

19.

The Old Folks Go North

IN JUNE OF 1857, Harriet was again working in a hotel in Cape May, New Jersey. While she was there she kept having vivid dreams about Old Rit and Ben, her mother and father. In the dream they were about to be sold. Off and on during the day she would shiver, remembering the sad expression on Old Rit's face.

She had always wanted to bring them North. But she did not know how she could travel with two old people. All her other passengers, with the exception of the babies, had been young and strong, able to walk long distances. The babies were no problem, light as air to carry. Sometimes she carried them herself in a basket, and she always gave them a few drops of paregoric so they would keep quiet. A group of runaways could travel just as fast with a baby as without one. But Old Rit and Ben—

It was with a shrug of her shoulders that she started South to get them, thinking that she'd solved all kinds of

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problems and, with the help of the good Lord, she'd solve this one when she got there. There was an urgency about the dreams that suggested she could waste no time.

She went South by train, counting on the fact that no one would question her because she was going in the wrong direction for a runaway slave. It was broad daylight when she reached Bucktown, Maryland. She deliberately assumed the bent-over posture of an old woman, sidling down the street. She pulled her sunbonnet well over her eyes. There was always the chance she might be recognized because she had lived and worked in and around this area.

She stopped once, at a cabin where a family of free Negroes lived. She bought a pair of fowl from them, and asked that their legs be tied together. As she paid for the chickens she thought it takes a lot of cooking and cleaning and scrubbing to pay for these trips but it's worth it.

When she left Bucktown the chickens were fluttering and squawking and she looked for all the world like an old woman. She was not disguised, it was simply that the bent back and the chickens, legs tied together, transformed her into a granny, obviously coming from or going to market. The chickens would serve to distract the attention of anyone who passed her.

She walked along the dirt road, thinking about Bar-

rett's slave, and how he had run down this same road, with the overseer close behind him, and she behind the overseer. She touched the deep scar on her forehead, remembering. She had worked in these woods that were so close to the road, swinging an ax just like a man. Sometimes she had walked here with John Tubman. She knew a moment of self-pity, of regret, thinking of the quilt she had made, reliving all the tender dreams that had gone into the making of it. She sighed. It had, in all truth, been freedom's quilt. It was the only gift she had to give to the woman who had helped set her feet firmly on the road to freedom.

Far down the road she heard the pound, pound, pound of horses' hoofs. She stood still, undecided. Should she hide in the woods? She gathered up her long skirt in one hand, preparing to run. She wouldn't run. Her skirt would be snagged and torn by briars, she might trip and fall. Besides, she still did not know how she was going to get Old Rit and Ben to the North. She might have to take them on a train, and she couldn't ride on a train with her clothing torn, it was one of the earmarks of the fugitive.

As the hoofbeats grew nearer, she pulled her sun-bonnet farther down over her face and shortened the length of her steps, edging over to the side of the narrow road, hitching along. When the horse came abreast of her,

she looked up, sidewise, at the rider. It was Doc Thompson, her old master, cigar in his mouth. She caught a glimpse of his heavy gold watch chain, of his broad-brimmed Panama hat.

She gave a hard violent jerk at the string on the chickens' legs, and with a squawk and a wild fluttering of wings, the chickens ran back down the road. Harriet gave a high-pitched, quavering screech and hobbled after them.

Doc Thompson reined in his horse, turned to watch the pursuit. He laughed and then he shouted, "Go it, Granny! I'll bet on the chickens but go it anyway, Granny! Ha! Ha! Ha!"

She stopped running as soon as she heard him cluck to the horse, and when the hoofbeats started again, she turned and walked purposefully toward the plantation, back straight, head held proudly. She lingered near the edge of the road until it was dark. Then she went toward the quarter, moving so quietly that she was only a shadow that emerged from deeper shadows, disappeared, emerged again. She tapped on the door, lightly.

Slow footsteps approached the door. Old Rit opened the door a little way and said, "Who is it?" caution in her voice.

"It's Hat," Harriet whispered.

She was afraid that Old Rit would exclaim, loudly,

laugh and cry, and everyone in the quarter would know that she had come back.

But Old Rit merely said, "Come in. I didn't think I'd ever see you again."

They stood looking at each other for a moment and then Old Rit hugged Harriet and kissed her. Harriet looked at her mother, frowning, wondering how in the world she was going to make the trip North with her. Old Rit moved slowly, stiffly.

"I've got a misery in my knees and my back all the time," she explained, apologetically. "Even on a night like this I keep a little fire going. It kind of helps my legs."

Harriet could see that her mother was troubled by something. She was very glad to see her but she seemed worried.

"Where's Daddy Ben?" she asked.

Old Rit sighed. "He's up to the Big House. They keep asking him questions. They say your daddy helped hide Barrett's Peter. That he put him in the corncrib and fed him. I'd of never let that worth-nothing Peter stay here, and I'd of never took food to him. Food we should have been eating—"

"Well, what happened?" Harriet asked.

"Peter he took off after he stayed here five days. Then he got scared walking through the woods, and he turned around and come back, and told his wife that your daddy

helped him. And she went and told her master about your daddy. And now they say he's been running off slaves—"

The door opened and Ben entered the cabin. He stared at Harriet as though he didn't believe she was real. He said, "Hat! You come back for us, didn't you?"

She could only nod. It didn't seem possible that Ben, too, could have grown so much older, so slow, so bent-over. Ben hugged her and patted her arm.

Old Rit said, "What'd they ask you this time?"

"The same thing over and over. 'Did you see Barrett's Peter?'"

"How do you answer them?" Harriet asked curiously.

"I just keep saying I ain't never seen him in the corncrib—and I ain't. It was dark in there and I never did really see him. That first time when I opened the door it was moonrise and he was right close to the door. I had thought there were rats got in there again. I got good ears and I heard a kind of rustle noise. I got a big stick and I went so quiet he never even heard me open the door. The moon shine was right on his face and I could see his eyes." Ben covered his own eyes with his hand for a moment. "Anybody would have fed him," he said, "anybody with a heart. You could tell how scared he was and how long he'd been scared and how long he'd been starving just by his eyes. He told me he'd been in the corncrib

for two days without nothing to eat because he left Mr. Barrett's place without taking no food with him. I saw hunger and I saw fear but I didn't see him."

Harriet remembered how Ben had blindfolded himself so he wouldn't "see" her that Christmas night she stayed in the corner with a party of fugitives.

Ben went on talking in his old man's voice. "I couldn't bear not to feed him. And then one night I went out there with some hoe cake and a bit of fish and he weren't there. I knew he'd took off and two days straight I prayed that he'd make it. Next thing I heard he were back. He told his wife he couldn't stand the lonely dark and the not knowing where he was going so he come back and he told her I helped him. So she told Mr. Barrett and Mr. Barrett told the Master."

Old Rit said drearily, "They keep asking him questions about it. Every time he goes up to the Big House I'm scared he won't come back."

"The Master wouldn't let nothing happen to me," Ben said. "He said I'd been a good slave and he wouldn't let nobody abuse me or arrest me. But he said the others like Mr. Barrett was getting madder and madder at him because they think I got something to do with the man they call—" he hesitated, looked around the cabin, and then whispered the word, "Moses."

Old Rit said, "Hush!"

Harriet said, "Will they ask you about Peter again tomorrow?"

"They been asking me every day for a week now. Of course they'll ask me again tomorrow. Mr. Barrett he comes to the Big House and the Master sends for me and they talk and smoke and argue. And the Master says, 'I got to believe Ben. He ain't never been known to tell a lie, and if Ben belong to you, you'd believe him too. He ain't the one that run away. Peter's the one that run away. Ben ain't the one that run away and then got scared and come back. Whyn't you go ask some of those free Negroes about Peter? Ben's an old man and been on this plantation all his life. He ain't the one's been running off the slaves around here!'"

