rowing up in a loving family on a farm near Corinth, Greece, young Lykon only has to worry about whether or not his father will gift him a discus and how quickly he can learn to throw it well. Although mutterings of unrest, fear of the Roman soldiers, and a new religion based on one god, not many, filter through to Lykon’s ears, he is not worried. But when his father is arrested for attending secret meetings, Lykon is separated from his parents and sent to Rome, where he is sold as a slave. *The Sign of the Anchor* is a beautiful story of a boy opening his mind and heart to this new savior, the Christus, and risking his life to get back to his family with the help of new friends who work to keep him safe in the spirit of Christianity.
Foreword

This story takes place approximately sixty-five years after the birth of Christ. The historical background is authentic. The meeting of the Christians in the catacombs, the raiding of these secret meeting places by the Roman soldiers, the Christians’ use of symbols to identify one another, their persecution by Nero, and the emperor’s freeing the Corinthian people because of their enthusiastic reception of his performances in the theater, are all matters of historical record. —E.C.N.
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Lykon had risen early to take the goats up a trail through the tall pine trees in back of his hut. Ahead of him the flock moved slowly through thick, bright patches of sunlight across a winding path.

At his heels was a dog. It was as if all of them—the goats, the dog, and the boy—could move no faster through the beauty of an early spring morning, a morning filled with the odor of the cool, damp earth, the tangy smell of pine needles, and the song of an oriole and a thrush.

The dog stopped and raised his head high, his nostrils twitching.

“Come, Beppa,” the slender, dark-haired boy called. “No time for squirrels.”

The dog’s nose gave another quiver, but the scent was gone. He followed the boy.

At the top of the hill, Lykon stopped and looked down
across the sloping plains to the distant city of Corinth and beyond that to the blue sea.

Someday he would make a trip to the city. He had never been away from the slopes and quiet valleys in back of the ancient port. Here lay the scattered baked clay huts of the country people, sturdy men and women who earned their living peacefully tending their vineyards, their olive trees, their herds of goats, and their grainfields. Among them lived a few weavers of goat’s hair cloth, men who had not found work on the modern looms in the city, but who used the looms handed down to them by their fathers.

Deplovius, Lykon’s father, was one of these weavers. The night before, he had gone to the city to sell his cloth on the busy wharves that edged the blue water, and he had promised Lykon a surprise when he returned.

The boy turned his gaze to the dark shape of a baked clay hut at the far edge of the meadow below him. Lifting two fingers to his mouth, he sent three sharp notes into the valley. In a few seconds, an answering whistle came from the hut in the meadow. At once Lykon rushed down the mountainside. The goats, anxious to reach the lush grass of the meadow, raced ahead of him.

Coming across the meadow was a thin line of goats, and, behind them, a boy and a dog. Lykon stopped for a moment to wave his arms and to halloo. As soon as they were in speaking distance he asked, “Do you have them, Midias?”

“Yes, here.” The stubby fingers of the short, fat Midias fumbled with the pouch which hung from his belt. The
pouch was narrow and deep and full of many things. There was a wooden whistle, a string, a piece of rope, and several pickled olives. But at last he found what he was looking for. In his hand lay five small knucklebones that he had saved from lambs his father had recently slaughtered to sell in the markets of Corinth.

Midias handed them to Lykon, who tossed each one separately to test their difference in weight.

Midias watched him anxiously, for some of his joy in having the new set of bones would be lessened if Lykon did not think they were nearly perfect. He could keep silent no longer. “What do you think of them, Lykon?”

“I have never seen a better set,” Lykon answered appreciatively as he handed them back. “It is good that they are so evenly matched.”

The anxious expression left Midias’ round, ruddy face, and a wide grin took its place. “I’ll play you a game,” he said.

Lykon drew an old, soiled set of bones from his pocket.

The game of knucklebones is very simple. Any number of bones can be used, but the number must be decided upon before the game starts. The bones are placed on the back of the hands and tossed into the air. The player tries to catch as many as possible. Each boy has three turns, and at the end of that time the one who has caught the most wins.

Lykon placed the five bones on the back of his hand and, with a quick flip, sent them into the air. He caught three of the five.

When it was Midias’ turn, he caught all five of his bones.
Each took his three turns, and at the end of that time Lykon was the winner, with a score of eight bones against the seven caught by Midias.

One game led to another. The boys were so evenly matched in skill that first one would win and then the other.

The dogs returned from a hunt, their noses covered with dirt and their paws grimed with the damp, dark soil of squirrel holes. They lay in the shade, dozing and snapping at flies.

“It’s noon,” said Lykon. “Let’s eat.”

As the boys sat on the grass and took from their tunics black bread and cheese wrapped in clean white cloth, a nanny goat wound her way in and out of the herd and came to stand in front of Lykon. He scratched her behind the ears, and Beppa, running to her, gave her face a quick lick with his tongue.

“Aren’t you going to give Gink a bite of your bread and cheese?” Midias asked Lykon.

“When she asks for it,” the boy answered.

The goat lowered her head and nuzzled the boy on the neck.


Gink waited a second and then lowered her head. This time she gave Lykon a nip on the neck with her sharp teeth. The boy howled with pretended pain, Midias laughed, and the dogs stood a few feet away, barking. Then Lykon broke off pieces of the cheese and bread and gave them to the goats and the dogs.
The boys spent the afternoon on the hillside, throwing sticks for the dogs to chase. They climbed trees and swung from the branches, and picked berries and munched them until their teeth were stained from the purple juice.

All afternoon Lykon watched the sun as it moved farther and farther toward the west, his mind not always on what he was doing. Several times Midias had to speak to him twice. Finally Lykon said, “It is time to separate the goats and start for home.”

“It’s early yet,” Midias protested. “Don’t go!” But he saw that Lykon’s mind was not to be changed easily. “If you stay,” he bribed, “I’ll let you have my new knucklebones to take home with you.” He filled his mouth with a handful of wild berries.

“No,” Lykon answered. “I’m anxious to reach home. My father went to Corinth last night to sell the goat’s hair cloth and promised that he would bring me a surprise. By the time I reach home, he should be there.”

Midias’ mouth was so full of berries that for a moment he couldn’t speak, and he almost choked when he tried to speak and to swallow all the berries at once. His face grew red as he sputtered and gasped. “It’s a discus, Lykon! You’re going to get the discus your father promised you.”

“I think so, too,” answered Lykon.

Midias grew breathless with excitement. “Be sure to bring the discus with you tomorrow. Don’t forget it.” He drew his arm back and made the motions of throwing a disk. “We’ll be the best discus throwers in the country!” he exulted. “We’ll throw it clear to the other end of the meadow.”
In Midias’ mind the discus was already purchased and was now bouncing over the rough roads from Corinth in the cart of Lykon’s father. “Come,” he shouted to Lykon, bribery forgotten. “Let’s separate the goats. It’s time to go home!”