

HANNA'S PROMISE



A STORY OF GRACE AND HOPE

DAVID CLAIRE JENNINGS

with

JOAN AUSTIN

Hanna's Promise

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Author's website: www.davidclairejennings.com

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Photo of Hanna courtesy of Leroy Skalstad, Freeimages.com (portrait of Anne).

The John R. Drish House has been added to the National Register of Historic Places and is registered in the Alabama Register of Landmarks and Heritage. The drawing was captured in 1932. Its author was W. N. Manning. It was accessed through Wikimedia Commons.

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For those who came before and made a difference-

Abigail, Harriet, Dilsey and Rosa

Acknowledgments

The prequel to this novel, *After Bondage and War*, was its inspiration. The characters in that work taught us what we needed to know, drove us forward and compelled us to tell the rest of the story. In a generational cycle, the young ones from there become the old ones at the end of this sequel as the new generation lives their lives in America's continuing tumultuous historical times. As some leaves fall and others grow in their place, so too with the generations of flesh and blood, one dies and another is born.

The focal point of *After Bondage and War* was 1865, the end of the Civil War. For *Hanna's Promise*, 1865 is a retrospective reference point.

We end the story corporeally in Ohio where the last one ended but about 40 years later. Spiritually, the story ends simultaneously where it began in Alabama, not far in time or place from Faulkner's imaginary world in Mississippi.

Joan Austin's ear for the southern accent across class, race, region and time – her research into idiom and manner of speech of the many former slaves from the Federal Writers Project – assured authenticity and breathed life into our women's voices in Tuscaloosa and Mobile, Alabama and Mississippi in the late 19th century.

Of the many modern historians produced by Columbia University in the turbulent 1960's under the stern and liberal tutelage of the socialist zealot Robert Hofstadter, Alan Brinkley emerged relatively unscathed. He produced his historiography atypically evenhanded, balanced and without ideological agenda, much in the same manner as the broadcast journalists fading out of vogue at that time. Without the opportunity to have him directly

as a teacher, his writings and textbooks provided me an honesty that has kept me from tipping too far in either extreme direction. His *American History: Connecting With the Past, Fourteenth Edition* provides a sound launch point for exploration into any of the vagaries and back alleys of our past we may choose to pursue.

William Faulkner has left us a legacy of America's finest early 20th century writing from our country's own literary canon. Those of us who have had the fortitude to struggle with his enigma and brilliant literary shenanigans, have been rewarded with a richness rarely available to us from the many excellent but more common writers. For the full flavor of "southernness" in all its brutality and humanity in the late 19th and early 20th century, there is no equal. For serious fictional work, and literature at its finest for his readers, his *The Sound and the Fury* published in 1929 and *Absalom, Absalom!* published in 1936, exemplify his immense inspirational value for serious writers following him 80 years hence.

The tradition of American historical fiction has continued into our century. Kate Medina, Executive Editor at Random House recently spoke, as his personal editor and upon the occasion of his passing this year, of E.L. Doctorow and his novel, *The March*, published in 2005. In this, Edgar Doctorow wrote a fresh story of the tried-and-true topic of Sherman's march across Georgia to the sea. She spoke of his talent and humanity and the value of his contemporary writing

Whether it's called a novel or something else, all fictional work, if based on a particular period and its people and events, is historical fiction.

David Claire Jennings and Joan Austin

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Prologue

Long after the cruel war had ended, the Deep South was reeling from its devastation. Its white people were struggling to find a way out of their loss. Its black people were struggling to make a different and better life of their own. The land and infrastructure were destroyed. In their agricultural based economy, cotton continued as their mainstay cash crop. But the world market was declining as other foreign competitors reduced America's share.

Slavery was abolished. African Americans would never wear a slave collar and chains on their ankles and wrists again. They would never be lashed with a whip for saying the wrong word or for trying to learn to read or for leaving the plantation without permission. Their families would not be broken apart and their wives and daughters would not be raped by the slaveholders ever again.

The Republican reformers – the carpetbaggers from the North and scalawags from within the South – were two of the same kind of thing. Both groups were trying to force change in the Southern politics of the Democrats there who were trying to recoup their glorious way of life and undo the defeat of their beloved lost cause. The Southern redeemers there were looking for state and local legislation to circumvent the new 13th, 14th, and 15th Constitutional changes - the so-called Civil War Amendments – while trying to be re-admitted to the government of the Yankees in the Union Federal government up in Washington DC.

Often their adventures were motivated for both good purpose and self-gain. Often for the carpetbaggers, their tools were mendacity and duplicity. Many of them sought graft and enrichment through government control. For the scalawags, especially the vocal ones, like even former Confederate General James Longstreet, their fellow white southerners viewed them as

sellouts to their southernness and their great cause for their advocating the new Radical Republican ideas and changes for their country. The Civil War continued with words and politics. Some of the combatants had changed sides. While some lasting positive improvements in education resulted, it was mostly the result of rapid expansion of government services.

