



CASINO CELESTIALE

AS TOLD BY LEVI COFFIN



I am awaiting my wife as she readies herself for the costume ball we've been invited to. Perhaps I should explain.

You have heard about the robes of light we wear—well, for variety we sometimes clothe ourselves in the period dress of certain times on Earth. "Heritage Night" is similar to a costume ball where everyone dresses up to a certain theme. Tonight the theme will be the Underground Railroad* movement. Since I was known as being the "president" of the Underground Railroad while on Earth, there will be some special recognition for my work in helping around 3,000 slaves find freedom.

I don't feel it necessary to make a fuss over me—I just did what had to be done. I figured it was always best to do the right thing. I know I wasn't the only one who made a difference in the Underground Railroad, so I'm glad that others will get their time in the limelight too.

Here she comes now. "You look wonderful, darling!" I say.

The Underground Railroad, beginning in the early 19th century and continuing well up to the Civil War, was a secret and extensive network of people, places, and modes of transportation that led runaway slaves from the Southern United States to freedom in the North and Canada. Begun in the 1780s under Quaker auspices, the activity acquired legendary fame after the 1830s. It was once thought that more than 60,000 slaves gained their freedom in this way.

Few details of the Underground Railroad are known because of the extreme secrecy required in its operation, but there are reports of its existence as early as 1837. The exact number of slaves who were freed by the railroad is also not known because, in the interests of security, the conductors of the railroad could not keep records. Although this number was never high enough to threaten the institution of slavery itself, the legends and metaphor of the freedom train proved much more ominous to slaveholders. Tales that were often repeated throughout the nation included.

(Microsoft® Encarta® Reference Library.)

"Do you think I should have worn the white bonnet with the black dress—or should they have been matching?" she asks.

I take in her white dress with black bows and matching bonnet. "You're perfect, my dear. We do need to be off though, our ride is waiting."

As part of the experience, we are being driven to the casino in a horse and buggy. No, it's not our usual form of transport, but sometimes it's nice to take our time instead of zooming about in a flying vehicle.

After a friendly exchange of salutations with the driver, we board the carriage. The smell and touch of the leather bring back many memories.

Note: Information for portions of this story is based on *Reminiscences of Levi Coffin, the Reputed President of the Underground Railroad*, by Levi Coffin (1798–1877).

Art by Tiago — August 2008

For children ages 9 on up. May be read to younger children at parents' or teachers' discretion.

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We pull up in front of the casino where a fountain is splashing with an amazing light and music show. People are streaming into the entranceway. We greet friends who are also dressed in period costume. A valet escorts us inside. People are lined up expecting our arrival. They cheer and applaud as we ascend the red-carpeted marble steps into the hall.

Inside, a speaker introduces me, and then I am directed to the podium for my “spotlight time,” as an orchestra plays a stirring rendition of “Beams of Heaven*.”

“Greetings! Welcome, everyone, to Heritage Night, dedicated this evening to the brave souls of the Underground Railroad. We thank the house* for hosting our little gathering this evening.

“If you look around you’ll see many familiar faces—people you loved and some you may have even hated while on Earth. Perhaps you’ll even see some folks you chased or some folks you ran away from.” There are a few laughs as former masters, slave catchers, and slaves remember their time on Earth. Several of them chuckle and slap each other on the back.

“But thanks to our Father and His plan of Universal Reconciliation*, we are now all brothers and sisters.—And since I was never fond of long speeches, let’s get on with the games!”

There is a tremendous cheer as we each take up positions at various gaming tables.

The first thing to do is to pick up our chips. I go to the counter and am handed a large pile of chips of various colors which represent different values.

You can’t really lose in this casino, and the house actually wants you to win! How contrary to how things work on Earth. As you may know, gambling was forbidden by our faith, and I never played on Earth. This casino, though, is as different from earthly gaming establishments as light is from darkness.

Waiters come around bringing some delightful viands*. There is a tangible excitement in the air as the games are about to begin. All my friends—and some of my former “enemies” who in this realm have become my friends—are gathered around our table.

