



H u c k T e l l s t h e T r u t h

THE NEXT MORNING, AS I WAS WALKING DOWN THE STAIRS, I HEARD the sound of someone crying. The door to Mary Jane's room was open, and I could see her sitting by her open trunk. She had been packing her clothes for the trip to England. But now she stopped packing and sat with her face in her hands, crying. I felt very sad to see her like this.

I entered her room and said, "Miss Mary Jane, I hate to see people feeling sad. Tell me what troubles you."

She said that she was crying because of the black slaves. She said that the beautiful trip to England was ruined for her and that she could never be happy in England knowing that the black mother and her two children would never see each other again. Then she threw out her arms and cried, "Oh, oh! They'll be separated forever."

"But they *will* get together again. I know that they will!" I assured her.

I had said that before I could think. And before I could say another word, she put her arms around me and kissed me and told me to say that again, and again, and again!

I knew that I had made a mistake to say what I had said, and told

her that I needed a minute to think. In the past, I had never told the truth when I was in a difficult situation, but this time it seemed to me that the truth would actually be safer than a lie. I decided to take a chance and tell the truth this time and hope all would turn out well.

I said to her, "Miss Mary Jane, is there any place out of town where you could stay for three or four days?"

"Yes, I could visit Mr. Lothrop. Why?"

"I can't tell you yet. I'll assure you that the black slaves will see each other again soon—within two weeks—if you'll visit Mr. Lothrop and stay four days."

"Four days! I would be happy to stay a whole year if I could be assured that our slaves will be united again."

I stood up and closed her bedroom door, then returned to her and said quietly, "I'll tell you the truth. This will not be pleasant but I can't change that. Those two men are not your uncles; they have simply been tricking you. They're here to steal your money. I've told you the worst; the rest is not so bad."

She was very troubled by what I had said, but I knew that I had to tell her the complete truth. I told her about the boy we had met who told us about Peter Wilks and about the people in the town. I told her how the king and the duke had made the plans to trick her and her sisters. And I told her that they did not intend to take her and her sisters to England.

She jumped up angrily and said that she wanted the people of the town to be told the truth, too. But I reminded her of her promise to visit Mr. Lothrop for four days, and she said that she would keep her promise.

Once I had said those things, I thought of a new plan. I could see there was a way for Jim and me to escape if the king and the duke were put into prison.

"Miss Mary Jane, I have a new plan. This plan won't require you to stay at the Lothrop's for four days. I want you to leave immediately and stay the day there. At nine o'clock tonight, tell them that you have forgotten something and must return home. If you arrive here before eleven o'clock, put a lighted candle in the window. If I see the candle,

I'll come to you. If I don't come to you, you will know that I am on my raft and have gone away. Only then should you tell the men of this town that the king and the duke are not really your uncles."

"I'll do that," she answered.

"If I escape on the raft, I won't be here to prove that those two men are not your uncles. There are people in other towns who can tell you of the tricks that those two have played before. I will write down the names of the towns and you can talk to people there. When the court wants to learn what type of men they are, I'm sure men from those towns will be happy to tell the court."

I hoped that she understood exactly what she had to do. Then I continued, "Let them sell your property. Don't worry about that. No one will pay for the property immediately, and the king and the duke are not going to leave until they have all the money."

"I'll go down to breakfast now, and leave for the Lothrops immediately after I've eaten."

"Don't wait until after breakfast. Leave now! Why do you think that I've asked you to leave at all?"

"I have no idea. Why do you want me to leave?"

"Because you're not able to keep a secret."

"What about my sisters? Are they safe with those two?"

"They'll be safe enough. I'll tell them that you have gone to visit someone who's sick and that you should return tonight or tomorrow morning."

"I feel sad to think that I gave them that bag of gold dollars."

"But they don't have it. I *had* it because I stole it from them to give to you. But I don't have it any longer. I'm sorry, Miss Mary Jane. I'm very sorry. I did the best I could. I had to hide it quickly and didn't hide it in a good place."

"Oh, stop blaming yourself. But where did you hide it?"

"I would rather not tell you where I put the money, but I'll write it for you on a piece of paper, and you can read it as you travel to Mr. Lothrop's house."

I wrote: "I put the money in the coffin with Peter Wilks's body.

It was there when you were crying that night. I was hiding behind the door. I felt very sorry for you, Miss Mary Jane.”

She took the paper, then she said to me, “Good-bye. I’ll do everything that you’ve told me. If I don’t see you again, I want you to know that I’ll never forget you. I’ll pray for you, too”—and she was gone.

Later, when I saw Susan, I said to her, “Mary Jane has gone across the river to visit the Proctors. One of them is very sick.”

“What kind of sickness is it?”

“There’s no name for it, but it’s very serious. The family sat up with her all night, and they don’t think that she has much longer to live.”

“That’s awful. I must tell Uncle Harvey immediately.”

“Don’t tell him.”

“Why not?”

“Would your Uncle Harvey be willing to take Mary Jane on the long boat ride to England if he thought that she might become very ill with the same sickness that the Proctor girl has? Of course he wouldn’t. I think that a better idea is to tell your uncle that Mary Jane has gone across the river to tell your friends, the Lothrops, that your house and the tannery are going to be sold. You can say that Mary Jane is certain that the Lothrops would be interested in buying the house because Peter Wilks had said that he would prefer the Lothrops to own it.”

I felt very good about the work that I had done that day. I was certain that Tom Sawyer could not have done it better himself. Of course, Tom’s plans would have been fancier, but my plans have always had to be simple and realistic because that’s the way I was raised.

They sold all the property and furniture by the end of the afternoon. As they were finishing the sale, a large boat stopped to unload its passengers. Minutes later, a crowd ran up the street laughing and calling in loud voices, “Here is a second set of brothers of Peter Wilks!”