

January 29, 1870

Rose crouched down in front of the young girl, sliding gloves onto her hands.

“We can’t be out long, Miss Ophelia.” Rose tugged the wool cloak around the child.

“Why, Mama?” Ophelia looked down at the layers of clothing covering her.

“Because it’s cold.” Rose hesitated for just a moment. “Besides, you know you’re not supposed to be calling me that.”

“That’s your name.” Ophelia frowned.

Rose laughed softly, smoothing the child’s bonnet. “You know my name is Rose, Miss Ophelia.”

Ophelia nodded. “Right. Mama Rose.”

Rose sighed. “Miss Ophelia...let’s take our walk.”

Ophelia took her hand as Rose led her out of the house.

They walked around the grounds slowly.

“Why am I wearing more than you?” Ophelia tilted her head.

Rose offered her a smile. “Because children get cold easier.”

Ophelia watched her breath fog the air. “Aren’t you cold?”

“I’m alright, child.” Rose tugged her shawl closed. “I’ve got my shawl.”

Ophelia frowned. “You should have more clothes on too.”

Rose chuckled. “This is how adults dress in the cold.”

Ophelia looked around at the people working in the yard. Her eyes landed on an overseer bundled up almost as much as Ophelia was.

She pointed at the man. “Then why is he wearing so much?”

Rose frowned as she followed Ophelia's finger to the overseer. "Miss Ophelia, you know it's rude to point."

Ophelia lowered her hand, narrowing her eyes at the woman. "You didn't answer my question."

Rose went quiet for a moment. "No, I suppose I didn't."

"Move along." An overseer interrupted them.

Ophelia frowned at the man. "We're already moving."

Rose pulled her hand gently. "Miss Ophelia."

"You heard me." The overseer narrowed his eyes at the pair.

Ophelia returned his glare.

"Miss Ophelia." Rose warned quietly.

"You're not the boss of me." Ophelia lifted her chin. "Mama Rose is."

Rose's mouth fell open.

The overseer scoffed. "Mama Rose?"

"She didn't mean—" Rose's voice turned frantic. "Sir, she didn't—"

A loud crack echoed across the yard as the back of the man's hand connected with Rose's cheek.

Ophelia looked up at Rose as Rose's hand covered her cheek.

Red drops fell from beneath her palm.

Before the adults could react, Ophelia's boot connected with the man's shin.

The overseer grunted, grabbing his shin. "You damn brat!"

"How do you like it?" Ophelia kicked his other shin. "You made her bleed!"

The man stumbled back, glaring at Rose as the yard fell silent.

"Miss Ophelia, please." Rose sat her hands on Ophelia's arms.

“No, he hurt you!” Ophelia tried to launch herself at the man.

A voice boomed across the yard. “What the devil is going on here?”

Rose’s shoulder tensed as she whispered. “Miss Ophelia.”

William stormed across the yard. “Ophelia Grace Beaumont, explain yourself.”

Ophelia turned to face her father. “He made Mama Rose bleed.”

“Who?” William narrowed his eyes.

Rose drew in a sharp breath.

Ophelia glanced at Rose quickly. “Miss Rose.”

“That’s better.” William sat his hand on her shoulder, turning her sharply to face the overseer. “That is no reason to attack this man, Ophelia.”

The overseer glared at Ophelia.

“You owe this man an apology.” William motioned to the overseer.

Ophelia frowned. “He owes Ma—Miss Rose an apology.”

William’s hand tightened on her shoulder. “Now, Ophelia.”

Ophelia looked from the man to Rose, who nodded once.

She sighed deeply, turning back to the overseer. “I’m sorry.”

“For?” William nudged her.

Ophelia rolled her eyes. “For kicking you.”

“Mister?” William pressed.

Ophelia huffed. “Mister Whitacker.”

“Good.” William cleared his throat. “Now, all together.”

Ophelia narrowed her eyes. “I’m sorry for kicking you, Mr. Whitacker.”

“Don’t do it again, Miss Ophelia.” The overseer smoothed his clothes.

“Don’t hit Mama again.” Ophelia muttered.

“What was that, Ophelia?” William looked down at his daughter.

Ophelia shook her head. “Nothing, Papa.”

“Good.” William released her shoulder, nudging her towards the house. “Now, go inside. You’ll take your lessons now.”