The game I will play tonight is similar to the “Wheel of Fortune” that is played on Earth. A huge wheel is set in the middle of the green felted table. Instead of numbers, the faces and names of each of those who surround the table are pictured on separate slots of the wheel.

Universal reconciliation

(Dad:) I believe in the eternal universal reconciliation of man because Jesus said He died that all might be saved (1Ti.2:4; 2Pe.3:9), that the whole world might be saved, and I believe that’s going to happen someday!

“Space City!—The New Heaven and New Earth!” ML #1198:52; 5/81)

Beams of Heaven: an old, black spiritual; “black spirituals” is a term used to classify songs that were created by American slaves, and the unique style in which they were sung
house: a gambling casino, or the people who manage it
viands: food that makes up a meal or feast

You place your bets on whoever's story you think will be up next. The Wheel of Fortune can also be set on different modes. For example, you can set it on "funny situations," "embarrassing moments," or "love stories." There are all kinds of possible combinations. Tonight it is set on "deliverance" mode.

The wheel is then spun, and a ball of light is thrown into the rotating wheel. The light ball goes around until it lands on a slot. The story of the person whose face is featured in that slot is then projected to be relived with all those taking part in the game. Each of us will experience a segment of that person's story firsthand.

"Ladies and gentlemen, please place your bets," says the croupier*.

Everyone places their chips where they think the ball will land. "*Les jeux sont faits!*"

The croupier spins the large wheel which picks up speed until it seems to disappear in a whirl. He shakes the ball in his hands and then throws it onto the spinning wheel—finally the wheel begins to slow down. The light ball first hits one slot then bounces to various slots until it finally lands on one main character.

Cheers go up as players collect their winnings. A bright light shines and engulfs the table. When it dims, we are in another place and time.

North Carolina, 1822

"I hereby rule that the State of North Carolina has deemed the will of T.C. Barnes null and void. It is clear to the court that anyone who would bequeath a large portion of his estate to his body servant, as well as give to that same servant his freedom, without due consideration to his immediate relatives, must be deemed mentally unstable. Therefore, the estate shall be divided up between the relatives of the Barnes family. The freedom of Jack Barnes is forfeit. He is now the property of the Barnes' estate and is subject to the laws governing slaves in the State of North Carolina."

Cheers went up from the Barnes family who were in attendance.

The judge continued, "The slave, Jack Barnes, will now approach the bench."

The bailiff* cleared his throat and said nervously, "I regret to inform Your Honor that Jack Barnes has escaped."

"This court orders him to be found and presented!" proclaimed the judge.

Reward: \$100! To any person who will secure the escaped slave Jack Barnes, or give information that would lead to the discovery of his whereabouts.

—*The State of North Carolina*

The value of \$100 in the early 1800s was worth ten times its current monetary value.

croupier: person in charge of a gaming table who collects and pays out the players' money and chips, and deals the cards or spins the roulette wheel

Les jeux sont faits (*French*): "the bets have been placed"

bailiff: a court official whose tasks include supervising prisoners and keeping order in court during a trial

Young Levi Coffin stuffed the leaflet into his coat pocket. With head bowed, he walked quickly out of town. He passed a notice board that had the same leaflet posted alongside a sketch of Jack Barnes, the runaway slave. Jack Barnes had been working at the Coffin estate all winter, and was a hard-working, honest man, and with the recent turn of events, was now hiding on the Coffin property. It was only a temporary solution until Jack could be moved to a free state*.

Levi knew that the risk loomed large. If Jack were found, anyone who was found sheltering him would be dealt with harshly, according to North Carolina laws.

That night the Coffin family met to consider all the options. After seeking God's guidance and angelic protection, it was decided that Levi's uncle, Bethuel, his son, Elisha, and daughter, Mary, would take Jack to Indiana. It would be a two-day trip over rivers and through the Blue Ridge Mountains. This route was thought to be safe as the area was thinly inhabited. All were in agreement that the risk was worth the venture for Jack Barnes' freedom.

