

*Wellington Rose*

(Book Three in the  
Wellington Cross Series)

By Cheryl R. Lane

# *Prologue*

*Jonesborough, Tennessee, 1885*

Ian Banks held a worn brown moneybag tightly in his left hand as he ran down Main Street, then turned down a side street, looking behind him every few seconds to see his partners in crime chasing after him, shouting obscenities. He skidded down the creek bank, hopped across, ran up the steep bank on the other side, and then ran alongside the deafeningly noisy locomotive until it outran him and he crossed the railroad tracks just behind the caboose as it sped past. He dove behind some bushes and looked behind him one more time. No one was following him. He breathed for the first time since he took off running.

He surveyed the area to make sure no one was watching him, and still clutching the bag, he ran around to the back of the off-white old two-story home of his cousin, Jefferson Banks, and rushed in through the back door as the sun was going down. Just inside the long hallway stood Josiah Barkley, the son of Jefferson's sweetheart, Fanny. He slammed the door quickly behind him.

"Joe!" Ian said, his deep blue eyes shining in the candlelight. "Can you hide something for me? Can I bury this in your backyard?"

"What have you done now?" Josiah asked him.

"Never mind that. The less you know the better."

"What in the world is all this commotion about?" His cousin Jefferson, a friendly looking blonde-haired man in his early forties, came into the hall from the dining room. "Ian? What's the problem?"

"Cousin Jeff, I've come into some money recently." He glanced down at the bag in his hand with "Banking and Trust" written on the side and held it up. "It needs a new place to stay put for a while, if you know what I mean."

"Did you rob a bank?" Josiah yelled.

"Shhh," Ian said, holding up his hands in surrender. "My buddies and I took an advance out of the bank, that's all. Borrowed a little cash. I decided to take the whole loot for us so we can finally spruce this place up, make it real nice for Miss Fanny. She'd love that."

Their conversation was interrupted by loud voices yelling across the front yard, and they ran down the hall and looked out the parlor windows to see several men carrying torches.

"Oh, no," Ian said. "They found me."

"No," Jefferson said. "It's me they're after. I made a gambling bet I couldn't pay. They're here for money I don't have." He looked down at Ian's bag in his hands.

"It's yours if you need it," Ian said. He looked out the window again and was relieved it wasn't his friends.

"No time for that now. Go," Jefferson said, pushing both of them towards the back door. "Get outside and hide in the stables with that bag. Both of you, go on. I'll handle this. Stay close, but stay out of sight."

The two young men hurried down the hall and out the back door to cross the courtyard to the stables. Before they got there, they heard a woman's shrill voice scream.

"Mama!" Josiah said, panic in his voice.

"Shhh," Ian said. "Jeff said to stay out of it. If they see how many of us there are, they might panic and shoot all of us including your mother. Let Jeff handle it for now."

Josiah reluctantly followed Ian into the stables. They found a place to hide where they could still look out the windows, crouched down by the wagon. They could see Fanny out in the front of the house where two big maple trees met with a rope tied around her neck on one end and the other end looped up around a

tall branch of one of those trees. Luckily, she was still standing on her feet at the moment. The sky turned orange behind her, and the trees looked dark and ominous.

Jefferson came out the front door. "What do you boys think you're doing?"

"Jefferson," a short balding man with a scar over his left eye said. "We's goin' string us up a dark beauty here if you don't pay us the money you owe."

"Boys, your quarrel is with me, not my housemaid. Let her go."

"Not until you pay your debt to Ralph," another man said, holding a torch in one hand and a cigar in the other.

"I'll get you the money. In fact, my cousin just came into a sizeable amount of money just to-day and said he'd be happy to loan me the money. So if you'll just let Miss Fanny go..." He tried to hide the urgency in his voice. He loved Fanny with all his heart and didn't want anything to happen to her. How they figured out she had dark blood in her, he didn't know. She looked like a white woman, beautiful creamy skin with dark hair and deep blue eyes with long eyelashes. He had to do something to get her out of this alive. He'd do anything for her. "I'll go and get my cousin right now. He's over in the stables, putting up his horse."

Ralph loosened the rope and took Fanny by her hands, which were tied together, and pushed her towards Jefferson. "Let's go, then. All of us."

