**The Choice – Risking Your Life for Freedom**

**Dale Jones**

***Making History Connections***

**For**

**Sotterley Plantation**

Situation: Sotterley Plantation in Maryland on the Patuxent River, circa 1813. The British are sailing up the river and wreaking havoc as they burn homes and crops. They are currently across the river attacking a plantation and are soon to attack Sotterley.

Characters: Peregrine and Elcie are both enslaved. Peregrine is the main house and personal servant for the owner, and Elcie works in house as a servant.

**SLAVE CABIN SCENE**

AUDIENCE ENTERS CABIN. CABIN IS SPARSELY FURNISHED, BUT EVIDENCE THAT THE ENSLAVED PEOPLE LIVE HERE IS VISIBLE.

ELCIE ENTERS, QUICKLY, NERVOUSLY, CALLING OUT

ELCIE

Peregrine – you here? Peregrine? SHE GOES TO DOOR, LOOKS OUT. SHOUTS IN A WHISPER Peregrine. Peregrine. NO ANSWER. Where could he be? He’s surely in big trouble now. SHE GOES TO WINDOW, LOOKS OUT. CALLS FOR HIM AGAIN. Peregrine. Peregrine.

PEREGRINE

HE IS HEARD OFF STAGE. IN A LOUD WHISPER. Elcie. Elcie.

SHE FREEZES. PEREGRINE BURSTS IN BEHIND HER THROUGH THE DOOR. WHISPERS LOUDLY. Elcie, here I am.

ELCIE

STARTLED, SHE JUMPS. Oh Lord, Peregrine. I was so worried. Where you been? Master been calling for you since this morning. And he’s mad. He’s fit to be tied. He needs you up there right now. To pack up and move. The British are right down there across the river and they’ll be coming here soon.

PEREGRINE

Forget Master. We gotta go. Right now. Come on.

ELCIE

What you mean, we gotta go? I gotta get back up the Big House. They been looking all over for you, and Miss Elizabeth sent me down here to see if you was about. Thought maybe you sick, or hurt. Maybe you come with me now, it won’t be so bad for you. Maybe they just send you back to the fields again for a while.

PEREGRINE

Truth is, I don’t mind so much going back to being a fieldhand. Gotta work in all weather, but at least I got my evenings to myself and don’t have to do whatever Master wants, whenever Master wants it. Ain’t got no time to myself up in the Big House. Always “Peregrine, Do This” or “Peregrine, Do That.” They got no care for me.”[[1]](#footnote-1)

ELCIE

So, why don’t you just go back. That probably what Master do. Send you to the fields.

PEREGRINE

Oh, no. That’s not gonna happen this time. It’s gonna be bad for me. I’m a runaway now.

ELCIE

SHE GOES TO THE WINDOW TO LOOK OUT, NERVOUSLY. You hush! They be coming down here for me soon enough if I don’t get back. And then they’ll see you anyway, and we’ll both be in trouble.

PEREGRINE

Well I ain’t going back. Not me. I heard happened to Cephus after he ran away. First time he ran, the hounds caught him, and chewed him up something awful. Then they strapped his arms around a tree, and whipped him bloody till his shirt and his back was slashed like ribbons. Then they rubbed salt in it. But that don’t stop Cephus. Next chance he got, he run. This time though, it was worse. HE SHAKES HIS HEAD. They whipped him, and then you know what they did – they just put that big spiked collar on his neck so he couldn’t run no more. Spikes two feet long HE HOLDS HANDS UP TO SHOW so you can’t get close to nothing -- people or nothing.[[2]](#footnote-2)

ELCIE

What did Cephus have to run for again? Why did he do that?

PEREGRINE

The same reason I’m doing it. We got to. For our freedom. I ain’t being a slave no more.

ELCIE

Wait – don’t go. Maybe it won’t be so bad. Master like you. That’s certain. He ain’t never treated you so bad before.

PEREGRINE

But he could if he wanted. And ain’t nobody going to stop him. Cause we’re just property and they can do whatever they please to us. And it don’t matter, cause I’m leaving. Now.

ELCIE

Where you gonna go? What you gonna do?

PEREGRINE

I’m running off to the British. They giving us freedom. They say all we got to do is join up in their army. Help em fight the Americans. The ships are just right out there, out in the river. All I gotta do is go. And I’ll be free. It’s like I’ll be born again. And this time not as a slave.

