



## T H E Y O U N G P I R A T E S

TOM HAD DECIDED NOW. HE WAS SAD AND WITHOUT HOPE. HE WAS a boy with no friends. No person loved him. He had tried to do what was right, but they would not let him. Yes, they were forcing him into a bad life. He could now choose nothing else.

He had come far from the village.

He heard the distant school bell, and he knew that he would never, never hear it again. Tears fell from his eyes.

Here he met his best friend, Joe Harper. Joe's eyes were filled with anger, and it was easy to see that there was a great and sad purpose in his heart.

Tom said that he was going to travel around the world, never to return to the village. He hoped that Joe would not forget him.

And Joe had come to say the same to Tom. They were two souls with only one thought.

Joe's mother had beaten him. But he had done nothing. She plainly wished him to go away. Therefore, he was going. He hoped that she would be happy now. He hoped that she would never be sorry about sending her boy into the cold world to suffer and die.

The two boys walked together. They agreed to be like brothers.

They would never separate until they died. They began to plan.

They decided to be pirates.

Three miles south of the village, there was an island in the river. The Mississippi River was a mile wide there. The island was long and not very wide, and it was covered with trees. No people lived on it, and few people lived on the river's shore near the island. It would be a good place for pirates.

Then they met Huckleberry Finn, and he joined them.

They talked, and then they separated. They would meet again beside the river two miles north of the village at twelve that night. Tom knew where they would find a small boat. They would take it. Each boy would bring food and other useful things, if possible.

Tom arrived with meat and a few other things. He stopped among the trees on a hill above the meeting place. There were many stars, and it was very quiet. The great river lay like an ocean at rest. Tom listened a moment, but the quiet was broken by no sound. Then he whistled gently. The **whistle** was answered from below. Tom whistled two more times and was answered again. Then a voice said:

"Who goes there?"

"Tom Sawyer the Black Pirate. Name your names."

"Huck Finn the Red-Handed and Joe Harper the Destroyer of the Seas." Tom had taken these names from his best-loved books.

"Speak the word."

Two voices spoke together: "BLOOD!"

Tom went down the hill to join them.

The Destroyer of the Seas had also brought meat, and Finn the Red-Handed had some **tobacco**. The Black Pirate said that they must also have fire. They went to a large riverboat that was near, and they took some of the fire burning there. They knew that there were no men on the boat. The boatmen were all in the village. But the boys moved very quietly and carefully. Pirates must be pirates.

With Tom as captain of their ship, they left the shore and went into the middle of the river. From here they let the moving river carry them along. They passed the distant village. Two or three lights showed where it was, peacefully sleeping. The Black Pirate stood in the boat looking for the last time at the scene of his early joys and later suf-

ferings. He wished that his aunt could see him now, facing the fearful future with a smile on his lips.

After two hours their boat touched the island. There was an old sail in the boat. They spread this over their supplies, under the trees. They would sleep in the open air, as pirates should.

They built a fire and cooked some meat. It seemed wonderful to be eating in that wild, free manner in the forest, far from other people. They said that they would never return to a village or town again.

After eating, they lay on the ground, talking. The fire lighted their faces and the trees near them with a red light. Huck prepared to **smoke** some of his tobacco. Soon he was blowing out a cloud of smoke, and the other pirates were wishing that they could do the same.

Huck said, "What do pirates do?"

Tom said, "Oh, they enjoy life. They follow other ships and catch them and burn them. They take the money from those ships and put it in a deep hole in the ground on their island. And they kill the people on the ships."

"They carry the women to the island," said Joe. "They do not kill the women."

"No," Tom agreed. "Pirates are good. They do not kill the women. And the women are always beautiful."

"And their clothes are covered with gold and silver," said Joe.

"Whose clothes?" said Huck.

"The pirates'."

Huck looked down at his clothes. "I am not dressed right for a pirate," he said. "But these are my only clothes."

The other boys told him that the fine clothes would come later, when they began their adventures.

Slowly their talk ended. The Red-Handed went to sleep quickly. The Destroyer of the Seas and the Black Pirate could not sleep so quickly. They began now to have some doubt. Had it been wrong to run away from home? Had it been wrong to take the meat? The meat did not belong to them. They decided that they would never again take what did not belong to them.

And with that decided, these pirates also were peacefully asleep.