



MEAN TO BE FREE

A Flight North
on the Underground Railroad

A Drama in Two Acts for Young People 8-12

BY
JOANNA HALPERT KRAUS

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NEW PLAYS FOR CHILDREN
Box 2181 Grand Central Station
New York, New York 10017

* Runagate, Runagate

Rises from their anguish and their power,

Harriet Tubman,

woman of earth, whipscarred,
a summoning, a shining

Mean to be free

And this was the way of it, brethren brethren,
way we journeyed from Can't to Can.
Moon so bright and no place to hide,
the cry up and the patterollers riding,
hound dogs belling in bladed air.
And fear starts a-murbling, Never make it,
we'll never make it. Hush that now,
and she's turned upon us, leveled pistol
glinting in the moonlight:
Dead folks can't jaybird-talk, she says;
you keep on going now or die, she says.

Wanted Harriet Tubman alias The General
alias Moses Stealer of Slaves

In league with Garrison Alcott Emerson
Garrett Douglass Thoreau John Brown

Armed and known to be Dangerous

Wanted Reward Dead or Alive

Tell me, Ezekiel, oh tell me do you see
mailed Jehovah coming to deliver me?

Hoot-owl calling in the ghosted air,
five times calling to the hants in the air.
Shadow of a face in the scary leaves,
shadow of a voice in the talking leaves:

Come ride-a my train

Oh that train, ghost-story train
through swamp and savanna moving moving,
over trestles of dew, through caves of the wish,
Midnight Special on a saber track moving moving
first stop Mercy and the last Hallelujah.

Come ride-a my train

Mean mean mean to be free.

* last verse of "Runagate, Runagate" by Robert Hayden
from SELECTED POEMS
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MEAN TO BE FREE was first produced at Hunter College Playhouse in New York City, under the auspices of Hunter College High School by the Junior Theatre Club on June 18, 1968. The cast and credits were as follows:

MEAN TO BE FREE

A Flight North
on the Underground Railroad

by Joanna Halpert Kraus
directed by Patricia Minos
settings by Susan Wyman
costumes by Camille Acampora

CAST OF CHARACTERS:

Hedy.....Vanetta Speller
Tom.....Gail Benjamin
Moses.....Cheryl Cottrell
Linda.....Lynn Richardson
Joe.....Beverly Moran
Thomas Garrett.....Maggie Cowlan
First Townsman.....Carol Schuler
Second Townsman.....Sue Faerman
Sarah Garrett.....Diane Janoff
Policeman.....Carmella Ruisi
Oliver Johnson.....Lisa Molho
Conductor.....Rachel Feldman

MEAN TO BE FREE is based on historical records of the escape of runaway slaves kept by William Still of Philadelphia and published in 1872 under the title of The Underground Railroad and on the biography of Harriet Tubman, Harriet, the Moses of Her People, written in 1886 by Sarah Elizabeth Bradford.

Some of the characters - Tom, Hedy, Miss Nancy, Linda, the bounty hunters, the bricklayers, the policeman, the railroad conductor - are fictional. They are typical of the more than three hundred runaway slaves, including children and babies, and the people who either helped them or sought rewards for their capture during the course of Harriet Tubman's nineteen trips north to freedom.

Others are actual people whose dialogue contains quotations from their known statements and letters. Thomas Garrett and his wife lived in Wilmington, Delaware. Through their Quaker home, nearly three thousand fugitive slaves passed safely. Oliver Johnson was head of the Anti-Slavery Office in New York City. Joe Bailey's story can be found in the Underground Railroad records, and his name can be found on the posters printed to aid in his capture. Harriet Tubman was born in 1820 on a Tidewater, Maryland plantation. Before her death in 1913, she had helped more than three hundred slaves escape, acted as a nurse and a spy for the Union Army and established a home for the poor. In 1897, as a result of Mrs. Bradford's book, she was invited to attend Queen Victoria Regina's Diamond Jubilee in England. Today, in New York City, there is an elementary public school named in her honor.

It is hoped that the production of MEAN TO BE FREE will help illuminate one aspect of the Negro's long neglected contribution to our American heritage.

CAST OF CHARACTERS

HEDY: Age nine
TOM: Age eleven
MISS NANCY: Wife to the owner of the Tidewater, Maryland plantation. She is quick tempered, self-centered and determined to have her own way on all plantation matters.
MOSES: (Harriet Tubman), a former slave in her mid-thirties, short and plain in appearance. Now she is a conductor on the Underground Railroad. She is deeply religious.
LINDA: Age seventeen, formerly a lady's maid on a plantation. She is delicate and spoiled.
JOE: In his mid-thirties. A former overseer of a plantation. He is handsome, hard working and has an innate sense of dignity.
THOMAS GARRETT: A devout Quaker whose house has become one of the stops on the Underground Railroad.
SARAH GARRETT: His wife.
TWO MEN: They search for fugitive slaves in order to collect the reward money.
TWO BRICKLAYERS
ONE POLICEMAN
OLIVER JOHNSON: Head of the Anti-Slavery Office in New York City.
RAILROAD CONDUCTOR

NOTE: Throughout the play, it is suggested that a guitarist sit on the side of the stage accompanying the few songs that are sung by individual members of the cast. It is also suggested that he provide background music during the escape scene and during set changes.

SETTINGS

ACT ONE
Scene 1 A Tidewater Maryland plantation just before the Civil War, autumn, 1857.
Scene 2 A grass swamp area in Maryland at night a week later
ACT TWO
Scene 1 Thomas Garrett's small Quaker house in Wilmington, Del., two days later just before dawn
Scene 2 The outskirts of Wilmington the next day
Scene 3 Oliver Johnson's Anti-Slavery office in New York City a week later
Scene 4 The Railroad train bound for Niagara Falls, Ontario, the next day

ACT ONE

Scene 1

SETTING:

A Tidewater, Maryland plantation, just before the Civil War, 1857. A backdrop, if used, would suggest fields of hay and stacked cornfields. On stage there is a windowless log cabin, its chinks filled with mud, which serves as the laundry cabin. The entrance to it is merely an opening in the wall. Inside there are huge washtubs, scrub boards, etc. It is an autumn, Saturday afternoon.

AT RISE:

HEDY, age nine, drags a heavy wash tub over to a pile of sheets. She kneels and begins the laborious chore of scrubbing the sheets clean.

TOM

(TOM, age eleven, enters, terrified. He sinks on the floor beside HEDY. His shirt is bloody and torn. He is half crying)

Hedy!

HEDY

Tom!

(Stops her work)

What happened?

TOM

Hedy, it hurts bad. You gotta help me. He used the whip.

HEDY

How many times?

TOM

PLENTY!

HEDY

(Lifts his shirt gingerly)
Here, I'll wash it off for you.
(During the next few speeches, she cleans the wound)

HEDY (Cont'd)

Tom, you get into any more trouble and they're gonna sell you down river...tie your hands and feet to a big rope, the way they did Old Jim. Who beat you?

TOM

Master Ed.

HEDY

Master Ed! What'd you do?

TOM

All I done was take a peach. It was there hangin' on the bough. Big and juicy. Just waitin' to be 'et. I was hungry. Real hungry. There it was. Wasn't anyone around. Oh, I know I shouldn't have done it.

HEDY

(Shocked)

You mean that peach tree near the Big House window?

(TOM nods)

But that's Miss Nancy's own tree. She planted it herself. I heard Mama say so.

TOM

It was quiet. All the white folks were having lunch. I could smell the food. Didn't think no one could see me. But Miss Nancy, she looked out the window and screamed, "Robber! Robber!" And Master Ed came out with his whip... with his whip, Hedy.

HEDY

Mama told you not to go near the Big House. And you shouldn't steal, Tom. Mama told you that.

(HEDY finishes wiping the wound)

Does it feel better, Tom?

