

FREE INDEED

AMBER FLORENZA

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TWEEN BIBLICAL FICTION/JESUS TIMES

Bible Stories/Fiction/Ages 8+/Timeline 30s A.D.

Based on Jesus healing a rich master's son, feeding the five thousand with five barley loaves and two fishes, and telling the sinful woman to sin no more.

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Free Indeed



ALEXANDROS FELT his pulse race as he sat there, waiting for the games to begin. Every year in Jerusalem, the Romans would host a huge event—ending with the chariot race. But in recent years, they began having competitions such as foot racing and games of ball. Last year, he had won a foot race.

“Get yourself in the arena, young man.” A man in his middle forties told him. “You look fit enough.”

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“I am.” Alexandros said proudly. “Last year I won the foot race. But now, I want to enjoy this gladiator fight.”

“A nice view from here, eh?” the man leaned up and stared into the round dirt field with a partial smile. “A good fight always gets me in the best of moods—so long as my champion wins.”

“You don’t like losing good money? I don’t either.”

“Ah, listen to those daggers! Such music.”

Alexandros listened. The gladiators’ daggers made a repetitious *twanging* noise, grating against his senses. Truth be told, their swordplay was giving him a terrible headache—but he suffered it

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silently. He would not be branded as a weak man and complain. Besides, there were other things to think about than the noise. *The blood*, a little voice nagged him inside, *which spills from the loser of the game, perhaps?* He gulped. That, he admitted, was another thing he did not care for.



JOANNA SWEEP with large strokes, causing little puffs of dust to rise. Her master's son had gone to the games again. Last year he had strut about for weeks afterwards because he had won some foot race. Of course, he reminded

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her that she could never win such a prize for she was a slave.

“I wonder what it would be like to be free,” she muttered, her broom slowly stopping to a halt.

“What?” The master’s wife, a Greek woman, arched her left eyebrow. Slaves were not supposed to speak until spoken to.

“Nothing, mistress.” Joanna ducked her head and continued sweeping the courtyard.

“Do not forget to wipe the broom when you are through, girl.”

Joanna felt her mistress’ eyes bore into her back. She nodded, “Yes, I shall not forget.”

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Then she looked up briefly into the cloud-filled skies of Galilee. *Please send us the sun—and may the son of my master become kind.* A wonderful breeze from the sea blew against her face, and she smiled. Living in a villa overlooking the Sea of Galilee was pleasant indeed.



ALEXANDROS FELT a trickle of sweat run down his neck before he realized he was burning hot. Then his vision became blurry...and he felt his tongue thicken.

“Ah, young man, there goes the one

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with the black shield.” The man was now commenting, adding a half amused chuckle. “Look at him—hitting weaker than a woman.”

Alexandros could only nod, feeling worse by the second. “Sir—” he gasped out.

Then, the next thing he knew he was stretched flat onto the back of a cart, bumping along in haste. He was still burning hot—perhaps worse, and he thirsted crazily. If only he could taste a drop of cool water! But the lingering taste of dry dust rolled up his nostrils. Two questions rollicked in his mind as he bumped along the rough Judean road. Where was he going? And why did

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the sky roll back and forth so?



JOANNA WAS helping serve supper when she heard a cart roll into the courtyard. Had Alexandros come home early? Surely not. He never came home early. Last year he had come home several days late, and the master had been upset.

“Girl, pass that bread.” The master spoke to her gruffly.

Mealtimes the master was always gruff—until he had filled his belly with food and drink. Only then, he was nice. She gave him his bread, and then she

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stepped back to her place beside the window—where she could see who and what came and went. Suddenly, a cart was rushing inside the courtyard. Now the courtyard would need sweeping again. She frowned.

Then Joanna stared into the back of the cart as it stopped abruptly. There was a man in the back of the cart, covered with a cloth. *It cannot be!* She felt her mouth drop in shock.

“Why do you gape so?” The mistress called over to her. “You will drool. Close your mouth.”

“But, mistress—” Joanna began.

“Do as I say, for once.” The words were said in a clipped tone.

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Joanna closed her mouth and looked at her mistress. Then the mistress stood up to look at that stranger's cart in their courtyard. She gave a cry, and Joanna knew who was in that cart. She bit on her lip, not knowing what to say.



ALEXANDROS HEARD a loud wailing coming from somewhere. He felt nothing. He saw nothing. He only heard noises, sinking slowly into his numb-feeling head. Where was he now? Why was he lying flat? Did not the servants know that cushions existed?

