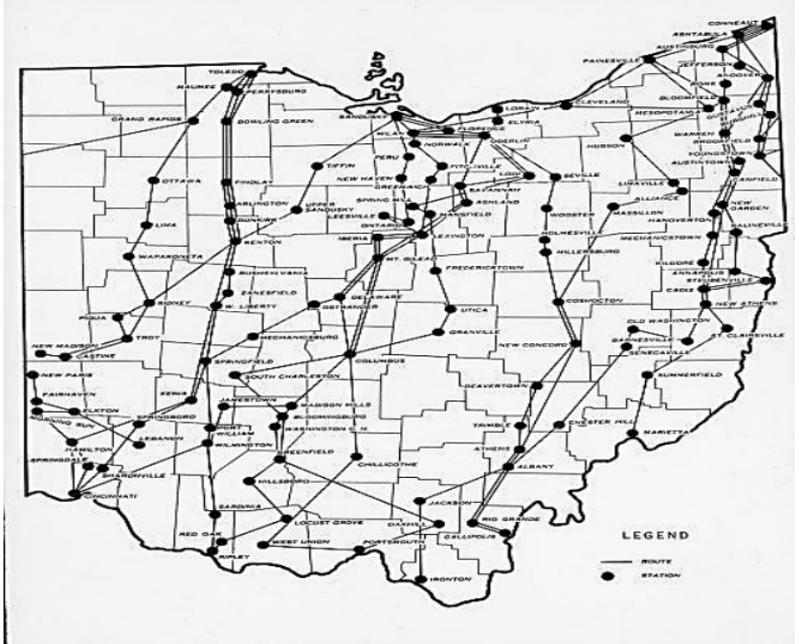


Liza's Liberty Lantern



Hello History!
Volume One
Kathy Warnes



Underground Railroad in Ohio

Lizas Liberty Lantern

October 1895



Hurry along, Susannah!”

Susannah shrugged her shawl over her shoulders. I’m coming, mother she shouted. Her mother’s voice prodded her to hurry so fast that her shawl slipped off her shoulders and down her back. She stooped and snatched it up, trying to settle the shawl snugly on her shoulders. Once again the shawl escape to the ground and this time when Susannah picked it up it was covered with autumn leaves.



“Why are we hurrying so fast, mother?” Susannah asked as she shook off the leaves.

“Pelton’s is going to close in half an hour and your father wants another lantern.”

Susannah nodded. Darkness as thick as mother’s pea soup usually covered the path leading to the outhouse

every night. She welcomed the idea of another lantern.

Susannah and her mother hurried down Conneaut, Ohio's Main Street to Peltons, the town's largest general mercantile store. Susannah swung open the wide wooden door while mother hurried inside to look at the lanterns. Susannah hurried past counters full of pots and pans and calico and striped yard goods. They finally reached the back of the store where buckets and rakes and hoes and iron washtubs were located.

Perched on a dusty corner shelf, rows of kerosene lamps and lanterns eyed the Pelton world and beyond. While mother fingered the square and occasional round lantern, Susannah picked up a lantern and ran her fingers along its eight sides,

"That is an attractive octagon lantern mother said, but is it practical?"

"Let's buy it and take it home. It has holders for eight candles," Susannah said, picking up the lantern. "And it is only a dollar."

On the way home, Susannah ran ahead of mother swinging the lantern first in her right hand and then in her left. They turned onto Liberty Street and Susannah skipped and swung the lantern faster as they walked closer to their home at the Octagon House. She slowed her skipping and stood in front of the Octagon House staring at the cupola rising from the shingled roof on top and admiring the white house with its black shutters. Maybe father was sitting up there in the cupola in his rocking chair reading the newspaper. He often did that.

Susannah ran into the house still holding the Octagon Lantern and ran up the stairs to the cupola. The rocking chair rocked gently as father rocked, puffed on his pipe, and read his newspaper.

"Father, we bought a new lantern," Liza told him.

"We'll put it to good use in the evenings," father said. "Store it up the closet cupboard right here."

"I thought we were going to use it at night."

“We will, but we have to use up the kerosene in the old ones first.”

“Yes, Papa.” Susannah opened the cupboard door and eased the lantern inside. As she pushed on it, she felt a wooden panel in the cupboard give way. She pushed harder and the panel opened, exposing a dark square hole in the wall. Without taking time to be afraid, Susannah inched her fingers into the hole and they closed around something like metal. She pulled the object out of the hole in the closet. It was a lantern. The lantern was shaped like an octagon and had glass panels on all eight sides.

Susannah ran her fingers lightly over the lantern. Long streaks of dust stained her fingers. She put the tip of her thumb in her mouth and ran it across the lantern. A clear, shiny thumbprint appeared in the dust.

Susannah lifted the lantern out of the closet and when she did a small package wrapped in tissue paper fell out of the bottom. Susannah picked the package up from the floor and unwrapped the tissue paper. A black book with gold letters was nestled in the paper. The letters spelled out the word “Diary.”

Susannah held out the diary. “Papa, look what fell out of the lantern. It looks like a diary.”

“You must read it,” Papa said.

“Why?” Susannah asked.

It’s history, Papa said. Your grandmothers history story and now it belongs to you. Read it, Susannah.”

That night after dinner, Susannah climbed back up to the cupola and carefully eased the diary out of the cupboard. She opened it and began to read.

A girl named Liza signed her name on the flyleaf. She wrote that it had been her grandmother’s diary, then her mother’s diary, and then her diary as she and her sister and brother had made their own journey into freedom. She wrote that the lantern, which she called the Liberty Lantern, and a cat named Castaway had taken them to freedom.

Chapter One

“O, that I were free!...Why am I a slave? I will
run away. I will not stand it. Get Caught, or get
clear, I’ll try it...”

Frederick Douglass

“Liza girl, git yourself to the cook. She needs help with the biscuits.”

Liza ignored Mary Jane. Mary Jane was 15, only three years older than Liza, but she liked to stick her nose up in the air and use a parasol to keep the sun off her pale white skin.

Mary Jane tried again. “Liza, Mama said to go help cook, then you can hold my parasol for me while I pick some flowers from the garden for the dinner table.”

Liza stuck her nose up as high as Mary Jane’s, then she stuck out her tongue at Mary Jane and kept dusting the library table and bookshelves. Dusting the library table gave Liza a good excuse to sneak a book off the shelf and read a few paragraphs before anybody could catch her. But Liza wasn’t sneaky enough this time. Mary Jane spotted her holding the book about *Nellie, the Match Girl*.

“I’m telling Mama you’re reading my book!” Mary Jane yelled, dropping her parasol, and yanking the book out of Liza’s hand. She yanked and Liza pulled back on the page just as Mary Jane yanked. RIPP! *Nellie the Match Girl* ended up in two pieces.

Mary Jane ran off, waving the torn page in front of her like a banner. Liza knew that she was going to wave it right under Mistress Caroline Emerson’s nose. Liza didn’t care. She traced the letters, *Nellie the Match Girl*, in the dust on the table in front of her. Liza wondered if Nellie was free, even though she lived in a strange country like England. Liza knew that Nellie was poor like

her because she had to go out on the streets of London every morning and sell matches to help her Mama buy food for her and her little brother.

But as far as Liza could tell, Nellie was white and she could choose which street to stand on to sell her matches. She was free like William and Papa.

“I’m gonna be free too,” Liza vowed. “Just forty more dollars and I’m going north, just like William.”

“You’re not supposed to show anybody you know how to write. It’s bad enough you know how to read, but writing too! That’s a double crime.”

Liza knew that it was Annie without turning around. Annie was Mary Jane’s sister, but they were as different as compone and baking powder biscuits. “It’s your fault too, and your Mama’s.” Liza’s Mama was the Doctor Woman of the county—more than the county, all of the way to Baltimore City and even to the Pennsylvania line. Mama knew how to read and write and which medicines were good for worms and stomach ache and lots of other things that made sick people better.”

“You already knew how to read, Liza. I just loaned you books. And we practiced our writing together.” Annie was the same age as Liza and they were friends. Liza’s Mama always told her that she and Annie learned how to walk together, Liza toddling beside Annie.

Liza didn’t remember that, but she did remember learning how to read together with Annie and William. Reading led to writing and they all learned that too. That was one of the reasons William got to buy his freedom and travel all of the way to Detroit to work on the colored newspaper. Dr. Emerson had said that it didn’t make much sense to keep a slave who could read and write tied down in Maryland in 1852 when he’d just run away sooner or later. So he let William buy his freedom for \$500 dollars.

Liza had helped William earn the \$500 picking cotton and doing chores on Rosewood, the plantation where she lived. Liza was working on buying her

freedom now. She already had earned \$1 toward her freedom price by ironing for Mistress Jordon at Fairhope, the next plantation over. And Papa only had \$40 left to pay for Mama's freedom.

Annie hugged Liza, breaking up her thoughts like cook's piecrust. "Never mine, Liza. I'll tell Mama I tore the book accidentally while I was reading it."

"She might not whip me, Annie, but she'll make me roll piecrust for cook and help her beat the clothes down at the creek," Liza said.

"She makes me work too, Liza."

"I have to work harder than you do, Annie. But not for long. Papa just has to git forty more dollars and Mama will be free. Just forty more dollars and Mama's free. Then Papa and Mama and Emily can go to Baltimore. Papa can git some carpentry work and Mama some doctoring work and they can help me buy myself. I'll be free Annie!"

Annie caught the dusty cloth and hugged Liza the cloth covering both their hands. "I'll help you work, Liza. You're my best friend and I'll miss you. But I want you to be free.

Liza hugged her back. She couldn't blame Annie for being born white and free like she could Mary Jane. "Annie, I've got a secret. Mama told me last night that William's coming home for a visit."

Annie pulled back from Liza and Liza felt something come between them—something that felt like the cold waters of Crawfish Creek when they waded in it early in the spring. Liza stared at Annie, but Annie wouldn't raise her blue eyes to meet Liza's brown ones. "Did'ja hear me, Annie? William's coming back for a visit. Mama said he'll be here tomorrow." "That's good news, Liza."

"Will you tell your Papa for me? I won't see him 'cause I have to hold Mary Jane's parasol while she picks flowers and then I have to help cook make biscuits."

"You might see him," Annie said.

Liza stared at Annie. "What do you mean?"

"Nothing, Liza. You just might." "Ouch!" Liza jumped up and rubbed the seat of her overalls.

"I knew that would get your attention!" Mary Jane jabbed at Liza with her parasol again. This time she got Liza in the arm.

"Mary Jane, you don't have to be so mean. Let Liza finish her dusting."

"Don't be stupid, Annie. She's reading instead of dusting."

Annie ran her hand down the library table and held it up for their inspection.

"Clean as Bernie's teeth after he's eaten a piece of chicken," she said.

Mary Jane pulled a pair of white gloves from the key bag that she wore around her waist and put them on. She trailed her gloved fingers down the table and held them up. There was a solid streak of dust on every finger. "She was doing more reading than dusting," Mary Jane said.

She poked Liza with her parasol again. "It's time to pick my flowers and you'd better hold that parasol steady and strong or I'll lock you in the hall closet."

Mary Jane threatened Liza with this punishment because she knew that Liza was more afraid of the dark than she was of being flogged with hickory sticks or working 12 hours straight in the tobacco fields.

"I'm ready, Mary Jane," Liza said meekly. "I'll carry your parasol until we get to the garden."

Mary Jane stared at Liza. "You're acting too innocent, Liza. You're up to something."

Liza turned up her palms and shrugged her shoulders. "I just want to carry your parasol, Miz Mary Jane." Liza felt like an Uncle Sampson slave as she followed Mary Jane out of the house, across the yard and to the kitchen garden that grew to the right of the outbuildings. Daddy had explained the difference between slaves to her. Uncle Sampson slaves went along with

whatever the Master and Missus wanted. They did everything they could to please their masters and some even did extra, like cook putting buttermilk in the biscuits. Then there were slaves like Daddy and Mama, who hated being slaves and taught their children to love freedom.

And they worked hard to buy their freedom. Daddy was the farm carpenter and you could even call hi the county carpenter, because he worked all over Anne Arundel County, helping free colored people and white people alike to build their houses and barns and out buildings. He had even built the white wooden church where the Methodists had their meetings.

Daddy was from Annapolis and he was a free black. He had made a bargain with Dr. Emerson when he and Mama got married and Mama came to Rosewood to live, carrying her freedom lantern. Daddy promised that he would pay Dr. Emerson \$750 for Mama and the lantern and if they had any children, the children would go with Mama. William had already gone and Liza and Emily were ready to go. Daddy just had forty more dollars to pay and then they would all move to Baltimore and work.

Mama was the doctor woman. She had grown up at Fairhope and Dr. Rudolph, her master, had taught her homeopathic medicine. Liza had asked Mama what homeopathic medicine was and Mama had told her that it was natural medicine, using herbs and remedies that were as old as time instead of the drugs that were made by man.

Mama had taught Liza and William and Emily, their younger sister, how to rebel against slavery without getting whipped. Every day, Mama set her own pace doing the garden work and working in the tobacco fields and doctoring everybody, even Mistress Emerson. Daddy worked hard as

the plantation carpenter before he did his carpentry all over the county. Dr. Emerson depended on him. Mistress Emerson didn't like him making his

own choices, but she put up with it because the Dr. made her put up with it.

Mama and Daddy weren't Uncle Sampson slaves –on no, they weren't– but they weren't really Rebel slaves either. If they had been Rebel slaves they would have gone to Canada a long time ago instead of waiting for Daddy to buy Mama and Liza and Emily. Liza didn't have any idea where Canada was, but she'd ask William. He'd know. William knew just about everything there was to know out of books and from people.

All of the time Liza was thinking her fingers roamed over the parasol like Dr. Emerson's dogs ranged through the woods after a fox. She shivered. What had made her think of Dr. Emerson's dogs? They weren't bloodhounds like people had in the Deep South, but they were huge brown dogs that he had bought in England. Mastiffs, he had called them. Mastiffs. The word had a scary sound.

“Mastiffs,” Liza said out loud, trying to make the word less scary. She quickened her pace. She wasn't going to walk like an Uncle Sampson slave.

“What did you say?” Mary Jane shouted without bothering to turn around.

“Nothin,” Liza said. She walked so fast that she bumped into Mary Jane. Mary Jane shoved her hard. “Watch where you're going!”

Liza pretended to fall onto the dusty path. She rolled over and over in the dust, holding the parasol stiffly in front of her so that she wouldn't break it. She got it ready for her plan.

“I need you over here, Liza!” Mary Jane stood in the middle of a large patch of daisies. They danced and bowed in the breeze, reminding Liza of the Christmas ball in the big farmhouse a few months ago.

“Coming, Miss Mary Jane,” Liza said, sweet as sweet potato pie.

Mary Jane stared at her. "What are you up to, Liza?"

"Me, I ain't up to nothin'," Liza said. "I'm just holding your parasol so you can pick them daisies for the table."

Mary Jane bent over the daisies and started to pick them. "Hold it right over my head, Liza. That sun is hot as a coal fire."

Liza held the parasol over Mary Jane's head. She smiled to herself. The parasol would keep Mary Jane from getting a sunburn everywhere but on the top of her head. That's where Liza had cut a hole in the parasol, but that's where Mary Jane's hair got pretty thick, too. Liza figured the odds of Mary Jane getting a sun-burn were half-and-half.

"Give me the parasol!" Mary Jane demanded. "I'll hold it myself because you can't do anything right!"

She flounced off down the path to the house. By the time they got back to the house, Mary Jane was rubbing the top of her head. "I feel hot on top of my head," she complained. "Mama!" she hollered. "I'm hurt!"

Mistress Emerson hurried out onto the porch that wound its way around the entire house. She pushed her glasses up from her nose and fitted them snugly over her cold blue eyes that reminded Liza of the water in the South River than ran about a mile behind the farm house. Mistress Emerson pushed strands of her muddy brown hair behind her ears. She adjusted her white apron over her fat stomach. She peered at the top of Mary Jane's head. "You've got a sunburn, child," she said.

Mary Jane whirled around, pointing the parasol at Liza. "You did something to my parasol you stupid slave!" she hollered.

"No, I never," Liza said, tossing her head. If Dr. Emerson weren't home, she knew that Mistress Emerson would probably whip her now, but she didn't care. Mistress Emerson glared at Liza.

"I'll have to handle your disobedience myself since the Doctor went duck shooting down at the river," she said. It seemed to Liza that her blue eyes got

cold enough to freeze ice.

But Mistress Emerson didn't whip Liza. She did something worse. She shut her in the root cellar and made Emily stand guard by the door. Liza knew that Emily wouldn't tell on her if she did come out, but if she did come out, Mistress Emerson would whip Emily. For some reason Liza did not understand Mistress Emerson always had her whip ready to use on Emily. Once she heard Mama and Papa talking in whispers about Emily, but she didn't understand the words. Liza did understand that Emily had lighter skin than hers and that Mistress Emerson stiffened her shoulders and looked down her nose at Mama.

Liza stayed in the dark cellar. She didn't want to be an Uncle Sampson slave, but she was scared. Water dripped down the stone walls and she felt things crawling around her feet. A thick crack of light shown through the door and she kept her eyes fastened on the crack, pretending it was the kerosene lantern that Mama kept burning for people who needed doctoring at night. It seemed to Liza that she saw shadows flittering across the lantern light. Some of the shadows turned and stared over their shoulders at pursuing shadows behind them.

Liza saw the outline of Dr. Emerson's mastiffs. "Run away, run away quick or they'll catch you!" she shouted at the fleeing shadows.

The shadows ran, leaving the dogs far behind. The shadows hastened toward a star shape glimmering far ahead.

At first, the star twinkled like a firefly, then it glowed with a steady light like Mama's lantern.

Liza sighed from deep in her chest. The shadows would soon be safe and she could look away at other things. Suddenly, a huge shape blotted out the light like a cloud covering the moon. Liza screamed and closed her eyes. "Run away!" she cried. "The giant is coming! Run away!"

Liza wanted the shadow people to get away from the giant. She wanted to see if they were running fast enough but she couldn't stay here in the dark. She ran up the cellar steps and pounded on the door. "Emily, let me out! I'll take the

whipping! Let me out!”

She stared at the door, willing it to open. It remained firmly shut. She pounded so hard on the wooden door that she got a splinter in each fist. “Emily, let me out!”

Still no answer. Liza collapsed at the foot of the stairs, sobbing. “Please God, if you get me out of here I’ll listen to you more often.”

She waited for the door to creak open as anxiously as Moses must have waited for the Red Sea waters to open. The door remained firmly closed. “Mama, Ma- ma,” Liza whimpered. She wanted Mama to be here. She wanted to feel Mama’s soothing cool hand on her forehead and hear her gentle voice saying,

“Now, now, Liza, it ain’t so bad that it can’t be fixed. Let’s see how we can fix it.”

“Let’s see how we can fix it.” Liza stirred. If I think about how to fix the dark then I can do something besides stare at the shadow shapes, she thought. It’s dark in here and I need some light so I won’t be afraid. How can I get some light when there ain’t any windows and the door is closed?

She looked around, trying to let her eyes adjust to the darkness. There was a wooden crate over there in the corner where Mistress Emerson used to sit her butter to cool. She could break up the crate and try to start a fire. Quickly Liza sat

the butter molds on top of the wooden shelf that her Papa had built all around the square cellar. The crate wasn't very strong. Papa hadn't made it; she knew that for sure. It took her two blows with a rock to break up the thin wood that was probably pine. She fixed herself two wooden sticks and started to rub them together. Papa had once told her that this worked, but it took a long time.

Papa was right, she thought as she rubbed the sticks together as fast as she could. She felt the sticks. Not even warm. Well, she had lots of time. She would sit and rub the sticks all night if that's what it took to keep from seeing the shadowy shapes in the light from the crack. Liza rubbed and rubbed. She felt her eyes closing. Would she really fall asleep this time instead of being in a trance like the Conjure Granny at Fairhope fell into sometimes. When the Conjure Granny went into one of her trances, she saw things that were going to happen, and for a coin or two, she would tell people what was going to happen to them. Mama said that only God, not the Conjure Granny, knew the future, but Liza liked to watch the Conjure Granny weave her spells.

One time the Conjure Granny took Liza's hand and traced her fingers over her palm. "You're going to travel through pitch dark, child, but hold on to your lantern. You'll make it to the light."

Now, Liza remembered the Conjure Granny's words as she rubbed the sticks together in the dark cellar, trying to make some firelight.

Chapter Two

“Because my mouth is wide with laughter, And my throat
is deep with song,
You do not think I suffer after I have held
my pain so long.”

Langston Hughes

“Eliza Jane Myers, what the thunder are you doing down there?” The door creaking on rusty hinges and the sound of William’s voice hit Liza’s ears at the same time. William. It had to be William! He was the only person who used her full name. He said that having a full name was a sign of freedom instead of being called Cato or Sam or Emily after your master. But how could it be William? He was working in Detroit on the freedom newspaper. Liza kept rubbing her pine sticks. Thinking about the Conjure Granny had got her to imagining. She needed some light to bring back real things like this black cellar.

William stood silhouetted in the doorway. “Liza, climb up out of there right now!”

Liza climbed up the damp stone steps, her bare toes curling over the edges. She blinked and closed her eyes. The sun was a fireball sinking under the horizon into the Sky Ocean, but it blazed like a pine fire, it didn’t glow like Mama’s lantern or Emily’s eyes when Mama told stories at night around the fireplace. Quickly Liza opened her eyes. “Where’s Emily?”

“Mrs. Emerson sent her down to the river to tell the doctor and his sons that dinner was long ready. Emily told me that you were here before you left.” William didn’t call the doctor’s wife Mistress Emerson. He had always called her Mrs. Emerson, even before he bought himself free. Liza threw her arms around William. “I’m so glad to see you! When did you get home?”

William smiled at her, his teeth gleaming in his black face. “I got in about the time you were tearing a hole in Mary Jane’s parasol and helping her get a sun burn!”

“It wasn’t a very bad sunburn, William. Her hair covers her head so much that she just got a little sun- burn, not much.”

William grinned at her again. “You’d better come home for supper yourself. Emily should be back by now and Mama’s cooking hog back and collard greens.”

He put his arm around her and they walked back to their log cabin house in the slave quarters behind the barn. Liza always figured that Mistress Emerson put on airs by calling three log cabins and outhouses the slave quarters, but Mistress Emerson had come from a huge plantation in Tennessee that she mentioned very time she talked to Liza or any other member of her family.

Mistress Emerson had come from Mountain Knoll, and her father owned 200 slaves that had to work in the cotton fields from sunup to sundown. Mistress Emerson often told Liza how many whiplashes her father’s overseer gave the slaves and how hard even the house slaves had to work. Mistress Emerson’s mama whipped slave children with a hickory switch, the same as Mistress Emerson whipped her slave children, including Emily and Liza.

Liza peered up at William. She could hardly see his face now; it was getting so dark. “Do you think Mistress Emerson learned how to be mean to slaves from her Mama and Papa?”

“I think she did, but she could take it into her own ways to be kind.”

“She won’t though,” Liza said. “Dr. Emerson is kind and so is Annie, but Mistress Emerson and Mary Jane are mean!”

William patted Eliza’s head. “Don’t worry yourself about it, Liza. We’re going to be free soon and on our way to Baltimore. I brought some money with me from Detroit just in case Daddy don’t have enough.”

“How long you gonna be here, William?”

“I’m figuring on a week or so, Liza. Papa wants me to help him build the new town hall. Says he needs an- other good hand, somebody that knows how to hoist logs and get them in place without getting killed in the bargain.”

Liza stopped in her tracks and clapped her hands. “Can we go back to Detroit with you? All of us? Mama could doctor there and Papa could do his carpentry work and they have schools for girls in Detroit, don’t they?”

Liza could hear the smile in William’s voice. “Yes, they have schools for girls in Detroit, but I think Ma- ma and Papa want to settle in Baltimore.”

“I want to go to Detroit with you, William.” “You’re too young to decide that, Liza. You have to wait until you’re old enough to know your own mind.”

“I’m old enough, William. I’m even old enough to learn how to doctor from Mama. She’s already showed me how to poultice and bandage and how to use moss to stop bleeding. I can make chamomile tea that puts you to sleep and strawberry leaf tea to take aches out of your joints. I can do all of this. Why can’t I come to Detroit with you?”

