



H u c k a s S a r a h W i l l i a m s

“COME IN,” SAID THE WOMAN, AND I DID. “SIT DOWN.”

I sat in a chair, while she looked at me with shiny eyes and said, “What’s your name?”

“Sarah Williams.”

“Where do you live? In this town?”

“No, I live in Hookerville, seven miles down the river. I’ve walked from there and I’m tired. My mother’s sick and has no money, and I’ve come to tell my uncle Abner Moore. He lives in this town, but I’ve never visited him. Do you know him?”

“No, but I don’t know everyone yet. I’ve lived here only two weeks. It’s dark outside now, and your uncle must live in the other end of the town, since I know the people who live nearby. I don’t think that it will be safe for you to look for your uncle’s house in the dark. My husband will be home soon, and he can help you.”

“I won’t need help. I’m not afraid of the dark.”

“Then you must not have heard about the murder.” And she told me all about how Huck Finn had been killed and his murderer had not been caught.

“Who do people think did the killing?” I asked.

“Most people thought his Pap murdered him—at least that’s what they thought at first. But then they changed their minds. Now they say that he was murdered by a runaway slave named Jim. He ran away the very night that Huck Finn was killed. A large reward—300 dollars—will be paid to anyone who catches Jim. A reward of 200 dollars will be paid to anyone who finds Huck’s father. He had come to town the morning after the murder and told about it. Then he went out on a boat with many others to search for Huck’s body. The next day he went to Judge Thatcher to get some of Huck’s money. He said that he needed the money to search for Jim. The last time he was seen he was very drunk and walking with two strangers. No one has heard from him since then. Some people think that he killed Huck for the money and that he’ll return in a few weeks and demand what’s left of the 6,000 dollars from Judge Thatcher.”

“Why are they searching for Jim?”

“Because of the 300 dollars! That’s a lot of money. Some people think that Jim hasn’t gone very far. I was asking some neighbors about Jackson’s Island out in the river. They told me that no one lives there. Yet I know that I saw smoke from a campfire on the island two or three times recently. I think that’s where Jim is hiding. I spoke to my husband about the smoke, and he’s going over to Jackson’s Island to search for Jim.”

I became so worried that I couldn’t sit still and had to do something with my hands. I took a needle off a table and began to thread it. My hands were shaking, and I had trouble threading the needle. The woman stopped talking and stared at me. I quickly put down the needle and thread and said, “Three hundred dollars is a lot of money. I wish that my mother could get it. Is your husband going to the island tonight?”

“Oh, yes. He went to get a friend to go with him. They want to borrow a boat and another gun. They’ll leave tonight.”

“They could see better if they waited until daylight.”

“Yes, and Jim will be able to see better, too. After midnight, he’ll be asleep. They can find his campfire easily in the dark.”

“I didn’t think of that.”

The woman looked at me in a curious way, and I felt very uncomfortable. Next she asked me, “What did you say your name was?”

“M————Mary Williams.”

I was afraid to look at the woman’s face. Had I said Mary before or had I said Sarah?

“Dear, I thought you said that your name was Sarah when you first came into the house.”

“Oh, I did. My name is Sarah Mary Williams. Some people call me Sarah, and some call me Mary.”

“Is that the truth?”

“Ya————Yes.” I was feeling a little better, but I wished I could leave.

The woman quickly changed the subject and started telling me about the problems caused by **rats** in their house. I could see a rat stick out its nose out of a hole as she talked. She kept some rocks on a table to throw rocks at the rats. She asked me to do it for her. I threw one rock and hit the rat’s hole but the rat had disappeared.

“Watch for other rats. Here’s another rock to throw when you see one.” And she dropped the rock into the skirt of my dress. I quickly brought my legs together to catch the rock.

After a few minutes, the woman looked straight into my face and said, “Tell me. What’s your real name? Who are you?”

“Wh————What?”

“What’s your real name? Is it Bill or Tom or Bob————What is it?”

I was shaking like a tree in the wind. I thought a moment before I spoke. “Please, don’t joke with me. I’m a poor girl. If I’m causing you a problem, I’ll leave.”

“No, you won’t. Sit down and stay where you are. I’m not going to hurt you. Just tell me your secret. I won’t tell anyone. Trust me. I’ll help you. My husband will help you, too. Tell me the truth now, like a good boy.”

I could see that she was not fooled by the girl’s dress that I was wearing. I told her that I would speak the truth but that she must keep

her promise not to tell anyone my secret. I told her that my mother and father were dead, and that I was forced to work for a mean farmer who lived about 30 miles from the river. He beat me and treated me in a bad way and I knew that I had to run away from him. He was going to be away from his farm for a few days, and I knew that this was the time to leave. I stole a dress and hat from his daughter, so that no one would recognize me on the road. I believed that my uncle, Abner Moore, would take care of me, which is why I came to this town of Goshen to search for him.

“Goshen? Do you think that this is the town Goshen? This is St. Petersburg. Goshen is ten miles further up the river.”

“Well, if this is St. Petersburg, then I must leave. By walking quickly, I should get to Goshen in the morning.”

“Wait. I’ll give you some food to take with you. Before you leave, tell me your real name.”

“George Peters.”

“Remember that name, George. Don’t tell me later that it is Alexander, and then that it is George Alexander. And don’t try to be a girl again. You might fool a man, but you’ll never fool a woman. When you thread a needle, don’t hold the thread still and bring the needle to it. That’s the way a man does. A woman always holds the needle still and brings the thread to it. And when you throw a rock at a rat, don’t do it in a skillful manner. And be sure to miss the rat’s hole by five or six feet. And when a girl tries to catch something in the skirt of her dress, she throws her knees apart. She doesn’t bring them together. I realized that you were probably a boy when I watched you thread the needle. I asked you to do the other things as a kind of test. If you ever need a friend, remember me—Mrs. Judith Loftus.”

I left quickly and quietly returned to my canoe, which was some distance from the woman’s small cabin. I went as fast as I could to the island. First, I ran to my old camping place and started a large fire. Then I ran to the cave and awakened Jim. “Hurry. We have no time to waste. They’re after us!”

Jim asked no questions; he said not a word. We loaded all our

supplies onto the raft that we had found a few weeks before. We worked in the dark. Thirty minutes after I reached the cave, we were ready to leave. Jim was on the raft with the supplies, while I rowed the canoe. We stayed close to the island as we traveled, protected by the tree branches that grew out over the water. We soon passed the end of the island and were out in the open river and neither of us had spoken a word.