***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 15:***

***Translation:***

We figured that it would take three more nights to reach the city of Cairo in southern Illinois. That’s where the Ohio River empties into the Mississippi, and it was the Ohio River we wanted. We could sell the raft and take a steamboat up the Ohio River and into the [free states](javascript:void(0);). Then we’d be out of trouble.

On the second night, it began to get foggy. It wouldn’t make any sense to navigate in the fog, so we headed toward a towhead to wait it out. I paddled ahead in the canoe with a rope to tie the raft, but when I got ot the towhead, I found only little saplings. I threw the rope around one of the saplings on the edge of the bank, but the current was so strong that the raft came zooming down and tore out the sapling by the roots. I got sick and scared as the fog closed in and the raft disappeared. I couldn’t see twenty yards ahead. I stood frozen with fear for a moment, then I jumped back into the canoe, ran to the stern, grabbed the oar, and started paddling. But the canoe didn’t move. I’d been in such a hurry that I forgot to untie it. I got out and tried to untie the canoe, but I was shaking so much from excitement that my hands were useless.

As soon as I got the canoe untied, I took off after the raft. I paddled furiously along the bank of the towhead. That part went fine, but the towhead wasn’t longer than sixty yards, and the minute I got past the foot of, it I shot out into the solid white fog. A dead man would have had no better idea of which way he was going than I did.

I figured I’d be more likely to run into a bank or towhead if I paddled, so I didn’t. I decided to just sit still and float, even though it was pretty nerve wracking to have to hold my hands still at a time like that. I heard a small whooping sound from farther down the river, and my spirits lifted. I started paddling after it, listening carefully to hear it again. The next time I heard it, I realized I wasn’t headed straight toward it, but away and to the right from it. The time after that, I was heading to the left of it. And I wasn’t gaining on it much, since I was paddling all over the place instead of just heading straight for it.

I wished that the fool would think to beat repeatedly on a tin pan. The quiet times between the whoops are what made it hard for me to steer. But he never did. I continued paddling until pretty soon I hear the whoops BEHIND me. I was in a fix now. EitherI was hearing someone else’s whooping or I was turned completely around.

I threw the paddle down. I heard the whoop again; it was still behind me but in a different place. It kept coming toward me, and changing its place. I kept answering, and soon enough it was in front of me again. Now I knew the current had swung the canoe’s head down stream, and that I’d be alright as long as Jim was the one whooping and not some other guy. It was hard to identify voices in the fog, since things don’t look or sound natural.

The whooping continued. In a minute or so I realized I was sliding across a steep bank with the smoky ghosts of big trees on it. The current had thrown me off to the left and was shooting by. The water was roaring loudly as it passed through some snags.

After a second or two, things became solid white and still again. I sat perfectly still, listening to my heart thump. I held my breath and I’ll bet my heart thumped a hundred times before I breathed again.

At that point, I gave up. I figured out what was going on. The steep bank was on an island, and Jim had floated down the other side of it. This wasn’t a towhead that you could float past in ten minutes. It was a regular island with big trees on it. It might be five or six miles long and more than half a mile wide.

I kept quiet with my ears cocked for what I imagine was about fifteen minutes. I was still floating along at about four or five miles an hour, though I wasn’t really didn’t notice. At a time like that, you FEEL like you’re sitting still on the water. If a see a snag slip past you don’t think to yourself how fast YOU’RE going. Instead, you catch your breath and think about how fast that snag is moving. If you don’t think it isn’t sad and loney being out in a fog by yourself at night, then try it sometime. You’ll see what I mean.

Well, I whooped every now and then for about half and hour. At last, I heard another whoop answer me from a long ways off. I tried to follow it, but I couldn’t. I figured I’d gotten caught in a patch of towheads, since sometimes I’d catch little glimpses of the narrow little channel between them. There were others that I couldn’t see, but I could hear the sound of the current against the old dead brush and trash that hung over their banks. Well, it wasn’t long before I lost the whoops completely in the towheads. I briefly tried going after them, but it was harder to chase them than it was a Jack o’lantern. You can’t imagine how much the sound jumped around and changed places.

I had to work to claw myself away from the bank four or five time, to keep from knocking too hard against the towheads. I figured the raft must also be bumping into the bank every now and then, otherwise it would have gotten farther ahead and would have been clear out of hearing range. The raft was floating a little faster than I was.