Harriet thought, I can see them as he tells it, see the cigar smoke and the long cold drinks, see Doc Thompson enjoying Barrett's irritation, smiling through the cigar smoke, toying with his gold watch chain.

Ben said, "Then Mr. Barrett he gets mad and leaves. Jumps on that big white horse and jerks at the reins and goes off, cursing and swearing at the horse, his face all red. And the Master and I know he's really cursing us and not the horse. And then the Master says, 'He'll be back tomorrow, Ben.'"

While Ben was talking, part of Harriet's mind was still trying to figure out how she was going to get these

two elderly people away from here. If she could get them to Thomas Garrett in Wilmington, everything would be all right. But how get them there? They simply could not walk. Well, if they couldn't walk, they'd have to ride.

"It'll be all right," she said confidently. "Daddy Ben, let's you and me go outside for a while."

Once outside the cabin she put her hand on his arm. "I've got to have a horse," she said. "You'll have to tell me where I can get one. It's the only way I can get you folks away from here."

"A horse?" He shook his head. "It ain't easy to get hold of one since so many slaves run off." He thought a long time. Finally he said, "There's Dollie Mae. That's that old critter they mostly keep out to pasture over to Mr. Barrett's. But it's a good mile to their plantation."

"A mile?" she said and laughed. "Why, I've walked—" and she stopped. "I'll get the horse. You and Mammy get yourselves ready to leave. Pack up whatever food you've got. I'll be back for you."

She found Dollie Mae lying down under some trees in Barrett's pasture. Someone had left a long rope around her neck. She got the horse up, patted her, talked to her. My, but she's old, she thought. I just hope she'll be able to make the trip.

The stars were out and the air was warm. She got on Dollie's back with difficulty because of the long skirt, and went down the road toward the quarter. True, she

had the horse but she needed a wagon and she would need reins of some kind. Well, she'd just have to borrow some things from Doc Thompson. There used to be an old wagon in back of the stable.

She tied the horse to a tree in the woods near the quarter. Then she went behind the stable, moving cautiously. Sure enough, there was the wagon. So far, so good. Next thing was to get inside the stable. Warm night, doors ajar. She pushed them back and they made no sound. Someone evidently kept them greased. Once inside she got the harness and—

She heard a sound behind her, turned. The groom or hostler, a man she had never seen, was standing in the door, eyes wide with fright. They looked at each other in silence, not moving. Then she put her finger to her lips and shook her head, and backed out of the stable as quietly as she had entered it.

Would he give the alarm? She'd just have to risk it. She went back to the tree where she'd left Dollie, harnessed her up, urged her toward the stable, stopping every once in a while to listen. Nothing. She backed Dollie between the shafts of the old wagon, hurrying now.

Once on the seat she clucked softly. The wagon started moving, creaking faintly as it moved. She drove off toward the woods, hitched Dollie to a tree again. Now for the old folks.

When she reached the cabin, Old Rit and Ben were

arguing. Rit said she wasn't going to leave without her feather tick and Ben said she couldn't take it with her. Old Rit appealed to Harriet. "He's got his broadax," she said. "Why can't I take my feather tick? It took me most of my life to get the feathers to make that tick and I'm not going off anywhere without it."

Harriet said, "We'll take it along. But we've got to hurry."

She carried the broadax and the feather tick, loaded them on the wagon and then helped Ben and Old Rit up on the seat. She murmured a prayer under her breath when she untied Dollie. Lord, let this horse hold out or we'll never make it.

Then she climbed up on the seat, said, "Giddap," slapped Dollie with the reins and they were off. They traveled all that night. Toward morning, Harriet got off the seat and led Dollie and the wagon off the road. They spent the day in the woods. The old people ate and then went off to sleep. When it got dark they set out again.

Three nights later, just at dusk, Harriet stopped the wagon in front of Thomas Garrett's house in Wilmington. She had got them safely through this far. The rest of the trip would be comparatively easy.

Garrett gave Harriet enough money to take all of them to Canada. From Wilmington on up she followed her usual route, stopping in Philadelphia, and then in New York.

The pattern of her life changed after the rescue of Ben and Old Rit. It was cold in St. Catharines in June, 1857. Old Rit said she did not believe she would ever feel warm again as long as she lived. Ben, too old and tired to use his beloved broadax, said nothing. He hugged the fireside and sighed.

Harriet, listening to them, watching them, doubted that they could survive the winters, and thought with **nostalgia** of the Tidewater country, and the smell of honeysuckle and the warmth that lay over the land in the month of June, so that the fields, the earth, the woods, yielded and held heat and a thousand fragrances; even after the sun went down, the night air was warm and sweet-smelling.

She wondered what she ought to do. It wouldn't be safe for them to live in the United States. The Fugitive Slave Law was still in force, though there were few people in the North who would willingly betray a fugitive. Yet it was a risky thing to do.

But she had run risks before, plenty of them. One way or another, she had been running risks all her life. They ought to be fairly safe in New York state. Frederick Douglass lived in Rochester, Jarm Loguen lived in Syracuse; both men were friends of hers. But her mother and father would find cities like Rochester and Syracuse too big and bewildering, too noisy. She thought of the smaller places, stops on the underground, and remem-

bered Auburn, a small town, with elm trees arching over its streets, and smooth lawns, and houses painted white. It was a friendly place.

In 1857 she bought a small frame house in Auburn from William H. Seward, who was at the time the United States Senator from New York. The house was at the end of South Street, beyond the tollgate, on land that belonged to Senator Seward. She had very little money to make a down payment, so there was a rather large mortgage.

That fall she was back in Dorchester County, Maryland, again. In October, William Still recorded the arrival of sixty fugitives from the area in and around Cambridge. All of them had followed the Underground Railroad route under Harriet's direction though she did not go with them all the way to Philadelphia.

But she spent the winter of 1857-58 in St. Catharines, working in the woods, cooking, cleaning, doing whatever jobs she could get.

During those winter months she was troubled by a recurrent, disturbing dream which had no meaning. Night after night she dreamed that she was "in a wilderness sort of place, all full of rocks and bushes." Very slowly, the head of a snake appeared on the rocks, and as she looked, terrified, the head changed, and turned into the head of an old man with a long white beard and glittering eyes. He kept looking, "wishful like, just as if

he was going to speak to me." Slowly two other heads appeared beside his. These were smaller heads, and the faces were younger. Suddenly a crowd of men came swarming over the rocks and struck down the heads of the two young men and then the head of the old man. All the time he kept looking at her as though he wanted to say something to her and couldn't.

One day, in April, she went deep into the woods to gather firewood. When she finished, she sat down on a rock to rest. She looked up and saw a man approaching her. In the distance he looked like an old man, his shoulders stooped, but he walked with the swift space-covering gait of a young man.

When she saw his face, she drew in her breath. It was the face of the old man in her dreams, the same white beard, the glittering gray-blue eyes. Then Jarm Loguen came up to them. He told Harriet that the man looking at her with such interest was John Brown, and that he had come a long distance just to meet her and talk with her.

She listened to Brown in silence. He wanted her to tell him the route she had followed on the way North from Maryland, to reveal the hiding places she had used in the swamps, the forests, all the secrets she had learned in the last eight years, in those trips back and forth through the Tidewater country.

