



# Trouble Don't Last

By Shelley Pearsall

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Eleven-year-old Samuel was born as Master Hackler's slave, and working the Kentucky farm is the only life he's ever known—until one dark night in 1859, that is. With no warning, cranky old Harrison, a fellow slave, pulls Samuel from his bed and, together, they run.

The journey north seems much more frightening than Master Hackler ever was, and Samuel's not sure what freedom means aside from running, hiding, and starving. But as they move from one refuge to the next on the Underground Railroad, Samuel uncovers the secret of his own past—and future. And old Harrison begins to see past a whole lifetime of hurt to the promise of a new life—and a poignant reunion—in Canada.

In a heartbreaking and hopeful first novel, Shelley Pearsall tells a suspenseful, emotionally charged story of freedom and family. *Trouble Don't Last* includes a historical note and map.

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## Trouble Don't Last By Shelley Pearsall Bibliography

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## **Editorial Review**

From Publishers Weekly

This action-packed, tautly plotted first novel presents a quest for freedom on the Underground Railroad that realistically blends kindness and cruelty. "Trouble follows me like a shadow," begins 11-year-old narrator Samuel. When Harrison, one of the elderly slaves who raised him after the master sold off the boy's mother, decides to run away, Samuel must go with him. "Truth is," Samuel confesses, "even the thought of going straight to Hell didn't scare me as much as the thought of running away." His fears prove justified. Samuel and Harrison's journey thrusts them into uncertainty and peril, and introduces an imaginatively and poignantly rendered cast. Characters include a black man who helps them cross the Ohio River, all the while threatening them with a pistol and a knife if they don't do exactly as he says (he abandons a less cooperative fugitive to certain capture) and a creepy young white widow who converses with her husband's ghost. Throughout, Pearsall seamlessly refers to Samuel's and Harrison's hardships under slavery, creating a sense of lives that extend past the confines of the book. This memorable portrayal of their haphazard, serendipitous and dangerous escape to freedom proves gripping from beginning to end, Ages 9-12.

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From School Library Journal

Gr 5-8-Strong characters and an inventive, suspenseful plot distinguish Pearsall's first novel, a story of the Underground Railroad in 1859. Samuel, the 11-year-old slave who narrates the story, is awakened by 70-year-old Harrison, who has decided to flee their tyrannical Kentucky master. The questions that immediately flood the boy's mind provide the tension that propels the novel: What has precipitated the old man's sudden desire for freedom? Why would he risk taking Samuel along? Harrison is mindful of the dangers and wary of trusting even the strangers who might offer help. Samuel, an impulsive boy who seems prone to trouble, is grudgingly accustomed to his life of servitude and reluctant to leave it. As days of hiding and nights of stealthy movement take them farther away from their former lives, Harrison and Samuel forge a bond that strengthens their resolve. Faith, luck, and perseverance see the man and boy safely into Canada, where a new journey-one of self-discovery and self-healing-begins. Pearsall's extensive research is deftly woven into each scene, providing insight into plantation life, 19th-century social mores, religious and cultural norms, and the political turmoil in the years preceding the Civil War. Samuel's narrative preserves the dialect, the innocence, the hope, and even the superstitions of slaves like Harrison and himself, whose path to freedom is filled with kindness and compassion as well as humiliation and scorn. This is a compelling story that will expand young readers' understanding of the Underground Railroad and the individual acts of courage it embraced.

*William McLoughlin, Brookside School, Worthington, OH*

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From [Booklist](#)

\*Starred Review\* Gr. 5-10. Far from the romantic Underground Railroad stories about brave abolitionists and hide-and-seek adventure, this powerful historical novel is harsh and realistic, not only about the brutal effects of slavery that the runaways carry with them forever but also about the prejudice and hardship they encounter on their journey to freedom. First-novelist Pearsall is a museum historian in Ohio and her astonishing story is based on fact. Her runaway heroes are brave and determined to save each other; they're also rough, mean, and frightened. The conductors aren't saints: some are scared runaways and their help is

often limited. The patrollers are always close. The story is told by Samuel, 11, who is forced to run with Harrison, an old slave, from the Kentucky plantation to Ohio in 1859, and finally to freedom in Canada. Harrison hates taking orders, even from the conductors, and Samuel rages at having to disguise himself as a girl. Yet when they find shelter with caring people, Samuel says with simple eloquence that his words of thanks are too small and what he wants to say is too big. This is a thrilling escape story, right until the very last chapter, but always there's the memory of daily life under slavery and the anguish of family separation. Samuel's mother was sold off when he was a baby: will he ever see her again? *Hazel Rochman*

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## **Users Review**

### **From reader reviews:**

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#### **Larry Dolin:**

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