ELCIE

I heard about the British. But I heard there’s patrollers looking for slaves trying to escape. They shoot you on sight. I even heard tell some slaves got tricked – they went to a boat that didn’t have British, but had Americans, and they took em right back to their owners.

PEREGRINE

Not me. I’m meeting Ignatius, James, and Josephdown in the woods, and we’re going together. We ain’t gonna get caught.

ELCIE

I heard they give you a gun.

PEREGRINE

That’s what I heard. That’s what I hope. I’d carry it with pleasure.

ELCIE

What happens if you with the British troops, and you come back here and run into Master. And he tells you to return. What you do then?

PEREGRINE

HE STANDS UP STRAIGHT. I would just tell him “No. I ain’t no slave. I’m a free man now.”

ELCIE

And if he demanded. What then?

PEREGRINE

I just might have to shoot him.

ELCIE

You dare not.

PEREGRINE

I would if I could, and that’s the truth. But never mind that. Elcie, come with me. Now.

ELCIE

Peregrine, I don’t know. What would happen if we left. If they caught us, they’d whip us for sure. TRYING TO CONVINCE HERSELF Maybe it ain’t so bad for me now. I’s in the Big House, cookin, and such. Master not so bad. Mistress mostly treats me good. I got real mad at her the other day, and she says she’ll whip me if I don’t do right, but she don’t. Just yesterday, I heard Miss Elizabeth say to the Master, “I don’t know what I ‘d do without Elcie. She makes me furious, but she’s clever in the kitchen.” Clever in the kitchen. That’s what she said. They need me in the Big House.

PEREGRINE

They need a slave, that’s what they need. Someone to get up, fix the fires, cook the food, clean-up. Be up whenever they need something. Someone they don’t pay! Hmpph. They need a slave, yes’m they do.

ELCIE

But they scared. [[3]](#footnote-3) I never seen em like that before. Miss Elizabeth just running around, picking things up, settin em down. Can’t figure out what to do. And Master, he just being calm-like, but determined. He look determined.

PEREGRINE

Elcie, none of that matters. Them being scared or anything. We can be free. That’s what matters. You don’t do no more cookin for someone else, just for yourself, unless they pay you. Come with me.

ELCIE

Oh Peregrine, we been friends a long time, and I trust you, but I ain’t so brave as you. And you know the real reason I can’t leave. I got Henny to take care of – she needs me. Who’d take care of her? Who?

PEREGRINE

Somebody’ll take care of your kin. But if I asked her right now, she’d want you to go if you have a chance. Freedom, Elcie. That’s what I’m talkin about. Freedom. How many times we talked about being free, not being no slave having to do what somebody tells us?

ELCIE

You right, we have talked about it. And I want to be free more than anything. But just not now. If I left, who knows how Master and Mistress would treat Henny.They’d be furious and take it out on her.[[4]](#footnote-4)

PEREGRINE

PAUSES, CONSIDERS. I know what you mean. I still have family here, and I’m worried about them, but we always said if one of us gets the chance, they should grab their freedom. And that’s what I’m about to do – grab my freedom, and never let go.

ELCIE

SHE CONSIDERS, VACILLATES. THEN SHE SHAKES HER HEAD. No, I can’t. I wish I could. When you going?

PEREGRINE

I’m going right now. I jes came by to get you.

ELCIE

LOOKING OUT WINDOW Peregrine, they coming. Looking for me. I should be back by now. YELLS OUT WINDOW. He’s not here! TO PEREGRINE. I gotta go.

PEREGRINE

HE GOES TO HER AND GIVES YOU A HUG. Elcie. If you get a chance, promise me you’ll get out and run to the British.

ELCIE

I don’t know. I’ve gotta leave. You better head off.

PEREGRINE

HE DOESN’T LET GO OF HER. Promise me.

ELCIE

I promise

THEY LEAVE

1. Household slaves sometimes preferred field work, because at least they had some time to themselves at night. *This*  *Species of Property.* 1976. Leslie Howard Owensp 108 [↑](#footnote-ref-1)
2. *Life of a Slave on a Southern Plantation.* 2000. Stephen Currie. Image p. 45. There are also a variety of other similar images and existing objects [↑](#footnote-ref-2)
3. The British did indeed give reason to fear with their raids in the area. [↑](#footnote-ref-3)
4. *Life of a Slave on a Southern Plantation.* 2000. Stephen Currie. p.54 Family connections made many slaves think twice about disappearing for good [↑](#footnote-ref-4)