“Yes, Papa.” Ophelia made her way to the house slowly.

William waited until Ophelia was out of earshot before he turned to face Rose.

“Why is she still calling you that?” William hissed. “I’ve told you that behavior is unacceptable.”

“I’m sorry. I’ve corrected her, sir.” Rose kept her head down.

“Then perhaps you should correct her more firmly.” William cleared his throat. “Go tend to your duties, Rose.”

“Yes, sir.” Rose spoke quietly.

William glanced at the overseer. “If this continues, there will be consequences.”

Rose tensed. “Yes, sir.”

Rose rushed back to the house while William moved through the yard.

August 20, 1871

Ophelia hummed as she walked through the yard, holding Rose's hand. She looked around the yard until her eyes found a familiar boy.

"Mama, look!" Ophelia tugged her hand, pointing across the yard. "It's Henry."

"It is." Rose nodded. "He's working."

"I'm going to go say hi."

Before Rose could stop her, Ophelia had slipped her hand free and was running through the yard.

Henry faltered as he turned to grab a crate and spotted Ophelia.

"Get moving, boy." Mr. Whitacker shoved his shoulder.

Henry lifted the crate with a grunt as Ophelia stopped in front of him.

Ophelia looked between them. "Henry, why are you moving those?"

"He's working, Miss Ophelia." Mr. Whitacker snapped at her.

Ophelia frowned.

Henry's arms shook as he moved the crate to sit beside the wagon.

"Those look heavy." She motioned to the crates.

"I'm alright, Miss Ophelia." Henry walked past her to the stack of crates.

Ophelia met Mr. Whitacker's gaze. "Why aren't you working, Mr. Whitacker?"

"I am." Mr. Whitacker's jaw tensed.

Henry froze for a moment. "Miss Ophelia, please."

"No, you aren't. Henry's working." Ophelia narrowed her eyes.

"I'm sorry, Mr. Whitacker." Henry lowered his head as he lifted the next crate.

"What does Papa pay you for?" Ophelia crossed her arms.

Mr. Whitacker scoffed. "Excuse me?"

“You’re just standing.” Ophelia motioned towards him. “Papa shouldn’t pay you to stand.”

“Mind your manners, Miss Ophelia.” Mr. Whitacker’s nostrils began to flare.

“You’re not the boss of me.” Ophelia huffed. “Papa pays you. You should be moving those boxes.”

Henry nearly dropped the crate before catching it against his chest.

“Miss Ophelia!” Henry whispered. “Please go back to Mama.”

“Can’t even carry a crate proper?” Mr. Whitacker glared at Henry.

“You’re a lazy bully!” Ophelia pointed at Mr. Whitacker.

“I’m sorry, sir.” Henry sat the crate down on the pile. “I’ll be more careful.”

Mr. Whitacker clicked his tongue. “Come here, baby.” He grabbed Henry’s arm and began pulling him away.

“Let him go!” Ophelia stormed after them.

“Miss Ophelia, go inside, please. I’ll come see you later.”

The desperation in Henry’s voice made her steps falter.

Ophelia stopped, watching Mr. Whitacker pull Henry away.

A field hand nearby shook his head, mumbling under his breath. “You done it now, child.”

Ophelia frowned, turning to the man. “Done what?”

The field hand cleared his throat. “Nothing.”

“Then why’d you say it?” Ophelia tilted her head.

“Head on inside, Miss Ophelia.” The field hand nodded towards the house.

Ophelia narrowed her eyes at the man. “Only because Mama like you.” She trudged off towards the house.

The man chuckled to himself as she walked away. "Of course Rose likes me."

He returned to his work as the child disappeared inside.

Rose stopped beside him, resting a hand on her stomach. "Child's too fast for me anymore."

"Ain't many could keep up with that one." He offered Rose a soft smile.

She frowned as she looked towards the building Mr. Whitacker pulled Henry behind. "Couldn't hear much. Was it as bad as it seemed?"

His expression grew tense. "I won't lie to you, Rose. It wasn't good Mr. Whitacker ain't looked that mad in a while."

Rose shook her head. "It'll be a long night."

He swallowed hard. "Least he's got us."

"Yeah." Rose squeezed the man's hand once before heading inside.

She found Ophelia sitting by the window in her bedroom.

