

ESCAPE

Something strange happened. During the escape I knocked a guard off the wall. I was so desperate to be free- of mental torture- I no longer cared. But as soon as I was among the trees, under the stars, drinking from a flowing brook, I regretted. I was tortured still- by the sound of his cry falling. I had hurt people getting into prison, but resolved never to do so again. Now I know I must pay. On the frontier of that state, paces from a land beyond their jurisdiction, I made a fire. They followed the smoke. Three days I waited for my pursuers. The dogs came first. Finding a quarry no longer fleeing, smelling no more of sweat, they curled up at my feet. When the first guard arrived, he sat with me puzzled. Why are you waiting? he asked. I want to apologize to the family of the guard I killed, I said.

“Killed who?” he wondered aloud. “You mean Jones! He fell in the laundry truck. He’s fine!” I could not believe the explanation. He insisted, implored me to flee over the border quickly, before the others arrived. I did so, simply obeying.

Free, I stumbled along a path in the new state, stunned, as the sun rose. I had fasted for days now and found I was hungry. My clothes were torn and unwashed as my body. I had a beard growing and only a walking stick as sole possession. I saw someone coming and considered my aspect for the first time, afraid to frighten them, unsure what to say- “I am a prisoner,” I said.

“Master!” the pilgrim bowed. “Come I will accompany you!” He gave me bread and took me to a village a day’s walk away. I found I could not speak, accustomed to the crowded solitude of prison. I stared ahead, quiet.

“We have been awaiting you, Master!” the monks said. They were waiting in the village on the appointed day, and took me to the monastery. When the Master came for who they had been sent in reality, the confused villagers brought him to the temple.

“Who are you?” the Master asked me, searching my eyes.

“I am a prisoner,” I said.

“When the student is ready, the teacher comes,” the Master laughed. “I have come a long way to meet you and waited a long time. Now...” He gathered the monks and villagers and introduced them to their new teacher- me. I agreed on condition released prisoners would be welcomed there. Years later, Jones himself brought a released prisoner. I did not recognize Jones until he apologized for getting in my way upon escape.