



Sleeping Spirits — A Box Full of Gold

ON SATURDAY, SOON AFTER NOON, THE BOYS MET AT THE DEAD TREE. They smoked and talked in the shade. Then they worked a little at their last hole. They had no great hope. But Tom said that people sometimes stopped working when they had almost found the box of gold. Then another person came and with very little work discovered it.

However, they failed to find anything. But they felt that they had done everything that was possible.

When they arrived at the old house, they were first afraid to go in. It was completely quiet there under the hot sun, and very lonely.

Then they went without any noise to the door and looked in, shaking with fear. They saw a room with an earthen floor. There was a place where a fire had been built, windows without glass, and dust everywhere.

They entered. They did not dare to speak. Their ears were ready to hear any small sound. Their legs were ready to carry them quickly outside again.

Soon their fear became less. They looked around with interest. Then they wanted to look at the room above.

They found nothing up there and were starting to go down when—

“Be quiet!” Tom’s voice was shaking.

“What is it?” Huck asked, becoming white with fear.

“There!... Hear it?”

“Yes!... We must run!”

“We can’t move. They are coming toward the door.”

The boys were on the floor, looking down into the room below through holes, sick with fear, waiting.

Two men entered. Both boys had seen one of the men in the village. He seemed to be very old. He had long white hair hanging around his shoulders, and much white hair growing on his face. It seemed to the village people sad that he could neither hear nor speak.

The other man was a stranger. He was wearing very old clothes. His face was not pleasant. He was talking as they entered.

The two men sat on the ground, with their backs against the wall.

“No,” said the other man. “I have been thinking about it. I do not like it. They will catch us.”

“You fool!” said the man who was believed not to be able to hear or speak. “You are afraid!”

The boys were now shaking with fear. This man was Indian Joe!

Joe said, “We were not caught before.”

“But that was different.”

“They may catch us here in this house,” Joe said. “I wanted to leave here yesterday. But those boys were playing on Cardiff Hill. They would have seen us.”

“Those boys” were Tom and Huck. They were shaking again. What would have happened to them yesterday, if they had come to this house? They wished that they had waited a year before coming.

The two men had brought some food, and they began to eat.

After a while Joe said, “When it is dark, go home. Wait there until you hear from me. I will go into the village once again. Then we will do the job we planned. And then we will run. Far away. Now I need sleep. You stay here as a guard.”

He was soon asleep. And then the guard, too, was soon sleeping. The boys took a long, thankful breath. Tom said:

“Now is our chance—come!”

Huck said, “I can’t. I would die if they opened their eyes.”

He would not move, and Tom started to leave alone. But the old floor made so much noise that he stopped, almost dead with fear.

Slowly time passed until the sun was going down.

Indian Joe sat up and called the other. He said, “It is almost time for us to be moving. What shall we do with our money? Shall we leave it here until we are ready to run? Six hundred silver dollars is heavy to carry. We can put it in the ground. Deep.”

His friend agreed. He went to the place where the fire had been built, raised one of the big stones from the earthen floor, and took out a big bag of money.

The boys began to forget their fears. Six hundred dollars would make six boys rich! And they knew where Indian Joe was putting it. Indian Joe was in a corner, making a hole in the ground with his knife. The boys did not dare to speak, but they looked at each other often. These looks were easy to understand. Their meaning was, “Oh, how glad we are now to be here!”

They heard Indian Joe’s knife strike something hard.

“Look here!” he said.

“What is it?” said his friend.

“It is an old box,” Joe said. “Help me lift it. No, I have broken it open.” He put his hand in the box and then brought it out again. “Man, this is money!”

The two men looked at the handful of money. It was gold.

Now the men found the gardening things that the boys had been using and had placed in another corner when they came into the house. Using them, they started to work. They soon had the box out of the earth. It was not large, but it had once been very strong, with iron bands to hold the wood together.

“There are thousands of dollars here,” said Indian Joe.

“Now it won’t be necessary to do that job in the village,” said the other.

Indian Joe said, “You do not understand. I am not doing that job

only for money. Wrong was done to me, and I am going to pay them for it. I need your help. Go home until I tell you to come.”

“What do we do with this money? Put it in the ground again?”

“Yes.” (Delight for the boys above his head.) “No!” (Deep sadness above.) “Where did those gardening things come from? There was fresh earth on them. Who was here? We must take the money away. I have a good place for it. At the Number Two place, under the cross.”

“It is nearly dark enough to go.”

Indian Joe went from window to window, looking out. Then he said, “Who could have come here? Do you think they are in the room above us?”

The boys’ breath stopped.

Indian Joe put his hand on his knife and started to go up. The boys could not move; their strength was gone. They heard Joe coming.

Then they heard the sound of breaking wood, and Joe fell to the ground.

“No people are up there,” his friend said. “They saw us coming and they ran. They thought that we were spirits or devils, and they are running yet.”

Soon the two men went out of the house with the box of gold and the bag of silver dollars.

Tom and Huck watched them through holes in the wall. But would the boys follow? No. They were happy enough to get away from the house with no broken bones, and then return to the town.

They did not talk much. They decided to watch in the town for Indian Joe, and then follow him to the Number Two place.

Tom had a fearful thought. “Indian Joe said that he would pay wrong with wrong. Was he talking about us, Huck?”

Feeling suddenly weak, Huck almost fell to the ground.