



F R E E S T Y L E

TWICE FREED



PATRICIA ST. JOHN

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FOREWARD
BY HER SISTER ~ HAZEL ST. JOHN

When Patricia St. John was about thirteen years old her imagination was captured by the story of Onesimus, the runaway slave, whose small history was captured in the New Testament book of Philemon. She told our father she wished to write a novel based on the incident, and without a flicker of a smile he accompanied her to the public library.

‘My daughter wishes to write a novel set in Bible times,’ he announced to the astonished librarian. ‘Could you please show her the ancient history section where she can do some research on the period.’

Patricia failed to see the wink that she later felt must have passed between them and felt very solemn and adult. She obediently researched and found out quite a lot about the Roman world and ancient Greece. She wrote her story laboriously, mostly in pencil in a multitude of lined penny notebooks. Our family applauded her but it never went any further. Some years later the manuscript, almost forgotten, was lost in a move.

But the idea never quite left her and one day, years later in 1966, we both set out from Lebanon in a small Volkswagen, with a tent and a primus stove, on a six week journey from Beirut to Tangier in North Africa. This took us to every place mentioned in St. Paul’s journeys in the book of Acts and to many other places too, except Caesarea and the islands of the sea. Among the most exciting were Colosse where Onesimus lived, Laodicea across the valley and Rome where through Paul the prisoner Onesimus found new life in Christ.

The story of that journey and it’s adventures can be read in the autobiography *Patricia St. John tells her own Story*,

published by STL, *Twice Freed* was written soon after she reached North Africa.

Patricia wrote twenty-six books, mostly for children and teenagers. These have been translated into many different languages. There are also five biographies, a book of verses and the story of the Ruanda Revival, *Breath of life*, and several booklets. Two of her stories, *Treasures of the Snow* and *Tanglewoods Secret* have been made into films, and a third is being prepared.

Though Patricia left us in 1993, letters still come from different parts of the world from grown-ups and children who think she is still with us and who want to tell her how much her stories have meant to them. What always made her most glad was news that someone, through her books, had found like Onesimus the difference that knowing Christ can make to life.

Dedicated
to my sister Hazel
who produced a Volkswagen and
a tent and accompanied me
in the steps of St. Paul

Patricia St. John

1

IT WAS MID AFTERNOON IN EARLY JULY AND the parched world was, in general asleep.

The black flocks, for which the valley was famous, huddled under the poplar trees, and the reapers drowsed in the shade of their stooks of corn or under their wooden carts.

In the well-to-do houses, set high above the pasture land, prosperous land owners and farmers and wool merchants slept soundly on their couches, while their slaves dozed guiltily, with one ear cocked, under the vines in the courtyard. Even the vultures hung motionless as though stuck flat against the blue.

Only up in the gorge, where the air seemed to swim over the burning rocks, something moved. A brown-skinned boy of twelve, naked except for a loin cloth and sandals, was climbing the canyon with the grace and agility of a young wild cat. He cared nothing for the sweat that was streaming down his face or for the rocks that blistered his hands, for this was his hour of freedom. From early dawn till late at night he belonged to his master and outwardly bowed to his discipline; but at this hour he belonged to himself and lived and conquered and exulted.

Here in the canyons nothing could withstand him. In winter he cut paths through the snow drifts, and in spring he breasted the cascades and the waterfalls. In summer the fierce afternoon heat could not daunt him and he climbed on, with one eye on the sun which was now to the west of him. When the shadow of the rock above him reached

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the border of the olive grove below, he knew he must turn home. But he still had time to reach the old fallen pine that blocked the ravine, and to dive into the green pool that lay on the further side of it.

The gorge was narrowing now, and the pines and stunted oaks and junipers cast their shade across the ravine. The stream was no more than a trickle, but it was cool and sweet, and he dashed the water over his face and body and felt he could go on climbing all day. He always yearned to go further - up to the bitter salt lake, Anava, where the absinthe flowers grew and where the river Lycus was born, up to the snows of Mount Cadmus - but the shade was creeping toward the olive grove, and his master would be stirring in his sleep. He cursed and spat.

At least he would have time for a quick swim in the green pool that was so deep that it never dried up. He scrambled up on to the fallen tree, and then stopped dead, his mouth open and his eyes dilated with a strange superstitious fear. For a little girl was sitting on the trunk, dangling her legs over the water, singing softly to herself.

She was about nine or ten years old, small and slender, with smooth dark hair hanging to her waist. Her cheeks were flushed with heat, and her lap was full of the flowers she had been gathering - drooping scabious and buttercups and forget-me-nots from the stream's edge. So absorbed was she that she did not see the boy approaching.

Who was she? Her simple tunic was of rich material, her sandals were new and expensive. Her bearing, even as she played, was that of a little queen. He watched her intently, crouching on the trunk, for he was still not sure of her identity. Was she some daughter of Cybele, the great mother of Nature, to whose arms the dead returned like homing children? Well, if she was, there was nothing to fear, for she was certainly no demon. He drew a little nearer, and a twig snapped under his feet.