TOM

(Nods)

Thanks, Hedy.

(MISS NANCY sweeps in. TOM moves away.
HEDY conceals cloth)

MISS NANCY

I thought I heard a boy's voice down here. A familiar boy's voice.

(To HEDY)

Looks to me like there's plenty of work to do, Hedy. And talking doesn't get it done.

HEDY

Yes, Miss Nancy.

(HEDY begins scrubbing again)

MISS NANCY

(To TOM)

So this is the way you repay Master Ed for feeding and clothing you year after year. First, you steal. Now, you stop Hedy from doing her work. You should be ashamed of yourself. But I can see you're not. And I can also see that it didn't take you long to forget Master Ed's lesson this noon. Well, I'll see to it, Tom, that you get another one, one you won't forget so easily!

(Her anger mounts)

A boy like you should just be sold. Let someone else worry about you.

(Pause, says to herself)

Yes, that's a very good idea. I'll talk to Master Ed this afternoon.

(To HEDY)

Hedy, remember those sheets have to dry in the sunlight. You'll have to work a lot faster than you are now. Meanwhile, Tom, get a wash basin and help your sister until I get back. You've made her lose enough time already.

(MISS NANCY exits. HEDY gets a wash basin for TOM)

HEDY

Oh, Tom. SOLD! Then, we'd never ever see you again. She couldn't mean that. Maybe if you work real hard this afternoon and help me finish, she'll forget about it.

TOM

No, Hedy. She ain't the kind to forget. And I ain't doin' no laundry either. That's women's work. Miss Nancy knows no man does that kind of work. She knows that, but she told me to do it, just the same. She's just a

HEDY

SH-H-H, Tom! She might come back and hear you!

(Sound of whippoorwill)

TOM

(Excited)

Hedy, do you know what that is?

HEDY

Sure. A bird down by the river.

MISS NANCY

(Offstage)

Hedy, I better not find you talking instead of washing.

(HEDY quickly continues to scrub the sheets)

HEDY
 C'mon, Tom. Won't you help me finish?

TOM
 (Looks around to make sure they're
 alone)
 That's a whippoorwill, Hedy.

HEDY
 (Scared)
 Mama says that sound means death, cause a whippoorwill doesn't
 ever sing down by the river.

TOM
 That sound ain't no bird, Hedy.
 (Whispers)
 That's Moses calling.

HEDY
 WHO? MOSES! Moses is in the Bible. Mama taught me that.
 You're just trying to fool me. Moses lived some hundred
 and thousands of years ago.

TOM
 Not that one, Hedy. And don't say the same so loud. She's
 a woman livin' now. And she takes people North, underground,
 and when they come up, they're all free and safe and happy.

HEDY
 You're crazy, Tom.

TOM
 No, I ain't. Listen, Hedy.

(TOM comes close to HEDY to tell her
 the amazing tale)

I hear the old men talking, late at night. They say Moses
 is tall, tallest woman in the world. They say she can see
 things a l-o-n-g way off, even in the dark, just like
 a bat. They say she can run faster than rabbits, climb
 trees like a possum, jump over fences, and fly over streams....
 and that she can hear a patroller sneeze twenty miles away.
 There's a price on her head....but ain't no one can catch her.

(Sound of whippoorwill.
 TOM gets the idea)

And Hedy listen, Hedy, I'm gonna run away with her...
 tonight!

HEDY
 (Looks around to see if they were
 overheard)
 Tom, if you run away, they'll send the dogs after you and
 they'll find you and eat you.

TOM
They won't catch me. Not with Moses.

HEDY
But Master Ed says the people up North fatten up runaway slaves and then they eat them.

TOM
He just says that to keep us all from runnin' away. Hedy, do you want to scrub sheets all your life?

(HEDY shakes her head)

Then, come with me. We could make it together.

HEDY
(Looks around again)
Ain't it dangerous Tom, to run away? Besides there's Mama and Papa. Anyway, how you gonna get past, Miss Nancy? She'll be back any minute.

TOM
If they're gonna sell me anyway, Hedy, I ain't got nothin' to lose. If they sell me down river, I'll never get away..... ever. Now's my only chance.

(Tries to persuade her)
Hedy... Hedy, don't you want to make Mama and Papa proud of you? Do somethin' beside scrubbin' sheets?

HEDY
(Gently)
Oh, Tom, what could I do?

TOM
You could go to school, Hedy. And then you could send Mama and Papa a letter and tell 'em we're fine. And then.....

HEDY
(Interrupts, laughing)
They can't read, and we can't write. Who you foolin'?

TOM
But we could learn. Oh, Hedy, come with me. Up North all the children go to school...girls too.

(Sound of whippoorwill. TOM tries to persuade HEDY)

Hedy, it's Saturday. That's the day Moses always starts. They can't print no poster about us on a Sunday, so we'd get at least one day's start.

(Convincing her)
And Hedy, when we're free, then we could help Mama and Papa and we could all have a nice little house together.
(She puts the sheets down thoughtfully)

TOM (Cont'd)
Oh, Hedy, c'mon. Leave those sheets. Leave 'em forever.

HEDY
(Rises)
Could we really help Mama and Papa come North? Really? And all have a nice house together?

TOM
(Confident)
Sure we can. Besides there'll be people up there to help us.

HEDY
And could I really learn to read and write, Tom?

TOM
Sure you could, Hedy. But you'll never get a chance to learn down here.

(HEDY stands uncertainly)

Hedy. Hedy, if you don't come with me, now, I might never see you - EVER!

(TOM crosses to entrance to see if MISS NANCY is in sight)
Now's my chance, Hedy. Miss Nancy's just gone inside the Big House. I gotta go now. If they see me goin' I'm as good as dead.

(TOM starts out)

HEDY
Wait. Wait for me, Tom. I'm comin' too.
(Softly)

Goodbye, old sheets. Goodbye, forever!

TOM
Quick, Hedy. NOW!
(TOM grabs her hand. the curtains close)

(The escape is choreographed. Their movements are tense, punctuated with the sound of the whippoorwill. Several times they think they are being followed. Finally they reach their destination and collapse near the riverbank. There are clumps of bushes along the bank)

HEDY
You go on alone, Tom. I can't. I've got to stop and rest. I bet Moses went on. We've walked for hours.

TOM
You can't stop now, Hedy.

HEDY

Sh.. Down there. Who's that?

(They crouch down. Slowly a shape comes toward them. MOSES enters. She has a deep scar on her forehead like a dent and old scars on the back of her neck. She is thirty-seven years old, five feet tall and has a rich-husky voice. She calls like a whippoorwill)

TOM

(Whispers)

Are you Moses?

MOSES

(Nods)

What are you children doing down here? Down here by the river bank this time of night. It's dangerous. Your mama and papa gonna be mighty worried.

TOM

(Rises)

We wanna go with you.

MOSES

Go? Where, child? Just where do you think I'm plannin' on going?

HEDY

Oh, Tom, she's not gonna take us. You said she was the tallest woman in the world and she'd take us North, and you were wrong the whole time.

(Starts to cry)

MOSES

(Bends down. Sees HEDY's feet are torn and bleeding. Lifts them)

You done come a long way, child, to find me.

TOM

We been looking for you all night. We ran away from home. You gotta take us.

MOSES

Is that any way to ask a question? Why'd you run away?

(TOM looks embarrassed)

HEDY

Tom stole a peach. That's why, and Master Ed beat him!

MOSES

(Notices wound, says gently)

You won't get far stealin' Tom.

I know. (Humbly)

TOM

And then, Miss Nancy said she was gonna sell Tom!

HEDY

TOM

(Pleading)
Moses, please take us with you! We want a chance to grow up free. If I go back to Master Ed now, he'll sell me down river, and I'll never have another chance to get away. We mean to be free, Hedy and me.