On the way over to the stables – all five men with Jefferson and Fanny – a gunshot rang through the air from the direction of the stables. Jefferson ducked nervously but then turned around and took Fanny out of Ralph's arms. At that moment, Josiah ran out of the stables and rushed to get his mother and pulled her in the direction of the stables. Jake Hulett, a tall hulking black man who worked for Jefferson, aimed a pistol at the men while Ian peeked around the back of the stables and shot one of the men in the arm, which caused him to cry out and fall down before he could reach for his own gun. Once Josiah had Fanny inside the stables, Jefferson turned around just as Ralph stuck him in the gut with a long knife. A shocked Jefferson fell to the ground, clutching his stomach.

Ian tossed a small bag of money towards the men, and Jake fired another shot up in the air. "Get out of here," Ian yelled. "You've got your money."

Ralph cleaned his knife on Jefferson's lapel, picked up the bag of money, and they all took off running away from the property, the injured man still holding his bleeding arm.

Back in the stables, Fanny went into panic mode. Josiah used his own knife to free the ropes around her wrists and neck, and she ran back outside before Josiah could stop her. He ran after her as she fell to the ground beside Jefferson, crying.

"No, Jeffery! No!" She trembled with sorrow, wiping his face, looking down at his bloody jacket and hands and the dark oozing substance all over his shirt. "Speak to me, Jefferson! Please say you're all right. Don't leave me!"

Jefferson looked directly at her. "I'm sorry, Fanny. So sorry. I love you," he said before he stopped breathing.

"No, come back to me. I love you, too. Please, Jeffery!" She threw herself over his chest and wept bitterly. "I need you!"

Josiah put his hand on her back while she cried over the only man she'd ever loved.

Violet Anne, who had been hiding in the barn like Jake told her to ever since the bad men came, ran over and clung to her mother. "Mama? What's wrong with papa?"

Fanny had given birth to the eleven-year-old girl, who had the same bluish-purple eyes as Fanny's mother, also named Violet, after she and Jefferson moved to Tennessee. She'd had a terrible time in labor and then wasn't able to have any more children after that.

Fanny wiped her tears and took the girl in her arms. "He's been hurt, Vi. Seriously hurt and he's not going to be with us no more." She sniffed and sobbed again, as Violet started crying. She let go of Fanny suddenly and looked at her father for a long moment, kissed him on the cheek, and closed his eyelids. Fanny had no idea how she even knew to do that.

"Now he's sleeping," Violet said. "Just like my dolly. Good-night, papa. You can come see me in my dreams now and then."

Fanny wept again.

Jake came over and spoke to her. "Miss Fanny, we've got to get out of here. They goin' to come back, with more men next time, and Jefferson won't be here to save you."

They heard a commotion a short distance away beyond the trees, and Ian agreed with Jake. "Let's get going." His buddies would be after him for the money. He'd had to give some of it away to save Fanny, but he still had the majority of it.

"But we can't just leave him here. We have to bury him," Fanny insisted.

"We don't have time for that," Jake said.

"Mama, we're in a heap of trouble, and there's only one way I can think of to get out of it," Josiah said. "I think it's time we went back to Virginia, back to the Wellingtons."

Fanny stopped crying and looked at her son. "You may be right about that." She wiped her tears away, kissed Jefferson on the cheek, and reached for her son to help her off the ground.

"I've got plenty of money here to help us get there," Ian said. They all stopped and looked at him. "What? I took this money for all of us. Of course I'm going with you."

They quickly went back into the house and rushed around, packing trunks and bags. Fanny hated leaving this house – the only house she'd ever lived in where she was the lady of the house. Jefferson had made enough money selling off his stepfather's plantation back in Charles City County, Virginia, to Ethan Wellington, a man she used to work for, a family she used to be a slave for, back before the war. They'd lived here happily for twelve years together. He had treated her with love and respect as no other man ever had. She hated leaving him and the house behind, but she felt she had no other choice.

They'd have to leave Jefferson's carriage since it would be recognized, so they took an old wagon instead, which would hold more of their things anyway. Fanny hastily packed some jewelry and Jefferson's pocket watch as well as some money that she'd stashed all over the house in various pots, drawers, and boxes. She never kept it all in one place. She knew they shouldn't take the money that Ian stole and told him he should turn it in.

"That's going to cause nothing but trouble for us," she said as they packed up the wagon.

Ian refused to turn it in but he did put it in a different bag, burning the bank bag in the fire before extinguishing it with water.

When they were all packed up, Jake guided two horses to pull the wagon out into the warm dark night as quietly as they could, bound for Eastern Virginia.

