

HARRIET TUBMAN

She heard the familiar guttural voice say, "Who's there?"

She answered quickly, "A friend with friends."

He opened the door and greeted her warmly. "How many this time?" he asked.

"Eleven," she said and waited, doubting, wondering.

He said, "Good. Bring them in."

He and his wife fed them in the lamplit kitchen, their faces glowing, as they offered food and more food, urging them to eat, saying there was plenty for everybody, have more milk, have more bread, have more meat.

They spent the night in the warm kitchen. They really slept, all that night and until dusk the next day. When they left, it was with reluctance. They had all been warm and safe and well-fed. It was hard to exchange the security offered by that clean warm kitchen for the darkness and the cold of a December night.

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HARRIET HAD FOUND it hard to leave the warmth and friendliness, too. But she urged them on. For a while, as they walked, they seemed to carry in them a measure of contentment; some of the serenity and the cleanliness of that big warm kitchen lingered on inside them. But as they walked farther and farther away from the warmth and the light, the cold and the darkness entered into them. They fell silent, sullen, suspicious. She waited for the moment when some one of them would turn mutinous. It did not happen that night.

Two nights later she was aware that the feet behind her were moving slower and slower. She heard the irritability in their voices, knew that soon someone would refuse to go on.

She started talking about William Still and the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee. No one commented. No one asked any questions. She told them the story of

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William and Ellen Craft and how they escaped from Georgia. Ellen was so fair that she looked as though she were white, and so she dressed up in a man's clothing and she looked like a wealthy young planter. Her husband, William, who was dark, played the role of her slave. Thus they traveled from Macon, Georgia, to Philadelphia, riding on the trains, staying at the finest hotels. Ellen pretended to be very ill—her right arm was in a sling, and her right hand was bandaged, because she was supposed to have rheumatism. Thus she avoided having to sign the register at the hotels for she could not read or write. They finally arrived safely in Philadelphia, and then went on to Boston.

No one said anything. Not one of them seemed to have heard her.

She told them about Frederick Douglass, the most famous of the escaped slaves, of his eloquence, of his magnificent appearance. Then she told them of her own first vain effort at running away, evoking the memory of that miserable life she had led as a child, reliving it for a moment in the telling.

But they had been tired too long, hungry too long, afraid too long, footsore too long. One of them suddenly cried out in despair, "Let me go back. It is better to be a slave than to suffer like this in order to be free."

She carried a gun with her on these trips. She had

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never used it—except as a threat. Now as she aimed it, she experienced a feeling of guilt, remembering that time, years ago, when she had prayed for the death of Edward Brodas, the Master, and then not too long afterward had heard that great wailing cry that came from the throats of the field hands, and knew from the sound that the Master was dead.

One of the runaways said, again, "Let me go back. Let me go back," and stood still, and then turned around and said, over his shoulder, "I am going back."

She lifted the gun, aimed it at the despairing slave. She said, "Go on with us or die." The husky low-pitched voice was grim.

He hesitated for a moment and then he joined the others. They started walking again. She tried to explain to them why none of them could go back to the plantation. If a runaway returned, he would turn traitor, the master and the overseer would force him to turn traitor. The returned slave would disclose the stopping places, the hiding places, the cornstacks they had used with the full knowledge of the owner of the farm, the name of the German farmer who had fed them and sheltered them. These people who had risked their own security to help runaways would be ruined, fined, imprisoned.

She said, "We got to go free or die. And freedom's not bought with dust."

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This time she told them about the long agony of the Middle Passage on the old slave ships, about the black horror of the holds, about the chains and the whips. They too knew these stories. But she wanted to remind them of the long hard way they had come, about the long hard way they had yet to go. She told them about Thomas Sims, the boy picked up on the streets of Boston and sent back to Georgia. She said when they got him back to Savannah, got him in prison there, they whipped him until a doctor who was standing by watching said, "You will kill him if you strike him again!" His master said, "Let him die!"

Thus she forced them to go on. Sometimes she thought she had become nothing but a voice speaking in the darkness, cajoling, urging, threatening. Sometimes she told them things to make them laugh, sometimes she sang to them, and heard the eleven voices behind her blending softly with hers, and then she knew that for the moment all was well with them.

She gave the impression of being a short, muscular, indomitable woman who could never be defeated. Yet at any moment she was liable to be seized by one of those curious fits of sleep, which might last for a few minutes or for hours.

Even on this trip, she suddenly fell asleep in the woods. The runaways, ragged, dirty, hungry, cold, did

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not steal the gun as they might have, and set off by themselves, or turn back. They sat on the ground near her and waited patiently until she awakened. They had come to trust her implicitly, totally. They, too, had come to believe her repeated statement, "We got to go free or die." She was leading them into freedom, and so they waited until she was ready to go on.

Finally, they reached Thomas Garrett's house in Wilmington, Delaware. Just as Harriet had promised, Garrett gave them all new shoes, and provided carriages to take them on to the next stop.

By slow stages they reached Philadelphia, where William Still hastily recorded their names, and the plantations whence they had come, and something of the life they had led in slavery. Then he carefully hid what he had written, for fear it might be discovered. In 1872 he published this record in book form and called it *The Underground Railroad*. In the foreword to his book he said: "While I knew the danger of keeping strict records, and while I did not then dream that in my day slavery would be blotted out, or that the time would come when I could publish these records, it used to afford me great satisfaction to take them down, fresh from the lips of fugitives on the way to freedom, and to preserve them as they had given them."

William Still, who was familiar with all the station

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stops on the Underground Railroad, supplied Harriet with money and sent her and her eleven fugitives on to Burlington, New Jersey.