A few days after Bethuel had begun his wagon journey with Jack Barnes through the Blue Ridge Mountains, a friend of Levi's, who was staying at an inn, overheard the following conversation between a local man, Jack Osborne, and a man who had just returned from a long journey.

"Where are you coming from, stranger?" inquired Osborne.

"I'm back from the Blue Ridge Mountains' trail."

"Haven't seen any Negroes traveling with anyone that way, have you? My Sam has gone missing, and I'm hell-bent on getting him back."

"Matter of fact, I did meet an old Quaker man and his family, driving a two-horse wagon. There was a Negro along with him."

"Did he say where he was going?"

"He mentioned something about Indiana."

"What did the Negro look like?"

"He was wearing a torn shirt, and was real tall and skinny."

"That must be my slave, Sam, to be sure! He's been hiding from me for several months," said Osborne. "That Quaker must be Old Man Coffin. I know him well from business dealings. I suppose my Negro met him and made him believe he was a free man. I don't think Old Man Coffin would have stolen my slave on purpose. Sam must have tricked them."

"What do you intend to do about it?"

"I'll follow them to Hell and back if I need to get that slave of mine! No slave gets the better of Jack Osborne! I'm going home, getting a fresh horse, and starting off after him!" said Osborne, slamming his fist on the table and spilling whiskey on the counter.

free state: a state in the United States, prior to the American Civil War, where slavery was either prohibited or eliminated

As soon as Osborne left, Levi's friend hurried to the Coffin household to tell Levi what had happened. Jack Osborne was known as a man with a vile temper and a reputation for mistreating his slaves. Upon hearing the news, Levi called his family together to counsel on what the best course of action was.

"Osborne is thinking that Jack Barnes is his slave Sam. If Osborne catches up with Uncle Bethuel, and finds out that Jack Barnes is not his Sam, he will most likely capture Jack just the same. He will know who Jack is by the notices, and he will be eager for that reward money to make his trip worthwhile," said Levi, explaining the situation to his fellow laborers in the cause for freedom.

Levi's father asked Levi's cousin, Vestal, "You are experienced in these matters of helping our brothers in bondage find freedom. What do you think we should do?"

"Someone must ride ahead of Osborne and warn Bethuel," said Vestal.

"And who should go?" Levi asked.

"Why, I was thinking of you, Levi," said Vestal.

"I don't have a horse, which is a necessity for such a journey ... or money or a warm overcoat. Surely another would be better prepared for traveling," said Levi uncertainly.

"Take no thought to all the obstacles, Levi. Didn't our Lord tell us that nothing would be impossible to us if we believed? We will give you a horse, and enough money and provisions. I believe you are God's man for this mission!" said Elihu.

"Take a minute to pray about it, son," said Levi's father.

Levi went to an empty room and as soon as he sought the Lord's guidance, he found it.

Coming out of the room, Levi announced, "Alright, I'll go. It's time I put my faith into action. Besides, it will be an adventure."

The Coffin family congratulated and embraced him. Vestal told his hired hand to bring out his favorite horse, Melissa, who had been freshly shod.

Elihu's wife brought Levi a parcel of food, which she placed into Levi's saddlebags. "You are a brave boy! But even heroes need to eat. Here are some of my mincemeat pies for your journey. May God watch over you."

Levi thanked her profusely. It was dusk now and night was falling fast as he ventured out. The sky was low and clear, with stars that shone brightly to guide his way.

Levi was scared yet also excited to be on an adventure that would rescue those he rode to warn.



At midnight Levi reached the Dan River that he would have to cross. During daylight the way would have been much easier as there were rock markers showing where to cross safely through the swift current, but now it was so dark the markers were impossible to see.

In the middle of the river, the horse lost its footing, and both horse and rider had to swim to the other side. Levi remembered the verse, “The rivers will not overflow you” (Isaiah 43:2). They made it safely to the other side, where Levi wrung out his clothes, dried off Melissa, and continued with greater speed on his journey.

At daybreak he reached a tavern.

“Greetings, friend!” Levi called to the man inside.

“What can I be doing for you, young man?”

“Could you be telling me where I am exactly? Is this the right road to Patrick Court House?”

