

[Lucindia Washington](#)

Interview with Lucindia Washington

—*Alice S. Barton*

Little black Cindy skipped along the narrow path that led to the Spring House. In her hand she swung an empty cedar pail that she was soon to fill with cool, fresh milk. She entered the small glade overhung with willow trees and spread with soft grass, and gazed at the sparkling water of the spring as it caught the beams of sunlight coming through the trees and reflected them in myriads of little points. Shadows of the waving leaves danced over the ground and up the side of the stone Spring House. How cool and nice it was here, she thought. Gentle breezes rustled the limbs of small saplings and quietly stirred the long grass along the upper part of the branch.

A young rabbit hopped from a little clump of bushes and Cindy watched him as the small creature drank thirstily from the crystal water. Occasionally, the bunny would lift his head as if warned by a slight sound, but in a moment she saw him fold back his delicate ears and once more dip his small mouth into the babbling water.

After quenching his thirst, the rabbit hopped a few feet away and nibbled on a wisp of tender grass. Cindy was as still as a statue as she watched the procedure. "Dat's de cutest little bunny I ever seed," she said to herself. "I wish I could ketch him." But Cindy knew that she could not catch a rabbit, so she was content to stand in the shadow of a sycamore and gaze eagerly at the animal, nibbling the grass.

Suddenly, without warning, Cindy's eyes protruded from their sockets with an expression of fear. Slipping noiselessly through the green undergrowth she saw a giant rattler gliding slowly toward the young rabbit. She wanted to cry out, but she was afraid; afraid of attracting the rattler's attention toward her. She was deathly afraid of snakes. Since babyhood, she had harbored a growing fear of them. If Cindy had been still before this time, she now became a frozen image. It would not have been apparent that she was even breathing. So frightened was she of the snake that her whole body broke out in a profuse perspiration. Her eyes were glued to the tremendous brown monster which, without the slightest sound, oozed deftly toward its victim. Cindy was hypnotized! The snake seemed to hold her in a strange spell. Slowly, inexorably he moved entirely out of the undergrowth and was now weaving on the clear ground. He approached the rabbit within a distance of three feet and began to carefully form himself in a deadly coil. Cindy saw every movement. She saw each diamond on its brown back; each scale of its crawling skin; each lash and point of its tongue; the whiteness of its breast, the large track that it had made in the sand. She watched its eyes gleam, expressionless and ominous. She gazed at the deadly mouth as it slowly began to open. She was aware of the first appearance of the two death-like fangs pointing downward. She saw the ten-buttoned rattle stand erect. She saw it quiver; shake; sound. She saw the rabbit turn with fear. She saw the strike; the sinking of the fangs into the soft, brown fur. She watched the rabbit give an ephemeral struggle; witnessed the brief pitiful look in the bunny's eyes and at last saw the mouth sink into the small belly and draw the last breath of life away.

The experience was more than the little girl could stand. Cindy was now in a state of frenzy. She could not move, nor speak, nor turn her eyes. She could only stare! At what?

The monstrous snake then girded himself for further onslaught. After being sure his victim was dead, he loosed his grip and stretched at full length upon the ground; drew the rabbit out until it too was stretched carefully out with its hind feet together and its head pointing in the opposite direction. Then followed an experience that to Cindy seemed entirely impossible. The snake took the hind feet of the rabbit in his mouth, until gradually they had disappeared. Then came what seemed to 'Cindy an agonized struggle. The snake's mouth stretched almost to the breaking point as it began slowly to close over the rest of the rabbit's rear quarter. With fits and starts and jerks and stretches, the rattler reeled and squirmed; contorted and wreathed and sucked until the rabbit had half gone. With the last great effort the serpent threw himself into another series of bodily contortions that seemed to 'Cindy positively agonizing to him, until at last the rabbit had entirely disappeared from the earth. For several minutes 'Cindy apparently watched the tremendous hump in the snake move slowly backward. With gradually diminishing intermittent jerks, the snake finally got the small animal to his digestive tract. The monster then crawled to a hot sandy section and went to sleep.

Two hours later it was twilight. An overseer was walking along the path to the Spring House. He paused for a moment beneath a sycamore tree to rest and cool himself. As his eyes roamed the shadowy little glade they came to rest on the body of a little Negro girl, lying inert upon the soft grass with the handle of a cedar bucket clutched in a death grip. He lifted the small black form into his arms and carried her to the house. He saw in her face an expression of mingled agony and fear.

"Yassuh, white folks, dat was me," Aunt 'Cindy smiled as she told me of the experience, 80 years later. "Dat was de biggest snake I ever seed. He musta been seven feet long.



Cindy Washington, [TR: Eutaw], Alabama

"All dis happen in Sumter County whar I was bawn. Us had a pretty place dere. I'll never forgits how de niggers worked dere gardens in de moonlight. Dere warn't no time in de day. De white folks work tuk dat time. De oberseer rung a big bell for us to git up by in de mawnin' at fo' o'clock, an' de fus' thing we done was to feed de stock."

"You axe was we punished?" Yassuh, we was punished for something: most of all for stealin'.

"Yassuh, we was taught to read an' write, but mos' of de slaves didn't want to learn. Us little niggers would hide our books under de steps to keep f'um havin' to study. Us'd go to church wid de white folks on Sunday and sit in de back, an' den we go home an' eat a big Sunday meal. When we got sick f'um eatin' too much or somp'n, Massa Jim Godfrey was a doctor an' he'd ten' to us. Den when new nigger babies came, nine little black bugs was tied up in rags 'roun' dere necks for to make de babies teethe easy. When I was ma'ied, white folks, at de age of thirteen, Alex Washington, my husband an me had a forty-dollar weddin'. My mistis baked me a cake, an' a white schoolmaster named Henry Hindron spoke de ceremony. Me an' dat ole husband had twenty-two chilluns.

"Yas ma'm. I sho does believe in ghosties. We's got one good spirit an' one bad un. One goes to heaben an' de udder stays on earth. Ghosties sho does lak whiskey, caze dey'll follow you iffen you got any. Iffen you po' it on de groun' beside you, dough, dey'll lose track of you. Always give a gos' de raght han' side of de road, white folks, an' he won't bother you.

"Yes my chile, I is got religion. I sead Jesus a hanging f'um de cross. He give his blood so dat us could live. I knows I is goin' to heaben."