Harriet felt safer now, though there were danger spots ahead. But the biggest part of her job was over. As they went farther and farther north, it grew colder; she was aware of the wind on the Jersey ferry and aware of the cold damp in New York. From New York they went on to Syracuse, where the temperature was even lower.

In Syracuse she met the Reverend J. W. Loguen, known as "Jarm" Loguen. This was the beginning of a lifelong friendship. Both Harriet and Jarm Loguen were to become friends and supporters of Old John Brown.

From Syracuse they went north again, into a colder, snowier city—Rochester. Here they almost certainly stayed with Frederick Douglass, for he wrote in his autobiography:

"On one occasion I had eleven fugitives at the same time under my roof, and it was necessary for them to remain with me until I could collect sufficient money to get them to Canada. It was the largest number I ever had at any one time, and I had some difficulty in providing so many with food and shelter, but, as may well be imagined, they were not very fastidious in either direction, and were well content with very plain food, and

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a strip of carpet on the floor for a bed, or a place on the straw in the barnloft."

Late in December, 1851, Harriet arrived in St. Catharines, Canada West (now Ontario), with the eleven fugitives. It had taken almost a month to complete this journey; most of the time had been spent getting out of Maryland.

That first winter in St. Catharines was a terrible one. Canada was a strange frozen land, snow everywhere, ice everywhere, and a bone-biting cold the like of which none of them had ever experienced before. Harriet rented a small frame house in the town and set to work to make a home. The fugitives boarded with her. They worked in the forests, felling trees, and so did she. Sometimes she took other jobs, cooking or cleaning house for people in the town. She cheered on these newly arrived fugitives, working herself, finding work for them, finding food for them, praying for them, sometimes begging for them.

Often she found herself thinking of the beauty of Maryland, the mellowness of the soil, the richness of the plant life there. The climate itself made for an ease of living that could never be duplicated in this bleak, barren countryside.

In spite of the severe cold, the hard work, she came to love St. Catharines, and the other towns and cities

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in Canada where black men lived. She discovered that freedom meant more than the right to change jobs at will, more than the right to keep the money that one earned. It was the right to vote and to sit on juries. It was the right to be elected to office. In Canada there were black men who were county officials and members of school boards. St. Catharines had a large colony of ex-slaves, and they owned their own homes, kept them neat and clean and in good repair. They lived in whatever part of town they chose and sent their children to the schools.

When spring came she decided that she would make this small Canadian city her home—as much as any place could be said to be home to a woman who traveled from Canada to the Eastern Shore of Maryland as often as she did.

In the spring of 1852, she went back to Cape May, New Jersey. She spent the summer there, cooking in a hotel. That fall she returned, as usual, to Dorchester County, and brought out nine more slaves, conducting them all the way to St. Catharines, in Canada West, to the bone-biting cold, the snow-covered forests—and freedom.

She continued to live in this fashion, spending the winter in Canada, and the spring and summer working in Cape May, New Jersey, or in Philadelphia. She made

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two trips a year into slave territory, one in the fall and another in the spring. She now had a definite crystallized purpose, and in carrying it out, her life fell into a pattern which remained unchanged for the next six years.

In April, 1851, Harriet Beecher Stowe (who once described herself in a letter as “a little bit of a woman—somewhat more than forty, about as thin and dry as a pinch of snuff: never very much to look at in my best days, and looking like a used-up article now”) sent the first chapter of what she thought would be a short novel to the National Era, an antislavery weekly published in Washington, D. C. It turned out to be a very long book. Eleven months elapsed before she finished it.

The book, Uncle Tom’s Cabin, or Life Among the Lowly, was published in two volumes in March, 1852. It was an instantaneous success. Three hundred thousand copies were sold in the first year after its publication. Men and women read it, talked about it, cried over the death of Little Eva and of Uncle Tom, shuddered at the cruelty of Simon Legree. Its influence was incalculable. Many of its readers became foes of the whole system of slavery.

Before the Civil War, eight different plays based on the life of Uncle Tom had been written and produced,

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without Mrs. Stowe's consent. During the summer of 1853, Professor Calvin Stowe, Mrs. Stowe's husband, wrote: "The drama of Uncle Tom has been going on in the National Theatre of New York all summer with most unparalleled success. Everybody goes night after night, and nothing can stop it."

16.

*"Be Ready to
Step on Board"*

IN THE FALL of 1854, Harriet Tubman began to feel uneasy about three of her brothers. Benjamin, John and William Henry were still in Maryland, working on plantations where they had been hired out. She kept having dreams about them, vivid dreams in which she saw them sold and sent away in a chain gang. She decided to tell them that she was coming to Maryland that fall, so that they would be ready to go North with her.

It would not be safe to communicate with them directly. She could not read or write. So she had a friend write a cryptic letter to a free Negro, Jacob Jackson, who lived near the plantation where two of her brothers worked.

Jacob had an adopted son who had gone North to live. Harriet thought that it would be perfectly natural and understandable if this son should write to his foster father, reporting about his health and inquiring about

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the family. She either did not know or had forgotten that the son, William Henry, had no brothers and no "old folks." But Jacob would know what she meant, for he had often provided shelter for her when she was in Dorchester County.

When the letter arrived in Bucktown, the postmaster opened it and read it. There was always the possibility that mail with a Northern postmark might contain Abolitionist propaganda, and when it was addressed to a free Negro, it was almost certain to contain objectionable material.

