

# The Great Escape

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**M**ANY ENSLAVED people bravely attempted to escape to freedom during America's long and terrible history of slavery.

Most of their stories are lost to the annals of time, but not all of them, fortunately. One of the more fascinating true stories is "Master Slave Husband Wife," which chronicles the 1848 escape from slavery of Ellen Craft and her husband William. Ellen Craft was enslaved by her father and her half sister in Georgia. Her husband, William Craft, was a gifted cabinet maker enslaved on a nearby estate. On December 20, 1848, they made a daring and ingenious escape. Ellen, who was very light skinned, dressed as an ailing white gentleman, while William posed as her enslaved servant. Together they traveled from Macon, Georgia to Philadelphia and then on to Boston and freedom.

In New England, with the help of activist William Wells Brown, the Crafts learned to tell their story as a way of supporting the abolitionist movement and joined the lecture circuit, despite being in danger from slave hunters. They learned to read and write and penned a book about their experience: "Running a Thousand Miles for Freedom."

Then the United States passed the Fugitive Slave Act in 1850, which required all citizens to return Black people to bondage in the South. The danger multiplied not just for the Crafts but for all formerly enslaved people in the North. Tensions boiled over throughout the country, with southerners fearing for their way of life, northerners supporting the abolishment of slavery (though they too had their prejudices against Blacks), and politicians arguing about whether to legalize slavery in the new territories and states out west.

Ilyon Woo has written a fascinating chronicle about this couple's story within the backdrop of the country's turmoil: the difficulties they faced during their escape, their struggles to find safety and work in New England, and the exhaustion of traveling the country telling their story.

Woo has carefully researched this subject and seamlessly notes places in the story where there is no supporting documentation to verify events. She paints a picture not only of the Crafts and their enslavers, but also of Congress wrestling with the problem of slavery. Readers can see how opposing views of slavery permeated the capital, anger and fear simmering and sometimes exploding as the country drew ever closer to Civil War.

The Crafts eventually settled in England and started a family, not returning to the United States until after the war. Still, now back home and no longer enslaved, they faced discrimination, financial struggles, and even civil suits. Woo wonders if this is why their story is not better known.

Yet this story should be more widely told. How this couple pulled off a brilliant escape, became renowned activists, wrote a book, raised a family, and returned to their homeland in the midst of Reconstruction and racism is worth telling. Their story of love and survival despite the odds is a profound testament to the courage and ingenuity of people who just want to be free. **NB**

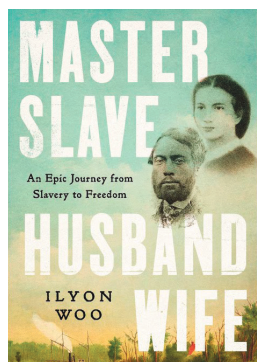
**"Master Slave Husband Wife"**

By Ilyon Woo

\$29.99

Simon & Schuster

416 pages



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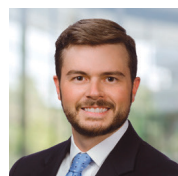
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## BOOK REVIEW

# True Love

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**“F**RAN, YOU JUST have to read this book,” said my friend Nancy, thrusting her copy of “Foster” into my hands. I nodded assent, tucked it into my bag and went on about my morning.

Later that afternoon, I opened her book and fell in. I gulped it all in one sitting and then started over again. Each time I was swept away by the gentle lyricism of this short, sweet novel that is now part of the school syllabus in Ireland, where its author, Claire Keegan resides. And I can certainly see why.

In “Foster,” a young girl, never named, is taken by her father from her home in Clonegal, Ireland, to stay with her mother’s relatives along the coast in Wexford. She will be spending some time with the Kinsellas, whom she has never met, while her mother juggles her siblings and awaits the birth of yet another child.

When the girl’s father drops her off with her relatives, we learn that money is very tight in the girl’s home. There’s no money to get the hay in and the father has gambled away their cow. Having the girl stay elsewhere will mean one less mouth to feed. The Kinsellas can keep her as long as they like, the father tells them. “She’ll ate ye out of house and home,” he says as he drops her off. “She’ll ate, but ye can work her.”

