

**THE  
SLAVE-MOTHER**

**BY**

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**FOR THE PENNSYLVANIA ANTI-SLAVERY FAIR.**

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**PHILADELPHIA:**

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**From “Burrith’s Bond of Brotherhood”**

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“A slave, escaping from the South, with her infant child, threaded the swamps where the snakes hissed at her, and where the tangled bushes tore her flesh, or the cougar glared at her as she passed, until she reached the town of Ripley on the shore of Lake Erie. But the hunters of her race were close upon her, and seized her on the very brink of the water. Raised above herself by maternal instinct, she no sooner found that she was to be carried back into slavery, than she threw her infant on the ground and refused to own to it. When taken before a magistrate and presented with her babe, she shut her eyes and turned away her head from it. ‘That is not my child,’ she exclaimed, ‘I have no child. That child belongs to freedom, not to me.’”

“And to whom do you belong?” said the Judge, his lips trembling with emotion as he spoke.

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“To me!” said one of the captors, “She belongs to me.” “Where is your title to her?” said the Northern justice, sternly. The slave-holder fumbled in his pockets, but could find no record of his ownership and her bondage. “Let the woman go!” said the magistrate. “Who dares hold her here without a warrant?”

With a scream of delight, the young mother sprang towards her child, and laid it once more on her bosom. With a wild shout of triumph, the stout boatmen of Ripley carried her and her child to the lake, and four strong rowers bent to their oars with right good will, and sent the impatient shallop over the water to Canada.

The baffled slaveholders begged, threatened, and offered bribes of gold to the men on the shore, if they could unmoor their skiffs and carry them in pursuit; but the seamen whistled in their faces, and smiled, stoutly refusing to touch either helm or oar. The heroic slave-mother was saved.”

**THE SLAVE-MOTHER.**

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The sunlight fades on Erie's shore—

No longer on its winding bay

Skims the white sail or sweeps the oar,

As darkness veils the blue of day.

The wave that danced with sparkling crest, [5]

Now murmuring sleeps upon the sand;

While dimly lying in the west,

The lake is quiet as the land.

No echoes break the solemn sound

Of winds through yon dark sea of pines, [10]

That skirt the distant rising ground,

Where earliest moonlight faintly shines.

Within that unfrequented wood,

At time, a stifled groan

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Fills the dull dreamy solitude, [15]  
And, vainly hushed, a cry for food  
Breathes in an infant's moan.  
Who wanders in that gloomy wild  
And sighs for rest in foreign lands?  
The sad slave-mother, with her child, [20]  
Escaped from harsh inhuman hands.  
The friendly north star for her guide,  
Secret and dangerous paths she tried,  
Where in the tangled thicket lay  
The panther lurking for his prey; [25]  
Or heard unharmed in swampy brake,  
The hissing of the poisonous snake.  
Her flesh with prickly brushwood torn,  
Her feet pierced with the fest'ring thorn,  
Still onward fled the hapless slave, [30]  
In search of freedom and a grave;  
Less dreading savage beasts of prey  
Than savage men more fierce than they.  
The light'ning glare, the howling storm  
That beat on her defenceless head, [35]

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Each thrilling sound or fearful form  
That rose at every hurried tread,  
Cold, hunger, thirst, the wailing cry  
Of the loved burden at her back,  
But bade the trembling mother fly [40]  
The faster on her lonely track.

Full many a long and weary mile,  
She labored on, uncheered the while,  
Shunning the face of many by day,  
In shades of night pursued her way, [45]  
Till faint with fear, with travel sore,  
She lay concealed upon that shore.

Faint gleams of light the shadows break,  
And vapors hover o'er the lake—  
Winds freshening drive these mists away, [50]

Till glow the skies with hues of day.  
Quick starting up from short repose,  
One timid glance around she throws,  
And marks near by, through brake and brier  
Where heavenward points the village spire; [55]  
Then hastens on by hope beguiled,

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Grasping in close embrace her child,  
Food, shelter and a home, to find  
With hearts, that beat for human kind.  
In vain—a well remembered note [60]

    Come ringing, death-like, to her ear;  
A moment more—the hunter smote  
    His victim down with curse and sneer.  
They bound her fast, but no reply [65]

    The torturing whip or hand-cuff wrung;  
With one long, sad, despairing cry,  
    Her babe upon the ground she flung,  
And, as her heart were turned to stone,  
    With madness flashing from her eye, [70]  
Refused the helpless one to own,  
    Or listen to its moaning cry.

Fast driven on with curse and blow,  
No mercy hoping in her wo,  
One thought alone can give her rest,  
And soothe a mother's aching breast; [75]  
Better, her nature to deny,  
Than that loved child in slavery die.