He said that he needed this information because he was

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going to free the slaves, on a large scale. He planned to establish himself in a stronghold in the mountains of Virginia. Once having done that, the slaves would rise up and flock to him. He would arm them with pikes and guns so that they could fight for their freedom. He wanted her to join him in this project so that she could lead the slaves to Canada. He also wanted her to help him here in Canada in raising recruits for the small army of men that he would need for this enterprise.

As he talked she thought of Nat Turner. And she was repelled by the thought of the bloodshed that must inevitably take place, remembering Nat and the bloody swath he had left behind him that night in Virginia, all those years ago, when he too had decided the time had come to free the slaves. This old man, like Nat, worshiped a God of wrath, of vengeance. The God she worshiped was a God of infinite mercy, of gentleness.

Yet his sincerity made a deep impression on her. He was so in earnest. He shared her hatred of slavery, shared her belief that freedom was a right all men should enjoy, and yet— She hesitated.

Finally she said she would help him. Later on, she suggested a possible date for the beginning of this action—the Fourth of July.

While in St. Catharines, John Brown wrote a letter to his son, John Brown, Jr., reporting on the success of his

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Canadian trip: "April 8, 1858. . . . I am succeeding to all appearance, beyond my expectation. Harriet Tubman hooked on his [her] whole team at once. He [she] is the most of man, naturally, that I ever met with. There is the most abundant material, and of the right quality, in this quarter, beyond all doubt. . . ."

But Harriet, waiting in St. Catharines, waiting for further word from John Brown, heard nothing.

In March, 1857, Buchanan was inaugurated President of the United States. A few days later, Chief Justice Roger B. Taney delivered the Supreme Court decision in the Dred Scott case. The Court said that: Scott was not a person or a citizen but a piece of slave property that must be returned to slavery; the Missouri Compromise was unconstitutional and therefore slavery could not be forbidden in the Territories.

In Springfield, Illinois, Abraham Lincoln said: "We think the decision is erroneous. We know the Court that made it has often overruled its own decisions, and we shall do what we can to have it overrule this."

On November 13, 1858, The National Anti-Slavery Standard, published in New York, made the following comment on a convention of slaveholders held in Cambridge, Maryland:

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"The operation of the Underground Railroad on the Maryland border, within the last few years has been so extensive that in some neighborhoods the whole slave population have made their escape, and the Convention is a result of the general panic on the part of the owners of this specie of property . . ."

Though the Standard carefully avoided all mention of Harriet Tubman's name, it was a recognized fact in Abolitionist circles that she was responsible for the panic. Under her guidance, over three hundred slaves had reached the North and freedom. By 1860 the rewards offered for her capture totaled sixty thousand dollars.

20.

The Lecture Platform

HARRIET SPENT most of the winter of 1858–1859 in Boston. She was badly in need of funds. There was the mortgage on the house in Auburn, which she never seemed to be able to pay off, no matter how hard she worked, and she wanted to make another trip to Maryland.

By this time she was known by reputation throughout the North. Many people called her "Molly Pitcher" because of the stories they had heard about the daring rescue trips she made into the South. Her friends in New York had urged her to go to Boston—people there were eager to meet her and equally eager to help her.

Early in December of 1858 she arrived in Boston, with a little packet of letters of introduction and a small bundle of daguerreotypes—pictures of some of her old friends like Gerrit Smith and Thomas Garrett. That afternoon of her arrival she sat in the front parlor of a boarding

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house waiting for a man named Franklin B. Sanborn. She had never seen him but he knew some of her friends. One of the letters of introduction she had brought from New York was addressed to him.

She felt a little strange in Boston. She never thought of her own safety. It was just that this city was unlike New York or Philadelphia or Syracuse or any other city she had known. The streets were very narrow and as crooked as a hickory stick. Most of them were cobbled. From what little she had seen of this famous old city, it looked like a place where it would be easy to get lost.

She folded her hands in her lap and her lips curved into a smile. Why would she get lost here? She had traveled thousands of miles and never lost her sense of direction. Suddenly she frowned. How would she recognize Mr. Sanborn? Suppose some slave catcher came instead. Boston was said to be overrun with them.

Then there was a tap on the door of the parlor. She said, "Come in," and stood up, holding herself very straight. The tall man who entered, smiled, said, "Mrs. Tubman?" and when she nodded, said, "I'm Franklin Sanborn."

She did not answer him. Instead she opened the little package of pictures that she had placed on a table near her chair and handed one of them to him. Because it had occurred to her that if he recognized the picture, then surely he was who he said he was—Franklin B. Sanborn.

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In the back of her mind an old memory flared: the Sims boy, Anthony Burns, Shadrach, all of them arrested here in Boston, charged with being fugitives. And she was a fugitive, too. For all she knew, this big young man smiling at her with such cordiality might be a sheriff—or—

"Do you know who that is?" she asked.

He raised his eyebrows. "It's Gerrit Smith," he said. "Why do you ask?"

When she explained, he nodded, his eyes amused. "You're quite right to be cautious." As she continued to stand, he said, "Let's sit down and talk."

He sat down beside her, asked her a few questions, listened intently as she answered, kept her talking—for more than an hour. As he was leaving he asked her if she would make a speech at an antislavery meeting in about two weeks. At first she refused. But he overrode her objections, saying, "You have no idea how important it is that you should tell some of these stories to the people here in Boston."

Two weeks later there she was on the platform at Faneuil Hall. She was wearing a dark gray long-skirted cotton dress. The only adornment was a bit of lace at the neck and jet buttons down the front. She held an old black reticule on her lap. The other speakers were distinguished-looking men: Wendell Phillips, Franklin Sanborn, Thomas Wentworth Higginson.

When Sanborn introduced her, she stood looking

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shyly at this audience of well-dressed people, not knowing what to say. And someone on the platform asked her a question, and then another. Then she started talking, telling about the trips she had made back into the slave country, how she carefully selected the slaves that would go North with her, how they traveled mostly on foot, wading through rivers, hiding in haystacks, in barns. Sometimes there were babies in the party, and once when there were twin infants, tiny babies that she had drugged with opium so that they would sleep, she found that one of the stopping places on the route had a new and hostile owner. She had expected to find food and shelter for her passengers and instead had to hurry them along, hungry, cold, fearful, and she herself fearful, too.

She had led them to the edge of a swamp, and she remembered there was an island in the swamp, so she took them there, leading them through the tall rank swamp grass, urging them on, because the people at the farm where she had stopped might well spread the word that a group of runaways was in the neighborhood. She had them lie down in the swampy grass, so tall it concealed them completely. It was cold there on that sedgy little island, and they shivered, their clothes sodden with mud; only the babies, the little twins, were dry and warm in their basket. She said she looked at them, looked at their small brown fists, and thought of them as treasures, tiny

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treasures who would be free with the help of the Lord.

They stayed there all day. All day she prayed, "Lord, I'm going to hold steady on to You—" There was always danger on the road, always the unexpected, but the Lord had never failed her.

The sun began to go down, and the tall grass looked golden. Then the light began to fade and water birds murmured their good night songs. It was dusk, and the little island was all shadow, when she saw a man. He was walking up and down along the edge of the swamp. She frowned, watching him, wondering what he was doing there. He could not possibly see them. He wore the wide-brimmed hat of a Quaker, and she thought perhaps he is really a friend, and yet one could never be sure. Anyone could put on the clothes of a Quaker, a Quaker's clothing did not turn a man into a friend.

His lips kept moving. She thought he must be talking to himself. She listened, and she heard what he said:

"My wagon stands in the barnyard of the next farm, right across the way. The horse is in the stable. The harness hangs on a nail."

He repeated these words. Then he was gone as suddenly as he had come.

When it was completely dark, Harriet left the little island, moving slowly, quietly. She looked back. The tall grass concealed where her passengers lay. No one

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passing by would know that they were there. They did not move, did not talk.

