Adrift Below the Island A Tale of Hidden Treasures

JOURNEY INTO THE DEPTHS OF HIDDEN TREASURES AWAITS

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Seek: At Ancient Ruins

And so, take it all around, we made a good haul. When we was ready to shove off we was a quarter of a mile below the island, and it was pretty broad day; so I made lay down in the canoe and cover up with the quilt, because if he set up people could tell he was a nigger a good ways off. I paddled over to the Illinois shore, and drifted down most a half a mile doing it. I crept up the dead water under the bank, and hadn't no accidents and didn't see nobody. We got home all safe.

AFTER breakfast I wanted to talk about the dead man and guess out how he come to be killed, but Jim didn't want to. He said it would fetch bad luck; and besides, he said, he might come and ha'nt us; he said a man that warn't buried was more likely to go a-ha'nting around than one that was planted and comfortable. That sounded pretty reasonable, so I didn't say no more; but I couldn't keep from studying over it and wishing I knowed who shot the man, and what they done it for. We rummaged the clothes we'd got, and found eight dollars in silver sewed up in the lining of an old blanket overcoat. said he reckoned the people in that house stole the coat, because if they'd a knowed the money was there they wouldn't a left it. I said I reckoned they killed him, too; but didn't want to talk about that.

I says: "Now you think it's bad luck; but what did you say when I fetched in the snake-skin that I found on the top of the ridge day before yesterday? You said it was the worst bad luck in the world to touch a snake-skin with my hands. Well, here's your bad luck! We've raked in all this truck and eight dollars besides. I wish we could have some bad luck like this every day, ." "Never you mind, honey, never you mind. Don't you git too peart. It's acomin'. Mind I tell you, it's a-comin'." It did come, too.

It was a Tuesday that we had that talk. Well, after dinner Friday we was laying around in the grass at the upper end of the ridge, and got out of tobacco. I went to the cavern to get some, and found a rattlesnake in there.

I killed him, and curled him up on the foot of blanket, ever so natural, thinking there'd be some fun when found him there. Well, by night I forgot all about the snake, and when flung himself down on the blanket while I struck a light the snake's mate was there, and bit him. He jumped up yelling, and the thing the light showed was the varmint curled up and ready for another spring. I laid him out in a second with a stick, and grabbed pap's whisky-jug and begun to pour it down. He was barefooted, and the snake bit him right on the heel. That all comes of my being such a fool as to not remember that wherever you leave a dead snake its mate always comes there and curls around it.

 told me to chop off thesnake's head and throw it away, and then skin the body and roast a piece of it. I done it, and he eat it and said it would help cure him. He made me take off the rattles and tie them around his wrist, too. He said that that would help. Then I slid out quiet and throwed the snakes clear away amongst the bushes; for I warn't going to let find out it was all my fault, not if I could help it.

 sucked and sucked at the jug, and now and then he got out of his head and pitched around and yelled; but every time he come to himself he went to sucking at the jug again. His foot swelled up pretty big, and so did his leg; but by and by the drunk begun to come, and so I judged he was all right; but I'd druther been bit with a snake than pap's whisky. was laid up for four days and nights. Then the swelling was all gone and he was around again.

 I made up my mind I wouldn't ever take a-holt of a snakeskin again with my hands, now that I see what had come of it. said he reckoned I would believe him next time. And he said that handling a snake-skin was such awful bad luck that maybe we hadn't got to the end of it yet. He said he druther see the new moon over his left shoulder as much as a times than take up a snake-skin in his hand.

Well, I was getting to feel that way myself, though I've always reckoned that looking at the new moon over your left shoulder is one of the carelessest and foolishest things a body can do. Old Hank Bunker done it once, and bragged about it; and in less than years he got drunk and fell off of the shot-tower, and spread himself out so that he was just a kind of a layer, as you may say; and they slid him edgeways between barn doors for a coffin, and buried him so, so they say, but I didn't see it. told me. But anyway it all come of looking at the moon that way, like a fool.