In the end, by 1877, they were threatened by the redeemers' violence and repulsed by the stronger southern Democrats. Reform was abandoned. The country once again looked toward the West. By the 1880's, the South fell into quiet desperation.

Share cropping and tenant farming provided something for the freedmen to survive. But they would be economically enslaved and join the poor whites in the meager, but best, agricultural system the South could devise. Bitterness, hatred and poverty would characterize the Deep South for generations to come. Racism would abound after the slaveholders and enslaved parted their ways. Laws would be passed to keep them separate and limit their freedom. But there were glimmers of hope for the races to live together in harmony.

The black Christian woman had come from Mobile, Alabama to McComb, Mississippi to care for the people and their children, keep their houses, and heal their ailing bodies and spirits. She was their Negress but she brought her faith and her love and it spread to those around her.

She was born in Tuscaloosa on a plantation in the sweltering heat of Alabama – born of a young slave woman brought there from another crueller plantation in Mississippi and conceived back there from a slave father lost to her when her mother had been sold.

She had been treated special there in Alabama, maybe out of pity or maybe because the owner was a more kindly man. But it was in the middle of America's time of greatest cruelty and human injustice, nearer the end of it before the great war. It was a hard time in the country.

She grew up as a fatherless child with a loving mother until her mother had been killed. Now, as a complete orphan in the depth of a human tragedy, it seemed as though God had not noticed her, wasn't paying attention or didn't care in that time of America's deepest sinful shame when His people had turned their backs to His intentions. That was true of them, but not Him.

With the help of some kind older people, she was able to survive her childhood and overcome the horrific events of those early years.

God kept His promise when her mother had been killed so long ago; for He was keenly interested in those troubled times and this young life.

Her impact on the people in her life would seem disproportionate to her humble status. Perhaps it was just because of that that her life was so profound.

The South soldiered on long after its men had surrendered. Ignored and on its own, it rebuilt itself and its people endured on its American land.

Illustrations



Hanna Drish in McComb, Mississippi in 1895



John R. Drish House in Tuscaloosa, Alabama



Historical Oberlin College, Cleveland, Ohio



The Ashford Family Ohio Homestead in the 1920's

One – The Twins

Josiah rose from his seat, walked to the podium and shook the speaker's hand. He looked out at the assembly, paused to look across the room and smiled. He stood bolt upright and with his left thumb in his suspenders and right hand raised in the air, spoke to his colleagues.

His face turned to its characteristic resolve as he spoke eloquently and clearly:

"Speaker, esteemed colleagues, we find ourselves at a crucial moment. What we decide today will affect our constituents - our people, our citizens, our families - for the remainder of their lives and for the lives of their descendants to follow.

The great Ordinance of 1787 gave us a plan and guidance to follow. It provided land for schools. The schools were built. But education has been left to us - the great state of Ohio to resolve for ourselves. Much has changed since then; much has run afoul. I will speak to you about that today. We have the opportunity, the authority and the responsibility to change that, correct that and rectify that."

The room was silent in rapt attention. He continued:

"The intent of our founders was clear. We would establish a great nation to the extent of its boundaries, not even known at that time, where free men would live their lives and prosper under the grace of God, as no nation had ever done before."

Loud cheers and applause broke out and drowned Josiah's words. The speaker rapped his gavel for several moments and spoke out, "Attention! Attention! Call to order!"

The room returned to silence and Josiah continued to speak:

The Twins

"Many of our aspirations have come to pass to fulfill our original ideals. We have turned around the subversions of our southern fellow citizens with the sacrifice of the blood and treasure of our people. Abraham Lincoln brought us to that eventuality and shall ever be remembered for the salvation and redemption of our nation."

The room remained silent in anticipation. He continued:

"Today we have many laws establishing the rights of property owners and for our citizens to vote and hold public office. Our schools are flourishing, our children are benefitting from this, and our country is improving."

They waited for his next words:

"But there is more to be done. There is always more to be done. We will never achieve perfection, but we must strive for it, reach up for it, as Americans and God loving human beings.

We have before us SR403. It will guarantee equal access to higher education for all our children without regard to the color of their skin. It will be based on the content of their character and our character. Surely, honor and integrity will compel us to pass this as the right thing to do. I urge you to vote for it in the affirmative."

Applause broke out one last time as Josiah returned to his seat. Assembly bill SR403 was passed by a narrow margin. It ratified and finalized the senate bill that preceded it. Citizens of all races would attend Ohio's educational institutions. Mary and the children understood that Josiah had played an important part in this change. They were proud of him.

After Bondage and War, Josiah Ashford

The Twins

David and Josena Ashford were born on May 17th in 1870 as the twins of Josiah and Mary Custis Ashford. David was five minutes older than Josena. They were raised in Hamilton, Ohio and for years they had heard the stories from their father, his white friend David and their mother about the past – slavery, the Civil War and failed Reconstruction. They had heard that there was an older half-sister from their father’s tragic first marriage in Mississippi.