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As doubts and fear alternate rise,  
Back to the past her fancy flies—  
Toiling beneath a master's nod, [80]  
Once more in sun-burnt fields she trod;  
Again she saw the driver wield  
The whip, and lash her to the field;  
Again she heard the echoing horn  
That roused her in the cold grey morn, [85]  
Or bade her pause at latest eve,  
The scanty ration to receive.  
Once more she met the haggard face  
That spoke a heart whence hope had fled,  
And prayed that she might find a place [90]  
Of rest among the nameless dead.  
She sees not—hears not—till a cry  
Betrays her famished infant near;  
Startled, at once she hides her eye,  
To cover up the gathering tear, [95]  
“Is this your child?” in a gentle tone,  
Sounded like some new melody;  
With long-drawn sigh, she said alone,  
“I have no child! this stranger one

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Belongs to freedom—not to me.” [100]  
“And who may then your person claim?”  
The Northern justice quickly said,  
As o’er his cheek the glow of shame,  
And pity for her sufferings, spread.  
“To me! to me!” with angry frown [105]  
The woman-hunter fiercely cried,  
“She’s mine, I claim her now—and down  
Will quickly bring her stubborn pride.”  
A shadow crossed his noble brow,  
As sternly spake the Justice then, [110]  
“Show me your title to her *now*,  
Or she at once is free again!”  
As thrilling words of sentence fall  
Upon the silent culprit’s ear,  
The oppressor felt the imperious call [115]  
Change his hot wrath to chilling fear.  
Confused, abashed, he sought to find  
Some writ the slave to bind,  
Some Slaver’s word, or false or true,  
His weak pretence to hide from view. [120]  
Vain was the search—his purpose vain,

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The trembling captive to detain.  
In gloomy mood he turned away,  
Foiled, like a tiger, of his prey,  
When crackling noise of brushwood dead [125]  
Warns of his stealthy, measured tread.  
His dark eye kindling at the wrong,  
While round him pressed the anxious throng,  
The Judge's tones rung loud and clear  
Unwelcome to the tyrant's ear. [130]  
"Who dares in Slavery's power to hold  
A soul among the free enrolled?  
What fiend shall drive with curse and blow  
This childless mother?—Let her go!"  
"My darling babe!" that mother cried, [135]  
And bounded towards her only child,  
"For thy sake I could have died,  
When wandering in the trackless wild.  
Joy! joy to thee! That thou art now  
Far from the hated Southern soil, [140]  
And joy to me! that from my brow  
Shall drop no sweat of thankless toil."  
She clasped her infant to her breast,

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And hushed its moans with plaintive song,  
Then, weeping, asked for food and rest, [145]  
Nor waited there an answer long.  
With one wild shout the eager crowd  
From her torn arms the shackles break,  
Then swiftly bear, in triumph proud,  
Mother and nursling to the lake. [150]

Close moored upon its sandy marge,  
Rocked with the tide the ready barge,  
Impatient, as it were, to wait  
The coming of its living freight.  
Nearer is heard the heavy tread [155]  
Of stalwart men, unused to dread,  
Or muttered threat against the law,  
That life-blood from the slave would draw.  
They rest not, till upon the shore,  
Her weary feet are pressed once more. [160]  
The tears that glisten on her cheek,  
At once her thanks and joy bespeak.  
They reach the bark, rough oarsmen there  
Received the charge with tenderest care,

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They part 'mid prayers on every hand, [165]  
"God speed them to a happier land!"  
With right good will it skims the deep,  
Impelled by arms and bosoms true,  
And soon afar the flashing sweep  
Of oar fades in the distant blue. [170]  
Foul curses gathering on his lip,  
Outspoke the baffled slaver then,  
As, grasping hard his blood dyed whip,  
He saw the chattels free again;  
"Ho! fellows! see this purse of gold! [175]  
Whoe'er will bring me back my slave,  
Himself shall own the wealth I hold,  
Wealth that can make a coward brave.  
Come on! nor lose a moment more,  
Or useless will be our pursuit; [180]  
Come on! and I will pull an oar,  
Again to catch the ungrateful brute."  
"No! tyrant, no!" in tones of scorn,  
Replied each hardy sailor there,  
"The sons of sires in Freedom born, [185]  
Will never taint their native air.

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Back to the land from whence you came,  
Nor linger 'neath our northern sky!  
We brand with infamy the name  
Of those who nature's rights deny. [190]  
No bribe shall stain our toil worn hands,  
Nor threat awake a slavish fear,  
The soul that prompts such vile commands  
Meets no response in bosoms here."  
Still more incensed, he raved and swore, [195]  
And lashed the tide in frenzied trance,  
But now the boat is seen no more,  
Lost in the wide and dim expanse.  
As thus he stood, a sudden light,  
And then the booming of the gun, [200]  
Prolonged in cheers of wild delight,  
Announced the shore of freedom won.  
Then streamed on high the beacon's flame,  
And onward as the tidings spread,  
With execrations on his name, [205]  
The haughty despot turned and fled.

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When the Roman warrior stern  
In the tyrant's presence stood,  
And, to save his child from shame,  
Bathed his dagger in her blood; [210]  
Though the blow the pierced her heart  
Heavier fell upon his own,  
With a smile he saw depart,  
Her, the pure, beloved, one.  
In heroic virtue bold, [215]  
Proud of an ancestral fame.  
Never would his arms enfold  
One unworthy of the name.  
Childless thus, the murderer's meed  
Was to spend a life in gloom, [220]  
At the memory of the deed  
Graven on Virginia's tomb.  
Ancient Rome has passed away,  
Borne the tide of time along,  
But the record of that day [225]  
Lives in story and in song.  
With the breath that speaks of crime,  
Frequent in her earlier years,