“Liza, when you get older you’ll find out that everything happens in its own time and being anxious about it won’t make it happen any faster. Sometimes you just have to trust God and wait for His time for things to work out.”

“I trusted God down in that cellar, William and when I opened my eyes from praying I was still in the cellar. I didn’t get out until I broke some sticks and rubbed them to make a fire. That’s when you came along.” William sighed. “You still have lots to learn, Liza, but then you’re only twelve years old. You still got time.”

Liza skipped ahead of him. She followed the light of Mama’s lantern glimmering through the pine trees. “Mama’s got her light burning right now.

My time is right now and I’m working on going to Detroit with you when you go back next week.”

She threw open the cabin door. “Mama, Papa, guess what! William let me out of the cellar and I’m going back to Detroit with him if you say I can. Say I can, Mama. Say I can, Papa.”

Mama and Papa were sitting at the log table. Mama liked to pretty things up so a woven red tablecloth covered the logs and tin plates and cups sat in five places.

Everybody had a cup, even William who didn't live at home any longer. Mama had put a silver vase full of daisies in the center of the table. It was so highly polished that it reflected the firelight. Mama had brought the vase with her when she married Papa. The glow of firelight and light from the reading lantern softened the rough walls and danced off the plain wooden table and chair and bedstead in the corner. The light flowed over the wooden chest of drawers sitting on the right side of the fireplace that Mama used to store her herbs and other medicines.

The firelight couldn't skip up the stairs to the loft like Emily and Liza did every night to explore the two rooms upstairs. The rooms were divided by a bright blue blanket that Mama had woven and dyed herself. One side had a large bed. Its wooden frame was covered with a straw tick mattress that Liza and Emily helped fill with fresh straw every few weeks and a blue woven blanket. This was Mama and Papa's bedroom and it reminded Liza of the sky when they ate the noon meal.

The other smaller bedroom belonged to Liza and Emily. It contained a bedstead, not pallets on the floor like some of the other slaves in the other cabins slept on, but a bedstead with a wooden frame and a straw mattress. Liza and Emily hung the few clothes they had on wooden pegs on the wall. Papa had made them each a small table and on Liza's table stood a wooden doll with a painted face and wooden lantern, just like Mama.

Emily's table held a jumble of her treasures. There were small stones that she had gathered from the shallow bottom of the river.

She had a sheaf of dried grass and some nuts and berries from the woods. Papa had made Emily a doll too, but Emily had buried it in the woods and wouldn't tell anybody where. "She's waiting for her freedom," is all Emily would say.

"We've been waiting supper for you two," Mama said. "Emily should be back any minute." She put some of the hog back and greens on a plate for William and sat a pan of corn pone on the table. "Sit down, William. Liza, dish up the blueberries."

Liza dished them up and poured milk into her cup. Mama poured hot tea for Papa and William and herself, then she sat down at the table.

“Where is that Emily?” she fretted. “We can’t eat until she gets there.”

“I’m here, Mama.” Emily stood in the doorway. “Mama, guess what happened?”

Liza poured milk into Emily’s cup. “Sit down so we can eat.”

Mama pointed to Emily’s seat. “Sit down child, so we can say blessing and eat.”

“But Mama.”

Liza got up and walked over to Emily. She picked her up and sat her in a chair. chair.

Papa prayed in his deep voice. “Lord, set us free. Lead us to a place where we can’t hear the rattling of slavery’s chains and we call no one but you Master. Amen.”

“Amen,” William said. He picked up his fork and took a bite of the hogback and collard greens. “Mm, Mama. Tastes like heaven.”

“Eat your way straight through to heaven,” Papa said, taking a huge bite.

Mama smiled at Emily “What did you want to tell me?”

Emily jumped up from her chair and ran to Mama. She put her head in Mama’s lap. “Dr. Emerson got shot,” she said, her lip trembling.

Pa slammed down his fork. “What do you mean Dr. Emerson got shot?”

“Mistress sent me to bring him home for supper. When I gits there, Mama, he’s lying in the mud and grass and the dogs are standing over him. Tom, he’s standing there crying and he keeps saying, “I didn’t mean to shoot him. I was aiming at the ducks! I didn’t mean to shoot him! Lord forgive me, I didn’t mean to shoot him!”

Mama jumped up, spilling Emily onto the floor. “He needs a doctor!” She

ran to the herb chest and pulled out a cloth bag of dried herbs. She was halfway out of the door when Emily sat up and hollered after her. “He dead, Mama. The boys say he dead.”

Mama didn’t miss a step. She ran out the door and up to the big house faster than a runaway horse. Pa- pa sat staring into space. William played with his fork. Liza picked Emily up from the floor and sat her back in her chair. “I want Mama,” Emily wailed.

“Eat your supper, child,” Papa said.

Emily put a bite of food in her mouth, but she chewed on it for at least five minutes. Liza constructed a collard green jungle on her plate and wondered if it was like the African jungle where her great grandparents had been captured. If they had had a medicine lantern like Mama’s, they would have seen the slave traders coming and fought them off. In her imagination, Liza hung lanterns in front of the thatched village huts and the evil red eyes watching them from the edge of the jungle disappeared into the thick underbrush.

Mama’s voice pierced her thoughts. “It’s true. He’s dead.” Mama sank heavily into her chair.

“What happened?” William jumped up and paced back and forth in front of the fireplace.

“He was duck hunting on the South River. He was hiding in the bushes and one of his boys thought he was a duck and shot him. He died right there on the riverbank.”

Papa put his head in his hands. William stopped behind Mama’s chair and put his hands on her shoulders. “This changes everything, Mama.”

Mama stared at him. “How does it change things, William?”

“It puts Mrs. Emerson in charge of his estate,” William said.

“She has to do what he tells her to do in his will, doesn’t she?”

“She can do what she wants with his property, including his slaves,” William said.

“But we won’t be his slaves much longer,” Mama said. “Your Papa has earned the last forty dollars to buy me. And when he buys me he buys Liza and Emily too.”

Papa jumped up and went to the wooden chest where Mama kept her herbs. He opened a drawer and rummaged around in it. He pulled his hand out of the drawer and waved a wad of greenbacks in the air.

“Here’s the forty dollars,” Papa said.

“Take it up to the house the day after the funeral,” William said. “You have to hurry Papa or she’ll change her mind.”

“She’ll do what the doctor says in her will,” Mama said. “All them white women do that.”

“Not Mrs. Emerson, Mama,” William said.

“We’s gotta trust her,” Mama said. “God’s gonna help her do right by us.” When Mama said that Liza started to worry about her freedom. She twisted her callused hands under the table. She could touch freedom with the rough edges of her fingertips. She couldn’t feel God’s hands at all

All of the slaves at Rosewood sang at Dr. Emerson’s funeral, even the Conjure Granny, and Winny, the six- day-old daughter of Cato and Minaje. They sang in the parlor of the big house where Mistress Emerson had put his coffin. Liza thought that

Dr. Emerson looked too serious to be him. He had always laughed and tickled her under the chin at the farm. Even when he came to their cabin doctoring when their illness was bigger than Mama’s skills, he was serious while he doctored them. Then when he finished he gave them lemon drops and asked them silly riddles.

“I remember one of his riddles,” Emily whispered to Liza as they stood in the rows of slaves. “He always asked me what was black and white and read all over.”

“What would you say?” Liza asked her, blinking back tears.

“A newspaper!” Emily said. “He’d laugh so loud that the chickens would run away. Do people laugh in heaven, Liza?”

Liza put her finger to her lips. “SHH! The preacher’s saying something and we have to sing again.” They sang *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* and Liza watched

Mistress Emerson faint at the preacher’s feet. Everybody ran to pick her up and fan and comfort her except Liza and Emily. Dragging Emily by the hand, Liza went over to Annie and hugged her. “I’m your friend,” she whispered. “I’m sorry, Annie.

Annie hugged her back. “Thank you Liza. I know you care about me and I care about you too. I think I’d better tell you-“

Before she could go on, Mary Jane sailed up, her black skirts swishing and bellowing. “You shouldn’t be talking to the slaves, Annie. Come along, Mama needs us.”

She sneered at Liza. “I’ll see you next week. You’re my new lady’s maid and you’re going to Baltimore with me.”

Liza sneered back defiantly, but inside she quaked like aspen leaves before a storm. She’d have to talk to Mama about this right away. “Come on Emily, let’s find Mama,” she said.

But she couldn’t talk to Mama until that night back in their own cabin. Mama had to help with the funeral food and make sure all of the white folks were comfortable. Mama had to fetch smelling salts for Mistress Emerson and loosen her stays and fan her while she rested.

Mama and Liza had to stand in the cemetery fanning Mistress Emerson and Mary Jane and listen to the thuds of the dirt hitting Dr. Emerson’s coffin. Liza shivered. Mama put her arm around Liza. “It’s only his body, baby. “His soul’s in heaven with God.”

Liza buried her face in Mama’s skirt. She hoped heaven had light in every corner, even the dusty corners like the ones in Mistress Emerson’s library. Liza and Mama had to spend the next two days caring for the guests at the big farmhouse because Mistress Emerson was too flattened by grief to do anything but cry.

“She doesn’t feel too sad to eat,” Liza said to Mama as they watched the last of the funeral guests disappear. “She ate nearly half of your plum cake, Mama, and six biscuits for breakfast. And she wants fried chicken for dinner.”

“Never mind child,” Mama said. “She’s grieving in her own way.” But Mama’s eyes flashed when Liza told her what Mary Jane had said.

“You ain’t gonna be nobody’s lady’s maid,” Mama said. “You are going with your family to Baltimore and go to school. We’s settled that.”

Mama kept insisting the issue was settled and when everybody on the farm gathered on the front porch to hear the reading of Dr. Emerson’s will, it still sounded like the issue was settled. In front of the assembled crowd of slaves and the Emerson relatives, Mistress Emerson accepted the forty dollars that Papa gave her for Mama and Liza and Emily’s freedom. Mary Jane flounced into the house, slamming the door when she heard this, but Liza didn’t care. She just stuck out her tongue at Mary Jane’s back.

The next two weeks flew by in a busy whirl. Mama and Papa packed as much food and clothes as they could fit into knapsacks that Mama sewed out of thick, woven cloth. They would have to leave most of their things in the cabin, but Mistress Emerson promised that they would be there when Mama and Papa could come back with a wagon to collect them. William kept hurrying Mama and Papa, looking over his shoulder like he expected a slave catcher or the monster from the cellar to jump on them any minute.

One night Mama was stuffing herbs in the corner of a sack. She found a dry stick and snapped it for the fireplace. It sounded like a gunshot. William jumped up and had his hands around her neck before she could move.

“Willie, Willie, why are you so jumpy?” Papa asked him.

William slapped his knee and laughed like an Uncle Sampson slave. “I don’t know, Papa. ‘Seems like the devil’s riding on my shoulder and I just wanna run fast as I can.”

“You’ll get your chance tomorrow morning,” Papa said. “We’re leaving at dawn and you can move as fast as you want.”

“You’ve got your freedom paper?” William asked anxiously.

“I got it,” Papa said. He reached inside of his shirt and pulled out a square of paper. “Right here, next to my heart.

Mama sighed and looked at the cabin. She took the lantern down from its hook. “We can’t leave without the liberty lantern,” she said.

“This is the last thing to pack.

Now we’ll be ready to go at dawn. Don’t worry so, William. Nothing’s gonna go wrong. Liza, you, and Emily get to bed. We’s got to get up mighty early in the morning.”

Emily ran ahead of Liza so that she’d be the first one to crawl in bed. Liza followed her up the stairs more slowly. She had a feeling that something was gonna go wrong. Liza sang songs with Emily until Emily went to sleep. Then Liza tried to go to sleep. She counted fireflies in the meadow. She named a litter of twelve puppies and fifteen kittens. She was still wide-awake. Finally, Liza rolled out of bed and slid downstairs on her bottom, step by step so that Emily wouldn’t hear her bare feet. Mama and Papa and William were still sitting on the cabin steps. Liza made a beeline for Papa’s lap. “I can’t sleep,” she said.

Mama sighed. “How hard did you try, Liza?”

“I tried hard, Mama. Tell me about the Liberty Lantern again. That usually makes me sleepy.”

Mama sighed again, but this time Liza heard a smile in her sigh. Mama told Liza the story of the Liberty Lantern.

Chapter Three

“My Mammy had her own cabin for her
and us chilluns. De wuz rails stuck through de craks in de logs fo’ beds
with straw on top fo’ to sleep on.” William Nelson, aged 85
Former slave, born in Missouri

Mama told Liza the story of the Liberty Lantern again. “Your great great grandmother Naomi lived on a plantation on a great bay called Chesapeake. She was one of the many slaves who toiled under the hot Virginia sunshine in the tobacco fields of her master. The master hired a cruel overseer who whipped the slaves every day and made them work in the fields long after dark. The slaves decided to fight back. Oh my, I have an itch in my nose, Liza. Ahhh...ahhh...wait Liza...choo!”

Liza continued the story while Mama sneezed. “The slaves decided to fight back. They got together and made their plans. They would steal one of the master’s boats and row it across the bay to the Maryland shore. They would make their way through Maryland to Pennsylvania and freedom. On the appointed night—did I tell the story the right way, Mama?”

Mama smiled at Liza. “You said it the right way, Liza. Go on with the story.”

“On the appointed night, the slaves gathered in the boat. Taking a lantern filled with whale oil with them they started off on their row across the bay to free- dom.”

Mama interrupted. “I’m through sneezing now, Liza. I’ll go on with the story. They didn’t make it across the Chesapeake Bay. They were about in the middle when a storm blew up like they often do on the Bay. The waves got so big that they overturned the boat and the runaways ended up in the water. Your great grandmother and the lantern washed upon shore. The rest of the slaves were never found.”

“Did great grandmother make it to freedom?” Liza asked, even though she already knew the answer.

“She made it to Maryland, but she didn’t make it to freedom,” Mama said. “A handsome young slave from a Maryland tobacco plantation found your grandma unconscious on the beach. He took her to the plantation and his master claimed her as one of his slaves. He treated her pretty well, but she had to work in the tobacco fields. He fed and clothed her and she even married the handsome young slave. They had children and a fairly good life together, but they didn’t have their freedom.

Great grandma passed the lantern down to her daughter who was my Mama and my Mama gave it to me when I came to live at Rosewood with your Papa. I promised her I’d take it with me when I got my freedom.”

“Can I carry the lantern on our trip, Mama?”

“Yes, Liza, you can carry the lantern. Now go to bed.”

Liza went to bed but she still couldn’t sleep. She was too excited. She lay in bed listening to Emily breathe. She stared out the small square on the wall that Papa called a window. The slaves who built the cabin had been afraid to cut a window, because they thought it would let the evil spirits who roamed the night into the cabin. Papa had cut a window but it wasn’t big enough. He had promised Liza that he would cut it bigger, but he had been so busy working out and earning money for their freedom that he hadn’t done it yet.

Liza felt the cool night air blow across her skin. She got out of bed and stood underneath the window. She got up on her tiptoes and let the wind blow her hair. The wind of freedom-tomorrow it would blow over her body from head to foot. Tomorrow. Liza got back into bed and snuggled next to Emily. She closed her eyes.

They started out early the next morning. It was still dark enough so that Liza had to carry the lantern, filled with kerosene instead of whale oil, but still

the same lantern that Great Grandmother had used in the rowboat. She wore her overalls and Mama had insisted that she stuff a handkerchief and some herbs in her pocket just in case they needed them.

They trudged down the dirt road. Papa marched first with the precious freedom papers under his shirt. Mama walked behind him, carrying her medical knap- sack full of herbs and cures. Next came William, tall and looking more like a field hand than a newspaper writer in his ragged pants and patchwork shirt. Liza and Emily walked alongside them. Liza swung the lantern back and forth, casting dancing shadows around them. They looked like the shadows that Liza had seen when Mistress Emerson had locked her in the cellar.

Liza held the lantern higher. They were walking to freedom. No monster black shape was going to stop them. Her family was free! Papa carried the paper in his shirt. Liza ran up to him and felt the paper in his pocket. Papa had the freedom paper!

They walked for miles. Emily counted the miles. “One mile, two mile, three miles to go, Three for the feet and one for the crow!” It was the planting rhyme that they used for corn. Emily had just put new words to it.

Then Liza thought of one: “One potato, two potato, three potato eight, I planted three and then I ate!”

William sauntered over to them. “How many potatoes did you eat, Liza?”

“I lost count after ten of them, William. I was hungry and seed potatoes are good to eat when you’re in the fields and it ain’t supper time yet.”

“I hope the potato crop is good this year,” William laughed. Liza touched his hand.

“William, now far are we from the road?”

“We’re on the road, Liza.”

Emily danced back and forth in front of Liza. “Liza don’t know the road! Liza don’t know the road!”

“I mean the big road to Baltimore, frog mouth!” “We’re about nine miles from the Baltimore Pike.” “How long will it take us to get there, William?”

“Walking, about eight hours. Horse and buggy, maybe four.”

“Did you walk all the way home?”

“Not all of the way. A farmer with a wagon gave me a ride down the pike after I showed him my freedom papers. I took a boat from Detroit to Pittsburgh.”

“Did you row the boat?” Emily asked William.

“No, the captain steered the ship. I sat on the deck most of the time and read. I wrote some of my stories for the paper there too.”

“Did anybody think you were a slave?” Liza asked him.

“Lots of people did, but I told them I was a free black. I only had to show my papers to a sheriff in Cleveland. The rest of the way home nobody stopped me.”

Emily threw her arms around William’s knees and hung on so tightly that he couldn’t move. “I’m scared, William. Will they send the dogs to get us?” “They aren’t going to get us, Emily. They can’t. We’re free.”

Liza watched William scoop up Emily and sit her on his shoulders. He marched down the road carrying her, looking like a stork with his long legs. Liza skipped on her own two feet in front of them. She laughed with Emily as her braids tied with bright red yarn that Mama had woven for her flew out behind her back. Liza fingered her own braids sticking out all

around her head like flowers in Mistress Emerson's garden. She had tied hers with blue yarn, because she liked blue birds and blue flowers like bluebells.

"Do you like red yarn better or blue yarn?" Liza asked William.

"I like them both," William said. He swung Liza up on his other shoulder, but he didn't carry her very long. "You're growing up fast, Liza Jane," he said. He put her back down with a grunt.

Mama and Papa started to sing to make their steps in the dust go faster. They started one of Liza's favorite songs. "That's the freedom song!" she shouted. "Let's sing it again. Please?"

Papa smiled. "We can sing it all of the way to Detroit if you can sing that long, Liza."

They all sang the freedom song together.

Rabbit in de briar patch,

Squirrel in de tree,

Wish I could go huntin',

But I ain't free.

Rooster's in de henhouse,

Hens in de yard,

Love to go shootin,;

But slavery's too hard.

"But that's sad song now," Liza said. "It don't fit. It need new words."

"Well Liza, use that imagination of yours and make up some new words,"

Mama challenged her.

"I will," Liza said. And she did.

Her new words said:

Walkin down the dusty road,

Sitting neath a tree,

Drinking water, eating bread,

But now we's free."

They sang the new words the rest of the morning as they traveled the long dusty road to the Baltimore Pike. Nobody stopped them. Only two people passed by.

One was a young man with a brown beard riding a mule. He had two flour sacks slung over the back of the mule.

He told them that the sacks had tobacco in them and he was taking it to Baltimore to sell so he'd have money to buy seed corn. He didn't even seem to notice that they were black people traveling alone. He just talked to them for a few minutes and moved on.

The other person they ran into was a man of middle years dressed in a long black coat and square-topped hat. He was driving a team of brown horses hitched to an open buggy. He stopped and watered his horses and talked to Liza and her family. He told them that he was a Methodist minister on his way to Baltimore to preach. He told them that he came from Sayesville, a small town near there and had just finished preaching at a camp meeting.

He studied Liza with gentle brown eyes the color of his horses. "I feel you are celebrating your freedom, young lady," he said smiling.

"We are celebrating," Liza told him. "We's all free."

"If you need help, I'll be a little ahead of you on the road," he said as he drove away.

"We's all free!" Liza shouted after him. She shivered. "We are free, aren't we Papa?"

Papa reached into his shirt pocket and handed her the freedom papers. "Hang on to these Liza. Touch them and let them crackle in your fingers. Feel freedom, Liza. Feel it!"

Liza clutched the papers tightly against her overalls. She felt them but she still felt something flutter in her stomach, something like a mosquito lighting on her arm.

"William," Liza said.

But William wasn't looking at her. His eyes were fastened on a cotton boll of dust blowing toward them. Mama and Papa and Liza stopped too, watching the cloud grow like a thundercloud. Liza watched the cloud change into a large white man on a black horse. He had a rifle slung across his saddle. He took off his wide brimmed hat and tipped it to Mama.

"Sheriff Rawlings, I do declare! What are you doing here? Do you need some doctoring?"

The sheriff nodded at Mama's greeting. "Not today, Sary. I don't need doctoring today."

"Hello sheriff," Papa said. "Do you need some carpentering, then?"

"I might later on, Caleb. My wife's Mama and Daddy are coming to live with us. But right now I'm looking to take you folks back home."

"We're going home now," William said firmly. "We're free and we're going home to Detroit."

"Mrs. Emerson says you're runaways," the sheriff told them. "She sent me to fetch you back. She's posted a \$50 reward for each one of you. Lucky nobody caught you before I did."

Liza didn't wait for Papa to tell her to get out the freedom papers. She grabbed them from her overall pocket and spread them out. Smoothing down the edges, she handed the papers to the sheriff. He glanced at them and handed them back to Liza.

"Mrs. Emerson said these papers are no good," he said. "She said that William held her at gunpoint and made her sign them."

"You know that's a lie, Sheriff Rawlings," Mama said sternly. "I know it's a lie," the Sheriff admitted. "But we gotta figure out a way to keep her happy and let you go on your way at the same time."

“We ain’t got much money, but you can have what we got,” Mama said. “It’s not the money, it’s the nature of the lady involved,” Sheriff Rawlings said.

“I knows what you mean,” Papa said. “She don’t wanna lose her doctoring lady and her carpenter. I’ll bargain with you, sheriff. I’ll go back with you if you let my children go..”

“I’m going with you,” Mama said. “Sheriff, I’ll go back with you on the same terms. You let my children go.”

“No!” William shouted. He ran over to the sheriff, forgetting that Emily was on his back. She bounced up and down, clinging to his back like a monkey. “We don’t have to bargain with you sheriff. I am free and my father bought freedom for my mother and sisters. It says so on this paper that Mrs. Emerson signed of her own free will. How can you dispute that?”

Sheriff Rawlings sighed. “I don’t dispute any of it, William, but Mrs. Emerson does and so does the South. I can’t win a gun battle with all of them and neither can you. All you can hope to do is escape.”

Papa and Mama moved together and stood in front of the sheriff. “We’ll go with you if you write the children a freedom pass.”

Sheriff Rawlings pulled a pencil and some paper out of his saddlebag. He wrote something on the paper and handed it to William. William read it carefully and tucked it away in his pocket.

“You keep hold of the freedom paper, Liza,” Papa told her. “It will help you make your way to Detroit.”

“But Papa!”

“Obey me, Liza. You must obey me this time. Mama and I will come later. You and William and Emily can come after us once you’re settled. We’ll get around Mistress Emerson.”

Mama hugged William and Liza and Emily. “You go now, quick,” she said with tears in her eyes. “We’ll meet again soon.” She handed Liza the freedom lantern. “You take this with you.”

Liza held the lantern tightly.

Mama and Papa stood next to the Sheriff. He turned his horse around and they headed down the road in the direction of Rosewood. None of them looked back. William hoisted Emily higher up on his shoulders. “We must go quickly,” he said. “Mrs. Emerson might send Mary Jane after us!”

Liza didn’t think that Mary Jane would walk very far after them, but she didn’t argue with William. She walked along behind him, not saying anything, but swinging the lantern. Already, she missed Mama and Papa. Emily snuffled into William’s shirt.

“You’re getting his back all wet,” Liza said.

“I won’t drown,” William said. He walked faster and Liza trotted along beside him. The fields alongside the dirt path looked to Liza like one of the green patchwork quilts the Conjure Granny made and gave to the slave children to snuggle under. She and Emily had one on their bed at home. Home. She didn’t think she’d ever have a home again. No place would be a home without Mama and Papa. Tears blurred her eyes and she blinked hard at the brown snaky road winding in front of her. “Come along, Liza,” William said. “I think I hear hoof beats back there.”

