***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 12:***

***Translation:***

The raft seemed to go incredibly slow. It must have been nearly one o’clock in the morning by the time we finally passed the island. We decided that if a boat came along, we were going to jump into the canoe and make a break for the Illinois shore. It was a good thing no boat ever came, though, because we hadn’t thought to put the gun or a fishing line or anything to eat in the canoe. We were panicking too much to think of all those things. It sure wasn’t good judgment to put EVERYTHING on the raft. If those men did go to the island, my guess is they found the campfire I built. They probably watched it all night waiting for Jim to come back. Well, whatever the reason, they stayed away from us. If my fake campfire didn’t fool them, then you can’t say I didn’t try. I did my best to fool them. When the first ray of sunlight stretched over the horizon, we tied the canoe up to a towhead—a sandbar covered in thick groves of cottonwood trees—in a big bend on the Illinois side of the river. We hacked off some cottonwood branches with the hatchet, and used them to covered up the raft so it looked like there had been a cave-in on the riverbank. There were mountains on the shore on the Missouri side of the river and thick forest on the Illinois side. The channel ran down the Missouri shore around there, so we weren’t afraid of anyone running into us. We lay there all day and watched the rafts and steamboats float down along the Missouri shoreline. And we watched other steamboats chug against the current in the middle of the river. I told Jim everything the woman in the cabin had told me. Jim said she must have been pretty smart. He said that if she had decided to come after us herself, she would have used a dog instead of wasting time watching campfires. I asked why she didn’t suggest that to her husband. He said she probably did. He’d probably had to go back upriver into town to get a dog. That’s why we were able to escape to this towhead sixteen or seventeen miles downstream. Otherwise we’d have been caught. So I said it didn’t matter how we’d gotten away, so long as we had. When it started to get dark, we poked our heads out of the thicket of cottonwood trees. We looked all around, but couldn’t see anything. Jim took some of the planks from the raft to build a snug little wigwam to get out of the rain and keep our things dry. Jim made a floor for the wigwam and raised it at least a foot above the deck of the raft. This kept the blankets and traps from getting soaked by the waves made by the passing steamboats. We put a layer of dirt about five or six inches deep inside a little wooden frame in the middle of the wigwam. We could build a fire there that wouldn’t be seen or get drenched by the rain. We made an extra steering oar, too, in case one of the others broke or got caught in a snag in the water or something. We hung the lantern on a short forked stick so that the steamboats coming downstream wouldn’t hit us. We’d only have to light it, though, if we were in what they call a “crossing.” You see, the river was high enough that boat traveling up river didn’t have to run the channel, but could look for easier waters. We floated for about seven or eight hours in the current on this second night. We were moving about four miles an hour or so. We caught fish and talked and swum now and then to stay awake. It was kind of solemn, drifting down the big, still river, lying on our backs and looking up at the stars. We didn’t ever feel like talking too loudly, and we rarely laughed—we just chuckled a little. The weather was excellent, for the most part, and nothing much happened to us that night, the next night, or the one after that. We passed a few towns each night. The towns way up on the hillsides looked light nothing but patches of shiny lights because you couldn’t see any houses. On the fifth night, we passed St. Louis. It was so bright that it looked like the whole world was lit up. People in St. Petersburg used to say that there were twenty or thirty thousand people in St. Louis. I never believed them until I saw all those amazing lights at two o’clock that quiet night. Everyone was asleep and you couldn’t hear a sound. Around ten o’clock every night, I’d swim ashore to whatever little village we’d happen to be passing. I’d buy ten or fifteen cents worth of corn meal or bacon or other food. Sometimes I even stole a chicken that wasn’t roosting comfortably. Pap always said to take a chicken when you had the chance because you can always give it away if you don’t want to eat it. Then that person will owe you a favor. I never knew pap to actually turn down a chicken, but that’s what he used to say. Every morning just before dawn I’d sneak into cornfields and borrow some watermelon, mushmelon, pumpkins, corn, or something like that. Pap always said there wasn’t any harm in borrowing things if you meant to pay them back at some point. The widow, though, said borrwing was just a nicer way of saying stealing, which decent people didn’t do. Jim said he figured that pap and the widow were both right. He said it’d be best if we compromised by promising ourselves that we just wouldn’t borrow certain things anymore but continue borrowing others. So we talked about it one night while we were drifting down the river. We tried to decide whether we’d give up watermelon, cantaloup, or mushmelons. By dawn, we’d decided to give up borrowing crabapples and persimmons. We’d been feeling a little guilty before, but now we felt much better about things. I was glad that we hadd settled this way, since crabapples never taste and persimmons wouldn’t be ripe for another two or three months. Every now and then we’d shoot a waterfowl that woke up too early or went to bed too late. All in all, we lived pretty well. A big storm hit just after midnight on the fifth night after we’d passed St. Louis. There was lots of thunder and lightning, and the rain came down in a solid sheet. We stayed in the wigwam and let the raft take care of itself. When the lightning flashed, we could see the big river straight ahead and high, rocky cliffs on both sides. At one point I said, “Hey, Jim! Look over there!” I pointed to a steamboat that had run aground on a rock directly in our path. We could see the boat clearly each time the lightning flashed. The boat was leaning over to one side, with only part of the topmost deck above water. You could see each little smokestack and a chair by the big bell that had an old hat hanging on the back of it. Since the storm made things dark and spooky, I felt like any other boy would feel if he saw that shipwreck just listing there so lonely in the middle of the river: I just had to get aboard and explore! So I said, “Let’s land on it, Jim.” Jim didn’t want to at first. He said, “I don’t want to go fooling around on that wreck. We’re doing fine without it, and we’d better