Well, the days went along, and the river went down between its banks again; and about the thing we done was to bait one of the big hooks with a skinned rabbit and set it and catch a catfish that was as big as a man, being foot inches long, and weighed over pounds. We couldn't handle him, ofcourse; he would a flung us into Illinois. We just set there and watched him rip and tear around till he drownded. We found a brass button in his stomach and a round ball, and lots of rubbage. We split the ball open with the hatchet, and there was a spool in it. said he'd had it there a long time, to coat it over so and make a ball of it. It was as big a fish as was ever catched in the Mississippi, I reckon.

said he hadn't ever seen a bigger . He would a been worth a good deal over at the village. They peddle out such a fish as that by the pound in the market-house there; everybody buys some of him; his meat's as white as snow and makes a good fry. Next morning I said it was getting slow and dull, and I wanted to get a stirring up some way. I said I reckoned I would slip over the river and find out what was going on. liked that notion; but he said I must go in the dark and look sharp. Then he studied it over and said, couldn't I put on some of them old things and dress up like a girl? That was a good notion, too. So we shortened up one of f the calico gowns, and I turned up my trouser-legs to my knees and got into it.

hitched it behind with the hooks, and it was a fair fit. I put on the sun-bonnet and tied it under my chin, and then for a body to look in and see my face was like looking down a joint of stove-pipe. said nobody would know me, even in the daytime, hardly. I practiced around all day to get the hang of the things, and by and by I could do pretty well in them, only said I didn't walk like a girl; and he said I must quit pulling up my gown to get at my britches-pocket. I took notice, and done better.

I started up the Illinois shore in the canoe just after dark. I started across to the town from a little below the ferry-landing, and the drift of the current fetched me in at the bottom of the town. I tied up and started along the bank. There was a light burning in a little shanty that hadn't been lived in for a long time, and I wondered who had took up quarters there. I slipped up and peeped in at the window. There was a woman about forty year old in there knitting by a candle that was on a pine table.

I didn't know her face; she was a stranger, for you couldn't start a face in that town that I didn't know. Now this was lucky, because I was weakening; I was getting afraid I had come; people might know my voice and find me out. But if this woman had been in such a little town days she could tell me all I wanted to know; so I knocked at the door, and made up my mind I wouldn't forget I was a girl.

"COME in," says the woman, and I did. She says: "Take a cheer." I done it. She looked me all over with her little shiny eyes, and says: "What might your name be?" "Where 'bouts do you live? In this neighborhood?' "No'm. In Hookerville, mile below. I've walked all the way and I'm all tired out." "Hungry, too, I reckon. I'll find you something." "No'm, I ain't hungry. I was so hungry I had to stop two miles below here at a farm; so I ain't hungry no more.

It’s what makes me so late. My mother’s down sick, and out of money and everything, and I come to tell my uncle . He lives at the upper end of the town, she says. I hain’t ever been here before. Do you know him?” “No; but I don’t know everybody yet. I haven’t lived here quite weeks. It’s a considerable ways to the upper end of the town. You better stay here all night. Take off your bonnet.” “No,” I says; “I’ll rest a while, I reckon, and go on. I ain’t afeared of the dark.”

She said she wouldn’t let me go by myself, but her husband would be in by and by, maybe in a and a half, and she’d send him along with me. Then she got to talking about her husband, and about her relations up the river, and her relations down the river, and about how much better off they used to was, and how they didn’t know but they’d made a mistake coming to our town, instead of letting well alone—and so on and so on, till I was afeard I had made a mistake coming to her to find out what was going on in the town; but by and by she dropped on to and the murder, and then I was pretty willing to let her clatter right along. She told about me and finding the (only she got it) and all about and what a hard lot he was, and what a hard lot I was, and at last she got down to where I was murdered. I says: “Who done it? We’ve heard considerable about these goings on down in Hookerville, but we don’t know who ’twas that killed Huck Finn.”

“Well, I reckon there’s a right smart chance of people here that’d like to know who killed him. Some think old Finn done it himself.” “No—is that so?” “Most everybody thought it at first. He’ll never know how nigh he come to getting lynched. But before night they changed around and judged it was done by a runaway nigger named .” “Why he—” I stopped. I reckoned I better keep still. She run on, and never noticed I had put in at all: “The nigger run off the very night Huck Finn was killed.So there’s a reward out for him— dollars.