She looked up and gave a start but she showed no great

surprise or fear. For she was a practical child, and to her a boy was a boy. Besides, he looked a nice boy, and she was just beginning to feel slightly afraid of what she had done.

"What are you doing up here, boy?" she asked, in perfect Greek. "I thought everyone was asleep."

"What are you doing?" he retorted rather severely, for he was convinced now that she was nothing but a human girl. "It is a long way up the canyon for a little maid to stray alone. And, anyway, who are you?"

"I'm Eirene," replied the child. She spoke guardedly and watched him gravely, as though wondering how much it was safe to reveal. And he gazed back at her, the tremulous sunlight falling upon her through the pine boughs, so alone and defenceless among the crags of the ravine; and he found himself longing to know all about her, to gain her trust and, if need be, to protect her.

"But where is your home, Eirene? I've never seen you playing with the little girls of Colosse."

"I live in Laodicea," she replied, still watchful, still hesitant.

"Laodicea!" he repeated in astonishment, for Laodicea was ten miles across the valley. "Surely you never came here alone, and will no one be looking for you?"

"Yes, they will!" Her eyes suddenly twinkled with amusement, and her confidences came pouring out. "They will be getting crazy about me. I came over this morning with my father. He makes cloaks, and he came to talk to Master Philemon about wool. But they went in to dine together, and I was left with my nurse and the slaves. My nurse started to talk to Philemon's slaves, and she didn't want me to hear. She gave me some food and told me to go out into the vineyard, but there was nothing to do in the vineyard. I wanted to climb and see what lay at the top of the canyons, so I ran away. I climbed right up here, and I should have gone further, but the green pool stopped me."

"But weren't you afraid, so high up, all alone?"

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"No," replied Eirene with spirit. "I like being alone. I get sick of my nurse. She is so afraid of my father she never takes her eyes off me at home. It is Eirene this, Eirene that, till I could scream. Why should I do what she wants and go where she takes me, all day long? Don't you ever want to get away from everybody and do what you like, instead of doing what you are told all the time?"

The boy laughed aloud. Here was indeed a kindred spirit!

"Yes," he replied, "indeed I do. That is why I come up the ravine: to get away from everyone and do what I like. Sometimes, when I have time, I swim across the pools and go higher up into the rocks, up to where the eagles live. One day I shall go even further. One day I shall follow the river right to its source. One day I shall climb right to the top of the peak and look over the whole land of Phrygia and away to the sea westward. And then one day, I shall cross that sea. They say the land of Greece is the most beautiful in the world."

He stopped, surprised at his own outburst, for he usually kept his longing to himself. His thoughts came back abruptly to the little creature at his side, who sat staring up at him, eyes alight, sharing his visions.

"You ought to go home!" he said. "Your nurse will be out of her mind. And what about your mother? Did you leave her in Laodicea?"

A shadow passed over the child's face. "She died two years ago," she said simply. "When she was alive it was different. She never watched me all the time. She let me play, pick flowers and go where I liked. When she was alive, I was free."

"Have you no brothers or sisters to play with?"

"No, there's only me. My father says I am all he has and very precious to him; so my nurse never dares to stop looking after me. My father is a very busy man, always down at the looms, or going to look at wools, or travelling down to Ephesus or

Miletus with his merchandise. Sometimes I think he forgets all about me.”

“I don’t suppose he does really,” said the boy, comfortingly. “Come, Eirene, we must go home now, at once. Swing over the bough like that and you will reach the rock with the tips of your toes. Now, down to the next one and into the stream bed. It is easier there. Loop you dress into your girdle and take my hand. Now just jump from rock to rock as I do, and we’ll soon be down.”

He glanced anxiously at the shadows below him. Already half the olive grove was immersed in shade. He was very late, and his master Philemon had an important guest and would have been yelling for him for the past hour. He had not known what had been happening in his master’s house, as he had been sent out early with a message to the shepherds in a distant pasture up the valley, and he had not been expected back until after Philemon’s siesta. Perhaps he could invent some story about difficulty in finding the flocks. That might at least delay his beating until his master could investigate. In any case it did not matter too much. He was used to beatings. What mattered now was the nimble little creature who held his hand so tightly and laughed so gaily she missed her footing, skipping from one side of the stream bed to the other. He must hand her over safe and sound to her nurse.

And say goodbye? She was the only daughter of a rich Laodicean merchant and he a poor slave at Colosse. Why should his mind refuse so doggedly to say goodbye? They were nearly out of the canyon now, and he reached up to help her down from a boulder too high for her. But before he could take hold of her he was startled by a piercing scream behind him, and turning his head quickly, he received a stinging slap in the face then another and another from a strong young slave, while the nurse screamed hysterically and held out her arms to the child.

“Oh, Mistress Eirene, Mistress Eirene, you cruel girl,”

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shrieked the nurse. "How could you disobey me and run off with this wicked, wicked boy? Oh, Mistress Eirene, I've been nearly out of my mind, hunting through the vineyards where I told you to stay. How could you listen to a low slave and run away from your own poor nurse? Oh, beat him again, Menander, beat the breath out of him!"

