



The Picnic — Indian Joe's Job

THE NEXT MORNING TOM HEARD GLAD NEWS—JUDGE THATCHER'S family had returned. Both Indian Joe and the box of gold were not so important for a while.

More good news made the day perfect. The following day Becky would have her picnic.

Before eleven in the morning the young people were at Judge Thatcher's house, ready to start. Soon the happy group was walking toward the river. They were going to ride down the river on the old riverboat.

Sid did not go; he was sick. Mary stayed with him.

Mrs. Thatcher said to Becky, "You will return late. Perhaps you should stay all night at the home of a girl friend who lives near the river."

"I can stay with Susy Harper, Mother."

"Good. And be a good girl."

The boat took them three miles down the river. There it was tied to the shore. The crowd ran off the boat and into the forest. Soon shouting and laughing could be heard from many places.

After a while, all were hot and ready to rest. They met again near the boat, and began to eat the good things they had brought with them. After eating, they rested in the shade of the big trees.

Then there was a shout: "Who is ready to go to the **cave**?"

All were ready. They got lights to guide them in the darkness and started to walk up the hill. The cave could be entered through an opening in the hillside. A door had been placed across the opening, but it was not closed. Inside was a small, very cold room. The walls were rock, and always had water running down them.

It was a strange pleasure to stand there in the darkness and look out at the green valley shining in the sunlight. But the strangeness was soon past, and the children began to play and run through other parts of the cave. None of these parts was wide and some were very small. Some led to other rooms made of rock. Some of these were very big; the children could not see the top of them.

A person might walk days and nights and never find the end of this cave. He might go down and down, and yet further down into the earth, always finding new parts and new rooms. No person knew the whole cave. Only part of it was known, and people did not go where others had not gone before. Tom Sawyer knew as much of the cave as any person.

The children walked for almost a mile before any of them started to return to the outside. Then one group after another began arriving at the opening on the hillside. They were surprised to see that it was almost night. The boat's bell had been calling for half an hour.

However, they thought this end to the day's adventures was delightful. Only the captain of the boat was sorry that he had waited so long.

Huck saw the lights of the returning riverboat. He was already watching for Indian Joe. There were clouds in the sky and the night was becoming very dark. The people in the village began to go home to sleep. The village clock was striking eleven and nothing had happened. Huck also began to think of sleep.

Then a noise came to his ear. The next moment two men passed

near him. One was carrying something. It must be that box! Should he call Tom? No. The men would carry away the box and it would never be found again. He would follow them.

Without shoes, as usual, Huck moved as quietly as a cat.

The men went toward the river, and then, turning, went up Cardiff Hill. Passing the house of an old man named Jones, they arrived at the top of the hill. There, among the trees, they could not be seen.

Huck stopped, listened, but heard no sound except his own heart. He knew that he was not far from the house of Mrs. Douglas, an old lady who lived alone.

Then, very near, he heard a voice. It was Indian Joe. He said, "There are lights. It is late, but she is not alone."

"I can't see any lights." That was the other man.

Huck's heart was cold. This was the job Indian Joe had talked of!

Mrs. Douglas had often been kind to Huck. Perhaps these men were planning to kill her. He wished that he dared to run to the house and tell her. But the men would catch him.

"Look from here," said Indian Joe. "Now do you see the lights?"

"Yes. Forget the job."

"Forget it! I have told you before, you can have her money, I do not want it. But her husband put me in jail. Then he died. I can't hurt him. But she is living yet."

"You must not kill her!"

"I will not kill her. But I am going to cut her face, and that hurts a woman more than killing. You will help me or I will kill you. And if I must kill you, I will kill her, too. Then she can't tell who killed you."

"If we must do it, then do it now."

"No. Wait until the house is dark."

Huck knew that now all would be quiet, and the quiet would be more fearful than the talk of killing. Very, very carefully he moved down the hill.

When he dared, he began to run. He arrived at Mr. Jones's house and beat on the door. Mr. Jones and his two strong sons opened a window and looked out.

“What is that noise? Who are you? What do you want?”

“Let me come in—quick.”

“Who are you?”

“Huckleberry Finn. Quick, let me come in.”

“Huckleberry Finn, indeed. Is that a name to make me open a door? But let him come in, boys. What does he want?”

“Please never tell that I told you,” were Huck’s first words. “I would surely be killed—but Mrs. Douglas has been a good friend to me. I want to tell you.”

“Speak,” said the old man. “We will never tell, boy.”

Three minutes later the old man and his sons, carrying guns, were going up the hill. Huck went only part of the way. Then he stopped behind a large stone, and listened.

Suddenly he heard the guns and a cry.

He waited for nothing more, but ran down the hill as fast as his legs could carry him.