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1. Masters and Slaves

White, black, brown, yellow, red—no matter what your color, it's likely that someone in your family, way back, was once a slave.

For every corner of the earth has known slavery. And every people on the earth has been its victim.

The poor and the hungry, of course. But also the rich and the famous. Princes were made slaves, and so were millionaires. People were enslaved thousands of years ago, and people are still being enslaved today.



A slave is a human being who is owned by another human being. For just as a person can own land, a house, an automobile, or a pair of shoes, so he or she can own a person. Like a horse, a slave can be bought, sold, hired out. A slave can be exchanged, given as a gift, inherited. How the slave feels about it doesn't matter. The master treats the slave as a *thing*, not as a person.

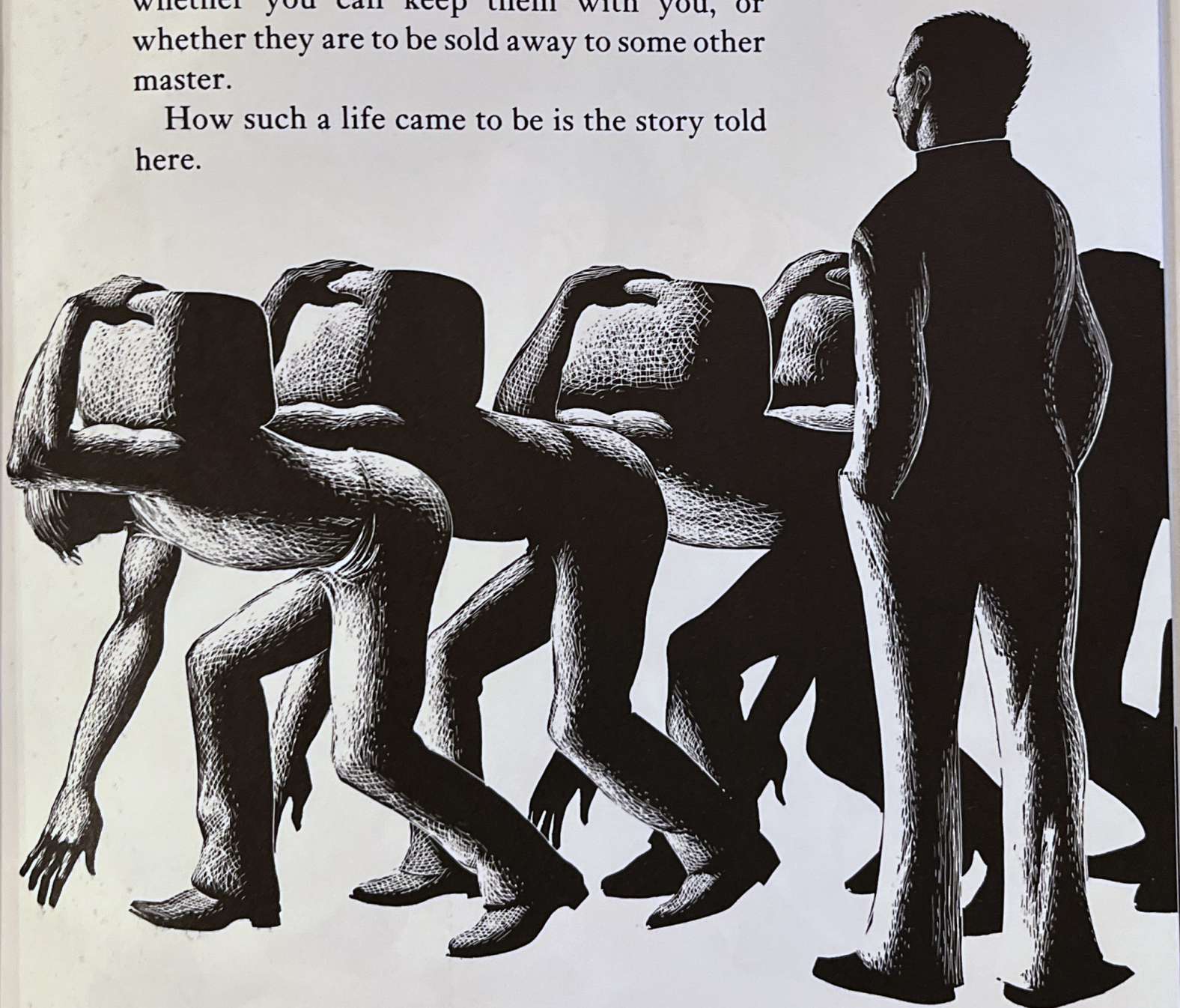
Imagine yourself as a slave. You have no rights. The law doesn't protect you. It is written to protect your master's power over you. You are his property, and the law says he can do almost anything he likes with you. What he most wants to do with you is force you to work. That is how he profits from owning you. You work as long and as hard as he wishes you to, at whatever job he wants done—and for nothing more than the food you need to stay alive.