Well, after a little while, I seemed to be back in the open river, but I couldn’t hear any whooping sounds. I figured Jim had gotten caught on a snag and that he was a goner. I was pretty tired, so I lay back in the canoe and said it was no use trying anymore. I didn’t want to go to sleep, of course. But I was so sleepy that I just couldn’t help it, so I decided to take a little catnap.

It turned out to be more than a cat nap, though. When I woke up, the stars were shining bright. The fog was all gone, and I was spinning around a big bend stern first. At first I didn’t know where I was, and I thought I was dreaming. But then things began to slowly come back to me, as if everything that had happened took place a long time ago.

The river was extremely wide at this point. The tall, thick trees growing on both riverbanks formted a solid wall that blocked out the stars. I looked far down stream and saw a black speck on the water. I took off after it, but when I reached it, I saw that it was only a couple of sawed logs stuck together. Then I saw another speck and chased after that one too. This time I was right—it was the raft.

When I got to it, Jim was sitting there asleep with his head down between his knees and his right arm hanging over the steering oar. The other oar had smashed off, and the raft was littered with leaves and branches and dirt. The raft looked like it’d had rough time coming down the river.

I tied the canoe to the raft, then lay down on the raft at Jim’s feet. I began to yawn, and I stretched my fists out against Jim and said: “Hello, Jim. Have I been asleep? Why didn’t you wake me up?”

“Goodness gracious! Is that you, Huck? And you aren’t dead—you didn’t drown. You’re back? It’s too good to be true, pal, too good to be true. Let me look at you, child. Let me feel you. No, you aren’t dead! You’re back, alive and well. You’re just the same old Huck—the same old Huck! Thank God!”

“What’s the matter with you, Jim? Have you been drinking?” “Drinking? Have I been drinking? Have I had the chance to drink?” “Well then, why are you talking so crazy?” “What do you mean crazy? Do I sound like I’m crazy?”

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| “DO YOU? Haven’t you been talking about me coming back and all? As if I’d been gone?” |

“Huck. Huck Finn. You look me in the eye. Look me in the eye. HAVEN’T you been gone?” “Gone? Why, what do you mean? I haven’t been gone at all. Where would I go?” “Well, look here, boss. There’s something funny going on, there sure is. Am I ME? Who AM me? Am I here or not? Now that’s what I want to know.” “Well, it’s pretty obvious you’re here, but I think you’re a mixed up old fool, Jim.” “I am, am I? Well, answer me this: Didn’t you get out the rope in the canoe so that we could tie ourselves up to the towhead?”

“No, I didn’t. What towhead? I haven’t seen any towheads.” “You haven’t seen any towheads? Look here. Didn’t the rope pull loose and the raft go sliding down the river and leave you and the canoe behind in the fog?” “What fog?”

“Why, the fog! The fog that’s been around all night. Didn’t you whoop, and didn’t I whoop until we got mixed up in the islands? And then one of us got lost and the other one was as good as lost since he didn’t know where he was? And didn’t I almost drown getting the raft through those islands? Now isn’t that what happened, boss? Isn’t it? Answer me.”

“This is too much for me, Jim. I haven’t seen any fog, or any islands, or trouble, or anything. I was sitting here talking with you all night until you went to sleep about ten minutes ago. Then I suppose I did the same. You couldn’t have gotten drunk in that time, so you must have been dreaming.”

“Come on, how could I dream all that in ten minutes?”

“Well, darn it, you did dream it because none of it happened.”

“But Huck, it all seemed so real to me, just as plain as….”

“It doesn’t matter how plain it seemed. Your story isn’t. I know because I’ve been here the whole time.”

Jim didn’t say anything for about five minutes. He just sat there thinking it over. Then he said:

“Well, then, I guess I did dream it, Huck. But I’ll be damned if that wasn’t the most intense dream I’ve ever had. And I’ve never had a dream before that’s made me as tired as this one did.”

“Oh, well that’s alright because dreams can really wear you out sometimes. This one seems to have been a doozy, though. Tell me all about it, Jim.”

So Jim started to tell me the whole story from beginning to end. He told it just the way it had happened, though he exaggerated quite a bit. Then he said he needed to interpret the dream, because it was meant to be some kind of warning. He said that the first towhead represented a man that would try to help us, but the current was another man that would take us away from the first man. The whoops were warnings that would come to us every now and then. If we didn’t try hard to figure out what they meant, we would end up having bad luck instead of good luck. The area with a lot of towheads represented trouble we were going to get into with some bad people. But if we minded our own business and didn’t talk back or do anything to aggravate them, then we would pull through the fog. We would make it into the open river, which represented the free states.