MOSES

And once you get free, what do you mean to do?

TOM

I mean to be somebody... Not like Master Ed neither. But somebody I'm proud of... inside. And Hedy's gonna be a lady. A fine lady, like that lady from Boston. And she's gonna learn to read and write along with me, and.....

MOSES

(Interrupts laughing)

Well, now before you two children turn into the finest lady and the smartest gentleman that this world ever seen, we gotta get North first.

(Looks at the two small figures before her, uncertain that they can make the hard journey)

But this freedom train is goin' a long way. And the road ain't easy.

MOSES

You've got to sleep by day, walk by night. And never let folks know you're about. Watch me. You'll learn to hide as well as I can. You gotta walk so quiet that there's not even a sound of your bare feet on the earth. When you sleep, you gotta be so quiet that there's not a sound of breathing. Not a cough or a sneeze. Once this train starts, ain't no turning back.

TOM

Don't want to go back...ever!

HEDY

EVER.

MOSES

You're sure?

TOM

We're sure.

(HEDY nods)

MOSES

(Looks up at sky)
It's near daylight. We'll wait right here. There'll be
two coming to meet me here.

(Thoughtfully takes out pistol)
And I reckon there'll be a heavy price on the man's head.

TOM

Is that why you got a pistol?

MOSES

To protect us all, Tom. So no one falls off this train.

(Points to North Star)
Got to follow that star, and it's a long way off yet.
(Crouches in the bushes, so she can
barely be seen. HEDY crouches down
beside her)

HEDY

How can you tell if you're looking at the right one?

MOSES

That's easy. The star up there never moves. It doesn't rise
in the East or set in the West as the other stars seem to.
Anyone walking toward it could use it as a guide, because
it never moves.

(To TOM and HEDY)
Come on, children. You've got to melt in with the bushes.

TOM

Then you will take us?

HEDY

PLEASE!

MOSES

I never said "NO," yet.

(They hug each other, then exit)

ACT ONEScene 2SETTING:

A grass swamp area. There is an oak tree with Spanish moss in the center. There are the noises of the swamp at night and the swish of the river against the bank.

AT RISE:

JOE enters, followed by LINDA. JOE is in his mid-thirties, handsome, muscular, and a former overseer of a plantation. LINDA is 17, delicate, spoiled and a former lady's maid on a large plantation.

LINDA

(Sits down)

Joe, I'm not walkin' another step. I'm tired. We been walkin' and hidin' for a week now, since we met up with Moses and the two children. If she's so good at gettin' people North, how come there ain't no more along? And how come we ain't there yet? I think the old women's crazy.

JOE

She ain't crazy, Linda, so none of that foolish talk. Why, a week's nothing. Sometimes it takes months.

(Sits beside her)

Nothing's happened to us yet either, Linda, remember that. You and me gotta be careful. Remember we run away. I was hired out to be overseer of a plantation, and you were right there in the Big House as a lady's maid. They're gonna be looking for us - soon - if they ain't looking already. There's no turning back just cause your feet's sore. It's a miracle we ain't dead, LINDA. If it weren't for Moses, we would be. She sure do know where to hide out.

LINDA

(Sarcastically)

Strange houses where we hide in secret rooms, or in potato holes in cabins, or sleeping all day in a hollowed out haystack in the fields. I thought I was gonna die from chokin' in that stuff. I've had enough.

JOE

But you didn't die. She knows what she's doing.

LINDA

Joe, it ain't a woman's job to lead us, it don't make no sense.

MOSES

(Enters with TOM and HEDY)

Nobody asked whether I was man or woman when they put an axe in my hand or tied me by the waist to a mule. I been doing man's work all my life. I'm not afraid.

(Gives TOM and HEDY a scarf from her neck)

Here, fill this with all the berries you can find.

(TOM and HEDY work nearby throughout scene)

LINDA

Joe, I never should have listened to you. It's all your fault with your fancy talk of a better life. Well, if this is the life, I don't like it. I thought you meant we'd have some fun. Well, I don't see no tables lined with food or people welcomin' us. My dress is nearly torn off from briars pokin' at it, and my feet are covered with blisters and sores. As far as I can see, I ain't no better off than I was two weeks ago when I was still a lady's maid. I don't want to suffer like this for some fool notion in your head about freedom. That's book talk. All I want now is just to eat and sleep regular.

JOE

(Angry)

Just some fool notion? Is that what you call freedom? Linda, do you think your mistress would welcome you back if you went and said that to her? You think she'd throw her arms around you and say "Linda, honey, we sure did miss you."

(JOE takes out a bowie knife and sharpens it on rock throughout scene)

MOSES

It's too late, Linda. You're a runaway, remember that. You can't go back. You're wanted dead or alive and you're another man's property until you cross that line further north. If you don't want to go with us, then you'll die right here. I won't let you talk to anyone... anyone, you hear, about our plans. Too many lives are at stake, and one scared skinny young miss is not gonna stop my underground railroad, and the chance of Joe here and Tom and Hedy to go free... and your chance too, Linda, if you'd think a minute.

LINDA

(Subdued, but still complaining)

I don't want to think. I'm tired. None of us wanna go further. It ain't worth this travellin', footsore, backs achin', bellies achin'.

TOM

(Realizing how tired he is)

When will we get there, Moses?

HEDY

(Joining in)

I don't reckon I can walk much further.

LINDA

(Bitter)

Besides what makes you so sure it'll be any better when we get North? At least we were alive in Maryland. Where's this Canada we're heading for? I never heard of it before. This crazy talk about a North star. There are as many stars in the sky as grains of sand on the earth, it says so in the Bible. So how do you know which one's the North star for sure? Have you got a special message from up above? We may be heading right back for Maryland.

MOSES

(Firmly)

We're headin' for WILMINGTON, Delaware, and when you get there you'll be fed.

LINDA

(Skeptical)

Fed?

MOSES

(The time has come to boost their spirits)

Listen to me. There's a man in Wilmington, a quaker with a wide brimmed hat. He calls himself Thomas Garrett. He don't dress like us or look like us, - face as pale as cow's milk, but he's our friend and he's gonna give each one of you a pair of shoes to wear North and fresh milk and bread to eat soon as we get there.

HEDY

A pair of shoes? Honest? Real shoes?

MOSES

New shoes.

TOM

(Uncertain)

Milk? Bread? Do you mean it? Or are you just sayin' it to make us feel better?

MOSES

No, it's true. Thomas Garrett keeps a pail of milk and a loaf of bread always ready, always fresh, for God's poor that come to his door.

LINDA

God's poor. That sure is us all right.

MOSES

He's got a shoe store and one side wall of this shoe store swings open. Behind it is a whole room for us where we can be safe and sleep before goin' on.

LINDA

(Sarcastically to JOE)

In our new shoes. Sure. Well, I don't believe it. It sounds like crazy talk. Stories. I want to know where she 's really takin' us?

MOSES

For the last time we're goin' to Wilmington. I've made this trip eight times, and we've made it safely. Some folks say it can't be done. But it can. It was. And it will be done once more. Sure it's gonna be hard. Ain't no use saying "It's gonna be easy." But you'll be free. You can walk where you want to and say what you want to when you want to. You'll earn your own money for your own work. You won't be in any chains. And when you look at the sun each mornin', you can say, "Glory to God. I'm free and I can become somethin'." You can stand tall, Tom and Hedy; head high, Joe; proud, Linda.

LINDA

Proud, nothin'. As I see it, it still amounts to the same thing. You can work from sun up to sun down for someone else.

JOE

No. Don't you understand nothing? You'll be workin' for yourself. Ain't nobody holding a whip over you. I think there must be a whole different feeling when you work for yourself. Like there's nothing between you and the sun. Up there in Canada, I hear folks like us go to school and some do the teaching in the school. Ain't that something? Something to live up to?