# *Chapter One*

*Wellington Cross Plantation*

*May 1885*

Lillie Rose Wellington strolled outside in the perennial garden at her family's home, Wellington Cross, looking at the pink, red, and yellow roses, inhaling their perfumed scent deeply. It was early morning, and she liked to take walks in the garden at that time of day before the afternoon heat took over. She heard feet crunching on the oyster shell path close by on the other side of the trees and bushes. Peeking through the foliage, she saw Wesley Hamilton, her beau, wearing a top hat and holding a brightly-colored rose in his hand.

The two first met when they were both seven. He was her great-aunt Catherine's first husband's nephew, and he lived in Bellwood, Virginia. He came to visit occasionally at big social gatherings, and so they grew up playing together, teasing one another, and getting into mischief – just like her mother and father did when they were young, except that Lillie and Wesley didn't see quite as much of each other as her parents did since they had lived in such close proximity to each other.

Lillie smiled as he came through an opening in the bushes and appeared right in front of her.

"Lillie, here you are. I have been looking for you. I'm getting ready to leave, but I had to come and see you first before I left." He took her hand and kissed it. His chestnut brown hair, parted to one side in neat waves, glistened in the early morning sun and his green eyes fairly sparkled. He was dressed in a tan sack coat, waistcoat and trousers, a white collared shirt, and a white Ascot tie, all handsome and ready to travel by train up to Washington, D.C., with his father, Charles Hamilton, II, who was a solicitor. Wesley planned to follow in his father's footsteps and was to attend a legal internship during the summer on a special case his father was asked to represent. At eighteen years of age, he had already attended two years at Richmond College in the school of law.

"I brought you this," he said, handing her a fragrant rose, unlike any they had in their own garden. His mother, Caroline, specialized in growing roses and had many exotic colors and fragrances, growing many in her large glasshouse. Wesley was always bringing Lillie a different rose when he came to visit. This one was several shades of yellow in the middle that gradually got darker to a light orange on the outer petals. She sniffed its fragrance, which was sweet and heady.

"Thank you, I love it! Your mother has such beautiful varieties."

"She knows how much you love roses."

Her own mother grew a few roses but not as many as Caroline. It was lilies that Madeline was better at growing. Lillie helped her with that garden, too, as it was her other favorite flower since she was named after them both. Her mother grew as many varieties of lilies in every shade she could find and planted them in the big field by the tall sunflowers over behind the stables. They were just now beginning to bloom.

"Shall we take a stroll?" he asked her, offering his elbow.

"Of course." She linked her arm in his elbow, and they walked down the sloping hill towards the James River. "Are you sure you have the time?"

He looked over at her and smiled nervously. "Yes, I have a little time." They talked as they strolled. "How was your art history examination?" he asked. "Did you pass?"

"Yes, I did." He was referring to a particularly difficult examination she had been studying for the last time they were together a week prior. She attended the Women's College for the Arts, which was located right across from Richmond College, and so they spent time together studying or eating on occasion. He had

visited her where she was staying at her grandmamma's cousin's home in Richmond and helped her study for that examination. "All thanks to you," she said, smiling demurely.

He blushed and smiled back. "Not me, Lillie. You are the artistically inclined one." He reached over and tucked a loose strand of hair behind her ear, and then pulled his hand back away quickly.

"Thank you," she said.

They stopped walking when they got to a cluster of tall cedar trees close to the water, and he guided her into the shade. He looked around nervously and rubbed his hands together. She hadn't seen him this nervous before.

As she watched him, she admired his handsome creamy white face, his long sideburns and bushy dark eyebrows, which were furrowed, and she asked him, "Is something wrong, Wesley?"

"No, of course not." He took his top hat off and placed it on the ground, then stood back up, moving close to stand directly in front of her.

"Are you nervous about going to D.C.?"

"A little." He looked into her amber eyes and took her hands in his. "I'm going to miss you."

She smiled. "I'll miss you, too."

"Lillie Rose." He cleared his throat and moistened his lips. "I have recently come to realize that my affection for you has grown steadily into hopes of future matrimony. I care for you a great deal, and nothing would make me happier than for you to agree to be betrothed to me." He paused, seemingly flustered, cleared his throat again and then kneeled down on one knee and pulled out a round diamond ring in a velvet square box. "Lillie, would you marry me?" he blurted out quickly.

