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[Home](#)

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Submit](#)

[Meet the
Editors](#)

[Issue 23-
Spring
2022](#)

[Previous
Issues](#)

[Join Our
Team](#)

Fiction

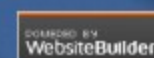
[back](#)

[At Her Master's Feet
By: Joyce Stewart](#)

[Erasing The Past
By: Brooke Kirkland](#)

[Scary Movies and Suicided Notes
By: Bryan Phillips](#)

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[Home](#) [About Us](#) [Contact Us](#) [Submit](#) [Meet the Editor](#) [Issue 23—Spring 2022](#) [Previous Issues](#) [Join Our Team](#)

At Her Master's Feet

By: Joyce Stewart

[back](#)

An Adaptation of Luke 7:11-17, 37-50

"Aaaaaa!" she screamed as they drove the stake through her right foot, pinning her to the ground.
"She won't run away again. I'll make sure of that!"
Blood flowed from the wound in her foot. Fortunately, no bones were broken, but she lost consciousness, unaware of her good luck.
At 12 years old she was the favorite slave of her master, a wealthy Roman trader who had homes in both Nain and Caesarea. Purchased on one of his trading trips he kept this slave in Nain for his enjoyment when he came for respite from the crowds at the port.

During his absences she ran away but someone always returned her to his home. Punishment followed her escapes. Once she was chained to a post for a week. Another time she was left tied to a tree for a month. The last time she ran away she was whipped until her back felt like she had been scoured with a searing brand clear through to her very soul. The master, though, was careful not to mar her face. Her eyes glowed with light from heaven. Her hair flowed down her back like a black waterfall. He forgot his business troubles when he lost himself in her purity.

Her master sold his soul long ago. Only in possessing her soul could he have salvation. Her virtue was an altar on which he could lay his sins, absorbing himself in the throes of sexual abandon. Rich as he was, he could not afford to lose his living sacrifice. Each of her escapes heightened his desire for further conquest. Each ensuing capture enraptured his lust. Each scream from her lips soothed his heartless breast. He took from her all he knew of love.

After 24 hours at the stake she was carried to the house, her foot cleaned and bandaged. In her weakened state he found her irresistible. Her degradation was his triumph. He was God Almighty.

...

Unknown to the master was his slave girl's secret love for a God she had learned of from the other slaves in the household. They told her of a God who loved her and had power to free her from the sin forced upon her. As she listened to the stories of this mighty Jehovah she learned he didn't blame her for what her master did to her. She confessed her own sins, hatred, bitterness, anger, and despair. She received Jehovah's assurance that he did not condemn her. Jehovah would punish the master, not her. Jehovah was a god of justice. Yet the pain of her master's sins pierced her heart.

Unable to read or write, she experienced God through the vision of her soul, free from the constraints of the written word. She knew God in her body. God dwelt within her because she loved God. God's love sustained her.

One year after the nailing to the stake incident, the master was murdered returning from Caesarea. In the settling of his accounts she was sold to a Pharissee to use as a house slave. She was 15. She served the Pharissee for four years. Then in a public gesture of righteousness he freed her. However, one of the covert stipulations of her freedom was that she continue to provide the sexual servitude he had initiated when she was a slave in his household. He believed his righteousness was not tainted by his sexual bondage of her since she was not a Jew.

He saw the scars on her back and the disfigurement of her foot. Knowing they were punishments given at the hands of her former master, he used his fear of violence to force her into submission to his will. Once she had her own house, he invited other Pharissees to avail themselves of her sexual submission, for a price. He gave her the merest fraction of the money he gained from her prostitution. Ostensibly, she was free to move about town, but her chains were as real as the stake that had gone through her foot when she was 12. For added security he kept her under the constant surveillance of the other Pharissees who do not want their deeds known and thus benefited from her silence.

Her strength to survive came from her constant communion with Jehovah. She took comfort in Jehovah's love for her and the knowledge that the sins of the Pharissees were not imputed to her. When she sinned, she asked Jehovah's forgiveness and believed his goodness made her good, too. Yet, in the night, she wept for she bore the weight of the Pharissee's sins.