(Laughs softly)

Maybe to tell my grandchildren.

LINDA

(To MOSES)

Just answer one question. I don't understand why you do all this. Make these trips. Why do you bother with us, for instance?

MOSES

We all God's children, ain't we? Somebody got to set you free, and looks like the good Lord selected me this time around. Every time I go there's more to come back for. When I was Tom and Hedy's age, I used to see half starved runaways brought back. I cried when I saw some of them branded with an "R", some with their ears cropped, some whipped, some sent South with a chain gang to work in the rice fields or in the hot sun of the sugar and cotton plantations. I began to wonder about the other runaways I didn't see come back. Master said he's sold them or to frighten us he'd said that the dogs ate them. But I didn't believe it. So I used to wonder how come just one of them

MOSES (Cont'd)

didn't come back to us and say, "It's not impossible. You can do it, too" I guess that's why I done it. That's why I keep goin' back. So the others will know. To give them courage.

LINDA

Well, I ain't no hero like you. I'm goin' back. No one treated me bad at the Big House. I ate regular anyhow, and I slept at night instead of creepin' through swamps.

MOSES

(Takes out pistol, points it at LINDA's shoulder blades, calmly)

No, Linda, there's no goin' back on this road. Move ahead, or die here.

TOM

I don't see what she came for in the first place.

LINDA

When Joe came to me talkin' about freedom, I got to thinkin' about what he said. The folks in the Big House treated me all right. But after that, every time I want to eat the food burned with master ownin' it. Nothin' was mine... even the air was part of the property. And I knew Joe was right. I was just another piece of property to be sold or beaten when they felt like it. And then I asked myself what Joe asked. How can a handful of potatoes and cornmeal thrown at you taste sweet? How can clothing thrown at you feel soft? How can plantation air ever be fresh?

HEDY

If you feel like that, what are you fussin' about?

LINDA

I didn't know walkin' to freedom was goin' to be like this. I know I can't walk clear to another country.

JOE

(Pleading)

C'mon Linda. Don't ruin everything. Come with us. Please. I'll help you. Moses will help you. Ain't no better conductor in the whole underground Railroad. You'll see. We'll make it..

(LINDA turns, slowly, to join them)

MOSES

(Happy at LINDA's decision)

C'mon now all of you march! We got a long way to get before daylight, and this freedom train ain't makin' any more stops tonight.

(They begin walking. There is the sound of hoofbeats. The sound is low at first but it increases in volume as the scene progresses)

1-2-15

JOE

(In a panic, freezes)
They're coming for me, Moses. Hear 'em.
(Sound of dogs in the distance)

HEDY

(Frightened)
Oh, is Miss Nancy comin' after us?

LINDA

(Starts to cry)
I told you. I told you. OH? We're all gonna die.

MOSES

Sh. All of you. Break off some pine branches.

TOM

What for?

MOSES

(Ignores him)
Linda, tear up your petticoat. We're gonna fool those
dogs..

(TOM brings over pine branches and
LINDA and HEDY give her strips of
petticoat. MOSES works as she
talks)

(Distributes pine boughs and rags to each
as she talks)

Take this pine bough and take this rag and tie a tail on
yourself that will brush behind you the whole way. That's
all the hounds is ever gonna smell is plain old pine trees.
This Freedom train is just startin'. It ain't got up
its high speed. And fears gotta ride on this train. Right
up front with us. Make friends with it. Shake its hand.
It's one of the angels that's ridin' with us, protectin'
you, remindin' you to be steady, silent and careful. It's
gonna get a lot colder as we get on - and you're all gonna
go hungry. But at the end of the ride, God willin', we're
gonna be free. We're gonna be free and safe and happy -
if the good Lord chooses it.

(They tie them on. HEDY starts to
laugh at TOM)

HEDY

You look funny, Tom.

MOSES

Hush, child. Not a sound. Take your brother's hand, Hedy.
Joe, take Linda's hand.

(MOSES takes HEDY'S hand)

MOSES (Cont'd)

We're gonna make a chain for the next few miles. When I stop you stop. If I fall to the ground, you fall to the ground. Don't breathe a word.

(The children start as if it's a game)

Now listen. Any old body can go through the woods crashing and mashing things down like a cow. That's easy. You gotta move like an Injun. So quiet, even a bird in the nest don't hear you - and fly up. So quiet, not even a leaf makes a rustle. Not even a twig cracks back on itself when you come through them.

(Points to the star, and they begin)

Remember that's where this train is goin'.

(This section should be choreographed. As they walk, MOSES stops dead. They all freeze. She listens. They continue. Behind it all, we hear the steady rhythm of horses' hoofbeats and the sound of hounds in pursuit. At one point MOSES drops to the ground, and they drop too. The tension and weariness mount. Suddenly, MOSES points to the sky and in the distance we hear a rooster announcing dawn. There is now silence around them, and they realize they are safe for the moment. The sky is visibly lighter.

We've lost them. We're safe for awhile. Joe, see if you can get us a swamp rabbit. The rest of you sleep while you can.

(Silently they find spots to hide and sleep amongst the bushes and undergrowth. MOSES kneels and prays. HEDY crawls to her and tugs at her sleeve. MOSES goes on praying. HEDY tugs again)

HEDY

(Whining)

I'm hungry.

MOSES

Go to sleep.

(Goes on praying)

HEDY

(Doesn't budge)

I'm hungry. Ain't had nothin' to eat since yesterday.

MOSES

(Firmly)

When you wake up, we'll eat.

HEDY

But I'm hungry now.

MOSES

Well, I reckon we could all do with a good meal, Hedy; but there isn't enough food for that. Maybe later tonight Joe will catch us a swamp rabbit.

HEDY

I could eat a whole one myself. Right now. Without cooking it first, even. Moses, when we go underground, will there be food then?

MOSES

(Laughing gently)

What are you talking about, Hedy?

HEDY

Tom said you led people underground and when they got there, everything was fine and beautiful - and when they came up, they were free, just like that.

(She starts to cry from exhaustion, hunger and fear)

MOSES

(Holds her in her arms)

Oh, honey, it ain't gonna be like that. It's gonna be on this real earth and we're gonna be creepin' North in the night through trees and swamps, because we've got plenty of enemies around us by daylight.

HEDY

(Fresh outburst of sobs)

I wanna go home. I wanna go home. I miss Mama and Papa.

MOSES

(Comforting her)

Sure you do, honey. And I'll bet they're thinking of you too. Right now. Hedy, can you see that star up there?

(Hedy looks up and nods)

It's almost mornin! You can barely see it now. But it's travelled millions of miles so you could see its light every night. And it's tellin' you to be brave, not to give up now. Millions of miles just to tell you that.

HEDY

(Slowly, questioningly)

I guess if that star can go all that way, I guess I can go a little further, maybe. Only when we gonna get there, Moses, when?

MOSES

Why, honey, we only been walking a little more than a week. I reckon we'll be in Wilmington soon. But then we gotta go clear to Canada.

HEDY

Why we gotta go all that way? Why can't we just stay with the man who's gonna give us all new shoes? Can I pick any color I want?

MOSES

Them shoes is to help you walk and the color does not matter. Any more of that lazy girl talk, and you won't get any shoes at all, Miss Hedy.

HEDY

(Subdued)

Is Canada very far? Very cold?

MOSES

Yes, it is.

HEDY

Why do we have to go so far?

MOSES

Didn't used to, Hedy. But seven years ago in 1850---

HEDY

What happened then?

MOSES

Now child, if you'd stop askin' so many questions and give me a chance to answer, I'd tell you. Seven years ago the government passed a law. Said runaway slaves couldn't have a trial by jury. Said they'd punish anyone tryin' to help us escape.

HEDY

Punish?