This is what he found: "Read my letter to the old folks, and give my love to them, and tell my brothers to be always *watching unto prayer*, and *when the good old ship of Zion comes along, to be ready to step on board.*" Signed—William Henry Jackson.

The postmaster showed the letter to two other men. They agreed that it must mean something—but the meaning eluded them. They knew that William Henry Jackson had no brothers or sisters. He was an orphan. As for "old folks"—well, he didn't have any.

They sent for Jacob, showed him the letter, and asked him for an explanation.

Jacob read the letter quickly, though he pretended to read it slowly, stumbling over the words, repeating some of them, using his finger as a guide, back and forth across the sheet of paper. He wondered how Moses had known

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that her brothers were in trouble. It was common talk in the cabins that they had been sold and were to go South with the chain gang the day after Christmas. She would get here just in time to rescue them.

He handed the paper with its seemingly meaningless words back to the postmaster. "That letter can't be meant for me nohow," he said, shaking his head. "I can't make head or tail of it."

That same night, Jacob told all three of the Ross brothers that Moses would be coming for them soon, and to be ready to leave. Benjamin and John worked for Eliza Ann Brodins in Bucktown, William Henry worked on a plantation farther away. They said they would be ready when she came. John said he would be ready, too, but he looked worried.

Harriet made her way South, slowly, without incident. She reached Bucktown on the 23rd of December. The next night she started North again, with a larger party than she had planned for, though John Ross was not with them. Benjamin and William Henry were there. William Henry had brought his fiancée with him, Catherine (or Jane) Kane, a pretty girl, who had been a house servant. She was dressed in a boy's suit, and she looked like an attractive young boy. Then there were two strangers from Cambridge, Peter Jackson and John Chase.

When they were ready to start, John Ross, the third

brother, had not arrived. Harriet started without him. She never waited for anyone. Delays were dangerous. She left word with Jacob for him, so that if he did come, he could overtake them along the way. The first stop would be in Caroline County, near Ben's cabin. Old Rit and Ben were now living forty miles to the north of Bucktown, in another county, but on a farm that belonged to Dr. Thompson.

John Ross did overtake them, finally. It was daybreak of Christmas morning when he found them. They were concealed in the fodder house, not far away from the cabin where Old Rit and Ben now lived.

John told them why he was late. His wife had just had another baby. He had to go get the midwife. Then after the baby was born, he couldn't bear to leave her. Yet he knew if he didn't run away, go then, he would be separated from her anyway. Because he was to be sold on the day after Christmas. Though she did not know that. He couldn't bring himself to tell her. At least not then.

So he had lingered in the cabin, looking down at his wife and the newborn baby. Then he had edged toward the door, and each time he moved, his wife had said, "Where you goin', John?"

He had told her he was going to see about being hired out on a new job. They all knew that changes in jobs

were arranged during the Christmas season. He thought she believed him. He couldn't bear to tell her he was taking off, couldn't bear to tell her that he had been sold. When he left the cabin, he stood outside the door, listening. He heard her crying and so went back inside.

She said, "Oh, John, you're going to leave me. I know it. But wherever you go, John, don't forget me and the children."

Then he had told her that he was leaving. He said that he would send Moses back for her, on her next trip. He had promised. It wouldn't be long—and in the dim light in the fodder house he looked at Moses for approval, for agreement. She nodded her head. So he felt better.

Then the girl, Catherine, saw John staring at her. She explained, with a toss of her head, that she was wearing a boy's suit because William Henry had bought it for her. It was the only way she had managed to get away so quickly, and with no trouble. William Henry had left the suit inside the garden fence at the Big House. The garden sloped right down to the river.

When she picked up the bundle William Henry had left for her, she just kept walking down through the garden, down to the river. Crouching under the bank, she had put on the boy's suit, bundled up her own clothes and dropped them into the water, stood a moment

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watching them float out on the tide. She said, shivering, that it was a queer sight to watch your own clothes, skirts and things, in the water like that.

Then she had walked back through the garden, walked past some of the other maids who had been sent to look for her. When the other girls saw her, they giggled. She strolled right past them, past the house, right out through the gate, and she had heard them saying, what a likely looking little boy, wonder where he came from, wouldn't you like to know him better. She had all she could do to keep from laughing out loud.

William Henry had been waiting for her, just off the plantation, on the road. He brought her right along with him. They'd be married when they got to the North—and freedom.

In 1854, men talked of Kansas and Nebraska, and of the Little Giant—Stephen Douglas, the handsome black-haired Senator from Illinois—who was trying to persuade the Senate to repeal the slavery restriction clause in the Missouri Compromise, as part of his Kansas-Nebraska Bill.

On March 2nd, the Senate passed the Kansas-Nebraska Bill which repealed the Missouri Compromise restriction and divided the Nebraska Territory into two territories: Kansas and Nebraska. In May President Pierce signed the Bill.

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And it was in May that the most dramatic of the fugitive slave cases began to unfold in Boston. Anthony Burns, a fugitive slave, who had escaped from his master in Virginia, was arrested and held in the Boston Court-house. After a three-day trial, the United States Commissioner, Edward G. Loring, decided that Burns must be returned to his master. On June 2nd he was escorted to the Long Wharf in Boston and put aboard a revenue cutter and sent back to Virginia.

The temper of Boston had changed. The biggest factor in that change was the Kansas-Nebraska Bill, for men in the North felt that the South had gone back on its promises, that its intention was to extend slavery all over the United States.

On the 2nd of June, 1854, when Anthony Burns walked toward the Long Wharf through streets lined with marines and cavalry, guarded by one thousand policemen, bells were tolled. The houses and the shops were draped in black. As the procession which surrounded Burns moved down toward the wharf, it was met with a perfect howl of "Shame! Shame!" and hisses.

