



F i n a l P r e p a r a t i o n s

IN THE MORNING, WE WALKED TO THE TOWN AND BOUGHT A SPECIAL box in which to catch rats. We took the box into the basement and put it next to the best rathole we knew of. Within an hour, we had caught fifteen large rats in the box. We hid the box under Aunt Sally's bed, and then we went to search for bugs.

One of Aunt Sally's small sons found the box and opened it to see if the rats would come out. They did.

Aunt Sally entered the room at that moment, jumped on top of her bed, and began screaming. Aunt Sally knew that we had put the rats in the box, and she punished us. It took us two hours to collect fifteen new rats, but they weren't as nice as the first ones.

We collected a splendid group of bugs and insects, and, last, we looked for some harmless snakes. They were easy to find, and we soon had two dozen snakes in a bag. This time, we hid the snakes in *our* room, but when we returned after we had eaten dinner, the bag was empty. Not even one snake was to be seen in the room. We knew that they had to be in the house somewhere, and we were certain that we could catch some of them again.

There was no lack of snakes around the house for many days. We could see them on the walls or hanging from the lamps. Some would fall onto the table while we were eating or fell down our backs. They were handsome snakes and quite harmless, but Aunt Sally could not see the beauty in them. She hated snakes; she did not care whether they were harmless or not. When a snake fell onto her neck, she would drop whatever she was doing and run screaming for help. And when she found one of them in her bed, she would jump out of bed and scream so loud that you would think the house was on fire. Even after all the snakes had been caught and taken out of the house and none had been seen for a week, Aunt Sally was still nervous. If she was sitting in her chair thinking and I came near her and touched her neck with a feather, she would jump out of her stockings.

We were punished each time Aunt Sally was frightened by one of the snakes. I didn't object to the punishment, but I did object to our having to catch a new group of snakes. We finally had all the snakes, rats, bugs, and other insects that we needed, and brought them to Jim's cabin. Jim complained that there was hardly space in the cabin for him to move around. He said that if he ever got out of that cabin, he wouldn't return to being a prisoner again even if we paid him.

By the end of three weeks, we had everything ready for Jim's escape. Tom said that the last thing that we had to do was to write a letter to the Phelpses warning them that Jim might escape.

I couldn't believe what he had said. "Why would we want to *warn* anyone? Let them discover that Jim is gone once we have escaped with him."

"We can't expect Aunt Sally and Uncle Silas to notice all the trouble that we've taken to do this correctly. Unless we warn them that someone plans to steal Jim, the escape will be too easy. All our work and trouble will be useless if no one notices."

The next night, Tom wrote the following letter, and we put it on Jim's cabin door:

Don't tell anyone what I have written here. I wish to be your friend. A group of criminals from the Indian Territory are planning to

steal your runaway slave tonight. I am one of this group, but I don't want to live with these criminals anymore. I wish to live an honest life, which is why I am telling you of this plan. They have a key to the slave's cabin, and will enter at midnight. I am to watch for danger, and if I see someone approaching they have asked me to blow on a small horn. Instead, I will make a sound like a sheep to let you know when they are all inside the cabin. Then you can quickly lock them inside and kill them all. I do not wish a reward; I simply want to feel that I have done the right thing.

An Unknown Friend