

## Court Case: Commoner Accused of Harboring a Runaway Slave

**Characters:** Judge 1                      Judge 2  
                    Witness 1                      Commoner

**Judge 1:** We are here today to determine if this commoner is guilty of harboring a runaway slave. The commoner was found with the runaway slave. Are there any witnesses to speak for the commoner?

**Witness 1:** *(Slowly stands. Gestures to the commoner and speaks sincerely.)*  
The commoner swore, on an oath to the Gods, that he did not help the slave escape. He said the slave came to his door and refused to give his name. The commoner believed there was no way to find out who was the rightful owner of the slave.

**Judge 2:** *(Points his right index finger at the commoner and raises his voice angrily.)* Commoner, did you take the slave to the palace in order to discover his rightful owner?

**Commoner:** *(Stands with one hand on his hip. Speaks impatiently.)*  
No, I was too busy to do that.

**Judge 2:** *(Frowning angrily.)* Where was the missing slave found?

**Commoner:** *(Obviously annoyed.)* He was captured in the street while accompanying me to my house.

**Judge 1:** *(Looks at the audience.)* Ladies and gentlemen of the Assembly, it is time for you to decide this case. You must decide if the commoner is guilty of any crime and, if so, what the commoner's punishment shall be. In making this decision, consider these laws from the Code of Hammurabi that you have before you:

1. If a person has helped a palace slave or a commoner's slave to escape out of the city gate, that person shall be put to death.
2. If a person has harbored in his house a fugitive slave owned by the palace or owned by a commoner, and that person has not surrendered the slave at the demand of the police, that person shall be put to death.

3. If a person has captured a fugitive slave in the open country and has returned the slave to his master, the owner of the slave shall pay that person two shekels of silver.
4. If a person has captured a fugitive slave in the open country and the slave will not name his owner, that person shall take the slave to the palace and inquire into his record and then return the slave to his owner. If that person keeps the slave in his house and the slave is captured in that person's possession, that person shall be put to death.

**Judge 2:**

Ladies and gentlemen, you have heard the evidence and have read the laws. You must now judge the case.

**Stop Here  
& Discuss**



- **What is the legal problem in this case?**
- **How did the commoner come to possess the runaway slave?**
- **Why didn't the commoner know the real owner of the runaway slave?**
- **How could the commoner have discovered the real owner of the runaway slave?**
- **Where was the runaway slave found?**