The twins’ names were chosen with care and purpose when they were born. Josiah had wanted to preserve important memories from the past. His wife Mary understood this, and because she loved him so, she lovingly agreed to his wishes for her children. It was not her history, but it was his.

For David Ashford, it was Josiah’s abiding friendship with David Wexley, the Union soldier from Baltimore. He had first met him in Natchez at the edge of the Big Muddy when David strolled over to him and asked him who he was.

Josiah had walked over there, just emancipated from the plantation Savannah Oaks nearby to the east. David had walked much farther from the east, just released from the Confederate prison camp called Andersonville in southwest Georgia. By either pure happenstance, or divine providence, they arrived there together the same afternoon within a couple hours of the same time. This chance meeting had profoundly altered their lives. It had set their whole lives on a trajectory of redemption and fulfillment. David would never forget their history or the history of his country.

For Josena Ashford, it was her father’s loving sad memory of his first wife, Josena Taylor Ashford and his lost daughter whose life and name he did know. Her father had had a brief marriage when he was a slave in Mississippi. She had been taken away and killed

The Twins

on another plantation in Alabama. It was a poignancy Josena would never forget, as though she had lived the life of her namesake – as though it had been her own life.

As fraternal twins, they had a similar general look about them. They were close comrades of thought throughout their whole lives. But from there they departed.

David grew to be tall and lanky. He was taller than his father but not so big and robust – more wiry. He had a sharp mind and a thirst for learning. After he had done that – learned – he became professorial. He was contemplative and reflective, but once his mind was clear, he would launch into long lectures to teach you what he knew and wanted you to know. He was always careful and skillful to avoid unnecessary confrontation if he thought it served no purpose. He was generally affable and gregarious.

Sometimes he would miss the mark, but was gracious when someone he respected pointed him in the right direction. That would be his sister.

Josena grew to be short and heavy – some would say dumpy. But she was not frowsy. She may have had to look up at you, but was always put together and immaculate, maybe elegant in spite of herself. She had a fat elegance once you got to know her if that makes any sense. It was about her mind too.

She was smart as a whip and self-assured. She never suffered fools gladly and would rip into you if she thought you were misguided or ignorant. David had to hold her back on many occasions for her own good and the good of the circumstance.

The Twins

Together they reminded you of Abraham and Mary Todd Lincoln, had they not been a brother and sister of color from a more modern time.

They grew up together on a parallel path and supported each other as the alter egos that they were.

The twins began their college attendance in 1887 at Miami of Ohio University in nearby Oxford. The college had been built on land provided by the Northwest Ordinance. George Washington signed for the land purchase from the Miami Indian tribe and the village of Oxford was laid out in the college township. The original purpose of the school was to train teachers, so it was referred to as a normal school.

They took introductory level courses there permitted under a new pilot program for Negroes that showed promise. It was a program urged by their father, Ohio State Congressman Josiah Ashford. But the university had no intention of conferring degrees on Negroes. It was too soon for that precedent and they weren't going to be the first. It wouldn't be until 1905 before Nellie Craig would graduate there as a teacher and the first African American.

When Josie and David learned that they would never be permitted to graduate, they brought their concern to their father. Josie told him the program was a sham. She was more emotional about injustices than David and became more easily outraged.

Josiah was upset, but ever the pragmatist, he counseled them to apply to Oberlin College up near Cleveland. This prestigious college founded by Presbyterian abolitionists would provide them opportunity for any degrees they wished to pursue. Miami of Ohio's time for equal treatment of the races had not arrived in time for his children. Oberlin was more established than Miami and

The Twins

offered the twins a broader selection of courses and degrees. It had worked out for the best.

Josie would never forget the slight she felt from the treatment she and David had received at Miami of Ohio, but would someday become a prominent professor there. She became more pragmatic as she matured.

At Oberlin, providence was kind to the Ashfords. Despite its abolitionist foundation, Oberlin was prominent as a Protestant conservatory of music with a white majority and few blacks.

David and Josena were a curiosity. They were different in the eyes of most of the student body. But as a curiosity, their classmates were drawn to them, not viewed as people to be avoided.

They were recognized as progeny of a prominent family with a father a powerful politician in the Ohio government. And they were Ohioans like Grant from Point Pleasant, the former general and president who had just passed away five years ago. No one viewed them as ignorant Negro farmers from Mississippi or Alabama.

David had a good sense of this and used his affable nature to form many friendships with his white classmates. Josena learned too that her father's advice would be fruitful in forming relationships. They were colored for certain, but in this environment, that could be advantageous. They became that best of all things in college – popular.

When they stood beside each other, it was humorous – two such uneven fence posts. “How could they be twins?” their classmates wondered.

