

Late one December night in the year 1848 two people sat huddled together talking.

"It is all very dangerous," whispered William Craft.

"But we must try!" pleaded his wife Ellen.

Ellen and William Craft were slaves who for many years had been looking for a way to escape. They were determined to find freedom far away from their owners in Georgia.

Freedom meant running away to the northern states, for slavery was against the law there. Slaves made frequent attempts at escape, but if they were caught it meant being chained and dragged back like animals. They were then whipped and given the most grueling work to do. Still the dangerous attempts were worth the risk, because slavery was like a prison term with no freedom in sight.

Ellen and William had saved some money, and they had enough to purchase their passage to the north. But slaves could not travel alone, since no one would sell tickets to them.

William looked questioningly at Ellen, "You know, your complexion is very light. You really look white."

Ellen considered what William had said. "I could pretend *you* are *my* slave," she suggested, "and *that* way I could buy train tickets!"

"But ladies never travel with men servants," said William. "Only women slaves accompany them."

Ellen pondered again. "Suppose I dress like a man?" she asked.

William studied her face a long time. "That just might work," he said slowly.

Ellen interrupted, "But travelers must register in hotels and I can't write." In the south it was against the law to teach slaves to

read and write; their owners thought learning might make them want freedom. What a silly notion that was! Slaves hungered after freedom regardless of their lack of education.

William thought again. "If your arm were bandaged," he said, "you couldn't write, and then someone would have to do it for you. But it is still too dangerous."

"We must try!" Ellen insisted excitedly. So they whispered together and made their plans.

That week William went to several stores. He bought a hat at the first, a shirt at the second, and a coat at the last. Ellen sewed a pair of pants.

At last their preparations were complete, and late one night Ellen dressed in her new clothes. She wore a bandage on her arm and another on her face to help her disguise. She put on dark glasses. Then she and William slipped quietly out of their room and went in darkness to the train station.

Ellen's heart pounded as she stood at the ticket window and demanded in a deep voice, "A ticket for me and one for my slave."

"Your name?" the ticket seller asked.

"Mr. Johnson," said Ellen. It was the first name she thought of.

The ticket seller wrote the name and handed her two tickets. "You sit in the front car," he said, "but your slave goes to the back car."

That was all! Ellen and William went to different parts of the train, and finally it started to move—on their way at last!

The train ride was many hours, and at its end Ellen and William transferred to a steamship headed for South Carolina. In South Carolina Ellen had to register herself and

William in a hotel for the night. This was what she had feared. "I cannot use my arm," Ellen said to the clerk. "Please register for me."

"Do it yourself," the man snapped.

Ellen's hand shook. What could she do? Now surely they would be discovered and sent back to slavery.

Then a soldier they had met on the boat came up and said, "I'll gladly register for you.

There's no need for this rudeness."

The following day Ellen and William bought railroad tickets for the last part of their journey. Again they were sent to different cars. The very next morning the train pulled into the station in Philadelphia, Pennsylvania. It was Christmas Day, and Ellen and William Craft were in the north. They had the best Christmas gift of all—they were free!

CHECK YOUR READING

1. **Ellen and William decided to run away because**
 - A they couldn't buy their freedom
 - B they hated slavery
 - C Both A and B

2. **Runaway slaves went to the North because**
 - A the weather was better there
 - B they didn't have to pick cotton
 - C slavery was illegal in the northern states

3. **Runaway slaves who were caught were**
 - A thrown in jail
 - B put in chains and whipped
 - C made to pay heavy fines

4. **Ellen had to dress as a man because white ladies**
 - A did not ride on trains
 - B wore uncomfortable clothes
 - C did not travel with male slaves

5. **Ellen bandaged her arm to**
 - A have an excuse for not writing
 - B make people feel sorry for her
 - C hide a brand on her arm

6. **In the South, slaves did not learn to read or write because**
 - A they had to work all the time
 - B it was against the law
 - C they weren't interested

7. **William bought clothes for Ellen's disguise at several stores because**
 - A he didn't want to attract attention
 - B one store wouldn't have everything
 - C the storekeepers were his friends

8. **In South Carolina Ellen thought they were about to be exposed because**
 - A someone recognized them
 - B William called her by her real name
 - C she had to register in a hotel

9. **The Crafts' final destination was**
 - A Philadelphia, Pennsylvania
 - B Raleigh, North Carolina
 - C Washington, D.C.

10. **The Christmas gift Ellen and William gave each other was**
 - A a sea voyage
 - B a festive dinner
 - C their freedom