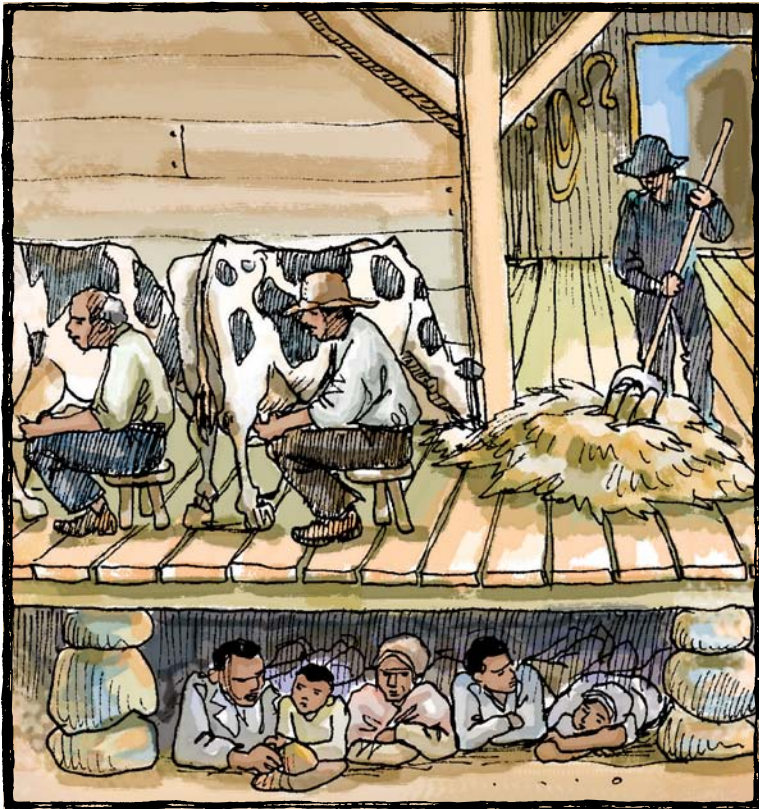


Running for Freedom

A Reading A-Z Level T Leveled Book
Word Count: 1,470



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Running for Freedom



Written by Katherine Follett
Illustrated by Marcy Ramsey

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The Next Stop

It was too dark outside when I nudged her.

"No," Momma groaned, and waved her hand at me.

"Shh, now," I said. Finally, she opened her eyes, and I could see them shining in the dark.

"Daniel?" she whispered.

"It's time to go," I said. "I'm here to lead you. We're running!"

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A Famous Place on the Underground Railroad

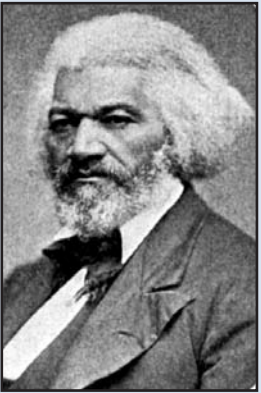


Artist's rendering: Levi and Catharine Coffin greet escaping slaves at their home in Newport, Indiana. The Coffins are credited with helping thousands of former slaves.

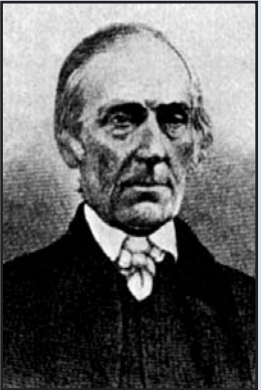


Today, the Levi Coffin House is a National Historic Landmark site and museum. Children can explore the small upstairs room where the Coffins hid slaves. A bed could be moved to conceal the door. They can also see a wagon used to hide slaves on the move.

Famous Faces on the Underground Railroad



Frederick Douglass was born into slavery, but escaped and became the publisher of the *North Star*, an anti-slavery newspaper. Douglass's house in Rochester, New York, was one of the last "stations" for hundreds of escaping slaves fleeing to Canada.



Levi Coffin was a white anti-slavery activist in Ohio who reported helping an average of 100 escaping slaves a year for 33 years. His house, where many slaves hid, rested, were fed, and clothed, is on the National Register of Historic Places.



Harriet Tubman was a former slave who became known as "Moses" for her 19 trips to the South to help at least 300 escaping slaves flee north. At one time, a reward of \$40,000 was offered for her capture.



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Running

It was too dark outside. Usually, we got up before the sun rose, but I could tell that it was too early for my father to be shaking my arm.

“Daniel!” he whispered.

