

PATRICIA ST JOHN

WHERE THE
RIVER
BEGINS

Copyright © Patricia St John 1980
First published by The Moody Bible Institute of Chicago 1980
Published by Scripture Union 2007, reprinted 2011, 2014
This edition 2015

ISBN 978 1 78506 289 6

All rights reserved. No part of this publication may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted, in any form, or by any means, electronic, mechanical, photocopying, recording or otherwise, without the prior permission of Scripture Union.

The right of Patricia St John to be identified as author of this work has been asserted by her in accordance with the Copyright, Designs and Patents Act 1988.

British Library Cataloguing-in-Publication Data.
A catalogue record of this book is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in India by Replika Press Pvt Ltd

Cover design by Luther Spicer
Internal design and layout by Author and Publisher Services

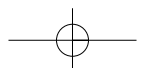
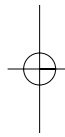
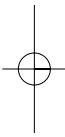
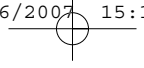
 Scripture Union is an international Christian charity working with churches in more than 130 countries.

Thank you for purchasing this book. Any profits from this book support SU in England and Wales to bring the good news of Jesus Christ to children, young people and families and to enable them to meet God through the Bible and prayer.

Find out more about our work and how you can get involved at:
www.scriptureunion.org.uk (England and Wales)
www.suscotland.org.uk (Scotland)
www.suni.co.uk (Northern Ireland)
www.scriptureunion.org (USA)
www.su.org.au (Australia)

Contents

1	The cherry tree	7
2	The river	12
3	The farm	16
4	The cherry tree again	23
5	The gang	31
6	The fire	40
7	In trouble	47
8	Flight	54
9	Refuge	63
10	Questions	68
11	The source	74
12	The tulip bed	84
13	The river of life	90
14	The swan	99
15	The homecoming	105



Chapter 1

The cherry tree

“Francis!” shouted his stepfather, “will you behave yourself! Leave your little sister alone!”

Francis gulped down his mouthful and started the usual argument.

“I tell you, Dad, she kicked me first – she always does, and you always think—”

“I didn’t!” wailed Wendy.

“You did.”

“I didn’t!”

“Francis, be quiet! Can’t you see how you’re upsetting your mother and bringing on her headache? Don’t you care?”

“Well, I’m only telling you—”

“You just stop telling us then. Finish your lunch in your room and stay there till I call you. I’m sick of all this arguing. Anyone would think you were a baby!”

Francis seized his plate, snatched a cake from the middle of the table, aimed a last deadly kick at Wendy’s leg, and made for the door. Her yells followed him down the hall. But he didn’t go up to his bedroom. He sneaked through the living room, stuffed his Star Wars comic down his jumper, and streaked out of the back door into the garden. He couldn’t walk in front of the kitchen window, where they were finishing lunch, so he tiptoed round the house and made a run for the hedge. Stooping low, he crept through the long grass behind the apple

trees and reached the cherry tree at the very end of the garden in safety.

Nobody quite knew who the cherry tree belonged to, because its roots were half in Francis' garden and half in old Mrs Glengarry's next door. That meant that climbing the tree gave Francis an exciting, trespassing sort of feeling. It was fun to peer over into other dangerous territory and pretend he couldn't be seen, although Mrs Glengarry had often noticed the dangling legs; and when Francis' trainer had once dropped into her lavender bushes, she had come out and handed it back. She liked the dangling legs; they reminded her of something she had lost many years ago.

But nobody from his own house had yet discovered Francis' hiding place in the cherry tree, for it was hidden by an evergreen and wasn't easy to climb. In fact, climbing was impossible with a plate, so he finished his lunch crouched in the bushes, squashed his cake into his pocket and jumped for the lowest bough. He kicked up his legs to catch hold of it and hauled himself up and over. Then, hand over hand, he climbed to a big fork in the trunk where there was a kind of seat and a hollow large enough to contain a tin box.

Francis settled himself comfortably and checked the contents of the tin box. It was all there – three dinky cars, fifty football cards and a bag of mints. He ate up the crumbs of his cake and started to think over his position.