Menander, holding the boy fast, noticed that he neither struggled nor made any attempt to escape. He lifted his hand to strike him again but was arrested by a sudden shriek of rage above him. Eirene stood poised on the boulder like a small commanding fury, her eyes blazing, trembling with anger.

"Let him go this instant, Menander," she shouted. "Do as I tell you immediately or I'll tell my father of you. How dare you hit that good boy?"

She suddenly ceased to be a commanding fury and burst into tears, a frightened hurt little girl whose happy afternoon had been spoilt. Kicking her nurse aside, she slid off the boulder all by herself and took her stand defiantly beside the boy.

Menander had let go. He had a healthy fear of his little mistress' temper.

"Does my father know I'm lost yet?" asked Eirene, sniffing hard. The tears were still running down her cheeks, but she had drawn herself up to her full small height and held her head high.

"No, Mistress Eirene," twittered the nurse. "He is still talking business, but he will call for you at any moment now. I pray you come back quickly."

"I shall not come back if you say any bad things about this boy," retorted Eirene. "I shall stay here and be lost, and my father will be very, very angry with you both for losing me. He will probably punish you both when I tell him."

It was only too likely. The nurse started to plead tearfully. Menander scratched his head. The boy looked her straight in the face.

"Come home, Eirene," he said gently. "I must go to my work now; but if I see your father I will tell him you are all coming." He took her hand and helped her over the last rough bit of rock. Menander controlled himself with difficulty.

"Mistress," protested the frantic nurse, "a common slave..."

"I don't care what he is," retorted Eirene. "He's a boy, and he helped me. Goodbye, boy, and thank you. One day we will meet again."

"The gods forbid," muttered Menander under his breath; but the boy took no notice. He turned back and looked straight at Eirene and spoke to her alone, as though ratifying a covenant. "Yes," he said, "one day we shall meet again."

2

HE SPED DOWN THE STEEP OLIVE SLOPES AND arrived breathless at his master's house. He had not wanted Eirene to know he was Philemon's slave, but, of course, it had all come out in the end. It always did, he thought suddenly. There was no escaping the fact of his slavery. And yet it had not really mattered. It warmed his heart that, knowing all, she had still stood by him and still wanted to see him again. The thought of that had made him forget his stinging bruised cheeks; in fact he only remembered them as he flung himself breathlessly into his master's house and confronted young Archippus, Philemon's son.

"You're late, Onesimus," said Archippus sharply. "My father has been calling for you. He has a guest, and he wanted you to bring the wine when they finished the siesta. He is very displeased with you. Where have you been and who slapped you in the face?"

"I've been down at the sheep pastures," said Onesimus hopefully. "It took a long time to find those shepherds. They had gone down to the river to water the flocks."

"Liar!" said Archippus scornfully. "You were back from the pastures soon after noon. One of the slaves saw you running up to those precious ravines of yours several hours ago, and my father knows it; so don't try this story out on him."

It was only two or three years ago that Onesimus and Archippus had climbed the canyons together, and although Archippus, since leaving school, was busy establishing the new relationship of master and slave, and Onesimus was

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busy resenting it, there was still a close bond between them. Archippus as a baby had spent hours in the slaves' hut, watching the grindstone, blowing on the charcoal, snuggling down into the unteazled piles of black sheeps-wool that awaited the spinning-wheel. The two had explored the stream beds together, dammed the same pools, shared secrets about birds' nests and foxes' lairs and together tracked bears and hyenas. Onesimus hated Archippus and was ashamed of it, because Archippus had been his good friend in the past. Archippus loved Onesimus and was also ashamed of it. It was weak and unmanly to love a slave.

"Who is the guest?" asked Onesimus, hastily wiping the mud off his hands and arms and slipping on a clean tunic.

"Polemon, from Laodicea," replied Archippus impressively. "He's the richest cloak-maker in the town, and he has decided to buy our wool. He came over this morning to see some of our flocks and to take back samples. He may even introduce our wool to others of his guild. It may mean a journey to Ephesus later on, and I shall go too."

Onesimus, fastening his girdle, made no reply. Somewhat fearfully he entered the atrium or central court of the house and stood before his master. Archippus, anxious to see what would happen slipped in behind him and sat down at his father's feet.

Philemon and his guest reclined on couches, sipping their wine and talking eagerly. It was a beautiful courtyard, shaded by an old vine which dangled its ripe bunches of grapes through the lattice work that supported it. The floor was paved in the Greek style with coloured mosaic, and a fountain played in the centre. Philemon, a prosperous farmer, with a keen, weather-bronzed face, turned sharply on the young truant. His guest was an important one, and though he had plenty of slaves on call, he would have liked to have had this graceful boy in attendance.

"Why are you late?" he asked coldly.

It suddenly struck Onesimus that it might pay to tell the

truth, or at least some of it. It might also afford an excellent opportunity of revenging himself on the slave Menander. He turned and bowed to the guest.

"I beg you to excuse me, Sir", he said. "You have a little daughter?"

Philemon frowned, and the guest raised his eyebrows, as much as to say, "If I have, what is that to you?"

"She strayed too far at her play, Sir," went on Onesimus undiscouraged. "I saw her climbing the rocks up in the ravines and went after her. She was little, Sir, and the boulders were high. I brought her down slowly, helping her where the ground was rough."