“It is the very one. You are forty-seven miles from the river.”

“I have just come from there,” Levi explained.

“Well, you have come a long way. Why don’t you rest up for an hour or two now? You will have some company. A gentleman stopped here last night.”

“Oh, do you know where he is going?” asked Levi.

“He is in pursuit of his runaway slave.”

It dawned on Levi that Osborne was inside at that very moment!

“Unfortunately, I must push on,” he told the man.

I am ahead of Osborne now, but can I keep the lead? I have traveled all night and Melissa is tired, while Osborne is getting a fresh start on the day with a fresh horse. It doesn't seem possible to reach Bethuel before he does.

Levi’s mind was filled with these anxious thoughts. Finally he took his burden to the Lord and asked for His wisdom and help.

Stop at the next tavern—it’s just a few miles ahead. Rest and eat some food. Osborne will overtake you, and then after you are rested you can catch up with him. Make this enemy a friend. Ride with him and find out his plans. I will then show you what to do next.

The plan seemed strange, but Levi couldn’t think of a better idea.

It was half-past eight in the morning when Levi stopped at the next tavern. He ordered breakfast for himself and feed for Melissa. Half an hour later, Osborne rode up and stopped at the same tavern for breakfast. It was the custom for travelers to get an early start on the day and stop for breakfast at nine.

“Barkeep, get me a whiskey!” shouted Osborne as he strode up to the bar.

Levi recognized Osborne, as he had seen him do business with his father before, but Osborne did not recognize him. Levi had been much younger the last time they’d met.

Osborne called over to Levi, “Quaker man, let me buy you a drink to start your day out right.”

“No, thank you, sir.”

“Well ... let me buy you a meal.”

Levi reluctantly accepted, thinking that perhaps it was a way he could befriend Osborne and find out his plans.

“Which way are you traveling?” Osborne asked.

“I’m going west. I’m planning to cross the mountain at Mayberry’s Gap and take the left road to Burk’s Fork. My uncle, Samuel Stanley, has a cattle farm there where he keeps a large herd. He most likely will need my help.” Levi was now thankful for the alibi he had contrived before leaving home.

“Ever heard of old Bethuel Coffin?”

“He is my uncle, sir.”

“Well, now! I meet the nephew of the man I’m in pursuit of!” Osborne guffawed loudly.

Calming himself, Osborne continued. “Your uncle has one of my slaves with him, taking him to Indiana, I suppose.”

Levi mustered a surprised look.

“Oh, I don’t think your uncle is involved in any shady dealings,” said Osborne. “I imagine my Sam tricked your uncle into helping him.”

Osborne downed several shots of whiskey and slapped Levi on the back. “As we are going the same road, why don’t we travel together? It’s mighty lonesome traveling through this rough country with too few taverns—besides, it’s good protection to travel together.—Never know when you might get attacked by bandits or when your horse might break a leg.”

This is part of My plan.

Levi consented to traveling with Osborne. Osborne paid the bill and filled his pocket flask with whiskey. Their horses were taken to the door, and they rode off together—an abolitionist* and a slave catcher brought together by a mysterious force.

As they rode, Osborne was full of jokes and stories, most of which consisted of bragging about himself and denigrating his slaves. He paused only long enough from his tirade to take a swig from his whiskey flask.

Levi heard little of this patter. Instead, his mind and heart were full of plans, anxious thoughts, and prayers for wisdom. From Levi’s pensive silence, Osborne could tell that he had no interest in his boastings.

“Here, Coffin, take a healthy swig!” said Osborne, hoping to win Levi’s attention by passing him his flask of whisky.

Levi was desperate. If things continued, Osborne would reach Bethuel’s camp before he could warn Jack of the danger. To save Jack, he would have to keep his own head clear. Levi realized that the effects of Osborne’s drinking could work for him. Putting the flask up to his lips, he pretended to drink, but made sure that he swallowed nothing.

abolitionist: member of a movement who sought to put an end to slavery and the worldwide slave trade

“How do you plan to catch your slave?” Levi asked Osborne.

