



Indian Joe Explains

AT NINE THAT NIGHT TOM AND SID WERE SENT TO BED AS USUAL. They prayed, and Sid was soon asleep. Tom was waiting.

Time passed very slowly. Little noises came out of the darkness. The cry of a far off dog was heard in the night air, and was answered by another dog. By that time Tom was asleep.

Then there came, among his dreams, the call of a cat. A neighbor opened a window. Tom heard this, and a minute later he was through his window. He “meowed” as he went. Then he jumped.

Huckleberry Finn was there with his dead cat.

In half an hour the boys were in the **graveyard**.

The graveyard was on a hill, a mile and a half from the village. There was an old board fence around it. A light wind sounded in the trees, and Tom was afraid that the sound came from the spirits of the dead. The boys talked little. The time and the place and the quiet were heavy on their hearts. They found the new **grave** and sat down under the branches of three big trees near it.

They waited a long time. After a while, Tom felt that he must talk. “Huck, do you believe that the dead people are pleased to have us here?”

"I wish I knew."

"Huck, do you think Hoss Williams hears us talking?"

"His spirit hears us."

"I wish I had said Mr. Williams. But all the people said Hoss."

"You must be careful how you talk about dead people, Tom."

There was no more talk for a while.

Then Tom touched Huck's arm. "Did you hear it? There it is again! Now you hear it."

The two held each other with fast-beating hearts.

"Tom, they are coming! What shall we do?"

"I do not know. Will they see us?"

"Tom, they can see in the dark, like cats. I wish I had not come."

"Oh, do not be afraid. We are doing nothing. If we are completely quiet, perhaps they won't see us."

"I will try, Tom. But I am shaking."

"Listen!"

The sound of voices came from the far end of the graveyard.

"Look! See there!" said Tom. "What is it?"

"It is devil-fire. Oh, Tom, this is very bad."

Some dark shapes came near, carrying a light. Huckleberry said, shaking more, "It is the devils. Three of them. Tom, we are in great trouble. Can you pray?"

"I will try." Tom began to pray.

"Tom! They are human! That is old Muff Potter's voice. He is drunk, as usual. *He* won't see us."

"Huck, I know another voice. It is Indian Joe."

"Devils would be better than that half-Indian. What do they want here?"

Then the boys were quiet, because the three men had arrived at the new grave. "Here it is," said the third voice. In the light the boys saw the face of young Doctor Robinson. He was so near that the boys could have touched him.

"Hurry, men!" he said. "The moon may appear from behind the clouds."

The other two men began opening the grave. For a while no sound was heard except the sound of their work.

Then they came to the box which contained the body. They opened it and lifted the body out of the box. The moon appeared and the dead man's face could be seen.

Potter held up a knife. "Now, Doctor, the thing is ready. And here it stays unless you pay us five dollars more."

"You have your money," the doctor said.

"You and your father once sent me to **jail**," Indian Joe said. "Five years ago. Do you think I would forget? Now you pay!"

The doctor hit him suddenly, and Indian Joe fell.

Potter dropped his knife. "You hit my friend!" he said. He jumped at the doctor and the two began fighting.

Now Indian Joe was on his feet again. He picked up Potter's knife, and began moving like a cat, around and around the fighters. He was watching for a chance to strike the doctor. Suddenly the doctor was free. He picked up a board and used it to strike Potter, who fell quickly to the ground.

At the same moment Indian Joe saw his chance. The whole length of his knife went into the doctor's body. The doctor fell, partly on Potter, covering Potter with his blood.

Clouds covered the moon, and the two boys ran into the darkness.

When the moon appeared again, Indian Joe was looking down at the two men lying on the ground. The doctor made some sounds that were not possible to understand, and then, after a long breath, he was quiet. The Indian said, "Now that is finished!"

He put the knife in Potter's right hand. Then he sat down and waited.

Soon Potter began to move. His hand closed on the knife. He looked at it and let it fall. Then he sat up and looked at the doctor's body. "What happened, Joe?" he said.

"It is a bad business," said Joe. "Why did you do it?"

"I! I never did it!" Potter was shaking. "I was drunk. I do not

remember what happened. Did I do it, Joe? I never wanted to do it.”

“He hit you and then you did it. But you have always been good to me, Muff Potter. I won’t tell.”

“Oh, Joe, I will bless you for that as long as I live.” And Potter began to weep.

“This is no time for weeping. You go that way and I will go this way. Move, now.”

Potter started running. Joe stood watching him. “He forgets his knife because he is drunk. When he remembers, he will be afraid to return for it.”

Two or three minutes later the dead doctor, the body from the grave, the opened box, were alone under the moon. The quiet was complete again.