

Start SARA. Need to bite a pillow? I got a satchel of feathers over there.

ABNER. I'm fine. I'm a man. I'm a soldier. I'm fine.

SARA. Stop calling yourself that. Be proud and quiet. Last thing we need is for LuAnne to hear you talking. She the fastest snitch on the whole plantation. Master Dan got her wrapped around his finger. More loyal to him than she is to her own god.

ABNER. Let her be that. She got her own way to make due. You don't wanna be none of that.

SARA. I know I don't.

ABNER. You good 'n' safe with what you do right now. Fast picker. Keep out of the eye of the storm. You like the nighttime nobody seem to notice. That's good 'n' safe. I ain't got to worry as much.

SARA. Don't wanna be safe. Wanna be useful.

ABNER. I told you no.

SARA. Why not?

ABNER. Ain't for womanfolk.

SARA. Cuz you braver? That's what you think?

ABNER. Ain't gon' fuss about this with you no mo'.

SARA. I been sewed up 'bout five times before. Once from getting sliced with a piece of sharp wood from Missy Sue cuz I could read better 'n' her so she stopped learnin' me. Once from a glass Mistress threw at my head for askin' if I could sleep inside the house with Missy Sue since we was friends and such. And three other times from fights out here in the field and I ain't never screamed or hissed like you been doin' ever since I threaded this needle. How you figurin' this ain't for womanfolk? It ain't not-for-womanfolk neither.

ABNER. I told you we ain't fussin' and I mean it! And you gon' stop sayin' you can read like it's just everyday okay.

Ain't a faster way for a gal to get lynched then to be actin' smart.

SARA. You stop sayin' you a soldier all loud and proud, I'll stop sayin' I can read.

(ABNER sighs loudly with exhaustion. SARA truly and really exhausts him.)

(SARA sews quietly.)

ABNER. We movin' down westward. Two days mo' and we'll be crossing the state lines.

SARA. And then I won't be seein' you?

ABNER. When it's over, you'll see me anytime you want.

SARA. You the only brother I got left.

ABNER. And you gon' see me. I'll come back for you.

SARA. I should come with you. You gon' need a nurse.

ABNER. Not the way you stitching.

SARA. I mean it.

ABNER. No Sara. The mens would have their way with you. You get caught and I wouldn't be able to protect you. You safer here.

SARA. Safer. Here???

ABNER. This, you already know. This, you got skill in. Hands know how to pull to keep from gettin' whipped. Know how to birth them chir'en for all the womens so they don't get sick and die 'fore the babies come out. You barren as the forest in the winter. Nobody come messin' with you. Everybody know you got the *mark*, but them skills make you useful. Out there in the trenches? Got to get learned all over again. Ain't safe.

SARA. You ain't no safer. Runaway turned Union soldier. They find you they chop your head off and eat it for supper.

ABNER. 'Least I'll die like a man.

SARA. How I'm gon' die?

ABNER. Free. That's why I'm fightin'.

SARA. I want to die like a man too.

End (ABNER *sighs again.*)

ABNER. You make less and less sense the mo' you talk.

SARA. Then stop talking to me.

(She finishes the last stitch. Pats his side.)

Done.

(ABNER stands up slowly.)

ABNER. You a good nurse.

SARA. Ain't the way to flatter me.

ABNER. You a good sister.

SARA. I want to come with you.

ABNER. I won't have it.

SARA. I can fight. Hold me one of them muskets and see what I could do.

(She eyes his musket nearby. Picks it up. He hastens over to her as best he can through his pain.)

ABNER. Damn it, I told you don't touch it!

SARA. Just want to see how it feels. Real mighty. Like I could gather me a bunch of kinfolk and walk right off the plantation.

ABNER. You gon' hurt yourself.

SARA. You hurt yourself. Only soldier to fall on his own sword.

ABNER. Got stabbed. Told you that. With a knife.

SARA. Yo' own knife. In practice, not combat.

ABNER. Was gettin' ready for combat.

SARA. I can do it Abner. I can be a good soldier. I can free 'em from every plantation. You could show me how to use it. I'd be good.

ABNER. Sara --

SARA. 'Least let me hold it. Show me how. So I know what it feels like to have the power of freedom in my hands. 'Case I never see you again.

(ABNER looks at his sister. He loves her. She is exhausting, but she is fierce.)

(He picks up the musket. Walks over to her slowly. Takes her hand and places it on the weapon. Aims it out for her.)

ABNER. *(As if he is knighting her with an honor.)* Now you're a real man.

(Lights shift. ABNER steps out of the scene and moves into the next as if he is stepping into a new time period...with a new name... and a new identity.)