



T O M T E L L S T H E T R U T H

UNCLE SILAS WENT TO TOWN EARLY THE NEXT MORNING—BEFORE breakfast. No one had seen Tom. Silas returned to the house very sad and worried. He and Aunt Sally sat at the table unable to eat anything.

Finally, Silas said, “Here’s a letter that came yesterday. I forgot to give it to you.”

Aunt Sally looked at the letter. “It’s from my sister Polly. She must be writing to ask about Sid and Tom.”

I began to feel very uncomfortable and was prepared to run from the room, when Aunt Sally shouted, “Look! Outside there!”

The doctor was walking down the road, followed by a crowd of people. Someone was carrying Tom, and Jim was being led with his hands tied behind his back.

Tom turned to look at Aunt Sally, and she cried, “He’s alive! Thank God!” Then she ran to the house to get his bed prepared.

I followed the men to see what they were planning to do with Jim, while Uncle Silas and the doctor went into the house with Tom.

Some men wanted to hang Jim as an example to other slaves who might try to run away. But others said that it would not be right. If Jim’s

owner were to come to claim him, there might be problems if he were dead.

They returned Jim to his cabin again and put a chain around his leg. Jim never said a word and acted as though he didn't know me.

Later, the doctor came out to the cabin and told the men not to be rough with Jim. "He's a good man. When I found the boy, he was too sick to move and I knew that I needed help to care for his leg properly. As soon as I told the boy that I was going to need help, this black man came out from a hiding place and said that he would help me. And he did help and did a very good job of helping. I never knew a person who was a better nurse than he. He lost his freedom by helping. I like that black man. He's worth a thousand dollars and deserves kind treatment."

The men promised to treat Jim kindly and all agreed that he was a good person. I felt thankful to that old doctor for doing a favor for Jim. I was happy that the doctor agreed with my feelings about Jim—from the first moment that I met Jim, I knew that he had a good heart and was a good man.

I knew that I had much to explain to Aunt Sally and didn't know what I should tell her about how Tom was shot in the leg. I avoided her as much as I could, but that was easy to do since she spent all her time at Tom's bedside.

The next day, I was told that Tom was a little better and that Aunt Sally had finally gone to her own room to sleep. I went in to speak to Tom, but I found him sleeping peacefully. I watched Tom sleep for a long time, but was afraid to awaken him. Later that day, Aunt Sally came in to sit with me. She whispered how we could all be happy now that the worst part of Tom's illness had ended. He had been talking in a crazy manner when the doctor first brought him home, but she was certain that his mind would be clear when he awakened.

We sat by the bed watching Tom sleep. Suddenly, he began to move a little and then he opened his eyes. He looked around the room and said, "Hello! I'm at home! Where's the raft?"

"Everything's fine," I assured him.

“How’s Jim?”

“The same.” I tried to sound like I was telling the truth, but my voice didn’t sound natural. Tom didn’t notice.

“Good! Splendid! We’re all safe. Did you tell Aunt Sally?”

I wanted to quiet Tom, but I was too late.

Aunt Sally spoke. “Tell Aunt Sally what, Sid?”

“About the way the whole thing was done.”

“What whole thing, Sid?”

“There’s only one whole thing. Did he tell you how we helped the runaway slave escape?”

“What’s he talking about? Is he talking crazy again?”

“No, I’m not talking crazy. I know what I’m saying. We did help the slave escape, and we did it in a grand manner.”

Once Tom started talking, I knew I couldn’t make him stop. He told Aunt Sally everything—about the weeks and weeks we spent planning and working, how we never slept at night, how we moved the grindstone and made the pens, about the snakes and the bugs and the rats. And finished by saying, “You can’t imagine what fun we had.”

“I never heard such a story in all my life. I can’t believe that it was you two who have made all the trouble for us and frightened us nearly to death. You get all the enjoyment you can out of this now, but if I find you helping him again—”

“Helping who?” Tom asked.

“The runaway slave. Certainly you know who I mean.”

Tom looked at me sadly and said, “I thought that you told me everything was fine. Is he on the raft?”

“The runaway slave? No, he’s locked in that cabin again,” said Aunt Sally. “We’ll keep him until his owner comes to get him.”

“You have no right to keep him a prisoner. Let him go free immediately. He’s no slave; he’s as free as any man who walks on this earth.”

“What do you mean?”

“I mean every word that I have spoken, Aunt Sally. I have known him all my life and so has Tom. He belonged to old Miss Watson, and she died two months ago. She felt such great shame when she remem-

bered how she had threatened to sell him down to New Orleans that she left a letter setting him free.”

“Then why did you go through all that trouble to set him free if he was already free?”

“Don’t you understand anything, Aunt Sally? I wanted the *adventure*, that’s why. I would have been happy—why, Aunt Polly! What are *you* doing here?”

Aunt Polly was standing there, right in the room. I could not believe my eyes. Quickly, I hid under Tom’s bed.

After Aunt Polly had kissed Aunt Sally several times, she turned toward the bed and said, “What do you have to say about all this, Tom?”

“Oh! Has he changed that much? That’s Sid, not Tom. Tom is—where is Tom? He was here a minute ago.”

“You mean, where’s Huck Finn? I should be able to recognize Tom Sawyer when I see him. Come out from under the bed, Huck Finn.”

So I came out.

Aunt Sally couldn’t understand what was happening. She had to be told several times before she would believe Aunt Polly. Then Uncle Silas had to be told and he, too, had trouble understanding it all. I said that I had not planned to act as though I were Tom, but that when Aunt Sally assumed that’s who I was the very first day that she met me, I could never figure out how to tell her the truth. And when Tom Sawyer arrived, I knew that he would love the mystery and adventure, and he was happy to act as though he were Sid.

Aunt Polly said that Tom was correct; Miss Watson had set Jim free before she died. And that Tom Sawyer had gone through all that trouble and all that pain to set a free slave free!

I had wondered how Tom, good citizen that he was, could have helped a runaway slave, but now I understood. Tom was not an Abolitionist.

Aunt Polly said that when Aunt Sally wrote to her that Tom and Sid had arrived safely, she knew that something was wrong. “The only

way that I could discover the trouble Tom was in this time was to travel the 1,100 miles down the river—especially since you didn't answer my letters.”

“What letters? I didn't get any letters from you.”

“Tom, what did you do with those letters?”

Tom looked very uncomfortable and said, “They're in my bag. I didn't open them and haven't read any of them. I thought that you were in no hurry—”

“Tom Sawyer, you need to be punished. But I wrote a third letter saying that I was coming. The letter is not here in Tom's bag.”

“Oh, it came yesterday, but I never read it.”