The Twins

Their campus life grew to a point where they could discuss race openly, and they did so through many a long night of the brutal harsh winters near Cleveland along the southern edge of Lake Erie.

When David spoke of history, they wondered why it was not he, rather than the professor, standing at the front of the classroom.

Josena organized and led an all-woman string quartet to feature the beloved works of Mozart. Her second violin, cello and viola players from Illinois, New York and Maryland were young passionate white girls. And how they loved Mozart. Their music sparkled and filled their artistic souls. When Josena put her bow to the strings of her violin, she fairly took their breaths away. She held them speechless in rapture. Their throats tightened and their eyes shone.

Their college life was gratifying and it was painfully sad when they graduated and had to leave.

After they had graduated college and remained in their home area for a few years, they decided they wanted to travel into the Deep South to see what it had become now. They had learned in college the murmurings of an emergent movement for social justice and civil rights still denied to so many Americans.

And just maybe they might find their lost older half-sister who had been spoken about in such mysterious, almost mystical and even mythical, ways. Their sister's existence was an enigma. No one knew about her with any certainty.



David Ashford was smart. And he was thoughtful and wise beyond his years. He learned early how to observe those around

The Twins

him and how to gain understanding. He learned from his father and mother and from his father's friend, Uncle David. He absorbed all the knowledge available to him.

At Oberlin College he learned about history. He knew that those that didn't know history could not think historically. Without that training, it would be difficult to understand the world and its meanings.

David learned that history study is a discipline that approached understanding like viewing the layers of an onion as they are peeled away. He learned about all the important facts – the events in the Classic, Old World and American histories. With this comes the understanding of the causes and outcomes, as event leads to event in succession. And with those events are the people positioned in power to drive the events – the game-changers. These are the facts, the outer layer of the onion. There is not much in doubt or dispute here. When assembled together, they form the first layer – the information.

With thought, discussion and reflection, David gained insights into the ideas of history as the next layer becomes revealed. Certainly personal perspective and bias begins to creep in with this step, but information becomes knowledge. He is a black man – an African American son of a former slave – and nothing would change that.

Finally, the ideas he considered are merged together to reveal the meanings. Individuals depart to different conclusions here as more perspective is invariably applied. But here, in this inner layer, knowledge ends with wisdom. His college education was more profound for him than some of his classmates because of his experiences in his formative years.

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He came to understand that for many, truth is the facts that they choose to love. He knew that it is a mistake to look back at a period in the past and base truth on ideas and values of the present. Only by placing yourself in that past period can true understanding of those past motives, beliefs, events, causes and outcomes be gained. The truth is for those past people, their truth, not the truth of the observer many years after. David understood this as the purpose of history study. It helped him understand the present.

Josena had attended Oberlin College with David and graduated with her brother. She had studied the arts and the humanities. This brought a different perspective to her intelligence. Hers was based on sociology and understanding the nature of human kind.

She studied violin and became an accomplished musician. From the classics of Beethoven, she gravitated to the old sweet American tunes as Jefferson had played them at home in Monticello.

She was a black woman and understood she was different when white people looked at her with the prejudice of Social Darwinism, convinced she was inherently inferior. But she knew better and never suffered fools gladly. She used a sharp tongue when circumstance went beyond her limits.

David and his twin sister Josena had grown up on the Ashford estate in a life of comfort, but not one of ease. There on their land, the successful Ashford Furniture Company assured the family's wealth. But they were black and never at ease.

The region surrounding the town of Hamilton had seen progress in its rural economy and in its societal improvement just in the two decades from 1870 to 1890 as the twins grew to adulthood. It would take many decades more before full civil rights and social

The Twins

justice would be realized. But it would come sooner than in the South.

Racial harmony was an entirely different matter. It couldn't be legislated or forced. It had to come with the change of hearts. Old attitudes had to be unlearned. After the chains of slavery had been broken, the chains of hate remained. The twins knew this and were attuned to it more than their parents.

Racial prejudice was to be found everywhere. It troubled Josena more than David. He listened to her impassioned arguments with their father. Her emotional outbursts to the great man were common in their family life.

"White men are ignorant father. They have no basis for their stupidity", she said.

Josiah, with his wisdom, tried to convince her that her attitude would never resolve it or change it.

He told her, "Never bow or scrape. You are entitled to your pride. You must maintain your integrity. But if you want to change their hearts, you have to kill them with kindness – but by using your intelligence. It takes time. I have seen it work in my life. You know I have made progress in the legislature with the white men I have worked with there. It wasn't just about convincing them to pass legislation. It was also about winning their respect."

And also, "My sweet, beautiful brilliant girl, remember always with pride, our relationship is special because your name is the same as the brave slave woman that was once my wife."

She nodded in tacit agreement. It was something more she would have to learn.

The Twins

Right from the start, David was reflective and thoughtful; Josena was reactive, impulsive and passionate. Both were resolute.

