



A Talk of Devils – Happy Hours

THE NEXT MORNING TOM WAS VERY SAD. THIS WAS THE BEGINNING of another week of slow suffering in school. He usually began this day wishing that there had been no Saturday and no Sunday. Because of them, school seemed more painful to him.

He lay in bed, thinking. If he were sick, he could stay home. He thought carefully about all parts of his body, but he could discover no sickness.

Then he looked at his foot. His foot had been hurt.

He had an idea. He began to cry as if with pain.

But Sid, in his bed across the room, continued to sleep.

Tom's voice grew louder. Now he seemed to feel real pain in his foot.

No result from Sid.

Tom said, "Sid, Sid!" and tried shaking him. This time the result was good. When Tom cried again, Sid sat up and looked at him. He said, "Tom! What is wrong?"

No answer.

Now Sid tried shaking Tom.

Tom said, "Oh, do not do that, Sid. It hurts me."

"I must call Aunt Polly."

"No. Do not call her." He cried loudly again. Then he said, "I will forget everything bad that you have done to me, Sid. When I am dead—"

"Oh, Tom, are you dying?"

"Give my cat with one eye to that new girl, and tell her—"

But Sid was gone. He ran to his aunt. "Oh, Aunt Polly! Tom is dying!"

"Dying! I can't believe it!"

But she ran. Her face was white with fear. At the bedside she cried, "Tom! Tom, what is wrong?"

"It is my foot, Aunt. Where I hurt it. The doctor must cut it off."

The old lady sat down in a chair and laughed a little, then wept a little, then did both together. Feeling better, she said, "Tom, you stop that, and get out of bed."

Tom stopped crying and the pain stopped, too.

As he walked to school, he met Huckleberry Finn. Huckleberry's father was always **drunk**. None of the mothers in the village liked Huckleberry. But all the children liked him. They wished that they dared to be like him.

Tom also wished that he could be like Huckleberry. He had been ordered never to play with him. Therefore, he played with Huckleberry every time that it was possible.

Huckleberry was always dressed in old clothes. The clothes were always too big for him. His hat was full of holes. The bottom of his coat touched the ground. He came and went as he wished. He did not sleep in a bed; he did not sleep in a house. He did not go to school or to church. He could go swimming or fishing when and where he might choose. He was the first boy to wear no shoes in the early summer. He was the last boy to wear shoes in the early winter. He never washed.

He had everything that any boy could desire.

Tom said, "Hello, Huckleberry."

"Hello yourself."

“What is that?”

“Dead cat.”

“Let me see him, Huck. Where did you get him?”

“From a boy.”

“Why do you want him, Huck?”

“To take off these warts.” Huckleberry showed Tom the small spots of thick, hard skin on his hands.

“I take them off with a bean, Huck.”

“Yes. Bean is good. I have done that.”

“How did you do it?”

“You take the bean and break it in two pieces. Then you cut the wart and get some blood. Then you put the blood on half the bean. You make a hole in the ground. You put that half of the bean in the hole, and cover it with earth. You must do this in the middle of the night where two roads cross and when the moon is dark. Then you burn the other half of the bean. The piece of bean with blood on it will try to pull the other half to it. And that helps the blood to pull the wart, and it is gone from your hand.”

“Yes, that is right, Huck. Although when you put the bean in the ground, you should say, ‘Down, bean; off, wart; appear no more.’ But how do you take off warts with a dead cat?”

“You wait until the dead body of some bad person has been put in the ground. Then you take your cat and you go to that place before the middle of the night. At the middle of the night a devil will come to carry the dead man away. Perhaps two or three devils will come. You can’t see them. You can only hear a sound like the wind. Or perhaps you can hear them talk. And when they take the body away, you throw the cat after them. You say, ‘Devil follow body, cat follow devil, warts follow cat.’ That will take off *any* wart.”

“Did you ever try it?”

“Not yet.”

“Huck, when are you going to do it?”

“Tonight. I think that they will come to get old Hoss Williams tonight.”

“But they put him in the ground Saturday. The devils would take him Saturday night.”

“The devils can’t come until twelve. At twelve on Saturday night, it is Sunday. Devils can’t come on Sunday.”

“I never thought of that. Let me go with you?”

“If you won’t be afraid.”

“Afraid! Will you come to my house and call to me? Make a noise like a cat.”

“Yes. But you answer. Another night I came to your house, saying, ‘Meow, meow,’ like a cat. But you never answered. And your neighbor threw stones at me.”

“Aunt Polly was watching me. But I will ‘meow’ this time.”

Tom continued walking to school. He went in quickly, and sat in his seat.

The teacher looked at him. “Thomas Sawyer!”

Tom knew that trouble was coming when his whole name was used.

“Why are you late again?”

Tom looked around the room. He saw the new girl. No girl sat in the seat beside her. And girls sat in all the other seats on the girls’ side of the room.

He said, “I stopped to talk with Huckleberry Finn.”

All the children looked at Tom. It was very foolish to say that to a teacher.

“Thomas Sawyer, I never heard more surprising words. Take off your coat.” The teacher had a supply of thin branches cut from a tree. He used and broke several of these while beating Tom’s back. Then he ordered, “Go and sit with the *girls!*”

The new girl turned her back toward Tom. Then, after a short time, she turned toward him, and she saw an apple on the table in front of her. She moved it away. Tom gently moved it toward her. She moved it away again. Tom returned it. Then she let it remain where he had placed it.

Now Tom began to make a picture on a piece of paper. He held

one hand over it while he worked and she could not see it. She tried to see. He seemed not to notice her interest. Then she said, "Let me see."

He showed her. It was a picture of a house. It was not good, but she thought that it was. "It is nice. Now make a man."

The man was bigger than the house.

"It is beautiful. Now make me."

He made a picture of another person.

"That is very nice. I wish that I could make pictures."

"I will teach you. At noon. Do you go home to eat?"

"I will stay if you stay."

"Good. What is your name?"

"Becky Thatcher. What is yours? Oh, I know. It is Thomas Sawyer."

"That is my name when they beat me. I am Tom when I am good. You call me Tom, will you?"

"Yes."

Now Tom began writing something, hiding it with his hand. She asked to see.

"Oh, it is nothing. You do not want to see it."

"Yes, I do."

"You will tell what it is."

"I promise never to tell."

"Oh, *you* do not want to see!"

"I *will* see." She put her small hand on his, and then Tom let her pull the writing away. She read these words: "I love you."

"Oh, you bad thing!" And she hit his hand. But her face showed pleasure.

At this moment the boy felt a hand on his ear, and a pull lifting him from the seat. He was returned to his usual seat. The whole school laughed.

But although Tom's ear hurt, his heart was joyful.