let it alone, like the Bible says. More likely than not there are guards protecting that wreck.” “I don’t want to go fooling around on that wreck. We’re doing fine without it, and we’d better let it alone, like the Bible says. More likely than not there are guards protecting that wreck.” Jim grumbled a bit, but he gave in. He said we mustn’t talk anymore than was absolutely necessary, and only then in low voices. The lightning flashes showed us the way to the wreck, and we grabbed hold of the starboard [derrick](javascript:void(0);)and tied the raft to it. The deck of the steamboat was pretty high above the water. We pulled up to the boat’s port side. We snuck in the dark toward the cabins, slowly feeling our way along the deck with our feet and spreading our hands out in front to fend off any guards. It was so dark that we wouldn’t have seen any sign of them. Pretty soon we got to the front end of the skylight, so we climbed on to it. Our next step brought us to the open door of the captain’s quarters. We looked in, and by golly, we saw a light down in the cabin! And we could hear voices down in there, too! Jim whispered to me that he had a bad feeling about this. He told me we better get going. I agreed and was about to head for the raft when I heard a voice from below cry out: “Oh please don’t, guys. I swear I won’t ever tell!” Another voice then said pretty loudly: “You’re lying, Jim Turner. You’ve acted like this before. You always want more than your share of the loot, and you always get it, because you’ve sworn you’d tell if you didn’t get it. Well, you’ve joked around one too many times. You’re the most awful, most treacherous rascal around.” By this time Jim had gone to the raft. My curiousity was killing me, though. I told myself that Tom Sawyer wouldn’t back out now, so I decided that I wouldn’t either. I was going to see what was going on down there. I dropped to my hands and knees inside the little passageway and crept in the dark toward the back of the ship. I got to where there was only one stateroom between me and the cabin hallway. I peeked in and saw a man stretched out on the floor with his hands and feet bound. There were two men standing over him, one of them holding a dim lantern. The other man had a pistol, and he kept pointing it at the head of the man on the floor, saying: By this time Jim had gone to the raft. My curiousity was killing me, though. I told myself that Tom Sawyer wouldn’t back out now, so I decided that I wouldn’t either. I was going to see what was going on down there. I dropped to my hands and knees inside the little passageway and crept in the dark toward the back of the ship. I got to where there was only one stateroom between me and the cabin hallway. I peeked in and saw a man stretched out on the floor with his hands and feet bound. There were two men standing over him, one of them holding a dim lantern. The other man had a pistol, and he kept pointing it at the head of the man on the floor, saying: The man on the floor would curl up and say things like, “Oh, please don’t, Bill! I’m not ever going to tell!” And every time he said that the man with the lantern would laugh and say: “Indeed you won’t! You’ve never said a truer word than that!” Once he said: “Listen to him beg! But if we hadn’t beaten him and tied him up, he would’ve killed us both. And what FOR? Because he could. Just because we stood up for our RIGHTS, that’s why. But I swear you aren’t going to threaten anybody ever again, Jim Turner. Put that pistol away, Bill.” Bill said: “I don’t want to put it away, Jake Packard. I want to kill him. Didn’t he kill old Hatfield the same way? Doesn’t he deserve to die?” “But I’ve got my reasons for not wanting him killed.” “Bless you, Jake Packard! I’ll never forget you as long as I live,” blubbered the man on the floor. Packard didn’t notice him, but hung his lantern on a nail. He started walking toward where I was hiding and motioned for Bill to follow. I crawled as fast as I could for about two yards. It took me longer than it normally would since the boat was slanted to one side. I crawled up the slant and into a stateroom to avoid getting stepped on and caught. The other man came walking up in the dark, and when Packard got to the stateroom, he said: “Hey—come in here.” He and Bill came inside, but I had crawled in the upper birth before they arrived. I was cornered and regretted my decision to stay on the boat. They stood there talking, their hands on the ledge of the berth. I couldn’t see them, but I could tell where they were by the whisky on their breath. I was glad I hadn’t drunk any whiskey myself, but it wouldn’t have made much of a difference since I was holding my breath. I was so scared. But even if I wasn’t scared, I wouldn’t be able to hear them talking if I breathed. They talked in low but earnest voices. Bill wanted to kill Turner. He said: “He said he’ll tell, and he will. Even if we gave both our shares to him now, it wouldn’t make any difference, now that we’ve fought him and tied him up. I’m sure he’ll turn state’s evidence and testify against us. Now you listen. I say we put him out of his misery.” “I agree,” said Packard quietly. “Damn it, I was beginning to think you weren’t. Well then, that’s that. Let’s go and do it.” “Hold on a minute—I haven’t said everything I want to say yet. Listen to me. Shooting a man is fine, but there are quieter ways to kill him. I don’t think it makes any sense to invite trouble if you can do the same thing with less risk. Am I right?” “You bet. But how are you thinking of killing him?” “Well, we can rummage around the boat and gather up anything else in the staterooms that we overlooked. Then we can head to shore and hide our loot. Then we’ll wait. I don’t think it’s going to be more than two hours before this wreck breaks up and washes down river. See what I mean? He’ll drown, and everyone will blame him for his own death. I think that’s much better than killing him. I’m against killing anyone if you can get around it. It’s not good sense. It’s not good morals. Am I right?” “Yes, I suppose you are. But what if the boat doesn’t break up and wash away?” “Well, we can wait a couple hours and see, can’t we?” “All right then, let’s go.” They started off, and I hurried out. I was in a cold sweat as I scrambled forward in the pitch dark. I whispered, “Jim!” and he answered me with a soart of moan right at my elbow. I said: “Quick, Jim. This isn’t a time for fooling around and moaning. There’s a gang of murderers inside. If we don’t find their boat and set it loose so these guys can’t get away, one of them is going to get murdered. But if we find their boat, then they’ll all be stuck and the sheriff can arrest them. Quick, hurry! I’ll look for their boat on the port side, and you hunt on the starboard side. Get the raft ready, and….” “Oh lordy, lordy! Raft?! There’s no raft! It’s broken loose and gone. Now we’re stuck on this wreck, too!”