William was right. Quickly glancing over her shoulder, Liza spotted small brown puffs of dust floating toward them. Behind the dust this time were a group of six men with hats pulled low over their eyes and hard voices and claw hands. One of them picked up Liza and slung her in the saddle in front of him before she could run away. The lantern swung wildly back and forth but she held on to it.

“I got me a runaway,” the man said. “Is there a reward attached to you, youn ‘un?”

William swung over quickly and lifted Liza from his horse. “No runaway and no reward,” he said. “We belong to Sheriff Rawlings. You probably passed him back yonder on the road with our Mam and Pap. We’s going to work in Baltimore. Mam and Pap got sick so the sheriff’s taking them back home.”

The man pushed back his hat and scratched his head. “How do we know that you’re telling the truth?” he asked William, his eyes hard.

“He give us a pass,” William said. He handed the man the pass and the man looked at it. Liza knew that he couldn’t read it just by the way his eyes didn’t move over it the right way. The man handed the pass back to William.

“Git along then,” he said.

The man spurred his horse, nodded to the rest of the men and they all galloped ahead of William and Liza and Emily.

Liza stared at William. “You talked like Jackson or Archie in the tobacco field.”

William laughed. “Do you think I’m going to talk educated talk to them? They’ll have me an “uppidity black and back as a slave quicker than a bunny can eat a carrot.”

Liza knew that William was right. It was just strange hearing him talk different than he usually did.

“Now quicker than a bunny can eat a carrot, Liza. We gotta move in case they decide to come back.”

Chapter Four

“My father told mother when I became of age he was going to free me, and send me north to be educated..”

James Calvert James, ex-slave, born in Virginia

Liza hurried to keep up with William’s long strides. They trudged along, the hot sun beating on their backs. Emily fell asleep and her head flopped loosely on William’s shoulder. Liza felt her eyes grow heavy and she wished that she were little like Emily so William would carry her on his back.

Liza wiped the sweat off her forehead with a handful of grass that she pulled from the side of the road. She wished that she had listened to Mama and worn a dress instead of her overalls. Dresses were looser and let the wind creep under her shirts and cool her off. But Mama had thought that she would be safer if she wore her overalls and had her long hair done up in braids fastened close to her head so that she looked like a boy.

On the other hand, Mama had dressed Emily to look like a pretty little girl in a patchwork dress and apron and braids tied with yarn ribbons bristling all over her head. People were supposed to pat Emily on the head and remark how cute she was. They were supposed to mistake Liza for a boy and chuck her under the chin or look past her at William or Emily. People usually did what they were supposed to do.

Liza didn’t mind much that everyone made a fuss over Emily and ignored her. Today, she didn’t mind at all. She was too busy missing Mama and Papa and Annie and wondering what Emily and William would do in Detroit. They had been moving down that road for a long time when Liza couldn’t stand being thirsty any longer. She tried to sound as much like Mama as he could. “William, we got to stop at a stream for a drink. I’m perishing of thirst.”

William smiled at her. “We’ll stop at the next stream,” he promised her. And they did.

A few more miles down the road they came upon a pond not too far off the road and they stopped for a long drink of water and some biscuits and cheese.

After lunch, Emily and Liza went swimming in the pond. The sun was so hot that their clothes dried off right away. They lay in the long grass sniffing its sweet, warm smell while William too, went swimming. They all took a long nap in the grass. Then they all started down the duty road again. This time when they saw a cloud of dust in the distance it came from in front of them instead of behind them. Liza wondered who was coming by them this time.

As she watched the horses and buggy with the wavering figure on the front seat come closer she realized it was the man in the long black coat and square topped hat who had passed them earlier that morning. He halted his horses in front of them, blocking the road. He beckoned to William and swung Emily up into the buggy without asking permission. "You'd best come with me," he said. "The slave catchers are on your trail."

"I'm a free black man sir," William said, drawing himself up to his full six feet. "Here are my papers and a pass from the sheriff of Anne Arundel County."

The man picked up Liza and put her in the buggy. "No time for that now," he said. "You'd best get in the buggy and let me cover you with blankets and my sacks full of beans and flour. Slave catchers don't look at papers when there's money involved."

"But who would post a reward for us?" William exclaimed. "We aren't runaways. We're free blacks going north."

"I know who'd post a reward for us and she'd be quick about it too," Liza said.

“We don’t have time to discuss it now,” the man said to William. “I see some riders in the distance. That might very well be them. Climb in quickly and hide in the back with the children.”

William didn’t argue any more. He lay down flat in the back of the buggy with Emily and Liza next to him and the man piled blankets and sacks over them.

Liza wanted to sneeze so badly that she had to squeeze her nose with her fingers, but she managed to swallow the sneeze by thinking about swimming. They’d have to go for another swim to wash off the dust and flour that had sifted all over them. Liza heard shouts and the whinny of horses. She felt the man stop the buggy and get out. “What can I do for you gentlemen?” She could tell by his voice that he was standing beside his horses, holding their bridles.

“We’re looking for three fugitive slaves,” a rough voice said. “One’s a tall young buck about six feet and the other two are girl pickinnies.”

Liza wanted to stand up in the buggy and shout at the men. “You can’t talk about William like that. He’s smart and good. He’s not a buck. Emily is learning to read and write and she can do her own braids. She’s not a pickinny. I ain’t a pickinny either. I can read and write and work hard.”

But she didn’t stand up. She listened to the Methodist man say, “I haven’t seen a soul along this stretch of road and I’ve been traveling since early this morning.”

“We know they came this way,” the voice said. “My brother run into them this morning on the road. The buck showed him a fake pass so he and his men let them go. When they got to the crossroads stores by their plantation, they saw a runaway notice with a \$50 reward for each of them posted, so my brother sent me and some of his men back after them.”

Liza stifled a laugh this time instead of a sneeze. It had to be Mary Jane who posted the sign. Mistress Emerson was too lazy to ride to the

crossroads store. But then Liza frowned. How dare Mistress Emerson say that they were runaway slaves! She had told a lie and made them fugitive slaves all in one wanted poster.

“I haven’t seen them gentlemen,” the Methodist man said. “I’m going to a baptizing service in Baltimore and I’m already late. I must be on my way.”

“Keep a sharp eye out for them,” the rough voice said. “They gotta be along here somewhere. Ain’t you one of them Abolition preachers?”

“No, I am not one of them Abolition preachers,” the Methodist man said sternly. “Now go on your way and let me go on mine.”

“We’ll be back if we find out you lied,” the man threatened.

Liza listened to the men ride away. She poked her head out from under a flour sack so that she could get a peek at the men who were riding away. Some of them were the same men that William and Papa had talked to that morning.

“We saw some of those men this morning,” Liza told the Methodist man.

“They’re slave catchers out to collect as much money as they can off of human misery,” the Methodist minister said scornfully.

William and Emily got themselves from under the flour sacks and onto the buggy seat. William brushed off his shirt and pants. He pulled the pass that the sheriff had given him out of his pocket and handed it to the Minister. “Sheriff Rawlings gave me this just this morning,” William said. “I’m William Myers. I’m a free black from Detroit visiting my family here. Here are my papers. My father bought my mother and two sisters from Mr. Emerson in Anne Arundel County. He owned a farm called Rosewood.”

“He’s the planter who was accidentally shot, isn’t he?” the Minister said.

“Yes, he’s the one,” William said. “My father gave Mrs. Emerson, his widow, the last payment for my mother and sister’s freedom and she

accepted it. All of us left Rosewood this morning on our way to Detroit. Liza carried our freedom papers and we were all happy and singing because we were together and we were free. Sheriff Rawlings caught up with us on the road and told us that Mrs. Emerson had offered a \$50 reward for our capture and return. My parents went back with him to make sure we kept our freedom.”

Mrs. Emerson wants you children back too,” the Minister said, pointing at Liza and Emily. “and if she can get you back into slavery again, she’ll do it,” he said to William.

“How can she get away with this?” William said. He clenched his fists, then he burst into tears. “How can she get away with this?”

Liza scooted over to William and threw her arms around him. “Please don’t cry, William. Emily and I won’t let them make you a slave again.”

Emily gave William a dirty square of cloth. “Here’s a kerchief,” she said. “Blow your nose.”

William took the handkerchief and pressed it to his nose. “Thank you Emily. That helped quite a lot.”

How can Mistress Emerson do this to us?” Liza asked the Minister.

“It’s called lying and using the Fugitive Slave Law,” the Minister said.

Liza tugged at the Minister’s sleeve. “What’s the Fugitive Slave Law?” She knew that she could have asked William, but this man that dressed like a crow used big words like William did and Liza liked to listen to his voice. Besides, William still had tears in his eyes and she didn’t want to make him cry harder.

The Minister looked at William. “Tell your sister what the Fugitive Slave Law is, William.”

William smiled. “The girl tugging your sleeve is Eliza Jane. We always call her Liza and the one curled up on your buggy seat is Emily.”

“I won’t tell you my name because it is safer for you and safer for me that way,” the Minister said. “I will tell you that I am Methodist minister, just as I told those slave catchers. I am an Abolitionist. That means that I believe that slavery is evil and I will try to help as many slaves find freedom as I can. You are people with black skins but with a right to be free.

You are not the property of the white man to do with as he wishes. I will take you into Baltimore to a safe house in the Underground Railroad. The people there will pass you safely to another station. He shook Liza’s hand. “I’m glad to meet you.”

Liza shook the Minister’s hand. “I’m glad to meet you too, but you still haven’t told me what the Fugitive Slave Law is.”

The Minister smiled. “William was going to tell you about that.”

“Congress passed the Fugitive Slave Law about two years ago, Liza. What it says is that runaway slaves are no longer safe in the North. A black man can have been living in the north for 20 years and under this law the slave catchers can come and take him back south. Slave catchers and federal marshals and other officials can pursue blacks into Northern states and arrest blacks who are merely suspected of being runaways and return them to their masters. Any person harboring and helping a runaway slave can be arrested and sentenced to prison. Do you understand that, Liza?”

“I understand that and I think we should start moving,” Liza said. “Those slave catchers might be back.”

The Minister clucked to the horses and the buggy moved down the road at a brisk pace. “Are we going to Baltimore?” Liza asked the Minister.

“We are going to Baltimore,” the Minister said. “There are friends in Baltimore who will give you shelter until you are ready to move on.”

Emily hugged William, then she moved the flour sacks from on top of her. “I’m going to take a nap,” she said.

William smiled. “Close your eyes, smell the daisies, and take a nap.”

The Minister stopped the buggy and William jumped out. He picked a handful of daisies from the field and made two bouquets of them. He handed one bouquet to Emily and one to Liza. Emily tickled her nose with a daisy.

She giggled. Liza carefully spread her daisies on top of a flour sack. She wanted them to dry in the sunshine so she could take them with her always, just like the liberty lantern. She felt around in her knapsack to make sure that the liberty lantern was still there. Mama was depending on her to carry it to freedom with them.

Mama. She missed Mama a lot already. Mama always washed their clothes in the creek and spread them on a rock to dry in the sun. Thanks to Mama their clothes smelled like freshly cut grass and sunshine. Mama made sure they had good things to eat too. She did extra chores for milk and churned some of it into butter for their biscuits and corn bread. She kept a flock of chickens that pecked around their log cabin door constantly and ended up in Mama’s iron kettle as part of her delicious chicken noodle soup.

Papa fished the river every day and brought home silvery strings of fish. Mama helped him clean the fish and she fried it in corn bread. Liza’s nose twitched. She could smell that fish frying. Liza sighed. She was hungry and she missed Mama’s care and love and Papa’s stories and love. Papa’s big hands would gently undo her braids before she went to bed every night and he told her stories about a black empire in a far off land called Africa as he brushed out her hair with a comb made out of bone.

“Tell me a story, Liza, please tell me a story like Papa tells us every night,” Emily begged.

“Don’t you want William to tell you a story?” Liza asked her, smoothing a wisp of hair back from her sweaty forehead.

“I want you to tell me a story. William makes it sound like a preacher story. You make sound like magic.”

The Minister laughed. “Preach us one of your sermon stories, William. I can learn something from listening to you.”

William laughed too, but his laugh sounded bitter. “Mrs. Emerson decided that she was going to give us a sermon every Sunday after we got through with our own church. This is what she made us say, ‘Who gave you a master and a mistress?’”

“I know this one!” Emily sat up and she was so excited. “What’s the answer, Emily?” I asked her.

“The answer is, ‘God gave them to me.’”

“Do you believe that, Eliza?”

“I believe that God made each one of us free.” Emily laughed. “I remember the next question too.

“Who says that you must obey them?”

“I know the answer to that one,” Liza said. “The answer is ‘God says I must.’”

“Does God say that you must be in bondage to the white man or woman?” the Minister asked.

“God says that I am free,” Liza said.

“What about the book that your mistress made you learn from?” the Minister asked.

“She made us learn things from a book she calls the Bible and tell it back to her like a parrot,” Liza said. “We just said it because she made us say it. We didn’t believe it.”

The Minister smiled at her. “You have learned that lesson well,” he said.

“Tell me about once upon a time,” Emily begged Liza.

“I don’t know that story very good,” Liza said. “I’m still learning it, but William know it. Let’s see if he can tell us the story without preaching it.”

Emily nodded. “Try it, William.”

William cleared his throat. “Once upon a time there was a great empire on the banks of the Niger River where its waters brush against the Sahara desert. The kingdom was founded by the Songhai, a nation of black scholars, warriors, merchants, farmers, and artists. The empire was called the Songhai Empire and the whole world knew about this race of talented black men. There was a city of the Songhai called Timbuktu where about 50,000 people lived. Here poets and priests lived like princes and books were more important than clothes or camel herds.” William stopped talking and smiled at Emily. “How am I doing? Do I sound like a preacher yet?”

Emily didn’t smile back. She drummed her fingers on a flour sack. “I’m still listening,” she said in a perfect imitation of the way Papa did when he listened to them explain why they had gotten into mischief.

William continued. “In Timbuktu there were about 4,000 boy students and scholars were the most important men in the cultural life of the city. Leo

Africanus, a historian from the 16th century said that these scholars were ‘bountifully maintained at the king’s cost and charges.’”

“But Mistress Emerson says that we’re ignorant savages that white people have to civilize,” Liza said. “Doesn’t she know about Timbuktu?”

“She’s so ignorant that she doesn’t know about Timbuktu,” William said. “And what do you think she’d say if she knew?”

“She’d say we were lying,” Liza said.

The Minister said, “Another lesson learned well, Eliza. A sad lesson.”

Liza thought for a minute. “Africa is a lot older than America and Africa is just as smart as America,” she said.

William hugged Liza. “Your wits are sharp, Liza.” “Mama’s teaching me how to doctor, too,” Liza said. “When I get free I want to be a doctor for black and white people.”

“Did you ever hear of the Moses of your people?” the Minister asked Liza.

“You mean Moses like go down, Moses, way down in Egypt’s land. Tell old, Pharoah, let my people go. Only Pharoah is America that won’t let slaves go free,” Liza said all in one breath.

“There is a black woman called Harriet Tubman who has led many of your people to freedom in the north. The last I heard the slave catchers had put a \$1,000 reward on her head.”

“A black Moses!” Liza had to think about this for a few minutes. She leaned back against the flour sack. Emily had fallen asleep against her leg so she had to move carefully so she wouldn’t wake Emily. A black Moses! Maybe going North, even without Mama and Papa, would bring miracles into her life after all. Liza thought about these things as the buggy jounced up and down the dirt road. After a long time they came to a road covered with wooden planks.

“We’re on the road to Baltimore,” the Minister said.

Liza listened to the Minister and William talking, her body still jouncing up and down with the movement of the buggy over the planks. Gradually the voices grew dimmer and she was asleep, leaning against Emily.

CHAPTER FIVE

“Slavery is not the pain of the body; it is the pain of the soul.”

John P. Parker, former slave, inventor, businessman, writer,
1850.

Liza awoke to the smell of bacon. She knew what bacon tasted like. Mama cooked them bacon once or twice a year a hog killing time when Mistress Emerson got in a generous mood and gave them their own hog to kill. Right now she was so hungry she could eat the whole hog and not just the bacon!

She opened her eyes and looked around her. She was in what looked like a cave. Someone, probably William, had taken the Liberty Lantern and lit it, and hung it on a hook on the wall. It gave off a small steady light that she could read one of her books by. Their knapsacks were piled by the fire- place. A white woman was bending over the fireplace, stirring something in an iron kettle. The Minister was sitting on a pile of sacks in the corner of the cave and William sat on a wooden chair, the only chair in the room.

“Charity are the biscuits finished yet?” the minister asked the white woman.

“You should not say my name,” the white woman said. “That could be dangerous.”

“Yes, indeed, you are the only Charity in the entire country.” The Minister’s voice vibrated with scorn.

“I’m protesting your actions, Asa.”

“There you’ve said my name. There will be someone immediately at the door to arrest me,” the Minister said.

“I said I would cook for them. I didn’t say I would enjoy doing it.” The woman took a long handled fork and pulled a pan of biscuits from the fire. She slammed the biscuits on a tin plate and some bacon on another. She poured hot coffee for William and the Minister and tin cups of milk for Liza and Emily.

The woman handed them each a plate and cup. All of the time she didn't say anything to them. William took his plate from her before she could thrust it at him. "Thank you," he said gently.

The woman didn't even look at William. She wasn't much to look at herself, Liza thought. She had muddy brown hair, not shiny black hair like Emily's and her eyes were muddy brown too, like the Frog River in the spring rains. The corners of her mouth were set in a grim straight line, the way Mama's mouth looked when she had wooden pins in her mouth to fasten a hem in a dress or pair of overalls for them. But this woman didn't smell like love like Mama did. This woman smelled like cold and hatred.

"You could ponder what your name means," the Minister told her.

The woman looked at him, anger pouring from her eyes. "You're putting us in jeopardy again for the likes of them ignorant savages!" she spat.

"So ignorant that their civilization is older than ours!" the Minister said.

"We live in a country that God gave us to rule over. It's our Christian duty to civilize these savages. We don't have to embrace them to our bosoms while we civilize them!" the woman said.

"We walk about our country founded on liberty and justice for all, yet we deny humans in our midst their basic freedoms. We assume God-like power over the lives of other human beings! I tell you Charity, it's wrong! From the bottom of my heart and soul I believe it is wrong and God will punish us for it!"

"Asa, you're heading us for trouble. You know we can get arrested and thrown in jail for helping these savages. You know the slave catchers could even kill us and get away with it. But you risk us every day for what? For creatures you don't know and will never see again. For property!"

The woman threw the last biscuit at him and rushed over to a dark corner of the room. She stood there and without looking at her, Liza knew she was weeping. Liza didn't take time to think about what she was doing. She rummaged around in the knapsacks until she found the Bible verse that she had written down for Mama at last Sunday's meeting. She handed the lady the soiled piece of paper. "Read what it says," Liza told her.

Liza watched Charity read the words on the paper. "Do unto others as you want them to do unto you."

"I wrote them down after I read them out of the Bible," Liza said. "I am not an ignorant savage!" She turned away from the woman and went back and threw her arms around William's legs. She felt tears streaming down her face.

The woman named Charity turned and threw the scrap of paper into the fireplace. She left the room without looking at any of them.

The Minister sighed. "You'd better finish your meal. Then I'm going to take you over to my brother-in-law's house. He's a tradesman from Pennsylvania. He sells pots and pans and other tinware and he travels around in a wagon. He's also a conductor on the Underground Railroad and will transport you to Pennsylvania in his wagon."

"Your brother-in-law?" William asked.

"Charity's brother Adam. Slave families aren't the only ones divided by this evil," the Minister said.

After Liza and William and Emily had finished eating, the Minister helped them gather their belongings in a pile in the center of the cave. He left them long enough for William to tell a story and say a prayer with them, then the Minister stood in the doorway of the cave with a thin man with long black whiskers behind him.

“We’re gonna get you going along on your trip,” the Minister said, beckoning to them to follow him.

Liza reached up and took the Liberty Lantern from the hook. She followed William and Emily and the two men outside the cave. Liza blinked and held the lantern high in front of her. By its flickering light she could see that the cave was really a spring house and a few yards in front of her stood a square white farmhouse with lilac bushes growing in the front yard.

“Quick, in the wagon!” the tin seller said. He and the Minister lifted Liza and Emily into the back of the wagon. William climbed in by himself. To Liza, William’s legs looked like stork’s legs. She didn’t know how he could hide them or fold them out of the way.

Liza took the Liberty Lantern and dove under a pile of sacks without the men saying anything to her. She pulled Emily in after her and they cuddled together, the still warm lantern between them. William sat up in the darkness listening. After a long time, Liza felt the familiar jouncing of a wagon. She heard William talking softly in the darkness with the tin seller.

They jounced along and suddenly Liza felt something hard bump against her. She reached out from under the sack and her fingers closed around a tin panhandle. She pulled it under the sack and before she could move Emily had grabbed the pan. She put it on her head and popped out from under the sack. “Look at me, William!” she shouted. “I have a new tin hat!”

The pan glinted in the light of the lantern that hung on the side of the wagon. William laughed, “You’re letting your light shine alright,” he said. “But you’d better take it off and get back under those sacks.”

Liza yanked the pan off Emily’s head. She put it on the seat beside the tin man. She and Emily dove back under the sacks. This time Liza didn’t wake up in a cave, she woke up because she was rolling from one side of the wagon to

the other, back, and forth over the splintery wooden floor. She grabbed Emily, afraid that Emily would roll right out of the wagon.

“Liza, hang on tight to my dress!” Emily shouted at her. “I’m afraid you’re going to roll right out of the wagon!”

They clung to each other and Liza flung out an arm, her fingers searching for something solid to grab. She touched what felt like a shelf and she hung on to that to keep herself and Emily from rolling around like a dried weed in the winter wind. Finally, the wagon stopped pitching so wildly and Liza could sit up and whisper, “William?”

“Everything is alright. Lie back down,” William said.

Liza laid back down, cuddling Emily in her arms. She felt Emily’s heart beating like a frightened dove. Her own heart thumped the same way, but she hugged Emily and sang to her until she fell back asleep.

Swing Low, Sweet Chariot Coming for to
carry me home,

I looked over Jordan and what did I see? Coming for to carry me home,

A band of angels coming after me,

Coming for to carry me home.

Emily was so sound asleep that she snored a little. Liza thought while Emily snored. She had sung this song, *Sing Low Sweet Chariot*, in church service for as long as she could remember, but now singing it, she felt something about it. She felt something deep like the idea of black and white people working together for freedom like they were now. There were white angels like the Minister and this tin peddler, and even unwilling Charity, helping them get North to freedom. These white and black angels working together would help her and Emily and William get over the Ohio River and all of the other rivers that they had to cross to freedom.

“A band of angels coming after me.” Liza sang so loud that William told her to be quiet. The wagon traveled on into the night. Liza dreamed now. She dreamed she heard dogs howling like they had some- times at Rosewood when a slave had taken to the swamps and Mistress Emerson had ordered

the dogs set on them. Liza woke with a jerk and sat straight up. The dogs still howled. The wagon lurched and came to a sudden stop.

The tin peddler said something in a low voice to William and William grabbed Liza under one arm and Emily under the other. He jumped out of the wagon and onto the front porch of a building that loomed like a huge black bear in the early morning light.

The tin peddler was right on their coattails. Behind them, the four men stopped their horses and snatched the guns from across their saddles. "Hold it right thar," one of the horsemen said.

"You hold it," a bullfrog voice croaked from the doorway of the house. "You hold it right there or I'll put the match to this keg of gunpowder."

Liza stared at the black man in the doorway. He had pulled a keg in front of him and held a long wooden match near it. He waved the match around. Then he spoke again and Liza saw the gleam of his teeth when he smiled. "Y'all want to meet the Lord dis morning? Put dem guns back or y'all will!"

The men on the horses put their rifles back across their saddles. Their leader, the same man Liza had seen when Mama and Papa were still traveling with them said, "We'll be back."

Don't doubt that you will," the match man said. "But for now, y'all be on your way."

The horsemen turned and rode away. The tin man whipped up his horses and disappeared around the corner. The match man smiled at them and said calmly, "Come in and have some breakfast. My folks here are Quakers and they will treat you well."

Liza and Emily squirmed until William sat them down.

