



Tom Gets Company for Jim

MAKING THE PENS WAS A DIFFICULT JOB, BUT JIM SAID THAT *WRITING* about his experiences was going to be even more difficult. Tom said that he simply had to do the writing; all prisoners that Tom had read about in books always wrote about their experiences.

“I know that the writing is going to be difficult, but it must be done. I’ll write on paper what I want you to copy onto stone.”

“But, Tom, where are we going to get a large stone to write on?” I asked.

“There’s a large **grindstone** down by the mill. We’ll steal it and move it into Jim’s cabin. He can write on that.”

Tom took a large piece of paper and wrote these lines for Jim to copy:

1. Here a prisoner broke his heart.
2. Here a poor prisoner, without friends, spent his sorrowful life.
3. Here a lonely, tired prisoner died, after living alone for thirty-seven long years.
4. Here, homeless and friendless, after thirty-seven years of being

kept in this small cabin, a noble stranger died.

Tom read these lines to us with tears in his eyes. At first, he wanted me to choose only one of the lines for Jim to write on the grindstone. But, he thought they were all good and decided that Jim should write them all.

It was nearly midnight when Tom and I left Jim's cabin and walked to the mill. We stole the grindstone and began to roll it toward Jim's cabin. The grindstone was very large and heavy. Rolling it was very difficult because it kept falling over. The stone was so heavy that it was almost impossible for the two of us to lift it.

When we had rolled the grindstone half the way to Jim's cabin, we became so tired that we couldn't move it further. We knew that we had to get Jim to help us. We returned to his cabin and told Jim our problem. Jim's leg was chained to a log of the bed, but all we had to do was raise the bed and slip off the chain. With Jim's help, we had no problem getting the grindstone to the cabin.

Our hole was quite large, but not large enough to push the grindstone through. Jim got some tools and dug a larger hole and soon we had the grindstone inside. Tom marked on the stone some words for Jim to write. Jim began to work by the light of his candle and continued until the candle was completely burned out.

Then we slipped his chain around the bed leg again and told Jim that he could go to sleep.

Suddenly, Tom thought of something. "Do you have any bugs in here?"

"No, I don't."

"Then we have to get you some."

"But I don't want any bugs in here. I don't like bugs. I'm afraid of them. I would rather have a poisonous snake in here than bugs."

"That's a good idea. I'm sure that it's been done in some book. Where could you keep it?"

"Keep what, Tom?"

"A poisonous snake."

"A poisonous snake! If a snake came in here, I would break through

that door and leave in a hurry—even if I had to use my head to break through the door.”

“You wouldn’t be afraid of it after a while. If you treated the snake in a friendly manner, you’d begin to like it. The snake would begin to love you, too, and want to sleep with you.”

“Tom, I don’t want a snake to love me. What the snake will do is bite me.”

“Can’t you at least *try* to live with a poisonous snake? All I’m asking is for you to try.”

“But, I’ll die if the snake bites me. Then you won’t need to set me free.”

“If you refuse to cooperate, we’ll bring you a harmless snake. We’ll simply *imagine* that it’s poisonous.”

“I could manage with a harmless snake, but I would far rather have no snake at all. I never knew that it would be so difficult to be a prisoner.”

“It’s difficult when it’s done properly. Do you have any rats in here?”

“No, I haven’t seen any rats.”

“We’ll get you some rats, too.”

“But, Tom, I don’t want any rats. They might bite my toes and awaken me when I’m sleeping. You can put a harmless snake in here with me, but not rats.”

“But, Jim, you must have rats—all prisoners have rats with them. They teach the rats tricks and become very friendly with them. The rats will run over you and have a good time.”

“I know that the rats may have a good time, but what kind of time will poor Jim be having? I don’t know why rats are needed, but I’ll have them here if I must.”

Tom wanted to think of other things for Jim to do. “Could you raise a flower in here?”

“I don’t know. It’s very dark in here, and a plant needs sunlight. I don’t need a flower plant in here. It would be too much trouble.”

“We’ll bring you a small plant, and you can water it with your tears.”

“Why water it with my tears when I can pour water on it from my glass?”

“Prisoners have always watered their plants with their tears. That’s the way that you must do it.”

“The plant will die, Tom, because I don’t cry easily.”

Tom said that Jim would have to do the best that he could. Jim complained about all the work that he was being asked to do—he didn’t want to raise the plant; he didn’t want to play with rats; he didn’t want to sleep with a snake; he didn’t want bugs walking over him; and he didn’t want to write on the grindstone using his own blood with the pen made out of the candlestick. He said that being a prisoner required more responsibility and more work than anything that he had done before.

Tom almost lost patience with Jim. He said that Jim had the opportunity to be a famous prisoner, if only he did things correctly, that Jim should actually thank him for the good ideas that he came up with. Jim said that he was sorry and that he would try to be grateful to Tom for helping him do all the things a prisoner is supposed to do.

Tom and I left the cabin and returned to the house and our beds.