



H u c k C h a n g e s H i s N a m e

WHEN I ARRIVED AT THE PHELPS'S FARM, ALL WAS QUIET. THE BLACK slaves were working in the fields. I could hear the quiet sound made by bugs and flies; this made the farm seem so lonely. They raised cotton, and the farm looked like many other small farms that I had seen in the South. The farmhouse was large and made of logs. Behind the houses was a small building used for smoking meat. Behind this smokehouse were three small log cabins where the black slaves lived. Off by itself, near the back fence, stood a small log building. I didn't know what it was used for.

I walked toward the farmhouse, not certain what I would say to the people who lived in it. As I neared the house, a great number of dogs—perhaps fifteen—came running toward me, barking and jumping and showing their teeth. I stopped and faced toward them and stood very still. It was as though I were the center of a wheel with dogs in a circle all around me. A black slave woman came out of the house and shouted at the dogs, "Go away! All of you. Run off!" And she hit several of them with a stick.

Behind the black woman, a white woman came running from the house. “Is it you, finally?” she shouted.

“Yes,” I answered, without thinking.

She put her arms around me and kissed me, with tears in her eyes. “You don’t look as much like your mother as I expected, but I’m happy to see you anyway. How are you, Tom? Have you eaten breakfast? Did you eat on the boat?”

I said that I ate on the boat. She then led me to the house and asked me to sit down. “I’ve waited many years to see you, Tom. We expected you a few days ago. Why was your boat late?”

I said that the boat developed engine problems and we were delayed.

“Why don’t you call me Aunt Sally?” she asked. “Your Uncle Silas has gone into town to learn if you arrived. He’s been looking for you for two days now. He should return very soon. You must have passed him on the road.”

“No, I didn’t see anyone, Aunt Sally. The boat arrived at day-break, and I hid my traveling bags and decided to walk to your house.”

“I’m surprised that you were given breakfast on the boat that early in the morning. Usually they don’t serve breakfast until later. Are you certain that you ate?”

I began to fear that my lies would be discovered. I needed to find some children to question if I were to learn who I was supposed to be. Who had this woman been expecting?

Mrs. Phelps continued to talk in her rapid manner. I hardly listened to what she was saying. Suddenly, a great fear came over me as I heard her say, “Now I’ll stop talking for a while and give you a chance. I want to know everything about my sister and about all the others in your family—*everything*. How are they? What are they doing? What did they tell you to tell me? I’m ready to hear what *you* have to say.”

I didn’t know what to say. I simply had made no plans for this. I could think of nothing to say and began to feel sick. I opened my mouth to begin to tell the truth, when Mrs. Phelps suddenly pushed me under the bed.

“Here he comes,” she whispered. “Stay hidden under this bed. I don’t want him to see you. This will be a great joke.”

I could think of nothing to do but follow her instructions.

I could hear someone enter the house. Then Mrs. Phelps said, “Has he come?”

“No,” said her husband.

“What could possibly have happened to him?”

“I don’t know, but I’m beginning to feel a little frightened.”

“A *little* frightened? I’m *very* frightened. Could you have passed him on the road and not realized it?”

“Sally, that could not have happened. You know that.”

“What will my sister say? He should be here. I’m certain that you passed him on the road without realizing it.”

“I’m also worried about him. I have no idea where he could be. He should have been here several days ago. I’m afraid something has happened to his boat.”

“Silas, look! Up the road! I see someone coming.”

When Silas ran to the window to look out, Mrs. Phelps pulled on my legs and had me come out from under the bed. When he returned from the window, there she stood, smiling and smiling, while I simply looked uncomfortable.

The old man stared at me and asked, “Who’s that?”

“Who do you think it is?”

“I have no idea.”

“It’s Tom Sawyer.”

I nearly fainted. But I had no time to show my surprise. The old man took my hand and kept shaking it, while his wife danced around and laughed and cried. Then they asked a dozen questions about Sid and Mary and all the other Sawyers.

If they felt joyful, that was nothing to what I was feeling. I felt like I had been born again. I was so happy to discover who I was supposed to be. In the following two hours, I told them more about my family—I mean the Sawyer family—than ever happened to any six Sawyer families. And I told them my boat had developed engine prob-

lems and that it took three days before the engine was repaired.

I was feeling both very comfortable and very uncomfortable. It was easy to act like Tom Sawyer because I knew all about him and his family. But, then I heard the sounds of a large boat on the river. What will happen if Tom Sawyer is on that boat? What will happen if he walks into this house and calls out my name?

I simply could not allow that to happen. I had to meet him along the road and tell him of my problem. I told Mr. Phelps that I would go into town to get my traveling bags that I had hidden. He said that he would go with me, but I insisted that I could go alone. I told him that I had been trouble enough already.