Two - Hanna

With a clarity of understanding and resignation Joe said, "Yeah, it's too late now for me to find her. But how can I forget her? I can never forget her. As much as my heart aches, I must find comfort in knowing that I have a daughter who was the result of my love for Josie. I can only pray that she will have the kind giving heart of her mother, and that God blesses her life."

"She will Joe, God knows she will."

After Bondage and War – Josiah Ashford and David Wexley

She was born on the Drish Plantation in Tuscaloosa, Alabama in 1856, six months after her mother was brought there and eight years before Josena would be accidentally killed there during the slave revolt. John Drish and his wife had treated her kindly, as they had her mother when she had been bought and brought there.

John Drish gave her her name, Hanna Drish, even though her mother had been Josena Ashford. Hanna's father, Josiah Ashford, knew that his lost wife had had a baby girl before Josena was killed. He lived in the North and was never able to find her. He knew about her but never knew her.

Little Hanna was raised as a house servant like her mother had been. She was a happy baby, not as light in color and without the pristine beauty of her mother. But her little heart and pure soul was all Josena. Her smiling face brought happiness to the Drish household. Without any children of their own, they loved her as their own.

Hanna

She grew up with the other slave children in the household and on the plantation. There was something bright and spiritual about her – like the glow from the Alabama sunset. It touched the heart of those that knew her. She reached out to others in her special childish way.

Following her mother's lead, Hanna went to work and learned how to help out in the big house and minister to the slaves in their cabins. Together they tended the sick.

As she grew older, she began to ask a lot of questions as children do. She wanted to know who her daddy was, and where he was. Didn't she have a daddy like everyone else?

Josena would hold her close and smother her against her breast. She sang lullabies to her softly, clearly, sweetly:

*Them that's got shall have
Them that's not shall lose
So the Bible said and it still is news
Mama may have, Papa may have
But God bless the child that's got his own
That's got his own*

and:

*Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.
Swing low, sweet chariot,
Coming for to carry me home.*

*I looked over Jordan, and what did I see
Coming for to carry me home?
A band of angels coming after me,*

Hanna

Coming for to carry me home.

*Sometimes I'm up, and sometimes I'm down,
Coming for to carry me home.
But still my soul feels heavenly bound,
Coming for to carry me home.*

*The brightest day that I can say,
Coming for to carry me home.
When Jesus washed my sins away,
Coming for to carry me home.*

*If you get there before I do,
Coming for to carry me home.
Tell all my friends I'm coming there too,
Coming for to carry me home.*

Hanna learned very young that there is so much beauty, solace, forgiveness and truth in faith.

Josena whispered through Hanna's tears that she had a wonderful daddy but he wasn't there with them.

When Hanna grew older, she stopped asking about her father because she saw it made her mother very sad. Hanna had an instinct about people and their feelings. She was like an old soul that had seen so much of life. She tried hard and learned how to make people happy. But for her, it came naturally. She didn't understand yet that God was inside her and working through her.

Hanna noticed the times her mother seemed to be off in another world, one of memories of her life past. During those moments her mother would seem to be silently praying or quietly crying. She

Hanna

intuited that there had been great pain and loss in her mother's life.

Not wanting to see her mother so sad, she would often do something silly to try to make her laugh and forget. Most times she was successful and lifted her mother's spirits. Hanna was learning how to love and make people happy. She possessed a calm and quiet maturity and a wisdom associated with someone much older.

When she was seven years old, on one evening when the day's work was done and Hanna and Josena were alone, her mother drew her into her arms and holding her tight said, "Hanna, time I'se tole you somethin' about your fathah 'n wheres we's lived. But when I'se done, we's nevah talk 'bout it agin. You understan' chile?"

Hanna was surprised and a little scared. Her mother had never spoken to her like this before. She could see the sadness in her mother's eyes, but at last maybe some of her questions would be answered.

"Yass, Momma" she replied and waited for her mother to speak.

Josena opened her heart as she spoke, "Your fathah was a wunnerful man. I'se love him from de minut' I'se sees him. He's handsum 'n very smarts – like's you he's question everthin'."

"We jump de broom 'n be marry by de Savannah Oaks Massa. We's live ina small cabin. I'se work in de house 'n your fathah, Josiah, he be a carpenter on de plantation. My lands, you's shoulda seen sum de beautiful furn'ture he make fo' the big house!"

She paused a moment as if deciding how much to tell her young daughter. She had never talked about her life at Savannah Oaks,

Hanna

preferring to enjoy the love and affection she received from the Drishs than to remember the hatred of Rebecca and the betrayal of Marcus who sold her away from Josiah.

But Hanna was getting restless, so she continued her story.

“You’s look mo’ likes him than me. He’s a big heart ‘n a lotta faith ‘n de Lord. I’s done tole you, he’s very smart; he’s even teached hissself to read”, she said smiling quietly to herself. “ ‘N he done it wid books I’s smuggle out uv de Massa’s house.”

