



T h e D o c t o r

THE DOCTOR WAS AN OLD MAN, A VERY NICE, KIND-LOOKING OLD man. I told him that my brother and I had been hunting on an island in the river and that he had dropped his gun, which accidentally shot him in the leg. I told him that we wanted him to go to the island to look at the leg, but that we didn't want our family to know of the accident. He acted as though he didn't quite believe my story, but he took a light and followed me to my canoe. When he saw the size of the canoe, he said that it was too small for the two of us and insisted on going alone.

I stayed on shore and soon fell asleep behind a pile of wood. When I awakened, the sun was high in the sky. I ran to the doctor's house to ask him about Tom, but his wife told me that he had gone away during the night and had not returned. I thought that must mean that Tom was very sick and I was determined to get to the raft. As I hurried toward the river, I suddenly met Uncle Silas.

He said, "Tom, where have you been all night? We were worried about you."

"Sid and I were hunting for that runaway slave."

“Where did you go? Your aunt has been very worried.”

“She need not have worried. We’re fine. We looked for the runaway all night. Sid is at the post office now hoping to hear news of him.”

Uncle Silas and I walked to the post office to find Sid, but, as I suspected, he was not there. We waited, but Sid didn’t come. The old man insisted that I walk home with him and said that Sid could follow later.

When we got home, Aunt Sally was very happy to see me. The house was filled with farmers eating dinner and talking about what had happened the night before. They kept discussing how the black slave must have been crazy to have written those strange words on the grindstone.

“And how did he get that grindstone inside the cabin?”

“And who dug that hole?”

“He couldn’t have done any of those things without help.”

“Did you see the pen made from the candleholder?”

“Who sawed off the leg of his bed?”

“A dozen men must have helped him—no, forty men—a dozen couldn’t have done all that. All the black slaves on this farm must have helped him. And Sid and Tom were watching all the time, and never saw anything happening.”

Later that afternoon, when all the farmers and their wives had gone home, Aunt Sally finally remembered about me and wanted to know where I had been. “And where’s Sid?”

I told her the same lie that I had told Uncle Silas, about how Sid and I had looked for the runaway slave.

“It’s nearly night, and Sid hasn’t come home. Where is that boy?”

“I’ll run into town to get him,” I said.

“No, you won’t. One boy lost is enough. Uncle Silas will go to look for him.”

When Uncle Silas returned at ten o’clock that night, he had not found Sid. He told Aunt Sally not to worry, that Sid would surely be home in the morning.

I went to bed early, but Aunt Sally came upstairs to my room and sat on my bed. She talked to me for a long time and said what a splen-

did boy I was and what a splendid boy Sid was. She didn't want to stop talking about Sid. She was sure that he was lying hurt somewhere or maybe even dead. She wanted to be near him to help. She cried softly as she talked, with tears on her face. She kissed me and told me to sleep well and not to climb out the window.

“The door won't be locked, Tom, but you'll be good and stay inside, won't you? To please me.”

I wanted to please her very badly, but I knew that I had to see what was happening with Tom. I really intended to go to Tom, but I felt so sad about Aunt Sally that I just could not disappoint her. Twice during the night I climbed out my window and went around to the front of the house and saw Aunt Sally sitting at a window watching the road. I wished that I could do something to help her, but I could not. All I could do was to promise myself that I would not make her unhappy again.