He doesn’t even remember to leave her things with her, so all she has is the clothes on her back and sandals covering her dirty feet. Mrs. Kinsella gently bathes her and dresses her in a boy’s outfit, though no child lives in the home.

As the summer wears on, the girl discovers that Mr and Mrs Kinsella are loving and kind in a way she has not experienced before. They draw her out and help her feel safe and secure. She especially connects with Mr Kinsella, who holds her in his arms as though she were his own.

Narrated by the girl herself, we follow along as she discovers the tragedy that shadows the Kinsellas and leaves her loving them even more. When she learns at the end of the summer that the new baby has arrived and her mother wants her to return home, the first thing she says is, “I have to go back, then?”

The sweetest part of the book is the ending. What happens when the girl is dropped off at her house and the Kinsellas drive away is worth a whole box of tissues. (Have them handy.)

This gentle treatise on the power of love and connection and how they can transform a child is worth reading more than once, and will be easy to do since this is a slender volume. Claire Keegan writes with gentle beauty, never succumbing to oversentimentality. The power of her work lies in its subtlety, in the emotions that lie just underneath the narrative, and in the honest depiction of the world through the eyes of this resilient, remarkable young girl. **NS**

*“Foster”*

*By Claire Keegan*

\$20.00

*Grove Press*

*128 pages*

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## BOOK REVIEW

# Paved With Good Intentions

by **FRAN WITHROW**

**WE SURE DO ADORE** our roads, unless we are inconvenienced by them. Traffic jams, construction blockages, and poorly maintained expressways will have us tapping our feet in frustration and peeking at our phones. The world is criss-crossed with roads and more are being built all the time. But there is a downside to our love affair with roads, and it is a doozy.

Ben Goldfarb explores the far-reaching effects of roads in his fascinating book, "Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet." Roads are a convenience, but Goldfarb shows how they are also detrimental to every sentient being on the planet.

You can easily guess that one problem is roadkill, which is not a new phenomenon. As early as 1910, people decried the death of animals who didn't have enough time to get out of the way of these quick, new predators. We're all familiar with those sad little carcasses by the side of the road as we speed by. And roadkill numbers are more massive than we see. Many animals crawl away to die, or are too small to be noticed by a passing motorist.

Roads block and alter rivers, which affect fish. Roads interrupt migration routes. Animals need to roam to survive, but highways can cut them off so severely they become trapped. Some species are so averse to these "moving fences" they starve and die, unable to access life-saving food just a few hundred feet away.

Amphibians, snakes, and turtles are less hesitant to cross roads, but are more likely to get squished since they are slower to run the gauntlet. And what about insects? Goldfarb says we are in an insect apocalypse, and I believe it. As a child, I remember our windshields spattered with insects af-

ter a trip. When was the last time you wiped a moth or butterfly off your car?

And it's not just the fact that animals and cars crash into each other. Traffic noise affects all manner of wildlife. Stress levels rise in both people and animals who live near high-traffic areas. People of color, whose communities are often forcibly divided by highways, are disproportionately affected by the noise and exhaust fumes emitted by vehicles.

All this is discouraging, but Goldfarb also talks to researchers, scientists, concerned civilians, and others who are struggling to help. Engineers are creating special underpasses and bridges so wildlife can safely cross highways. Volunteers meet to carry frogs and turtles across roads, wildlife rehabilitators take in those orphaned by cars, researchers gather data that helps in constructing safer highway crossings.

Some countries hold engineers accountable for road collisions, which cause millions of dollars in damage to cars and people as well as to wildlife. Thus it is the road designers rather than the driver who is responsible. A novel idea!

Our dependence on roads isn't going away anytime soon. What other ways can we help alleviate the suffering associated with roads? Well, as Goldfarb said he drove down a road in Brazil, "On a planet preoccupied with speed, it felt good to go slow." **[E]**

*"Crossings: How Road Ecology is Shaping the Future of Our Planet"*

*By Ben Goldfarb*

\$30.00

*W. W. Norton & Company*

384 pages