In the North, men said that it had cost anywhere between forty and a hundred thousand dollars for the United States Government to return Burns to his master. They said it showed how powerful the slaveholding South had become, that part of the United States Army should have been called out to assure the return of one

miserable fugitive. More important, they said they would work to make the Fugitive Slave Law a joke, make it as worthless as the Compromise of 1820, which the South had agreed to and then junked as part of the Kansas-Nebraska Bill.

In the South, members of the slaveholding class were disturbed. With the opening of vast new territories, slaves had tripled in value. The South held more than 3,000,000 slaves, estimated to be worth one billion dollars. If the temper of a city like Boston had changed so that it was necessary to call forth a small army to assure the safe return of one fugitive, then it boded ill for the future. It suggested that one billion dollars' worth of the South's property was insecure.

“Moses Arrives with Six Passengers”

HARRIET TUBMAN had experienced moments of envy when she listened to the story that John Ross had told, heard the warmth in Catherine's voice when she spoke William Henry's name.

After they finished talking, she frowned, forcing herself to think of something other than John Tubman, and marriages and children, and engagements and the tenderness in a man's voice when he spoke of his wife.

It was still raining. From the dark, heavy look of the sky, visible through the roof of the fodder house, it would be an all-day rain. Christmas Day. And a Sunday. The beat of the rain against the roof of the fodder house, against its sides, would be their only Christmas greeting. She hoped they wouldn't resent it too much.

There were wide chinks in the walls. Through them she could see the sway-backed cabin where Daddy Ben and Old Rit lived. It looked exactly like the cabin on

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the Brodas plantation where she was born. A whole row of these sway-backed cabins here, too. Smoke kept pouring out of the clay-daubed chimney, hanging heavy in the air. Old Rit had probably killed her pig, and was cooking it for the Christmas dinner. The master gave her a baby pig every year, and she fattened it, saving food from her own plate to feed the pig, so that she could feed her family with a lavish hand on this one day. She'd have pork and sausage and bacon. Plenty of food. The boys said that Old Rit was expecting them for dinner. They always spent Christmas Day with her.

She had to figure out some way of letting Ben know that she was here, that the boys were with her and that they needed food. It would never do to let Old Rit know this. She would laugh and shout. Then when she learned, as she certainly would, that the boys were running away, going North, she would try to detain them, would create such an uproar that the entire quarter would know their secret.

Harriet remembered the two men, John Chase and Peter Jackson. They were strangers. She asked them to go to the cabin, to tell Ben that his children were in the fodder house, badly in need of food. She warned them not to let Old Rit overhear what they said.

John and Peter did exactly as she told them. She watched them knock on the ramshackle door of the

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cabin, saw the door open, saw Old Ben standing in the doorway. The men motioned to him to come outside. They talked to him. Ben nodded his head. His expression did not change at all. She thought, how wonderful he is. Then he went back inside the cabin.

Late in the afternoon, he tapped on the side of the fodder house, and then opened the door, and put part of the Christmas dinner—cooked bacon, hoe cake, fried pork and roasted yams—inside on the floor. He did not look at them. He said, "I know what'll come of this and I ain't goin' to see *my children*, nohow."

Harriet remembered his reputation for truthfulness. His word had always been accepted on the plantation because he was never known to tell a lie. She felt a kind of wondering admiration for him. He had become an old man in the five years since she had seen him—an old man. Yet the integrity and the strength of his character had not changed. How badly he must have wanted to see them, four of his children, there in the fodder house, on Christmas Day; but he would not lie, and so he would not look at them. Thus, if he was questioned as to the whereabouts of his boys, he could say that he had not seen them.

He made three trips from the cabin to the fodder house. Each time he put a small bundle of food inside the door until he must have given them most of the food

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intended for the Christmas dinner. Harriet noticed how slow his movements were. He was stooped over. He had aged fast. She would have to come back soon for him and Old Rit. Some time very soon. She remembered his great strength, and his love for his broadax, and the stories he used to tell her about the wonderful things to be seen in the woods. She wanted to put her arms around him and look deep into his eyes and didn't because she respected his right to make this self-sacrificing contribution to their safety. How he must have wanted to look at them, especially at the daughter whom he had not seen for five long years.

They stayed in the fodder house all that day, lying on top of the corn, listening to the drip of the rain, waiting for dark, when they would set out. They spoke in whispers.

Harriet kept reassuring them. They were perfectly safe. They would not be missed for at least two days. At Christmas everyone was busy, dancing, laughing. The masters were entertaining their friends and relatives in their big, comfortable houses. The slaves were not required to work—as long as the Yule logs burned in the fireplaces. She had never lost a passenger, never run her train off the track, they were safe with her, the Lord would see them through.

She knew they did not like this long rainy day spent

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inside a fodder house, rain coming through the chinks in the boards. Dainty, pretty Catherine, who had been a house servant, complained bitterly. She objected to the rough feel of the corn. She said she thought she heard the sound of rats, a dry scrabbling sound.

Harriet laughed at her, and told her this was easy, just sitting around like this, that the Underground Railroad wasn't any train ride. It meant walking, and sometimes running, and being hungry, and sometimes jouncing up and down in the bottom of a farmer's wagon, but more walking than riding, rain or dry, through woods and swamps and briars and hiding anywhere that the earth offered a little shelter against prying eyes and listening ears. It meant not enough sleep because the walking had to be done at night and the sleeping during the day. Before the journey ended, Catherine would be able to sleep anywhere, on the ground, in a haystack, under a bush, and this rat-infested fodder house would loom in her memory like a king's palace.

