



H u c k a n d t h e J u d g e

THREE OR FOUR MONTHS PASSED, AND WINTER ARRIVED. I WENT TO school almost every day and was learning to read and write and spell. The teacher was also trying to teach me mathematics, but I knew even if I studied forever, I would never learn mathematics.

At the beginning, I hated school very much, but after a while, I hated it less. Whenever I began to hate school, I simply stayed away a few days. The teacher would beat me when I returned, but the beatings didn't trouble me. I had become accustomed to living in a proper house with the Widow and sleeping in a proper bed. The Widow said that I would become a good boy if I continued to study and to improve my character and that she was no longer unhappy with me. My life seemed to be improving.

Then one morning, while I was eating breakfast, I poured some salt on the table. It was an accident. I knew that it was bad luck to accidentally pour salt and that the only way to get rid of the bad luck was to throw some salt over my left shoulder. But Miss Watson stopped my hand and shouted, "Take your hands away from that salt, Huckleberry. You've already made the table dirty. Don't make it dirtier."

I knew that I couldn't stop the bad luck; it would follow me always. I quickly left the table and ran out of the house. I was worried and frightened. I knew that something bad was going to happen to me, but I didn't know where or when it would happen.

I walked through the front garden and climbed over a high fence. Snow was on the ground, and I could see tracks made by a man's shoes in the snow. The tracks showed that the man had walked around the garden fence, but had not come into the house. I bent down to look closely at the tracks and discovered that the heel of one shoe had left a mark that showed that it had a cross in it made with two nails. I knew that someone had put this cross on the heel of his shoe to get rid of bad luck.

I stood up quickly and was soon running down the hill. I looked over my shoulder, but didn't see anyone following me. I ran to Judge Thatcher's house as quickly as I could.

"Hello, Huckleberry, why have you been running? Did you come to ask me about your money? Do you need a few dollars?"

"No, sir," I answered. "Did the bank send you some money for me? "Yes, more than 150 dollars. That's a large amount of money. I would like to keep it for you, together with your 6,000 dollars. If I give you all the money now, you'll only spend it on foolish things."

"I don't want to spend my money. I don't even want it ever. Not even the 6,000 dollars. I want you to have it. I want to give all my money to you."

The judge looked surprised. He couldn't understand what I was saying. "What do you mean?" he asked.

"Don't ask me questions, please. Just take the money. You will—won't you?"

The judge said, "I'm puzzled. Is something wrong?"

"No," I said, and walked away.

Miss Watson's black slave, Jim, had a large hair ball that had been taken from the stomach of an ox. Jim thought that the hair ball had special powers. He said that it had the ability to tell what would happen in the future. I went to Jim and told him about the tracks that

I had seen in the snow. I told him that I knew that Pap was in town again because I knew that he had made a cross with two nails in the heel of his left shoe.

I wanted to know what Pap was planning to do. Would he stay in St. Petersburg a long time?

Jim took his hair ball and said some words over it. Then he held it up and dropped it on the floor. The hair ball rolled a short distance. Jim did this several times, but the hair ball acted the same each time. Jim put his ear against it and listened, but he heard nothing. He said that the hair ball would not talk unless I gave him some money. I gave Jim twenty-five cents, and he put the money under the hair ball. This time the hair ball talked to Jim, and he told me what it said.

“Your Pap doesn’t know what he’ll do. Sometimes he thinks he’ll go away and sometimes he thinks he’ll stay. The best plan is to stop worrying and let your Pap do what he chooses. You’ll have much trouble in your life, but also much joy. Sometimes you’ll be hurt and sometimes you’ll be sick, but always you’ll be healthy.”

I returned to the Widow’s house that night. When I took my lighted candle and went up the stairs to my room, Pap was sitting there.