"Come along then," the match man said. "I'll wager that y'all are hungry. Don't worry. Y'all is safe here."

"We'll be a lot safer if you blow out that match," William said.

The man looked down. The flame was about an inch from his fingers, which were about an inch from the keg of gun powder. "Sure enuf," the man said. He blew out the match.

Liza looked around. She tugged at William's elbow. "I was dreaming of bloodhounds and when I woke up, I still heard them."

"They had Mistress Emerson's mastiffs with them," William told her. "When our friend here presented them with the powder keg they retreated to the woods with her dogs. You know how she prizes them. She probably told them not to come back if anything happened to her dogs."

Liza's heart leaped up like a rabbit did when she ran them out of their cover in the meadows. She hated those dogs. She hated the helpless feeling they gave her when she tried to run away from them and they found her huddled in the deepest woods and the darkest cave. "They're after us, William! What are we going to do?" Emily clung to Liza and started whimpering. "Now look what I've done, I've frightened Emily," Liza thought. "But I can't help it, I'm so frightened myself."

William put his arm around her. "They will always be after us until we reach Canada, Liza. That's what we're going to do. We're going to escape to Canada right after we eat breakfast. Follow that gentleman to the dining room like I intend to do. Liza and Emily followed them into the house. Liza looked over her shoulder. "Aren't you going to bring that keg of gunpowder in with you?" she asked the match man.

"I always leave it right there so it'll be ready when I need it," the match man said. "Now come along and meet Miss Abigail."

Miss Abigail happened to be entertaining company. Liza walked slowly into a cheerful kitchen with red and white checked curtains at the windows. A long wooden table with benches stood under the window. The table was set for breakfast and Liza saw mush steaming in blue bowls. Liza smelled bacon again and she supposed that the black women bending over the fireplace was stirring the fried potatoes that smelled so good. A young blond woman wearing a gray dress and a matching gray bonnet poured coffee into blue cups that matched the bowls.

“Sit down, sit down,” the blond woman said. She smiled at Liza. “I imagine Thee is hungry.”

Everyone but the blond woman sat down, including the black woman who had been stirring the potatoes. Liza saw that she too, was a young woman. She wore her hair flat against her head with a part in the middle. Her expression said that she was serious about potatoes and everything else! She wore a ragged brown dress that looked like she had torn it in the thorn bushes. A leaf clung to a tear at the elbow. Liza’s mouth popped open and she forgot to close it. Never in her born days had she seen slave women sit down at the table and eat with her mistress.

“Liza, why don’t you put a bite of something to eat in your mouth while it’s open?” William asked her.

“But—”, Liza said.

Miss Abigail smiled at Liza. Her smile reminded Liza of melted butter it was so warm and kind. “No Liza, Harriet here isn’t my slave. Liza, I’d like you to meet Harriet Tubman. She’s going to guide you on the next leg of your journey, since the slave catchers are on to us.”

“The tin man,” Liza said. “He has all kinds of tin pans and good hiding places in the back of his wagon.”

William pushed back the bench, almost upsetting Liza and Emily. “You aren’t Harriet Tubman! The Harriet Tubman they call ‘Moses?’”

The black woman looked steadily at William. “Those Maryland planters put \$40,000 on my head. I haven’t lost any of my passengers on the railroad,” she said. “And I’ve guided 150 so far.”

Miss Abigail handed Liza a biscuit soaked in butter. “You must eat to prepare for your long journey.”

Harriet sat next to William and they talked in low tones as everyone ate the delicious breakfast that Miss Abigail and Harriet had cooked. Liza pretended her ears were grasshopper antennae and she pushed them up as high on her head as she could. She wanted to hear everything that William and Harriet Tubman said.

Liza heard that Miss Abigail and Harriet would guide them to Philadelphia. They had swamps and woods to cross but they would all ride in a farm wagon belonging to Miss Abigail's father. Harriet knew the stations along the route as far as Philadelphia. When they got to Philadelphia, Harriet would take them to the office of William Still, who worked for the Pennsylvania Anti-Slavery Society. He would arrange for them to get to Pittsburgh safely. From Pittsburgh they would travel to Erie. From Erie they would travel to Cleveland and from Cleveland to Detroit. Once they were in Detroit they would cross the river there called the Detroit River and then they would be in Canada.

“When we reach Detroit I hope I can establish that I am free and that my father bought the freedom of my two sisters,” William said. “I must continue to publish my newspaper. I call it the *Black Liberator* and many people read it. Many people have written to tell me that I encourage them to seek their freedom and others that I give them the heart to bear their burdens a little longer until they find freedom.

Miss Abigail smiled at William. “If all else fails, They can establish Thy newspaper in Canada.”

William smiled back. ‘I can and indeed, I will.’ They finished eating breakfast and Harriet and Miss Abigail packed a bag full of food for the trip. They all settled in a farm wagon with one board seat along the back of the wagon box. They packed their knapsacks and sacks of food under the seat. Harriet and Miss Abigail pulled a life like terra cotta figure on the wagon seat and sat it between them.

“What is that thing?” Liza asked.

“That’s our dress making lady,” Harriet said. “Miss Abigail will explain to anyone who stops us that this is the form of her mother who is ill at home and that we need to have dresses made to fit her.”

Miss Abigail smiled. “Thy plan should work, but if it does not, Thee must pray with me.”

“I will pray and so will everyone else,” Harriet assured her.

CHAPTER SIX

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”Look at me! Look at my arm!

I could work as much and eat as much as a man- When I could get it- and bear the last as well!

And ain’t I a woman?”

Sojourner Truth

“Ain’t you gonna hide us?” Liza asked, surprised. Miss Abigail had set Emily on the wooden wagon seat and gestured Liza to a place next to her. Liza fingered her fresh braids and straightened the yarn on Emily’s braids. Miss Abigail had helped them bathe and given them fresh clothes to wear and fixed their hair for them. She and Harriet had put on fresh dresses. They had found different clothes for William too. He wasn’t wearing his ragged outfit anymore. Now he wore a pair of tan trousers and boots and a white shirt with a brown cravat fastened under his chin. He put on a fawn colored jacket as he smiled at Liza and patted his shirt pocket. “I have my freedom papers in here safe and sound,” he said.

“William will sit up here on the seat with us,” Harriet said. Her skirts rustled as she settled on the seat.

Miss Abigail laughed. She wore a blue dress with a white lace collar. Her laugh sounded like a bell tinkling. “We have a place to hide him if we must. She showed Liza and Emily a partially sewn pink lawn dress wrapped in a layer of newspapers.

“Be ready to grab that dress and put it over the dummy as quick as cat pouncing,” Harriet told the girls. “You promise now. It could mean the difference between freedom and slavery for you all.”

“We promise,” said Liza and Emily solemnly. Liza put her hand over her heart while she promised and Emily did too.

“William, you know what you’re supposed to do?”

“William frowned. “I hope I won’t have to go quite that far, but I know what to do if I have to do it.”

“Then we’re ready to go,” Harriet said. “Girls, all you have to do is sit and talk to each other and talk to me and Miss Abigail. We’re her slaves, remember? And William will take care of himself when the time comes.”

“Why do we have to do this plan?” Emily asked them.

“Because the bad men are still following us,” William said. “And we have to think of ways to get away from them.”

“Can’t we just run away from them?” Emily said. “We have to run away with a plan,” William said. “Do we have to plan our freedom too?” Liza wondered.

“Thee asks an important question,” Miss Abigail said. “What would be Thy freedom plan, Eliza Jane?”

Liza thought about Miss Abigail’s question as they rode down a gravel turnpike that wound around tree covered hills. “Mama and Papa are the first part of my freedom plan. As soon as I had my freedom, I would go back to Rosewood and get them. What state is Rosewood in, Harriet?”

“Rosewood is in Maryland, Liza.”

“Where are we now?” Liza asked.

“We’re about ten miles outside of Philadelphia.”

“Where is Philadelphia?” Emily asked.

“Philadelphia is in Pennsylvania,” William told her.

“How far is Pennsylvania from Detroit?” Liza asked.

“We’ll have to go through Pennsylvania, Ohio, and then into Michigan,” William said. “It is about a 1 400 miles journey as the crow flies, but we won’t be able to travel like crows.”

“Thee’s already traveled like a black bear after berries,” Miss Abigail laughed. “But the berries are still there and so is the black bear.”

“I have one guide post for you,” Harriet said.

“What is your guidepost?” William asked.

“Follow the drinking gourd,” Harriet said. “If we get separated or one of us gets caught, the one that gets away has got to remember to follow the drinking gourd.”

“What does that mean?” Liza wondered.

“The words are from a song written by a free black carpenter from Philadelphia,” Harriet said. “Our people sing it as they hide in the swamps and woods and run the dusty paths to freedom in the North.”

“A carpenter like Papa,” Liza said thoughtfully. She missed Papa and Mama so much. She wanted to make her freedom plan work in a hurry so she could see them again.

“Do you mean to follow the gourd that we drink water from?” Emily asked, looking bewildered.

Harriet laughed and patted her hand. “No honey, follow the drinking gourd means follow the Big Dipper. The Big Dipper is the same as the North Star. The North Star leads our people north to freedom. So when they’re traveling to freedom, they follow the North Star.”

“Sing the song for me,” Liza asked.

Harriet sang and Liza hummed along. Then she sang the song herself.

“Follow the drinking gourd...

Follow the drinking gourd...

For the old man is a waiting for to carry you to freedom,

Follow the drinking gourd...

"I like the way that song goes. Can we sing it while we're traveling?"

"We can sing it while we're traveling, but not now," William said. "Now you need to be acting like an ignorant slave child, something you've never been in your life."

"Can't I just talk to Harriet and Miss Abigail?" Liza asked.

William smiled. "Go ahead."

They rode along what William had called the turnpike that went into Philadelphia. Miss Abigail and Harriet talked and William and Emily slept on a pile of sacks in the bottom of the wagon. Liza watched the daisies and cornflowers dance in the meadows and the thick pine woods slip by the wagon. Liza was the first to notice the men slip out of the woods and block the road ahead. "There's some men up there waiting to cross the road," she said to Harriet.

Quick as a finger snap William got inside the dress dummy and Miss Abigail plopped the pink lawn dress over the top of it. The dress covered the dummy and the folds of the pink lawn skirt covered part of the wagon bed.

"Remember child, you're an obedient slave girl," Harriet said.

Liza knew the man on the lead horse. He was the same man that had stopped them on the road from Rosewood. He grabbed the head of Miss Abigail's horse. "Stop there, Missus!" the man ordered. "I got to talk to you."

"Why is Thee detaining me, sir?" Miss Abigail stood up so that she seemed to tower over the men on horseback.

"We hear tell that you're hiding some runaway slaves," the man said.

Miss Abigail pointed to Harriet. "This is my maid, Harriet. This young woman is her daughter Liza, and the one asleep on the sack over there is Emily. We are going into Philadelphia with my mother's dress dummy to get

a dress made for her to wear to her funeral. Thee would stop a woman on an errand like this and accuse her of harboring runaway slaves?”

The man drew back in the saddle. “No insult meant, M’am.”

“If Thee does not mean to insult me, then let me go about my business. Unless of course, Thee wants to search my wagon floor or my dress dummy.”

“Sorry to bother you, M’am.” The man looked directly at Liza, but he didn’t appear to recognize her. Probably all slaves looked alike to him. That was a lucky thing, Liza thought.

“We’ll be on our way now,” the man said. “Come on boys.” They turned back into the woods.

William stayed inside the dress dummy for several more miles down the road. “Thee does not know if the men will have second thoughts,” Miss Abigail said.

“Better wait for a few more miles,” Harriet agreed. While they were traveling the few more miles, Emily woke up. She searched the wagon in frantic glances. “Where’s William? Did the slave catchers get him?”

She sobbed and threw herself on Liza’s lap. Liza hurried to comfort her. “No, baby. The slave catcher’s didn’t get William. He’s alright.”

William is right here,” Harried said. “Look under the dress, Emily. Be quick about it!”

Emily picked up a fold of the dress. She peeked underneath, then she giggled. “William’s under there,” she said.

“That’s his hiding place when the slave catchers come, but you have to keep it a secret, Emily,” Harriet told her. “If he’s hiding in there and somebody wants to know where he is, will you promise not to tell?”

“I promise,” Emily said.

“Shake on it,” Harriet said, shaking Emily’s hand. “Shake on it,” Emily said, pumping Harriet’s hand up and down.

Then Emily got back on the wagon floor and peered under the dress dummy again. “Hey, William, are you in there?”

The dress dummy took a wide step forward, then began to waltz around the moving wagon. It stopped in front of Emily and said, “May I have this dance, Emily?”

Giggling, Emily put her arms around him and waltzed with him. “I’m dancing with the pink man,” she giggled. She deliberately stepped on the dress as William whirled around so that he had to slow down and free himself or tear the dress. “I’m an old lady dancing with an old man,” Emily chanted.

“Easy Emily,” William said. “You got even with me for fooling you.”

Emily giggled. “I play acting, just like you,” she said.

Liza tugged at the pink skirt as it whirled by. “Sit down before you fall off the wagon, William

William stopped twirling and sat Emily down at Liza’s feet.

“Better settle down,” Harriet said. “We’re getting closer to Philadelphia and there will be lots more folks on the road.”

“Thee is correct,” Miss Abigail said smiling.

William crawled back under the sacks under the seat and Emily and Liza returned to the front wagon seat beside Harriet. Liza swung her feet back and forth and tried to whistle *Swing Low Sweet Chariot*. Emily sat and stared at the dress dummy with the pink dress on it.

“Liza, where does the pink dress go when it rains?” Emily asked her.

Harriet laughed. "Guess our foolproof plan only works in the sunshine," she said.

"Thee does well to point that out, Emily," Miss Abigail laughed. "But we can't use the same trick on them twice. Thee understands that, Emily."

Emily grinned. "I understand, Miss Abigail. We have to think of another place to hide William."

"We can dress him like a girl," Liza said. "They will be looking for a tall young black man, well dressed and well spoken. We can give them a crippled old woman bent over in pain, shabbily dressed and leaning heavily on a cane."

"That's a good idea, Liza," Harriet said. "You've got a good imagination, girl." "Emily gave me the idea when she was waltzing with William and pretending to be bent over so she could step on his dress," Liza said.

"That just might be the way to get him out of Philadelphia," Harriet said. "We need a good plan."

"Like what?" William asked.

"Think of this, William. They will be looking for a tall young man and two little girls. Can Thee change that description?" Miss Abigail asked him. "What if a crippled old lady and her two young charges took the stagecoach over the mountains from Philadelphia to Pittsburgh?"

William looked puzzled.. "I can transform myself into a crippled old lady, but how can Liza and Emily be transformed into two young ladies?"

Miss Abigail laughed. "William, Thy eyes have been blinded by some years away from home. It will take scarcely any work to change Miss Eliza Jane into a fine young lady. And although Emily is much younger, we can make her look a few years older. No one will recognize your family group when we are finished."

Liza jumped up and down. “What an exciting plan. When can we get started?”

“What are you going to be, Harriet? Will Miss Abigail make you a fine lady too?”

Harriet laughed. “Not this time child. I don’t think you’ll need me for a guide this time because we all came up with a better plan.”

“You can come with us the next time,” Emily told Harriet.

Liza hugged Emily. “Maybe Harriet will guide us back to Mama and Papa and then back to Detroit.”

“We’ll see what the future holds,” Harriet said. “Now we must make our plans for the present.”

They talked about dresses the rest of the ride into Philadelphia. What color of dress should William wear? Should he wear button shoes?

“And a shawl,” Miss Abigail said. “Every lady must have a shawl.”

“And a bonnet,” Emily said. “William needs a bonnet.”

Liza was thinking too. “Does being a lady mean that I have to wear a dress and bonnet and button shoes?” She clutched the straps of her overalls. “I like wearing overalls and chasing fireflies.”

“Thee won’t always have to wear dresses,” Miss Abigail promised.

Liza let go of her overall straps and whistled, *Swing Low Sweet Chariot* again. This time Emily sang along with her, so she knew she had the right tune.

They talked the rest of the ride into Philadelphia. No more slave catcher stopped them. No one even gave them a second glance as wagons and buggies and single riders passed them on the busy road.

“We blend in,” Harriet said.

“Do you know how to get to William Sill’s office?” William asked Harriet.

Harriet nodded.

“Then I’m glad you’re driving,” William smiled.

Liza’s impression of Philadelphia was cobblestones, cobblestones, and more cobblestones and shops full of people. She remembered hearing church bells in the background and the clip clop of hooves on the cobblestones. And the people! They came in all shapes and sizes. The long full skirts of the ladies made her think of the colorful butterflies in the meadows at Rosewood.

The smells made Liza wrinkle her nose and bury it in her sleeves. Liza was used to smelling manure in the stables at Rosewood and in the spring when the overseer used it to fertilize the fields, but the manure at Rosewood never smelled this strong and it never followed them wherever they went! “Phew! This city sure stinks,” Liza complained.

“They do have a crew to clean up after the horses, but it’s hard for them to keep up. The number of horses in the city increases every day,” Harriet said.

Miss Abigail didn’t say anything. She just held a perfumed handkerchief to her nose with one hand and drove with the other. Emily held her nose. “The horses need a bath,” she said.

Harriet laughed. “It’s not just the horses. It’s the garbage and the outhouses and the tanneries and a lot of other things, but the horses could do with a bath as well.”

“Are we almost there?” Emily asked.

Liza had wanted to ask the same thing, so she was glad that Emily had asked.

“We have to turn down Chestnut Street and then up Carpenter Street and we will be there,” Harriet told them.

“What’s the plan?” William asked. “Are we to be here very long?”

“We’re going to keep you overnight and turn you into an old lady and your sisters into refined young ladies. You will be on the stage to Pittsburgh tomorrow morning.”

“I have a little money-“ William began.

“Don’t worry about that,” Harriet said. “We will pay your fare and give you money for food and lodging.”

The Underground Railroad is remarkable,” William said. “But when I get back to Detroit I will reimburse your money to you.”

Harriet patted his hand. “We’ll worry about that when the time comes. Right now we will assure you a good night’s food and lodging and turn you into an old lady.

William smiled. “That will take some work.

CHAPTER SEVEN

“Don’t you remember the promise that you made, To my old dying mother’s request? That I never should be sold, Not for silver or for gold, While the sun rose from the East to the West? And it hadn’t been a year, The grass had not grown over her grave, I was advertised for sale, And I would have been in jail, If I had not crossed the deep, dancing waves. I’m upon the Northern banks, And beneath the Lion’s paw, And he’ll growl if you come near the shore.” Mrs. Julia King
80-year-old ex-slave from Toledo, Ohio

They turned onto Chestnut Street, which ran close by the river. Liza didn’t know what river it was, but it was a river. She saw the water stretching out wide to the buildings on the other shore and she saw lots of boats on the water. She saw a raft that looked like the ones they made at home and floated. She saw a flatboat with live hogs penned on it. She saw a group of people walking up the gangplank onto a boat. Maybe they were going north to Detroit, too, she thought.

Emily noticed the chains first. “Them people getting on the boat have chains around their necks,” she said. She started to cry. “Oh, Liza, can’t we go set them loose?”

“You must be imagining things, Emily.” Liza used the same words that had been used on her so often.

Emily pointed. “Look!”

Liza looked. A group of black people bound together by neck chains was being herded onto a boat.

“Woah!” Liza hollered to the horses the way she had heard Harriet and Miss Abigail yell. The horses stopped. Before Miss Abigail and Harriet could say anything, Liza was out of the wagon and running to the boat.

A white man with a whip herded the chained black people up the gangplank. Liza saw that they were chained together by their necks and their hands. She looked at their faces. Some of the women were crying. Some of the men were crying too.

Some of them looked angry. Some of them looked into space at things and places even she couldn't imagine. Most of them looked frightened. The white man with the whip cracked it across the back of the man in front of him. Liza jumped on the white man's back, knocking the whip from his hand. "You let them go!" she hollered. "How can you say this is a free country when you put people in chains and sell them?"

The white man pushed Liza out of the way so hard that she landed flat on the ground and breath whooshed out of her.

"Indeed the truth comes from the mouths of children and babies," a deep voice said.

From her position on the ground, Liza saw a Minister man, a man dressed in a gray coat with a white collar and a tall gray hat. It was the Minister man that they had met before. She remembered his name but she was afraid to even think it. The white man picked up his whip. He growled at the minister men. "This is none of your affair, Quaker. Get out of here or I'll whip you."

The Minister man walked over to the slave at the end of the line of chained slaves and stood in front of her. He carefully removed his coat and undid his stock. He folded them neatly and laid them at the slave's feet. Then he took off his shirt and folded it. The Minister man stood there still wearing his gray hat and gray trousers, but with a bare chest. Liza noticed that brown hair that matched his brown whiskers grew on his chest. She'd have to ask William if he had any hair.

"You go ahead and whip me," the Minister man said. "If that shows one person here that slavery is a mortal sin that destroys the soul of the slave holder, then you can whip me forty times over!"

“Doubt if I have the energy for that,” the white man with the whip drawled. “But I can whip you some.”

The Minister man turned around so the white man with the whip could reach his bare back. “Whip me, then.”

The white man drew back his arm and flexed his muscles. He brought the whip down on the Minister Man’s back as hard as he could. Liza jumped and ran to the Minister Man. A blood stripe crossed his back like a red snake. She pulled one of Mama’s handkerchiefs out of her overall pocket. She stuffed some of Mama’s soothing herbs into the handkerchief and folded it. She ran to a water pump by a horse through a few feet away and wet the handkerchief. Then she ran back and covered the cut with the poultice.

“Get away, child!” the Minister Man whispered to her. “It is dangerous for Thee to be here since Thee is black.”

Liza arranged the handkerchief, trying to get it to cover more of the bloody stripe. The white man with the whip shouted at her. “Get out of the way, or I’ll whip you too!”

Liza stood up as straight as he could and folded her arms in front of her. She swallowed. She hoped the whipping wouldn’t hurt too bad, but it couldn’t any worse than being locked up in the dark cellar for hours. Slowly she turned around.

Then she heard Miss Abigail’s voice.

“Thee dare whip a Quaker Minister and a child! Shame on you. Where is your conscience?” Miss Abigail wasn’t shouting but her voice could have melted a full icehouse.

“Get out of my way Quaker lady or I’ll whip you too. I’m just doing my job and taking these slave to their new master in Maryland. You’d best not interfere with me.”

“God interferes,” Miss Abigail said.

One of the chained slaves raised his hands, forcing the man who was linked to him to raise his hands too, "Let my people go!" the slave said. The rest of the slaves took up the chant. "Tell old Pharaoh, let my people go!"

Liza turned back around and stared into a herd of people. She couldn't even see the riverbank anymore, just rows of people. "Set the slaves free!" a man shouted. "This is too shameful a sight for Philadelphia, the City of Brotherly Love."

The man stepped up to the white man with the whip. "I'll have the key to those chains, if you please."

Since this man was bigger than the white man with the whip, the white man with the whip gave him the key and the man unlocked the chains. The slaves stood there, staring into the crowd. They looked dazed. Liza knew they didn't know what to do or where to go. Then she saw Harriet glide over to one of the women and say something to her. The woman whispered to the slave next to her. The word spread down the line and one by one the slaves turned and melted into the crowd with Harriet.

"Come Liza," Miss Abigail said urgently. "The sheriff is undoubtedly on his way and we must get away before he comes."

The minister man put his shirt and coat back on, grimacing with pain. The white man with the whip stood glaring at them. "You'll hear from me again," he threatened. "I'm gonna get me my slaves back and make you one too." He spoke directly to Liza. She shivered at the look in his eyes. She knew he wanted to whip her and put her in chains too. Then she tossed her head. She had the Liberty Lantern and she knew how to doctor people. The white man might be bigger than she was, but she wouldn't let him make her a slave.

Liza turned to the minister man. "I learned doctoring from my Mama. I can make your back feel better."

"Yes, Asa, do come with us so we can tend your back," Miss Abigail said to the minister man.

He smiled at Liza. "It is good to make your acquaintance again, even in these adverse circumstances," he said.

Liza didn't understand all of the words he used, but she knew that he would come with them. But where were they going? She knew that Harriet would guide those slaves to safety through the Underground Railroad. But where were William and Emily? Anxiously, she searched crowd. Then she spotted William's tall figure standing by the river.