***Summary:***

* Huck and Jim raft away down the river, with Missouri on one side and Illinois on the other.
* They travel at night, tying the raft to the shore and covering it up during the day.
* Some nights, Huck lands at a nearby town to buy food or occasionally steal a chicken. His father, he says, told him that you might as well steal a chicken whenever you can, because if you don't want it yourself, you can give it away.
* More good moral lessons from Pap: stealing is really "borrowing," as long as you "intended" on giving it "back" sometime.
* The widow, on the other hand, correctly identifies this as "stealing."
* Jim offers a compromise: they should pick three things they won't steal anymore, and everything else will be fine.
* Great! Now that's settled.
* A little later, the pair comes across a wrecked steamship in the middle of a thunderstorm.
* Huck wants to land and plunder, but Jim has a bad feeling. What if there are watchmen on board?
* Huck insists. Tom Sawyer wouldn't be scared of a steamboat, he says, so why should they be?
* Okay, that's evidently a convincing argument. The two both amble on board, only to overhear three robbers, two of them preparing to kill the third man.
* Eek.
* Jim skitters off to the raft, but Huck inches closer to the voices to see what's going on.
* We get some more info: Jake Packard is the man with the gun; he's trying to convince his buddy Bill to kill the third man, Jim Turner. It seems Jake is afraid Jim will "turn state's evidence," i.e., rat them out.
* Jake has a better idea: instead of shooting Bill, they should plunder the rest of the steamboat and then wait for him to drown when the boat goes under.
* You know, because this way, they'll have clean consciences.
* Huck hustles out to Jim and tells him they should hurry and get the sheriff.
* Great! Unfortunately, the raft has broken loose in the storm and gone off down the river.
* Uh-oh.

