



Tom's Troubled Mind

AT NOON THE WHOLE VILLAGE SUDDENLY KNEW THE FEARFUL NEWS. The story traveled quickly from man to man, group to group, house to house. The schoolteacher closed the school.

The knife had been found. It was known to be Potter's knife. And Potter had been seen washing himself in a small stream, in the very early morning. When seen, he had run away. All this was very strange, especially because Potter almost never washed.

All the people in the town were slowly going toward the graveyard. Tom joined them. He did not wish to go, but something seemed to force him. He arrived at the fearful place, and saw the scene again. It seemed a hundred years since he had seen it before. A hand touched his arm. He turned. His eyes met Huckleberry's. Both looked away. Were they being watched?

Now Tom began to shake, because he saw Indian Joe.

Then Muff Potter appeared. A few people saw him. They shouted. The crowd separated and Potter walked through. A village law officer was holding his arm.

Potter's eyes showed his fear. When he stood beside the dead

doctor, he put his face in his hands and began to weep. "I did not do it, friends," he said. "I did not do it."

"Who said that you did?" a voice shouted.

Potter lifted his face and looked around without hope. He saw Indian Joe, and said, "Oh, Indian Joe, you promised me that you would never—"

"Is this your knife?" It was held by the law officer for him to see.

Potter began to fall. Men caught him and let him go slowly down to the ground. Then he said, "I thought that I should come and get—" He stopped, shaking. Then he said, "Tell them, Joe. Tell them."

Indian Joe told his story.

Huckleberry and Tom stood, not able to speak, and with eyes wide with fear. They expected the skies to open with a sudden storm, to strike down Indian Joe.

But he finished his story and stood there, living and whole.

They wished to tell the truth, but they did not dare.

During a week after this, Tom could not sleep well. One morning Sid said, "Tom, you talk in your sleep so much that I can't sleep half the night."

Tom's face became white and he looked away.

"This is bad," said Aunt Polly. "There is something in your mind, Tom. What is it?"

"Nothing." But Tom's hand was shaking. He could not lift his cup.

"And you say fearful things!" Sid said. "Last night you said, 'It is blood, it is blood!' You said that again and again. Then you said, 'Do not hurt me. I will tell!' Tell what?"

Aunt Polly said, "I understand. It is that killing. I dream about it also."

Mary said that she also dreamed about it, and then Sid stopped talking.

Slowly Tom's mind grew quieter and his sleep was easier.

Almost every day, during this bad time, Tom went to the jail window and gave Potter some small gift. Then he felt happier.

The village people wanted to put Indian Joe in jail also. Like Muff Potter, he had been helping the doctor to carry away that dead body from its grave. But the people did nothing. All were afraid of Indian Joe.