



E s c a p e f r o m a S i n k i n g B o a t

WHEN I HEARD JIM'S WORDS, I COULD HARDLY BREATHE. WE WERE caught on a sinking boat with a group of murderers! I had no time to stand there worrying. We *had* to find the boat that belonged to the three men.

We got down on our hands and knees and moved very, very slowly along the slanted deck. Jim said that he was too frightened to move, but I forced him to continue the search. After what seemed like a week, we found their boat. At that moment, one of the men appeared and jumped into the boat. "Give me that bag, Bill." Bill gave him the bag and jumped into the boat, too. "We must hurry. This boat could sink at any moment."

"Wait. Did you look in Jim Turner's pockets? His share of the money must be in them."

"I didn't search him. Did you?"

"No. We have to return to get his money." They got out of their small boat and returned to the sinking one.

Immediately, Jim and I jumped into their boat, cut the rope, and

we were off. We didn't speak or whisper, and we barely breathed. Soon we lost sight of the sinking boat in the dark, and we knew that we were safe. Those two men would soon miss their boat and would realize that they were in as much danger as Jim Turner. Jim began to row the boat, and I searched the river for our raft. Then I began to worry about those men. What an awful situation they were in—awful even for murderers.

I began to feel sorry for those men and said to Jim, "When we see a light, we'll tie up the boat, and I'll tell the people about the sinking boat and the men on it. Prison would be a better place for those men than drowning in the river."

My plan was a good one, except that we couldn't find anyone to tell. And then the rainstorm returned. We continued down the river searching for our raft. After a while, a flash of lightning revealed a large, dark object ahead, and we rowed toward it. We had found our raft and were very happy to climb onto it again. Soon we saw a light on shore, and I said that I'd row the small boat toward it, while Jim continued floating down the river on the raft. He was supposed to go ashore a few miles further downstream and build a small fire, so I could find him.

I surprised a man sleeping in a boat tied to the shore. He had left a light burning and was supposed to be guarding the boat. I started to cry and told the man this story.

"My father and mother and sister are in trouble. If you'll go to them—"

"Where? Where are they?"

"On a sinking boat up the river."

"Are they on a boat named the *Walter Scott*? That's the only sinking boat that I know on the river."

"Yes. That's where they are." And I began to cry again. "Can you help them? My uncle lives in this town and I know he'll pay you for your work."

"I'll hurry to find some men to help me, and then we'll get your family off that boat. Are you certain that your uncle will pay?" And he rushed down the street in the dark to find help.

I quickly returned to my boat but decided to sit there until I was

certain that the man had returned and was on his way to find the men on the sinking boat. I would have liked the Widow to know the good that I was doing. I thought that she would be proud of me.

Suddenly, in the dark, I saw a black mass float slowly, silently down the river. I began to tremble, and my stomach felt sick. What I was seeing was the very top of the sinking boat. Nearly all of the boat was beneath the water. I moved close and called, "Hello" several times, but no one answered. All was quiet—the quiet of death.

I moved quickly to the middle of the river, then started toward the place where I had asked Jim to wait for me. By the time I reached the fire that Jim had built, the night was ending and we found a safe place to hide our raft. We were very tired and could finally sleep.