“I’ll find them first and then camp near them at night. Then I’ll gather some armed men, surround the camp and take my Sam back!” answered Osborne.

“And what if he tries to run?”

“I’ll shoot him down. No black man ever gets the better of me!”

“Pardon my wondering, but what if you find out that it isn’t your Sam after all? Is there a chance it could be someone else?”

“If it is not my Sam, then I may know who it could be. There was a black man who was willed free by a crazy master. The courts ruled in favor of the man’s heirs. Now the slave is missing, and the family has offered a reward of a hundred dollars to anyone who will find him. The Negro’s name is Jack Barnes, and by the drawing of him on the flier I think I’d recognize him. If it is not my slave, then it must be this Jack Barnes fellow. We could go fifty-fifty with the reward, and you’d get paid for your trouble.”

Levi heard God again instructing him to travel with Osborne, so he reluctantly agreed to aid Osborne in his endeavor.

Whenever they met others traveling in the opposite direction, Osborne would ask them if they had seen a family of Quakers in a wagon with a black man. If they had, he would ask what the slave looked like, and every physical description they gave led Osborne to believe it was his slave, Sam. However, both Sam and Jack were tall and lanky, and both very likely wore rough and torn clothes.



It appeared that they were nearing their quarry at a fast pace. Osborne seemed more determined than ever. His countenance loomed as heavy as a storm cloud about to break. Levi feared what Osborne might do to Uncle Bethuel, and prepared himself mentally to do what he could to protect his uncle. Many men had died mysteriously in these parts from unknown causes. Levi hoped that the influence of the liquor would slow Osborne and help Jack to escape his grasp.

By now, the two odd traveling companions had created a seeming bond of friendship. At the next tavern, Levi bought whiskey to refill Osborne’s pocket flask, which seemed to strengthen the budding friendship even more. Levi went out of his way to entertain Osborne with jokes that helped to keep him in good spirits.

“Deep within a forest a little turtle began to climb a tree. After hours of effort he reached the top, jumped into the air waving his front legs, but then crashed to the ground. After recovering, he slowly climbed the tree again, jumped, and fell to the ground.

“The turtle tried again and again, while a couple of birds sitting on a branch watched his sad efforts. Finally, the bird turned to her mate.

“‘Dear,’ she chirped, ‘I think it’s time to tell him he’s adopted.’”

Despite his joking, Levi's heart was heavy with the responsibility of his mission. Bethuel's family and Jack depended on him to get it right.

They again met a traveler going the opposite direction, and Osborne asked his usual questions.

"I have seen them. About fifteen miles down this road," the stranger told them.

"Let's stop for the night at the next tavern. We'll close in on them in the morning," said Osborne as they approached a log house, where a crudely painted wooden sign advertised: "Refreshments for man and beast."

Not this one. Go to the next tavern. Levi was reminded of someone he knew at the next tavern from his time collecting cattle for his uncle who just might help him. The tavern's owner was Squire Howells. He could picture Squire Howells's large, grey-whiskered, jolly face in his mind's eye. His jovial nature made him a friend to all the mountaineers. He kept no slaves, so he might be sympathetic to the cause of helping Jack escape. Levi hadn't gone wrong listening to God's voice before.

"I've been here before," said Levi to Osborne, referring to the dilapidated tavern just ahead. "The drink and service leave much to be desired. But if we go another eight miles down the road, the food and drink fill the stomach in a good way. There're usually a lot of other guests there, so you can collect the men you need."

Osborne reluctantly agreed, and after a few more hours, they arrived at Squire Howells's establishment.

Upon entering the tavern, Osborne approached a man whom Levi immediately recognized as Howells.

"Have you seen a two-horse wagon traveling this way with a Quaker man by the name of Coffin and his family?"

"They passed this evening, bought some horse feed from me, and inquired for a good camping place. I directed them to the Six-Mile Branch, where they would find good water," said Squire Howells.

"Was there a black man with them?"

"Yes," answered Howells. "Tall, lean fellow, wearing ragged clothing."

"That's him!" said Osborne. "That's my runaway slave! Gather some men and help me capture him, and I'll make sure you're paid generously for your efforts."