A free man can stop working whenever he likes. Sometimes he does it at the risk of going hungry. But still, he can quit. He has a choice. You, the slave, can't quit. You are your master's tool, to be used whenever and however he likes, as he uses his plow, or his hammer, or his mule.

In your master's eye you have no will. He

decides everything. Not only the matter of work, but where you will live, what and how much you will eat, what clothes you will wear, when and how many hours you will sleep, whether you can have time for play or rest. Even whether you can marry, and the person you can marry. And if you have children, whether you can keep them with you, or whether they are to be sold away to some other master.

How such a life came to be is the story told here.



2. How Slavery Happened

Slavery started a long time ago, in the early history of humankind. It was not the invention of any one mind—few things are. It probably grew up in many places as the result of the same forces or conditions.

The earliest peoples got their food from hunting wild animals or gathering roots and berries. Either way, it was hard for them to feed themselves. There was nothing left over. That is why, when they raided other people, they killed them instead of taking them prisoner. If the winners had spared the lives of the losers, they would have been unable to feed them.

That changed as people learned to tame animals. The pigs, sheep, goats, cattle they raised were now their food. And as they learned to make tools—from simple choppers and axes to more specialized tools, such as knives, spears and fishhooks—people lived a little better. They made an enormous leap forward with the discovery of farming. Now people could produce more food than they needed. With their pots and baskets they could cook food and store it, and thus settle down in one place for a long time.

This easier and surer life made slavery possible. When farmers or shepherds could produce more food than they needed, they had an extra amount to feed the few people they might capture. Why kill defeated enemies when you could make them do your work at little real cost to yourself? When you could use them as you used other spoils of war? When you could, in a word, make slaves of them?

In this special sense, slavery was a step forward in the development of civilization. Losers in war kept their lives and in return were made to work. Slaves cared for the flocks and labored in the fields, making the master's life easier. The slaves in this way became new tools of production.

who had been enslaved for debt, the Bible offered the promise of freedom in the year of jubilee, which came every fifty years. "Proclaim liberty throughout all the land unto all the inhabitants thereof," says the passage in Leviticus. (Those words, much later, were engraved on the Liberty Bell that now hangs in Independence Hall, Philadelphia.) But how often the Hebrews obeyed this command is not known. Again and again the sages reminded the Hebrews that to free slaves was an act of great merit. The Bible also called on the Hebrews to shelter runaway slaves. The Hebrew law advised masters to treat their slaves like members of the family. The slaves were not looked down upon for being slaves. Slavery was considered an accident of fate that could happen to anyone.

China too, that vast land in the Far East, knew slavery. Ancient Chinese art showing field slaves working under the whip of overseers reminds us of scenes in Egypt of the same period. The first version of the Great Wall of China was built with slave labor.

Later, at about the time of Christ, a reformer called Wang Mang became the ruler of China. Many desperately poor peasants had sold their children or themselves into



4. To Be a Slave

In every society, the rich and the powerful had the most slaves, of course. They owned scores of slaves, hundreds of slaves, thousands of slaves. And used them for every kind of labor imaginable, from the simplest domestic task of washing clothes to the hardest physical labor of mining or the most skillful brainwork of engineering. Odysseus, one of the ancient Greek leaders in the legendary war with the Trojans, was said to have 50 female slaves in his home. They did the household chores—washing, spinning, weaving, cooking and serving meals. Fifty may seem a lot, but later, in Rome, a single elegant family had as many as 400 domestic slaves. Still, that was little compared with Rome's richest men, such as Crassus. He owned 20,000 slaves, hiring out many of them to industry. The Roman emperors owned even more.