It had gotten pretty cloudy shortly after I’d gotten on the raft, but it was starting to clear up again.

“Well, your interpretation is pretty good, Jim,” I said. “But what do THESE things stand for?”

I was referring to the smashed oar and the leaves and debris on the raft. You could see them pretty clearly now.

Jim looked at the debris, then at me, then back at the debris again. He’d gotten the dream fixed so firmly in his mind that he couldn’t let go of it and confront the facts. But when he did piece it together and he realized what had really happened, he looked at me with a serious expression and said:

“What do they stand for? I’ll tell you. When I’d worn myself out working so hard to call for you that I fell asleep, my heart was completely broken because you were lost. I didn’t care anymore about myself or the raft. Then I woke up and found you back again all safe and sound, and I cried. I was so thankful that I could have gotten down on my knees and kissed your feet. And all you were thinking about was how you could make a fool out of old Jim by lying to him. This stuff here is TRASH. And trash is what people are who play dirty tricks on their friends and make them feel ashamed.”

Then he got up slowly and walked to the wigwam. He went in without saying another word, but what he’d said had been enough. I felt so awful that I almost kissed HIS feet to get him to take back what he’d said.

It took me fifteen minutes to work myself up to apologize to a n-----. But I did it, and I wasn’t ashamed of it afterwards. I never played any more mean tricks on him after that, and I would have never played that one if I had known it would make him feel that way.

***Significance:***

In the middle of a fog, the raft, which is being steered by Jim, is separated from Huck's canoe and the two lose each other. Finally, after a lot of disorganized "whooping," Huck finds the canoe, but Jim is now asleep. Huck decides to play a trick on him, pretending he was never lost- that there wasn't any fog or any hollering. Jim, having decided that it was a dream, decides to interpret it. But Jim then discovers some of the trash and broken oar on the raft and realizes he wasn't dreaming. Huck realizes he has gravely hurt his friend, who genuinely mourned for him when he was gone and apologizes to him, at the price of his pride.

Jim, although practical in some ways, is easily fooled by anything that caters to his superstitious nature. As the book progresses, there is the constant theme of Huckleberry continually evaluating what Jim means to him, whether just a slave or perhaps one of the best friends he ever had. His "conscience" sides with pro-slaver, but is it really his conscience. The whole story is about his constant re-evaluation of what is really good and what is really evil.

***Summary:***

* Huck and Jim are headed to [Cairo](http://www.illinoishistory.com/cairoscenes.html), "at the bottom of Illinois, where the Ohio River comes in" (15.1), where they can sell the raft and take a steamboat to Ohio–-one of the free states, where Jim won't be in danger of being sold back into slavery.
* They figure it'll take about three more days to get there.
* When a heavy fog rolls in, Huck goes ahead in the canoe and gets separated from Jim and the raft.
* Jim whoops to Huck, but in the fog and confusion he still can't make his way back. So he panics for a bit and then just goes to sleep.
* (Anyone else notice how many times people fall asleep during really important parts of the plot?)
* The next day the fog has lifted and Huck finds Jim, who has also been sleeping. He lies down on the raft and wakes Jim, pretending that he's been there asleep the whole night and that the fog incident was all a dream.
* Jim is all, "Argh, I had the strangest dream!" and Huck is all, "Really?"
* So Jim narrates the story, only he "paint[s] it up considerable" with exaggerations (15.43).
* Then he sees the leaves and smashed up oar on the raft, and realizes that in fact the incident was not a dream.
* Huck is still in stitches, but Jim is genuinely hurt. He says he thought Huck had died in the fog and was just miserable over the whole thing. He sulks off.
* Huck realizes his trick was a mean one. He works himself up to go apologize, which is hard because Jim is black. (Nice, Huck.)
* But he's glad he did.