Emily sat on his shoulders. Miss Abigail waved to him and he shoved his way through groups of excited people. They made their way back to the horse and wagon. The minister man called Asa took the reins and guided the horses through the streets. Finally they stopped in front of a plain brown building and Asa climbed out and hitched the horses. Miss Abigail motioned them all up the wooden steps and into the building.

"Is this somebody's house?" Liza asked Miss Abigail.

"It's called the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society," Miss Abigail said. "Here William Still and the other brave people fighting slavery gather and do the work required to send slaves northward to freedom."

"Is this where you're going to turn William into an old woman?" Emily asked.

Miss Abigail laughed. "Thee knows this is the place."

The rest of the evening blurred in Liza's mind. So much had happened to her in a few days. So much had happened in the few hours since they had arrived in Philadelphia! She made another poultice for Asa's back and he pronounced his wound healed by dinnertime. After they had eaten, everyone worked on the transformation. William was to become a crippled old lady and Liza and Emily her young lady slave attendants. They lived in Pittsburgh and had come to Philadelphia to visit the old lady's sister and acquire some doctoring. Now they were on their way back home.

Liza and Emily would keep their names, but William had to be renamed. They finally decided to call him Mrs. Wilhemina James. It took two more hours

to make William a gray wig and for Miss Abigail to find a dress that would cover William's long legs and big feet. They had beef stew for dinner and Emily said that she liked beef stew as much as she did fried chicken. Liza wasn't so sure, but ate the beef stew and bread and butter with it instead of biscuits. They slept for a few hours, then Miss Abigail dressed Liza and Emily in long frilly dresses and bon- nets and parasols. She gave them a satchel full of food and their passage money.

Liza ran to get the Liberty Lantern. "We can't go without this!" she said.

William looked troubled. "How will we find room for it?"

Miss Abigail took the lantern from Liza and fitted it inside the satchel. "Thee must always find room for the Liberty Lantern," she said. "And William Thee must use Thy old lady's voice from now on. Try it."

"How will we find room for it?" William quavered, bending over and massaging his back. Miss Abigail had powdered his face liberally with flour and his hat had a veil as big as a bed sheet that he could pull over his face. She gave him a long pair of gloves to pull over his hands. "Remember every minute that Thou are white now, William. Every minute. If Thee forgets, trouble will come."

"Ahhhchooo!" William sneezed from the flour.

Emily laughed, but Liza made a face. "You sound crabby, William."

"Liza, Thee and Emily must be sure to call William Mistress Johnson from now on. Practice it please," said Miss Abigail.

"You must always find room for the Liberty Lantern, Mistress Johnson," Liza said.

Emily giggled. "You're both very funny," she said.

Miss Abigail looked serious. “Emily, Thee must remember that this is not a joke. Thee must remember to call William Mistress Johnson and that he is a woman now.”

“I’ll help her remember,” Liza promised.

The next morning Miss Abigail and Asa drove them to a red brick building that Miss Abigail called the stage depot. Asa helped them all get into the stage, which was yellow and pulled by six horses. The wooden seats had cushions and blankets scattered over them, but Liza had the feeling that they would get pretty hard before the trip was over. There were three other passengers, a man, a woman, and a boy.

The boy looked to be about Liza’s age. The woman said that they lived in Pittsburgh and were returning home after a visit with family in Philadelphia.

Miss Abigail had tears in her eyes when she kissed Liza goodbye. “God is watching over Thee and Thee watch over Emily,” she whispered to Liza.

Asa the minister man wrote her recipe for the herb poultice and promised her that he would pass it on to his friends.

“Your lunch and supper are in the satchel,” Miss Abigail shouted as the stage pulled away.

Liza had never ridden in a stage before and neither had Emily, so they spent some time getting used to the feel of the horses and the riding. They looked out of the window at the city scenes and when the scenes turned into country pictures, they watched those. Miss Abigail had told them to be polite but not too friendly to the other passengers, so they nodded and smiled at them once in a while but kept their attention out of the window. Mistress Johnson, alias William pretended to sleep. Miss Abigail had told him to do that. “In truth, old ladies do a lot of sleeping,” she had said. “And it is safer that way.”

The boy passenger tried to talk to Liza. “Where are you bound for? He asked her. “Pittsburgh,” she said without looking at him.

“That’s where we’re going. Do you live there?” Liza nodded.

“Whereabouts do you live?”

“We live on Canal Street.” Liza figured that Canal Street was a safe enough name. Every town seemed to have a Canal Street.

Horace pointed to Mistress Johnson, alias William. “She your mistress?”

Liza nodded without saying anything. “How do you like being a slave?”

Liza looked at him with fish hooks in her glance. “Freedom is better,” she said.

He stuck his tongue out at her.

“Horace, you let those slaves be,” the lady sitting next to him ordered.

So Liza learned that her enemy’s name was Horace.

The lady didn’t bother to try to talk to Emily or Liza, but she did strike up a conversation with Mistress Johnson/William.

“Are these your slaves?” she asked, pointing at Liza and Emily.

“They are my slaves,” Mistress Johnson answered. Liza could tell that he was trying hard not to sneeze. Miss Abigail had given him a liberal dusting of flour again before they left.

“You bound for Pittsburgh?” the Horace Mama asked Mistress Johnson.

“We’re bound for Pittsburgh,” answered Mistress Johnson.

“Where do you live there?”

“We live on Appleton Street,” Mistress Johnson answered.

“That’s funny, Mama,” Horace said. “Her slave said that they on Canal Street.”

Liza crossed her fingers. "Think fast William. You need to talk your way out of this!"

"She always says that." Mistress Johnson dismissed her slave Liza with a wave of her hand. "She means Appleton Street. It connects with Canal Street in back of our house, but the house sits on Appleton Street."

Horace stuck out his tongue at Liza. "Slaves are stupid, aren't they?"

"Most of them are," Mistress Johnson agreed.

Liza tried not to kick William, but her foot had a will of its own. It landed on his skirt and left a black mark on it.

"Oh dear, look what your slave did to your dress," the Horace Mama said.

"Seems like you got yourself an uppity girl," the Horace Papa said.

"You should punish her right now," the Horace Mama said. "They need to keep their place."

"My Uncle Patrick's a slave catcher and he says you have to train slaves just like you do dogs. If you don't they get out of control and try to kill all of the white people." Horace hitched up his suspenders and put his thumbs through them. Liza was sure he had seen his Uncle Patrick do the same thing lots of times. "I'm going to be a slave catcher when I get older."

"Ain't you gonna punish her for dirtying your dress?" the Horace Mama insisted.

"I always punish my slaves," Mistress Johnson said. She swatted Liza hard across the bottom. Liza managed to cry by thinking about Mama and Papa. Later when they had stopped for the night at an inn in the Allegheny Mountains, William scolded Liza. "You put us in danger. You have to stop being so impulsive, Liza. Think before you act!" he said.

“I did put on a good act when you hit me,” Liza protested.

“Yes, you did, but that was after the fact. You have to think before you act, not after you act.” William insisted.

Emily sniffed. “Are you mad at Liza, Mistress Johnson?”

William patted her shoulder. “I’m not mad at her, Emily. I’m just trying to get her to be careful.”

“Let’s light the Liberty Lantern and say a prayer for Mama and Papa,” Liza said. She rummaged in the satchel for the lantern. Inside of it was a square brown package tied with string. Inside the package was a note from Miss Abigail. It said, “I knew you’d read this so I put it here. Use this liberally, William.”

Underneath the note lay a packet of flour.

William laughed so hard that tears ran down his face. Liza and Emily laughed with him. Then William gathered them both in his arms and hugged them. “But we have to be so careful. Please God, get us through this.”

They put a little of the remaining oil in the Liberty Lantern and sat in the darkness, watching the small steady flame.

CHAPTER EIGHT

“I remember the baying of blood hounds at night along the Ohio River, trying to follow the scent of escaping Negroes and the crack of firearms as white people Employed by the plantation owners, attempted to halt the Negroes in their efforts to cross the Ohio River into Ohio...”
Anna Smith, 101-year-old ex slave from Kentucky

Liza wasn't sure which day was which any longer. She knew that they had left Philadelphia on a Sunday, but she wasn't sure whether this day was Friday or Saturday a week later or the week after a week later. The days were all cut from the same dressmaker's pattern. They jounced up and down and back and forth on the hard wooden seat in the stage all day. The Horace Mama would cross-examine Mistress Johnson about her life and complain about slaves. She watched Liza and Emily carefully for signs of misbehavior and even made them fetch her bag and gloves and scissors.

At night they stopped at inns and sometimes at lone cabins tucked into the hills. They ate all of the food that Miss Abigail had packed for them and had to use some of the money that the Philadelphia Anti-Slavery Society had given them for room and board.

William was getting to the bottom of his flour packet and Liza knew that they would have to buy more very soon or William wouldn't have any to powder his face before he pulled down his veil. In the end it was the flour, Horace, his Uncle Patrick, and Emily's teeth that bailed them out. And so did the Liberty Lantern.

At the end of this day on the road – the one that Liza wasn't sure was Friday or Saturday or the week after that – the stage coach pulled into a clearing that wasn't much bigger than one of Mama's handkerchiefs. The sun set behind a river that flowed a few yards from the cabin. They had crossed so many rivers that

Liza had given up trying to remember the names of them. She remembered the Delaware and Susquehanna and she had heard the driver mention that they would cross the Allegheny River at a place called Kittanning.

At the beginning of the trip the driver had told them about the mountain ranges they had to cross. Liza remembered Appalachian, Second Mountain, and Brown Mountain.

After that, they all ran together in her mind and ached in her bones.

This morning the driver had told them that they had crossed the last of the big mountains they had to cross, but there were still hills and ridges to cross. She had sighed with relief. Emily had turned to William and asked, "Mistress Johnson, do we have to go to Pittsburgh? Can't we stop somewhere else closer?"

William had to play the stern Mistress and inform her that of course they were going to Pittsburgh that was their home. But Liza knew how Emily felt. She too was tired of traveling. Her body kept jouncing up and down on the stagecoach seat even while she slept. They were getting low on money and so far, they hadn't been able to buy any more flour, either. The layer of flour in the brown package was very thin and William had to keep his veil down all of the time now. He pretended that he needed to ward off the warm rays of the sun, but Liza wasn't sure that the Horace Mama and the Horace Papa believed him any longer.

"We're stopping at my Uncle Patrick's tonight," Horace had bragged to Mistress Johnson this very morning. They have an inn by the Allegheny River at Kittanning. Uncle Patrick says it's pretty handy because he can use his boat to go to Pittsburgh and catch runaway sales that come down the Ohio River from Kentucky and other places south. My Uncle Patrick always gives me candy."

Emily was intrigued. "Does he have gumdrops?" she asked him.

"Sure he does, but he don't give slaves gumdrops."

He made sure that she was crying before he started teasing Liza.

“Don’t mind him,” Liza whispered to Emily. “He’s nothing but a spoiled whiteboy!”

Horace bellowed. His ears were as loud as his voice, Emily thought scornfully. The Horace Mama had been taking a nap, but that sure enough woke her up. The bellow woke up the Horace Papa too, and he got up out of his seat and stood in front of Mistress Johnson, otherwise known as our brother William. “I demand an apology at once, sir!” the Horace Papa bellowed, just like his son.

Mistress Johnson didn’t lift the veil. She couldn’t because she had used the last of her flour powder.

“Apologize Liza,” she ordered in a muffled voice. “Liza won’t apologize,” Emily said, choosing the wrong time to be stubborn. “He is a spoiled white boy!”

“No, he isn’t Emily. You’re just mad at him because he won’t give you any gumdrops.”

Liza dropped to her knees in front of the Horace Papa and bowed. “I’m very sorry sir. Emily doesn’t mean it. She’s got to be trained better.”

“See that you train her better,” the Horace Papa muttered. “The Horace Mama didn’t say anything. She just sat and stared at Mistress Johnson. Liza knew that the Horace Mama was suspicious. Her stomach tired up in knots.

A man with arms like hams and a body that weighed as much as a hog came out of the cabin door, yelling louder than Horace and the Horace Papa. The Horace Mama made Liza and Emily help her out of the stage right in front of Mistress Johnson. That’s another sign that we’re in trouble, Liza thought. She doesn’t even pretend to respect Mistress Johnson any more.

Liza and Emily walked the Horace Mama up to Uncle Patrick. As they moved closer, Liza saw that a woman who looked like a starved crow in a black

dress and bonnet, stood behind Uncle Patrick. The Horace Mama didn't even glance at Liza and Emily. She threw herself at the crowd and cried, "Mary, it's so good to see you. Oh, I had the most awful trip. Let me tell you about it."

They moved into the cabin and Liza and Emily watched the Mary won pot the kettle on the fire. Uncle Patrick and the Horace Papa walked toward the barns, deep in conversation. Liza had an uneasy feeling that the conversation was about them. They hurried back to the stage, where Mistress Johnson still sat, staring out the window.

"William, I think they are getting suspicious of us," Liza said.

"William, I want to go home," Emily whined.

The stage driver stuck his head in the door. Liza hoped that he hadn't heard them call Mistress Johnson William.

"Mary said that supper will be ready in half an hour. You can wait in your quarters in the barn," the stage driver told them.

William reached out his cane and pulled the stage driver back. "What do you mean our quarters in the barn! We're paying passengers. We paid fare and room and board all of the way to Pittsburgh."

The stage coach driver shrugged. "It's a two room cabin and since there are eight people in the family, the rest of the passengers have to sleep in the barn."

"You mean there are more Horaces?" Emily said.

She sounded so horrified that the stage coach driver smiled a mean smile. "Uncle Patrick and Aunt Mary have three boys that are older than Horace. I'm one of them."

"Are you a slave catcher too?" Emily asked.

The stage coach driver looked thoughtfully at Emily. "I used to be," he said. "Now I ain't so sure."

"Why not, pray tell?" Mistress Johnson asked.

She had to find out if the stage coach driver had heard the girls call her William. "I've been to Philadelphia and I've seen how hard those slaves run to their freedom. I helped catch one of them and do you know what he did?"

"What did he do?" asked Mistress Johnson, adjusting her veil.

"He jumped right into that Delaware River. He couldn't swim, cause he paddled around and swallowed lots of water. Lucky for him, somebody that could swim went out after him and brought him back. But he kept saying, "I'd rather drown than be a slave. I'd rather drown than be a slave. I hope he got away. Anybody that wants freedom enough to die for it deserves to have it."

Liza couldn't keep quiet any longer. "Slaves are people," she said. "Nobody has the right to own anybody else."

"I think I agree with you," the stage driver said. "But my family don't feel that way and there are more of them than there is me. Come on, I'll show you where the barn is."

They followed Mistress Johnson as she thumped across the yard to the barn, leaning heavily on her cane. Liza hugged their satchel. Emily and the stage coach driver walked together. Emily was talking to him and he was laughing at what she was saying. Emily knew how to make the right kind of friend, Liza thought.

"Look sharp!" William whispered to Liza. "We have to figure out a way to get out of here."

Liza looked sharp. The log cabin didn't offer too much hope, but bobbing on the river she saw a boat. No, that wouldn't work. That belonged to Uncle Patrick and they didn't know much about boats anyway. But a few yards from

the boat pulled up on a sand-bank was a raft. It was a genuine river raft that looked like it could set sail on the river at the slap of a wave.

“I found something,” she whispered to William. “Tell you about it later.”

They walked up to the barn, which was really nothing but a log hut with a wide frame door. Inside of it was some straw and a cow. Liza couldn’t tell in what order they were supposed to be. In the middle of the room, a slat ladder led to a loft filled with straw.

The stage coach driver pointed to the loft. “It ain’t so bad,” he said. “At least it’s soft. And Aunt Mary’s gonna give you supper and breakfast.”

“You don’t expect me to climb up there?” Liza couldn’t tell who was more outraged, William or Mistress Johnson!

“No, you can sleep down here with the cow,” the stage coach driver said.

“I thank you young man,” Mistress Johnson said. Leaning heavily on her cane,” she sank down into the straw.

Emily smiled at him. “Thank you stagecoach driver.”

He patted her hand. “The name’s Jess. And let me give you a warning, little lady. My Pa’s a slave catcher and he aims to catch some slaves here tonight. He’s a good eater though. He don’t let nuthing keep him from having his victuals, not even his raft.”

The stage coach driver winked at Emily and Liza. He thumped Mistress Johnson on the head with her cane. Then he walked back to the log cabin to his family.

“Before we panic, let’s light the Liberty Lantern and talk this over,” William said, laying down his cane. “We have to be careful of fire,” Liza said. “There’s lots of straw to burn here.”

“That gives me an idea,” William said.

“The stage coach driver knows that we’re runaways,” Emily said.

“He warned us about his Pa,” Liza said.

“Obviously,” William said, hitching up his skirts and lighting the lantern.
“Now we have to decide what to do.”

“It is obvious,” Liza said. “We go down the river on Uncle Patrick’s raft.”

“Steal it?” William said.

“Should we knock on the door and ask if we may borrow the raft to run away from them?” Liza asked.

“Very funny, Liza.”

“If we fight, how can we work together?” Emily sounded so worried that Liza hugged her. “We’re not fighting, we’re just discussing things,” Liza assured her.

Liza and William kept discussing. They discussed so hard that they didn’t notice Emily had gone. Liza felt somebody tugging at her sleeve. She looked around. Emily was standing beside them again with a cup of milk in her hand.

“What’s that?” Liza asked her. “It’s milk,” Emily said.

“Where’d you get it? You didn’t go up to the house did you?” Liza said.

Emily looked insulted. “No I didn’t! I milked the cow.”

William laughed. “How did you know how to milk a cow?”

“I watched Liza,” Emily said. “She milked cows lots of times at Rosewood.”

Liza stared at her. “I didn’t think about milking this cow,” she said. “Emily, you are proving to be a good hand to have on this trip.”

“Let’s keep figuring our way out of this,” William said.

“You ain’t gonna get out of this one.”

Liza knew that voice. It belonged to Horace. “I heard you talking and now I know for sure you ain’t a woman,” he said to William.

“I’m gonna lock the barn door so you can’t get away, and then I’m gonna tell my Mama and Papa that you’re runaways for sure!”

Liza knew that she would tackle Horace and punch him in the nose before she would let him leave this barn. She started toward him, but Emily beat her to it. Emily bent down quick as a hopping bunny and bit Horace in the leg. William grabbed him and held his arms behind his back while Liza and Emily stuffed their things in the satchel.

“You two run down to that raft and hop on it,” William said. “I’ll be right there.”

“But William,” Liza said.

“Leave the lantern. I’ll bring it with me,” William said.

“But William” Liza protested.

“Hurry! We don’t have much time,” William said, ripping off his shirt and ripping it again into long bandage strips. Then Liza knew what his plan was. She grabbed Emily and the satchel and ran to the riverbank. The raft lay on the sandbar. She sped over to it, tugging Emily and the satchel behind her. She pulled them onto the raft.

Liza thumped Emily and the satchel in the middle of the raft. Then she sprinted over to the boat. Yes, there was a long wooden pole, just as she had hoped there would be. She grabbed the pole and dashed back to the raft. Bracing herself against the pole and the pole against the sand, she pushed the raft off the sandbar and into the river.

“Liza, wait for William!” Emily cried.

“William’s coming Emily don’t worry. We are close enough in that he can wade. And if he can’t wade, he knows how to swim. Watch for William, Emily, while I pole.”

Emily watched and Liza poled for what seemed like forever. Then Liza heard Emily exclaim, “There he comes! But the bottom half of his dress is gone!”

William looked funny running along the bank, the Liberty Lantern in one hand and a blanket and a long wooden paddle in the other. The top of his dress flapped. Then bottom on him wore ragged trousers. There wasn’t enough of them left to flap.

“Look at the fire!” Emily shouted. “Did William start a fire?”

“He started one with the lantern so we could get away,” Liza told her.

“But what about the cow and Horace?” “Ask him when he gets on the raft, Emily.”

Liza poled as close to the grove of aspen trees in front of them as she could. She knew William had spotted the raft. A few seconds later he was helping her pole quickly away from shore. He had tossed the blanket to Emily who was spreading it out to make a soft seat.

“Is the cow all right?” Liza gasped between poling

“The cow is tied in Uncle Patrick’s front yard.” “What about Horace?”

“Horace is tied in Uncle Patrick’s front yard as well. ”Was he yelling a lot?” Emily asked from her comfortable seat.

“He wasn’t yelling at all, at least not when I left him,” William said. “I stopped his mouth with a strip of my skirt. I imagine his Uncle Patrick has freed him by now. Or his Mama Horace.”

“Will the barn burn down?” Liza asked him.

“I think so,” William said. “It was blazing away quite happily when I left. But it was just a cabin after all. It won’t take them very long to rebuild it and we needed a diversion so that we could get away.”

“What’s a diversion?” Emily asked him.

“A diversion is a burning barn,” William grunted. “I need to help Liza pole right now. We can talk later, Emily.”

“Guess what was in the blanket, William.” “Emily, I said we can talk later.”

“All right,” agreed Emily. “Liza, guess what was in the blanket.”

“What was in the blanket, Emily?”

“A whole box of food,” Emily said. “There’s bread and cheese and biscuits and half a ham and even an apple pie. And a big package of dried fruit and some dried beef jerky.”

“I thought it was really heavy for just a blanket,” William said.

“Your stage coach driver is a secret Abolitionist,” Liza grunted.

“What’s an Abolitionist?” Emily asked.

“Miss Abigail and the ministers and the Quakers that we met. And your stage coach driver. Now be quiet and let us pole, Emily. We need to gain some distance while they put out the fire.”

“Liza, can I have a bite of pie?”

“Eat a biscuit first. Then you can have some pie, Emily.”

Emily must have been eating biscuits and pie because she was quiet for a long time while Liza and William poled and paddled and steered.

CHAPTER NINE

“Mammy used ter bake ashcakes, deywuz made wid meal, wid a little salt and mixed wid water; den mammy would rake up de ashes in de fire place; den she would make up de meal in round cakses, and put dem n de hot bricks te bake; when de had cooked rou’d de edges, she would put ashes on de top ob dem, and when dey wuz nice and brown she took dem out and washed dem off wid water...” Aunt Susan, ex-slave from Virginia

Darkness settled over the river and as Liza helped pole the raft along, she heard frogs croaking and crickets and night animals calling. “Do we have any kerosene left?” William asked, handing her the lantern.

“About half a dipper full. Maybe we can buy some in one of the river towns.”

“Tomorrow,” William said. “Put the rest of the kerosene in the lantern. We need a light tonight so we won’t run aground or into another boat.”

Liza stopped poling and reached into the satchel leaning against Emily. She pulled out the little bottle of kerosene and poured it into the lantern. She handed it back to William. “What are we going to do with it? There’s no place on the raft high enough from the water to hang it.”

“One of us will just have to hold it,” William said.

“I’ll hold it for a while,” Emily said.

“That’s a good idea,” Liza said. “William and I will have to pole for most of the night so we can get a head start on Uncle Patrick and his men.”

And that’s the way their first night on the river went. Poling made Liza’s achy muscles ache more. They were still complaining about the stagecoach ride so when they were required to power a raft ride at short notice, they complained louder.

Liza kept telling herself that each stroke of the paddle or pole brought her closer to freedom. She poled harder at the thought.

She estimated that she and William covered at least fifteen miles that first night of poling. When she saw sunrise tinting the edges of the eastern horizon, she said to William, "I don't want to stop. There are too many towns along this section and I thought I heard some dogs back there. Let's just keep poling all day."

"On one condition," William said.

"What condition?" Liza asked.

"You give me enough time to take off the top of this dress," William said.

Liza laughed and grabbed his pole while he stripped off the remains of the dress of Mistress Johnson.

"Here Liza! Find a use for this parasol."

Liza rolled up the parasol and put it inside the Liberty Lantern.

"What about me. Liza?" Emily held the lantern with one hand and rubbed her eyes with the other. "I'm so tired I can't keep my eyes open much longer."

Liza smiled and took the lantern from her. She carefully blew it out. "We don't need the lantern during the day. Lay down and go to sleep," she said.

Emily was sleeping before Liza finished blowing out the lantern. They poled along for a while in silence. Liza watched the green wall of trees slide by and gazed into the water. She said, "I'm worried William."

"We don't have anything to worry about, Liza. We're in the middle of the Allegheny River poling who knows where. We have a two day supply of food and a one-day supply of money. Why should we be worried?"