MOSES

If some people find out Mr. Garrett is helpin' us, they may just put him in jail.

HEDY

Why?

MOSES

Because the law says they can. Sometimes folks who are scared act like cowards and sometimes they pass laws to make them sound brave. They call the law the New Fugitive Slave Law. Sounds important. But inside you know the men who passed it were just scared.

HEDY

Scared of what? Of me? What for? I wouldn't hurt no one. Neither would Tom. You just ask him.

MOSES

Scared that you and Tom and others like you really mean to be free. to stand tall.

MOSES (Cont'd)

(Crisply)
 So since I can't trust Uncle Sam with our people no longer
 I gotta take 'em even further, up to Canada. And when we
 get there, you gotta promise me you're gonna learn to
 read, Hedy, and write and you're gonna amount to somethin'
 and folks are gonna say, "There goes Hedy. She's some
 fine brave girl."

HEDY

I'm gonna try, Moses. I'm really gonna try. But I don't
 think I'll ever be as brave as you.

MOSES

Hush, now, honey. You sleep awhile. You gotta rest to
 grow up taller.

(Puts her shawl around her.)

Sings softly a chorus of "GO DOWN
 MOSES.

Lights come up softly and then fade to
 indicate the day has passed and it is
 now twilight. MOSES is asleep with HEDY
 in her arms. LINDA and TOM are asleep,
 nearby. JOE enters, shakes MOSES
 urgently)

JOE

(Whispers)
 I went near the road. There wasn't anyone around. But it
 looked like a horse team had gone by - maybe a few hours
 ago. Looks like they lost this on the way.

MOSES

(Picks up poster)
 A runaway poster. About you Joe?
 (He nods)
 Read it to me.

JOE

(Scans it)
 "Reward, \$1000. Wanted alive. Valuable man." Valuable
 man. First time I ever heard that.

MOSES

Does it go on to give your name and description of you?

JOE

(Nods, reads to himself, then aloud)
 "Believed to be heading North."

TOM

(Incredulous)
 Joe! Can you read?!

JOE
Enough to know we're in trouble.

TOM
(Nudging HEDY)
Hedy, Joe can really read!

MOSES
(Jumps to her feet, wakes LINDA)
Come on children. We're gonna have to leave this place... now...fast. We're still in danger. We're gonna wade in the water so no one will see our footprints. We gotta go a long way tonight, and even your breathin's gotta be soft. We're in trouble. Someone's lookin' for us and lookin' right around here, and if they find us, we'll never live to tell about it.

(LIGHTS DIM to show passage of time. LIGHTS UP. They are making their way precariously along the river bank)

TOM
(Whispers)
Moses, I'm cold.

MOSES
Sh.

(Clap of thunder. HEDY starts to scream and TOM covers her mouth. LIGHTNING flashes in the sky)

LINDA
Storm comin'. We better stop and find shelter.

MOSES
No shelter tonight. We gotta keep movin'. If the heavens all open up, we gotta keep goin'. Only a few more miles and then we can stop. We've got to cross that line into Delaware or nothin' will matter again.

TOM
Moses, it's beginning to rain!

MOSES
I know, honey. Praise God there's no moon and there's a fog rollin' in. Ain't no one gonna see us tonight. You've been out before in the rain, Hedy. Didn't hurt you before. Won't hurt you now. You just follow me.

HEDY
How do you know we're even goin' in the right direction? We can't see the North Star now.

MOSES

Come here, and I'll show you. You feel the bark on the tree, this way. There, can you feel the side the moss is thickest on?

HEDY

(Feels tree)

YES!

TOM

What good does that do?

MOSES

The north side of the tree hardly ever gets sun. That means it's the north side where the moss grows thickest.

TOM

It's cold. I ain't never been so cold before, Moses.

MOSES

(Lifts her head up, taking in the air. It is sharp and biting. She is jubilant)

There's a north wind, Tom. Come clear from Canada. There'll be frost on the ground tonight. Praise God! We're getting there!

(Stops)

We cross the river there. It's the narrowest part. (She steps into the river -- on the side of the stage, so they will exit into the wings)

LINDA

You gonna wade that river!

MOSES

Runnin' water leaves no trace. And we gotta cross it here. We gotta cross that line.

LINDA

That does it. I'll wade no freezin' water for no crazy woman.

(JOE follows MOSES)

JOE

I'm coming Moses.

TOM

Look, it's up to her knees.

LINDA

It's up to his waist.

HEDY
It's as high as Moses' chin!

(Pause. They watch, fearing the worst)

TOM, HEDY, LINDA
They made it!

LINDA
Joe's waving from the other side. He's coming back to help us. C'mon children. We're crossing too.

(Grasps their hands. Realization)

No wonder they call her Moses!

(They start)

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene 1

The interior of THOMAS GARRET'S Quaker home in Wilmington, Delaware. We see the front room, a shoe store with a front door up center. Up right is an old wooden desk and chair. Stage right on the diagonal is a wall lined with shoe boxes. A few boots and shoes are displayed. In front of the wall are chairs for customers. One panel of this wall leads to the secret room stage left. The room is dark and windowless. On the floor are a few pallets and blankets to lie on. At the back of this room there is a water pitcher, basin, and a thick candle on a stand. It is just before dawn. We hear three knocks in rapid succession. This is repeated a second time.

THOMAS

(Enters, wearing traditional quaker garb, appropriate for the late hour. He opens the door slightly)

Who goes there?

MOSES

Friend.

(She uses the secret code)

I have four parcels with me.

THOMAS

(Opens the door wide)

Come in quickly, friends. I have room and thee are welcome.

(HEDY is half asleep. THOMAS carries her in. JOE carries LINDA, who is ill. MOSES and TOM enter)

Sit down, my friends. Sit down.

(Carries over a pail of milk, ladle, and tin cups)

I am glad to see thee, Moses. I was not sure if thee was alive or dead.

(Serves milk)

MOSES

Alive, praise the Lord! But I have a risky cargo. Joe here has \$1000 on his head.

THOMAS

(Takes a loaf of bread from desk and slices it)

Joe...yes...I think I saw the poster. We shall do our best to make sure no one gets that reward while you are here.

THOMAS (contd)

(Distributes bread)

Is the girl ill?

JOE

Linda's been bad since yesterday.

THOMAS

Let us hope that rest will help, for I dare not call a doctor.

HEDY

(Wakes up sleepily)

Moses, I'm hungry.

THOMAS

(With affection)

I see thee are hungry, child, and tired. Thee must have food and rest. And we will start with the food!

HEDY

(To TOM)

Why does he talk so funny?

TOM

Sh! Moses said he was a Quaker, and they all talk that way.

(Munching the bread)

Everything's just like Moses said.

THOMAS

I see thee will need new shoes.

HEDY

It was all true. It really was!

THOMAS

(To MOSES)

Can thee rest here today? This evening I will send you on. There is more danger at present than before.

LINDA

More danger, Lord, I can't go on. I can't.

MOSES

She has been ill since yesterday, but we had to get to your house before we could risk stopping.

(THOMAS puts his hand on her forehead to see if she has a temperature)

LINDA

(Shakes him away)

No! No! Go away.

THOMAS

(Gently)

Thee needs rest and care. I will do what I can. Sit down for a moment, friend.

LINDA

So tired. So tired.
(Dozes off)

HEDY

Thank you for the bread, Mr. Garrett.

TOM

And the milk.

HEDY

(Impatiently)
And will we really get shoes? New shoes?

MOSES

(Laughing)
Hedy! Thomas Garrett there are two North Stars, one in heaven,
and one right here. We would be lost without your help.

THOMAS

Thee knows, I hope by now, that your knock will never go
unanswered as long as I live in this house.

MOSES

(Gratefully)
Children, this is our greatest friend in the North.

THOMAS

(Shakes his head)
No.