"And in the name of the goddess," exclaimed Polemon the cloak-maker, half rising, "where was her nurse? And where is Eirene now?"

"I restored her to her nurse, master," replied Onesimus. "In fact I met the nurse and the slave Menander at the entrance to the vineyards searching for her. No harm has come to the little maid. If you would have me bring her..."

"I will go myself," said Archippus rising hastily, "and see that all is well." His handsome young face was flushed with jealousy and arrogance. That impudent young Onesimus should have been keeping company with Polemon's daughter and championing her in danger was indeed a twist of fortune. He left the room hastily, and Polemon carelessly threw a piece of gold at Onesimus.

"Take that for your services," he said. "The nurse shall be dismissed tonight and the slave punished. She's a wilful little maid and needs a mother. Now, to go back to those bales of wool we were discussing just now....."

His daughter was forgotten and he was once again intent on his money-making, his eyes gimlet-shrewd. Onesimus stood quietly at attention for a time, pouring out wine when necessary, and then Philemon sent him to fetch fruit, and he left the room on silent bare feet.

But as he crossed the outer courtyard on his way to

the kitchen, he stopped and caught his breath. Eirene was sitting in front of the house, framed in the vine leaves that clustered round the door. She was playing with a late-born black lamb that Archippus had brought her, and he sat beside her, both of them laughing at the tame nuzzling little creature. Her nurse was on guard a short distance away. As Onesimus came toward them, Eirene looked up and called to him joyously. He took a step towards her, smiling, but Archippus rose immediately.

“Back to your work, slave,” he ordered, and Onesimus had no choice but to obey his master’s son. Ashamed to look again at the happy, innocent little face, he hurried on his errand, and it was not till he was standing again behind his master that he realised that something had happened to him. In those few moments he had changed.

Firstly, all his allegiance to the memory of their childhood together had died, and he now hated Archippus with a steady, purposeful hatred. Secondly, he had made up his mind to be free. At whatever cost, and whatever he had to do to achieve it, he would be free. He fingered his small gold piece knotted in his girdle, and it seemed like a pledge.

“I will keep it till I purchase my freedom,” he said to himself. “It is the beginning.”

“Slave!” Philemon spoke sharply and clapped his hands. “I have spoken, and you take no heed! Fetch Master Polemon’s cloak and give word to the slaves to prepare his litter.”

The slaves were already waiting, glancing anxiously at the westering sun; for they had ten miles to go, and the valley abounded in thieves and robbers lying in wait for rich travellers after sunset. Onesimus helped Polemon into his cloak and put on his sandals, and then withdrew to watch the departure from behind the lintel of the stables. He saw Archippus lift the little girl into the seat beside her father and hand her a vine leaf of mulberries, and he noticed that she thanked him gravely and politely, but with eyes averted; nor did she say “We shall meet again.” As the four slaves set off

at a run with the gorgeous litter borne on their shoulders, he saw her lean out and take a long look back, but she was not looking for Archippus. He wondered why, for Archippus was strong and handsome, two years older than himself and half a head taller.

By the time he had cleared up the remains of the midday banquet and laid out the evening meal and mixed the wine with honey, it was nearing sunset. Another slave would wait on the family while they ate, and he was free to go home. As he rose at cock-crow he was usually ready to swallow his food and fall asleep; but tonight he was in no hurry and sleep seemed far from him. He sat in the doorway, long after he had finished his supper of lentils, looking out to where the sun had now dipped behind the mountains north-west of the valley and the colours still flamed in the sky. On the upper plain of Colosse the harvest was nearly ended and the slow wooden wagons, drawn by oxen, were rumbling up the dusty paths between the poplars, the tired reapers resting on the piled up wheat. Behind them across the valley he could see the white limestone cliffs and cascades of Hierapolis, and below them, on the grassy hill above the river, the roofs and columns of Laodicea.

Perhaps she would have arrived by now. All the little sounds of twilight, the croaking of the frogs in the marsh, the whirr of crickets, the rattling cry of the stork making for her nest, the bleating of the folded sheep, seemed clearer and more important than ever before. He stared with rapt attention at the curling tendrils of the vine leaf, the crimson folded petals of the pomegranate flowers within reach of his hand, and he knew again he had changed.

"Mother," he said suddenly, "tell me about my father."

His mother laughed and sat down beside her moody, restless son, her hands busy with the studded teasing card, her heart with him all the time. She was a beautiful dark-eyed Phrygian woman, born into slavery, content with a master who was kind as masters went. She had loved her husband

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dearly, but she was glad that death had set him free, for to him slavery was a bondage too heavy to be borne.

"I think you know all there is to be known," she said. "What ails you tonight?"

He shook his head. "Nothing," he replied. "Only I should like to hear again about my father."

"He was born on the slopes of Mount Parnassus in Greece," began his mother, "and he loved all beautiful things. When he grew up he became a scholar in Athens. He said it was the most beautiful city in the world, and often he would sit of an evening and talk to me about his country. He would go on and on about islands set like jewels in a blue sea, about mountains whose heads were veiled in clouds where the gods lived, and about the great marble Acropolis standing on a hill above the city. He married me because I was beautiful and he loved me; but he was never happy here in a strange land and among strange gods. Those born free cannot submit to slavery. It was well that he returned to Cybele and her fair meadows." She fell silent, gazing out into the dusk.