Catherine let out a scream and then burst into tears and William Henry put his arm around her to comfort her. Harriet could not look at them. She turned her back on them, thinking not for her, ever, that soft light in a man's eyes.

She looked through one of the chinks in the wall, looked toward the cabin. Every few minutes Old Rit

came to the door, opened it, and looked out, hand shading her eyes, frowning, peering toward the road. Harriet thought, She's looking for the boys, wondering why William Henry and John and Benjamin haven't come, wondering what could have happened to them. The possibilities were infinite. They might have been sold South. They might have run away and been caught, might now be in chains. They might have kept going and been shot out-of-hand.

Late in the afternoon, Ben made one more trip. He pushed another bundle of food inside the door. He kept his eyes closed, tight shut. He said he would be back when it got dark and would walk with them just a little way, to visit with them.

At dusk Harriet left the fodder house. She moved quietly toward the cabin. She wanted to get a good look at her mother. The door was ajar. Old Rit was sitting in front of the fireplace, her head on her hand. The flickering light from the fire played over her. Harriet saw a little old woman, rocking her body back and forth, sitting on her heels, in front of the fire, sucking on a clay pipe as she grieved about her boys.

Harriet wanted to say something to her, to offer some word of comfort, of greeting, and dared not for fear Old Rit's uncontrolled joy or her loudly expressed fears would attract attention.

When night came, Ben tapped at the door. He had

tied a bandanna tight around his eyes. Harriet took one of his arms and one of the boys took him by the other arm. They started out, walking slowly.

Harriet answered Ben's questions as fast as she could, she told him a little about the other trips she had made, said that she would be back again to get him and Old Rit, told him where some of the people were that she had piloted North, what the North was like, cold in winter, yes, but there were worse things in the world than cold. She told him about St. Catharines, in Canada, and said that she would be back—soon.

They parted from him reluctantly. Ben stood in the middle of the road, listening to the sound of their footsteps. They kept looking back at him. He did not remove the blindfold until he was certain they were out of sight. When he could hear no sound of movement, he untied the bandanna and went back to the cabin.

The next day, Monday, the brothers should have been back on the plantations where they worked. By afternoon, their temporary masters, disturbed by their absence, sent messengers to Dr. Thompson, in Caroline County, asking about them. Dr. Thompson said, "Why, they generally come to see the house servants when they come home for Christmas, but this time they haven't been round at all. Better go down to Old Ben's and ask him."

They questioned Old Rit first. She said, "Not one of

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em came this Christmas. I was looking for 'em all day, and my heart's most broke about 'em not coming."

Ben said, "I haven't *seen* one of 'em this Christmas."

Meanwhile Harriet led her group through the woods. Sometimes she ventured on the road and they stumbled along behind her over the frozen ruts. Sometimes she took them through fields, sodden, gray. As they moved slowly North, through Camden, Dover, Smyrna, Blackbird, she became aware of the heavy brooding silence that hung over them. She told them about Thomas Garrett, and the food and the warmth of the welcome that awaited them in Wilmington, and thought of the many different times she had invoked the image of the tall, powerfully built Quaker with the kind eyes, to reassure herself, as well as a group of runaways who stumbled along behind her.

They stopped at a house in Middletown and spent the night and part of the day. Then they continued their journey, on through New Castle, down the New Castle Road, until they reached the bank of the Christiana River. Across the river, cold and gray in the dusk of a winter's night, lay Wilmington.

Harriet waited until it was dark and then she herded her party along, over the bridge, and then straight toward Thomas Garrett's house. Garrett fed them and hastily sent them on their way to Philadelphia that same

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night. The next day Garrett wrote a letter to J. Miller McKim, to let him know that this party of fugitives was on its way:

Wilmington, 12 mo. 29th, 1854

Esteemed Friend, J. Miller McKim:—We made arrangements last night, and sent away Harriet Tubman, with six men and one woman to Allen Agnew's, to be forwarded across the country to the city. Harriet, and one of the men, had worn their shoes off their feet, and I gave them two dollars to help fit them out, and directed a carriage to be hired at my expense, to take them out, but do not yet know the expense. I now have two more from the lowest county in Maryland, on the Peninsula, upwards of one hundred miles. I will try to get one of our trusty colored men to take them to-morrow morning to the Anti-Slavery office. You can pass them on.

THOMAS GARRETT

They arrived safely at the office of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee on the 29th of December, late at night. William Still wrote their names down in his record book under the heading "Moses Arrives With Six Passengers." He described Harriet as "a woman of no

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pretensions, indeed, a more ordinary specimen of humanity could hardly be found among the most unfortunate-looking farm hands of the South. . . .

"Her success was wonderful. Time and again she made successful visits to Maryland on the Underground Rail Road, and would be absent for weeks at a time, running daily risks while making preparations for herself and passengers. Great fears were entertained for her safety, but she seemed wholly devoid of personal fear. The idea of being captured by slave-hunters or slave-holders, seemed never to enter her mind."

He mentioned the sleeping seizures. "Half of her time, she had the appearance of one asleep, and would actually sit down by the road-side and go fast asleep when on her errands of mercy through the South. . . ."

Before he described the passengers she had brought, he offered a theory as to the reason for her successful trips. "It is obvious enough, however, that her success in going into Maryland as she did, was attributable to her adventurous spirit and utter disregard of consequences. Her like it is probable was never known before or since."