Like every good mother, she didn’t want to burden her child with some of the painful and grownup truths about her own life. So she didn’t tell Hanna that Marcus Taylor, the Massa, was her father who had raped her mother, and how hurt and betrayed she felt by her father selling her. She only wanted Hanna to feel loved and protected.

Hanna listened closely and, as an intelligent child, she had another question.

“But momma, where my daddy? Why ain’t he be heah wid us?”

The tears flowed quietly down Josena’s cheeks as she answered, “He don’t knows I’s havin’ a baby when I’s sole ‘way from Savannah Oaks. Iffen he’s knows ‘bout you, he’s very proud uv you, justs Is’e am. You such kindheart’ ‘n lovin’ girl. I’s knows you always makes me proud, ‘n him too iffen he’s knows ‘bout you.”

Josena and Hanna sat holding each other quietly for a while. Josena didn’t know why she had chosen this time to tell Hanna about Josiah, but she just had a feeling that it was the right time. Maybe God had chosen this time to move His plan along with these human beings.

Hanna

“Now ‘member Hanna, we’s ain’t nevah goin’ to talk ‘bout this agin, but you’s ole enuf to knows about your wunnerful fathah ‘n whys I sumtime get sad when I’se think’s ‘bout him ‘n how much we loves each othah.”

In another year Hanna’s mother would be gone and hell would be on its way to the Drish plantation.



As the war drew to a close in 1864, Hanna was eight years old. Dr. John Drish, and his wife Sarah, brought her to live with a friend in Mobile, Alabama for her upbringing, safekeeping and wellbeing. She was raised there in their mansion where she helped them keep their house and was a companion to their children. She was a member of their white family.

Hanna helped out around the household working with the servants. But she was more like an adopted daughter growing up in her parents’ home. She had her own room on the second floor family suite with Ken, Abigail and their two daughters. As was the custom, the live-in household servants had their quarters on the third floor apart from the family.

One night when she was 13 in 1869, she was sleeping in her quiet room. She was having a dream of vivid proportions. She suddenly awakened to the sound of soft beautiful music. In the room, dimly lit with the sputtering light of the oil lamp on the table, a heavenly visage appeared. He was imposing, very tall and magnificent in his warrior raiment.

“Hanna, do not fear. I am Michael from the South of Fire. God has sent me to meet you.”

Hanna

The Archangel of God's second phylum smiled at her and his strikingly handsome African features reassured her. His beautiful coffee colored skin was aglow and lit the room. It was so bright, it was like looking at the sun as it sets on the horizon in the southern sky.

Hanna was calm and at peace. She waited to hear his message.

Michael spoke clearly without equivocation as he began, "God has watched you every day since you were born on the plantation. He was with you the day your mother Josena died. He guided the Drish family and compelled them to single you out and love you."

She sat on the edge of her bed speechless in rapture and awe.

"God knows your pure spirit and has chosen you for a special life to serve Him by ministering to the black and white people of the South. He knows that they are hurting, disheartened, bitter and hateful. He wants you to work through Him and dedicate your life to heal them."

She nodded her head but couldn't believe what was happening.

"This is God's covenant with you Hanna. He will keep you safe from harm from all humans for the rest of your life. You will never marry or have children or a family of your own. Your promise to Him will be to serve Him always by spreading His spirit of true love to all white people and black people you come to know."

He waited for her understanding and response.

"I will", she said simply.

Hanna

Michael smiled at her and she felt God's warmth through His powerful messenger. He came over to her and held her in his arms.

"God loves you child", he said and disappeared from the room.



Hanna grew up to become a strong woman of purpose who was courageous and resilient. She had no fear of people because she believed God's promise as Michael had spoken it.

Her appearance was plain. Her face had none of the soft smooth beauty of her mother's. It was creased with the lines of care and concern. She had the stern serious expression of resolve like her father. It wasn't angry or unfriendly, but rather formed from the passion of her mind. It was an unfamiliar look for kindness. She lived the words of Micah – act justly, love mercy, walk humbly with your God.

Three - The Drishs and the Blanchards

John Drish came from Virginia. He was born there in Loudoun County near Arlington and the Potomac River in 1795. The county was established from Fairfax County in 1757. George Washington was still President then and it would be two more years before his Vice President, John Adams would assume the Presidency. The District of Columbia was not established and it wasn't until 1800 that Adams became the first President to live there in the President's House. His rival and Vice President, Thomas Jefferson would take over later that year.

He studied medicine at Harvard University in Massachusetts and met Kenneth Blanchard there. Kenneth had studied business. He had come there from his home in Charleston, South Carolina.

John and Ken had much in common and struck up a close friendship from the moment they met. They were both southerners, chums in college and graduated the same year. They were southern gentlemen in the truest and best sense.

