

I lifted my head up from the dirt floor and stared up at the shaking planks on the roof. Patches of sky peeked through and gave the cabin a dusty sort of light. *Just the wind, just the wind*, I told my rapidly beating heart. In the corner I could just barely make out the sleeping form of my younger brother. It calmed me to see him sleeping so peacefully.

The Master and Missus lived in the Big House on the far side of the plantation. Their house was huge and had many rooms for their family. And our house, in comparison, just a small, one room shack that held my entire family. I used to have an older brother, but he was taken in the middle of the night to a plantation miles and miles away. We didn't even get to say goodbye.

I hated the shack and the plantation with all of my heart. We were forced to do hard, grueling work, weren't treated like human beings, just because of the color of our skin. What if I wanted to learn how to read and write, to be educated, to be taken seriously? What if I wanted to have a daughter who grew up, not having to worry about slavery? What if I wanted the chance to make my own decisions? What if I wanted a real life? This, certainly, could not be living. Wasn't I allowed these dreams? Part of me itched for freedom, but the sensible part of me always hushed my racing heart and told me to wait. My parents told me it was dangerous to talk this way.

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The sun was blazing hot and so bright it was like a huge fireball in the pale blue sky. The plants wilted in its heat, and everything was dry as a bone. But it was better than being inside.

I reflected on this as my hands idly scrubbed at the endless dishes. I was so hot that I felt like I was melting. Having my hands immersed in hot, soapy water all day was not helping. At least when no one was looking, I could pull my chapped hands out of the water and take a break. The work was never done- if it wasn't scrubbing the endless pots and pans or washing the fragile china, it was sweeping, cooking, or cleaning. At least the boiling water was better than blisters on my hands from the broom handle or scrub brush. There were so many mistakes I could make, and I was afraid of being punished for them.

After working from dawn to late night, I was relieved to return to the cabin. We usually ate a meager supper without much conversation because I was always hungry and tired. After supper, everyone but me fell asleep immediately, even the little ones. I lay against one wall and let my thoughts roam out to be among the stars. *Slavery*. I had been a slave since I was born, and if I didn't do anything about it, my children would all be slaves as well. Now I wanted more than ever to be free from this run-down room, from the evil, vile plantation.

The dirt was cool and comforting beneath my bare feet. I padded out the open doorway to the surrounding lot and looked up at the sky. The stars winked and danced a little, showing off for me. For me, only. All around was sweet silence. And then, there wasn't. There was no way to describe the change, perhaps a rustling of leaves, maybe. But suddenly there was whispering, barely audible, but there. I turned slowly, my eyes falling upon a cluster of

shadowy trees. I thought I glimpsed a face among the dark leaves, and sparkling eyes. But I couldn't be sure.

All at once I knew what was happening. *Escape!* I wanted to call to my family to come out and run with me, but my mouth was dry with fear. Was I brave enough? Was I strong enough? And what would happen if I was caught? The voices in the trees were hushed, waiting. And so help me, I ran. I was thankful that my feet were silent and made no impression on the hard-packed earth.

The trees were a welcoming sight, but what did they hide? I pressed closer into the darkness, until I could see the three human figures. A woman, about the age of Mama, and two men. "Harriet?" My voice was a too-loud squeak, and she whirled toward me. She clapped one hand over my mouth and hurried me along through the trees. When we were safely out of range, she released me.

"You're Harriet Tubman." I whispered. Everyone had heard of this brave, wonderful woman, who led the slaves to freedom in the North. She was my hero. Every day I dreamed about meeting her, and now to finally see her in person made my heart yearn for freedom. I bounced a little on my feet, even though I was exhausted. I was excited. I was nervous.

"Of course. Now..." She pressed one finger to her lips and gave me an encouraging smile. She gestured out through the trees. No sounds came from the empty fields beyond the

forest.

My mouth opened and closed. Oh. Oh, no. She thought I was escaping! But if I wasn't, what was I doing? "I can't," I replied. Tears stuck to my eyelids. I wanted to leave, but how could I leave my family? Harriet sensed my emotions and put one solid hand on my back. It felt good. It felt strong. I sucked in a noisy breath, but she didn't quiet me. I made a split-second decision, and calmed by the misty darkness, I followed, silent as a shadow, after Harriet Tubman and a new life.

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