As to the passengers, John Chase was twenty years old, "chestnut color, of spare build and smart." He said that his master, John Campbell Henry, of Cambridge, Maryland, was a "hard man and that he owned about

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one hundred and forty slaves." Benjamin Ross was described as "twenty-eight years of age, chestnut color, medium size and shrewd." John Ross was "only twenty-two and had left his wife Harriet Ann . . . and two small children." "Peter Jackson had been hired out to a farmer near Cambridge." Catherine (or Jane) was twenty-two and said her master "was the worst man in the country." William Henry Ross was "thirty-five years of age, of a chestnut color, and well made," and said that he had "hardly been treated as well as a gentleman would treat a dumb brute."

William Still gave them advice "on the subject of temperance, industry, education, etc. Clothing, food and money were also given them to meet their wants, and they were sent on their way rejoicing."

After they left Philadelphia, they were guided to New York city, and then on up through New York state, stopping at various stations on the underground route in Albany, in Utica. They stayed with Reverend J. W. Loguen in Syracuse, and with Frederick Douglass in Rochester.

As they went farther and farther west it grew colder. But the icy wind and the snow were only a prelude to the low temperatures they found in Canada. They arrived in St. Catharines, Canada West, early in January of 1855.

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Day after day, Harriet listened as all six of them complained bitterly about the cold that stung their faces, numbed their fingers, frosted their feet. Finally, one night when they were sitting huddled around the fire in the small house where she lived, she became impatient.

"It's warm in Maryland, nice and warm down there in the Tidewater country, compared to here," she said. "You want to go back there?"

They were startled into silence. She knew they were weighing this new freedom in the balance. Was it better to be warm and be a slave? Or was it better to be cold and to be free? Then they said, No, in unison. Even Catherine, the delicately pretty girl who had been a house servant, said, No, she did not want to go back though she was shivering from the cold.

Harriet poked the fire. "It would have surprised me if you'd said, Yes. I've seen hundreds and hundreds of slaves who finally got to the North and freedom. But I never yet saw one who was willing to go back South and be a slave."

She thought, Freedom's a hard-bought thing, not bought with dust, but bought with all of oneself—the bones, the spirit and the flesh—and once obtained it had to be cherished, no matter what the cost.

She would help these six people get adjusted to life

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in St. Catharines, and then in a few more months she would go back to Maryland to help another group of slaves escape. Nothing would ever stop her from helping them, not masters or slave catchers, or overseers or fugitive slave laws.

"If being cold is part of the price of being free then we'll just have to pay it," she said, and sat up even straighter. "We got to go free—or die."

Late in the summer of 1855, John Brown arrived in Kansas with a wagonload of arms and ammunition. Four of his sons had taken up land there in October, 1854. It was obvious from the letters he had received from them that the "Kansas troubles" would have to be settled with guns.

Brown was fifty-six years old. His hair was gray. His shoulders were stooped. Men already spoke of him as Old Brown.

18.

A Wagon Load of Bricks

FROM 1851 to 1857, the country moved closer to civil war. During these years Harriet Tubman made eleven trips into Maryland to bring out slaves.

In November, 1856, she rescued Joe Bailey. In the spring she had made two trips to the Eastern Shore. The result of one of these trips is recorded in Still's *Underground Railroad*: "April 1856. The next arrival numbered four passengers, and came under the guidance of 'Moses' (Harriet Tubman) from Maryland. . . ."

The second trip, which took place in May, is mentioned in a letter that Thomas Garrett wrote to J. Miller McKim and William Still of the Philadelphia Vigilance Committee:

Wilmington, 5 mo. 11th, 1856

Esteemed Friends—McKim and Still:—
. . . . Those four I wrote thee about arrived safe up in the neighborhood of Longwood,

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and Harriet Tubman followed after in the stage yesterday. I shall expect five more from the same neighborhood next trip. . . .

As ever your friend,

THOS. GARRETT

The November trip started off inauspiciously. There were three men in the group: Joe Bailey and his brother William, and a man named Peter Pennington. There was one woman, Eliza Nokey.

After Harriet heard Joe's story, her fear of immediate pursuit increased. Joe was a tall, dark man, muscular and handsome. His master had hired him out to another planter, William R. Hughlett, for six years. Finally, Hughlett decided to buy him, for Joe supervised the running of the plantation so well that Hughlett didn't have to pay an overseer. He paid two thousand dollars for Joe.

Joe said the day Hughlett bought him, he beat him with a rawhide, to make certain Joe knew who was the master. Joe told them that he had said to himself, "This is the first and the last time." That night he took a boat and rowed down the river to the plantation where Old Ben lived. He told Ben, "The next time Moses comes, let me know."

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The scars on Joe's back weren't healed yet. Harriet worried about that. His height, the bloody stripes on his back, would make it easy to identify him. Perhaps it was the worry, the haste with which they had to move to get away, the fact she felt impelled to urge them to move faster and faster; anyway, her head began to ache. She made them walk along the edge of the road, dangerous, but going through the woods was too slow. As she hurried them along, the scar from the old wound on her temple began to throb like a toothache. The ache in her head increased. She could feel sleep creeping over her like a paralysis. She tried to sing, tried to fight off the sleep, and stumbled, went down on her knees. And was sound asleep.

When she awakened, she had no idea how long she had slept. She heard a man's voice saying, "You've got to trust her. When she has those sleeps you have to leave her alone till she wakes up, she'll wake up pretty soon."

It was Joe who had spoken. He was squatting on his heels, and Eliza and Bill and Peter were standing up, looking down at her. She was lying flat on the road. The sun was shining, sunlight so brilliant that she thought she could feel it warm on her eyelids. Yet the ground was cold, the air was cold.