***Analysis:***

Huck and Jim build a wigwam on the raft and spend a number of days drifting downriver, traveling by night and hiding by day to avoid being seen. On their fifth night out, they pass the great lights of St. Louis. The two of them “live pretty high,” buying, stealing, or hunting food as they need it. They feel somewhat remorseful about the stealing, however, so they decide to give up a few items as a sort of moral sacrifice.

One stormy night, they come upon a wrecked steamboat. Against Jim’s objections, Huck goes onto the wreck to loot it and have an “adventure,” the way Tom Sawyer would. On the wreck, Huck overhears two robbers threatening to kill a third so that he won’t “tell.” One of the two robbers manages to convince the other to let their victim be drowned with the wreck. The robbers leave. Huck finds Jim and says they have to cut the robbers’ boat loose to prevent them from escaping. Jim responds by telling Huck that their own raft has broken loose and floated away.

***Synopsis:***

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) and [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim) float down the river at night and hide the raft during the day. They build a wigwam on the raft in order to escape the sun and the rain. They buy or borrow food as they need it. While they call it borrowing, it's stealing, and Huck and [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) feel guilty about it. They pass St. Louis, and the lights of the city impress them.

During a stormy night they come across a wrecked steamboat. Huck wants to board the boat and he convinces Jim, so they tie the raft to the boat. While exploring the boat Huck comes upon two robbers holding their partner prisoner and threatening to kill him. The two robbers decide to leave the man tied up, figuring he will die when the boat sinks. Huck goes back to Jim to tell him the news and to untie the men's skiff so they will be trapped on the boat. However, Huck and Jim discover that their own raft has broken loose.

While [Tom](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Tom) Sawyer is not part of the action, the memory of him inspires [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) to act in ways that are often foolish and—as in the case of Chapter 12—dangerous. [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim)'s suggestion to leave the boat alone proves wise. Entering the boat ultimately causes Huck and [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) to be trapped along with dangerous robbers. Tom's childishness contrasts greatly with Jim's practicality and seriousness. This trip, and life in general, are not a game for Jim. Like all slaves Jim has lived a hard life, with survival and avoidance of the whip two of his major concerns. Huck is caught between Tom, his childhood and childish companion, and Jim, his mature and adult companion.

Huck is also conflicted morally. [Pap](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Pap)'s suggestion that as long as you intend to one day pay someone back you are not stealing strikes Huck as disingenuous. The widow, according to Huck, would call this stealing; but he does not see it her way either. Huck and Jim see truth in both Pap's and the widow's views. After some thought and discussion Huck and Jim come up with their own moral system when it comes to taking food. Despite their misfortune Huck and Jim strive to be moral but are willing to bend the rules as they see fit.

***Critical Analysis:***

Finally, Huck and Jim find the murderers' skiff. They are about to leave when they remember that they have forgotten to go through Jim Turner's belongings and get their share (before they leave him there to drown when the steamboat capsizes). When they left to go back to their partner, Huck and Jim jumped in the boat and cut the cord, not daring to even dip their oars, for fear of making noise. On the way, they encounter their old raft. They find that they amassed a fair amount of loot from the "Walter Scott" which they now put on the raft.

They had intended to get some help for the murderers, at least so they can be hung at the right time, but it starts to rain. Later on, Huck makes up a tall tale and gets a ferryboat captain to try and save them. But, by the time they get there, there is little doubt that the murderers are probably drowned. Finally, they watch the ferryboat slip away. They find shelter and go to sleep.

