

THE TRUE BALLAD OF GLORIOUS
HARRIET TUBMAN

By SARAH N. CLEGHORN

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Foreword

Harriet Tubman's achievements, of which this Ballad consists, have been verified by persons who heard them from her own lips.

The Ballad should be recited or read aloud.

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THE TRUE BALLAD OF GLORIOUS HARRIET TUBMAN

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A little girl slave in Maryland
A hundred years ago
Looked up and saw a tall black man
Throw down his cursed hoe,
And take a fool's one hopeless chance
For freedom, alive or dead.
The overseer sent a great rock
Hurling at the runaway's head,
But wide of the tall black man it flew
And struck the little slave;
And made him the first of three hundred
slaves
Whom she their freedom gave.
They carried Harriet into the house,
And there she lay like dead.
But life ran strong in her good black body
And fought with death for her head.
And when she rose and walked again
And her good brain was healed,
The white men said her wits were dull,
And set her to work in the field.
Good luck it was for young Harriet
The white men sent her there.
She grew as stalwart as any young man
Working in the sun and air.

Her powerful hands could hold the plough;
Her shoulders could brace the reins,
And her bright red blood, in the glory of
health,
Ran ringing along her veins.

She married a free young Negro man,
And took her own bondage light,
And worked, as the blacks of the world
still work,
To keep the world for the white.

The white man died that owned Harriet,
And she was to be sold soon.
She had two brothers with dangerous
hearts,
And it was the dark of the moon.

All that they knew of earth and sky
Was where the Pole star shone forth.
All of them took their lives in their hands
And started for the north.

But thoughts of wisdom and common sense
Discouraged the elder brother,
And his persuasions and common sense
Persuaded back the other,

And Harriet went on all alone,
Up at the North star staring;
And the wits the white men thought were
dull
Safeguarded her wayfaring;

And none of the deadly white patrol,
That hunted runaway slaves
Got wind of her where she trudged in
the dust,
Or forded the neck-deep waves.

She slept by day and walked by night;
And after many a day,
She came to a good New Jersey town
She found was called Cape May.

And there she lay down under a roof,
And was sheltered from the shower,
And took her pay as a free woman
That bargained out her power.

She made herself a white woman's cook,
And saved up dollar and cent.
But when the weather of fall came on,
Down to the south she went.

Down to the south she had to go;
Her heart was tugged with pain
To find her free young Negro husband
And bring him north again.

But when she had gone that dangerous
way
Into the lion's mouth,
She found it was all to get herself sorrow
She had risked her body in the south.

She found her free young husband now
Married to another wife.
She turned away from the thought of this
To save her sister's life.

She took her sister's children all—
Three little ones there were,—
They walked by night and slept by day,
And they all came north with her.

And none of the deadly white patrol
That caught the runaway slaves
Got wind of the five that trudged in the
dust

Or forded the neck-deep waves.

If ever they thought the white patrol
Had found their hiding place,
Harriet pulled her sunbonnet down
All over her dark face.

"Oh sister, never go south again!
They'll get you back a slave!"
"I'm going down to get my mother;
My mammy and yours to save."

"Mammy is old, mammy is scared,
Mammy is weak and worn.
She never will take that desperate risk;
She'll die where she was born."

Harriet stayed on in the north
Enough to draw a long breath,
And then walked down to the south again
At the risk of her freedom's death.

She came in the dark to her parents' door.
"Mammy and daddy, come!
I'll take you both up into the north
And earn you both a home."

Their hearts were trembling, their strength
was faint,

Their poor old lips said, "No."
The sky would fall through their cabin
roof

If they should dare to go.

Harriet walked among the graves,
And shadows followed after,
Caught at her sleeve in wonder and fear,
And smothered their sobbing laughter.

"Oh, Moses! will you take us north?"
She took them all with her;
And none of the deadly white patrol
Got wind of where they were.

But once, in a wide potato field,
They heard the white patrol,
And every one of them buried himself
In a sweet potato hole.

When they came up to Canada
They kissed great Harriet's hand,
And sang the song it was a crime
To sing in Maryland;

The song it was against the law
For tongues of slaves to know;
"Go down, Moses, tell old Pharoah
To let my people go!"