"Well, now," said Howells, "I can't say that I like this slave 'capturing' business."

"I have money, and I don't mind sharing some with you and the boys if you help me get what's mine."

Howells hesitated, and then replied, "Let me think about that."

Levi was comforted by Howells's aversion for catching runaway slaves. Would Howells help Levi with *his* plan?

Levi needed some time to pray. He had traveled one-hundred and twenty miles without sleep, yet he felt no fatigue. It was one of those miracles—a sign

that God's Spirit was sustaining him and would see him through. The whole situation was coming to a head and would soon be over, a victory or ... he dared not think what might happen if things went wrong. He must focus on the success of his mission. He must act now or all would be lost.

Levi excused himself from Osborne's presence and made his way to the stables where he had seen Squire Howells heading. He had gone to make sure that his guests' steeds were well taken care of. Levi seized the opportunity.

"Squire Howells, I don't know if you remember me. I passed this way and stayed at your establishment about a year ago with my uncle."

"I do recognize you. What business do you have with Osborne? Somehow you two don't seem like likely traveling companions."

"We are from the same county in North Carolina. I fell in company with him as I was traveling on business. Osborne is in pursuit of my uncle—the man with the wagon, who is going to Indiana. He believes that my uncle has got one of his Negroes with him, who somehow got hold of free papers."

Howells listened silently as Coffin continued. "From the accounts I've gathered from Osborne's neighbors, Sam was a faithful servant, who most likely ran away on account of the ungodly treatment he received. That was several months ago. I have heard that Sam was hiding out in the woods. But to tell you the truth, sir, I do not believe the Negro with my uncle is Osborne's slave at all."

"Who is he, then?" Howells asked.

"I believe that it may be another fugitive slave, Jack Barnes. On his master's death, he was willed free, but his freedom was rescinded by the jealous relatives of his former master."

"A man has a right to enjoy his freedom if it's been granted fair and square," said Howells.

"I am of the same mind, friend," Levi said. "If the man is Osborne's slave, he is entitled by the law to have his property returned. But if it is Jack, he should be free."

Levi did not tell Howells all he knew about Jack and Sam, yet he told no lie. If the whole truth were known, Sam was at that moment hiding amongst the stacks of hay in Levi's father's barn. Levi knew of this before he'd set off on this journey, yet he revealed this fact to no one.

"If it is this Jack Barnes fellow, I would rather help him than capture him! To be willed free and then enslaved again would take the heart out of any man."

"Osborne's plan is to collect some armed men, surround the camp, and take the fugitive dead or alive. If it proves to be Jack Barnes, Osborne will drag him back for the sake of the reward money. I must say that I am hoping for your help in saving Jack."

Howells was silent for a moment then replied, "I've decided I'll go with you. About the armed men that Osborne is trying to collect, I think I can help with

that. I will take my son and gather my friends and neighbors—people I trust. I will inform them thoroughly of the situation before they come.”

Howells and Coffin broke off their conversation and went into the bar room to find Osborne dancing drunkenly to some music that was being played on an old piano. Osborne’s jubilation was no doubt a mixture of the large quantities of liquor he was consuming and the excitement of capture soon at hand.

“Good news, Osborne, I’ve got the men we need. Squire Howells has some friends who will help us.”

“Good!” slurred Osborne. “I will not tolerate any nonsense if my slave tries to escape. He’ll either come quietly back with me, or he can sleep the long sleep. Here, Coffin, take one of my pistols. I see you don’t have one.”

“No need, friend,” Levi responded. “I don’t believe in killing.”

“Have it your way,” said Osborne. “But tell me, what do you believe in, then?”

“I believe that Jesus is the Way, the Truth, and the Life. He set me free from sin and death, and He can set you free, too.”

“Set us free? What do you mean? We are not slaves!”

“No, not like your Sam, but we are all slaves to sin, unless we know Jesus.”

“You’re talking mighty queer, Levi Coffin. Next thing I know you’ll be speaking up for them damn abolitionists.”