She approached the farm as cautiously and as quietly as she had left the island, a prayer on her lips. Sure enough there was a wagon, a big farm wagon in the barnyard. She reached inside it, felt along it, to make certain that no one lay concealed in it. One never knew when one might be walking straight into a trap of some kind. Her hands touched something bulky and she gave an exclamation of surprise. There was a package on the floor of the wagon, bulky. She pulled it toward her, and almost cried from thankfulness, for she could smell food.

After that she moved quickly into the barn. A big white horse turned his head toward her, and she patted him, then put on the harness. A few minutes later she had hitched him to the wagon and was driving toward the little island. Thus she and her passengers rode to the next stop on the road (the Underground Railroad), a farm belonging to another Quaker, where they left the horse and wagon to be picked up by its owner.

She described the rest of the journey, the stop at Thomas Garrett's in Wilmington, and the slow journey North to Philadelphia, where William Still recorded their names and the names of their owners in his thick notebook.

This firsthand information about the Underground

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Railroad, by a woman who had served as one of its conductors, thrilled that first audience before whom she spoke. They stood on their feet and cheered and clapped when she finished.

After that first speech she was a much sought-after speaker in Boston and its environs. Her appearance had undergone subtle changes during the course of the years. There was something brooding and tender in her face, a gentleness in her eyes. The lips were slightly compressed, the only indication of a never quite fulfilled hunger for affection. Her speaking voice, deep in pitch, slightly husky, was more beautiful than ever. Yet sometimes she sat on a platform in plain sight of an audience and went sound asleep just as she had often done on the long road to the North. In spite of this strange handicap, she was a tremendously successful public speaker.

During that winter in Boston, she saw John Brown several times. He called himself Captain Smith because he did not want his enemies to know his whereabouts. Harriet told him all she knew of the routes to the North, the hiding places on the way out of Maryland, drawing crude maps for him. During the spring and early summer she waited for further word from him, and heard nothing more.

She was much in demand as a speaker. She visited Con-

cord, Framingham, Worcester, speaking at antislavery meetings.

Early in June, Thomas Wentworth Higginson told her that he had had a letter from Franklin Sanborn. And that Sanborn had said John Brown "is desirous of getting someone to go to Canada and collect recruits for him among the fugitives . . . with H. [Harriet] Tubman, or alone. . . ."

Higginson told her that he had lost confidence in the plan. He said that it had "grown rather vague and dubious" in his mind because of the repeated postponements.

Harriet did not know what to think. The Fourth of July had come and gone. On that day she made a speech at a meeting of the Massachusetts Anti-Slavery Society at Framingham. Someone said that Brown was in Maryland, and someone else said, no, he was in New York.

On the 1st of August she was back in Boston to make another speech. She liked Boston. Whenever she had a moment's leisure she went to Boston Common. Sanborn had told her something of its history, said that years ago a Quaker, a woman, had been hanged there and that a mob once tried to hang William Lloyd Garrison there. Sanborn said that these days all manner of people aired their grievances on Boston Common. He spoke of Amelia Bloomer, and laughed, describing the costume she had worn when she made a speech there one afternoon. She

had on full, stiff trousers that reached all the way to her ankles and were tied there. He said it was one of the funniest sights he'd ever seen.

Harriet thought that over, and though she did not say so, decided that she could have used just such a costume many times. Long, full skirts would hamper any woman who had walked and ridden along a road that almost ran under the ground.

Harriet never heard from John Brown again, never saw him again. She was unaware of the fact that Brown and his assistants kept referring to her in the letters that they sent to the Boston Abolitionists who were helping to finance his project. "Harriet Tubman is probably in New Bedford, sick. She has staid in N.E. [New England] a long time. And been a kind of missionary." "I have sent a note to Harriet requesting her to come to Boston." "When Harriet comes. . . ."

But Harriet never came. Perhaps she was ill, perhaps Higginson had told her that he had lost confidence in the plan, perhaps word of Frederick Douglass's absolute refusal to enter what he believed to be a steel trap had influenced her—in any event, she was not at Harper's Ferry, nor did she send any recruits from Canada.

On October 17, 1859, she was in New York, visiting friends. It had been years since she had experienced that

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curious fluttering sensation of her heart, a wild beating inside her chest, that she interpreted as a warning of danger. But that morning, at the breakfast table, she held her hands against her chest. She said, "Something's wrong. Something dreadful has happened, or is about to happen."

Her hostess looked about the dining room, white tablecloth on the table, pretty china sprinkled with rosebuds, the good smell of bacon in the room, and the fragrance of coffee, and shook her head. "But Harriet," she protested, "there's always something wrong somewhere."

Harriet frowned and closed her eyes, thinking, wondering. Then she shivered, feeling suddenly cold. "It's Captain Brown," she said. "Something is happening to him. Something dreadful has happened to him."

No argument could shake off her feeling of disaster. Later in the day they heard that the United States Government Arsenal at Harper's Ferry had been seized. The next day's papers carried the news: eighteen men in the fire-engine house with Brown, ten of them were killed, including two of Brown's sons. John Brown had been taken prisoner.

A week later, Old John Brown was put on trial. He was found guilty and sentenced to death.

Harriet was deeply affected by Brown's death. She worshiped his memory. It seemed to her amazing that a white man, free, independent, should have held such

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strong convictions on the subject of slavery that he was willing to risk his life in order that slaves should be free.

Someone read her the final statement that he made. She had it read to her over and over again, until she knew parts of it by heart: ". . . I say I am yet too young to understand that God is any respecter of persons. . . . I believe that to have interfered as I have done, as I have always freely admitted I have done, in behalf of His despised poor, I did no wrong but right. . . ."

Harriet always regretted that he had not made his plans more carefully. The slaves in the area had no knowledge of his intention, had been given not so much as a hint that such a plan existed, or that it in any way involved them, and they were as disturbed and frightened by the action at Harper's Ferry as the rest of the country.

She resolved to do something in memory of Captain John Brown, something, she did not know what, "in behalf of God's despised poor."

John Brown was hanged at Charlestown, Virginia, on the 2nd of December, 1859. A rope made of South Carolina long staple cotton was displayed outside the jail. The placard above it read: "No Northern hemp shall help to punish our felony."

He became a ghost and a legend that haunted both North and South.

In 1859 The Richmond Whig said: "The miserable

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old traitor and murderer belongs to the gallows and the gallows will have its own."

In Boston, Wendell Phillips, Abolitionist and reformer, commended those who looked "upon that gibbet of John Brown, not as the scaffold of a felon, but as the cross of a martyr."

21.

With the Union Army

AFTER THE DEATH of John Brown, Harriet began to feel dissatisfied with the life she was leading. It seemed to her that she was doing absolutely nothing for the cause of freedom. Certainly the audiences before whom she spoke offered no challenge to her ingenuity or her imagination. She traveled on trains unhampered, unhindered, stayed in boarding houses or visited the homes of her friends, openly, freely. When she thought of the restrictions imposed on the slave population, she longed to return to Maryland to bring out more slaves.

She was still surprised by the enthusiastic reception she was accorded. When she finished talking, people began to clap, and then they stood and cheered, and came up to the platform to shake hands with her, to give her money. Many of them told her not to make any more trips into the South for fear she would be caught.

This was a thought that she impatiently rejected as

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of no consequence. She was more interested in how the whole question of slavery would be settled. She was certain that it would be settled soon—one way or another. Southerners believed that the entire North had supported John Brown and in 1860 they lived in dread because they thought that a tremendous uprising of the slaves might still occur. Northerners, as far as she could tell from what she saw and heard in her travels, had turned the Fugitive Slave Law into a joke. People said that in northern Ohio, where Levi Coffin operated the busiest branch of the Underground Railroad, it was impossible to put an Abolitionist in jail and keep him there, no matter how guilty he might be of harboring run-aways.

