



A S P L E N D I D E S C A P E

TOM AND I SPENT THE ENTIRE DAY IN MY CANOE ON THE RIVER. WE checked the raft to be sure that it would be ready when we returned late that night with Jim.

We returned to the Phelps's house at suppertime, and found the whole family acting in a troubled manner. They didn't tell us what was worrying them, but they asked us to go to bed immediately after we finished eating.

Tom and I planned to climb out of our bedroom window and hurry to Jim's cabin just as soon as everyone had gone to bed. But Tom asked me to get some food to take with us. As I went down to the kitchen to steal some food, Aunt Sally saw me.

"What are you doing down here?"

"Nothing, Aunt Sally."

"You must be down here for something. What is it that you want?"

"I don't know."

"Go into the living room and wait for me. I want to ask you some questions. I'm busy at the moment, but I'll be free to speak to you soon.

I have this feeling that you're down here for no good reason and are going to cause trouble again."

I walked into the living room and found a crowd of fifteen farmers sitting in there. Each of them carried a gun! I felt sick to my stomach. I knew why they were there. I wished that Aunt Sally would punish me quickly, so that I could rush upstairs to warn Tom.

When Aunt Sally returned, she asked me some questions, but I had trouble listening to her. I was too busy listening to what the farmers were saying. Some said that they thought everyone should wait for the sheep signal. Others said that they wanted to get inside the cabin first and wait for the criminals. I nearly fainted.

Suddenly, Aunt Sally thought that I looked sick and told me to hurry upstairs to bed. I ran upstairs in a second and was soon out the window and running through the dark to Jim's cabin. Tom was already there, and I told him as quickly as I could about the fifteen men with guns waiting in the house.

Tom became very excited and said, "That's great. If I were to plan this again, I'm sure that I would have two hundred men. If we could put this off—"

"Hurry, Tom. Where's Jim?"

"He's standing next to you in the dark. Everything has been done, and we can now escape with him."

But then we heard the sound of men outside the cabin. We could hear them testing the door to see if it was locked.

"I told you that we would arrive too soon. They haven't come. The door's locked. I'll unlock it. Some of you wait inside in the dark. Kill them when they come. Others must hide outside and listen. They'll warn those inside when they hear the criminals approaching."

Some men came inside but couldn't see us in the dark. We quickly jumped under the bed, and quietly left through the hole that we had dug. Soon we were inside the small building next to the cabin, and we could hear men outside. We opened the door just a little, but could see nothing because it was very dark. We listened and listened for a long time, and then Tom said that it was safe for us to leave if we were very

quiet. We walked safely to the fence, and Jim and I were quickly over the fence, but Tom's trousers got caught on a fence board. The board broke when he pulled himself free.

"Who's there? Answer, or I'll shoot."

But we didn't answer. We simply ran. We heard men running and the bang! bang! bang! of their guns.

"They're running toward the river. Catch them. Don't let them escape. Let the dogs catch them."

We could hear their heavy shoes running after us. They couldn't hear us because we didn't wear shoes. The dogs ran past us and were not interested in us because they knew us; they were the Phelps's dogs that we played with all the time. The dogs ran on, searching for strangers.

We reached the canoe and soon rowed to our raft. When we finally got onto the raft, I said, "Jim, you're a free man. You won't be a slave ever again."

"That was a beautiful escape, Huck. It was planned beautifully and it was done beautifully. There's no one who could have thought of a plan that was more splendid than that one."

We were all happy to be on the raft, but no one was happier than Tom. He said that he was happy to finally get to sit down. He had been shot in the leg!

Suddenly, Jim and I didn't feel as happy as we had felt before. Tom's leg pained him very much, and we could see that it was bleeding. We tore off the duke's shirts into long strips and wrapped these around the leg to stop the blood. Tom didn't want us to worry about his leg and kept shouting for us to untie the raft and start down the river. But Jim and I talked quietly to each other about this new problem, and finally Jim said, "We'll not leave this place until you see a doctor, Tom. If you were the slave and I were the free man who had been shot in the leg, I know that you would do the same for me."

I knew that Jim was white on the inside, and I knew that he would say what he did. I told Tom that I was going to get a doctor, and though Tom objected, Jim and I insisted. I left in the canoe to get a doctor.