“When Jesus told us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, He said nothing about only helping out folks of a certain color, so I reckon those abolitionists are just trying to follow the teachings of the Good Book.”

Osborne was strangely silent.

A couple of hours later, Howells returned with his son, and the friends he had gathered, each carrying his gun in plain sight. The company of men rode off to the camp that was about six miles away. It was now past midnight, and they were nearing Six-Mile Branch. Levi’s heart throbbed with excitement. A few minutes more would decide it all.

Soon they could see Bethuel’s campfire through the trees. The riders moved back into the trees to decide what would be their plan of action. Now was the time, and Levi steeled himself, asking God for wisdom to talk to the men and foil Osborne’s plans.

Levi said, “Before we begin, I have something to say. Although the Negro with my uncle on account seems to be Osborne’s Sam, I have reason to believe that it may be a different Negro—Jack Barnes—who was set free by his master’s will. But his freedom was rescinded by an unfair ruling. Jack worked in our settlement all winter, and I found him to be a good and honest man, but since learning the news that the will was annulled and he had been consigned once again to slavery, he disappeared. I presume he is with my uncle trying to make his way to a free state. If this is the man we find in camp. I will have nothing to do with capturing him, and I hope neither will you.”

"You can rest easy, Mr. Coffin. We are men of principle, and we won't be capturing any man who was lawfully set free," said Howells. The rest of Howells's company voiced their consent.

Seeing that he was outnumbered, Osborne reluctantly chose to agree, but Levi could sense that he still hoped to find a way to capture Jack Barnes if it turned out not to be his slave.

"I have another proposition to make," said Levi, continuing to take command of the situation. "I propose that we wait till daylight. If we were to rush in now, someone may get hurt, and my cousin, Mary, is a gentle lady who is part of my uncle's traveling party. I am concerned for her safety. At daybreak I will enter the camp alone, and talk with my uncle privately to ascertain if the Negro with them is Sam. If it is Sam, I will make my way back here so that Osborne can enter the camp and reclaim his slave. However, if I find that it is Jack Barnes, I will signal that you can come to the camp peacefully."

Howells's men agreed to the plan, however Osborne was not as accommodating.

"But if it is my slave, then he may sense that something is not right when you show up at the camp. He could run off while you are talking with your uncle."

"If it is Sam and he escapes, I'll pay for him myself," said Levi, knowing full well that Sam was safe in his father's barn.

"That's fair," said Howells, strongly discouraging any further objections from Osborne.

Seeing that they were against him, Osborne relented.

When daylight broke, Levi rode up to the camp. Bethuel, Elisha, Mary, and, of course, Jack were greatly surprised at Levi's unexpected appearance in the wild mountain regions of Virginia.

"There is a slave catcher riding with me, by the name of Osborne. He is looking for his runaway slave," said Levi in explanation. "He thinks Jack may be his Sam. However, there is no danger."

Levi rode back to the men who were awaiting the news. He told them that it was indeed Jack Barnes and not Sam. The party of men rode up to the camp, and if it weren't for Levi's advance warning, would surely have struck terror in the hearts of the travelers, as the men were of the mountain regions and well armed.

After an explanation as to what they were about, Osborne inspected Jack, the Negro traveling with Bethuel, and acknowledged that he was not his slave.

Bethuel and his son Elisha knew Osborne and shook hands. Mary pulled out some victuals and refreshments for the party of men. The morning was clear and bright, and they ate heartily. The load of care was lifted from Levi's heart, and he was elated.

After a breakfast and a time of rest from their night's adventure, Levi told Osborne, "I'll stay with my kin and see them off. Then I'll return to the tavern with Howells and have my horse properly fed."

There was some mysterious force at work that changed Osborne's heart for the moment to give up his mischief to capture Jack. Osborne agreed to Levi's idea, then said, "Thank you kindly, Mr. Levi. You have been a help to me, and I'm obliged for it. I wish I could pay you something for all your trouble."

"No need. I was doing my duty—as any gentleman would."

Levi thanked the Lord that things had turned out as well as they had.

The men rode away to return to their homes, and Osborne to the tavern to sleep off his drunkenness.