“Very funny, William” Liza said. “We need to stop somewhere in the next few days and buy some kerosene. And we should stop tonight so I can cook a hot meal.”

“We can do that,” William said.

“I miss Mama and Papa,” Liza said. “We are going back after them, aren’t we William? Promise?”

“I promise,” William said.

“What if the dogs are chasing us, William?”

“We don’t let them catch us, Liza.”

“What if they catch us, William?”

“We’ll get away from them. Now quit worrying and pole, Liza.”

Liza poled and William paddled and Liza paddled and William poled. They worked together all morning while Emily slept. The sun blazed high overhead and Liza knew it was about noon. Emily woke up stretching and yawning. “Liza, I don’t have any clean clothes to wear,” she said.

“I know Emily. None of us do. We’re going to stop in a town tomorrow and get some kerosene and see if we can get some clothes.

“We don’t have time to have clothes made, Liza.” “Maybe somebody has some we can buy. There has to be somebody out there with clothes that fit us.” “

“Liza, I need a bath.”

“Look, Emily. We’re going to stop tonight so I can cook us a hot meal. Wait until then and you can take a bath in a creek or a stream. The river’s too deep here. I don’t want to have to jump in and rescue you.”

“All right.” Emily smiled, rolled over, and went back to sleep.

“William what’s your newspaper like? You didn’t show me the copies of it that you brought home.”

“We didn’t have much time for that, Liza.”

“I know, William. But we have lots of time now. Tell me about your newspaper. I know you call it the *Black Liberator*.”

William nodded. “I call it the *Black Liberator*. It’s an Underground Railroad paper. That means that black people can read it or have it read to them and find out good escape routes. I publish letters and stories from black people and white people about escape. I publish people stories and information for Abolitionists and slaves and runaways.”

“Do you publish the paper by yourself William?”

“I started off by myself, but now I have two people working for me. You’ll meet them when we get to Detroit.”

“What are we going to do after we escape to Canada?”

“Maybe they’ll come with us,” William said. “We’ll have to work that out when we get to Detroit. Never give up hope about anything in life, Liza, whether it’s work or friends or family. Whatever it is.”

“How are we going to get to Detroit William? This Allegheny River doesn’t go to Detroit.”

“The first thing we have to do is get down the Allegheny River as far as we can go, probably to Franklin, where French Creek flows into it. Then we can take French Creek up to Erie and from Erie go to Cleveland. From Cleveland we can get to Detroit.”

“Do we have to pole all of the way there, William?” “We could pole up to Erie and try to catch a schooner there. We can ask some local folks about it, Liza.”

“We have to be careful of local people, William. Some of them are probably slave catchers.”

“Not so many of them this far north, Liza. But you’re right. We have to be careful.”

“We have to keep an eye out for a place to camp tonight. I don’t want to be near any towns or cities.”

William stared at the unbroken line of trees on both sides of the river. “It looks like a green sea,” he said.

“It looks safe to me. I hope it stays like this all of the way down the river,” Liza said.

“What are we having for supper tonight, Liza?” “Miss Abigail packed some corn meal for us.” “Corn meal mush for supper?” William asked.

“No, ash cakes and fried ham. I’d better cook that ham that the stagecoach driver gave us before the sun turns it spoiled and full of worms.”

“That’ll be a good supper to look forward to,” William said.

“I’m counting on finding some greens in the woods, too. Things like dandelion greens and collard greens that grow wild and are there just for the picking.”

“We can go fishing,” William said.

“We don’t have a fishing pole or a hook,” Liza said.

“I’ll fix that problem in a hurry,” William told her. “Pole over here by the shore. See where that willow hangs over the water? See how it’s all tangled up with those maples and oak trees?”

Liza nodded.

“Lean over and pick a sturdy branch,” William said.

Liza leaned over and picked one off a tree. It snapped like a rifle shot. “That tree’s dead so it was easy to pick a branch. Here’s your branch.” She handed it to William.

William took a knife from his pocket and smoothed and shaved the tree branch. “That’s ready. Now for the line.”

“What are you going to use? We don’t have any string,” Liza said.

“Ah, but we do, or the next best thing to it,” William said. He reached behind Emily who was still sleeping and pulled a long strip of his dress from the blanket. He slashed the strip into three pieces with his knife and tossed the three pieces at Liza. “Braid them,” he said.

“I can’t paddle and braid at the same time,” she told him.

“I’ll paddle, you braid,” he said.

Liza paddled while William attached the braided cloth to the stick-fishing pole. “Now for the hook,” he said. He reached into the satchel. “I’m glad I was a woman for a while or I wouldn’t have known about button hooks.” He twisted the buttonhook that he had used for his shoes and his dress buttons and twisted it some more until he had twisted it into the shape of a crude fishhook. “Now all I need is a worm,” he said.

“We can have Emily dig for worms tonight when we camp,” Liza said.

“Yes, let her sleep so she will be well rested for tonight.”

“She held the lantern all night for us while we rowed and poled,” Liza reminded him.

“She has been a good resourceful helper,” William said. “I don’t think of her as a little sister any more. I don’t think of you as a little sister either. I think of you both as true and equal partners.”

Liza was so pleased that she couldn’t say anything. She hugged William with the paddle still in her hand.

He smiled. “Don’t knock me out with the paddle. You will need me to paddle later on.”

The traffic on the river picked up that afternoon. They hugged the banks as closely as they could when several big barges and a steamboat passed. They continued to hug the banks as row boats and flat boats and skiffs and rafts passed them on the broad face of the river. Emily still slept, stretched out flat in the middle of the raft.

The sun’s position told Liza that it was about four o’clock when she thought she heard a kitten meowing. At first she thought her imagination was running away with her again. How could there be a cat in the middle of the river?

“William, do you hear a cat meowing?” Liza asked him.

“Sure I do, William said. “MeOWWWW!”

She flipped the paddle at him, giving him a shower of water. “I mean it William. I hear a cat.”

“How could there be a cat out here?” William asked.

“I don’t know,” Liza said. “But I’m listening for it.” She listened carefully above the noises on the river.

Again she heard a faint, “Meow.”

Liza stretched flat on her stomach so that she was level with the water. She heard it again. Meow.”

The meow came from a tangle of brush floating by their raft. At the top of the tangle sat a soaked, shivering cat. The current swirled the brush past them as Liza watched and the cat meowed in terror. Liza maneuvered her paddle and managed to work it under the cat. “Grab on, Kitty,” she said. “Calm down and grab on.” The sound of her voice seemed to soothe the cat.

Its claws scabbled on the brush as it struggled to get up on the paddle. “Come on Kitty, you can do it,” Liza said.

Liza was dimly aware that behind her, William had stopped the raft with the pole and was trying to hold it steady so she could reach the cat. Behind her, Liza heard a soft, crooning voice. “Come to me, Cast Away Cat. Come to Emily. She will keep you safe.”

The cat clung to the paddle.

Liza had an idea. In a rare moment of friendship, Mary Jane had taught Liza to whistle and they had carried on several whistling conversations. Mary Jane told her that dogs and cats could hear whistling better than they could talking. Liza whistled at message to the cat. She made her whistle say, “We will help you. Don’t be afraid.”

The cat understood the whistle. The cat stopped struggling and she climbed up on the paddle. She left Liza lift her and pull into the raft without any- more frantic meowing. When Liza pulled the paddle onto the raft, she saw that the cat had a gray and white striped coat and green eyes as clear and deep as the South River back in Maryland.

“You’re fine now, kitty,” Liza said. She stretched out hand. “Come here and let me dry you off.”

The cat stopped in front of her and looked her up and down. Then she walked over to Emily and settled in Emily’s lap.

“That cat is really grateful to you for rescuing her,” William laughed.

“Her name is Castaway,” Emily said. “And she is grateful. She just wants to get dried off right now.”

“She told you that?” Liza asked.

“She got in my lap so I could dry her off. And that’s what I’m going to do,” Emily said. She got up off the blanket and started rubbing the cat’s fur with it. The cat immediately began to purr. “She likes being dry,” Emily said.

“So do I,” Liza said, wringing out her own wet skirt.

“Is the cat alright?” William asked. “She’s getting dry,” Emily said.

“Then we’d better get underway,” William said. “We don’t know who Uncle Patrick put on our trail.”

William and Liza poled and paddled the raft while Emily dried off Castaway and introduced her to her new family. “Castaway says that she’s happy to be part of such a brave family and she will help us get our freedom,” announced Emily.

“I’m glad she approves of us,” Liza said, rubbing her arms. “I got tired arms from hauling her in from the water, but do you think she’ll come over and thank me?”

“I’ll talk to her,” Emily said. She whispered in the cat’s ear.

The gray and white striped cat carefully picked her way from the middle of the raft where Emily sat to the edge where Liza poled. She rubbed up against Liza’s leg. Liza reached down and scratched behind the cat’s ears. Then she stroked the cat’s head. The cat purred louder.

“She likes you,” Emily said.

Liza patted the cat again. “What did you say her name is?”

“Her name is Castaway. Don’t you think that name suits her? She was a castaway until we found her.”

“It suits her fine,” Liza said. “But what are we going to feed her Emily? We don’t have a cow for milk here on the raft.”

“She already likes ham,” Emily said. “I fed her some of the ham and she said that it tasted fine. She said that she would go hunting for us and I promised her that I’d try to find some milk.”

“Emily, you don’t really think that cat is talking to you, do you?” William asked.

“Yes, we’ll keep her and care for her and feed her, but no I don’t think she talks.”

“She does talk!” Emily insisted. “She told me about a tunnel where good people hide runaways not far from here. And she told me that some bad men are chasing us and we have to run fast to get away.”

She told you all of that while you were drying off?” William asked. Liza could tell by the tone of his voice that he didn’t believe Emily.

“She told me all of that stuff,” Emily said. “You believe me and Castaway, don’t you Liza?”

“I believe that Castaway is grateful to us,” Liza said, petting the cat again. “I hope she tells us more about that tunnel and the bad men. How about it Castaway?”

“Meow,” said Castaway, licking Liza’s fingers.

CHAPTER TEN

“I was told that one of our slaves ran off and was gone for three years. Some white person wrote him to come here, that he was free. He was making his own way in Ohio and stopped in Lexington, Kentucky for breakfast; while there he was asked to show his Pass papers which he did, but they were forged, so he was arrested.” Bert Mayfield, ex-slave from Kentucky

At dusk William and Liza steered the raft into a narrow creek and poled it up the creek. They had gone only a few miles up the creek when the raft bumped on a sand bar. Emily and Castaway went into the woods to collect firewood. Emily returned with an armful of sticks and Castaway carried one between her teeth.

Liza made a fire and laid the ham between two rocks to cook. She mixed some of the corn meal with water from the creek to make a dough and she and Emily shaped the dough into balls. Then they flattened them and put them on rocks to cook in the ashes of the fire. Castaway licked their fingers after they had shaped all of the ashcakes and she licked their fingers again after they had pulled the cakes from the fire and dusted the ashes off of them.

William came to the fire to dry off after he had bathed in the creek. “Something smells good enough to eat around here,” he said.

“I think we can use these leaves as plates,” Liza said. “They are big enough and as far as I can tell, they aren’t poison.”

“That’s good to know,” William said. He kept eating from the leaf, so Liza knew that he wasn’t too scared.

“Let’s eat Emily,” Liza said. “Then we can go down to the creek and take a bath with our clothes on to wash them too. We have to find someone with clothes to trade.”

“What have we got to trade?” Emily asked.

“I don’t know, but we’ll think of something,” Liza said. “What do you think, Castaway?”

“Meow!” said Castaway.

Liza thought that Castaway was just asking for another piece of ashcake. She didn’t realize until later that Castaway was thinking about their problem. She and Emily ate and went down to the creek for a bath. Liza thought that Castaway would stay with William. After all, hadn’t Castaway had enough of water for a week? But Castaway followed them and sat on the bank watching them splash each other and wash their hair and dive under the water to get their necks clean. Back home in the South River, Liza had learned how to open her eyes under water, so she practiced here in this swimming hole.

When she opened her eyes, she saw something gleaming among the rocks at the bottom of the hole. She reached down and picked it up. It was a gold locket. Somebody had lost a gold locket in this isolated place. She held it up to show Emily. Emily took it and fastened it around Castaway’s neck. “It has to dry off and Castaway wants to help,” Emily said.

Liza shrugged and braided her hair. Then she braided Emily’s hair. “Let’s go back to the fire and finish drying off,” Liza said. “Come on Castaway, you can dry the locket in front of the fire.”

They all sat in front of the fire enjoying its warmth and comfort. Liza lit the Liberty Lantern and William sat down beside it.

“We’ll need the light when the fire goes out,” William said. “We can’t leave it burning all night, but the lantern we can.”

“Why can’t we keep putting wood on the fire and make it burn all night? I’m cold and scared William,” Emily said.

“Someone might spot it and come after us,” William said. “I am sure Uncle Patrick wants to have me arrested for burning down his barn.”

“His shanty you mean,” Liza said. “And you saved the cow and Horace before you burned it.”

“You burned it because they wanted to arrest us and send us back to Maryland,” Emily said.

“He needed to build a new barn anyway, but he still wants to arrest me and send me back into slavery,” William said.

“Me too,” Emily said.

“Me too,” Liza said.

“Meow,” Castaway said

“You didn’t get your freedom papers wet, did you?” Liza asked him.

“No, they are still in the tin box in my pocket,” William said. “I can reach them when I need them.”

The fire died down to embers and the stars dipped so low in the sky that they touched the embers with sparkling fingers. Liza and Emily piled leaves to make a soft bed and William covered them with the blanket. Emily patted the blanket and held up one edge. “Come on, Castaway, it’s bed time.”

Castaway wouldn’t come. Instead she clawed her way up the trunk of a nearby tree and perched on a branch. The fur on her back stood straight up and her tail twitched back and forth.

“I don’t think now is a good time to get the locket from around her neck,” William said.

“Castaway, come down. It’s bed time,” Emily coaxed in her softest voice.

But Castaway didn’t move. She just sat twitching her tail. William doused the fire with a tin pan of creek water

The Liberty Lantern made small pinprick of light that matched the stars. Liza felt its glow protecting them. “God, watch over us and Mama and Papa,” she whispered. Then she fell asleep, cuddled next to Emily. The howling and snuffing of dogs woke her up. She had been dreaming about the mastiffs that Dr. Emerson owned. She had dreamed of huge white teeth, and dripping jaws and evil red eyes.

She had dreamed of howling deep in the pulsing throat of the dog. The dream frightened her so much that she woke up. The howling didn’t go away. It echoed throughout the black night. The cat in the tree hissed and spat and howled back.

Men circled the Liberty Lantern. They held lanterns circled with harsh yellow light. Uncle Patrick stood there with two dogs straining on leashes. Horace stepped into the circle of light, holding up chains. The chains gleamed in the yellow lantern light.

Uncle Patrick stepped forward. “Didn’t think I could track you down, did you?” he said.

William stood up, the lines of his body straight and stiff and defiant. “How did you track me down?” he asked.

“Had the dogs sniff the skirt of Mrs. Johnson’s dress you left in the barn. Once they get the scent, they can follow it to hell.”

“Or to heaven,” Emily said.

“I’m going to take you,” Horace said to William.

He rattled the chains and started toward William.

Liza jumped up and tackled him. “I’ll get you first!” She punched him in the stomach.

“Uncle Patrick,” she hit me!” Horace mumbled dropping the chains.

The other man stepped into the circle. “We’d better get the Niggers and go,” he said. “Some of the folks around here don’t approve of slave catchers.”

“You can’t take me anywhere without my consent,” William said. “I am a free man.!”

He reached inside his coat pocket and pulled out the tin. He opened it and smoothed out the papers. He handed the papers to Uncle Patrick. “These are my freedom papers from Dr. Emerson my former master. They are quite in order, I assure you.”

“Owheee! Listen to him talk,” Horace hooted. “You got your voice back,” Liza said. “I better tackle you again.” Uncle Patrick!” Horace howled.

The other man took the papers from Uncle Patrick and read them. “Stop acting the fool, Horace. This is serious business,” he said.

“I wasn’t acting!” Horace insisted.

Emily giggled.

Liza felt fear cramping her stomach as she watched Uncle Horace. That man was dangerous.

“As you can see, my papers are in order,” William said and so are those of my sisters. Now, if you will be good enough to leave so we can have a good night’s sleep. We have a long journey ahead of us.”

The man bent over the Freedom Lantern. He thrust the edges of the Freedom papers in the flame. Tongues of fire spread slowly up the papers like water lapping at toes, then knees, then waist, then shoulders, and then finally closing over hair. All of them stared as the flames ate the papers. The man kicked the ashes. “That’s what I think of your Freedom papers,” he said. “Come on boys, let’s take ‘em.”

Uncle Patrick and the man moved toward William. Horace grabbed Liza. Liza bit his arm and he dropped her arm. “Uncle Patrick, I need the dogs!” he yelled.

“Take care of yourself,” Uncle Patrick told him. “The dogs are just for tracking, not catching slaves.”

Horace headed for Emily this time. He probably thought he’d start small and then work up to Liza again. He grabbed Emily, who was standing under the branch where Castaway lurked like a leopard.

Castaway landed on Horace’s back like a leopard. Horace howled like a dog. “Uncle Patrick, help! It’s got me. Help! Help!”

Uncle Patrick and the other man stopped moving in on William and ran to rescue Horace. The man dropped the dog’s leashes. Castaway jumped off of Horace’s back and on to the back of the nearest dog. She rode the dog out of the clearing with the others running behind. All three of them howled mournfully.

“My dogs! I’m not paying you if I don’t get my dogs back!” he said to the man. Uncle Patrick ran after the dogs and the man ran after Uncle Patrick. Horace stood at the edge of the clearing. “I’ll set something to get you!” he yelled. “Watch out for muskrats!” Then he ran after the others.

“What’s he talking about?” Emily asked. “Never mind. Let’s go!” Liza said.

William grabbed the satchel and kicked dirt over the embers. Liza grabbed the Liberty Lantern and Emily. “Hurry!” William said.

They raced toward the creek. William pushed the two girls ahead of him. They ran under some maple trees along the bank and that’s when the trap got William’s leg. Liza heard a horrible snap and William cried out in pain.

“That’s what that horrible Horace meant. He must have set a muskrat trap when they were trailing us. William, let me take it off your leg!”

“We got to keep moving,” William gasped. He kept moving, half running, half hobbling, but Liza saw him stumble. She knew that he couldn’t keep moving much longer.

“William, you have to stop and let me take that trap off your leg.”

“We can’t stop now, Liza. They’ll get the dogs back and track us down again. We got to get back on the river!”

He kept running and Liza and Emily ran beside him. The light in the Liberty Lantern flickered. It was almost out of kerosene. Liza held it high. There was the raft up ahead. They raced to the bank and onto the raft. Emily grabbed the pole and Liza the paddle. William snatched the pole from Emily and William and Liza poled the raft down the creek and back into the river. Gasping with pain, William poled furiously. Liza kept up with him.

“Castaway,” Emily wailed. “We have to wait for Castaway.”

“We can’t,” William grunted. “We have to get out of here.”

“Castaway can take care of herself,” Liza said. “She’s probably still riding those dogs through the woods.”

“She won’t be able to find us,” Emily sobbed.

“She’ll find us,” Liza assured her. “I know she will.”

“I want Castaway,” Emily sobbed.

She sobbed while Liza helped William take the muskrat trap off of his leg. She sobbed while she helped Liza throw the muskrat trap overboard.

“I want Castaway,” Emily sobbed. “How will she know where to find us?”

Liza was more worried about William at this point. “We have to stop in the woods so I can get some herbs and make a poultice for your leg,” she told him. “It will turn black and give you a fever if I don’t.”

“We’ve got to put distance between us and those slave catchers,” William said, gritting his teeth.

“We’re stopping for herbs,” Liza said. “You can watch from the raft, but we’re stopping. I have to do something for that leg.”

Liza didn't like looking at his leg. Luckily, the trap hadn't broken William's leg, but its jaws had left a deep, ugly cut that Liza washed out with river water. She pulled some moss from under the trees growing beside the river to soothe the wound, but it needed to be poulticed.

They kept moving and Emily kept sobbing. Finally, Liza couldn't stand it any longer. "Be quiet!" she shouted at Emily. "You care more about that silly cat than you do your own brother!"

"Her outburst made Emily cry harder. She threw her arms around William, bumping his leg and making him cry out in pain. "I love you William, but I love Castaway, too!" she sobbed. "Your leg's not going to fall off, is it? I couldn't stand that. Oh, I want Mama and Papa!"

Liza shook Emily. "I want Mama and Papa, too, but they aren't here! We have to figure out things for ourselves and we have enough problems. We don't need to worry about a cat!"

That was Castaway's signal and she answered it – with a friend. Castaway appeared on the riverbank, running alongside the raft. The friend, a male friend, appeared on the riverbank, running alongside Castaway. Liza was busy hugging Emily and apologizing for yelling at her. She didn't see Castaway or her friend at first. Emily did. She shouted, "Oh Castaway, I'm so glad you came back. William, stop! We have to pick her up!"

"We have to pole into shore first," William said. "And I'm not so sure about her friend."

William was pale and swayed on his feet. He looked like he was going to faint. "We have to trust him," Liza said. "Emily, you pray."

Emily prayed while William and Liza poled and paddled the raft to shore. Castaway didn't wait until the raft bumped against the bank.

She made a flying leap and landed in Emily's lap. Emily hugged Castaway so hard that she squeaked. Then she started purring.

“Castaway, you bad girl! What did you do with your locket?” Emily asked her.

Castaway purred. Castaway’s male friend- who close up turned out to be a lanky black boy with kinky curls didn’t jump after her.

He waited until they hit the bank and Liza tied up to a willow tree. She studied the boy. “Hello,” she said.

“Hello. I want to know where you found the locket that cat was wearing. “I found it at the bottom of a swimming hole in the little creek back there,” Liza told him. “Why does it matter?”

“My sister lost that locket one day a long time ago when we went swimming in the creek. I dove and dove looking for it and so did she. I never thought I’d see it again.”

“I put it on the cat to dry it out,” Liza told him. “We were going to trade it for clothes and food.”

The boy took the locket out of his pocket. “Finders keepers, I guess. Do you want it back?”

Liza swallowed. “No, give it to your sister.”

The boy blinked. “What will you do for clothes and food?”

“We’ll manage,” Liza said.

“You can come to my house and let my sister thank you for finding her locket,” the boy said. “My name’s Jeff.”

“Tell your sister I’m glad that I found her locket, but we have to keep traveling,” Liza said.

“Your brother there looks like he needs a doctor,” Jeff said. “My Pa’s a doctor.”

“I can poultice his leg,” Liza said.

“You said you needed to trade the locket for food and clothes. Folks around here want to help. We’ve helped lots of escaped slaves go north.”

“We aren’t slaves,” Liza said. “My Papa bought our freedom.”

“We can’t prove that anymore,” William groaned. “Those slave catchers burned our papers. ”Come home with me and let us help,” Jeff said. “Will you stay with William while I get some leaves and moss?” Liza asked him. “That leg’s bad.”

Jeff nodded and jumped aboard the raft. Castaway purred him a welcome and Liza knew that was a good sign. Castaway jumped on slave catchers. Maybe Jeff could be trusted. She had no choice but to take the chance.

Liza hurried into the woods for her leaves and hurried back even faster. The raft was still there. Jeff sat talking to William and petting Castaway. Emily was taking a nap.

CHAPTER ELEVEN

*“We used grease lamps, made
outer iron, wid a piece of cotton rope down in de grease on dis jes send
out a puny smelly light.” Mary Wright-former Kentucky slave*

Jeff went to get his Pa and bring him back to fix William’s leg.

“I’m trusting you because I have to trust you,” Liza told him. “But if you’re tricking us, I can still cast off the raft and the river will take us away from you. Be sure of that, black boy!”

He grinned at her and she was sure she saw him grow more hair right in front of her eyes. “I’m sure of that, Liza. Gotta hurry now because those slave catchers might still be around.”

“Did you see them?” Liza asked.

“I see their tailcoats flapping. The dogs were giving them a good chase.”
Hurry back,” Liza said.

William’s leg seemed to be paining him pretty bad now. Then of course the hot noon sun beating down on him didn’t help either. Emily and Liza took turns bailing water out of the river and pouring it over William’s head and body. But he closed his eyes and groaned.

