



Exploring the Island

THE SUN WAS HIGH IN THE SKY WHEN I AWAKENED. I LAY IN THE GRASS in the cool shade of some large trees. I felt very comfortable and planned to wait before I cooked my breakfast.

While I lay under the trees, I heard the distant sound of a large gun being shot across the water. I sat up and listened. I heard the sound again. Then a third time. A large boat filled with people was traveling on the river. I knew what they were doing; they were shooting the large gun in an attempt to force my dead body to float to the top of the water.

I was now hungry, but it wasn't a good time to build a fire to cook my breakfast. The people on the boat might see the smoke. I sat there watching them for a long time. The boat passed close to where I was hiding, and I could see many people I knew—Pap, Judge Thatcher, Joe Harper, Tom Sawyer, Tom's Aunt Polly, and his brother Sid, and many more. Everyone was talking about my murder.

The boat captain shouted, "Look carefully! The current flows toward the island here. The river may have carried Huck's body to the edge of the island."

All the people on the boat crowded to one side and watched the

shore. I stayed hidden. They shot the big gun, and the noise made my ears hurt. The boat floated on and was soon out of sight around the island. I could hear the noise of the gun further and further away, and then I didn't hear the gun anymore.

The island was three miles long. When the boat came to the end of the island, it turned and traveled up the other side. I crossed to that side and watched it travel toward the far shore, and I knew that the people were returning to their homes.

I was going to be safe now; no one would search for me again. I carried my supplies from the canoe to a place under some large trees near the center of the island. There, I made a tent out of my blankets and put my supplies inside. I caught a fish, cleaned it with my knife, and cooked it for supper.

When it was dark, I sat by my campfire smoking tobacco and feeling well satisfied. After a while, I became lonely and walked to the edge of the island. I listened to the river current and counted the stars in the sky. Then I counted the logs and rafts floating down the river. There's no better way to spend your time when you are alone. Soon you lose that feeling of loneliness.

For three days and nights my life followed this pattern. Nothing was different; each day I did exactly the same things. On the fourth day, I explored the island. The whole island belonged to me, and I wanted to know everything about it. I was also growing bored and needed a change. I found grapes and other small fruit to eat. I carried my gun and hoped to find an animal that I might kill for food.

I had walked a long way and knew that I must be near the end of the island. Suddenly, directly in front of me were signs of a small campfire. Smoke was rising from the burned wood. My heart jumped. I held my gun tightly as I slowly backed away. Quietly, I began the long walk to my tent. I would walk a short distance, then stop to listen. I was so frightened that I could hardly breathe. I knew that another person was on the island with me.

When I reached my tent, I quickly gathered all my supplies and carried them to my canoe. Then I scattered the bits of burned wood

from my fire. When I was satisfied that I had left no signs of my camp, I climbed a tall tree and looked around. I stayed in the tree for two hours, but could neither see nor hear anything. I couldn't stay in that tree forever and finally, climbed down. I stayed hidden most of the day and listened for sounds made by the other man.

When it was dark, I quietly got into my canoe and traveled to the far shore near a town. I was very hungry and looked for a place to get some food. Suddenly, I heard the sounds made by many horses. The sounds came nearer, and I could hear men talking.

"We'll stop here. The horses are very tired. We can continue our search in the morning. We're sure to find him."

I didn't wait. I ran quietly to my canoe and returned to the island. No place was safe. I tried to sleep in the canoe, but I didn't sleep much. After a few hours, I said to myself, "You can't live this way. You have to find the other person living on this island."

Having decided to do this, I felt better immediately. I rowed the canoe close to shore, staying in the shadows made by the tree branches that grew out over the water. The moon was shining brightly, and outside the shadows it was nearly as light as day. I rowed quietly for an hour. Nothing else moved except the river current. When I reached the end of the island, I came ashore. I carried my gun out of the canoe and walked through the trees overhead. The moon was gone from the sky now, and the sun would soon appear. I took my gun and walked quietly toward the place where I had seen the campfire. A fire was burning. I approached it slowly.

There lay a man on the ground. He was wrapped in a blanket with his head toward the fire. I sat behind some bushes and watched him. The day was getting brighter, and the man slowly sat up. He stretched his arms, and his blanket fell to the ground. The man was Miss Watson's black slave, Jim!

"Hello, Jim. Am I glad to see you!" I shouted.

Jim jumped up and stared at me wildly. Then he dropped down on his knees and put his hands together and said, "Don't hurt me—don't! I've never done you harm. I've always liked ghosts and did what

I could for them. Get back into the river where you belong.”

I quickly made him understand that I was not a ghost and I was not dead. I was very happy to see Jim. I wasn’t lonely now. I talked for a long time, but Jim sat quietly. He never said a word.

“I’ll cook our breakfast. Add more wood to your fire. We’ll need a large fire for cooking.”

“What will we cook? All I’ve been eating are some of the fruit that grows on the island. Fruit doesn’t have to be cooked.”

“How long have you been on the island, Jim?”

“I came here the night your Pap said that you were murdered.”

“You’ve been here that long time and have eaten only fruit? You must be starved.”

“I’m hungry. What have you been eating?”

“I have a gun and have been shooting small animals for food. I’ll get my supplies from my canoe now, while you put more wood on the fire.”

After eating a large breakfast, Jim turned to me and asked, “Who was murdered in that cabin, and why did your Pap think that you were dead?”

I told Jim the whole story, and he said that I was very clever, that even Tom Sawyer could not have thought of a better plan.

Then I asked, “How do you happen to be here, Jim?”

Jim looked unhappy and said nothing for a moment. “Maybe I shouldn’t say.”

“Why, Jim?”

“I have my reasons. Promise that you won’t tell anyone.”

“You know I won’t tell, Jim.”

“I believe you, Huck. I ran away.”

“Jim!”

“Remember, Huck. You promised not to tell.”

“I won’t tell, Jim. People will call me an **Abolitionist** and will hate me for not telling, but I don’t mind. I’ll never return to St. Petersburg again, anyway. Tell me why you ran away.”

“You know I belong to Miss Watson. She didn’t always treat me

well, but she promised that she would never sell me down the river to New Orleans. The city of New Orleans is as close to hell as a black slave can get on this earth. Last week, I saw a slave trader talking to Miss Watson. This made me feel uneasy. One night, I listened at an open door as Miss Watson was talking to the Widow Douglas. I heard her say she was planning to sell me for 800 dollars and that I would be sent down the river to New Orleans. She said that she hated to do this, but that 800 dollars was a lot of money and she needed money. As soon as I heard this, I started to run. I hid in town all day. I heard people talking about how you were murdered, and I saw them leave in a boat to search for your body. When it was dark, I jumped into the river and swam to this island.”

“And you’ve had almost nothing to eat until I found you.”

“I couldn’t look for food along the shore because someone might see me. I’ve had to stay hidden in the bushes during the day, and all I could find there was fruit.”