York Times Company, New York, 2020. *ProQuest*,
<https://go.openathens.net/redirector/liberty.edu?url=https://www.proquest.com/blogs-podcasts-websites/someday-we-ll-look-back-on-all-this-write-novel/docview/2377630081/se-2>.
- Cuddon, J. A. (John Anthony). *A Dictionary of Literary Terms and Literary Theory*. 5th ed., Wiley-Blackwell, A John Wiley & Sons, Ltd., Publication, 2013.
- De Groot, Jerome. *The Historical Novel*. Routledge, 2010.
- Doody, Margaret Anne. *The True Story of the Novel*. Rutgers University Press, 1996.
- Dukes, Jessica. "What is Historical Fiction?" <https://celadonbooks.com/what-is-historical-fiction/>. Accessed 10 Feb. 2024.
- Gautam, Trishita, and Piyush K. Banerjee. "From Epic Characters to a Movie Transformation: Tracing the Journey of Beowulf from Old English Poetry to Contemporary Motion Picture." *Litinfinitive Journal*, vol. 2, no. 1, 2020, pp. 22-29.
- Hower, Jessica S. "'all Good Stories': Historical Fiction in Pedagogy, Theory, and Scholarship." *Rethinking History*, vol. 23, no. 1, 2019, pp. 78-125.

- Lukács, György. *The Historical Novel*. Beacon Press, Boston, 1963.
- Manshel, Alexander. *Writing Backwards: Historical Fiction and the Reshaping of the American Canon*. Columbia University Press, 2023.
- Mintz, Steven. "Why Historical Fiction Matters." *Inside Higher Ed*, Mar. 5, 2023, <https://www.insidehighered.com/blogs/higher-ed-gamma/why-historical-fiction-matters#>.
- O'Brien, Lee. "Telling Gaps and Domestic Tyranny: Georgette Heyer's Regency Romances." *Journal of Popular Romance Studies*, vol. 11, no. 1, 2022, pp. 1-19.
- Phelpstead, Carl, et al. *An Introduction to the Sagas of Icelanders*. University Press of Florida, 2020.
- Saxton, Laura. "A True Story: Defining Accuracy and Authenticity in Historical Fiction." *Rethinking History*, vol. 24, no. 2, 2020, pp. 127-144.
- Schmidt, Mark R. *Familiar Strangers: World Literature and Our Hearts*. Bedford/Macmillan/Hayden/McNeil, 2020, pp. 27-68.
- Shaw, Harry E. *The Forms of Historical Fiction Sir Walter Scott and His Successors*. Cornell University Press, 1983, <https://doi.org/10.7591/9781501723278>.
- Sheffer, Jolie A. "Introduction—Historical Fiction and the 1960s: Mediating the Past and Reimagining the Future." *Melus*, vol. 45, no. 4, 2020, pp. 1-21.
- Stevens, Anne H. *British Historical Fiction before Scott*. Palgrave Macmillan, 2010.
- Stocker, Bryony D. "'Bygonese' - is this really the Authentic Language of Historical Fiction?" *New Writing (Clevedon, England)*, vol. 9, no. 3, 2012, pp. 308-318.
- Stocker, Bryony D. "Don't Lie - a Methodology for Historical Fiction?" *New Writing (Clevedon, England)*, vol. 16, no. 3, 2019, pp. 322-335.

Young, Terrell A., and Barbara A. Ward. "Talking with Linda Sue Park: In the wake of her new release, *Prairie Lotus*, the Newbery Medalist joins us to discuss historical fiction, research, and racial prejudice." *Booklist*, vol. 117, no. 1-2, 1 Sept. 2020, pp. S8+. *Gale In Context: Biography*, link.gale.com/apps/doc/A637433720/BIC?u=vic_liberty&sid=summon&xid=672fdc47. Accessed 6 Feb. 2024.