The Fugitive

1 With bleeding back, from tyrant's lash,
   A fleet-foot slave has sped,
   All frantic, past his humble hut,
   And seeks the wood instead.

2 Once in the woods, his manhood wakes;
   Why stand this bondage, wroth?
   With diabolic, reckless heart,
   He turns he, to the North.

3 He flings his crude hat to the ground,
   And face the northern wind;
   Fleet in his tracks, the blood-hounds bay,
   He leaves them far behind.

4 By devious way, cross many a stream,
   He fiercely pressed that day,
   With deadly oaths for brush or brake,
   That chance to block his way.

5 Erelong, when kind and soothing night,
   Had hushed the strife of man,
   He wades waist-deep, unto a tree,
   To rest awhile and plan.

6 He knows no friends or shelter, kind,
   To soothe his deadly grief,
   He only knows, that farther north,
   A slave may find relief.

7 No lore of book, or college crafts,
   Lends cunning to his plan,
   Fresh from the tyrant's blasting touch,
   He stands a crude, rough, man.
But Providence, with pity, deep,
Looked down upon that slave,
And mapped a path, up through the South,
And strength and courage gave.

Sometimes, a friendly fellow-slave,
Chance, spying where he hid,
At night would bring his coarse, rough, fare,
And God-speed warmly bid.

And sometimes, when to hunger fierce,
He's seem almost to yield,
A bird would fall into his clutch,
A fish would shake his reel.

And when on reaching colder climes,
A sheep-cote shelter made,
Or, law-abiding Yankee, stern,
Clandestinely, lent aid.

Till after many a restless day,
And weary, toiling, night,
All foot-sore, worn, and tired of limb,
His haven looms in sight.

His tired feet press Canadian shore,
Friends tell him he is free;
He feels a craving still, to hide,
It seems it cannot be.

But from suspense and thralldom freed,
His manhood wakes at last,
And plies he hand and brain with might,
To mend his ruthless past.

And Providence, in years that came,
Sent blessings rife, his way.
With grateful heart journeyed through,
His free, allotted days.

—Priscilla Jane Thompson
The Runaway Slave

The runaway slave came to my house and stopt outside,
I heard his motions crackling the twigs of the woodpile,
Through the swung half-door of the kitchen I saw him
limpsy and weak,
And went where he sat on a log and led him in and
assured him,
And brought water and fill'd a tub for his sweated body
and bruis'd feet,
And gave him a room that enter'd from my own, and
gave him some coarse clean clothes,
And remember perfectly well his revolving eyes and
his awkwardness,
And remember putting plasters on the galls of his neck
and ankles;
He staid with me a week before he was recuperated and
pass'd north,
I had him sit next me at table, my fire-lock lean'd in the corner.

—Walt Whitman