



H e l p i n g J i m

AS SOON AS WE KNEW THAT EVERYONE WAS ASLEEP THAT NIGHT, TOM and I went down to the small building behind Jim's cabin. We closed the door and began our digging. Tom said that if we dug in a certain place, our hole would come up inside Jim's cabin directly under his bed. No one would be able to see the hole because the blankets on his bed would cover it up. We dug and dug for many hours until we were very tired. Our hands were covered with sores, but we had dug a large hole.

The next day, Tom stole a spoon and a candleholder from the house. He wanted to make pens for Jim out of these in the manner of people that he had read about in books. He wanted Jim to write messages using the pens and his own blood. Jim said that he would be willing to do this if it would make Tom happy.

That night, we returned to our digging. After two and a half hours the job was done. We lay down on our stomachs and pushed our way through the narrow hole and soon found we were under Jim's bed in his cabin. He was asleep but we awakened him. He was so happy to see us that he almost cried. He wanted us to help him escape immediately, but Tom explained to him how that would be too simple, that he had bet-

ter plans that would be like those he read about in books, and assured him that he would be free in a short while if he would just be patient. Jim agreed to follow Tom's plans, though he didn't understand them very well. Jim assured us that he was comfortable, that he was being given good food, and that Uncle Silas came to talk with him and pray with him every day.

Tom told Jim how he wanted him to write about his experiences using the pens he would make for him and in his own blood. Jim said that he didn't know how to write and didn't see much sense in doing it, but if that was what white folks did, he was willing to try.

In the morning, Tom got an ax and cut the candleholder into several pieces. He went to the slave cabins where Jim's food was being prepared and hid the piece of the candleholder inside of Jim's bread. Then we went with the black slave who took the food to Jim. When Jim bit into his bread, he nearly knocked out his teeth, but he acted as though nothing had happened. Tom was very pleased and thought that this was exactly how people acted in the books that he read.

While we were watching Jim eat his breakfast, several dogs came running into the cabin from under Jim's bed. They must have gotten into the small building behind the cabin and found the hole we had dug. Soon the cabin was filled with eleven barking dogs. The black slave screamed, "Devils!" and fell to the floor. He cried and acted like he was dying.

Tom opened the cabin door and threw out a piece of Jim's meat. The dogs ran outside to eat the meat. Then Tom talked to the black slave lying on the floor. He asked him what had frightened him and if he was imagining things again.

The black man answered, "Master Sid, you'll think that I'm a fool, but I do believe a million dogs or devils or something were here in this cabin a few minutes ago."

Tom shook his head slowly as though he had no idea what the black man was talking about.