Levi spent an hour with his uncle's party, explaining his adventure in full, and allaying Jack's fears.

"May the Lord bless you with a safe and pleasant journey," said Levi in parting. "Jack, may you find agreeable refuge in your new home in Indiana."

Levi turned toward home. God had kept him safely every step of the way. The adventure was over, and his mission was completed.

Melissa had traveled well. As for Levi, he was weary. Now that this battle had been won, he desperately needed to rest.

When Levi returned to his father's house he was warmly greeted by his family and friends. They had been anxious about him, but their worries were replaced with joy on hearing of the danger averted and Jack's narrow escape.

That night, Levi took a basket of food to Sam. Sam still slept out in Vestal's barn. Levi sat down and in a low voice told Sam of his adventures with Osborne, his former master, and of Jack Barnes who had escaped being captured.

Every few sentences, Sam praised the Lord. Levi had to remind him to keep his voice down, as they did not know what slave catcher might be lurking in the dark, watching for him or some other fugitive.



Indiana, 1823

Almost the first man Levi saw as he rode into Richmond, Indiana, was Jack Barnes. As soon as Jack recognized Levi, he ran up to him and clasped him in his arms.

"Here's the man who saved me from slavery," said Jack to the little crowd that had gathered around to witness their reunion. "If it hadn't been for Friend Levi, I would have been dragged back to slavery for sure.—Or I might have been sold to the rice swamps of Georgia, where all they give a man to eat is a bushel of corn a week."

Turning to Levi, Jack Barnes asked, "How are you fixed for money, Levi? Is there something that I can do for you?"

"I've been paid richly enough today, Jack, seeing your joy. But, do tell me what you are doing now."

"I work at a saw mill. I get good wages. I even saved up and bought some land! Imagine! I was the first in this small village to build a proper cottage."

Levi congratulated him. "Praise the Lord! He's brought you through deep waters and the fires of testing to your determined haven."



The scene starts to swirl and dissolve into a blur of light, as the room at the casino and the game board begin to reappear. Everyone surrounding the table cheers as the players recount their participation in the adventure.

The croupier resets the game for the next play and announces, "I hope you enjoyed the game. There will now be a break for refreshments. If you folks like, you can mosey on down to the theater where the River Boat Show is about to begin. Following the show, we will resume play. See you then! On behalf of the house, I thank all of you for playing at Casino Celestiale tonight."

A few folks linger around the table to talk. One of them is none other than Jack Osborne. He comes over to me and embraces me affectionately. I am shocked! "Osborne?"

"I bet you did not expect to see a scallywag like me here!"

"Well, I..."

"You remember what you told me at the tavern that day? It took me a few years to get around to taking Jesus, but I followed your advice, and here I am. I have you to thank for telling me what I needed to hear."

"Don't thank me, I was just sharing my bread with the hungry, so to speak. Praise God! I'm so glad you made it! And have you reconciled with those from your Earth life?"

"I suppose you mean Sam?" said Osborne with a chuckle. "He came with me tonight, and is just over there."

THE END

Levi Coffin (October 28, 1798–September 16, 1877) was an American Quaker, educator, and abolitionist.

Coffin was born in Greensboro, North Carolina. In 1821, he wanted to start a school for slaves, but slave-owners refused to allow them to attend. In 1826, he moved to Fountain City, Indiana (then called Newport). In 1847, he moved to Cincinnati, Ohio, where he opened a store which sold goods made by freed slaves. He also visited Britain to raise funds, and in 1867 he was a delegate to the International Anti-Slavery Conference in Paris.

Coffin has been referred to as the “President of the Underground Railroad,” allegedly from a slave catcher who said, “There’s an underground railroad going on here, and Levi’s the president of it.” Coffin claimed to have been involved in the escape of about 3,000 slaves. Questioned about why he aided slaves, Coffin said “The Bible, in bidding us to feed the hungry and clothe the naked, said nothing about color, and I should try to follow the teachings of that Good Book.” Another time he simply said, “I thought it was always safe to do right.”

(Web excerpt)