This got Liza pretty worried. She was glad when she saw Jeff standing there on the bank with a stout man beside him. “This is my Pa, Dr. Wentworth,” Jeff said.

“I have my wagon on the river bank over there,” the doctor said. “I think we can fit your brother and you and your sister in it.”

Emily stared at him. “Why aren’t you a slave?” she asked.

“I was born a free black. I always have been free and so are my wife and family. Now let’s get your brother into the wagon.”

He shook William's shoulder. "Can you walk?" he asked William. William whispered, "No."

The stout black doctor picked him up and carried him off the raft and up the riverbank. Emily followed, clinging to Castaway. Liza followed, clinging to the Liberty Lantern and their satchel. Liza started to run away when she saw a white man sitting on the wagon seat with the reins in his hands.

"It's a white man," Liza gasped.

"White men work with us too," the doctor said. "We work together to help runaways get to freedom."

He gently lay William in the back of the wagon. Jeff helped Emily and Castaway climb up to the seat. Liza and the Liberty Lantern climbed up by themselves. Liza still felt a little jumpy about trusting these men.

The doctor examined William's leg while they jounced down a grassy trail through the woods. "Who-ever made this poultice did a good job," he said. "I couldn't improve upon it."

"Will it cure William?" Liza asked.

"It already has helped him," the Doctor told her. He made William swallow some medicine and washed his leg with something that tickled Liza's nose. Then he looked at Emily. "Do you have bruises or cuts, young lady?"

"No, I don't, but Castaway has some fur missing." Emily pointed to a bald spot on Castaway's back about the size of a penny. The doctor winked at Emily. "I'll bet you the dog's missing more hair than this."

"I know he is," Emily laughed.

Then his kind brown eyes studied Liza. "What about you, young miss?"

Liza shook her head. "I'm alright. Where are you taking us?"

“We’re going to the house of a white friend of mine. He’s got a hidey room in it, in case our dog owning friends decide to make another appearance.”

They spent about a week at the house of Dr. Worthington’s friend. Emily and Castaway got fatter. Liza gave the necklace to Jeff’s sister Sylvia who was about her age and they got to be talking friends. William’s leg got a little better every day. He got so that he could limp around on it and Dr. Worthington didn’t have to carry him around anymore. Folks came to visit Liza and her family, bringing them more food and clothes than they could use in a year.

“I wished for clothes,” Liza said, twirling around in front of Sylvia in a green plaid dress. “I have six dress- es, three pair over overalls, a coat and I haven’t even opened this package that came today.”

“Won’t the skirts get in your way when you’re poling the raft?” Sylvia asked her.

“I can tie them back,” Liza said.

“I wish you could live here,” Sylvia said. “It’s fun having someone my age to talk to and swim with and take berry picking.”

“We haven’t gone berry picking,” Liza said.

“Papa said we could go today. No one’s seen the slave catchers around, so he thinks it will be safe.”

Liza, Jeff, Sylvia, Emily, and several of Mr. Chatam’s children headed for the woods the next day. Mr. Chatam was the name of the man they were staying with. Mr. Chatam and Mrs. Chatam were white, but they were as kind as Miss Abigail and Liza asked if their two little girls could go as company of Emily. Their boy, Caleb, came along too. He was Liza and Jeff and Sylvia’s age. Liza started them on the berry picking and then slipped away to the raft to make sure it was still in one piece.

The pole was leaning right where William left it, but she didn't see the paddle. She remembered she had left it right alongside a pile of moss in the center of the raft. She waded out in the water to get a closer look. Suddenly, the paddle flashed out at her from behind a tree. "I knew one of you Niggers would come back sooner or later!" Horace aimed the paddle at Liza again. She ducked. "I'm gonna take you back to my Pa and we're gonna get the reward money for you, girl!"

"I thought he would have fed you to his dogs by now, boy!" Liza said.

"I'm gonna get you for that!" Horace swung again. Liza grabbed the pole from the raft and hit the paddle with it. The force of the blow knocked Horace into the water, which was only about three feet deep here. Horace thrashed around. "Help, I can't swim!" he blubbered.

Liza knew that if he made enough noise, his father would hear and come to investigate. She knew she had to work fast. She threw down the pole, grabbed Horace by the neck, dunked him to keep him quiet and towed him into shore. She left him spluttering on the bank and ran through the woods to find the other children. Sylvia saw her first. "You decided to go swimming instead of berrying, Liza."

"I ran into Horace down by the river," Liza said quietly. "I think we'd better go back so I can talk to Dr. Wentworth. They finished filling their berry buckets and then raced back to see Dr. Wentworth. He looked serious when Liza told him what had happened.

"I thought they had given up and gone home, but I guess their pocketbook is empty," the doctor said. "I wanted William to have a few more days rest off that leg before he had to travel again."

"I can go with them and do most of the raft work," Jeff said. "Where are they going?"

“I think up French Creek would be the best way. You know that creek that flows into the river at Franklin?”

“Sure I do, dad. I’ve taken loads of corn up to Franklin for Uncle Silas, remember?”

“That’s right,” Dr. Wentworth agreed. “Then you would be the logical one to go with them.”

“They can pole and paddle French Creek to Cussawago Creek which runs into Lake Erie around Erie. Then which way will they go?”

“We have connections in Erie, too. They can take the train cars from Erie to Detroit,” Dr. Wentworth said.

“Won’t somebody question them because they’re black?” Jeff wondered.

“Not if Emily and Castaway ride in a wooden pet crate and Liza is an invalid white lady traveling with a trusted old servant.”

“William will be glad that he doesn’t have to be the girl this time,” Liza said.

“We’d better get them into the hideaway,” Dr. Wentworth said. “Horace has probably alerted them by now.”

“We have to get a different raft, Pa. They’ll be watching that one.”

“They can take ours. It’s tied up at the back of the house.”

“Thanks, Pa. Ours is in better shape anyway.”

William and Liza and Emily spent the night in the hidey hole tunnel under the Chatam’s house. Castaway visited them often, but she spent some time upstairs with the Chatam’s too. Early the next morning, Jeff came to collect them. “Follow me to freedom,” he said with a bow.

He led them down the tunnel. Liza held the Liberty Lantern as high above their heads as she could.

“I’ll carry the lantern,” Jeff offered. “I AM taller than you are.”

“I’ll carry the Liberty Lantern,” Liza said. “It belonged to my great grandmother.”

Jeff didn’t say anything else about the lantern, but he made a holder for it with a long handle so Liza could hold it high above her head and light the way for everyone.

They reached end of the tunnel. It ended behind Dr. Wentworth’s house at the riverbank. Mist steamed off the river like steam from a pan of boiling potatoes. The sky was still night dark but dawn light spread a patchwork quilt across it. They settled on the raft.

“This raft is a lot fancier than the one I stole,” William said.

“You didn’t steal it, you borrowed it for a river trip,” Jeff said. “That’s why we’re taking this one. My Pa gave it to us.”

This raft had to weigh twice as much as their other one had. It was loaded down with provisions. They had a bucket of flour with a tight fitting wooden lid and a bucket of corn meal. They had a bucket of salt meat. They had a satchel full of clothes. In the satchel was a long dress for Liza to wear when she became the invalid Miss Brimstead, traveling with her faithful manservant Cato.

“I really am going to ride in a car with Castaway?” Emily jumped up and down.

“It’s a very large crate, Emily. It’s supposed to have machinery in it and that takes a lot of room.”

Dr. Wentworth appeared and handed William packet. “This is your money and papers,” he said. “Journey safely.”

He shook Jeff’s hand. “I expect you back home in about two weeks, son.”

“I’ll be here, Pa.”

Jeff and Liza grabbed their poles and oars. They pushed into the river and Liza’s body adjusted to its rolling motion. This leg of the river journey was a lot easier and happier for Liza. Castaway and some books from Dr. Wentworth kept Emily from worrying and crying. They had enough food and water and a change of clothes when they took a bath. Liza knew that Dr. Wentworth and their other Underground Railroad friends were keeping the slave catchers busy and unhappy.

After two more days on the river, they reached Franklin and the mouth of French Creek. They all watched intently for the mouth of French creek.

“Does it have lips and a tongue and teeth like we do?” Emily asked.

“What are you talking about Emily?”

“The mouth of the creek.”

Liza smiled at her. “It won’t look like a person’s mouth. It will probably have some sandy islands with water between them.

The mouth of French Creek where it emptied into the Allegheny River featured several sand islands and narrow channels. They navigated them safely and soon were floating down a rushing creek with heavily forested hills on each side of it. Liza put her hand in the water and felt the current grab it. She could feel it trying to grab the rest of her and pull her into its power. She braced her arm and paddled harder.

After another day and a half, they reached a calmer stretch of the creek. It widened out and flowed wider and deeper. Liza saw fish and rocks gleaming in its shallows. She fetched the fishing pole that William had made for them back along the river. “Can you take over for a while, William? I want to go fishing.”

William and Jeff paddled, Emily and Castaway took a nap, and Liza fished. She caught bass and trout and suckers and put them in a wooden bucket. When they camped that night, Jeff and William cleaned the fish and Liza fried them over the fire in an iron skillet that someone had put in their

satchel. They sat around the fire enjoying its heat and the light of the Liberty Lantern.

Jeff smiled at her. "You have to let me and Sylvia know when you get to Detroit. Or Canada. Or where ever you end up."

"We're coming back through to collect Mama and Papa," Liza said. "Do you want to raft us on the way back?"

"You could set yourself up in business," William said.

"I've traveled the creek and river lots of times already," Jeff said. "So far everyone's made it to freedom."

He smiled at Liza. "Let me know when you want to come back down the creek and the river, girl. Maybe I can help."

"I'll let you know, boy!" she said.

The next day they reached Meadville, a medium sized Abolition city on French Creek. "I'm going into town and talk around," Jeff said. "I'll see if I can find out if our friends are still following us. There are friends here who can tell me that and we have to make sure that the train plan is in place."

Jeff tied up under a bank at the bottom of a steep hill. "I won't be gone very long," he said. "Keep your wits about you and your eyes wide open."

Castaway spotted Horace and the dogs before the rest of them did. They were all stretched out on quilts on the raft napping when Castaway started hissing and spitting. She wouldn't stop until she woke everyone up.

Then she paced up and down the raft and yowled loud enough to split Emily's eardrums. When the dogs standing on top of the hill with Uncle Patrick and Horace yowled back, Liza knew what Castaway had been trying to tell them.

At first Liza panicked. She untied the raft and was ready to take off without Jeff. It would take the dogs and Uncle Patrick and Horace some time to get down the hill, unless they rolled down.

“Let’s sit still for a few minutes,” William said. “We’re sitting here under the bank and they can’t see us. They probably think the dogs are just yowling so let them think that. We have to try to wait for Jeff.”

William started getting a little nervous when the men and dogs disappeared from the top of the hill. Castaway stopped yowling as well. Too much silence made him wonder what was going on. Then Jeff slipped aboard the raft and pushed it off the bank. “We’d better get going,” he said. “Our friends traveled overland by stage and horseback and they spread the word around town about a reward for you people. I don’t think anybody will turn you in for it, because this is an Abolitionist town, but money sometimes changes people’s minds.”

“We saw them!” Emily cried. “Uncle Patrick and Horace and the dogs were standing at the top of the hill and Castaway howled at them.”

“We’re going to lose them,” Jeff said grimly. “I’m tired of them playing games with people’s lives.”

On the other side of Meadville, the creek curled and twisted around several islands. It wound and curved its way through woods and farms. Jeff rounded the curves and twisted with the twists. He and Liza poled and paddled up narrow inlets to spend the night. During the day they kept to the middle of the creek talking care not to crash the raft on the rocks. They swam and fished and listened to the church silence of the woods on either side.

William told them about George Washington’s trip down French Creek from Franklin, the same way they were rafting. Only George Washington was carrying a letter from the Virginia Governor to the French Commander of Fort LeBoeuf which stood near French Creek in Waterford.

“What did the letter say?” Liza asked, before Emily opened her mouth.

”The letter told the French Commander at Fort LeBoeuf that he could not bring more soldiers from Canada and that he could not build any more forts in Pennsylvania.

Emily stuck out her tongue at Liza. “Who gave him the letter?”

“The Governor of Virginia. Virginia was a British Colony and the British and French were fighting over who would own Pennsylvania, and Ohio and the rest of the Northwest Territory. Even the rest of America,” William said.

Emily asked William more questions about the French and the British fight over Ohio and Pennsylvania, Liza heard his voice and his words in the back of her ears, but she trailed her fingers in the water imagining George Washington and his men on rafts poling down French Creek. Had they wondered if the French people in charge of the fort would be friendly and give them food and water or would they shout and shoot guns at them? Would George Washington giving them the Governor of Virginia’s letter bring them peace?

Liza touched the Liberty Lantern with wet fingers. She would give it as an offer of peace wherever they settled in Canada. When they got close to a small town that Jeff called Union Mills, he told them about the rest of their getaway plan.

William helped him tell. William never let people plan without him.



Conneaut Creek Albion Pennsylvania

“There’s a wooden water tower up the railroad track about three miles,” Jeff said. “There are two men who mind it and help water the train when it comes through. Today they are going to load some freight. The freight is machinery that has to be kept ‘This side up.

'Inside the wooden box will be Emily and Castaway. They will ride in the baggage car of the train so people will not be able to hear the machinery box meow.'

William took over, just like Liza knew he would. "The men will load the machinery box on the train when it stops for water. Getting on the train with the box will be the invalid Miss Brimstead who is traveling to Detroit to live with her brother. Accompanying her is her faithful black servant Cato, who has been with the family for fifty years. Miss Brimstead has to spend most of her time resting, and she most definitely has to guard against sunlight so she is heavily veiled."

"Do you think it will work?" Jeff asked Liza

"If Castaway doesn't meow too loud and Miss Brimstead doesn't go fishing at the wrong time, it will work," Liza said.

"Keep your fingers crossed," Jeff said.

"I'll do more than that, I'll pray." William smiled folding his hands.



French Creek Albion Pennsylvania

CHAPTER TWELVE

“When I wuz ten years old I wuz doin’ women’s work. I learned to do a little bit of eberthing.’ I worked ond e farm
And I worked in de house. I learned to do a little bit of eberthin.’
On de farm I did eberthin’ cept plow.
Ex-slave, 87 years old Steubenville,
Ohio

The wooden water tower stuck up into the sky like a bony finger. They poled the raft to a stop right underneath it. Liza saw the railroad tracks at the top 1 of the bank looking like brown chalk lines moving into the distance. Dusk shook the folds of its black cloak over the hills and fields. It settled across the trees. Night creatures started to stir awake. Liza heard frogs and peepers and owls calling. Liza tilted back her head and peered at the tower. Was anyone there?

“Looking for somebody?” A man in raveled trousers and a patched shirt stood at the boom of the tower. Behind him Liza saw wooden cleats leading up to the top of the tower.

“I’m looking for Mason,” she said.

“Here I am, ma’am.

“You’re the right man,” Liza said. “What are you supposed to do?”

“I’m supposed to make sure you climb the tower safely,” Mason said.

“Then

I have to go back home to Meadville.”

“Did you light the Liberty Lantern?” William asked Liza.

“I lit it,” she said.

“Then climb up the steps with it and flag down the train. Liza looked at the wooden cleats that seemed to go all of the way up into the sky.” Do I have to climb up there to flag down the train?”

The engineer might not see you if you stand by the tracks,” Mason said. “How important is that for you to stop the train?”

Liza clutched the lantern and put her foot on the first wooden cleat. She winced when some splinters of wood flew off under her boot, but she put her foot on the second rung.

Emily threw her arms around Liza’s legs. “I’ll come with you,” she said.

Liza shined the lantern in Emily’s face. “This is too dangerous. You stay with William, Emily.”

Liza climbed up another step. Her lantern bumped against something soft and furry.

“Castaway, you get back down there with Emily. She needs you. I’m glad that you’re willing to climb with me, but I have to do this by myself.”

Castaway climbed up a step higher. Liza climbed to a step beneath her. Liza looked down at the creek and saw Jeff poling the raft away from the bank. He waved to her, “Keep climbing the path to freedom and lightning it with your lantern,” he said.

Liza waved and watched him disappear around a bend. She imagined him winding his way back home down French Creek. She imagined the slave catchers waiting for him on their raft at a bend in the creek. She saw the rafts bumping each other and Jeff pulling Uncle Patrick out of the water.

Jeff slapped Uncle Patrick on the back and helped him get the water out of his lungs. Horace led Uncle Patrick home while the dogs ran off chasing rabbits. She imagined herself and Emily and William and Jeff and Sylvia sitting around a kitchen table with the Liberty Lantern in the middle

enjoying a meal with Dr. Wentworth and the rest of their friends in Kittanning. She heard William's voice. "Are you alright up there, Liza?"

"I'm alright, William. I see the moon rising and Jeff leaving and no train is coming yet."

"It's not supposed to be here until eight o'clock," Mason shouted up at her. "But you can start waving that lantern of yours. The engineer might be looking up ahead of the track."

Liza climbed another step and saw Mason walking home along the track to Meadville. She saw Mason and all of the other Underground Railroad people black and white, giving their food and clothes and time and money and risking their lives so that slaves could capture their freedom.

"Meow!" The Liberty Lantern bumped against Cast- away again, this time a step higher.

"Do I have to walk you back down to Emily by the paw?" Liza asked.

Castaway stared down at her. Then with a faint Meow that grew fainter as she climbed down the ladder, Castaway disappeared. Liza heard Emily shout, "Castaway!"

Sharp wooden splinters poked Liza's bottom and she woke with a start. Had she been dreaming? She stood up on the wooden stair and turned up the knob on the Liberty Lantern. She swung it into the darkness and its light created a tunnel of light shimmering on dark water. She was still in the water tower on French Creek.

At this point French Creek ran alongside the tracks and the Liberty Lantern light created a long shimmery trail through the black water. Then suddenly the light from the Liberty Lantern path bumped against a solid black wall. Liza held the lantern higher and crept to the edge of the tower. The black wall turned into a rowboat with two shadowy shapes at the oars and a tall, thin

silhouette standing in the bow. The slave catchers were catching up with them!

Feeling the rungs of the wooden ladder with her toes curling her fingers tightly around the Liberty Lantern, Liza climbed down to the ground. William and Emily were already on the raft. Castaway tugged at Liza's skirt, pulling her toward the raft.

"Hurry, Liza!" Emily shouted. Liza hurried, swinging the Liberty Lantern swinging back and forth as she ran. *She ran with her head down and in its light she saw Mama and Papa sitting on the doorstep of their Maryland log cabin. They looked sad and lonely and they weren't reading by the Liberty Lantern. They were reading by candlelight. Then came the red glow of the Liberty Lantern's light and Mama and Papa looked up from their newspaper. From the shadows around the cabin, Emily and Liza and William ran to hug them. Castaway and the Yankee brown cat and twelve kittens followed them. Jeff and the other Underground railroad agents waited on rafts at the South River, ready to pole them to freedom.*

Liza didn't have time to decide if the lantern was making her dream again, because the slave catchers were coming and they had to get away. She jumped on the raft and grabbed a pole. William shoved the raft away from the bank and he and Liza grabbed the poles and propelled the raft into the current of French Creek. Emily and Castaway sat in the rear of the raft and Emily pushed with her feet while Castaway trailed a paw in the water.

"Hurry, Liza," Emily said. "They're catching up with us."

Already Liza's chest felt like it would burst like dandelion seeds did when she blew them off their round sturdy heads nodding from their strong armed stems. But she grasped the pole tightly and pushed firmly against the French Creek current.

William bent over his pole like he was stirring one of Mama's iron pots and stirred as hard as she did when she was making apple butter and didn't want the fire to scorch it. Emily lay flat on her stomach on the rear of the raft and

paddled with both hands. Castaway rested on her back, keeping watch for the slave catchers.

After what seemed like hours of poling, Liza felt the slave catcher boat getting closer and closer and without turning around she shivered at their fierce eyes glaring with anticipation at capturing them. William suddenly steered the raft sharply to the right. "Where are we going?" Liza gasped.

"We're on Conneaut Creek in Kingsville where it turns to flow to Conneaut and then into Lake Erie. I know of a little stream hidden by the trees. We are going to hide there and let the slave catchers go on without us."

And that's what they did. Liza and Emily and Castaway helped William pole their raft up the thin stream that was so shallow that Liza felt the raft scrape the rocks on its bottom. But they found a part of the bank that jutted out into the water and pulled the raft up on the sandy beach.

"You were right about the trees," William." Liza stood on her tiptoes and she still couldn't see the tops of most of them.

"Not so loud, Liza and crouch down. We don't want to take any chances."

They pulled the raft up the bank of Conneaut Creek and hid it in the bushes. Then they hid themselves in the bushes and waited for the slavecatchers to pass. Soon, Liza heard their voices and then the barking of dogs stirred the crows to cawing and caused the squirrels to cease their chattering.

Castaway heard the dog bark and before Emily could stop her, Castaway had crashed off into the woods, and instead of using stealthy cat stalking behavior, she stepped on every brittle stick she could find and meowed as loudly as a foghorn bellowing. Liza heard a loud splash, some frantic human voices, and then the frantic barking of dogs coming closer.

Emily darted out of her hiding place in the bushes ready to run and rescue Castaway. Liza pulled her back and slapped her hand over Emily's mouth. "Shh!" She hissed like Ma's tea kettle. "Castaway knows how to handle dogs. Be quiet. We don't want them to hear us."

Liza and William and Emily breathed so quietly they could hear the squirrels resuming their chattering and the crows cawing. Liza welcomed the crow chatter. It covered up the sounds of their breathing. She heard the men assuring each other that the fugitive slaves were just around the corner and would soon be caught. She heard the barking of the dogs fading into the distance. "Please don't come back now, Castaway," she silently prayed.

Castaway didn't come back and the voices of the slavecatchers and the barking of the dogs faded away. The fugitives spent the night in their sheltered bend of Conneaut Creek. When the sun sent exploring fingers of light above the horizon, Liza and Emily had already explored the woods enough to discover a patch of wild blueberries and gather them in their aprons. Slipping his compass in his pocket, William announced that they were less than eight miles from Conneaut and breakfast would be waiting for them at one of the Underground Railroad stations dotting their route to Lake Erie. Emily didn't say anything, but a tear rolled down her cheek. Liza knew that Emily wanted to shout, "We have to find Castaway!"

"We will find Castaway," Liza whispered.

"We will find Castaway," William said in his normal voice, but first we have to escape from these slave catchers. Get back on the raft you two! We have to hurry!"

They pulled the raft out of the bushes and slid it back into the water.



"What if the slave catchers are waiting for us?" Emily asked as she took her paddling place at the back of the raft. "We're going to church, so we can pray they won't," William said.

As they drifted down Conneaut Creek, in her mind Liza sharpened her ears like Papa sharpened his knives on his whetstone. She listened with ears

sharpened to knife points, but she could not hear anything but a woodpecker working on his tree home and the scurrying of squirrels and other animals in the woods. She slowed her frantic poling enough to see blankets of tiny purple violets growing around and under the trees.

“William stopped poling and leaned over the edge of the raft. It’s getting pretty shallow here. We best make the rest of our trip on foot.”

“How far do we have to walk?” Emily whimpered? The slavecatchers can catch up with us if we are walking.”

“Don’t worry, they are ahead of us,” William assured them. “And I know where they are going, so we can avoid them. Come along now. We do have to hurry.”

They beached the raft and Liza curled her fingers around the Liberty Lantern, hugging it to her chest. William led them through the thick woods and Liza walked quickly ahead of them, gaining enough time to stop and pick some of the fragrant violets dancing in the filtered sunlight under the trees. By the time William and Emily caught up with her, Liza had picked a large bouquet. Carefully, she wrapped them around the candle inside the Liberty Lantern.

They trudged through sometimes intertwined trees and thick brush. The Liberty Lantern grew so heavy that it left a ridge across Liza’s right hand. She shifted the lantern to her left hand and kept walking.

“I’m tired,” Emily whimpered.

Liza put her arm around Emily. “Look, look ahead,” she said. “Do you see that gleam of white through the trees?”

“Emily squinted. “I don’t see anything white,” she said. “Castaway is yellow.”

“Castaway is with the dogs,” Liza said.

