



Island Life — Tom Quietly Leaves

OPENING HIS EYES, TOM WONDERED WHERE HE WAS. HE SAT UP AND looked around. Then he remembered.

It was cool and the light was the gray color of early morning. There was a delightful feeling of rest and peace in the deep quiet of the forest. A thin blue breath of smoke rose from the fire. Joe and Huck were yet asleep.

Now, far away, a bird called. Another answered. Slowly the cool gray of the morning changed to white. More sounds were heard. The life of the forest began to show itself to the watching boy. Bugs appeared and started their day's labors. Birds were making many noises now. A big blue bird stopped very near to Tom. It turned its head to one side, and sat watching its strange new neighbors. Small animals appeared and they also looked at the boys and seemed to be talking to them. Perhaps they had never seen a human being before. Perhaps they did not know whether or not to be afraid.

Tom called to the other pirates. Within a few moments they were all playing in the river near the shore. Their boat had been carried away, but this pleased them. They were certain now that they would never

return to their village.

Happy and hungry, they built their fire. Huck had found some good water to drink. While Joe cooked some meat, Tom and Huck went to the river and caught some fish. Joe cooked these with the meat. No fish had ever tasted so good.

Then Huck smoked. After that, they all started to walk through the trees to see what they could discover.

They found much to delight them, but nothing surprising. The island was almost three miles long and a quarter of a mile wide. It was very near to the shore on one side, but far from the shore where their village was.

They played in the river often. It was the middle of the afternoon before they returned to their fire. They ate some meat again and then they sat in the shade to talk.

But the talk soon stopped. The quiet, the loneliness, were beginning to change their happiness. They began to be sad. Tom and Joe were thinking of home. Finn the Red-Handed, who had no home, was thinking of the places where he usually went to sleep.

But they did not speak to each other of this weakness.

Now they heard a distant sound. They looked at each other, and listened. There was a long quiet, and then the sound—Boom! Then a long, long quiet, and then again, Boom!

“We must go and see.”

They jumped up and ran to the shore nearer the town. The trees there were small, and grew thickly. Through them, the boys looked across the water.

They saw a big riverboat. It was the boat that crossed the river many times every day. Now it was coming slowly down the river. It was crowded with people. There were many small boats around it. Then from the riverboat came a cloud of white smoke, and then another Boom!

“I understand now!” said Tom. “Some person is drowned!”

“That is right,” said Huck. “They did that last summer when Bill Turner was drowned. A big gun makes that Boom! And then the body

rises to the top of the water.”

“I wish that I was on that riverboat now,” said Joe.

“I wonder who is drowned,” said Huck.

They continued to listen and watch. Then a thought came into Tom’s mind like a sudden light. “Boys, I know who is drowned. They are looking for us!”

This was a wonderful thing to know. Hearts were breaking for them. Tears were falling. People were sorry that they had not always been kind to them. The whole town was talking about them. This was fine.

It was good to be a pirate. All doubt of that was gone.

As darkness came, the riverboat returned to her usual business. The pirates returned to their fire. They were joyful that they were so important and were causing so much sadness. They caught more fish to eat. Then they talked about what the village people were thinking and saying.

But as the night grew darker, they stopped talking and sat looking into the fire. Tom and Joe thought of persons at home who were not enjoying all of this. Joe began to speak of returning to the village.

Tom laughed at him. Huck joined with Tom.

Huck fell asleep. Then Joe fell asleep. Tom sat for a long time, watching the others.

Then he stood up. He found two pieces of thin wood on which he could write. After writing on the wood, he put one piece in Joe’s hat. He put the other in his pocket.

Then, carefully, he moved away among the trees. When he knew that they could not hear him, he began to run toward the river.