"Go on," said Onesimus. "Tell me about the brigands."

"Your father was a traveller, always restless, always wanting to see over the top of the mountain," said his mother with a tender smile. "He lectured for years in a school in Athens and then set off one early Spring morning to visit the University of Tarsus and to study the teaching of one, Athenodorus. He often talked about that journey. He joined a caravan in early summer when the snows were melting on the Taurus mountains. How he loved the gazelles on the Cilician plains! At the end of the summer he travelled on, while the roads into Syria were still open, and wintered in Jerusalem."

"Did he tell you much about Jerusalem?"

"Yes. Many a winter night he would sit by the fire and talk about Jerusalem; for he arrived at a strange time, some twenty-six years ago. The Romans had not long before

crucified a man called Jesus, hated by the Jewish rulers, but greatly loved by the common people.”

“Why did the rulers hate him?”

“They feared him, and he taught some new religion. But although they had crucified him, Jerusalem that winter was full of his followers. There were strange stories afloat too. Hundreds had declared that he had risen from the dead and claimed that they had actually seen him. Besides, there was something about his followers that made people afraid of them. They possessed a strange power. Your father actually saw one of them take hold of a well-known lame beggar and command him in the name of Jesus to rise up and walk, and the man ran into the Jews’ temple leaping and shouting. They did not seem to mind being persecuted either.”

“But why were they persecuted? Did they do wrong?”

“No, they were full of good works; but their teaching would have turned the world upside down. They taught a brotherhood between Jew and Gentile, slave and free. They made no difference. Naturally the upper classes and the Jewish leaders opposed it.”

“Did my father accept this teaching?”

“No. He had his own gods and goddesses who lived on Parnassus, gods of thunder and gods of war and goddesses of hunting. His favourite, I believe, was the goddess of beauty, for he used to say he found her everywhere: in the sunsets, in the first spring flowers, in the vine tendrils. But he stayed for some months in Jerusalem, and just before he left he saw something he never forgot. One of the followers of Jesus, called Stephanos, was on trial for his life. He was brought into the council as the result of some street brawl and your father was in the crowd. Stephanos was given a fair chance to defend himself, but he seemed not to care whether he lived or died provided he could say what he believed about this Jesus. The mob got angry in the end - began shrieking and cursing, but he never even seemed to see them. He was looking up into the sky, his face alight like

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the face of a god. He said something but your father could not hear. Later, one standing near vowed that he had cried out, 'I see the Heaven opened and Jesus standing at the right hand of God'. Anyhow, the crowd all went mad and fell on him and dragged him outside the city and started to stone him. He looked up again and called to someone, but he was soon beaten down. Only just before he died, he seemed to be asking his god to forgive his murderers."

"To forgive his murderers?" Onesimus suddenly laughed. "I don't believe it."

"Yet it was true. Having heard him, your father never forgot."

"Then that Stephanos was a poor fool. Tell me about the brigands."

"Your father lingered in Jerusalem and left the journey home too late. The first rains fell as he passed through the dark Cilician gates. He was benighted with his companions, and the brigands came swooping down from the Taurus mountains. They took everything: his money, his clothes and, what he minded most, his precious books. He himself was taken captive and sold as a slave in a Phrygian market."

"And then," said Onesimus softly, "he met you."

"My master paid a high price for him because he was young and strong and handsome, and he married me who had been born on the estate. I comforted him and bore him children, but life was hard on those high, desolate plains, and the first three died. Your father was never a good slave; nothing could tame his fierce Greek pride."

"And then I was born."

"Yes, you were born, and the end came quite soon. Our master was determined to break him, making him work for long hours in the deep Cilician mud when he was weakened by coughing and fever. Then one day he ordered him to beat a child slave who had accidentally broken something, and your father refused. Our master struck him, and your father struck back. He never rose again from his bed after

the punishment they gave him, although day after day in his fever, he prayed the gods to give him strength to revenge his injuries. Then on the night he died ... it was very strange. He talked about Stephanos. 'How could a man die without fear and without hatred?' he asked me. 'How could a man ask forgiveness for his murderers? Whom did Stephanos see?' Many times he asked the question, but I could give him no answer. At dawn he died."

"And then?"

"Soon after that the gods executed vengeance, and our master fell from his horse while hunting and was killed by a wild boar. We were all sold again, and fate was kind. You and I were bought together and, my son, you should praise the gods for a just master."

"Why should I have a master at all?" said the boy obstinately.

His mother laughed gently and ran her fingers through his thick dark hair. "You were born like your father to love beauty and freedom, more's the pity. But tonight I will tell you something I have never told you before. Every coin I can earn or steal I am hiding away for you to buy your freedom. One day you will be free."

He fingered the gold piece knotted in his girdle, and a wild hope surged up in his heart. One day he would be free, free to wander, free to hate and to revenge himself, free to love.

He stared out into the night sky to where the first stars burned over Laodicea.