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The wailing he heard grew louder. Then his ears hurt him. His eyes stayed closed. He felt so weak...so lifeless. Why did his tongue taste so dry?

“Alexandros, my son!” the wail sounded so familiar. But whose voice was it?

“Alexandros.” A stern tone spoke.

He tried turning his face in the direction of the voices. He only found himself making a strange noise in his throat. *Perhaps I am dying*, he thought. Then he heard himself screaming in his head. *No! I am not ready to die. I am young—my whole life is waiting for me. Please, let me live. God!* He felt his pulse weaken, and his fears made him

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breathe in short, little gasps.



JOANNA STARED. The master's son was indeed sick unto death. What would her master and mistress do if Alexandros did die? He was their idol—their prize in life.

She took a deep breath. There was a man in the village who could make sick people well. Perhaps he would come. She started towards the cart where the mistress was wailing and the master was swallowing with effort.

“Master,” Joanna gulped down her saliva and inhaled a breath of courage.

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“I have heard there is a man in the village who can make sick people well.”

“But my son is not *sick*—he is dying!” The mistress wailed even louder.

The master swallowed another time and stroked his beard thoughtfully; then, he nodded to Joanna. “Take my wife into the house—and stay with her until I return.”

Joanna nodded. Of course, what else would she do but stay with her tragedy-stricken mistress? She walked over to the woman and gently began leading her into the house. The stranger and the servants carried the master’s son before them.

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Just as they were walking through the threshold, Joanna glanced back outside. The master was already on a donkey, hurrying out the gateway towards the village. *Please God, she silently prayed, let the man who can heal be in the village.*

She let out her breath slowly. Now, all they could do was wait.



THE SKY was indeed dark when the master returned. Joanna peered through the window and saw the man she had heard teaching by the seaside and who made the sick well. Her master had

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found him.

“They are here, mistress.” She said gently to the woman kneeling at her son’s side.

Her mistress stood up with swollen eyes and a very red nose. She wiped at her face with her veil. Joanna only stood there quietly. She had not cried...but neither had she been friends with the young master, Alexandros.

At the sound of her master’s and the other man’s footsteps on the chamber’s threshold, Joanna shrunk into the shadows—out of the way of light from the oil lamp by the bed. Her master and the man entered the room.

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FOOTSTEPS AWAKENED Alexandros from his deathlike slumber. Then his ears listened to the voices that spoke around him, and his lips tried to move, to speak. But no words came. His tongue felt fastened tightly into an odd tight angle.

For a moment, he lay there. Still. Too still that he felt his limbs flattened onto the bed like a blanket. He tried to open his eyes—but he could not. He only heard a man speak a few words. Then the footsteps walked away...and he fell into a restful sleep.



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DAYS LATER, Joanna was summoned to her master's study. The young master was well and now he went about the villa with a smile, instead of his usual haughty smirk.

"Joanna," her master called her by her given name for the first time. "I have some news for you."

"Yes?" Joanna did not know how else to respond. So she simply folded her hands, and waited silently.

"I have signed the papers."

She felt her hands tremble. If a master signed papers, it only meant one thing: she had been sold to a new master. Her lips shook as she thought of a new owner—possibly an evil master

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who would treat her ill. *No, I cannot go!*
She sucked in her breath, and slowly exhaled.

She knew she had no other choice but to go. So she asked, "What time must I leave, sir?"

"As soon as you can pack your things." Then her master did a very odd thing. He smiled.

Joanna plucked up her courage to ask another question, "What is my new master like?"

"You have no new master, Joanna. You are free."

"But you said you signed papers."

"I signed papers, yes, to free you."

Joanna stared. What was her master

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saying? *Am I truly free?* She heard him talking again.

“What you did for my son—I can never be able to repay you. I hope someday I can.”

Joanna felt her body freeze. She was free...she had no new master, none at all. Her master had said so. *But where will I go to live? I know no one here.*

“Jesus, the man who made my son well, said that you would be welcomed into their group. There is a woman—a wife of one of His disciples—who will care for you.”

“Thank you, master!” Joanna was so happy she could barely speak.

“Master no more, Joanna.” Her old

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master smiled again. “Shalom.”

“Shalom.” And Joanna felt free indeed.



ALEXANDROS WATCHED Joanna leave with her small bundle of things. If it had not been for her, he would be dead now. He should thank her—before he would see her no more.

Within a couple minutes, he had his own donkey saddled. Then he started after her. Already, she was a small figure upon the horizon. The donkey jolted beneath him as it trotted alongside the Sea of Galilee. He glanced over and saw

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men in a fishing boat. One man was standing up, speaking to a crowd that was gathering on the shore.

