

TO BE CAPTIVE OR FREE



DENA WADE

THE WARM BREEZE RUFFLED MY HAIR AS I TRUDGED through the muddy yard and down the narrow path that led to the rabbit cages my husband and I kept on the corner of our 3-acre property. The rays of an April sun beat their warmth on my bare arms as I struggled not to let my feet sink too deeply in the muck. It felt good to put away my winter coat, but I'd be wearing my boots for a while yet as the remainder of the winter snow continued to melt. The melody of the birds singing in the trees sounded sweet to my ears. Light green buds had begun to appear on the trees and fluffy white clouds floated in a bright blue sky. Spring has always been my favorite time of year. It signifies the end of death and the beginning of new life. We had 30 rabbits of various ages, some as young as a few days old. The oldest was two years old. The rabbits were of various colors: black, white, brown and tan, some with white or tan spots on their faces. In spite of my knowledge from biology class about recessive genes, I marveled that all these different-colored offspring came from one brown and one tan rabbit. I saw movement out of the corner of my eye and turned to see a female rabbit that had escaped from her cage nearly three months before, hopping timidly toward me. Her nose was twitching as she picked up the scent of the food in my hand. This rabbit was the mother of the rest and I had saved her from the jaws of my Rottweiler a few months before she escaped, prying his teeth from her back. Since her escape, she had come back daily looking for food and I had been trying to gain her trust so I could catch her and put her back in her cage where she would be safe. I was afraid a wild animal would eat her as we had seen foxes and

coyotes in the woods. But if I moved too quickly when she came near, she would run off, and if I picked up the net I kept nearby she would run. She'd experienced the net before and remembered it. So I didn't try to catch her for a while. I just let her be free and hoped she would learn to trust me. On this day she must have been extra hungry, or maybe was growing more trusting, because she came right up to my feet. I bent down slowly and put some food on the ground for her to eat. Crouching there for a moment, I watched the rabbit eat in front of me without fear for the first time. I slowly reached out to pick her up. However, when my hands touched her, she jumped and tried to get away. I tightened my grip and managed to pick her up. She screamed in fear and kicked me with her hind legs. The claws on one of her legs made contact with my face and neck and the sudden pain made me drop her. In a couple of bounds she was out of sight and I knew she would probably never give me the chance to get close to her again. For a week after, I saw her every day as usual, but she never came closer than a few feet. Then she stopped appearing and I knew it was likely that an animal had killed her. It made me sad to know that if she'd allowed me to capture her she would be safe in her cage. Suddenly it struck me how much sadder God must feel every time He reaches out to us and we run away from His loving, protective arms, thinking He means us harm, when in reality He only wants what is best for us. We fear being captive, ignorant of the fact that belonging to Him allows us the only freedom a human being can truly have, because if we are not servants of God we are slaves to sin and death. In my experience I can say that, with God as our master, life becomes a joyful experience – not without trials or troubles – but with a peace that passes understanding, even through the trials, as we look toward the promise of eternal life with our loving heavenly Father and our Savior Jesus Christ, who became captive so that we could be free. Why would anyone want to run away from that?