



The Promise — The Result of Fear

THE TWO BOYS RAN TOWARD THE VILLAGE. THEY LOOKED BEHIND them often, afraid that they were being followed.

After a while, they came to the edge of the village. There stood an old building which was not used. They ran through the open door and fell to the ground.

“Huckleberry, what do you think will happen now?”

“If the doctor dies, they will hang Indian Joe.”

Tom spoke. “Who will tell about it? You and I?”

“If we did, and if Indian Joe did not hang, he would kill us.”

“I was thinking that, Huck.”

“Let Muff Potter tell if he is fool enough. He is usually drunk enough.”

Tom continued to think. Then he said, “Huck, Muff Potter does not know what happened. The doctor had hit him with that board. Huck, are you sure that you won’t tell?”

“Tom, we can’t tell. You know that. Indian Joe would drown us like two cats if we told. Tom, we must promise never to tell. It must be a strong promise. With writing. And blood.”

Tom agreed with all his heart. This idea was what must be done. It was deep and dark and fearful. This was the hour and the place to do it. He found a clean broad piece of wood. In his pocket he found something to write with. The moon was his light. Painfully he formed the words:

Huck Finn and Tom Sawyer promise they will never tell about this, and they wish they may die in their footsteps if they ever tell.

Then each boy cut a finger and signed in blood *TS* and *HF*. Tom helped Huck to write his *H* and *F*.

Then they made a hole in the ground near the wall of the building. They placed the piece of wood in the hole and covered it with earth. Now they were certain. Their mouths would never speak about what their eyes had seen.

When Tom entered his house through his bedroom window, the night was almost gone. He took off his clothes very quietly and lay down. He believed, happily, that his aunt would never know that he had been away. But Sid was not asleep.

The next morning his aunt gave him some food. Then she wept, and she asked him why he hurt her old heart. She wished to help him to be good. She tried and tried, but she could try no more.

A thousand beatings would have been easier for Tom. He wept. He promised to be good. But he felt that she did not believe his promises.

He went to school, and there the teacher beat him and Joe Harper, because they had run away from school the day before.

Then he went to his seat. A hard object, covered in paper, was waiting for him there. He opened the paper. Inside was the bright, shining ball that looked like gold that he had given to Becky Thatcher.

This was too much. Now his heart was broken.