



T o m L e a r n s W h a t I s H a p p e n i n g

A FEW MINUTES LATER TOM WAS WALKING INTO THE WATER TOWARD the shore where the riverboat was tied. The stream was not wide here, but it was strong. It carried Tom south. But after a while he arrived at the river's edge. He found a good place and pulled himself out of the water. He began walking north through the trees, near the shore.

He arrived at an open area, across the river from the village. The riverboat was lying near. Everything was quiet under the stars. Watching with both his eyes, he entered the water again. There was a small boat tied behind the large boat. Soon he was pulling himself into the small boat.

After a minute or two he heard a bell. The riverboat began to move. He knew that this was the last time it would cross the river that night. Twelve minutes later the boat stopped. Tom was quickly in the water again, swimming to the shore.

Soon he had jumped over the fence behind his aunt's house. He looked through a window into a lighted room. There sat Aunt Polly, Sid, Mary, and Joe Harper's mother. They were talking. They were beside the bed, and the bed was between them and the door.

Tom went to the door and opened it quietly. He thought that he might be able to go inside without being seen. He began moving carefully, on his knees.

"I feel a wind. Is that door open?" said Aunt Polly. "How strange! Many strange things are happening now. Sid, go and close the door."

Quickly Tom went under the bed. Sid did not see him.

"But," said Aunt Polly, "he was not *bad*. He was only wild and full of life, like any young animal. He did not wish to do bad things. And no boy ever had a kinder heart." She began to weep.

"My Joe was the same. He was not really bad. And he was always kind. And now I shall never see him again!"

"I am sorry now for so many things! Only yesterday the cat—" Weeping, Aunt Polly told about the cat and the Painkiller. Tom was weeping a little now. He could hear Mary weeping also. Had he really always been a good boy? It was quite surprising to think this. But now he was beginning to believe it. He wished to rush out from under the bed. He wished to fill his aunt with joy. But he remained still and listened.

Their small boat had been found five or six miles down the river. Now hope for them was gone. On Sunday the whole village would pray in the church, for the boys' souls.

Mrs. Harper went home. Sid and Mary went to bed. Then Aunt Polly prayed for Tom. Her words and her old voice were filled with love. Tom's tears began falling again.

Then she got into bed. She talked to herself and she turned over again and again. Tom remained quiet for a long time. But at last she was still.

Now the boy came out and looked down at her. He loved her and he was very sorry for her. He took from his pocket the piece of wood with his writing on it. He placed it on a table. She would see it there in the morning.

But then a new thought came to him. He considered it. His face grew bright. He put the wood into his pocket again. Then he kissed his aunt's lips, and went out the door.

He returned to the river and to the riverboat. There was a man who guarded the boat, but he would be sleeping. Tom knew that. It was easy to take the small boat. He got into it and moved it first up the river. Then he crossed to the other shore. He had often crossed the river in a small boat, and he knew how to do it.

He considered taking the small boat to the island. A real pirate would keep the boat. But people would try to find it, and they might find the boys also.

He got out of the boat and walked south along the shore. At daylight he could look straight across the stream and see the island. He rested. Then he entered the water.

Soon he was on the island. He heard Joe say:

“No. Tom is true, Huck. He will return. What has he been doing? I wonder.”

“Here I am!” cried Tom, stepping out from among the trees.

In a short time they had caught more fish and were eating them. Tom told his adventures. Then Tom found a place in the shade. There he was able to sleep until noon.