“No,” I groaned. I had been picking cotton all day. I could still feel my fingers throbbing as I tried to wave my father away. He picked me up by the arms and carried me outside.

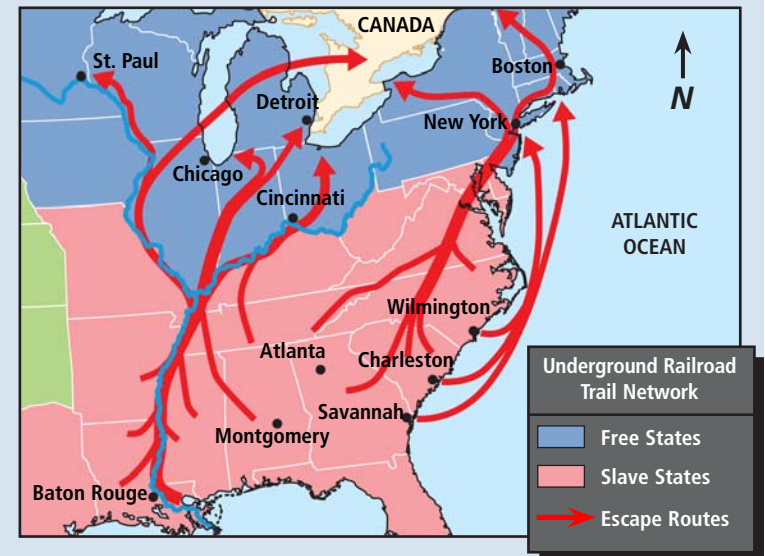
“Shh, now,” he said, and I fell asleep again.

Daddy was the carriage driver for Mr. and Mrs. Winters, our owners. My mother had been a nanny for little Mary Winters. But Mary was grown now, and Momma was gone.

The Underground Railroad

The Underground Railroad was a loosely organized network of homes, trails, and people whose goal was to help slaves from southern states flee north to freedom. After the Fugitive Slave Act of 1850, the goal was to get escaping slaves as far north as Canada. The Fugitive Slave Act allowed slave owners to recapture escaped slaves in the northern free states and take them back to the South. Hefty fines and jail time were the punishment for anyone who helped escaping slaves.

After some slaves were freed, they went back south to lead others north to freedom.



"We have to trust him," Daddy said. But his voice didn't sound so sure.

Mr. Avery led us through the streets. The white people ignored us. The black people glanced quickly at us and then looked away.

Mr. Avery led us onto the bridge. I was crying, because I was still so afraid that he would turn us around and sell us again. But then I felt my feet touch the soft soil on the Ohio side of the river. Somehow, my tired feet could tell that I was free. Even though I was still in the shackles, I felt the weight of them disappear.

"We did it, Daniel," Daddy said with a shaky voice. "Someday we'll go back for her."



I must have muttered in my sleep, because I heard Daddy saying "Shh," again. I woke up and saw dark trees. I heard soft footsteps all around. I looked over my shoulder and saw the bent back and shoulders of Emmy, another field worker on the cotton plantation. She walked with her head down, moving at a very quick pace.

"Can I get down?" I asked my father.

Emmy whipped her head around and gave me a cold look. She put her fingers to her pursed lips and kept moving. Suddenly, I realized what was going on. We were running.





Momma

Momma was sold a few years ago, when I was still too young to work in the fields. Mrs. Winters used to send me to the local inn, where I did cleaning. The inn paid me for my work. But I had to take the money right home and give it to Mrs. Winters. She would count every cent and tell Momma to spank me good if she thought even one penny was missing.

We met the white man, Mr. Avery, just before dawn. Emmy wished us luck before she headed south again to find more slaves and lead them to freedom. Mr. Avery took most of our clothes and packed them in a trunk. He put us in shackles. Daddy looked scared. I suddenly wondered if this was all a trick for Mr. Avery to capture runaway slaves. I started to cry. I hated those chains. All I could think about was how Momma's hands and feet would have been in them as they led her away.





The River

We passed many days in hidden spaces in the homes and barns of people who helped us along the way. We spent many nights walking silently through the woods, cold and hungry. We had little food of our own and had to rely on the people who helped us to give us food. Now came the hard part. We had to cross the Ohio River in order to get to freedom.

Emmy gathered us in a tight circle. “You’re going to have to do something that seems completely wrong,” she whispered. “You’re going to go up to a white man and let him put you in chains. But he’s going to help you. You’ll look like his slaves. No one will suspect you when he leads you across the bridge.”