3

AFTER THAT THE BURNING SUMMER DAYS seemed to race past, and Onesimus worked from dawn to dusk. The wheat harvest was nearly in, and there were rejoicings on the threshing floor, sacrifices and processions. And before the grain was stored in the underground pits, the grapes were ripe for vintage. Gangs of slaves worked all day long in the vineyards, picking the grapes, spreading them out to dry, carrying them in great cart-loads to the winepress, pruning the vines and holding high festivals to Bacchus.

It was a merry time of year and Onesimus loved it. By the time they started to gather the figs and pomegranates the poplars in the upper plain were beginning to turn golden along with the bracken that clothed the lower hillsides. The air was heady and sweet as good wine, and every house top was gay with its store of raisins, figs, corn and pomegranates drying in the sunshine. Cool and clear were the mornings, with mists rising from the river in the valley and all the trees heavy with fruit. It seemed as if their mother, Cybele, was pouring out showers of gifts on her children in prodigal wasteful abundance, as a last token of her blessing, before the dark wintry days should come.

But before they were through with the olive harvest, well before the oil was stored, the first snows were flurrying down the ravines, and the conical peak at the east of the glen and the towering head of Cadmus were powdered with snow. Winds were beginning to howl round the canyons and across the plains, and winter was upon them, with jackals and hyenas

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howling in the gorges, with the rain and mud, the silence of the snow, and the angry crimson sunsets down the valley.

The rich lit their great heating braziers, and slaves were kept busy piling on the charcoal. But the slaves themselves, in their leaking mud huts, fared ill. The great roads to the East were blocked by snow, and no travellers passed by, and no news reached them from the outer world. There was little to do and nothing to talk about except the bitter cold and the old slaves' rheumatism.

But there came a day when Onesimus went out at dawn and heard the bleating of the first young lambs and felt a breath of warm south wind stealing down from the high passes, and he knew that on the other side of the mountains the sea was blue. He looked down and saw a clump of dwarf narcissi flowering in mud. Spring was on the way. Very soon the spring ploughing and sowing would begin, and the storks would arrive from Syria.

Everyone stirred to the breath of the south wind. The sun shone out and the snows began to melt. The cascades overflowed their banks, half flooding the meadows as they foamed to the valley. Ships began to cross the sea, and the roads were once again thronged with merry travellers bringing tales from East and West. Mistress Apphia, Philemon's wife, took advantage of the fine weather to spring-clean her mansion, and so there was plenty of work to do, and little Pascasia, her daughter, adopted a motherless lamb and nursed it like a baby.

"We are going over to Laodicea next week," said Archippus carelessly one spring evening, pausing at the door of the stable where Onesimus was cleaning and polishing his master's riding equipment. "My father and I are both to be fitted with a new trimiton at Master Polemon's establishment, and I am to have new sandals. I will give you my old ones, Onesimus."

Onesimus acknowledged his favour as ungraciously as he dared. He could not understand Archippus these days. He

was growing at an alarming rate and at fifteen was almost as tall as his father, and he alternated between snubbing and humiliating Onesimus in every possible way and then seeking him out and trying to regain their old comradeship and offering him presents. But he might as well have tried to be friendly with a brick wall, and he little knew how every slight and wounding word was being stored up in the boy's memory. Archippus had become to him the symbol of his slavery, and he hated him with all the strength of his proud young heart.

Archippus sighed. He longed to possess this boy wholly and to gain his devotion and respect and admiration; but when they were together something always whispered that it was hopeless. He rose, knowing himself defeated, but still he lingered.

"I have to take a chain of my mother's down to the goldsmith's for repair," he said at last. "Be ready to accompany me in an hour's time."

As they sauntered down the road towards the town, Onesimus' black mood lightened, for the beauty of the early spring days always moved and lifted him. The almond blossom twisting from the naked wood and the gold of the dandelions along the roadside made even Archippus seem less odious, and had he been alone he would have run and leaped and praised the gods. As it was, he walked, as befitted a slave, two or three paces behind his young master, obstinately refusing Archippus' invitation to forget the relationship and walk together.

"I hope my father will take you in attendance tomorrow," said Archippus generously. "The streets of Laodicea are a real sight after the dull little streets of Colosse, and they say that Master Polemon lives in a marble mansion. Little Mistress Eirene no doubt will have grown throughout the winter. I must take her some little gift."

A small cloud passed over the face of the sun, and Onesimus trudged on in silence!

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"The messenger who came to summon us to Laodicea brought news of the world beyond Colosse," went on Archippus with a little laugh. "In Thyatira the dye merchants are complaining about the Jewish settlers; the new Emperor, Nero, flourishes in Rome, and no Emperor has ever lived so gloriously or in more royal style; down in Ephesus the Greek traders and the local silversmiths have been rioting in the streets again. The priests are anxious for the honour of their goddess and not only on account of the competition of trade. There are rumours of a strange new teaching that seems to be taking root everywhere, the teaching of some Jewish peasant who died by crucifixion in his own capital. It is strange how ignorant people will fall for every new-fangled ridiculous fable they hear."

"Jesus," said Onesimus, startled into speech. "They say he rose again from the dead."

