



## I s I t T h e m ?

THE NEWS THAT WE HAD ARRIVED SOON SPREAD THROUGH THE TOWN. People came running from every direction to greet us, some still putting on their coats as they ran. Soon we were in the middle of a large crowd. I could hear people asking, “Is it *them*?”

When we reached the Wilks’s house the street in front of it was filled with people, and three girls were standing at the door. Mary Jane, the oldest, was beautiful and her face seemed to glow, she was that happy that her uncles had come. The king held her in his arms, while the duke held the youngest girl. All the women watching cried for joy to see them meet again at last.

When the king saw Peter Wilks’s body laid out at one end of the room, he put his arm round the duke’s shoulder and slowly walked toward the body. They both started crying again, louder than ever, and were soon joined by the three girls. Tears were in the eyes of every person in the room, but the two who cried the loudest and the longest were the king and the duke. I never felt so angry and so ashamed in my life.

When the king could control his crying, he told the people in the room the long journey we had made from England—a journey of 4,000

miles. He said that he and his nieces would be happy if a few of Peter's closest friends stayed to eat supper with them that evening, and he named those people his brother had often mentioned in his letters: Mr. Hobson, Lot Hovey, Ben Rucker, Abner Shackelford, Levi Bell, Dr. Robinson, and their wives, and the Widow Bartley.

Mr. Hobson and Dr. Robinson were out of town together and Levi Bell was in Louisville on business, but the rest were there and thanked the king for the invitation. The king continued talking about nearly everyone in that town and mentioned many things that had happened. He said that his brother Peter had written all this in letters to him. That was a lie, of course. He had learned these facts from the young boy that we had taken to the passenger boat that morning.

Mary Jane gave the king the letter that Peter Wilks had left. The king read it aloud and cried. Peter had left the house and 3,000 dollars in gold to the girls, and he left the **tannery** and 3,000 dollars in gold to his brothers, Harvey and William. He told where he had hidden the 6,000 dollars in the basement of his house.

The king and the duke asked me to go with them to the basement and when they found the bag of gold they poured it out onto the floor and counted it. Four hundred and fifteen dollars were missing! They counted the money a second time, and again they found that instead of 6,000 dollars in gold, they had only 5,585 dollars. They searched the basement, but couldn't find the missing dollars. The king said the best plan would be to add four hundred and fifteen dollars of their own money, otherwise they might appear dishonest.

The duke said that he had another idea. To keep the people from suspecting they were dishonest, he told the king that they should carry the bag upstairs, count the money in front of the group, and give the complete 6,000 dollars to the girls. The king said that was the cleverest idea that they had had yet.

When we got upstairs, everyone crowded around the table as the king poured out the gold dollars. He put the money into twenty piles—three hundred dollars in each pile. The people in the room looked hungrily at the money. The king then turned to the people and began

another of his speeches.

“Friends, my poor brother, who now lies dead, was generous to those he loved—his three nieces. And we know that he would have been even more generous to them if he had not been afraid of hurting my brother William and me. I’m certain that William feels as I do. Let me ask him.” And the king turned to William and made a lot of signs with his hands. William looked foolish at first, and then his face brightened as though he suddenly understood and he started jumping around from joy and the king said, “I knew that he would feel the way that I do about this. Here, Mary Jane, Susan, and Joanna, take the money—take it *all*. The complete 6,000 dollars.”

Mary Jane danced about and began kissing the king, while Susan and Joanna kissed the duke. Then everybody started kissing the duke and the king and shaking their hands and saying that it was the loveliest thing that they had ever seen.

Then the king made another speech about his dear dead brother, and invited everyone in the room to come to the funeral. Suddenly, a man laughed right in his face. Everyone turned to see who had dared to laugh at such a sad time.

“Why, Dr. Robinson,” said Abner Shackelford, “you’ve been away and haven’t met this man. This is Harvey Wilks.”

The king smiled and extended his hand to shake the hand of the doctor.

“Keep your hands to yourself,” said the doctor. “You’re no Englishman. Your voice sounds nothing like an Englishman. *You* say that you’re Peter Wilks’s brother! Never! You’ve been lying.”

The crowd around the doctor tried to quiet him and tried to explain to him how Harvey had proved in many ways that he was Peter Wilks’s brother—how he knew everyone’s name in town and even knew the names of the dogs. They begged the doctor not to hurt the girls’ feelings, but the doctor wouldn’t listen to them. Peter Wilks’s three nieces began to cry and begged the doctor to stop.

“I was your father’s friend, and I’m your friend,” the doctor said to them. “I warn you as a friend, and an honest one who wants to protect

you and keep you out of harm and trouble, to turn your backs on these two liars and have nothing to do with them. This man has given you a lot of names and facts which he learned somewhere, and you're eager to believe that this proves that he is your uncle. Mary Jane Wilks, you know me for your friend, send these two liars away. I beg you to do this. Will you?"

Mary Jane looked into the doctor's eyes and said, "Here's your answer." She picked up the bag of gold dollars and put it into the king's hands and said to the king, "Take this 6,000 dollars and put it into a bank or a business for my sisters and me. I trust you."

She then put her arms around the king and her sisters did the same. The king held up his head and smiled proudly.