Momma would make it look like she was doing what she was told, but she would just tap me lightly. I would yell and cry like it really hurt. That seemed to make Mrs. Winters happy.

One night I came home from the inn as usual. It had been a windy day, and a dollar had blown out of my hands. Mrs. Winters noticed the missing money right away. She called in the cook and told her to spank me hard. The cook didn’t know about Momma’s trick, so she spanked me as hard as she could. I yelled and cried for real. After it was over, I asked the cook where Momma had gone.

“Well, Mistress Mary’s about grown now. I suppose they sold your momma to someone who needed her,” she said.

I felt like my heart fell down a deep well and landed on the bottom with a cold splash. Daddy’s eyes looked hollow when I got back to our one-room shack. He only said one thing about Momma being sold: “Someday, we’re going to be free, and we’ll find her.” That day of freedom was today.

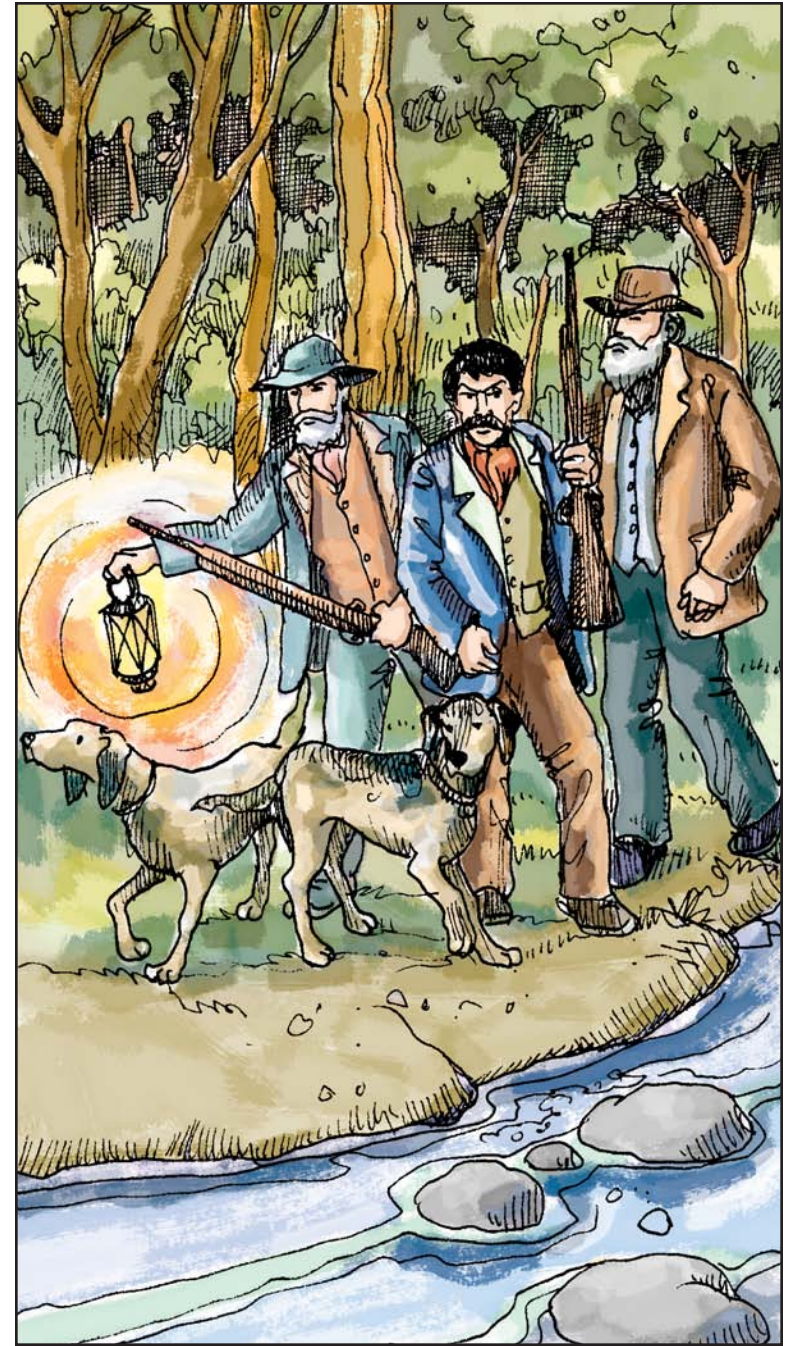


The Barn

"Haul in," Emmy said. She pointed across a field at an old sagging barn, and we went inside. She felt around the floor until she found a trap door. She motioned us all into a small space under the floor. Everyone had to lie down in order to fit. Emmy closed the door behind her and it was silent.