"Where and from whom did you hear that?" asked Archippus, turning round sharply. Onesimus' frequent knowledge of subjects about which he himself often knew nothing had always annoyed him.

"I hear these things," replied Onesimus lightly; for the memory of his father was a wound he had never shown to Archippus.

"Well, they say the teaching has already taken root in Hierapolis," went on Archippus. "A native of our own city, Colosse, who has been working with some tent-makers at Ephesus, has been wintering there. The followers of Jesus are making quite a stir. They cease to fear the demons or to offer sacrifices, and they worship one invisible God - Jews and Carians, Greeks and Phrygians all mixed up together like a lot of silly tame sheep. They say that the temple priests as well as the Jews have tried to suppress the movement, but these people are patient under persecutions. One of their maxims is to love and forgive their enemies. That is what that crucified peasant leader of theirs did."

"Well I don't want to love or forgive my enemies," said

Onesimus with quiet finality, and the two boys fell silent until they reached the town.

It was a prosperous little town, centred on its wool market and its purple dye works. On the outskirts stood a fast-growing Jewish colony with its isolated, unpopular community. The boys sauntered through the streets, lingering near the open-fronted shops. Delicious smells came from the cooked meat shops, and merry crowds jostled with each other at the entrance of the wine shops. Watered gardens with marble statues lay between the streets where children ran and shouted, playing hopscotch or bowling their hoops. They passed the temple and the school where Archippus had once learned reading and writing and mathematics, Latin and Greek. It was always a source of wonder to Onesimus, who would have given almost anything to learn to read, that Archippus had persuaded his father to take him away from school so early.

"Geometry, astronomy, philosophy and music!" he had exclaimed to Onesimus. "What good will they ever do me? I want to learn to take over my father's farm and trade and make money and travel. Am I not his only son?" And since this was an argument that had appealed to Philemon, Archippus had left school at thirteen and two years later was already showing himself an able overseer with a flair for money-making.

The goldsmith's shop was in a small side street, and they found him intent on heating his gold in a little crucible that looked like an egg shell. Heating and refining, heating and refining, he crouched over his furnace absorbed in his work, till the seven times purified liquid showed him his own face as in a mirror. The boys, unwilling to interrupt him, stood waiting. Archippus stared thoughtfully at an exquisite little chain and pendant.

"I should like to hang that round the little white throat of Mistress Eirene," he said. "And see, Onesimus, these bracelets - what cunning craftsmanship! And these curios,

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little figures of the gods!" He roamed restlessly round the shop, but Onesimus stood still, watching the bubbling metal and the skilled hands of the craftsman purging the gold of its dross.

At last the old man looked up, and Archippus handed him the broken necklace and explained what his mother wanted done. Very respectfully, the goldsmith promised to have it ready next day; for Philemon was one of his richest clients, and he was pleased that Philemon's son should have honoured his little shop by coming in person. He would have asked many questions concerning the health and welfare of his patron's establishment, but Archippus seemed eager to leave the shop. Instead of lingering to watch the bales of wool being unloaded, or to listen to a wandering street musician, he hurried on at a round pace, until the two boys were once more on the steep track that led to their upland farm.

"What is the hurry, master?" asked Onesimus in surprise, pausing for breath at the bottom of the hill.

"You should be back at your work," replied Archippus. "My father will be needing you. Come, don't dawdle about."

He was already hurrying ahead when Onesimus called to him.

"Stop, master. Wait. Someone is riding after us and shouting at us, an old man, by the way he rides. Why, it is the goldsmith, mounted like a sack on an old mule, waving his whip as though some disaster had happened! He will fall off if he drives that poor old beast any faster." Then, suddenly, he stopped laughing, for Archippus was standing grave and irresolute, and his face was very white.

"Stupid old man," he muttered. "Whatever can he want? Let us go on, Onesimus, and take no note of him."

"But, master," said the slave, "he will catch us up in no time, unless he breaks his neck first." And indeed the old man had already left the town behind and was careering up the

slope, beating the mule for all he was worth. His head-dress was all askew, and he was clutching the mule by the mane. Onesimus, without further ado, ran to meet him and was just in time to catch him as he slithered off sideways.

"Can I help you, father?" asked Onesimus. "Has anything happened?"

"Let me speak to your master," cried the old man. He was trembling with shock and seemed half distraught. "Ah, young master, come hither. What is this that you boys have done? The chain and locket, it is gone! Shame on you to trick an old man so!"

There was a moment's silence. Just for a second Archippus seemed uncertain what to reply. Then he spoke, and his voice was haughty.

"We know nothing of your chain, Master Plautus. Maybe some other customer . . .!"

"There was no other customer," cried the old man, wringing his hands. "Do you think I do not know my gold as a father knows his children? Could one piece be missing and I would not know it with my whole soul and body? Oh, you are fleet-footed, but you cannot escape me!" He was trembling all over. "Unless that chain is restored, I will walk beside you to the house of Master Philemon and search you both in his presence. Ah me, do you not fear the gods that you should do this to a poor old man?"