One day she was shopping in the market and heard a funeral procession on its way to the burial grounds outside the city gate. When she approached the mourners she saw that a widow was following her son's casket. The sound of her weeping filled the air. The prostituted woman knew the weeping woman. She realized the woman was in dire straits as the coffin carried her only son. Without her son to provide for her, the widow would be freed from her home. She faced starvation. But who was that man entering the city gate? He came to the weeping woman and spoke to her. The prostituted woman looked at the man's face and saw compassion for the bereaved mother.

The procession stopped. Someone whispered that the man was a powerful healer from Nazareth named Jesus. In the ensuing silence everyone heard his next words: "Do not weep," he told inconsolable woman. Then he touched the coffin and said, "Young man, I tell you, arise!" At this, the dead man sat up and began talking. Jesus carried him back to his mother who was standing speechless in utter amazement. A shiver went through the crowd. Instantly, people fell to their knees, lifted their hands to heaven and said, "Glory be to God on high." Others shouted, "A prophet! A great prophet is here! God is visiting us this day!"

Upon hearing their words, the prostituted woman knew Jesus was a prophet of Jehovah, the God who loved her. Instantly she determined to see him. She must touch him. She must show him her love for Jehovah. She who wept hidden in the night must weep at his feet. Jesus could comfort her in her grief. Jesus would know her heart for surely he knew Jehovah. Jesus could turn her grief to rejoicing as surely as he turned the woman's despair into salvation by raising her son from the dead. She who felt dead in sin could live, too.

Three days later she overheard the Pharissee boasting to another Pharissee that he had invited Jesus to eat with him. "I'll find out whether he is a prophet or not?" If he could unmask Jesus as a fraud, his reputation at the synagogue would grow. He would gain the power he coveted. After all, wasn't he a rigorous man? Didn't he fulfill all the requirements of the law? He observed the washing rituals, made the proper sacrifices and tithed all his increase, right down to mint from the kitchen garden.

Unknown to her, the Pharissee was setting a trap for Jesus by planting the seeds of the dinner in the woman's ear. He suspected she would make an appearance at the dinner because he had noticed her attentiveness to the Pharissee's arguments about God. Whenever anyone recited the Torah or debated a point of the law she stopped whatever she was doing and listened until the conversation was concluded. On several occasions she had even dared to ask him a question in private about words she didn't understand. He sensed there was something about her that could not be attributed natural qualities of intelligence or beauty.

His shrewd gamble paid off. The day of the dinner arrived. Jesus came at the appointed hour. Everyone reclined at the table as was the custom in those days. They had not been at table long when the woman appeared behind Jesus. To the Pharissee's horror he saw that she carried an alabaster flask he had given to her on his most recent visit to her bed. Hiding his mouth for fear of discovery he watched as she began weeping and knelt at Jesus' feet. Her tears flowed from a well he never would have believed existed. As the tears coursed down her cheeks she leaned over Jesus' dirty feet, cradling them in her arms.

Rivulets of mud dripped onto the floor while her sobbing filled the room. As Jesus gazed on her with profound respect she unbound her thick hair and tenderly wiped his feet until they were clean and dry. All the while, she lavished kiss after kiss on the tops of his feet. Once she completed her ministrations she took the cork from the neck of the flask and poured the expensive oil over his feet until each crack and blister was softened by the combination of her massage and the healing quality of the ointment.

The Pharissee's judgment was confirmed. Jesus showed no signs that he knew he was being touched by an unclean woman. Jesus didn't protest her advances nor rebuke her for her forwardness. Jesus was a fake. A true prophet would never allow himself to be tainted by such a sinful woman. But wait. Oh no! As the Pharissee continued to watch the expression on Jesus' face, fear took root. Jesus might talk to this weeping woman? What if she poured out the truth as freely as she gave expression to her tears? Might she not confess the Pharissee's sexual profligating? She must be stopped and stopped now! What if his secret arrangements were revealed?