It was almost impossible to try a runaway slave. She found that out herself, because she became involved in the case of a runaway slave who had been arrested and was to be tried.

On April 27, 1860, she was in Troy, New York. She had spent the night there and was going on to Boston to attend an antislavery meeting. That morning she was on her way to the railroad station. She walked along the street slowly. She never bothered to find out when a train was due, she simply sat in the station and waited until a train came which was going in the direction she desired.

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It was cold in Troy even though it was the spring of the year. A northeast wind kept blowing the ruffle on her bonnet away from her face. She thought of Maryland and how green the trees would be. Here they were only lightly touched with green, not yet in full leaf. Suddenly she longed for a sight of the Eastern Shore with its coves and creeks, thought of the years that had elapsed since she first ran away from there.

She stopped walking to watch a crowd of people in front of the courthouse, a pushing, shoving, shouting crowd. She wondered what had happened. A fight? An accident? She went nearer, listened to the loud excited voices. "He got away." "He didn't." "They've got him handcuffed." Then there was an eruptive movement, people pushing forward, other people pushing back.

Harriet started working her way through the crowd, elbowing a man, nudging a woman. Now and then she asked a question. She learned that a runaway slave named Charles Nalle had been arrested and was being taken inside the courthouse to be tried.

When she finally got close enough to see the runaway's face, a handsome frightened face, his guards had forced him up the courthouse steps. They were trying to get through the door but people blocked the way.

She knew a kind of fury against the system, against the men who would force this man back into slavery

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when they themselves were free. The Lord did not intend that people should be slaves, she thought. Then without even thinking, she went up the steps, forced her way through the crowd, until she stood next to Nalle.

There was a small boy standing near her, mouth open, eyes wide with curiosity. She grabbed him by the collar and whispered to him fiercely, "You go out in the street and holler 'Fire, fire' as loud as you can."

The crowd kept increasing and she gave a nod of satisfaction. That little boy must have got out there in the street and must still be hollering that there's a fire. She bent over, making her shoulders droop, bending her back in the posture of an old woman. She pulled her sunbonnet way down, so that it shadowed her face. Just in time, too. One of the policemen said, "Old woman, you'll have to get out of here. You're liable to get knocked down when we take him through the door."

Harriet moved away from Nalle, mumbling to herself. She heard church bells ringing somewhere in the distance, and more and more people came running. The entire street was blocked. She edged back toward Nalle. Suddenly she shouted, "Don't let them take him! Don't let them take him!"

She attacked the nearest policeman so suddenly that she knocked him down. She wanted to laugh at the look

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of surprise on his face when he realized that the mumbling old woman who had stood so close to him had suddenly turned into a creature of vigor and violence. Grabbing Nalle by the arm, she pulled him along with her, forcing her way down the steps, ignoring the blows she received, not really feeling them, taking pleasure in the fact that in all these months of inactivity she had lost none of her strength.

When they reached the street they were both knocked down. Harriet snatched off her bonnet and tied it on Nalle's head. When they stood up it was impossible to pick him out of the crowd. People in the street cleared a path for them, helped hold back the police. As they turned off the main street, they met a man driving a horse and wagon. He reined in the horse. "What goes on here?" he asked.

Harriet, out of breath, hastily explained the situation. The man got out of the wagon. "Here," he said, "use my horse and wagon. I don't care if I ever get it back just so that man gets to safety."

Nalle was rapidly driven to Schenectady and from there he went on to the West—and safety.

Harriet's friends knew that she was in danger of arrest for the part she had played in Nalle's rescue. They saw to it that she stayed hidden in a house on the outskirts of Troy for two days.

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Shortly afterward she went to Boston where she filled two speaking engagements, one at a meeting of the New England Antislavery Society on May 27th, the other at a women's suffrage meeting on the 1st of June.

After this she returned to Auburn, where she spent the summer. She was restless, impatient. People were talking about Abe Lincoln. He had won the Republican nomination for the presidency in the spring. No one thought he had a chance of winning the election. Even if he did, Harriet doubted that he would do anything about slavery.

In November, 1860, she made another trip to Tidewater Maryland. Perhaps she felt the need for action, perhaps she wanted to return to the fields and the woods and streams of the Eastern Shore, in order to offset the tame-cat life she had been leading on lecture platforms. Possibly the rescue of Charles Nalle had whetted her appetite for adventure. Perhaps the memory of John Brown haunted her, too.

In any event, she brought out a man and his wife, with three children, one of them six years old, one of them four years old, and a three-months' old baby, and another man. En route to Thomas Garrett's in Wilmington they met a young woman who was also escaping, and she joined the party.

On December 1st, Thomas Garrett wrote one of his characteristic letters to William Still in Philadelphia:

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I write to let thee know that Harriet Tubman is again in these parts. She arrived last evening from one of her trips of mercy to God's poor, bringing two men with her as far as New Castle. I agreed to pay a man last evening, to pilot them on their way to Chester county; the wife of one of the men, with two or three children, was left some thirty miles below, and I gave Harriet ten dollars, to hire a man with carriage, to take them to Chester county. She said a man had offered for that sum, to bring them on. I shall be very uneasy about them, till I hear they are safe. There is now much more risk on the road, till they arrive here, than there has been for several months past, as we find that some poor, worthless wretches are constantly on the look out on two roads, that they cannot well avoid more especially with carriage, yet, as it is Harriet who seems to have had a special angel to guard her on her journey of mercy, I have hope.

Thy Friend,
Thomas Garrett

Despite Garrett's uneasiness, the entire party arrived safely in Philadelphia. William Still wrote their names down on loose slips of paper. His big notebook had been hidden, for "the capture of John Brown's papers and letters, with names and plans in full, admonished us that such papers and correspondence as had been preserved

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concerning the Underground Rail Road, might perchance be captured by a pro-slavery mob.”

Still wrote swiftly and briefly: “Arrival from Dorchester Co., 1860,” and under it, “Harriet Tubman’s Last ‘Trip’ to Maryland.” Then he put down the names of the people who came with her, and that was all.

When Harriet returned from this trip, her friends in Auburn hurried her off to Canada, suddenly afraid for her safety. It was not until she reached Canada that she learned that Old Abe Lincoln had won the election in November.

In December, South Carolina seceded from the Union. As the year turned, the cotton states began leaving the Union: Mississippi, Florida, Alabama, Georgia, Louisiana, Texas.

In January, 1861, she was back in Boston. She was there when John A. Andrew was inaugurated Governor of Massachusetts. He was a short heavy-set man who wore spectacles. Men said he was a Free Soiler and a radical. The day he was inaugurated, he sent out a call for the Massachusetts Militia, and sent a man to England to see about guns. He talked about the need for money for overcoats for the militia. That winter on Boston Common, Harriet heard the word “overcoat” become a joke, a slang word for “warmonger.”

In February, the states that had seceded formed a new

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union called the Confederate States of America. Jefferson Davis was elected President of the Confederacy. On April 14th, the Confederacy took over Fort Sumter. Lincoln sent out a call for militia.

Governor John A. Andrew of Massachusetts telegraphed the President, “The quota of troops required of Massachusetts is ready. How will you have them proceed?” The answer was, “Send them by rail.”

No other state in the Union was prepared to act so quickly. In a week’s time, Massachusetts was able to send out infantry, riflemen and artillery, properly equipped and thoroughly drilled.