Huck and Jim, in their attempts to salvage the steamboat, had encountered some very dangerous individuals. They are stuck there until they find the murderers' skiff. After they leave the murderers, Huck has his usual strange battle with conscience. He now feels a bit sorry for the criminals, trapped as they are on a doomed steamboat- and takes on a disguised identity to encourage a ferryboat captain to rescue them. Huck's constant battle with right and wrong is one of the more charming aspects of this tale.

***Critical Study:***

Jim and Huck spend the next few days traveling down the river. They improve the raft by building a wigwam, which will keep them dry and warm. Each night, Huck goes into a nearby town and buys more provisions for the next day. They only travel at night to avoid being seen and questioned.

One night, during a strong storm, they see a wrecked steamboat ahead of them. Huck convinces Jim to tie the raft to the boat and climb on board. They are surprised to hear voices, which Huck goes to investigate. There are three robbers on board, two of whom have tied up the third man. Apparently the bound man had threatened to turn them all in to the state. One of the robbers wants to kill him immediately, but the other man restrains him. The two men finally decide to kill their partner by leaving him on the boat and waiting until it sinks.

At this news, Huck scrambles back to rejoin Jim. Together they discover that their raft has come untied and floated away.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) drift away from Jackson’s Island, undiscovered by the men looking for them. At dawn, they tie up their [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft) on the Illinois side of the [river](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-mississippi-river) and hide it, lying low there all day while Huck recounts what Mrs. [Judith Loftus](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) told him. Come dark, Jim builds a wigwam on the raft, in which a fire can safely be built. By night, the pair drifts downriver on the raft, passing silent cities like St. Petersburg and St. Louis as they go, the inhabitants of which are all asleep.

***Analysis Part 1:***

To remain free from their pursuers, Huck and Jim have to impose rules on themselves, like not lighting fires save for in the wigwam and only travelling by night. Freedom isn’t so much an absence of rules here, as self-reliance and discipline. Huck and Jim are also uncannily distant from society: while others sleep, they are awake.

***Summary Part 2:***

At nights, [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) goes into town to buy provisions and supplies. In the mornings, he slips into cornfields to “borrow,” that is, steal produce. Huck says that [Pap](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/pap) told him that it wasn’t harmful to “borrow” things if you mean to pay for them eventually, but the [Widow](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson) told Huck that such “borrowing” is really just stealing. Huck and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) discuss this and consequently decide not steal any more crabapples or persimmons. Nevertheless, Huck says that he and Jim “lived pretty high.”

***Analysis Part 2:***

Huck and Jim have the perfect freedom to choose which moral system they will subscribe to: Pap’s, which is convenient but harmful to others, or the Widow’s, which imposes hardships on Huck and Jim but not on others. The two, committed to the well being of others, freely decide not to steal—and still live well! One can be free and good at once.

***Summary Part 3:***

One night during a storm, [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) see a wrecked steamboat. Huck wants to board it and have an “adventure,” in the spirit of [Tom Sawyer](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/tom-sawyer), but Jim “was dead against it.” Huck, however, convinces a reluctant Jim to go against his better judgment, supposing that the pair will find valuable things onboard the boat.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Even though Huck is morally maturing, under Tom’s influence he is still childish when it comes to balancing costs and benefits. He thinks endangering himself and Jim is worth potential profits. Jim knows better, but goes with the willful Huck to protect him.

***Summary Part 4:***

Once onboard the steamboat, [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) and [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) realize that they’re not alone. They hear voices, one of a man pleading for his life, the other two of men planning to kill the man in order to protect themselves, because they think he will betray them to the State for having broken the law. Huck eavesdrops as the two men decide not to shoot the man, but rather to escape the steamboat and let the third man drown in it as the storm raises the water level of the river. Killing a man, one of the two says, just “ain’t good morals.” As the men start out, Huck tells Jim to make for the [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft) that is lashed to the steamboat. But, when Jim does so, he discovers that the raft has broken loose, stranding him and Huck.

***Analysis Part 4:***

In contrast to Tom’s make-believe gang of children, the gang Jim and Huck encounters on the doomed steamboat are very real, vicious, and murderous—but, like Tom’s Gang, this one is just as arbitrary in its moral code. It is ironic that one of the thieves refuses to shoot a man, but is willing to let a man drown. This thief seems to want to excuse himself from the guilt of murder, even though his action here has the same effect as murder. His rule is absurd.