Wait! What's that? Jesus is talking.
"Simon, I have something to say to you."
The Pharissee kept his face masked in propriety. "Tell me, teacher."
"Two people were in debt to a certain creditor; one owed five hundred days' wages and the other owed fifty. Since they were unable to repay the debt, he forgave it for both. Which of them will love him more?"
Simon answered, "The one, I suppose, whose larger debt was forgiven."
"You have judged rightly," came Jesus' reply.

All the while the woman crouched at Jesus' feet, not daring to move lest the Pharissee's wrath fall upon her. She knew she had violated the laws the Pharissee held sacrosanct. She expected a fierce reprisal for her act of devotion to a man whose disregard for the Pharissee's authority was putting him in danger.

But she knew the pain of injured feet. She knew the hurt of being used for someone else's gain. She knew the loneliness of worshipping a god who others used to their advantage. Regardless of the risks to herself, she had to treat this man with the honor he deserved as a representative of a just and loving God.

Jesus turned to look at her. Here was the real test. Was her love for God a fantasy she had concocted to allow her to survive an unbearable life? Would Jesus, too, side with the Pharissee and humiliate her, belittling her love and exalt the Pharissee's obvious love for God?
Her world hung on a thread.

Jesus spoke. "Do you see this woman? When I entered your house, you did not give me water for my feet, but she has bathed them with her tears and wiped them with her hair. You did not give me a kiss, but she has not ceased kissing my feet since the time I entered. You did not anoint my head with oil, but she anointed my feet with ointment."
The woman's head began to rise. Her deflated spirit moved within her breast. A slight breath passed through her lungs. The attention shifted from her to Jesus. All eyes were now on Jesus instead of the prostituted woman. What would he say next?

"So, I tell you, her many sins have been forgiven; hence, she has shown great love. But the one to whom little is forgiven, loves little." Complete silence fell over the room, not even whippers broke the hush. Jesus had shamed the Pharissee and praised the woman. As the magnitude of Jesus' reversal made its way into her ears, she heard him speak now to her.
"Your sins are forgiven."

His boldness shocked the hardened Pharissee. No longer did they show any interest in the woman. Jesus challenged their authority to its very core. As leaders in the synagogues, the Pharissee prided themselves on their exacting observance of a code of laws they developed to keep the law of Moses alive after the Romans conquered their land. One could not be forgiven without the shedding of blood, yet here was an outsider offering forgiveness by faith alone. Impossible. To suggest it was unspokable. To declare it was unspokable.

Angry voices filled the vacuum left by Jesus' outrageous claim, a behavior more offensive than the woman's foot washing display. "Who is this who even forgives sins?" reprimanded the guests one to another.

Jesus, through his defense of the "sinful" woman, transferred the reproach from her shoulders to his back when he laid the charge of sin at the feet of the Pharissee who had not treated him with the hospitality required. Staring at Jesus, the Pharissee forgot the woman.

Unseen, the woman stood to her feet, and looked with dignity at the still reclining Jesus. He looked her in eyes and said, "Your faith has saved you; go in peace."
He brought her Jehovah's message of forgiveness. He deflected the Pharissee's contempt for her on to himself. He offered a forgiveness that took her sins onto his person. The woman accepted Jesus' message and left in peace.
Jesus was marked for death.

Postscript
Assured of forgiveness, the woman returned to the dwelling where the Pharissee kept her for their pleasure. She packed her things and vowed never to return. She walked to the widow of Nain's house, asked for shelter and was taken in immediately. For the remainder of her life she was treated as one of the family and both women were supported by the son who had been raised from the dead.



East Fork: A Journal of the Arts

[Home](#)

[About Us](#)

[Contact Us](#)

[Submit](#)

[Meet the
Editors](#)

[Issue 23-
Spring
2022](#)

[Previous
Issues](#)

[Join Our
Team](#)

Erasing The Past

[back](#)

by Brooke Kirkland

She swallowed the pill. A mix of fear and excitement plagued her. She pulled a chair beside her to help stable her woozy body and collect her thoughts; if this turned out to be true, her life was in for a complete and drastic change.