"You want to play with your toys?" Rose opened the toy chest only to find it empty.

Ophelia shook her head. "I want to play with Henry, Mama."

"Perhaps you could later." Rose swallowed the lump in her throat. "I can play with you now though."

Ophelia turned to look at her. "Why did Mr. Whitacker take him away? Henry didn't do anything."

Rose sighed. "I know he didn't do anything wrong, honey."

"Is he in trouble?" Ophelia moved to sit on her bed.

"That's enough talking about it, baby." Rose looked down. "Don't worry yourself with this."

“You’re worried.” Ophelia patted the bed.

Rose sat down beside her. “That’s because Henry’s my son.”

“He’s my friend.” Ophelia rested against her side. “I don’t want Henry in trouble.”

“I know, baby.” Rose wrapped her arm around Ophelia’s shoulders and pulled her close.

“I don’t like Mr. Whitacker. He’s mean.” Ophelia frowned.

Rose snorted softly. “The whole plantation knows you don’t like him.”

Ophelia pouted. “I wish Papa would make him go away.”

“Come on, honey. Let’s go get you washed up for supper.” Rose stood up, offering her hand to Ophelia.

“Alright, Mama.” Ophelia took her hand.

Ophelia laid in her bed, staring at the window.

Henry had never come to see her that night.

Then Mama hadn’t come to tuck her in.

Ophelia climbed out of bed and frowned as she looked through the window.

There was a light still lit in Mama’s quarters.

She pushed off the window, running downstairs as quickly and as quietly as she could manage.

Ophelia peeked her head out the back door, looking around to make sure there was no one to stop her.

She raced across the yard, stopping only when she reached Mama’s quarters.

“This is going to sting, baby.” Rose’s voice drifted through the door. “I’m sorry.”

Ophelia froze as she heard Henry suck in a sharp breath.

“Deep breaths, baby.”

Ophelia pushed the door open slowly. “Henry?”

He was laying face down on the pallet when he looked over at her.

The field hand from the yard sat beside Henry, brushing his fingers through the boy’s hair.

“Miss Ophelia.” Henry swallowed hard as he attempted to turn.

Rose knelt beside him, holding a small jar. “What are you doing out of bed, child?”

Ophelia moved deeper into the room. “What happened?”

“It’s nothing, Miss Ophelia.” Henry settled back onto the pallet.

Rose sat a hand on Ophelia’s arm, trying to turn her gently. But Ophelia’s gaze landed on the whelps on Henry’s legs.

“Did Mr. Whitacker do that?” Ophelia dropped to the ground beside him.

Henry looked down.

Ophelia turned to Rose. “What are you putting on him?”

Rose sighed as she resumed tending to Henry. “Salve.”

“Can I put some on him?” Ophelia tilted her head.

“No.” Rose shook her head. “Takes a long time to figure out how to be gentle with it, Henry.”

Ophelia frowned. “I wanna help Henry get better.”

“I’m alright, Miss Ophelia.” Henry tried to smile at her but winced when Rose touched the back of his legs again.

“No, you’re hurt.” Ophelia sat her hand on his arm. “And I want to help you stop being hurt.”

“You can hold the lantern.” Rose picked the lantern up off the floor, passing it to Ophelia. “I need to be able to see.”

“Yes, Mama.” Ophelia held the lantern up above Henry, leaning to watch Rose work.

Henry hissed softly in pain.

“I know, baby.” Rose whispered.

“Papa should get rid of Mr. Whitacker.” Ophelia announced. “We don’t need meanies like him around.”

The field hand sighed. “It don’t work like that, Miss Ophelia.”

“Why not?” She tilted her head.

“It just don’t.” Rose spoke softly. “Your pa likes him too much to get rid of him.”

Ophelia frowned. “Then I’ll get rid of him.”

The field hand let out a breath that was almost a laugh.

“That’s dangerous talk, Miss Ophelia.” Rose warned.

“Why?” Ophelia looked up at her. “He ought to know I don’t like him by now.”

“It’s just—” Rose sighed. “It’s the kind of thing that’s alright to think. But saying it can get people hurt.”

“Oh.” Ophelia looked down.

Rose brushed one hand through her hair gently. “Just don’t say it where anyone else can hear you.”

“Alright, Mama.” Ophelia nodded.