He didn't mind being sent away from the table. In fact, when Dad was in a temper and Mum had a headache and Wendy was in a bad mood, it was much nicer to have lunch in the cherry tree. Nevertheless his heart was sore. Wendy had kicked first – she always did – and Dad always blamed him because he was the oldest, and it wasn't fair. If he had been Dad's son, Dad would have

The cherry tree

9

liked him as much as Wendy and Debbie, and it wasn't true that he didn't care about Mum's headaches. He did care, and he would do anything for his mother, but somehow he never got a chance to tell her so. And Dad said I was naughty, and Mum always believes him, and it wasn't fair – Wendy kicked first, and they never said Wendy was naughty. Dad always blames me.

His thoughts were going round and round in the same old circle, back to the same place. It wasn't fair – it wasn't fair. He said it to himself so many times in bed at night that he sometimes couldn't sleep, and he said it to himself in class so often that he forgot to listen to what the teacher was saying, and she had said on his last report that he didn't pay attention. Then Dad had been cross and said he was naughty again, and Mum had believed him. And it wasn't fair.

But here in the cherry tree it was easier than anywhere else to forget that it wasn't fair, because there were so many things to look at. He could see Mrs Glengarry coming out, wrapped in shawls, to feed her cats, and Mrs Rose, two doors away, hanging out her washing. He could spy on everyone's back garden and on beyond the gardens to where cars and lorries roared along the main road, and on to where the woods began and small hills rose behind with warm acres of pink Warwickshire soil, farms, and pastures, and somewhere, between two dips in the hills, the river. It was March and the end of a wet winter. The river would be flooding its banks in parts and nearly reaching the bridges.

Then he looked round his own garden. The crocuses were ragged and dying, but the daffodil spears were pushing through the grass. It was very quiet except for the birds, and he wondered what everyone was doing. Mum would have gone to bed with her headache, and Dad

would be with Wendy and Debbie because it was Saturday afternoon. He would probably take them to ride their bikes in the park and buy them ice creams. And, no doubt, he would soon go up to Francis' bedroom to tell him that if he would behave and say sorry to his sister he could come too. Francis had to admit that Dad quite often tried to be kind.

But he didn't want anyone's kindness, and he wasn't going to say sorry to Wendy or ride his bike with little girls, and he had enough money in his pocket to buy himself an ice cream. Spring was in the air, and he'd go off by himself and have an adventure. He would go to the river, and Mum wouldn't worry because she would be asleep, and Dad would probably be only too glad to get rid of him. He put the mints in his pocket and scrambled cautiously down the tree, peering through the evergreen to make sure the coast was clear. His bike was in the shed and not hard to get at. Another few moments and he was out through the gate, pedalling madly and breathing hard. He had made it!

Francis had a vague idea of how to get to the river, but he had never been so far by himself, and by the time he had reached the bottom of his road, he was beginning to wonder whether an adventure by himself would be much fun. He even found himself thinking about Dad, Wendy, Debbie and the park, half hoping the others would catch up.

But they were nowhere in sight, and he suddenly realised that he was standing at the bottom of Ram's street. Ram was a boy from India who was in his class at school. He had never taken much notice of Ram. Nobody had, because he was very shy and small for his age, and he couldn't speak much English. But Ram had a bike and

The cherry tree

11

would be someone to share an adventure with. Francis pedalled to number eight and knocked on the door.

Ram's mother came to the door, wearing a deep blue sari, her hair hanging in a plait down her back, and a tiny girl on her hip. She called Ram, who came running out and introduced everybody. His little sister was called Tara, and she stared solemnly at Francis with huge, unblinking black eyes. Francis decided that he liked her much better than Debbie.

Ram's mother seemed pleased that Francis had come to invite Ram to go for a bike ride, because no other child had visited, and her son was lonely here in England where they found it so hard to communicate. While Ram pumped up his tyres, she prepared them a small picnic. Francis sat and waited for him, and tried, unsuccessfully, to make Tara smile at him.

Then they were off, pedalling along the grassy edge of the main road that led out toward the open country. Francis remembered the way for he had been there once or twice with his stepfather.

"Where are we going?" asked Ram, his black eyes sparkling.

"To the river!" shouted Francis, racing ahead.