Certainly they behaved with refined gentility and courtly manners. They spoke slowly at the same melodious pace, taking their time as though the words really mattered as they flowed from their lips like sweet molasses. The lilt from the rise and fall of their intonation was seductive to the ear with a lightness like the scented breeze through the pines in Virginia and the ebb and flow of the tidewaters in Carolina. That is how it sounded in America. But its roots came long before from their forbearers back in the British Isles.

John and Ken were kind, as well as charming, but never gave a thought about the immorality of keeping human property. Long before them their society had ceased caring about that in the South, and few cared about it in the North either. The incongruity with their Christianity was not apparent.

(material omitted)

When John came to Tuscaloosa in 1822, he built a most unusual mansion on his 450 acre property and operated a most unusual plantation business. He was a widower and came to Tuscaloosa as a man of sorrows. He eventually married Sarah Owen McKinney, a wealthy widow herself in 1835.

(material omitted)



The Blanchards were Catholics. Their people had come to Charleston from the Gulf Coast French. When they settled there, it was an immutable fact that they were an inferior breed of Christians in the eyes of the Anglo Saxons. The Carolina people paid more mind to what kind of a Christian you were, not how good of one you were.

After college in Massachusetts, Ken moved back home for a brief while. Then he moved to the Gulf shores to seek his fortune in business. He settled in Mobile nestled in its bay up river from the Gulf.

Ken met Abigail before the war up in Virginia. She had been John's first wife's best friend and was introduced to him through

that relationship. When they moved to Mobile, the Blanchards maintained a long distance friendship with the Drishs up in Tuscaloosa.

(material omitted)



As all men are, they were a product of their time. But their fundamental goodness would be their oar to steer them through the currents and eddies of an uncertain future.

The Drishs and the Blanchards had adjusted to the new realities. They were not selfish and hateful people. Their kindnesses and generosityes made life better for the extended families that were part of them. People like them would be the hope for the South as the changes came in the future generations.

John died in 1867 at age 72. He had weathered the storm of war, and its ruin, and managed to help with the rebuilding. He was still solvent from the financial ravages and managed to leave Sarah a life of comfort and ease in his absence. He had fallen down a staircase and was accidentally killed. Sarah lived until 1884. The folklore about them and their home spoke of ghosts and hauntings that would persist for decades.

Ken missed him and their frequent visits between Tuscaloosa and Mobile.



Characters

Yahweh, Jehovah, God, the Creator of the Universe

Michael – Archangel from the South of Fire

Hanna Drish – freedwoman from Drish plantation, daughter of Josiah and Josena Ashford

Josiah Ashford - slave and freedman, Savannah Oaks plantation

Josena Taylor Ashford - Josiah's wife and a slave, Savannah Oaks and Drish plantations

Mary Custis Ashford - Josiah's 2nd wife

David Custis Ashford, Josena Custis Ashford - Josiah's children, Hanna Drish's half siblings

David Wexley – friend of the Ashfords

Dr. John and Sarah Drish – Owners of Drish plantation near Tuscaloosa, Alabama

Kenneth and Abigail Blanchard – Wealthy merchants in Mobile, Alabama

Nora Travers, Hanna's friend

Elizabeth Jefferson – David Ashford's wife

Sam Jefferson – Elizabeth's father

Crista and Hans Hannon – migrants to Ashford, Ohio

Locations

Hamilton, Ohio – Ashford family farm and estate

Tuscaloosa, Alabama - John Drish Plantation

Mobile, Alabama – Hanna Drish’s adopted home

Montgomery, Alabama – First capital of the Confederacy

Atlanta, Georgia – Industrial center of the South

McComb, Mississippi - town where Hanna settled

Character and Historical Timeline

1795 - John Drish is born in Virginia

1807- Marcus Taylor is born in Savannah

1809 - Rebecca Stanley is born in Charleston

1820 - Missouri Compromise

1822 - John Drish came to Tuscaloosa and bought 450 acre property

1829 - Josiah Ashford is born on a Missouri plantation

1832 - David Wexley is born in Baltimore

1837- Josena is born on Savannah Oaks plantation

1837 - Drish House completed

1852 - Marcus bought Josiah for his Savannah Oaks plantation

1853 - Josiah and Josena marry on Savannah Oaks

1854 - The Kansas-Nebraska Act

1856 - Josena is sold from Savannah Oaks to Drish plantation

1856 - Hanna, Josena's daughter, is born on Drish plantation

1860 - Lincoln elected President, South Carolina secedes

1861 - The Civil War breaks out

1864 - Josena is killed on Drish plantation

1864 - Hanna, age 8 is sent to the Blanchard family in Mobile, Alabama to raise her and care for her

1865 - Lee surrenders to Grant at Appomattox, April 9th

1865 - Lincoln assassinated in Ford's theater, April 14th

1865- Joe Johnston surrenders to Sherman at Durham Station NC, April 26th

1865 - 13th Amendment passed abolishing slavery

1865 - Josiah is freed and meets David Wexley in Natchez, Mississippi

1866 - KKK supported by Confederate General Nathan Bedford Forrest to terrorize the South

