



B a d L u c k

THE FOLLOWING DAY I WANTED TO TALK ABOUT THE DEAD MAN AND why he was murdered, but Jim refused. He said that talking about the murder would cause bad luck. I said no more about this, but continued to think about the dead man and wished that I knew who had shot him and why.

I searched through the pockets of the old clothes we had taken from the floating house and found eight silver dollars in an old coat. I showed the money to Jim and said, "You're always talking about bad luck. When I showed you the snakeskin I found yesterday, you said that touching a snakeskin would bring me the worst bad luck in the world. Do you call this bad luck? We found all those clothes and other supplies in that old house, and now we have eight silver dollars. I wish that we had this kind of bad luck every day."

"Don't make a joke about bad luck, Huck. It's coming. Listen to me. Bad luck is coming."

It did come, too. Four days later, we were resting on the grass after eating a large meal. I went into the cave to get some tobacco and found a large, poisonous snake. I killed it and placed it on Jim's blanket in such

a way that the snake appeared to be alive. I thought that this would be a funny trick to play on Jim and was waiting to see him jump with fear when he saw the snake.

When it grew dark, and we returned to the cave to sleep, I had forgotten about the dead snake. While I was lighting a candle, Jim lay down on his blanket and suddenly screamed. He was bitten by a live snake! He wasn't wearing shoes and was bitten on his foot. I felt like a fool. I had forgotten that whenever you kill a snake, a second snake will come and curl around it.

Jim told me to cut off the snake's head and throw it away. Then he told me to remove the snake's skin and cook a piece of its body. I did that, and Jim ate what I had cooked. He said that this would cure him. I carried both snakes out of the cave and threw them as far as I could into the bushes. I didn't want Jim to see *two* dead snakes and to discover the trick that I had played on him.

Jim became very, very sick. I thought that he was going to die. The snake's poison caused his foot and leg to swell to twice their normal size. We had found some whiskey in the floating house, and I gave that to Jim to drink. He was too drunk to notice the pain in his leg.

After four days and four nights, the swelling in Jim's leg began to grow smaller. He felt less pain and was able to walk again. I made a promise to myself that I would never again touch a snakeskin. All Jim said to me was that he hoped that I would now believe him when he spoke to me about bad luck.

When Jim was no longer sick and I didn't have to care for him, I began to get bored. I was curious about what was happening in St. Petersburg. What were they talking about? Did people continue to talk about me? I told Jim that I wanted to return to the town for a day or two.

Jim liked the idea, but said that I would have to go when it was dark and that I had to be careful. He said that no one would recognize me if I dressed like a girl, and I agreed. I rolled up my trousers and put on a girl's dress and hat that we had found in the floating house. All day I practiced acting like a girl until I could do it quite well.

When it grew dark, I went in the canoe to the shore near the far

end of town. I saw a light in a small cabin that had been empty for years. I looked in the window and saw a woman that I did not know. She was a stranger in this town, which was lucky for me. I began to worry that people who knew me would recognize me even though I was dressed like a girl. I decided that this woman would be able to tell me all I wanted to know about what was being said in the town.

I knocked on the door and tried to remember that I was a girl.