"Peace, Master Plautus," said Archippus quietly. "There is no need to take you so far up the hill. Already your ride has been too much for you. You may search us here on the path. I will search my slave here in your presence, and then you are at liberty to search me."

He took hold of Onesimus rather roughly and dragged him into the middle of the path. At the same time he shouted, "Look to your mule, Master Plautus."

The animal, unnoticed, was making off quietly toward home. The goldsmith hobbled a few steps down the path and returned, dragging the beast by its bridle. He was dizzy

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and breathless, bewildered between watching the boys and fear of a sudden bite from the mule. Archippus passed his hands carefully over Onesimus' person, removed his sandals, shook out his cloak. Then he removed his thick girdle, and as he did so the gold chain fell to the ground and lay sparkling in the sun in full view of them all.

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THERE WAS A MOMENT'S STUNNED silence, and both boys stood rooted to the spot. Then the old man pounced on his gold with a triumphant scream and stood there fondling it and gloating over it. Then he lifted his skinny old hands to Heaven and began to call down the curses of the gods on the thief.

"That is enough, Master Plautus," said Archippus. He tried to speak with authority, but his voice shook slightly. "You have your trinket, and I will take my slave home and see that justice is administered. I assure you that the punishment will be all he deserves."

"A branding," shouted the old man, shaking his fist feebly at Onesimus. "It must be a branding. That I demand. I myself will come in person and see it carried out. I don't trust boys. Let me speak to his master myself. I will be content with nothing but a branding."

"Go home, Master Plautus," entreated Archippus, drawing up the mule and trying to persuade the old man to mount it. "I will mention the matter of a branding to my father, as you wish, and he will decide. I assure you he is not one to let a dishonest thief get off lightly. Justice will be administered. Come slave!" He pushed Onesimus ahead of him with a rather unsteady hand and started off up the hill.

But the old man had no intention of leaving this affair to Archippus. Passion made him strong, and with a tremendous effort he pulled himself up onto his beast and came

lumbering up the hill on their heels, cursing, slobbering at the mouth, trembling with exertion and excitement.

"Branding," the goldsmith was muttering the word over and over again, the mark of a thief, burned indelibly on the forehead of a slave, proclaiming his disgrace and his slavery till the day of his death. No man with that mark could ever again hold up his head among free men. And Onesimus was thirteen. He had a long way to go.

A wild idea of flight seized him, and he looked round in desperation. But there was nowhere to flee to. The upper plain stretched for miles, with no hope of a hiding place, and that wretched old bag of bones puffing along on the mule behind him would soon track him in the town. He would be pursued and caught like a wild beast if he fled to the canyons. Only death could shelter him now, and how gladly would he have embraced death, but where was death to be found? The foaming river was a mile away, and he had no weapon. "Oh, ye gods, ye gods, if gods there be," he cried from the depths of his terrified heart, "oh father of gods, and Artemis our mother, not branding, oh, not branding."

Trembling, white, driven by Archippus up the hill, Onesimus now reached Philemon's mansion. Archippus gave brief orders to an older slave to put a chain on the boy, and then without a word or backward glance he went to find his father. The old man seemed unable to dismount and was only restrained with difficulty from shambling in on his mule, right into Philemon's private apartment.

They stood waiting. Apart from the babbling of the old man, it was very quiet. Pigeons cooed in the nesting-boxes at the side of the house; a small slave girl passed by on an errand and gave Onesimus a quick compassionate glance. Her slender little figure and dark tresses reminded him of another, and quick tears started to his eyes. What if *she* should see him with the mark of the brand on his forehead? But he must not weep in front of Archippus; that was the

most important thing of all. With difficulty he lifted up his chained hands and wiped away his tears.

And then a slave appeared at the door of the outer courtyard and bade the party enter. Seeing the mule joining the procession, he helped the exhausted old man dismount and half dragged him, half carried him into the presence of Philemon.

Philemon sat in the doorway of his apartment which opened into the atrium, and behind him in the shadows his wife, Apphia, was stitching at her embroidery, the golden Phrygian embroidery, famous all over the Roman world. Her five-year-old daughter, Pascasia, played at her feet. Archippus, half hidden behind a pillar, stood waiting on his father. Onesimus saw these things in a dream, and even the babblings of the old man now seemed far away and unreal. He hardly heard what he said nor cared that all eyes were upon him as he stood there, young and pitiful and in chains. Only his heart kept calling out, "Not branding, not branding," but to whom he called, or whether there was any to hear, he did not really know.

"So you see, my noble master," finished up the old man, suddenly falling flat at Philemon's feet, whether from reverence or exhaustion no one quite knew, "he must be branded. Let us heat the irons that I may witness the punishment and be off to my humble home. I am a poor man, master. If you would grant me a slight token of your favour..."

Philemon glanced at the prostrate goldsmith with extreme distaste and then turned to the white-faced boy in fetters and gazed at him thoughtfully. Onesimus had grown up with his own son and had tumbled round his footstool in babyhood. He was surprised at his own reluctance to sentence this slave, but discipline must be maintained and branding was the usual punishment for thieves.

"Very well," he said rather wearily, "he shall be branded. Janus go and heat the irons and take the boy where my wife cannot hear his screams."