It was John Andrew, the dimpled, curly-headed Governor of Massachusetts, who was responsible for Harriet Tubman’s final major role. During the Civil War she became a scout, a spy, a nurse for the Union forces. In May, 1862, she boarded the *Atlantic*, a Government transport, headed for Beaufort, which is located on Port Royal, one of the Sea Islands, off the coast of South Carolina. She was sent there at the recommendation of Governor Andrew.

The Confederate forts had been taken on November 7, 1861, and Port Royal and St. Helena were being used by the Union Army as supply stations. Slaves had been flocking to these islands ever since the Union forces had set up headquarters there. These slaves were referred

to as "contrabands." The term originated from an army report of May 24, 1861. Three fugitives were brought into Fortress Monroe by the Union picket guard. The Confederates asked for their rendition under the terms of the Fugitive Slave Law, but they were informed by General Butler that "under the peculiar circumstances, he considered the fugitives 'contraband' of war."

Port Royal was filled with contrabands, poverty-stricken, sick, homeless, starving. Many of them had traveled miles from the interior of South Carolina in order to reach the Union headquarters on the island. Some of them had been wounded by plantation owners who had attempted to halt their flight. A hospital had been set up for them on Port Royal.

It was in this contraband hospital that Harriet Tubman began to play her new role of nurse. She said, "I'd go to the hospital, I would, early every morning. I'd get a big chunk of ice, I would, and put it in a basin, and fill it with water; then I'd take a sponge and begin. First man I'd come to, I'd thrash away the flies, and they'd rise, they would, like bees around a hive. Then I'd begin to bathe the wounds, and by the time I bathed off three or four, the fire and heat would have melted the ice and made the water warm, and it would be as red as clear blood. Then I'd go and get more ice, I would, and by the time I got to the next ones, the flies would be around the first ones black and thick as ever."

More deadly than the wounds was the dysentery. Each morning when she went back to the hospital, she found more and more people had died from it. She was certain she could check it if she could find the same roots and herbs here on the island that had grown in Maryland. But this was a strange new country to her; even the plant life was different.

One night she went into a wooded area, near the water, and searched until she found the great white flowers of the water lily floating on the surface, reached down and pulled up the roots, hunted until she found crane's bill. Then she went back to the small house where she lived and boiled the roots and herbs, making a strange dark-looking concoction. It was a bitter-tasting brew. But it worked. The next morning she gave it to a man who was obviously dying, and slowly he got better.

Once again men called her Moses, saying that no one could die if Moses was at the bedside.

She soon learned, however, that the contrabands resented her being able to draw rations, as though she were an officer or a soldier. They saw no reason why she should be so especially privileged. So she stopped drawing rations. In order to earn money to buy food with, she made pies at night, and a home-brewed root-beer, which she got one of the contrabands to peddle in the nearby army camps during the day.

In January, 1863, shortly after Lincoln had pro-

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claimed the slaves free, she saw a regiment of Negro soldiers for the first time. Thomas Wentworth Higginson, their commanding officer, was an old friend of Harriet's. As Harriet watched these men parade through the sandy streets, shaded by the tremendous live oaks, one thousand ex-slaves marching in unison, she was overcome by emotion. The band of the Eighth Maine met the regiment at the entrance to Beaufort and escorted them all the way.

She thought this the most moving sight she had ever beheld: a regiment of black, newly freed South Carolinians wearing the uniform of the Union forces, escorted by the band of a white regiment. She knew how Sergeant Prince Rivers, the six-foot color sergeant of the First Carolina Volunteers, felt when he said, "And when that band wheel in before us, and march on—my God! I quit this world altogether."

That night, long after she'd gone to bed, she could hear a kind of rhythmic hum from the direction of the camp—sound of singing, the clapping of hands, the throbbing of drums, a kind of carry-over of the day's excitement.

About a month later, she started serving as a scout for Colonel James Montgomery, who had encamped at Port Royal with the first detachment of the Second South Carolina Volunteers, also composed of ex-slaves.

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On the night of June 2, 1863, Harriet accompanied Montgomery and his men in a raid up the Combahee River. They had two objectives: to destroy or take up the torpedoes that the enemy had placed in the Combahee and to bring back to Port Royal as many contrabands as they could entice away from the river area.

They soon found out that they would not have to entice the inhabitants away. As the gunboats went farther and farther up the Combahee, they began to see slaves working in the rice fields. At first the slaves ran away, toward the woods. Then the word was passed around, "Lincoln's gunboats done come to set us free."

People started coming toward the boats, coming down the paths, through the meadows, for on each side of the river there were rice fields and slaves working in them. They kept coming, with bundles on their heads, children riding on their mothers' shoulders, all of them ragged, dirty, the children naked.

Harriet said that she had never seen anything like it before. "Here you'd see a woman with a pail on her head, rice a-smoking in it just as she'd taken it from the fire, young one hanging on behind, one hand round her forehead to hold on, other hand digging into the rice-pot, eating with all its might, hold of her dress two or three more; down her back a bag with a pig in it.

"One woman brought two pigs, a white one and a

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black one; we took them all on board; named the white pig Beauregard, and the black pig Jeff Davis. Sometimes the women would come with twins hanging round their necks; appears like I never see so many twins in my life; bags on their shoulders, baskets on their heads, and young ones tagging behind, all loaded; pigs squealing, chickens screaming, young ones squalling."

They were taken off the shore in rowboats. All the contrabands tried to get in the small boats at once. Even after the boats were crowded, they clung to the sides of them, holding them fast to the shore. The men rowing the boats struck at their hands with the oars, but they would not let go. They were afraid they would be left behind.

Finally Montgomery shouted from the deck of one of the gunboats, "Moses, you'll have to give 'em a song."

Harriet sang:

*Of all the whole creation in the East or in the West,
The glorious Yankee nation is the greatest and the best.
Come along! Come along! don't be alarmed,
Uncle Sam is rich enough to give you all a farm.*

As each verse ended, the contrabands threw up their hands and shouted, "Glory! Glory! Glory!" Immediately the small boats pulled off. Hurriedly unloading their passengers on the decks of the gunboats, they came

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back and got more. After the small boats were filled, Harriet had to sing again and again until they got all 750 contrabands on board.

Shortly afterward, Harriet had someone write a letter to Franklin B. Sanborn in Boston, asking for a bloomer dress because long skirts were a handicap on an expedition.

Sanborn was at that time editor of *The Boston Commonwealth*. He made a front-page story of the Combahee raid, and Harriet's part in it. It appeared Friday, July 10, 1863: "Col. Montgomery and his gallant band of 300 black soldiers, under the guidance of a black woman, dashed into the enemy's country, struck a bold and effective blow . . . and brought off near 800 slaves. . . ."

"Since the rebellion she [Harriet] has devoted herself to her great work of delivering the bondman, with an energy and sagacity that cannot be exceeded. Many and many times she has penetrated the enemy's lines and discovered their situation and condition, and escaped without injury, but not without extreme hazard. . . ."

During the winter of 1859-60 when Abraham Lincoln was campaigning for the Republicans in the New England states, he spoke of the reason for the difference in the point of view of the South and the North. In Hartford, Connecticut, he said: "One-sixth of the population

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of the United States are slaves, looked upon as property, as nothing but property. The cash value of these slaves, at a moderate estimate, is two billion dollars. This amount of property value has a vast influence on the minds of its owners, very naturally. The same amount of property would have an equal influence upon us if owned in the North. Human nature is the same—people at the South are the same as those at the North, barring the difference in circumstances. . . .”

22.

