

RANGER *in* TIME

Long Road to Freedom



KATE MESSNER

illustrated by
KELLEY MCMORRIS

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Summary: This time the mysterious box that Ranger the golden retriever found transports him to a Maryland plantation before the Civil War, where he must help a young house slave named Sarah and her younger brother, Jesse, find their way to the Underground Railroad and north to freedom, before Jesse is sold to a plantation further south.

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Chapter 1



LAST CHANCE TO GO

Sarah hurried into the dining room with Master Bradley's breakfast, a plate piled with corn bread and cold ham. She set it on the table before him and stepped back against the wall to listen. All morning, the house had been full of buzz and chatter. That was never good.

The Bradleys had sold a dozen slaves this year because they'd switched from growing tobacco to mostly wheat on their tidewater Maryland plantation. Wheat wasn't as much work, so fewer slaves were needed. Simon and Moses and Henry — men Sarah had known

her whole life — had already been sold south to work on a cotton plantation in Alabama.

“I can’t imagine you’ll get much for the boy. He’s not strong enough.” Mrs. Bradley set down her teacup and frowned at her husband.

Sarah’s heart jumped into her throat. Were they talking about her brother, Jesse? There were other boys on the plantation, but Jesse was the youngest and smallest.

“Mr. Fenn will decide if he has value. We cannot afford to keep more than we need.” Master Bradley wiped his mustache with his napkin and turned to Sarah. “Go up to the roof and watch for Mr. Fenn’s boat. Come tell me when you see him approaching.”

Sarah forced her voice to sound bored, as if she hadn’t been paying attention to their conversation. “Yes, sir.” She curtsied and hurried up to the third floor. She climbed the wooden

ladder, unlatched the trapdoor, and pushed it open. A warm wind blew in off the creek.

Sarah climbed out onto the rooftop porch and looked over the fields to the water. All she saw was a fishing skiff and a bigger boat docked by the tobacco prize house. Old Isaac would be at the prizier now, using the machine to pack dried tobacco into hogsheads, getting ready to load the barrels onto the boat.

There was no sign of Mr. Fenn's schooner, which meant there was time to think. Time to learn more.

Sarah raced down the stairs and out the back door to the yew tree near the formal garden. William Bradley sat leaning against it with a book.

Sarah and William had been born the same week in April, twelve years ago. They'd played together as babies while Mama tended Mrs.

Bradley's kitchen garden. Both their mothers had gotten sick with fever three years ago. But only Mrs. Bradley had recovered.

Sarah was sad and quiet for a long time after her mama died. William tried to cheer her up with stories. He'd meet her after breakfast to share books from his tutor. One day, he started teaching her letters, and then words. Most slaves couldn't read, but the Bradleys didn't seem to mind if Sarah learned. She could read almost anything now.

But today, she had no interest in books. "Who's your father selling?"

William shrugged. "I don't know. But not you. That much is certain. You're my favorite."

"What about Jesse?"

"Father would never sell your brother," William said. But he looked away when he said it. Mama always said eyes told the truth even when mouths were lying.