

 SCHOLASTIC BIOGRAPHY

THE STORY OF
HARRIET TUBMAN

FREEDOM TRAIN



by Dorothy Sterling

Little Girl, Little Girl!

HARRIET SAT IN THE MIDDLE OF THE FLOOR with the baby in her arms. Her thin body swayed from side to side as she tried to quiet him.

Hushaby
Don't you cry.
Go to sleep, little baby,

she crooned. Slowly his eyes blinked closed and his tiny head dropped back on her shoulder.

Harriet stopped rocking. "Hope you're asleep now for good and sure," she scolded. "You done me in all right this morning." Raising her eyes from his face, flushed and fretful even in sleep, she stretched her aching neck. Then she leaned back until she could look out of the window.

Outside a light spring breeze rippled the pink-and-white magnolia blossoms. A mockingbird flew to the stately oak which shaded the gateway of the Big House. In the distance, Harriet could see the tops of scrubby pines growing out of the salt marshes along the Bay. As she watched, a flock of geese rose above the pines. Fanning out behind their leader in V formation, they headed northward.

The sky stretched blue and cloudless, and the sun was dazzling on the tops of the trees. When she closed her eyes, she could picture the green velvet of the Big House lawns, sloping down to neat fence rows. She could hear the honking of the geese and the sweet trill of the mockingbird, and a murmur of song and talk from the workers in the fields. That would be her brothers setting out the young tobacco plants and her mother hilling up the soil around the corn or straightening the rows of yellow wheat. Far off in the woods, Daddy Ben was cutting down oak trees for the Baltimore shipyards. Harriet imagined she could hear the ringing impact of his ax and smell the fresh, clean smell of the newly fallen trees.

After the cold of winter and the long spring rains, everything was green and alive. Today was a day for running and skipping, for rolling on the grass; a day for climbing trees and hunting frogs' eggs in the swamp. It was a day for singing with the birds.

But the year was 1827 and the place, Maryland. Harriet, black-haired and black-skinned, was a slave, the daughter of a slave, the granddaughter of a slave. A hundred years before, the captain of a sailing vessel had kidnaped her great-grandmother. Carrying her across the ocean from her African home to a crowded wharf in Baltimore, he sold her to the highest bidder. Now her children and her children's children and their children belonged to Master, as surely as did his cows and pigs.

Although Harriet had not yet passed her eighth birthday, there was no running and skipping for her, no rolling on the grass or climbing in the trees. For her there was only work, and sometimes a stolen minute to look through the window and watch the birds as they flew North.

North. The word brought her from the sunny world outside to the room in which she sat with the sleeping baby in her lap. North. Some said it was bitter cold there and that the people — Yankees, they called them — all had horns. Others said that everyone in the North was free, black and white alike. School for all the children, no masters, no whippings.

"Sounds like the heaven Old Cudjoe's always talking about," Harriet whispered to herself. "Wonder what it's really like."

She counted up what she had done that morning



LET MY PEOPLE GO!

Born into slavery, young Harriet Tubman knew only hard work and hunger. Escape seemed impossible—certainly dangerous. Yet Harriet was strong-willed and courageous. “Some day,” she said, “I’m going to be free.”

When finally she did escape North, by the secret route called the “Underground Railroad,” Harriet didn’t forget her people. Again and again she risked her life to lead them on the same secret, dangerous journey.

FREEDOM TRAIN is the exciting, *true* story of Harriet Tubman’s bold and daring life.

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