The Last Years

IN THE SPRING of 1864, Harriet went back to Auburn to rest, to visit with Old Rit and Ben. She had been with the Military Department of the South for two years. She brought home a bundle of letters and passes with her. There was one dated July 6, 1863, from Colonel Montgomery to General Gilmore, who was in command of the Department of the South. Montgomery had referred to her as “a most remarkable woman, and invaluable as a scout.”

Another document, written by General David Hunter, February 19, 1863, said: “Pass the bearer, Harriet Tubman, to Beaufort and back to this place, and wherever she wishes to go; and give her free passage at all times, on all Government transports. Harriet was sent to me from Boston by Governor Andrew, of Massachusetts, and is a valuable woman. She has permission, as a servant of the Government, to purchase such provisions from

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the Commissary as she may need." This was countersigned by General Gilmore, who took Hunter's place as commander of the Department of the South.

Before she left Port Royal, Henry K. Durrant, the surgeon in charge of the Contraband Hospital, presented her with a certificate dated at Beaufort, South Carolina, May 3, 1864: "I certify that I have been acquainted with Harriet Tubman for nearly two years; and my position as Medical Officer in charge of 'contrabands' in this town and in hospital, has given me frequent and ample opportunities to observe her general deportment; particularly her kindness and attention to the sick and suffering of her own race. I take much pleasure in testifying to the esteem in which she is generally held." General Saxton added a note: "I concur fully in the above."

Harriet stayed in Auburn for a year. During the summer she paid a visit to Boston. The following spring she was in Washington, for she intended to return to Port Royal. She even received a War Department order providing for transportation there, dated at Washington, March 20, 1865: "Pass Mrs. Harriet Tubman (colored) to Hilton Head and Charleston, S.C., with free transportation on a Gov't transport. By order of Sec. of War." This was signed by Louis H. Pelonge, "Asst. Agt. Gener'l." But instead of returning to the Depart-

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ment of the South, she worked in the Contraband Hospital at Fortress Monroe. She was there when the war ended on April 9, 1865.

On April 2nd, Grant took Petersburg. A week later, April 9th, Lee surrendered to him at Appomattox Courthouse. Grant said afterward, in his *Personal Memoirs*, "I felt like anything rather than rejoicing at the downfall of a foe who had fought so long, and valiantly, and had suffered so much for a cause, though that cause was, I believe, one of the worst for which a people ever fought and one for which there was the least excuse. . . ."

Six nights after Lee's surrender, Lincoln was shot by John Wilkes Booth. He died the next morning, April 15, 1865.

Harriet stayed at Fortress Monroe until July of 1865. Then she went back to Auburn, New York. The war had been over nearly four months. She was tired. Old Rit and Ben needed her.

With the ratification of the Thirteenth Amendment to the Constitution in December, the long period of agitation for the abolition of slavery came to an end. Like many others who in one way or another had worked toward that goal, Harriet was at a loss as to what to do next. She sought for a new cause, and never really found one. Like many other former Abolitionists, she became

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interested in the movement for women's suffrage. She helped raise money for schools for the newly freed slaves. She farmed a little, raising fruit and vegetables, looked after Old Rit and Ben, and offered food and shelter to any homeless wanderer who needed a place to stay. She made repeated efforts to obtain some kind of remuneration for her service with the Union forces. Her friends wrote letters for her, presented petitions to Congressional committees—and nothing came of it.

It must have seemed a terribly tame existence to a woman who so recently had carried a musket and a canteen and a haversack on scouting expeditions through the marshes and along the river banks of the South Carolina Low Country; and who, in the years when she was a conductor on the Underground Railroad, had waded through rivers, and been jounced around in the bottom of farm wagons, had hidden in haystacks, and listened, holding her breath, to the hoofbeats of the patrollers, in the Tidewater country in Maryland.

Sometimes she experienced moments of regret for the one thing she had never had: the home complete with a husband and children. One day in October, 1867, she was assailed by the memory of herself as a young girl—a field hand, slowly piecing together a patchwork quilt, her fingers clumsy at first, unaccustomed to holding a needle—because she learned of the death of John Tub-

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man to whom she had been married. He was murdered in Talbot County, Maryland, on the road to Airey. There was a brief news item about it in the *Baltimore American*. She could not help thinking how different her life would have been if she and John had lived together, somewhere in the North, and had had children.

When she heard of John's death, she felt old and lonely. True, the people in Auburn liked her, admired her. They knew she had little or no money, had to support her old parents as best she could, knew that she could never turn away from her door anyone who said that he had no home, needed food, needed help, and so always had a larger household than one woman could hope to feed and clothe. The neighbors brought food to the little house on South Street—a bag of flour, a sack of potatoes, or a basket of apples. Friendly people.

In May of 1868, one of Harriet's friends and admirers, Mrs. Sarah Hopkins Bradford, a schoolteacher who lived in Auburn, decided to do something to raise some money for her. She began to write the story of Harriet's life. Most of the direct quotations used by biographers of Harriet Tubman are possible only because of Mrs. Bradford, who first recorded them.

Mrs. Bradford's book, *Scenes in the Life of Harriet Tubman*, appeared early in 1869. On January 9th *The Boston Commonwealth*, in announcing its publication,

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said that the proceeds from the sale of the biography were to go to Harriet, "she now being very old and infirm." Harriet was, however, neither old nor infirm. She was not more than forty-nine. She was simply a reformer without a cause, and therefore lost, and lonely, and exhausted.

She received twelve hundred dollars from the sale of the book. She paid off the mortgage on her house, for she was still in debt to Senator Seward for it. She even had money left over afterward. But she regretted that it came too late for Ben and Old Rit, her mother and father, to benefit by it. They were both dead by then.

In March of that year, she married again. Her husband, Nelson Davis, was more than twenty years younger than she. The folk in Auburn said Harriet had married him in order to take care of him, that even though he was a big, handsome, young man, he had tuberculosis. He had contracted it during the war. He was a veteran who had fought at Olustee, Boykin's Mill, Honey Hill, with the Eighth United States Colored Infantry Volunteers.

True or not, he was obviously unable to contribute to the support of the household on South Street where he lived with Harriet. The supply of money there never wholly met the need for it. And so, in 1886, Mrs. Bradford came to Harriet's rescue for the second time. She

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wrote another small volume about Harriet, entitled *Harriet, the Moses of Her People*. Again any money from the book was to go to Harriet, who now wanted to found a home for the aged and infirm.

In the preface, Professor Samuel Miles Hopkins (Mrs. Bradford's brother) of Auburn Theological Seminary, said: "Her [Harriet's] household is very likely to consist of several old black people, 'bad with the rheumatiz,' some forlorn wandering woman, and a couple of small images of God cut in ebony. How she manages to feed and clothe herself and them, the Lord best knows. She has too much pride and too much faith to beg. . . ." This certainly suggests that Nelson Davis, Harriet's husband, was unable to make much of a financial contribution to the little house on South Street.

Nelson Davis died on October 14, 1888. He was forty-four years old. Though Harriet had repeatedly applied for a pension for herself or back pay to reimburse her for those years she had served with the Union forces, her claim was never allowed. But in 1899 she was awarded a pension of twenty dollars a month, not for her own services, but as "the widow of Nelson Davis, who served in Company G, Eighth United States Infantry, from September 1863, to November 1865, and was honorably discharged."

As she grew older, the pattern of her life changed

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again. Finally, she became a tiny little old woman, peddling vegetables from door to door in Auburn. She didn't make many stops in the course of a day. There wasn't time. At each house, she was invited inside, told to sit down, and urged to tell a story about some phase of her life. Sometimes she spent the whole morning in one house. The housewife who sat across the kitchen table from Harriet, listening, felt as though she were traveling, too, and so was reluctant to let her go on to her next stop.