***Analysis:***

Huck and Jim approach the Ohio River, their goal. One foggy night, Huck, in the canoe, gets separated from Jim and the raft. He tries to paddle back to the raft, but the fog is so thick that he loses all sense of direction. After a lonely time adrift, Huck reunites with Jim, who is asleep on the raft. Jim is thrilled to see Huck alive, but Huck tries to trick Jim by pretending that Jim dreamed up their entire separation. Jim tells Huck the story of his dream, making the fog and the troubles he faced on the raft into an allegory of their journey to the free states. But soon Jim notices all the debris, dirt, and tree branches that collected on the raft while it was adrift. He gets mad at Huck for making a fool of him after he had worried about him so much. Huck eventually apologizes and does not regret it. He feels bad about hurting Jim.

***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) are striving to make it to Cairo, Illinois, where they can take a steamboat up the Ohio to the free states. They estimate it will take three more days. On the second day a thick fog appears. Huck is in the canoe and [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) is on the raft. Huck follows the raft for a while but eventually he and Jim get separated. Exhausted from all the effort and disoriented due to the fog, Huck decides to go to sleep. The next morning he finds Jim who is asleep on the raft.

Huck wakes Jim up and pretends the whole experience was a dream. Jim, who was thrilled to see Huck, eventually believes it. However, when Huck asks about the debris on the raft, Jim realizes that it was not a dream. He is angry at Huck for making a fool of him. Huck feels badly about the trick and apologizes to Jim.

When [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) become separated, Huck makes every effort to find [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) and the raft. It is clear that Huck enjoys Jim's company and does not want to be alone. However, for Jim the relationship has greater meaning, and his care for Huck is genuine. He is heart-broken when Huck disappears, and he has tears of joy when he wakes up to find Huck back and safe. So when Huck makes up the story about the dream, Jim is deeply hurt and feels as if he has been treated like a fool. He reprimands Huck and says only "trash" treats a friend like that.

In every way this scene puts Huck in the role of child and Jim in the role of parent. Huck acts silly and plays tricks. Jim, like most parents would be, is emotional upon reconnecting with Huck. A parent lectures a child when he or she has done wrong and instructs about proper behavior.

While Huck's apology to Jim is clearly called for, it is a major event. In the pre-Civil War South, one rule was "a white man is always right." A white man would be looked down upon if he stooped to apologizing to a black man.

***Critical Analysis:***

Jim is hoping to reach Cairo, at the bottom of Illinois where the Ohio river merges with the Mississippi. From there, both he and Huck will be able to take a steamboat upriver and into the free states where Jim will finally be a free man.

As they approaching that section of the river, a dense fog arrives and blankets everything in a murky white. They land on the shore, but before Huck is able to tie up the raft, the raft pulls loose and starts floating downstream with Jim aboard. Huck jumps into the canoe and follows it, but soon loses sight of it in the fog. He and Jim spend several hours tracking each other by calling out, but a large island finally separates them and Huck is left all alone.

The next morning, Huck awakens and luckily manages to catch up with the raft. He finds Jim asleep and wakes him up. Jim is glad to see him, but Huck tries to play a trick on Jim by telling him that the events of the night before were just a dream. After some convincing, Jim starts to interpret the "dream." After some time, Huck finally points out the leaves and debris left from the night before, at which point Jim gets mad at Huck for playing such a mean trick on him. Huck feels terrible about what he did and apologizes to Jim.

***Critical Study(Ch11-15):***

These chapters provide insight into Jim's character. Jim is sincere and trustworthy, but also stubborn and mature. The chapters test Jim's loyalty to Huck, and vice-versa. For the first time the novel is dealing with the issue of loyalty, which will later have a strong impact on each character's decisions.

Jim's sincerity is established in several ways. The most potent example is his joy at seeing Huck alive again after they are separated by the fog. Jim gets upset with Huck for tricking him into believing it was all a dream precisely because he had invested a great deal of emotional pain into the adventure. In this section, it becomes obvious that Jim would be willing to sacrifice a great deal to ensure Huck's safety.

The problem at this juncture of the novel is that Huck does not yet reciprocate Jim's feelings. Huck is not yet willing to sacrifice part of his life to ensure Jim's safety, and thus leads Jim from one adventure to another, be it on the wrecked steamboat or during the fog. This is important because it is Huck's loyalty to Jim that will be tested later.

The stubborn and mature side of Jim is evidenced by his arguments with Huck and his attitude towards adventures. Huck comments that once Jim gets and idea into his head it is impossible to change it, and proves this to the reader by discussing Jim's opinions of Solomon and Frenchmen. Jim's stubbornness can partially be traced to his maturity. He desperately wishes to avoid any adventures because adventures bring complications. Jim would be happiest if he were able to get to Cairo and take the steamboat upriver with no interruptions.