(Humbly)

It is HE that inspires us to do the work he requires of our
hands, and it is HE that is your greatest friend. Moses, I
am glad to see thee in good health and ready for action.

(Softly to her so children won't hear)

The highway is not safe. Some slaves escaped nearby and there
is great excitement. None of us are safe. They suspect I
helped.

(To TOM and HEDY)

Thee had better hide now and sleep out of sight.

TOM

Where? I don't see a place to hide.
(THOMAS pushes wall panel and
panel springs open)

TOM

Look at that!

HEDY

A secret room!

THOMAS

Here thee will be safe. Rest now. Thee has a long journey
ahead. I will call thee when it is time to leave, when it
is safe.

(He carries in remainder of food and
milk. JOE assists LINDA, puts her on
pallet. MOSES, TOM, HEDY walk in)

LINDA

(Half asleep)
Where am I? It looks like jail.
(Begins to cry)

THOMAS

I will light the candle, so thee will not be fearful.
(Lights candle)
But thee must be silent. One sneeze, one cry, one cough,
and thee will be found if there are unexpected visitors.
Rest, my friends, and finish thy food, but in silence.

(Exits, closes panel. TOM and HEDY
lie down. MOSES adjusts the blankets
over them and JOE puts a blanket over
LINDA. THOMAS sits at his desk in the
front room, lights a lamp, takes a
quill pen and dips it into the ink pot.
He writes the following note)

"To William Still: Philadelphia. Respected friend, this
evening I send to thee four of God's poor. May success attend
them in their efforts to maintain themselves. Please send
word whether or not these seven arrived safe, I wrote thee of
ten days ago. My wife and self are as ever thy friends,
Thomas Garrett"

(As he puts his pen down, there is a loud,
sharp knock at the door. GARRETT looks
surprised, snuffs out candle and hides
letter. He opens the door slightly)

Who goes there?

(Two men force their way in, one
flourishing a pistol and the other
a bowie knife. They look around
briefly)

1ST MAN

Where are they?

2ND MAN

Where are they hiding?

(In the secret room TOM wakes up. He
listens terrified by the wall. MOSES
and HEDY wake up. HEDY starts to ask
a question. MOSES covers HEDY's mouth
gently, hugs her, adjusts her blanket.
MOSES and TOM listen intently while
others sleep)

THOMAS

Friend, thee has wakened me. Pray lower thy voice.

1ST MAN

We'll wake up the whole household if we have to. Come on.
Out with it. Where are they?

THOMAS

If you mean my wife, she is upstairs and I pray not wakened by your loud noise. I am, as thee can see, awake and in front of you, though thee knows God meant for good men to sleep until the sun rose.

1ST MAN

We know you've got slaves here, Garrett. So you can cut out the holy talk.

(Flourishes knife)

Seems to me you lost all your property once before for helping slaves and giving them breakfast! Heard you lost all you owned. Did they thank you for it, Thomas Garrett. Did they?

(Knife is near his throat)

If you cooperate with us, Garrett, you'll live a lot longer.

THOMAS

(Calmly pushes aside weapon. With disdain)

No one but a coward resorts to such means to carry out his ends.

2ND MAN

We're after slaves, Tom Garrett. Not sermons.

THOMAS

In my home, and despite what you may hear, it is still my home, it is the word of God thee will hear, and none other. If thee does not like its peaceful sound, thee is free to leave!

1ST MAN

(Changing his tactics)

Garrett, we know they're in here somewhere. Even if you can hide them for three weeks, when they sneak out, we'll get them. There's \$1,000 on the man...he won't get away. Not with that price on his head!

THOMAS

(Tries to hide his concern)

Thee has strange information. How comes thee by it?

2ND MAN

So they are here! By Poster, Garrett, all over the country. A good description too. You can't get away with it any longer. The law will catch up with you.

THOMAS

My law is God's law. If thee does not respect it, thee is not welcome in my home nor has thee a right to be here.

2ND MAN

We'll catch you helping them soon enough, Garrett. We'll get you and put you out in the street with no place to go. See if your God protects you then. We're just waiting...and remember, the new law is on our side.

THOMAS

It's the Devil's law!

1ST MAN

Call it what you will... "Devil's Law or New Fugitive Slave Law," it was passed seven years ago and it hasn't been changed.

2ND MAN

Let us refresh Mr. Garret's memory. A man can lose all his property for giving food, shelter and assistance to slaves. Or have you forgotten so quickly.

THOMAS

There are no slaves in my house. In the past, God's poor have passed through, but in His eyes we are all equal.

(Reflects)

However, I am not sure what His opinion of thee would be.

1ST MAN

I'm warning you, if you've got fugitive slaves in this house, now, they won't get past the Delaware border. There are police at both ends of the bridge and even at other crossing points.

THOMAS

Thank you for the warning, gentlemen.

(Firmly, ushering them out)

I have only a few dollars left in the world, but if thee know a fugitive who needs breakfast, send him to me.

2ND MAN

Garrett, you'll go to prison.

THOMAS

If this be a crime for which one goes to prison, then there must be some excellent people there. Now if thee will excuse me, I have work to do. The sun is up. An appropriate moment for a night call to end, I think.

(Opens door and firmly ushers them out. He stands there against the door for a moment to recover from the ordeal. His wife appears)

SARAH

Again, Thomas?

THOMAS

Again.

SARAH

Will they not let us sleep?

THOMAS

They know.

SARAH

Who is here.

THOMAS

Moses and four others. They want the reward money.

SARAH

(Angrily)

They belong to the Devil.

THOMAS

And they will return to him, my dear, never fear.

SARAH

Oh, Thomas, it isn't fair. Some say women are weaker than men, but look at Moses. She's gone back eight times -- alone, despite the danger, to free more slaves -- a handful at a time. That's all she can take. And so she will go, again and again, until she dies or until the world comes to its senses. Is it right that such a woman should have to crawl along, tree by tree, and pray to pass unnoticed, while other men are free by law to hunt her down and be honored for the deed?

THOMAS

My dear, be glad she goes unnoticed and yet I wish it were more unnoticed. And as for honor, that will come, someday. God chooses strong people to do his work, but he never promised any that it would be easy. Did the men wake thee?

SARAH

The noise did. Thomas, he had a gun. I saw it. It seemed to be the very shape of a devil.

THOMAS

(Firm, calmly)

Yes, he had a gun. But we have reason and human kindness on our side.

SARAH

Oh, Thomas, is that any good against a knife and a gun?

THOMAS

Yes.

(Pause)

Provided we know how to use them.

SARAH

How long will Moses stay?

THOMAS

I'll send them on tonight, but not by the way I planned. That way is too dangerous, now. There will be police at the entrance of the bridge. That much information I just received from the Devil's own sides.

SARAH

How, then?

THOMAS

(Sits thinking)

A friend drives the brick layers across the bridge to work... Yes, yes! That's a common enough sight. The men go over singing and shouting. No one stops them. And at nightfall

THOMAS (Cont'd)

they return. Still singing and shouting. Moses only brought four. Yes, they can lie on the bottom of the wagon and under the boards. Yes. Yes. We could do it.

(Jovial)

Make a large breakfast, Mrs. Garrett. I'm hungry enough for six people this morning.

SARAH

(Laughing)

Thomas Garrett. I'm glad I married thee.

THOMAS

Why?

SARAH

My mother always said a man with such a big appetite must have as big a heart as well. Eggs for them, Thomas?

THOMAS

Yes. Eggs, milk, bread. Two are children, Sarah. They are very thin...frightened.

SARAH

And eggs and milk for thee, Thomas. Thee looks thin, too.

THOMAS

Nonsense, with all those big breakfasts thee makes!

SARAH

They go to others. I know. Now, promise me, Thomas. Thee needs nourishment too, to go on with thy work.