"But why are you turning back, Harriet?
Where are you going now?"
"I'm going down to get my father.
He shall die free, I vow."

"Your daddy is old, your daddy is sick,
Your daddy is weak and worn.
He never will take that desperate chance!
He'll die where he was born."

"I'm going into the lion's mouth
To bring my parents forth.
They shall not die in the bonded south!
They shall die free in the north."

She came in the dark to her parents' door.
"Mammy and daddy, come!
I know the way, I'll keep you safe,
I'll earn you both a home."

Their hearts were trembling, their legs
were faint,
Their poor old breath said, "No."
The ground would rise through their
cabin floor
If they should dare to go.

Harriet walked among the graves,
And there the shadows stirred,
Caught at her sleeve in wonder and fear—
"Oh Moses! have you heard?

They've made a purse in Baltimore
And laid it on your head.
It will bring forty thousand dollars
To catch you alive or dead."

"I won't go back to the north alone!
How many will come with me?
I've stepped three times in the lion's jaws
To set my people free."

Children, women and men came forth
And followed where she went,
And none of the deadly white patrol
Had hounds that found their scent.

She drugged the baby slaves to sleep
If they cried a single tear.
She pointed a pistol at the men
When they turned back in fear.

And up at Mason and Dixon's Line
They thought the march was done;
But she made them rise from the Yankee
land
And flee to the British one;

For north and south, the courts had said,
A slave a slave should be;
Wherever the stars and stripes might wave
He never could be free.

The gentlemen of Maryland
Raised her blood money in vain;
At eighty thousand dollars reward
She went down south again.

When now she came to her parents' door,
She seemed so sure and gay,
Their worn old strength leaned back on
hers,
And they let her take them away.

"But I must carry my best hencoop!"
Her feeble old father said.
Her mother tugged and tied with ropes
A well-loved feather bed.

"Oh father, oh mother! how can we travel
With such great bulks as those?"
But she saw her father's salt old tears,
And the waves of her courage rose,

And she found a wagon, a horse she
found,

She stowed the gear behind,
And north they drove through that sharp
patrol

As if those men were blind.

She went again, she went again,
She carried their slaves away;
Two hundred women, children and men,
And still she would not stay;

But went again, again, again,
A hundred more to save,
And never once did the white patrol
Fetch back a single slave.

The engineers of the Underground,
The freedom-loving Quakers,
Heard tell of glorious Harriet,
And mortgaged their home acres

For pairs of shoes and suits of clothes
And stocks of food and money,
To help her bring the captives forth
To the land of milk and honey.

From slave to slave, through all the states,
Her story went and came,
And what black ear, in north or south,
Had not been told her name?

Had any of all those black men's tongues
Breathed in a master's ear
Word of a place where Harriet hid
Or when she might appear,

What hope of freedom, what great price
Would such a man be paid!
Himself, his friends, his children and wife!
But the word was never said.

None of the tongues the black men owned,
Sober or drunk, would say
The name of a place where Harriet hid,
To sell her life away.

Before she trekked the twentieth time
Into the lion's mouth,
The Carolinian guns were primed
And a new flag flew in the south.

And Harriet dressed in a uniform,
And carried her own canteen,
And scouting far for the northern troops
In many a camp was seen.

If Harriet came to a Negro door,
The door would open wide.
Her people would trust her with all they
had,
And their hearts' desire beside.

When Harriet came to a Union camp,
They treated her like a mate.
She was known to Abraham Lincoln him-
self,
And the Secretary of State.

Wherever she was told to go,
Her mighty feet would tread,
And neither guns nor fevers touched
A hair of Harriet's head.

When the war was over, did she repose
Her toiling foot and hand?
She went to the town of Auburn, New
York,
And earned an acre of land.

In winter she worked, in summer she
worked,
And dollar and cent she saved.
It was all her pleasure and holiday
To work for the thing she craved.

When she had saved up money enough,
She built a welcoming home,
Where old black fathers and old black
mothers
Who had no money, could come.

She lived till twenty years ago;
And on her dying day
A cradle of golden arms came down
And cradled her away.