Twain is famous for his sense of irony, and this section contains several examples. His best use of irony concerns the three robbers on the wrecked steamboat. When Huck and Jim lose their raft, they need to steal the robbers' skiff. However, the robbers return before they can steal it. The robbers then decide that they want all of their money, including their partner's share, and thus head back into the steamboat. Huck and Jim immediately steal the skiff. The irony is two-fold: not only are the robbers "robbed," they are also condemned to die on the steamboat as a result of their greed. Huck attempts to have them rescued, but the river acts faster than he can, by dragging the wreck further and causing it to sink too far for anyone to survive. Thus, the robbers meet the fate they condemned their partner to, namely drowning.

***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) judge that they are three days out of Cairo, near the Ohio River. The pair plans to take a steamboat up the Ohio into the free States, where slavery is illegal and Jim can no longer be hunted. But a fog sets in, limiting Huck and Jim’s visibility. With Huck in the canoe and Jim in the [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft), the two become separated, and Huck becomes lost. Huck hears whooping sounds, and thinking them Jim’s signal, he whoops back, but to no avail. Huck continues to drift, “lonesome,” and, at some point, takes a nap. When he wakes, Huck realizes how big the [river](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-mississippi-river) is before spotting the raft in the distance. Huck and Jim reunite.

***Analysis Part 1:***

The free States are Jim’s beacon of hope as a place the laws of which preserve his freedom. They are also a symbol in the novel for freedom generally. However, at a crucial juncture, it is not slave-hunters, for example, who impede Huck and Jim progress to freedom, but rather nature, specifically the fog that separates Huck from Jim. Even though nature is not persecutory like society is, it is random, indifferent to human desires, and sometimes, as here, dangerous.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) asks [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) if he fell asleep and why Jim didn’t think to wake him. Jim says he is just grateful that Huck didn’t drown. Huck asks Jim if he’s been drinking, to which Jim, taken aback, responds that he hasn’t. Huck tells Jim that he must have been dreaming that the pair was separated, indeed, that there was any fog at all. Jim can’t believe it; he sits quietly for five minutes. At last he tells Huck he must have been dreaming, but that it was the most powerful, vivid dream he’d ever had.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Huck has tricked Jim before, but not about something so important as this. That he is inclined to trick Jim at all demonstrates Huck’s childishness, but it also demonstrates, more problematically, Huck’s callousness toward Jim, maybe the product of his belief that Jim is racially inferior to him. Huck doesn’t yet fully empathize with Jim.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) requests that [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) tell him all about his dream, which Jim proceeds to do. Jim even interprets the dream, saying that the whoops are warnings of bad luck, the tow-heads are troubles the pair is going to get into with mean people unless the two mind their own business, and that the [river](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-mississippi-river) clear of fog is the free States.

***Analysis Part 3:***

Even though the fog occurred randomly and without malice, Huck’s lie, that Jim dreamed the fog, encourages Jim to think of it within a superstitious interpretive framework, not as random and meaningless but as meaningful.

***Summary Part 4:***

Huck then asks what the leaves and rubbish on the [raft](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/symbols/the-raft) mean, along with its broken oar. [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) realizes that Huck was tricking him all along. Jim hadn’t been dreaming at all. He and Huck really were separated, and there really was fog. Jim tells Huck that he was heart-broken thinking that Huck had died in the fog, and that he had cried and wanted to kiss Huck’s foot to see him safe and sound again. And Huck could only think about making a fool out of Jim with a lie and shaming him. When he hears all this, Huck is himself ashamed. At last, after working himself up to humble himself to a black person, Huck apologizes to Jim, and feels no regret.

***Analysis Part 4:***

Jim is angry at Huck not for lying, but for failing to imagine the consequences of his lies, and, more generally, for failing to imagine how he (Jim) experiences the world. Jim was worried to death for Huck, even like a family member would worry, but Huck can’t imagine that and sees only a cheap opportunity to trick Jim in the style of Tom Sawyer. But after Jim expresses how much he worried over Huck, Huck realizes how calloused he’s been, and, as he will later in the novel to an even greater extent, he treats Jim like the equal that he is. That Huck feels no regret for apologizing shows his willingness to cross the slave/white divide and to see Jim as a true human being.