(Exits)

THOMAS

If they escape this time, it will be God's miracle. If no one sees them, and if they don't suffocate...but it's the only way...the only chance...we've got to try it!!

CURTAIN

ACT TWOScene 2

The outskirts of Wilmington. There is a bridge going from up center to down left. Down right there is a large bush. Several townspeople cross the bridge. SARAH crosses with a market basket. The two men are standing at the edge of the bridge watching each passerby. First man smokes a cigar. Second man doffs his hat when he sees SARAH. A policeman stands on duty, watchful.

2ND MAN

Good morning, Ma'am. Fine day. Clear as can be. Can see for miles.

1ST MAN

I was just saying it was nice weather to stand here and have a smoke.

SARAH

(Coldly)

It's a fine day for work, gentlemen. I wonder that thee hast none to keep thee busy.

(Exits quickly)

1ST MAN

(Nudges the other)

No work, she says! By midnight you and I will be \$1,500 richer.

2ND MAN

\$1,500???

1ST MAN

(Sorry he mentioned it)

Didn't you know. Reward's gone up. Five hundred dollars more.

2ND MAN

How do you know we'll catch them by tonight? Maybe they got away already. We haven't seen anything.

1ST MAN

Well now, you don't expect them to walk up and say, "Here I am. Go get your reward." The trouble with you is you're lazy. You better do your share of the work or you'll lose your share of the money.

2ND MAN

You're the one who's standing here smoking a big, fancy cigar. Don't try to threaten me.

1ST MAN

Take it easy. Maybe you should just look under the bridge. Maybe they're creeping along the river bank.

2ND MAN

Why me? Why don't you go? Afraid to get mud on your shoes?

1ST MAN

I got to stand here and watch the road.

2ND MAN

Oh, all right. Anything coming?

(Sounds of singing and shouting in distance)

1ST MAN

Just the brick layer's wagon coming up. Same as usual. They sure do make a racket. Go on, hurry up.

(2ND MAN goes. A wagon makes its way across the bridge slowly. Two men are singing, walking beside the cart. They are stopped by the POLICEMAN. One adjusts the reins and the other checks the wagon wheels)

POLICEMAN

HALT! Cargo?

BRICKLAYER

Bricks. Same as usual.

POLICEMAN

Oh, it's you two. Go ahead. No need to check your wagon.

(2ND MAN reappears, reports to 1ST MAN)

2ND MAN

Nothing.

1ST MAN

Let's go and check the other side of town. He's stopping all the traffic anyway, so they can't escape over this end of the bridge.

(They exit. Wagon turns off bridge and goes to bush. BRICKLAYER walks to back of wagon, knocks three times. Slowly, painfully, MOSES, HEDY, TOM, LINDA and JOE creep out. All are wearing new shoes)

BRICKLAYER

Run for it. I don't dare stop long. Good luck.

(They thank him)

BRICKLAYER

RUN!

HEDY

C'mon, beautiful new shoes. We're going North.

MOSES

This way! Not a sound.

TOM

Ain't we free yet, Moses? I'm tired.

MOSES

Mean to be free, Tom. But we ain't free yet. Now, down on your bellies and crawl!

(They do so. The wagon moves on)

CURTAIN

NOTE: If wooden cart not available, the scene can be played eliminating crossing of the cart and eliminating the character of the policeman. If the cart is eliminated, have TOM, HEDY, LINDA, JOE and MOSES creep out from behind the bush.

ACT TWOScene 3

OLIVER JOHNSON's Anti-Slavery Office, New York City, 1857. On the wall there is a large poster which reads \$1,500. In the upper left hand corner is a black woodcut of a small running figure with a stick over his shoulder, a bundle tied to the end of a stick and another stick in his hand. This is the symbol of the runaway slave. The legend reads: "Joe Bailey ran away from his subscriber on Saturday night October 12, 1856. He is about 5'10" in height, chestnut color, bald head with a remarkable skin. \$1,500 to anyone who will apprehend said Joe Bailey and lodge him safely in jail at Aston Talbot County, Maryland." OLIVER JOHNSON is at his desk. MOSES, HEDY, TOM, LINDA and JOE enter. MOSES is dressed in a man's suit. There are briars clinging to it. It is old, worn and snagged. She wears a felt hat and men's shoes on her feet.

OLIVER JOHNSON

Harriet Tubman! We just had word from William Still in Philadelphia that you were on your way.

(Glances at Poster on wall and studies JOE)

And this is Joe Bailey, if I'm not mistaken. I am glad to see the man who is worth \$1,500 to his master.

JOE

(Trembling)

Mr. Johnson, how did you know me?

OLIVER

(Points to Poster)

The poster's right here in our office and the description's so close that no one could mistake it. Welcome. Sit down, all of you. How did you get here?

HEDY

We rode at the bottom of a brick layer's wagon out of Wilmington.

OLIVER

(Laughs)

Well, they'd never think to look there for you.

MOSES

Children, this is Oliver Johnson, head of the New York anti-slavery office. And this is Hedy and Tom.

(They shake hands)

And Linda.

(They shake hands)

OLIVER

I'm glad to see two such brave children. I'm glad to see all of you... here, and safe.

JOE

But Mr. Johnson, what am I going to do now? If you recognized me, and you never even saw me before, how am I ever going to make it. \$1500!

(He buries his head in his arms)

TOM

(Admiring poster, tracing figure with his finger)

What'd you do, Joe? How come they're willing to pay so much for you? Nobody seems even to miss me.

MOSES

(Hugs TOM)

You just thank the good Lord they ain't out lookin' for you, child.

JOE

Mr. Martin hired me out every day. I was an overseer of a plantation. And then I was sold to the same man I'd been working for. \$1,000 down and \$1,000 to come. My first lesson after I was sold was a beating. Even though I'd worked from early morning to late at night, sun and rain. It didn't matter to him. My first lesson with my new master was a beating. And I went to Moses' Uncle Ben and just said, "Next time Moses comes, let me know."

(Suddenly angry, ripping poster from wall and crumpling it)

Well they can't stop me now. They can't. All I want, all I ask, is freedom to be a man, to earn a living, to raise a family, buy food for 'em, clothes for 'em, and someday maybe a house for 'em. A man's got to do what he thinks is right and say what he believes in or else he's no better off than a stray dog picking up scraps. I want to get to Canada. And when I get there I want to breathe the air... free air! Mr. Johnson, they can't stop me now. How far off is Canada?

OLIVER

The way you'll be going, three hundred miles to Niagara Falls on the train. When you cross the rise in the tracks, you'll be on the other side, and you'll be free.

JOE

We're going on the train? An open train? Shouldn't we keep right on going North the same way we got here?

OLIVER

Not in the winter. You'd freeze in the cold inside of a week. Besides, the train's so obvious, they won't even think of looking for you there. It's the road, ditches and fields they'll be watching. And it's three hundred more miles, remember.

HEDY

All that way to go, just to be free?

TOM

(To HEDY)

Moses told us before, it's a long walk to freedom.

OLIVER

And Moses has walked it nearly nine times. Do you still remember the first time, Moses?

MOSES

That's the time I remember most.

TOM

Why?

MOSES

Well, I crossed the line into the free state of Pennsylvania just as the sun was coming up. I looked at my hands to see if I was the same person, now I was free. There was such a glory over everything. The sun came like gold through the trees and over the fields, and I felt like I was in heaven.

(Group sits transfixed. MOSES
laughs gently)

But there was no one to welcome me to the land of freedom. I was a stranger in a strange land. And I sat down and thought, "My home is after all way down in the old cabin quarter right there with the old folks and my brothers and sisters." I was free, and they should be free too. I decided to try and make a home for them up here in the North and the Lord helping me, I would bring them all here. Oh, how I prayed then, lying all alone on the cold damp ground. I didn't have no friend then, and I needed help.

