

# **SARAH SHEPPARD**

African-American, female, plays 30 then later 50.

Ella's enslaved mother. A quietly towering figure.

Cursed by slavery, Sarah is the "property" of a cruel master. Devastated at learning he's been secretly exploiting her three-year-old daughter Ella to spy on other slaves then torturing them for disobedience, Sarah makes a harrowing sacrifice to protect her precious girl at any cost, a sacrifice that will tear Sarah's heart to shreds and haunt Ella for the remainder of the film.

A deeply emotional role.

## **DIRECTOR'S NOTE**

Though enslaved, Sarah is anything but weak. Bold and unflinching, her penetrating eyes, manner and speech reveal a woman of deep intellect, dignity, and courage.

Important: Sarah's dialogue, written in the vernacular of 19th-century enslaved communities, should be read as rich, vivid, and full of nuance, at times resounding with almost poetic beauty.

## SIDE 1

## EXT. PLANTATION RIVERBANK (PART 1)

Sarah has just learned that Bishop has been secretly recruiting her three-year-old daughter to spy on other slaves, then torturing them for disobedience. Devastated, Sarah confronts Bishop, recalling with heartbreak and rage how she found out.

SARAH

Brother Bo, good sister Hattie...  
 Samuella and me heard it all  
 tonight - their flesh splitting,  
 screams for mercy, throats choking  
 with blood. *The sounds of your  
 discipline - we've heard it many  
 times before...* But tonight I  
 notice Sam ain't troubled by it. I  
 ask why not. She say, *"They's just  
 getting they due."* I feel a knife  
 in my chest. "Child, who tell you  
 that?" *"Bishop."* Breathe,  
 Sarah... "Baby, what else he be  
 saying to you?" *"Just asking what  
 the 'niggers' be up to, day in, day  
 out."* My heart stops. "Bo and  
 Hattie planning to escape - you the  
 one tell him 'bout that?" Sam  
 start shaking. Tears of guilt fill  
 her eyes, guilt no three-year-old  
 should feel. An eternity I want no  
 part of goes by. She look down -  
*Yes'm."* Oh God...

(turns to the other slaves)

He been using my Sam to spy on us  
 all, then raining down bloodshed!

We now reveal the heinous scars that rack the slaves' bodies,  
 and the fresh blood soaking Bishop's holy robe.

END

## SIDE 2

## EXT. PLANTATION RIVERBANK (PART 2)

A horrific sequence of events has just unfolded. Devastated about Bishop's exploitation of her daughter and helpless to protect her from future abuse, Sarah had brought Samuella to the river and jumped into its depths to drown them both, before being rescued and revived. Learning of this, Bishop has furiously hog-tied Sarah and now prepares to flog her.

As he fetches the bullwhip, Sarah looks into her baby girl's eyes and tearfully speaks to her for the last time. Her eyes now blaze with a *vision* for her daughter's future - a heavy, heart-crushing vision that will free Samuella from slavery but forever separate them.

SARAH

As I stood at the river's edge, you in my arms, voices on the wind - a choir of voices - cried out, "*Don't do it, Sarah; God has need of this child.*" The voices were loud, but knowing that son of hell was making you his... the way he'd made *me* his... this river cried out louder.

(then, marveling)

But God gave you back! The voices were right - I see it now; I didn't then - you will never again be subject or party to his cruelty. *He's going to set you free.*

(proudly gazing into Samuella's wide eyes)

Precious baby, you got a call on your life - far from here, far from me. Run your race! Become everything your mother wasn't. And don't ever turn back - *I won't let you.*

END