And there's a reward out for old Finn, too- hundred dollars. You see, he come to town the morning after the murder, and told about it, and was out with 'em on the ferryboat hunt, and right away after he up and left. Before night they wanted to lynch him, but he was gone, you see. Well, next day they found out the nigger was gone; they found out he hadn't ben seen sence o'clock the night the murder was done. So then they put it on him, you see; and while they was full of it, next day, back comes old Finn, and went boo-hooing to Judge Thatcher to get money to hunt for the nigger all over Illinois with.

The judge gave him some, and that evening he got drunk, and was around till after midnight with a couple of mighty hard-looking strangers, and then went off with them. Well, he hain't come back sence, and they ain't looking for him back till this thing blows over a little, for people thinks now that he killed his boy and fixed things so folks would think done it, and then he'd get Huck's money without having to bother a long time with a lawsuit. People do say he warn't any too good to do it. Oh, he's sly, I reckon. If he don't come back for a year he'll be all right. You can't prove anything on him, you know; everything will be quieted down then, and he'll walk in Huck's money as easy as nothing."

"Yes, I reckon so, 'm. I don't see nothing in the way of it. Has everybody quit thinking the nigger done it?" "Oh, no, not everybody. A good many thinks he done it. But they'll get the nigger pretty soon now, and maybe they can scare it out of him." "Why, are they after him yet?" "Well, you're innocent, ain't you! Does I didn't say any more, but I done some thinking. dollars lay around every day for people to pick up? Some folks think the nigger ain't far from here. I'm one of them—but I hain't talked it around. A few days ago I was talking with an old couple that lives next door in the log shanty, and they happened to say hardly anybody ever goes to that island over yonder that they call Island. Don't anybody live there? says I. No, nobody, says they.

I was pretty near certain I'd seen smoke over there, about the head of the island, a day or before that, so I says to myself, like as not that nigger's hiding over there; anyway, says I, it's worth the trouble to give the place a hunt. I hain't seen any smoke sence, so I reckon maybe he's gone, if it was him; but husband's going over to see—him and another man. He was gone up the river; but he got back to-day, and I told him as soon as he got here hours ago."

I had got so uneasy I couldn't set still. I had to do something with my hands; so I took up a needle off of the table and went to threading it. My hands shook, and I was making a bad job of it. When the woman stopped talking I looked up, and she was looking at me pretty curious and smiling a little. I put down the needle and thread, and let on to be interested—and I was, too—and says: " hundred dollars is a power of money. I wish my mother could get it. Is your husband going over there to-night?"

"Oh, yes. He went up-town with the man I was telling you of, to get a boat and see if they could borrow another gun. They'll go over after midnight." "Couldn't they see better if they was to wait till daytime?" "Yes. And couldn't the nigger see better, too? After midnight he'll likely be asleep, and they can slip around through the woods and hunt up his camp fire all the better for the dark, if he's got one." "I didn't think of that." The woman kept looking at me pretty curious, and I didn't feel a bit comfortable. Pretty soon she says, "What did you say your name was, honey?"

Somehow it didn't seem to me that I said it was Mary before, so I didn't look up—seemed to me I said it was ; so I felt sort of cornered, and was afeared maybe I was looking it, too. I wished the woman would say something more; the longer she set still the uneasier I was. But now she says: "Honey, I thought you said it was Sarah when you first come in?" "Oh, yes'm, I did.my first name. Some calls me , some calls me ."

“Oh, that’s the way of it?” “Yes’m.” I was feeling better then, but I wished I was out of there, anyway. I couldn’t look up yet. Well, the woman fell to talking about how hard times was, and how poor they had to live, and how the rats was as free as if they owned the place, and so and so on, and then I got easy again. She was right about the rats. You’d see one stick his nose out of a hole in the corner every little while. She said she had to have things handy to throw at them when she was alone, or they wouldn’t give her no peace. She showed me a bar of lead twisted up into a knot, and said she was a good shot with it generly, but she’d wrenched her arm a day or ago, and didn’t know whether she could throw true now. But she watched for a chance, and directly banged away at a rat; but she missed him wide, and said “Ouch!” it hurt her arm so.