No one believed in time travel, in fact, they laughed and sneered at the thought of it. The mentality of today's world was that anyone who tried to time travel should be diagnosed clinically insane. But apparently Ellen was supposed to be insane; she had a hard enough time wrapping around the thought of it herself. Time travel by swallowing a pill, one small capsule to change her past. She knew the extreme dangers. Something this drastic would be hard to cover up from her family—there was no turning back now.

Sweat began to drip down Ellen's face; the pill was beginning to take effect. She falls to the ground. Stabbing sensations overtook her body completely. Her stomach churned. Her head pounded against her skull. Loud banging took over her ribcage and her heart was pumping as fast as it could. Was this what it felt like to die? No, he specifically told her the pill would work. This wouldn't be the end. Suddenly, pain was full and alive and breathing and everywhere all at once, the ringing of her ears and pain in her side stopped. It ceased.

Ellen woke up to the sensation of cold sweat all over her and a muggy atmosphere. Her eyes bolted open; She was lying on concrete. Her eyes were wide with shock—as if someone told her she only had a week to live. She couldn't tell if the ringing sensation in her ears was from the pill or the overwhelming trauma of thoughts floating through her brain. She takes in her surroundings and sees an empty street, lined with parked cars and vacant stores. Her hearing returns to her, the overwhelming sound of a stressed city hits her—cars honking, people talking, merchants selling. Her stomach was growling and hungry, how long had she been laying there?

She looked at the date on her flip phone: August 15, 2005. It worked.

She was back in time seven years. A surge of complete shock hit her; she whips her head around and looks up into the sky, the sound of people is everywhere. She tosses her fingers through her hair and wipes the sweat from her face. She is back in time. She rises from the warm concrete and arrives to the street—the street that changed everything. The same street that she had grown up on, on the same street where her mother would walk her across the crosswalk every day for school, the same street where she met him, Daniel. Him.

Her mind surged into a flashback, overwhelming her frontal lobe with memories of his voice and his smell. She remembered the way he always wore his purple Polo shirt for special occasions, the feel of his overwhelming hands clutching hers, the way his curly hair looked under his beanie hat. Being with Daniel created a whole new outlook on life for Ellen—an outlook that left her permanently changed for the good. Everyone said they were too young, "Too young" to know what love was. But she knew when he delicately touched her cheek for the first time, that his fingerprints would forever be burned there and she would never be the same.

He challenged her to see life beyond herself, beyond her father leaving them; beyond the lonely feeling she felt whenever it rained, beyond her bony structure, beyond her headaches when she thought too much. "It's hard to be happy when you're stuck in a glum state of mind, Ellen," his eyes desperately searched hers, "Don't you realize that this pain is only temporary?"

She clenched her teeth as she laid there on the wet pavement as her mind recreated the memory of Daniel lying in a hospital bed. A black SUV had plowed into his rib cage, collapsing his lungs. The rain clouds above her transformed into the image of her holding his limp and pale hand as the nurses whispered how much time he had left—as if whispering covered up the looming thought that he was about to die. Everyone knew. Pretending pain doesn't exist doesn't cause the pain to disappear; it simply postpones it. His hazel eyes opened as he saw her silently crying and praying to herself. He simply had said to her, "Ellen. This is only temporary." His eyelids closed and never opened again.

The agonizing pain of his death left her mourning for seven years, leaving her mind only to constantly recreate the memory, but that was about to change. She arose from the wet pavement and shook her head to rid herself of all the cloudy memories. Today she would recreate the past and have Daniel in her arms once again. Her head ducked around the corners of demanding business owners and traffic horns. She observed the traffic silently and watched a man with shaggy gray hair pass her holding a cup of scolding hot coffee. To them, she was a small 5'2" woman with choppy brown hair, standing in the middle of Grover Street waiting for a taxi. Little did they know that she was on a mission, that she had gone back in time and she was saving a life today. She walked towards a small shop, searching her brain for memories of where Daniel was standing the day he died and internally mapping out a plan to save him.

All of a sudden, a car honks furiously clear at the other end of the street. Her throat clenches up and her pupils widen. She whips her head around, to watch her brain collect yet another memory of two cars colliding. A violent crash sends a sound wave through the city—her stomach churns. Daniel. She was too late.