Eventually I leaned toward Daddy. "Do we have to stay here all day?" He nodded and put his fingers to his lips.

"Sleep," he said. I didn't think I could sleep. I still felt like I had energy running through all my muscles. Soon we would find Momma! But I kept still.

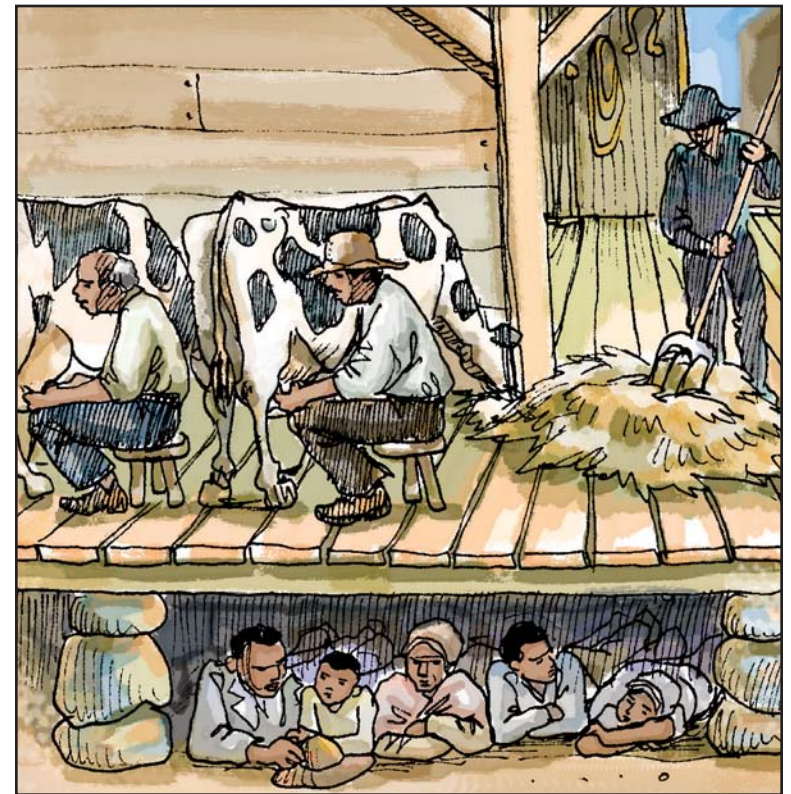


We heard the men and hounds come crashing down the gully. They came to the edge of the swamp where the water kept the dogs from following our scent. The dogs howled and roared like they wanted to charge across the swamp and attack us. Then I heard the sound of a shotgun loading.

The roar of the gun swept across the water and echoed back. It startled me so badly that I made a peep before I could stop it. Emmy's hand swiftly and silently came up and closed over my mouth. The sound of another shot blasted out across the water. The men were trying to scare us into making noise and showing ourselves.

After a long time, they turned and led the hounds back up the gully. We kept still for another half an hour before we dared to creep back out of the swamp. There was no more running or laughing when we got back on the road.

Sunlight began to peek through the boards above us. Feet began to thump over our heads. I could tell that all of us were scared. No one was sleeping. We heard the other slaves talking as they worked. Did they know we were here? I almost wished that I could peek my head through the trapdoor and whisper, "Come with us! Come and be free!" But I kept silent, and they kept working.



The Gully

The hours last a long time when you're crouched in an uncomfortable position. But finally, night fell. The noises from the barn had been silent for some time, but still we waited. Finally, Emmy pushed open the door and a gust of the sweetest fresh air in the world came rolling down into that tiny space.



She led us into the woods again, and we all began walking. I was so happy to be out of that cramped space that I began to run. The others started going faster, too. We came to a dark road and started hopping, skipping, and jumping. Someone in the back even giggled. We were going to be free! I could feel the cold air from the north pouring down toward me and making my legs springy and light.

Suddenly, I heard sounds that made every inch of my skin feel like ice. Hounds! Someone was coming after us. We all looked to Emmy.

“Gully!” she whispered. She went leaping through the trees, and we leaped after her. We rushed down a steep hill until our legs hit swampy water. It got deeper and deeper. It was up to my thighs, then my chest. Daddy pulled me up on his shoulders. It looked like we were in trouble—we couldn’t swim, but Emmy led us toward the opposite shore. There were stumps sticking out of the water there, and if we stood still, under the pale moonlight our heads would look like more stumps, especially to someone across the swamp.