Then she told me to try for the next one. I wanted to be getting away before the old man got back, but of course I didn’t let on. I got the thing, and the first rat that showed his nose I let drive, and if he’d a stayed where he was he’d a been a tolerable sick rat. She said that was first-rate, and she reckoned I would hive the next one. She went and got the lump of lead and fetched it back, and brought along a hank of yarn which she wanted me to help her with. I held up my hands and she put the hank over them, and went on talking about her and her husband’s matters. But she broke off to say: “Keep your eye on the rats. You better have the lead in your lap, handy.”

So she dropped the lump into my lap just at that moment, and I clapped my legs together on it and she went on talking. But only about a minute. Then she took off the hank and looked me straight in the face, and very pleasant, and says: “Come, now, what’s your real name?” “Wh—what, ?” “What’s your real name? Is it Bill, or?—or what is it?”

I reckon I shook like a leaf, and I didn't know hardly what to do. But I says: "Please to don't poke fun at a poor girl like me, mum. If I'm in the way here, I'll—" "No, you won't. Set down and stay where you are. I ain't going to hurt you, and I ain't going to tell on you, nuther. You just tell me your secret, and trust me. I'll keep it; and, what's more, I'll help you. So'll my old man if you want him to. You see, you're a runaway 'prentice, that's all. It ain't anything.

There ain't no harm in it. You've been treated bad, and you made up your mind to cut. Bless you, child, I wouldn't tell on you. Tell me all about it now, that's a good boy." So I said it wouldn't be no use to try to play it any longer, and I would just make a clean breast and tell her everything, but she musn't go back on her promise. Then I told her my father and mother was dead, and the law had bound me out to a mean old farmer in the country mile back from the river, and he treated me so bad I couldn't stand it no longer; he went away to be gone a couple of days, and so I took my chance and stole some of his daughter's old clothes and cleared out, and I had been three nights coming the miles.

I traveled nights, and hid daytimes and slept, and the bag of bread and meat I carried from home lasted me all the way, and I had a-plenty. I said I believed my uncle Abner Moore would take care of me, and so that was why I struck out for this town of Goshen. "Goshen, child? This ain't Goshen. This is St. Petersburg. Goshen's ten mile further up the river. Who told you this was Goshen?" "Why, a man I met at daybreak this morning, just as I was going to turn into the woods for my regular sleep.

He told me when the roads forked I must take the right hand, and mile would fetch me to Goshen." "He was drunk, I reckon. He told you just exactly wrong." "Well, he did act like he was drunk, but it ain't no matter now. I got to be moving along. I'll fetch Goshen before daylight."

“Hold on a minute. I’ll put you up a snack to eat. You might want it.” So she put me up a snack, and says: “Say, when a cow’s laying down, which end of her gets up first? Answer up prompt now—don’t stop to study over it. Which end gets up first?” “The hind end.” “Well, then, a horse?” “The for’rard end, mum.” “Which side of a tree does the moss grow on?” “North side.”

“If cows is browsing on a hillside, how many of them eats with their heads pointed the same direction?” “The whole, mum “Well, I reckon you have lived in the country. I thought maybe you was trying to hocus me again. What’s your real name, now?” .” “Well, try to remember it, George. Don’t forget and tell me it’s Elexander before you go, and then get out by saying it’s George Elexander when I catch you. And don’t go about women in that old calico. You do a girl tolerable poor, but you might fool men, maybe. Bless you, child, when you set out to thread a needle don’t hold the thread still and fetch the needle up to it; hold the needle still and poke the thread at it; that’s the way a woman most always does, but a man always does t’other way.

And when you throw at a rat or anything, hitch yourself up a tiptoe and fetch your hand up over your head as awkward as you can, and miss your rat about foot. Throw stiff-armed from the shoulder, like there was a pivot there for it to turn on, like a girl; not from the wrist and elbow, with your arm out to one side, like a boy. And, mind you, when a girl tries to catch anything in her lap she throws her knees apart; she don’t clap them together, the way you did when you catched the lump of lead.

Why, I spotted you for a boy when you was threading the needle; and I contrived the other things just to make certain. Now trot along to your uncle, and if you get into trouble you send word to , which is me, and I’ll do what I can to get you out of it. Keep the river road all the way, and next time you tramp take shoes and socks with you. The river road’s a rocky one, and your feet’ll be in a condition when you get to Goshen, I reckon.”