



Dead People and Spirits

THERE COMES A TIME IN EVERY BOY'S LIFE WHEN HE WANTS TO HUNT for gold and silver that pirates have put deep in the earth.

This desire suddenly came to Tom. He tried to find Joe Harper, but failed. He tried to find Ben Rogers, but Ben had gone fishing. Then he met Huck Finn. Tom took him to a place where they could be alone, and he explained. Huck agreed. Huck always agreed to do anything that would require time but not money. He had no money, but much time.

"Where?" said Huck.

"Oh, almost anywhere."

"Do you mean that there is money in the ground everywhere?"

"No. It is in very special places, Huck. Sometimes on islands, sometimes in old boxes under the end of a dead branch of an old tree, but mostly under the floor in a house where the spirits of the dead gather."

"Who puts it there?"

"People who take it away from other people."

"Why do they put it in the ground? If I were rich, I would spend

my money and enjoy it.”

“I would, too. But these people are different.”

“Do they never return and get it?”

“No. They think that they will, but they forget where it is. Or they die.”

“How are you going to find it, Tom? Where will you look?”

“We tried hunting for gold on the island when we were pirates. I know where there is a house full of spirits. And there are old trees with dead branches everywhere.”

“Is there gold and silver under every dead branch?”

“No! That would not be possible!”

“How do you know which one to choose?”

“Choose all of them!”

“Tom, we shall be working all summer!”

“What is wrong with that? We might find a hundred dollars. Or valuable stones, like **diamonds**. How would you like that?”

Huck’s eyes were shining. “Give me the hundred dollars, and you can have the valuable stones, like diamonds.”

“Have you ever seen a diamond, Huck?”

“I do not remember that I have.”

“Kings have diamonds. And I have heard that some of them are worth a dollar or more! Kings have hundreds of them.”

“I do not know any kings, Tom.”

“If you go to Europe you will see them jumping around.”

“Do they jump?”

“Jump? No.”

“Why did you say that they jumped?”

“Oh, I mean only that you will see kings everywhere. Not jumping. Why should they jump? But you will see many of them.”

The boys got some gardening things, used for making holes in the earth. Then they walked three miles to an old tree with a single dead branch. They were very hot and they sat in the shade of another tree to rest and smoke.

Tom said, “Huck, if we find some money, what will you do with it?”

“Spend it! Before my father takes it and spends it. What will you do with yours?”

“I will get married.”

“Married! Tom, you would be a fool. Think of my father and mother. Fight! They were fighting all the time. I remember.”

“The girl I will marry won’t fight.”

“Tom, they are all the same. Who is she?”

“I won’t tell you now.”

“If you marry, I will be more lonely than I am now.”

“No, you won’t. You will come to live with me. Now we must start working.”

They worked for half an hour. They found no box of money in the hole that they were making. They worked another half hour. Then Huck said:

“Is the money always so deep in the ground?”

“Not always. Perhaps this is not the right place.”

They began again on the other side of the tree. They worked without talking for a while. Then Huck stopped to dry his hot face, and said:

“Where do we try next?”

“There is an old tree on Cardiff Hill behind Mrs. Douglas’s house.”

“That might be a good place. But won’t she take the money away from us? It is her land.”

“If you find money in the ground, it belongs to you. It does not belong to the owner of the land.”

That was fine. The work continued. After a while Tom said:

“We must be in the wrong place again. Oh, I understand! What a fool I was! We must know where the shade of the dead branch is under the light of the moon in the middle of the night. That is where we must hunt for the money.”

The boys stopped work, and returned to the tree that night. It was a lonely place. They talked little. When they felt that the right hour had come, they found the shade in the moonlight under the branch, and began to work.

Their interest was strong. They worked fast. The hole grew deeper

and deeper. But every time they found something hard in the earth, it was only a rock. After a while Tom said:

“Huck, we are wrong again.”

“We can’t be wrong. We saw the shade of the branch.”

“But perhaps the time was not right. We guessed. We did not know.”

“We should stop trying,” Huck said. “We never know the right time. And I do not like the middle of the night, with spirits of dead men around. I feel that there is one behind me all the time, and I am afraid to turn.”

“I feel the same, Huck. And they almost always put a dead man in the hole to guard the gold and silver.”

“They do?”

“Yes, they do. I have always heard that.”

“Tom, I do not like to be where there are dead people. They will certainly cause trouble for us.”

“And I do not like it. Suppose this one should lift his head? He is only bones now. Suppose his bones should speak to us.”

“Stop that talk, Tom! That is a fearful idea.”

“Huck, I do not like this place. We can try another.”

“Where?”

“The old house where the spirits gather.”

“Tom, I do not like spirits or their houses. Dead people may speak to us, perhaps. But they won’t come quietly behind us, as spirits do, then suddenly make fearful noises.”

“But, Huck, spirits travel around only at night. We can go to the house in the day.”

“That is true. But people never go near that house in the day or the night.”

“That is because a man was killed there. But nothing is seen except in the night. And then only blue lights are seen.”

“When you see those blue lights, Tom, you know that spirits are near. Because only spirits use them. I agree to go to the house, if you want to. But I do not think that it is safe.”