

String of Hope

Carol March McLernon

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Ten-year-old girls should spend their days playing with dolls running outside maybe helping their mothers cook and clean — but a ten-year-old working full-time is unimaginable! The unimaginable is just what happens in *String of Hope*. Little Louisa is sent far away from her home to help an army major's wife keep house at Fort Winnebago on the Ouisconsin River. Louisa is a black slave girl.

Carol March McLernon begins her work of historical fiction for young readers as Louisa boards a boat in Mackinaw. McLernon writes "Louisa squeezed her eyes shut. She wanted to be back home in Buffalo New York. She didn't understand why she was here. The major said Mama wanted her out of the house because of the new baby. Louisa didn't believe it."

Once Louisa settles in with Miz Elizabeth the major's wife she learns her place and the jobs she must do. But Miz Elizabeth is cold toward her and often makes her feel bad. When a new white woman moves to the Fort Miz Elizabeth sends her young slave to a new mistress. And while Louisa is happy to be away from Miz Elizabeth's eyes Miz Juliette does not prove to be much of an improvement. She is stung by the woman's lack of trust: "Then to Louisa's surprise Miz Juliette took the precious conch shell from the mantel. Why would Mix Juliette trust the Indians to hold it? Louisa couldn't even touch it."

The story continues with Louisa's pain at being treated as less than human. She is accused of mischief and misdeeds and begins developing a plan to escape the Fort and return home. She hopes some of the soldiers at the Fort will help her make the escape.

McLernon brings her characters to life. Young readers can experience the pains of slavery and separation in a nonviolent but heart-wrenching story. Author of three other books *Katie Down the Pike Adventures with Jack* and *Samuele a Man With Many Names* McLernon uses historical facts to ground her fiction and enlarge her characters.

While *String of Hope* is a short read it doesn't scrimp on the feelings and emotions of period life. The book is suitable for home-schoolers classrooms and even as a thought-provoking bedside tale for families. Louisa can help bring hope to the young while expressing the desire of all children to be cherished by their parents.

CHRISTINA CLAASSEN (August 31, 2006)

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