She got to her feet quickly. Her heart seemed to be skipping beats; it was going so fast. They were out in

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plain sight, all of them; anyone who passed would recognize them for what they were—runaways, fugitives.

She ordered them to follow her and went into the woods that bordered the road, plunging into the woods, almost running. They came behind her, and it seemed to her their footsteps kept pace with the speed of her thoughts: should have been traveling at night, not in broad daylight; should have been concealed, not out in the open like that; got to go faster and faster, faster, faster.

Then she heard them muttering. One of the men said, "She's taking us back, I can tell, we're going back the same way we come, the woman's crazy—"

She led them on a zigzag course, up a hill and then down. At the foot of the hill there was a small river which followed a winding course. She went straight toward it.

Eliza Nokey said, panic in her voice, "You goin' wade that?"

Harriet said she had had a dream while she was sleeping. And in the dream she had seen this river.

Eliza said it was too deep to wade, they'd all drown.

Harriet said she was certain there was one place so shallow that they could wade it.

They stopped following her. All of them stopped. Bill asked her if she'd crossed this river before. She said no,

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but she'd seen it in her dream, that the Lord told her what to do, and running water leaves no trail. They would be safe on the other side.

Peter Pennington said, "I'll wade no freezin' water for no crazy woman," and started back toward the woods.

She raised the gun, pointed it, scowling. "Stand still," she ordered. "You try to go back, try to run back to the woods, and you'll never run any more. You go on with me or you die."

They went on. She didn't like it, the threat of violence always disturbed her. And she had never felt so unsure of herself, so desperate, so afraid. But her visions had never failed her.

She waded into the stream, water like ice was around her ankles, and as she went forward, it reached her thighs, and then her waist. She turned and looked back, and Joe was the only one who had followed her. The others were standing on the bank watching. Water reached to her shoulders and she kept going. She closed her eyes for a moment, in the grip of a despair as icy cold as the water.

She thought that if her belief were only strong enough, the waters of this stream would have parted, and they would all have walked across on dry land; instead the water rose higher, now it was above her shoulders, up to her chin. She kept going. She held the gun up out of the water; at least Joe was still following; and she thought, Wade in the water just like John, and a feeling of con-

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fidence returned. When the Lord no longer wanted her—

The water began to recede. It was down to her shoulders. But it wasn't the water that was receding, the stream was getting shallower. When the others saw this, they started to wade the river, too. Then all of them reached the opposite bank, dry land, a small island, or neck of land. They were shivering, shocked by the cold, numb, but otherwise unharmed.

They went through more woods and then they came to a clearing. There was a cabin there. Harriet said she had seen that in her dreams, too. They would be safe there.

And they were. The cabin belonged to a family of free Negroes. They were made welcome, given food. Their wet clothing was dried in front of the open fire.

The next morning they set out again. They went back the same way they had come, but they did not have to wade through the river. Their host served as guide, and he led them by a long roundabout road.

When they reached the spot where Harriet had gone to sleep by the side of the road, the day before, they all shivered. The patrollers had been there, had waited for them there. If they hadn't crossed that river at Harriet's direction, they would have been caught. The evidence was unmistakable: the grass had been trampled by horses' feet; the ground was littered with the stubs of half-smoked cigars.

A poster had been nailed to one of the trees. They

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recognized it immediately. In the upper left-hand corner there was a woodcut of a black man, a small running figure with a stick over his shoulder, and a bundle tied to the end of the stick, and another stick in his hand.

Harriet tore the poster down, and handed it to Joe. He read it aloud:

HEAVY REWARD

TWO THOUSAND SIX HUNDRED DOLLARS REWARD.—Ran away from the subscriber, on Saturday night, November 15th, 1856, Josiah and William Bailey, and Peter Pennington. Joe is about 5 feet 10 inches in height, of a chestnut color, bald head, with a remarkable scar on one of his cheeks, not positive on which it is, but think it is on the left, under the eye, has intelligent countenance, active, and well-made. He is about 28 years old. Bill is of a darker color, about 5 feet 8 inches in height, stammers a little when confused, well-made, and older than Joe, well dressed, but may have pulled kearsey on over their other clothes. Peter is smaller than either the others, about 25 years of age, dark chestnut color, 5 feet 7 or 8 inches high.

A reward of fifteen hundred dollars will be given to any person who will apprehend the

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said Joe Bailey, and lodge him safely in the jail at Easton, Talbot Co., Md. and \$300 for Bill and \$800 for Peter.

W. R. HUGHLETT,
John C. Henry,
T. WRIGHT

When Joe finished reading, there was silence. Harriet tried to say something, and her voice was only a croaking sound in her throat. Again she tried to speak, and couldn't. She must have caught cold from the river. What would she do? Bill sighed. Then Peter groaned.

Eliza Nokey was angry. No one had offered any reward for her return. Then Joe started to sing. He looked at that poster which meant any man who read it would be tempted to start hunting for the slave who was worth fifteen hundred dollars to his master, crumpled it up in his hand, and started to sing.

They hurried in a northerly direction, and Joe kept singing, softly, under his breath:

*The little wheel run by faith,
And the big wheel run by the grace of God:
A wheel within a wheel
Way in the middle of the air.*

As they went along, Harriet sensed danger everywhere, smelled danger. They were not safe. She herded

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them along, sometimes going ahead of them, sometimes walking behind them, prodding them with the butt of the gun. The hoarseness prevented her from speaking.