It was as the storyteller, the bard, that Harriet's active years came to a close. She had never learned to read and write. She compensated for this handicap by developing a memory on which was indelibly stamped everything she had ever heard or seen or experienced. She had a highly developed sense of the dramatic, a sense of the comic, and because in her early years she had memorized verses from the Bible, word for word, the surge and sway of the majestic rhythm of the King James version of the Bible was an integral part of her speech. It was these qualities that made her a superb storyteller.

In each house where she stopped, she was given a cup of hot tea with butter in it, which was the way she liked it. As she sipped the buttered tea, she would sometimes tell about the Underground Railroad, and that first trip she made to Canada, and how all of them were

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ragged, hungry, dirty, cold and afraid. Hunger worse than cold, the pinching of the stomach, pain in the stomach, from hunger. And fear worse than hunger, fear like a paralysis, inhibiting movement, fear so strong it was something they could feel and taste. She, threatening, cajoling, admonishing them: "Go free or die."

She made her listener see the snow in Canada, the trees hung with icicles, see Niagara Falls like frozen music in the winter. And she invariably ended the recital with a note of pride in her voice, as she said: "And I never run my train off the track, and I never lost a single passenger."

Sometimes she told about Colonel Robert Gould Shaw, the slender fair-haired boy (he was twenty-six), descendant of one of Boston's oldest and most aristocratic families, who had commanded a regiment of black men, the Fifty-Fourth Massachusetts. She told about how he led the attack on Wagner, how he stood on the parapet waving that sword which had been made in England, a field-officer's sword, with his initials worked in the handle, shouting, "Forward, Fifty-Fourth!" determined to prove the bravery of his regiment, to prove that black men would fight no matter what the odds, and then pitched forward, dead, his sergeant beside him.

Harriet's low-pitched husky voice made Shaw live again. The housewife, bending toward her, lips parted,

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listening, could see young Shaw, could see the silver eagles on his shoulders, the silk sash around his waist, the light blue of his trousers, the high felt army hat on his head.

Her voice was the voice of an old lady, but it was still beautiful, still thrilling as she summarized the attack on Wagner, summarized all battles by saying, "And then we saw the lightning, and that was the guns; and then we heard the rain falling, and that was the drops of blood falling; and when we came to get in the crops, it was dead men that we reaped."

She could speak of the death of Lincoln, and epitomize all the sorrow in the world by telling about an old man, at the Contraband Hospital at Fortress Monroe, who, hearing that Lincoln was dead, lifted his tremulous old voice in prayer: "We kneel upon the ground, with our faces in our hands, and our hands in the dust, and cry to Thee for mercy, O Lord, this evening."

Sometimes she talked about Old John Brown, the man with the hawk's face and the white beard, and the fanatic's eyes, cold and hard as granite. She told about the time Old Brown took her to see Wendell Phillips and when he introduced her, he said, "Mr. Phillips, I bring you one of the bravest people on this continent—*General Tubman*, as we call her."

Then again she spoke of Port Royal and the contrabands, and the strange speech of the Gullahs of South

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Carolina, and told about how they had said their masters had told them the Yankees had hoofs, horns and tails, and would sell them to Cuba, how they called the Confederates *secesh buckra* (white men who were secessionists). She showed her passes, those precious pieces of paper that she could not read though she knew by heart what each one of them said, a little bundle of much-fingered, well-worn paper, many of the documents barely decipherable they had been handled so much.

When she spoke of Port Royal, on a cold winter's morning, sitting in the kitchen of a frame house in Auburn, snow piled up on the ground, the woman listening to her could feel the warm air in Beaufort, hear the mewling of gulls, smell the magnolias and the jasmine, see the sharp-edged shiny greenness of palmettos, feel sand warm to the touch, see the great fireflies flitting about high up in the tops of the trees at night.

Harriet and her one-woman audience were no longer in a quiet kitchen in the North; they were in cypress swamps, or walking under live oaks hung with Spanish moss that waved like gray drapery overhead; they saw cotton fields and rice fields, and heard the swash of a river against the banks, and listened to the aching sweetness of a mockingbird, on an island where an incredible moon turned night into day.

Sometimes she went even farther back in her memory, to the days of the plantation and the overseer and the

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master. Then her listener could see a row of sway-backed cabins, smell the smoky smell from the fireplaces, could see a fifteen-year-old girl huddled under a dirty blanket, could see the great hole in her head and blood pouring from what should have been a mortal wound.

As she went farther and farther back in time, she spoke of the old slave ships, and the horror of the Middle Passage, retelling the stories she had heard as a child, stories of whips and chains and branding irons, of a quenchless thirst, and the black smell of death in the hold of a Yankee slaver. The word freedom became more than a word, it became a glory over everything.

Whoever heard her talk like that had a deeper understanding of the long hard way she had come, had a deeper understanding of what lay behind Gettysburg and Appomattox.

In 1903 she turned her home and twenty-five acres of land over to the African Methodist Episcopal Zion Church of Auburn, to be used as a home for the sick, the poor, the homeless, though she continued to live there herself. She wanted it called the John Brown Home. But shortly afterward, she expressed her dissatisfaction about the way the home was being conducted. The colored people in Auburn felt that they could not possibly support an institution which took its inmates in free of charge, and so began to charge an admittance fee.

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Harriet, who to the end of her life retained that rarest of human virtues, compassion, said: "When I give the Home over to Zion Church, what do you suppose they did? Why, they made a rule that nobody should come in without a hundred dollars. Now I wanted to make a rule that nobody could come in unless they had no money. What's the good of a Home if a person who wants to get in has to have money?"

She died on March 10, 1913. Of her old friends and associates, only Sanborn and Higginson were still alive. The others had gone long before: Theodore Parker, Thomas Garrett, William H. Seward, William Lloyd Garrison, Frederick Douglass, Colonel James Montgomery.

In many ways she represented the end of an era, the most dramatic, and the most tragic, era in American history. Despite her work as a nurse, a scout, and a spy, in the Civil War, she will be remembered longest as a conductor on the Underground Railroad, the railroad to freedom—a short, indomitable woman, sustained by faith in a living God, inspired by the belief that freedom was a right all men should enjoy, leading bands of trembling fugitives out of Tidewater Maryland.

On July 12, 1914, the city of Auburn paid tribute to her. During the day flags were flown at half-mast. At night a tremendous mass meeting was held in the Audi-

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torium, where a bronze tablet which had been inscribed to her memory was unveiled. The tablet was placed on the front entrance of the Courthouse in Auburn. This is what it says:

IN MEMORY OF HARRIET TUBMAN.
 BORN A SLAVE IN MARYLAND ABOUT 1821.
 DIED IN AUBURN, N.Y., MARCH 10th, 1913.
 CALLED THE MOSES OF HER PEOPLE,
 DURING THE CIVIL WAR. WITH RARE
 COURAGE SHE LED OVER THREE HUNDRED
 NEGROES UP FROM SLAVERY TO FREEDOM,
 AND RENDERED INVALUABLE SERVICE
 AS NURSE AND SPY.
 WITH IMPLICIT TRUST IN GOD
 SHE BRAVED EVERY DANGER AND
 OVERCAME EVERY OBSTACLE. WITHAL
 SHE POSSESSED EXTRAORDINARY
 FORESIGHT AND JUDGMENT SO THAT
 SHE TRUTHFULLY SAID
 "ON MY UNDERGROUND RAILROAD
 I NEBBER RUN MY TRAIN OFF DE TRACK
 AN' I NEBBER LOS' A PASSENGER."
 THIS TABLET IS ERECTED
 BY THE CITIZENS OF AUBURN.

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