

A Touch

I couldn't bring myself to look up at the other faces walking alongside me, so I kept my eyes fixed on my feet as they stirred up dust and shuffled small rocks as I took each step. I knew it was crazy to be taking this journey, but something inside me would not stop urging me forward. "I'm an outcast, I'm cursed, I'm no good." The words play over and over in my head like a chant. How true and oddly comforting these words are to me. They have been my mantra for so long, I don't know how to think any other way.

Sometimes I imagine what it must be like to be able to run freely without worrying about my garments falling away, exposing the curse I have carried with me these twelve years. On good days, I even wonder what it would be like to be married to a kind and gentle husband, who would put his arms around me and hold me tenderly as I sleep or wipe the tears from my eyes when I am feeling blue. Or to have my own little girl to hold my hand as we walk to the river to get water for the family.

"Stop it! Quit putting these ideas into your head." I remind myself of who I am and what I am. I could tell we were coming closer because I could see a crowd of people gathering near the riverbank. "So many people", I thought to myself. I prayed in my heart that no one who knows me will see me there. "Maybe if I stay near the outer edge, I won't be noticed."

"Jesus! Jesus!" The people started shouting toward the man we had all heard about. I couldn't help but try and stand on the tips of my toes to see him, straining my neck back and forth between the arms and hands waving all around me. "Jesus, Jesus, help me! My son is sick and needs your help!" Words like these were coming from all directions toward the man in the center of the crowd.

"What was I thinking? I am just a lowly woman with an issue of blood. The doctors have given up on me, I have given up on me. Why would this man care anything about me? And the embarrassment of trying to tell him what is wrong with me! No, I shouldn't have come here." I turned to walk away from the crowd but the same urging that kept me going forward when I decided to come here was telling me to stay. "How in the world would he notice me? What can I do?"

For a moment, the kind man whose name was Jesus stopped to speak to a woman with a small child in her arms. "Oh, my goodness! This may be my chance!" Instinctively, I crouched down toward the ground and crawled through the throngs of bodies shuffling back and forth. "If I could just reach out far enough and touch the hem of his garment, it might be all I need." Dirt was being kicked up into my eyes and my hands and robe were being stepped on, but I made it to the inner part of the circle, and I was able to look up and see the man himself, standing before me. I stretched out my arm and grasped the frayed edges of his cloak like a lifeline.

Immediately, I felt as if I were completely well. No flow, no pain I felt whole, and clean. Yes, clean. The man Jesus said, "Who touched me? I felt the power leave me just now."

"Who was it that touched me?" the men traveling with him asked. "With all of these people how can we know who touched you?"

Without a word, I could feel his eyes looking down upon me. I slowly lifted my head until my eyes settled on the most beautiful pair of eyes I had ever seen. Kind eyes, loving eyes. I felt every person watching me, dirty and curled up like a child on the ground. I felt completely exposed as the people stared. Jesus knelt down beside me and put his hand under my chin and said, "Daughter, look at me." As I lifted my eyes, again I was looking into the most loving and tender eyes. With a kind smile, he said to me, "Your faith has made you well. Go in peace."