She was not surprised by his proposal at all. Their childhood friendship had grown into a romance by the time they both reached sixteen. He had asked to court her at her cotillion ball in May of that year, and she had accepted. She had danced with several suitors at that ball but none of whom she felt more comfortable with than Wesley. They both agreed that they wanted to further their education before entering into marriage, and attending schools in the same area allowed them to spend much more time together than they had previously. He was studying law and insisted on establishing himself as a lawyer before marriage, to which she agreed. She herself studied art and music, hoping to find some sort of employment in an artistic field, perhaps as a teacher.

They'd shared sweet kisses now and then when chaperones were not watching. He had always been cordial, polite, sweet, handsome, and seemed to care for her deeply. She'd always enjoyed being around Wesley. He made her feel loved, comfortable, and they were on equal grounds socially. He was perfect for her.

She almost giggled at the reason for his nervousness. She touched her gloved hand to his shoulder. "Of course, I'll marry you, Wesley. You shouldn't be nervous at all. I've always known we would marry someday."

He visibly relaxed. "I'm so glad," he said, smiling again. He stood up and took the glove off of her left hand and placed the ring on her fourth finger. She looked at it and then smiled at him. He looked around before leaning over and placing a soft, sweet kiss on her lips. "I would like to wed when I return. Perhaps in September? Is that too soon?"

"No, that sounds wonderful. It will still be warm. Perhaps we can have an outdoor wedding."

"Yes, right here if you'd like. Just like your mother and father."

It was true; Ethan and Madeline Wellington had been married outside in the gazebo the first time they wed. The second time they wed, after a separation during which her mother had lost her memory, it was also here but inside the house. She'd always dreamed of being married here, too, just like her parents. "That would be perfect."

He stepped back and she placed her glove back on her left hand and then linked arms with him as they made their way back up the hill towards the house. They talked quietly about wedding plans and about how his father had asked him to join his practice when they returned from D.C., and so that was the reason for his proposal and wedding plans for the near future. He felt they were ready for marriage. When they reached the front of the house, he turned towards her once again in front of his carriage.

“You’ve made me very happy. I cannot wait until I return to be your husband.” He kissed her hand while still looking into her eyes, and she smiled.

“I also look forward to it. I shall be busy all summer preparing for it. I’ll write you every week to let you know how the plans are going.”

“Please do,” he said, then turned around and climbed up onto the carriage. “Farewell. Until August or September.”

“Godspeed,” she said as she waved, already thinking about who her bridesmaids would be.

Lillie found her mother and father both in the gazebo later that afternoon, embracing and laughing and kissing tenderly. She had witnessed scenes similar to this one her whole life. As far back as she could remember, her parents deeply loved and were devoted to each other. She wondered about hers and Wesley’s love and devotion for each other. Did she love Wesley? Truly love him? Did she look at Wesley the same way her mother looked at her father, or the way her cousin Ginny Brown looked into her husband William’s eyes? Those two acted as though they were still on their honeymoon even though they had been married twelve years. She could not fathom love that ardent. She did love Wesley, but perhaps that deep love, that passion for each other would come with time after being married for a while.

She held back until they noticed her. They both smiled at her. They never seemed embarrassed to have someone venture upon them while they were embracing.

“Lillie,” her mother said. “Come here. Did Wesley leave for the District?” She held her arms out towards Lillie. She walked right into her mother’s embrace.

“Yes, he did.” She stepped back and took off her glove to show them her ring. “But look, he proposed to me, and I said yes!”

“Oh, sweetheart! That’s wonderful news, isn’t it, Ethan?” Madeline said, looking at her husband.

He kissed his daughter on the forehead. “If you must be married, I couldn’t have picked a more suitable mate.”

“I agree,” Madeline said. She stood up and hugged her daughter again. “Have you decided on a date?”

“When he returns, sometime in September. We didn’t set an actual date, as he had to go. I shall have to go and look at a calendar. Hopefully he will be back in the beginning of September while it’s still warm outside. I shall have to pick a date and then write to him immediately to see if he can return by then. We’ve decided on an outdoor wedding right here, just like the two of you. What do you think of that?”

Both Madeline and Ethan laughed. “My, you certainly are excited,” her mother said. “That sounds wonderful. Whatever you want, you shall have it. Come on, we’ll start making plans.”

The two women excitedly walked into the manor arm in arm, leaving Ethan behind, forgotten in this very special moment of mother and daughter bonding over wedding plans.