OLIVER

Harriet, Harriet, you've got to be careful now. There's a \$40,000 reward out for your capture. I don't know how you've done it so far.

MOSES

With the Lord's help -- and yours.

OLIVER

I wish I could be more help. But this much I can do. I've got your train tickets here.

(Hands them tickets)

OLIVER (Cont'd)
 And here are five Bibles. There's a Bible meeting up North
 in St. Catherine. That's past the border, and you're
 going to it -- if anyone asks.
 (Hands them bibles)

HEDY
 But, I can't read!

OLIVER
 Here's your first lesson.
 (Demonstrates)
 These white pages always belong on the right side when the
 gold letters are on the top. The Gold letters spell Bible.
 E-I-E-L-E.

HEDY
 Tom...I'm learning to read, just like you said!
 (Traces letters with her fingers)

OLIVER
 Watch out for the conductor. If he accepts your tickets,
 he's one of us and he'll let you cross the border. If
 he doesn't, be prepared to jump off that train. And don't
 talk to the passengers. They may sound friendly to fool
 you, but they may just want to get a better look at you
 before they try to collect the reward money. Keep your
 heads in these Bibles. And you better leave now. Moses, you
 know the way to the station.
 (They all start out except
 LINDA who sits there)

LINDA
 Moses, I want to be free just like Joe said, you know I do.
 But I'm tired. I just don't think I can keep on going
 300 more miles. I don't want to go to no Canada.

MOSES
 Mean to be free. Remember? If I can't trust Uncle Sam with
 my people no longer, I can bring 'em up clear to Canada,
 and that's what I plan to do. There's two things you got
 a right to: Liberty or death. If you can't have one, you
 can have the other. But no one, hear me, no one is gonna
 take any one of us alive, ever. I never run my train off
 the track and I never lost a single passenger. We can
 fight for our liberty as long as our strength lasts, and
 when the time comes for me to go or for you to go, the Lord
 will take us in. No one else! I don't want to hear no
 more talk of givin' up. Three hundred miles! Why that's
 nothing! Think how many miles we come so far!

CURTAIN

ACT TWO

Scene 4

Stage Right, a railroad car.
Stage left, the platform between cars. The train is bound for Niagara Falls, Canada. MOSES, TOM, HEDY, JOE and LINDA are seated, pretending to study their Bibles.

CONDUCTOR

(Offstage)

Next stop. Niagara Falls, Ontario. Tickets, all tickets, please.

HEDY

(To TOM)

Does that mean Canada? Are we nearly there?

TOM

Shhhh. Yes. Make believe you're asleep, so he can't ask nothin'. And hold your book up, so he'll think we're free and go to school. Remember what Mr. Johnson told you.

(TOM studies Bible cover, whispers)

Hedy, which way does it go?

HEDY

(Looks at it carefully, turns it right side up)

This way...I think)

(CONDUCTOR enters car. TOM nudges HEDY)

TOM

Shhhh.

CONDUCTOR

You young folks have tickets.

(HEDY nods and gives him tickets.

CONDUCTOR examines tickets and looks at them carefully. He looks at MOSES, JOE and LINDA)

You all together?

(They look at one another apprehensively. There is a pause. Slowly, MOSES answers)

We're together.

MOSES

CONDUCTOR

(Looks at them all closely again.
Heartily)

Well now, if you'll just give me your tickets, I won't bother you any longer, and you can go right on with your Bible study group. Guess you're all heading up for that meeting in St. Catherine, up in Canada.

(MOSES nods gratefully. CONDUCTOR bends down, puts HEDY's Bible right side up. Goes on down the aisle)

I'll let you know when we get to the Falls.

(He goes toward platform as the two men come on the platform with the poster announcing reward for JOE. They study it carefully)

1st MAN

We've searched nearly every car on this train. Haven't seen him yet.

2nd MAN

But the man said he saw him get on.

1st MAN

You mean we paid a man fifty dollars to tell us that. You can't trust anyone these days. The whole country wants the reward money. Wait till I get my hands on him.

2nd MAN

C'mon. Let's try the next car. We haven't got much time.

CONDUCTOR

(Appearing, as men try to conceal poster. They exchange long look)
Tickets, gentlemen.

1st MAN

Give him the tickets.

2nd MAN

I haven't got them. You have.

1st MAN

I gave them to you.

2nd MAN

(Remembers)

You're right. But I put them in my coat pocket. Conductor, you'll have to get them later from us. The tickets are in my coat, about five cars back.

CONDUCTOR

Well, you'll just have to go five cars back and get them!

1st MAN

Conductor, we're looking for friends. We're supposed to meet them on the train. If you could just let us go into the next car to see if they're there...

CONDUCTOR

SORRY, GENTLEMEN.

2nd MAN

They'll be worried about us.

CONDUCTOR

As far as I know you gentlemen are riding free on an international railroad. You can't go wandering around a train without your tickets. How am I supposed to do my job?

1st MAN

But conductor...

CONDUCTOR

Every passenger must show his ticket upon request as proof he has purchased one. That's the regulation.

1st MAN

(Disgusted)

I told you to take those tickets!

2nd MAN

Hurry up. We've still got time.

(They exit)

JOE

How much longer, Moses?

MOSES

Should be soon.

CONDUCTOR

Next stop, Niagara. Niagara Falls, Ontario.

(Walks to TOM and HEDY)

If you keep watching out that window, you'll see the Falls.

TOM

When do we get to Canada?

CONDUCTOR

Soon as we hit that rise in the bridge.

(He exits, goes to platform)

HEDY

TOM! It's beginning now. Feel it?

LINDA
I can see the falls!

JOE
Moses, are we here?

MOSES
Almost.

(The men reappear attempting to show their tickets to the CONDUCTOR. At that moment everyone is jolted by the center rise of the track)

That's it! That bump! That's the center. You're in Queen Victoria's free land. Look at the Falls!

1st MAN
(Shakes 2nd MAN)
Canada! Now what good are those tickets. All this way for nothing!

CONDUCTOR
(Quietly)
Nice day to see the falls, gentlemen. As long as you've come this far.
(They exit)

LINDA
Oh, Moses, I didn't believe it. I didn't think we'd make it.

JOE
On an open train.

LINDA
Joe, I understand now what you meant. It means something when you see you're really free after walkin' all that way. You've earned it then, and ain't nothing can make you a slave again.

(They begin to put on wraps, standing up and gathering bundles)

TOM
Now we'll learn to read and write -- just like Joe can. And no more stealin' I promise..

HEDY
Moses, when we get off the train you're staying here with us, aren't you? We'll all live together and...

MOSES
No. Soon as you're settled I'm goin' back.

JOE
You can't. There's \$40,000 reward out for you.

MOSES
Ain't nobody collected it yet.

LINDA
But it's dangerous.

MOSES
I know.

TOM
DO YOU have to go?

MOSES
Yes.

LINDA
Oh, Moses, you've done enough already. You've made the trip nine times crawlin' on your belly, goin' hungry. And now all that again? Is it worth it to risk your life?

MOSES
Yes.

HEDY
Oh, Tom, I understand now. All this talk about freedom. It means I don't have to crawl on my belly no more, be silent no more, go hungry no more creepin' in the dark. Every time Moses goes, some more of us stand straight. I can walk right off this train standin' tall as a pine tree, singin' as loud as I can. Singin'. The whole world's gonna hear us.

LINDA
Joe, we're safe. The freedom ride's over.

JOE
(Slowly, thoughtfully)
The way I look at it, it's just beginnin'.

CURTAIN

(During the curtain call the company may wish to sing a verse of one of the popular freedom songs such as "Oh Freedom." Although this did not first appear in print until 1864, it was, and still is now, a favorite freedom song. The cast may wish to invite the audience to join in on the chorus)