Rose turned back to tending to Henry as the moon rose higher in the sky.

September 8, 1872

Ophelia hummed softly as she stopped to pick flowers.

Mr. Whitacker narrowed his eyes at her across the yard.

She sniffed a freshly picked carnation as he approached her.

“Miss Ophelia, what are you doing out here unsupervised?” He raised an eyebrow at her.

Ophelia smiled at him. “Picking flowers.” She held a single carnation up for him.

“Would you like a carnation, Mr. Whitacker?”

He looked between her and the flower slowly. “What?”

“I picked it for you.” She held it higher. “They’re my favorite.”

Mr. Whitacker moved his hand from where it had been resting on his switch to take the flower from her. “Thank you, Miss Ophelia.”

She didn’t hesitate to reach her hand out as soon as he took the carnation.

Ophelia snatched his switch and took off running across the yard before he could react.

His hand moved to his side. “Miss Ophelia!” He took off after her.

Flowers blew out of her basket with every step.

“Miss Ophelia, give that back now!” He could feel every eye in the yard falling on him as he ran past.

Ophelia giggled as she turned to look at him. “Come get it, Mr. Whitacker.”

His jaw tensed as she began moving away from him again.

The nice field hand frowned as Ophelia drew closer. “Miss Ophelia, you shouldn’t be runnin’ with that. You’ll get hurt.”

Ophelia slowed down to a fast walk.

Mr. Whitacker let out a grunt as his foot landed in a hole. A sharp pain shot through his ankle. His hands shot out to catch his fall before his face could hit the ground.

The field hand looked between the hole and Ophelia. He sighed. "Child."

She smiled at him. "You like my new switch?"

He raised an eyebrow at her. "Your new switch?"

Mr. Whitacker hissed as he checked his ankle.

"Gave him a flower for it." Ophelia beamed.

The field hand's lips tugged up in the corners involuntarily. "Don't think he knew y'all were trading."

Mr. Whitacker stood up, his nostrils flaring as he looked around.

"That's it." He threw his hat to the ground, yelling. "I'm done. I quit!"

He began limping away as William stepped outside.

"What the devil is going on here?" William frowned at Mr. Whitacker approaching him.

"I quit!"

William's eyebrows raised. "You what? Why?"

Mr. Whitacker jabbed his chest with one finger. "Put your damn demon child on a leash before she kills somebody."

He left as William turned to Ophelia.

"Explain yourself now." William stormed towards her.

"He stepped in a hole." She pointed to the spot on the ground.

William blinked slowly. "Did you dig the hole?"

“He should’ve known it was there!” Ophelia threw her hands up. “I’ve been digging right there for weeks!”

“Weeks?” William looked back at the hole.

She nodded. “Every day. He watched me do it!”

William turned towards the field hand. “What happened?”

The man tensed. “He chased Miss Ophelia and stepped in a hole, sir.”

William raised an eyebrow. “Why’d he chase her?”

“Well, she seemed to think she was trading a flower for his switch, sir.” The man rubbed the back of his neck.

William took the switch from Ophelia. “Inside. Now.”

“Yes, Papa.” She stared at the ground in front of her as she headed towards the house.

He looked around. “Get back to work.”

Rose met Ophelia at the door. “What happened out there? Your pa’s sounding awful angry.”

“Mr. Whitacker quit.” Ophelia smiled.

“Reckon you had something to do with it?” Rose looked her over.

“He fell into my hole.” Ophelia shrugged. “After he chased me through the yard.”

“You set a trap.” Rose pinched the bridge of her nose. “Miss Ophelia, you cannot set traps for overseers like that.”

Ophelia tilted her head. “Why not? He’s gone now.”

Rose sighed. “You just can’t, honey.”

Ophelia’s ears perked up. “You’re not mad.”

Rose looked down at her. "If your pa asks, I am." She glanced out the window.

"He's coming, look upset."

"Yes, Mama." Ophelia whispered before trying to hide her smile.

William slammed the door when he entered the house, making them both jump.

He scowled at Ophelia. "Go to your room. You won't be having visitors."

Ophelia frowned. "For how long?"

"A week." William crossed his arms. "Now go."

She grumbled under her breath as she went upstairs.

Ophelia threw herself onto her bed when she made it to her room.