

## The Emancipator

The wind blew through the house, through its eaves, and it knocked the picture off that was in front of the door. Elihu, who was sitting in his study, heard that and knew what had happened. “Frames! Frames!” he called out. “Frames” – there was no sound again. So he opened the drawer to his desk and pulled out a hammer and then walked over to that front door. He opened the door and he yelled. “Frames?”

Upon hearing his name, Frames got up from the garden. He was a tall young man, six foot one or so light skin, and he was covered with dirt. “Yes, sir, how might I help you?”

“Frames, I need your assistance, please.”

“Yes, sir.” And Frames began to walk towards the door. He brushed off his hands, brushed off his clothes, trying to get off as much dirt as possible. And then when he got to the door, he kicked his feet right at the edge of the bottom of the door. And then he took a six-foot one frame inside the door frame and there he spoke. “Yes, sir, I might help you.”

“Frames, I need you to put this picture back up again.”

Frames shook his head. “Sir, why do you keep this picture here? Because it's always falling down when the wind blows. Why do you keep it here?”

“I want to keep it here, Frames.”

“All right, then.” He looked around first and found the hole where the nail would go in, picked up the nail first and then, “Oh, sir, do you have...?” And he was handed the hammer. “Thank you, sir. Is that all right, sir?”

“That's just fine, Frames.”

“Still don't understand why you keep it here when it falls down all the time.” And he looked at it, Frames did. It wasn't a picture; it was words that were underneath a frame that were hanging on that wall. “What those words say anyway?”

“You know how to read, Frames. I've been teaching you. You could read those words.”

And his face scrunched up and his eyes scrunched up. Frames looked at those words. “Nah, I don't feel comfortable reading those words.”

Elihu Embree smiled. It wasn't that Frames couldn't read the words. He certainly could. But he was uncomfortable with people knowing that he could read. You see, being a slave that could read in the year 1820, that was a dangerous thing.

“All right then, I'll read it to you. ‘Freedom is the natural right of all men. And I, as a member of the abolitionist society, do believe in the manumission of all slaves.’”

And Frames turned to him. “You believe those words?”

And Elihu, Elihu got up. Elihu thought about what was being asked to him. And in his head he yelled out, "Of course I believe in this. "Of course I believe those words. Wasn't I the one that wrote The Emancipator and the Manumission Intelligencer? Didn't I put my own money and I'll go into debt for such? Aren't I the one that has gone to the legislator and demanded that we should free all of our slaves, whether gradually or all at one time? Am I not the one that has spoken up for slaves with a heart that I could have to think about those who are lesser than ourselves? Have I not been that one? Indeed, I believe these words. I believe these words."

But that's not what he could say. You see, when he was married for the second time, his second wife brought into the marriage slaves that she owned. And for a while there, Elihu enjoyed having slaves. He enjoyed the prestige that came with owning slaves. He enjoyed the leisure time that he had with them. And the fact was that it gave him more money and more leverage with money. He could use them for collateral so he could get himself out of debt and do the things he desired to do. And so he purchased more slaves. He purchased Nancy and her family, which included Frames. And he purchased a husband, a wife with a child. Over time though, the husband and wife had another child. And that's when he realized, how am I supposed to feed these, all these people? How am I supposed to clothe all these people? How am I supposed to keep a house over our heads? I cannot do it.

And so in order to make money, he sold the husband. It was after that that he could see clearly. He could see the sadness in the wife and older child's face. He could see the fear in Nancy and her children and how they all began to be hesitant around him, concerned and fearful around him. And besides that, he had been just returning to the Quaker society, to the Friends. He had been, as he said, a deist at the time and didn't have my proper Quaker ways. But now he was returning to the Quaker way of life. And his soul began to burn inside of him. And he needed to make it right. He needed to do something to make this right. So he convinced a friend to purchase the husband. And then he went into even debt so that he could help that friend to purchase the wife and the two children. So at least they would be together as a family. He very much wanted to write a piece of paper that said that Nancy and her family were free. But even if he freed Nancy, the children wouldn't be free. And he would have to make sure that Nancy was sent out of the state of Tennessee because he had no property that he could give her to help her to be able to stay. And her children would not be able to go either. So yes, he believed those words. But he could not speak it like he wanted.

"I believe those words, Frames. And you, I want you to know that you, you have the right to be free. Do you understand me? The right to be free."

Frames turned and looked at Elihu Embree, had stood his whole six foot one and looked at him and said, "I am free. Do you think because you have a piece of paper that says something different, that I am not free? No, I am free in my heart and in my mind and that you cannot have. And if I were to run or to go away, I would just simply move my freedom to another place."

Elihu looked at him. "You're a wise young man."

“Is there anything else you need, sir?”

“No, Frames.”

And his Frames turned around, his large frame in that door frame. He heard Elihu cough. He was reminded of how Elihu was ailing more and more. Since the beginning of the year to now in August of 1820. “Sir, you should go in the kitchen. My mama had some dinner there for you. You should eat something. You've been ailing.”

And Elihu said, “mmm.”

Frames went back out to the garden. Elihu went back into his office and put the hammer away. And then he began to walk towards the kitchen. He stopped at those words. “Freedom, the natural right.” And then he went into the kitchen and ate the food that was given to him from the one he owned.