



The Old Man Reports — Hope Begins to Weaken

THE NEXT DAY WAS SUNDAY.

In the very early morning Huck called gently at the old man's door. "Please let me come in! It is only Huck Finn."

"That name will open this door night or day, boy!"

These were strange words to the boy's ears. He could not remember hearing any so kind and pleasant before. The door was quickly opened, and he entered.

"Now, boy, I hope that you are hungry, because as soon as the sun is up, we shall have something hot to eat. We hoped that you would come here again last night."

"When I heard the guns, I ran. I ran for three miles. I came now because I want to know what happened. I came before daylight, because I do not want to meet those men, living or dead."

"They are not dead, boy. We are sorry for that. They heard us coming, and they ran. Then we went down to the village to get help. Men have gone to watch at the river. More men will hunt through the forest today. My sons will join them. I wish we had seen those two men. Could you see them in the dark?"

"I can tell you about them. One is a man that you have seen in

the village. He has long white hair. He can't hear and he can't talk." Then he told about the other man's face and clothes.

When his sons had gone, Mr. Jones asked Huck why he had followed the men up the hill. Huck told, after much thought, that one man was Indian Joe. But he did not tell about the box of money.

Soon people began coming to the house, and Huck went where they could not see him.

Mrs. Douglas was among the first to come. She came to thank Mr. Jones for saving her from being hurt by the men.

"You should not thank me," he said. "There is another person who did more to help you. But he does not want thanks."

All the people in the village went to church early that day. They wanted to talk about the two bad men. The two had not been found, and nothing had been learned about where they had gone.

Leaving the church, Mrs. Thatcher walked beside Mrs. Harper. She said, "Is my Becky going to sleep all day?"

"Your Becky?"

"Yes. She stayed with you last night, I believe."

"No."

Mrs. Thatcher stopped suddenly. She seemed ill.

At that moment Aunt Polly joined them. She said, "Good morning, Mrs. Thatcher. Good morning, Mrs. Harper. I suppose that my Tom stayed with Fred or Joe last night without telling me. And now he is afraid to come to church."

Mrs. Thatcher seemed more ill than before. She moved her head, saying no.

"He did not stay with us," said Mrs. Harper. Her face showed surprise and a little fear.

Aunt Polly also showed fear. "Joe Harper," she said, "have you seen my Tom this morning?"

"No."

"When did you see him last?"

But Joe could not remember.

People had stopped moving out of the church. The story traveled

quickly among them. Children were questioned. No child could remember seeing Becky and Tom on the returning riverboat. It was dark then. No person had thought of counting the group. A young man now said that Tom and Becky might be lost in the cave.

Mrs. Thatcher closed her eyes tightly. Aunt Polly began to weep. Within five minutes bells were ringing and all the people were gathering. What had happened at Mrs. Douglas's house was not important now. In half an hour two hundred men were going, either by river or by road, toward the cave.

Through the long afternoon the village seemed dead. Many women went to visit Aunt Polly and Mrs. Thatcher. They wept with them, and that was more help than words. Through the long night the town waited for news. But in the morning only this news came: "Send more food and more lights."

Mrs. Thatcher was almost ill, and Aunt Polly also.

Old Mr. Jones came home from the cave at noon, and discovered that Huck was sick. Mrs. Douglas came to care for him.

Other men began to return from the cave, but the stronger men continued their hunt.

They visited the farther parts of the cave. They shouted, and they shot guns, but they had no answer. Often a light would be seen far away, and they would think that the children were found. But the light always belonged to another of the hunters. The names "Becky" and "Tom" were found marked on a rock, and the string that had tied Becky's hair was found.

Three days and nights passed.

Huck asked about Tom Sawyer.

Mrs. Douglas said, "Quiet, child. You must not talk. You are very, very sick." She began to weep.

There were not many now with enough hope or strength to continue hunting for Tom Sawyer.