It was Joe who talked, Joe who encouraged them, Joe who, as if by instinct, told the old stories about the slave ships, the torture, the irons and the whips. When he sang, they moved faster. Eliza Nokey fairly skipped along, as Joe sang, his voice almost a whisper:

*Who comes yonder all dressed in red?
I heard the angels singing—
It's all the children Moses led,
I heard the angels singing.*

They saw other places along the road where the patrolers had been, found one place where they must have waited for as much as an hour, in the hope that they would be able to find some trace of this party. The horses had been tied to the trees.

Joe shook his head and stopped singing.

It was daybreak when they reached the outskirts of Wilmington. Within sight of the long bridge Harriet called a halt. She told the runaways to hide in the woods, not to speak to anyone, not to make a sound, not to move.

She watched the bridge for a long time. It was guarded. There were posters nailed to the trees all along the road. Stealthily, cautiously, she took two of the posters down,

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and went back to where she'd left the runaways. Joe said one of the posters was the one he'd read to them before and the reward for him had been increased to two thousand dollars.

But the other—the little running figure reproduced on the flimsy paper was that of a woman. The reward offered for her capture was twelve thousand dollars. The poster described her. It said she was dark, short, of a muscular build, with a deep voice, and that she had a scar on her left temple, scars on the back of her neck. Her name was Harriet Tubman. Sometimes she was called Moses.

Harriet laughed. She said nobody was going to catch her. She left them again and went as close to the bridge as she dared, waiting, watching. Thomas Garrett must know about those posters, must know the bridge was watched. He would try to get in touch with her. She was certain of it.

He did. Garrett sent his servant out to look for Harriet. When Harriet saw him, she signaled to him. They held a conference in the long grass by the side of the road. Then he went back to report to Garrett. Two hours later he was back again with Garrett's message.

It was dark when Harriet returned to the fugitives. As she went toward their hiding place, she signaled her approach by singing:

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"Go down, Moses—"

Her voice was no longer beautiful. It was like the croaking of a frog, hoarse, tuneless.

She told them to follow her. She took them through the woods, and then along a road, heavy woods on each side of it, more like a country lane than a road. There was a long wagon there. And men. And the sound of horses, jingle of harness, stamping of feet, soft blowing out of breath.

They got in the wagon, one by one, and lay down flat. Harriet said the men were bricklayers. She said that the men would cover them with bricks. When the men put boards over them, Eliza Nokey made a thin high sound of terror, and Harriet heard her whisper, "It's like being in a coffin." Then the bricks were placed on top of the boards. Harriet thought, Eliza is right—it is as though we had died together and been buried in a common grave, and croaked, "We got to go free or die." The words were lost.

The wagon started. There was a sound of hoofbeats. The men on the wagon began to laugh and shout and sing. Then they were on the long bridge and someone cried, "Halt!"

The driver shouted, "Whoa! Whoa!"

When he was asked if he'd seen any runaway Negroes, he laughed and said with that kind of money being offered

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for them, he planned to start hunting for them as soon as he got home, right after supper.

When they got out of the wagon at Thomas Garrett's house in Wilmington, Garrett said of Harriet, "She was so hoarse she could hardly speak, and was also suffering with violent toothache."

Garrett forwarded them to Philadelphia where William Still wrote down their past history in his record book. From Philadelphia they were forwarded to the office of the Antislavery Society in New York.

When they reached New York, it was Joe who lost his courage. The moment they entered the office of Oliver Johnson, head of the New York Antislavery Society, Johnson glanced at Joe and said, "Well, Joe, I'm glad to see the man who is worth two thousand dollars to his master."

Joe looked as though he were going to faint. He said, "How did you know me, sir?"

"Here is the advertisement. From the description, no one could possibly mistake you."

"How far off is Canada?" Joe asked.

Oliver Johnson showed him a map. "It's more than three hundred miles, by railroad."

Joe said he wouldn't go any farther because he would be hunted every step of the way, and he couldn't stand it any longer. If a man who had never seen him could

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recognize him from the description, then the whole dream of freedom was hopeless. He told Harriet to take the others and go on. None of them would be safe as long as he was with them.

But Harriet said they would not go without him. Finally, reluctantly, he went with them. She said afterward, "From that time Joe was silent. He talked no more. He sang no more. He sat with his head on his hand, and nobody could rouse him, or make him take any interest in anything."

They were put aboard a train and they passed through New York state without incident. The conductor had hidden them in the baggage car, but when they approached Niagara Falls, he took them into one of the coaches.

Harriet tried to rouse Joe from his apathy, and urged him to look at Niagara. But he still sat with his head in his hands, refusing to look.

Then she shouted, "You've crossed the line! You're free, Joe, you're free!"

The others shouted too. Still he sat, bent over, silent. Harriet shook him. "Joe! Joe! You're a free man!"

Slowly he straightened up in his seat, and then stood up, and lifted his hands, and began to sing. There were tears streaming down his cheeks as he sang, louder and louder:

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*Glory to God and Jesus, too,
One more soul got safe.
Glory to God and Jesus, too,
For all these souls got safe.*

His voice was like the sound of thunder. Harriet, listening, thought it put a glory over all of them.

By 1856 there was civil war in Kansas. In April, May and June, most of the speeches made in Congress concerned Kansas.

Toward the end of May, Old John Brown, accompanied by four of his sons, a son-in-law and two other men, headed for Pottawatomie, where they murdered five pro-slavery settlers, an action which set off guerrilla warfare in Kansas. Henceforth John Brown was known as Bloody Brown or Pottawatomie Brown.