1867 - John Drish died in an accidental fall

1868 - Josiah meets Mary Custis in Hamilton, Ohio

1869 - Josiah and Mary give birth to twins – David Custis Ashford and Josena Custis Ashford

1869 - Hanna, age 13 meets the Archangel, Michael in her Mobile, Alabama home

1877- Post-war reconstruction abandoned

1881 - Marcus dies in McComb, Mississippi

1882 - Hanna, age 26 comes to McComb and cares for old crazy Rebecca

1884 - Sarah Drish died

- 1887 – Public schools in Ohio are integrated
- 1888 - Rebecca dies, Hanna buries her
- 1892 - The twins, David and Josena graduate from Oberlin College
- 1898 - Spanish American war (David is 29)
- 1900 - The twins, age 31 travel south, retrace some of Josiah and David's old route
- 1900 - The twins unite with Hanna, age 44 in McComb
- 1900 - Telephone transmission extends across and between major cities
- 1900 - David Wexley dies in Aspen, Colorado
- 1900 - The twins return to Hamilton with Hanna and for David Wexley's burial
- 1903-1909 - Wright brothers in Dayton, Ohio develop flying machine
- 1906 - Drish House converted to a school, Drish property subdivided
- 1906 - Josiah dies in Hamilton, Ohio
- 1906 - Hanna gets close to Mary and cares for her

1907 – David runs Ashford Furniture, Josena (38) attends Miami of Ohio for her master’s degree

1908 - Henry Ford introduces first viable gasoline powered automobile

1910 – Josena introduces Peggy Jefferson to David

1912 - Woodrow Wilson elected President, social Darwinist racist who liked Birth of a Nation

1912 – David (43) marries Peggy Jefferson (34)

1915 – David and Peggy have a son

1915 - The Birth of a Nation movie debuts

1917 - The United States enters World War I

1917 - David enlists in U.S. Army as a correspondent with 93nd division under BG Roy Hoffman

1917 - Mary dies while David is overseas, Josena, Peggy and Hanna bury Mary

1918 - David returns from the war and reunites with Peggy, his son (3) and sisters

1918 - David and Josena again revitalize and run Ashford Furniture Company

1918-1942 – Hanna (62-86) serves the community and becomes a legendary figure for unification and harmony

1920 - 19th Amendment ratified for woman's suffrage

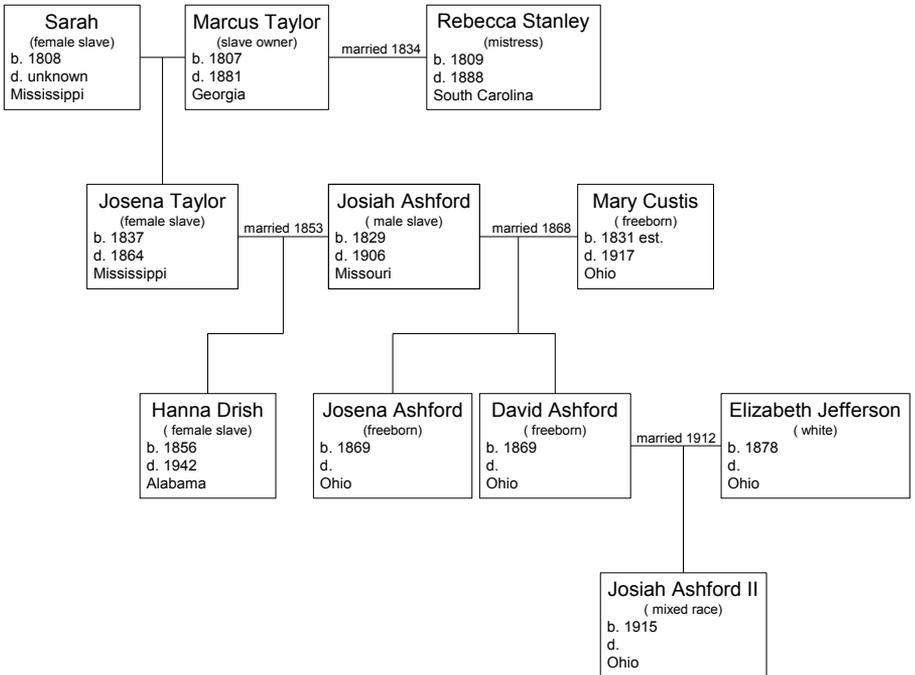
1925 – The Scopes Monkey Trial in Dayton, Tennessee

1942 - Hanna dies at 86, David and Josena are 73 with her in Hamilton, Ohio

1968 – Martin Luther King, Jr. assassinated in Memphis, Tennessee

1968 – Josiah Ashford II, David's son, frequents Miami of Ohio Campus

Ashford Family Tree



(end of sample)