“Let’s go find her,” Emily said, pulling at Liza’s dress.

“We need to get to the church,” William said. “We will be safe there for a moment.”⁷

William led them through more thick bushes. Emily let go of a branch too quickly and it snapped back, hitting Liza in the face. “Don’t be so clumsy,” Liza snapped at her sister. Liza bit her lip. She was sorry she had snapped at Emily.

Emily stopped in her tracks, staring at Liza. “I am not clumsy! You could have ducked.”

“I couldn’t see the branch coming,” Liza said. “But I’m sorry, Emily. I’m your older sister and I am supposed to be patient with you like Mama says. Here’s a branch. You can snap it at me again and I won’t yell at you.”

Emily stuck out her tongue at Liza. “You need to open your eyes like Mama tells you to do.”

“Alright girls,” William said, opening the door. “Here’s the church. Stop fighting, start praying. “

Liza lit the candle in front of the Liberty Lantern and held the lantern in front of her. Liza and Emily followed William into the cool, shadowy church. When they were inside the wooden door, Emily stopped so quickly that Liza bumped into her. “Are the slave catchers hiding in here?” Emily stared fearfully at the corner shadows.

William patted Emily’s shoulder. “No, the slave catchers are most likely waiting for us down at Conneaut Harbor by Captain Appleby’s boat, the Sultana. They have a spy network that knows a lot of the stations on the Underground Railroad in this part of Ohio and Pennsylvania. Our job is to keep them guessing and if they do guess, to stay one step ahead of them. “

“Why were the slave catchers chasing us if they knew where to find us? Why don’t they just go down to the Sultana and wait for us there?” Liza wondered.

William smiled. "Because we keep them guessing. But we had better move along. They might have a few of their men hanging around the church here. They know the church is an Underground Railroad stop, but they have to spread their people around the same way we do so they place them where think the action is going to be. Since we lost the ones chasing us on Conneaut Creek, they know we are traveling on the creek and they know that we are probably going to go to Canada from Conneaut Harbor."

"Won't they try to stop us here, William?"

William looked thoughtful. "They might. We should get going to our safe house."

"Isn't the church our safe house?"

"The South Ridge Baptist Church is the safest place in Conneaut. The first Anti-Slavery Society in Ashtabula County was founded here and there are many Underground Railroad stops throughout the county and many people willing to shelter fugitives on their way to freedom.

The people who hide the fugitives have to be anonymous, but in small towns their names sometimes become known. So do the names of the slave catchers and the people who reveal where the fugitives are hiding. Some of the meaner slave catchers in Conneaut are related to the Leander family and they live a few blocks down from the church. His cousin Sam Leander lives near the Emersons in Maryland. He's the leader of the party that chased us in the rowboat. Sam has sworn to capture all three of us and send us back to Maryland." William steered them toward the door as he talked.

"Where are we going?" Emily asked as William closed the door behind them.

"I know another safe place here in Conneaut," William said.

"Which is other safe place, William?"

“There is a house on Liberty Street called the Octagon House. We will be safe there until Captain Appleby and the Sultana wait for us in the harbor.” Then we can figure out a way to avoid the slave catchers and sail over to Canda on the Sultana.”

Emily stared at William. “Won’t the slave catchers know where we’re hiding?”

“There are hiding places in the Octagon House that the slave catchers can’t find. And we can watch for them from the cupola.”

Liza squirmed with excitement. She didn’t have to ask William what a cupola was. She already knew. There was a cupola on the Emerson house. Liza knew the cupola well. Well she should know the cupola since she swept the stairs and cleaned the bench cushions on the cupola bench every day. She also washed the windows every day so people could clearly enjoy the view of the trees, meadows, and houses punctuating them like fingernails.

Liza was certain the Octagon House cupola would reveal beautiful views and would be the best spot to watch for the slave catchers. Liza was also certain that the slave catchers would show up at the Octagon House. She walked beside William, determined to discover as much about the Octagon House as she could. Where would be the best hiding place for her and William and Emily?

“The skiff is ready.” A tall thin man wearing a black coat and trousers came up behind them. He beckoned to them with his hand. “Follow me like the disciples followed Jesus, with trust and faith.”

William walked over to the man and shook his hand. “It’s good to see you, Reverend Amberson.”

“I am glad to see you, William. Are these some of your passengers?”

“These are my sisters, Reverend Amberson.” Liza bowed to Reverend Amberson and Emily hugged him.

“Follow me,” Reverend Amberson hurried down a narrow path that snaked its way through the woods, “I know you must be hungry, but I think the slave catchers are close behind, so I didn’t want to risk sitting down to supper and having a slave catcher sip your soup while he is tying you up.”

“I did bring some dried apples, beef jerky, and corn pone,” Reverend Amberson said. And when you get to the Octagon House, Hannah will feed you.”

“I’m hungry now,” Emily whined. “Who is Hannah and what will she feed us?”

:Hannah is the servant girl at the Octagon House and she will feed you whatever the Cummins are eating for supper. It will be a delicious supper because they can afford good food and David Cummins grows a good garden. He sells his tomatoes all over the county and beyond and his pumpkins have their own factory and label.”

In her imagination, Liza saw a picture of a jack-o-lantern sitting an office desk writing orders with a quill pen on a large piece of paper hanging over the sides of the desk. She imagined a hand looking suspiciously like Williams writing, “Follow the Drinking Gourd!”

“William, what does “Follow the Drinking Gourd mean?”

“It means follow the big dipper.”

“Where’s the big dipper?” Emily asked. “I want a drink of water!”

“He doesn’t mean a drinking big dipper,” Liza said. “Do you William?”

“I mean the Big Dipper that the stars made,” William explained. “The Big Dipper points to the North Star and fugitive slaves can follow the North Star as a guide to freedom.”

“I’m hungry and I’m thirsty,” Emily complained.

“Hannah will see to us at the Octagon House,” William promised, “Now get into the skiff so we can row to the Octagon House.”

Liza helped Emily climb to a splintery seat on the skiff and sat by the right oar. William climbed in and took the left oar. Reverend Amberson handed them a package wrapped in brown paper. “I do have some ham sandwiches from Mrs. Amberson for you. She prays you a safe journey as do I.”

William and Liza took up the oars and Reverend Amberson pushed it out into Conneaut Creek. Emily held the packet of sandwiches. “I’m really hungry, Liza and we don’t have any more dried beef or hardtack biscuits.”

William looked over from her rowing. “We aren’t that far from the Octagon House, Emily. We better save those sandwiches for tomorrow. We don’t know what we will have to eat next since the hardtack and dried beef is gone.”

Liza imagined the smell of the ham sandwiches, thick slabs of salty tender ham resting between two slices of soft white bread with crunchy crusts. Her mouth watered. “Can’t we share a sandwich, William? We can divide it in thirds.”

“You need to get to the Octagon House hiding place before the slave catchers arrive. I have word that some are going there and some are going to the harbor to wait at the Sultana, Captain Goldsmith’s ship.”

“We’re going,” William assured the Reverend as the skiff bobbed to the middle of Conneaut Creek.

“How do you know where we’re going?” Liza asked William.

“I visited here on one of my trips and Reverend Amberson showed me this route to the Octagon House. It’s only about five miles from the church as the Conneaut Creek flows.”

Liza’s arms felt like they were flying the oars over Conneaut Creek she rowed so fast. She held the Liberty Lantern snugly between her knees as

she rowed. She kept telling herself that a warm fire, food, and a soft bed waited for them around the next bend in the creek. She kept telling Emily the same thing. William finally put down his oar and told Liza it was time to pull over a few feet from the creek bank. They waded to the shore and Liza stared at the steep grassy hills in front of them.

‘Let’s get climbing,’ William said.

They started to climb the steep hill in front of them. Liza couldn’t believe that Emily led the way and she moved ahead of her and William.

“Emily, wait for us!” Liza gasped. She shifted the Liberty Lantern from one hand to the other. “The Liberty Lantern has gotten heavier,” she said.

‘liberty is a heavy weight of responsibility that grows heavier with time, but the paradox is, it weighs lightly on the soul,’ William said.

Liza understood what he meant, but she was too hungry to say anything. She just touched William’s shoulder jutting in front of her with the Liberty Lantern. Emily stood at the top of the hill watching them. “Hurry up slowpokes!” she whispered.

Puffing and panting from the long climb up the hill, Liza and William finally reached the top. Liza peeked around a tree and there it stood. “Hello, Octagon House,” she said, waving the Liberty Lantern at the Octagon House.

A fence made of split logs surrounded the house along with rose bushes, lilacs, hollyhocks, daisies, and other flowers she couldn’t name. The Octagon House had eight sides and she stood on tiptoe to see the full length of the cupola. A woman wearing a plain gray dress with a white collar and a gray and white apron stood looking at them. Putting her finger to her lips, she whispered “I am Hannah. Follow me.”

She beckoned them to follow her and they silently filed behind her to the back door of the house. Liza managed to steal several quick glances at the house as Hannah hurried them along. The house was white, trimmed with

black shutters. Liza smelled lilacs from a lilac bush in the back yard and roses from the rose bushes in the front.

Hannah led them up the backstairs to the cupola.

“Oh no, more climbing,” Emily said. Hannah had sat a small table covered with dishes. She had fixed a meal for them and what a meal. They had turkey and cranberry sauce, biscuits, sweet potatoes, potatoes, and pumpkin pie. Smiling, Hannah made sure they had second helpings, especially giving William an extra piece of pumpkin pie. Hannah smiled at Liza. “You know, Mr. Cummins my boss grows pumpkins right out there in the backyard. I made the pie from one of those pumpkins.”

Through a mouthful of pie, Emily mumbled, “I want more pie.”

“Child, you can have all the pie you want, but you have to hurry. I have to get you all dressed and ready for the trip to Captain Appleby’s warehouse down in the harbor.

Liza looked over the top of her turkey drumstick. “What do you mean getting us dressed and ready.

Hannah frowned. “I mean the slave catchers are waiting on the porch of the house across the street. When their lookout gives the signal that we have been seen,, they are ready to dash across the street and capture you. They don’t want to attract any attention for fear people will prevent them from taking you.”

Liza put down her turkey drumstick and picked up the Liberty Lantern. “What do we have to do to get ready?” Liza hoped her voice didn’t shake. She felt her knees wobble and her heart beat faster with fear.

Hannah patted Liza’s hand. She didn’t seem to mind the traces of turkey grease on it. Ada Johnson, a sister of Mrs. Cummins is visiting from New York with her two children. They are walking down Broad Street to the harbor to see the ships and watch a shipload of ore being loaded.”

“How can we do all of this without the Cummins knowing we’re here?” William wondered.

Hannah chuckled. “Because they aren’t here. The whole family went to New York for a wedding. They won’t be back for three days. Hurry and finish eating. William, you look like you’re finished. Follow me.”

Emily ate another piece of pie and Liza finished her turkey leg. Hannah and William were still downstairs. Liza looked out of the cupola windows, eight in all, but she just saw the roofs of houses and the tops of trees from the left hand windows and the winding creek,

Emily got down from the table and ran to the window, pressing her nose against the glass, “I can see our boat, Liza! Look!”

Liza went to the cupola window and her eyes followed Emily’s pointing finger. Yes, the skiff that had brought them to the Octagon House bobbed up and down in the creek. They had landed it on the creekbank, but it had slid back into the water and as Liza watched, the skiff disappeared downstream. “I hope the skiff floats back to the Baptist Church,” she muttered. It certainly isn’t going to take us to Conneaut Harbor.”

“I helped William tie it up,” Emily told her.

“You didn’t tie it tight enough then,” Liza said.

“I’m going to tell him you said that.”

“You go ahead and tell him. I’ll tell him first.”

“You young misses need to stop arguing. Hannah stood in the doorway and next to her stood a woman dressed in a pink and brown housedress peeking from behind a long brown cape. She wore a sweeping brown hat with a pink veil covering her face. “Let me introduce you to Miss Hilda Williams, a friend of Mrs. Cummins,” Hannah said. She put her arm around Emily. “This

is Emily. Then pointing to Liza she said “and this is her sister Liza.” Emily and Liza bowed to Miss Cummins.

“Where’s William?” Liza asked.

Emily ran to the cupola window. “Maybe he’s down at the creek chasing the skiff, There’s someone down there by the edge of the creek.”

Liza ran to the window, and stood next to Emily. Pressing her nose to the window glass, she saw two men climbing up the creek bank, but no William. There are two men down there, but no William.” Liza didn’t know what to think. Had William rowed away in the skiff?

Hannah moved so quickly that her skirt spun around like a wagon wheel. She opened a closet door and pulled up a trapdoor to reveal a staircase descending into a black void. “Quick! Come with me! You have to hide. Those men are slave catchers!”

Hilda Williams, Emily, and Liza followed Hannah down a narrow flight of stairs. Liza was glad she had carried the Liberty Lantern with her from the skiff. She scratched one of her matches on the wall and it took a few minutes, but she managed to coax a wobbly flame from the candle wick to light their way down the steep stairs and into a room the size of Reverend Amberson’s wagon box.

“Can we all fit in here?” Hilda Williams wondered.

Liza stared. How many times through her life had she heard that voice? “William, why are you dressed up like a woman?” Liza asked.

After the slave catchers leave here, Hilda Williams and her two daughters will take a carriage ride down Broad Street to Conneaut Harbor. Captain Appleby has a warehouse there and they will rest there until his ship The Sultana takes them to Canada,” Hannah said. She handed Liza and Emily each a dress and bonnet. The skirts are full and will hide the boots that you are wearing. The bonnets will hide your hair.”

Emily handed back the dress and bonnet that Hannah had handed to her. “I don’t like yellow,” Emily said. Then seeing Liza’s raised eyebrows she said, “But I’ll wear them.

Liza didn’t understand why Emily argued so much today. She usually flowed along with most situations.

“You have a yellow dress at home,” Liza said.

“My yellow dress is home, but my feelings for yellow are the same,” Emily said.

“We’ll talk about this later,” Liza said.

“We won’t be able to talk to each other if the slave catchers find us,” Emily said.

Emily shivered and Liza turned and hugged her. Hilda/ William put his arm around her. “We will make it to freedom,” he assured Emily.

The sleeve of Hilda/William’s pink housedress fell over Emily’s shoulders and she grabbed the sleeve and clung to it. “I want to go home, William. I’ll be a slave. I just want to go home.”

“We will go home, Emily, when the battle to end slavery is won. We are winning it and you are an important part of it. You and Liza and the rest of our family,” William gently tugged the sleeve out of Emily’s grasp. “The color of your dress doesn’t matter. The color of your courage does, and you are brave Emily. You have shown your bravery every day of our journey. “

“But I’m afraid, William. Being afraid isn’t being brave.”

“Rowing while you are afraid is being brave,” Liza said.

“Walking while you are afraid is being brave, and that is what you have to do,” Hannah said.

Liza grabbed the Liberty Lantern and they followed Hannah to the closet and the trap door. The Liberty Lantern lit William/Hilda’s walk down the last stair on the stairway and across the room, He beckoned for Liza and Emily to follow him. There was a wooden table and chairs where they could sit down and several straw pallets in the corner.

“You won’t be in here very long,” Hannah assured them. “I’ll get rid of them, but I’d better shut the trap door and put the bench back on top of it.”

Liza listened to Hannah’s hurrying feet on the stairs. Next came the thud of the trap door and the scraping sounds of Hannah moving the bench on top of the trap door. William flopped down on one of the pallets. “I’ll take a nap while you two get dressed,” he said.

Liza helped Emily out of her overalls and shirt that she had washed in the creeks and worn during their trip. “There you are! It covers your boots nicely,” Liza said. She brushed Emily’s hair and tucked the bonnet around her head, tying the ribbons under her chin. “You are a proper young lady,” she said. “All you need is a parasol.”

William stirred on the pallet, “Hannah put two parasols in the corner before she went back upstairs.”

Emily grabbed a parasol and twirled it around her head creating fragments of colorful rainbows.

Laughing, Liza and Emily chased the parasols and weaving around each other.

“Be quiet girls,” Williams said. “We don’t want the slave catchers to hear us!”

Emily stopped so quickly that Liza crashed into her and they both fell to the floor in a tangles of umbrellas, dresses, and hats. Liza and Emily huddled under the parasols. Liza heard people voices, stomping feet, and faint dog voices barking,

“Blow out that lantern, and lie down on a pallet. Don’t make a sound!” William warned them. Liza and Emily did as he said and William himself stretched out in front of them with his finger to his lips. Liza heard heavy footsteps that sounded like heavy boots overhead and the barking dog voices sounded like the dogs were right there in the room with them. One of them sounded like a beagle hound baying.

Liza could make out a deep hoarse voice complaining, “Those damned runaways must be taking an underground railroad. I don’t see hide nor hair of them.”

“Did the dogs smell anything?” another voice asked.

They’d be hollering if they smelled anything I don’t hear them talking, let alone hollering and carrying on,” the deep hoarse voice said.

The deep hoarse voice had scarcely finished speaking when the digs turned up the volume of their barking to high.

Their barking sounded to Liza like they had spotted a cat instead of a fugitive slave. Dogs usually thought cats were more exciting to spot and chase than people, even fugitive slaves!

Then the barking died down as suddenly as it had begun, and Liza heard a cat meowing. Emily was so excited that she sat up. Liza put her hand over Emily’s mouth as she said something. Liza knew that Emily had said, “That’s Castaway!”

Liza listened to the meow which sounded like Castaway’s meow to her as well. The sound of the barking dogs died away and Liza knew that

Castaway had run past the dogs and they, being dogs, followed her. She heard the thump of heavy boots as the men followed the dogs.

William jumped up quickly and listened intently. “They’ve gone and we had better be gone too, We have to take a carriage down Broad Street to Captain Appleby’s warehouse at the Conneaut Harbor.”

Emily and Liza scrambled to their feet and tugged at their dresses. Hannah had given Liza a sky blue dress with crocheted lace around the sleeves and neckline. Liza admired the dress, but she rather have been wearing her overalls, which along with her boots made a comfortable combination to wear in the woods and in the fields. She glanced at her feet. The hem of the blue dress brushed the toes of her boots.

“Hurry girls,” William said. Those slavecatchers will be back as soon as they catch their dogs.

Liza helped Emily adjust her hat and Emily helped Liza pin hers more securely. William lifted the trap door and they all stepped out into a dark tunnel. Liza reached for the Liberty Lantern and felt a flash of fear as she remembered she had left it in the corner of the trap door. “I have to go back for the Liberty Lantern,” she told William.

“There isn’t time. I hear the dogs and the slavecatchers will be right behind them. We need to take our leisurely shopping trip walk to Captain Appleby’s warehouse right now.”

William led the way a few paces ahead of them, Leaning against the damp tunnel wall, Liza felt her way through the short, dark tunnel. Her fingers ached to curl around the handle of the Liberty Lantern. Emily followed close behind, hanging on to Liza’s skirt. They stumbled their way through the tunnel and Liza finally saw a glimmer of light piercing the darkness.

William put both hands on his hat and pressed it more firmly on his head. “Hold on to your hats, girls. We are going to the harbor. Follow me!”

He walked slowly down the wooden sidewalk, nodding and bowing to people passing by. He even twirled his parasol. Liza didn't want to follow him. She didn't feel like twirling her parasol and nodding to people. She just wanted to go back into the tunnel and the hiding place to retrieve the Liberty Lantern. But then she felt Emily tugging on her skirt pulling her forward. Liza help walking behind William.

William stepped back to walk beside Liza. The Reverend said there would be a wagon waiting for us on Liberty Street across from the Octagon House. I don't see it yet."

As they walked along, Liza suddenly felt a sharp something jabbing into her foot. She wanted to stop and take her boot off to see what had stabbed her, but William kept walking. "Hurry Liza,? Emily said, putting her hands on Liza's back and pushing her along. "We need to catch up with William."

Liza tried to hurry, but each step she took burned like the needle she had driven into her hand when she was hemming a skirt for Mary Jane. She tried to keep up with William's long strides, but her throbbing foot forced her to hobble instead of running. Emily stopped and stared at Liza.

:"What's wrong Liza?:" Emily demanded. She turned her head and took a long fearful glance behind her. "Are the slave catchers coming?"

"I don't think they are far behind us, Emily," Liza gasped. "You catch up with William. Hurry. I'll catch up with you."

"But what if the slavecatchers come back?"

Liza could see tears rolling down Emily's cheeks.

"Emily, there's no time to argue. Catch up with William!" she ordered.

Emily kept walking beside her.

Quickly Liza jerked off her boot and stocking. A wooden splinter was sticking up from her heel like an arrow. "Help me yank the splinter out of my foot," Liza said.

Emily knelt down on the splintery wooden sidewalk and tried to pull the wooden splinter out of Liza's foot. She worked it halfway out and then she stopped. "I think I hear the dogs barking. Do you think they caught Castaway?"

Liza leaned over and yanked at the splinter. "I don't think they caught her. Now, will you help me get this splinter out of my foot?"

Emily picked at the splinter, tears rolling down her face. Liza gave the splinter one more yank and at the same time she whistled. The whistle wasn't an ordinary whistle. She whistled the same song she had whistled when coaxed Castaway off the raft paddle and onto the raft. Would the whistle work this time and would it bring the slave catcher's dogs? Liza whistled louder.

Suddenly, a man in a lake captain's uniform knelt beside Liza and held out his hand to her. "I'm Captain Calvin Appleby. Can you get up and walk to the carriage?" he asked her. "If not, I will carry you."

Liza knew immediately that the man was Captain Appleby. Before she could tell him she could walk, he scooped her up and seated her inside a wagon parked in front of a grocery store that sitting next to the board sidewalk and dirt road. He plunked Emily beside her.

"Liza, whistle for Castaway again. Please." Emily begged.

Liza whistled again.

Liza heard the barking of the dogs in the distance. Again, she whistled as loud as she could.

Suddenly, Castaway jumped into the wagon, landing in Emily's lap. Then Castaway jumped in her lap and gave her a warm face bath with her tongue.

Captain Appleby jumped into the driver's seat. He slapped the reins across the horse's back and the wagon lurched into the road. Liza couldn't believe he was leaving William behind.

"Stop! You forgot William!" she screamed. Ignoring the pain in her foot, Liza climbed up on the wagon seat. "Stop! You forgot William!"

"I can't stop now. I have to get you two girls to the Sultana. William will be along."

Liza grabbed the horse's reins and shouted, "Woah!"

The horse stopped so abruptly that Liza had to cling to the wagon seat to keep from being thrown out of the wagon. She grabbed Captain Appleby's arm. "Where is William?"

"William is negotiating with the slave catchers," the Captain told her. He will be back shortly."

"How do you know?" Liza demanded.

"We made a plan," Captain Appleby said. "One of the slave catchers is your cousin Sam. His father is a white man, and he believes in slavery and hates Abolitionists. He doesn't hate William and I know he would like you and Emily if he ever meets you. He is a kind and gentle man until you mention Abolitionists and the Underground Railroad. He and William grew up together and when William found out that Sam was in this slave catching group, he went to visit him. They decided that they would work together to allow you and Emily and himself to escape.

"How did you get involved?" Liza wondered.

"William contacted me and we planned your escape. On his end, Sam did what he could to slow down the pursuit. He and William even taught your cat to come when you or he whistled so it would distract the dogs and the

slave catchers would have to go after them instead of you. Do you know the name of the song you whistle for Castaway?"

Liza shook her head.

Captain Appleby threw back his head and sang:

"Oh, freedom, Oh, freedom""

Oh freedom over me

And before I'd be a slave

I'd be buried in my grave

And go home to my Lord and be free!"



CAPT. CALVIN W. APPLEBY

By the time the captain had sung the entire verse, Emily had climbed up on the wagon seat beside the Captain and Liza. He slowed the horse because they were approaching the harbor. Liza saw a wooden ship with the name "Sultana" lettered on her side.

Captain Appleby guided the horse and wagon to the dock and Liza and Emily jumped out of the wagon before the wheels had stopped rolling. Liza saw a man standing on the deck, waving to them with one arm and holding a cat with the other. William and Castaway had arrived just ahead of them.

Liza and Emily skipped up the Sultana's gangplank. Emily ran ahead and Castaway jumped in her arms. Liza whistled the Freedom song. She missed the Liberty Lantern, but she knew now that she didn't need it to be free. Its light shined in her soul and she knew that the Liberty Lantern would keep shining its light from her heart and life as long as people need it.



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