“Alexandros!” a girl’s voice startled him.

Alexandros jerked his eyes from the sea. He had caught up with Joanna and she was standing beside his donkey on the road. He smiled. “I see I caught up with you.”

She blinked and a look of fear came to her eyes. “Has the master changed his mind? Am I no longer free?”

“No, my father has not changed his mind. You are indeed free.” Alexandros smiled again and Joanna’s look of fear melted into a smile.

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“Oh, I see.”

Alexandros cleared his throat. And it took him a moment to find the right tone to say the words that he had never used before. “I have come to thank you.”

“Thank me—for what?”

“For telling my father about—”

“The man who speaks upon that boat over there?” Joanna pointed to the sea almost excitedly. “You are welcome. Now, I must go to him. He knows a woman who can care for me—since I young.”

Alexandros slid from his donkey. “Then I will let you ride. Your bundle must be heavy.”

“Thank you, Alexandros.” Joanna

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sounded grateful and climbed up on the donkey. Once seated in proper position, she placed her bundle onto her lap.

Then Alexandros took the reins of his donkey and began leading it to the crowd by the Sea of Galilee. Joanna looked pleased as she glanced around at everything. Inside, he smiled. Doing such a little thing—such as leading the donkey and letting Joanna ride instead of him—made him feel fulfilled. He was glad he had not died. And he was glad he had a chance to live again.

He heard the man from the boat speaking again. This time, the man was standing on the shore. “Please sit.”

Everyone began to sit on the grassy

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hillside. Alexandros hurriedly finished his walk by taking bigger steps and helping Joanna from the donkey; then, he tied the reins to a small tree. They walked into the circle of people crowded on top of the hill and sat down with the others. The man who had been speaking on the boat bowed his head.

After the man gave thanks, Alexandros opened his eyes. In the man's hands was a small basket of food. The man began breaking the bread and fish...and then the amazing thing happened. The food began to multiply...and everyone began to eat.

"This food—how did it grow like that?" Alexandros asked Joanna in

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disbelief.

“If he can make you well, why can he not make food grow?”

Alexandros nodded numbly. He had witnessed his first miracle with his own eyes. God was still God—even then.



A YEAR later, they were all in Jerusalem to celebrate one of the Jewish feasts. And once again, the Roman games and competitions were being held. In the middle of their walk through the city, Alexandros heard loud cheers and noticed that they were passing the arena.

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“Two years ago,” he told the group almost proudly, “I won a footrace there.”

“You wish to go in there?” Jesus asked him, with eyebrows raised in question.

They stopped at the arena entrance, and Alexandros looked in. The footraces had just begun. Last year, the place looked inviting—but today, it seemed different.

“I don’t know,” he swallowed.

Where your heart is, there is your treasure. He remembered Jesus saying those words once. Was his heart into the arena—or with following Jesus? He knew he had to make his choice. But what would his decision be?

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“Should I or...” His words halted slowly.

“The choice is yours, Alexandros.” Jesus told him. “Make your decision.”

Alexandros looked again into the arena entrance. Inside, the layers of seats were packed with people. The wild shouts within, that had once thrilled him, sounded empty now. Now that he had been filled with something greater, could he possibly go back to the old life he had lived?

He turned back around, hearing a loud commotion behind him. Jesus was still there, but he had stooped and was now writing on the ground. A few priests were there in a tight group, and before

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them was a woman.

Alexandros stared at them yet he did not hear them. In his mind, he was still whirling with decision. The last time he had entered the arena, he had nearly died. But God had saved his life when Jesus had touched him. Now, inside he felt different—good, clean, kind, *right*. As if waking up, his thoughts suddenly cleared. Now the priests were gone, and Jesus was speaking to the woman.

“Go,” Jesus told the woman who had her face downcast, “and sin no more.”

Alexandros blinked. Then he knew what his decision was. Jesus had made up his mind for him. It was simple to him

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now. He was full inside. He no longer needed the empty pleasures the Roman arena could give him. He was following Jesus and—to him—that was all that mattered now.

He felt the last shred of darkness break away from inside his heart. Then he took a step forward, and walked towards Jesus and the crowd that was gathering. He did not look back. His eyes were centered on something greater—and more wonderful.

Jesus was speaking again. “I am the light of the world...”

THE END

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IF THE SON THEREFORE
SHALL MAKE YOU FREE,
YE SHALL BE FREE INDEED.

♥ John 8:36 ♥

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