***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 4:***

***Translation:***

Well, three or four months passed, and it was well into winter. I had gone to school most of the time, and by this point I could spell and read and write a little. I could also say the multiplication table up to six times seven is thirty-five, but I don’t think I could get any farther than that even if I lived forever. I don’t think mathematics is that useful anyway.

At first I hated school, but after awhile I was able to stand it. The longer I went to school, the easier it got to be. I played hookey whenever I got bored. The spanking I got next day would cheer me up and do me good. I was kind of getting used the widow’s ways, too, and they didn’t bother me so much. Living in a house and sleeping in a bed felt confining, but I’d take breaks from it by sneaking out and sleeping in the woods sometimes, at least until winter came. I liked my old way of living best, but I also liked the new ways a little bit. The widow said I was making progress slowly but surely. She was satisfied and said that she wasn’t ashamed of me.

One morning I happened to knock over the salt shaker at breakfast. I reached for some of it as quick as I could so that I could throw it over my shoulder to keep off the bad luck. But Miss Watson intercepted my hand before I could. She said, “Keep your hands away, Huckleberry. What a mess you’re always making!” The widow put in a good word for me, but I knew enough to know that wasn’t enough to keep off the bad luck. I left the house after breakfast feeling nervous. I wondering when the bad luck would strike and what it would bring. There are ways to keep some kinds of bad luck away, but this wasn’t one of them. So I didn’t take any risks, and just continued on my way, glum but on the lookout.

I went down to the garden in the front of the house and climbed over the gate in the tall fence. There was an inch of snow on the ground, and I spotted somebody’s tracks. The person had come up from the quarry and stood by the gate for awhile before going around the garden fence. It was funny that they just stood there instead of coming in. It was defintely strange, and I couldn’t figure it out. I was about to follow the tracks around the fence, but decided to bend down and inspect them a bit closer. At first I didn’t notice anything, but then I saw a cross made with big nails hammered into the left boot-heel to keep away the devil.

I got up quick and sprinted down the hill to Judge Thatcher’s house as quick as I could. I kept looking over my shoulder every now and then, but I didn’t see anybody. When I got there, Judge Thatcher said:

“Why you’re all out of breath, my boy. Did you come to collect some of the interest you’ve made on your money?” “No, sir,” I said. “Is there any?”

“Oh yes, a half-yearly sum arrived last night. It came to over a hundred and fifty dollars. That’s quite a fortune. You had better let me invest it along with your six thousand, so you don’t go and spend it.”

“Oh yes, a half-yearly sum arrived last night. It came to over a hundred and fifty dollars. That’s quite a fortune. You had better let me invest it along with your six thousand, so you don’t go and spend it.”

He looked surprised, and didn’t seem to understand. He said: “Why, what do you mean, my boy?” “Don’t ask me any questions about it, please,” I said. “You’ll take it, though, won’t you?” He said: “Well, I’m confused. Is something wrong?” “Please take it,” I said, “and don’t as me any questions, because I don’t want to have to lie to you.” He thought for a moment, then said: “Ah ha! I think I understand. You want to SELL all your property to me, not give it away. That’s what you mean.”

***Summary:***

* Against all expectations, Huck's been gettin' sivilized.
* In other words, he's been going to school and taking regular baths and so on, which for a boy from the woods is a big deal.
* When he gets too fed up with it all, he runs off to sleep in the woods.
* One morning, Huck spills some salt at breakfast. But before he can throw it over his shoulder (it's a [**superstition thing**](http://www.dailymail.co.uk/femail/article-1385380/Why-throw-salt-shoulder-superstitions-answered.html)), Miss Watson stops him and tells him not to be foolish.
* Huck knows this means that bad luck is coming.
* Outside, he sees tracks in the snow. Apparently, someone came up to the garden and then stopped before going inside.
* Examining one of the tracks, Huck sees a cross in the heel made out of nails—a sign to keep off the devil.
* After seeing this, Huck hauls it to Judge Thatcher's as fast as he can, with one eye over his shoulder the whole way. Clearly, he knows something we don't.
* When he gets to the Judge's, he says he wants to give him all the money (his six-thousand-dollar share of the money found in the cave).
* The Judge wants to know why, but Huck skirts the issue on the grounds that he doesn't want "to tell no lies."
* The Judge ponders for a moment and decides that what Huck really wants to do is sell his property over to the Judge; this way the transaction is legal and Huck is safe.
* This will all make sense soon, don't worry.
* Huck agrees, signs a document, gets a dollar as pay for all his property, and leaves.
* On his way back home, he tells us about Jim and his magic hairball. It's a fortune-telling magic hairball.
* So Huck goes to Jim to have his fortune read by the magic hairball. He says he saw his Pap's tracks in the snow and now he's scared.
* Jim drops the hairball on the floor, but sadly, that's not enough to make the thing talk. Clearly, the hairball needs some money.
* One counterfeit quarter later, the hairball tells Huck (via Jim's interpretation, of course), that his Pap doesn't know what to do. He's got a good angel on one shoulder and a bad one on the other, and it's hard to say who he'll listen to at any given time.
* Jim rather profoundly observes that sometimes Huck's life will be good and sometimes bad. For example, sometimes he'll be sick, but he'll always get better.
* We guess this is the "bad" part, because waiting for Huck in his bedroom is his abusive, drunk Pap.

***Brief Summary:***

Huck goes to school and manages, after a time, to learn a little math, spelling, reading and writing. He gets used it, playing hooky only once in a while. While going outside in the snow, Huck notices somebody's tracks, someone with a cross in the left boot heel. After seeing this, he quickly runs to Judge Thatcher, who is "investing" his money. Huck has made a fair amount of money over the last year, but the Judge wants to reinvest it. Huck then does a peculiar thing. He signs over the entire amount to Judge Thatcher for the consideration of one dollar.

Huck had recognized the tracks as being his Pap's and went to Jim, Miss Watson's slave, to consult his hairball. He tells Huck that his father is going to either come or go, but it's best to leave him alone. There's both a good and bad angel hovering around the old man. Huck will marry a poor lady and then a rich one. But he should do his best to stay away from water. When Huck goes up to his room, he finds his father.

***Brief Analysis:***

Was it seeing his father's tracks that led Huck to give away his money? It would seem that Huck gave away a lot of money that he could have used, but perhaps it seemed to interfere with the wild life that he loved- in between his flirtations with being civilized. The Hair-Ball Oracle doesn't do much for Huck either, since he finds his Pappy in his room.

***Synopsis:***

Over the next few months, Huck begins to adjust to his new life and even makes some progress in school. One winter morning, he notices boot tracks in the snow near the house. Within one heel print is the shape of two nails crossed to ward off the devil. Huck immediately recognizes this mark and runs to Judge Thatcher. Huck sells his fortune (the money he and Tom recovered in *Tom Sawyer,* which the Judge has been managing for him) to the befuddled Judge for a dollar.

That night, Huck goes to Jim, who claims to possess a giant, magical hairball from an ox’s stomach. Huck tells Jim that he has found Pap’s tracks in the snow and wants to know what his father wants. Jim says that the hairball needs money to talk, so Huck gives Jim a counterfeit quarter. Jim puts his ear to the hairball and relates that Huck’s father has two angels, one black and one white, one bad and one good. It is uncertain which angel will win out, but Huck is safe for now. He will have much happiness and sorrow in his life, he will marry a poor woman and then a rich woman, and he should stay clear of the water, since that is where he will die. That night, Huck finds Pap waiting for him in his bedroom.

***Critical study:***

Three or four months have passed when [Huck](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/huckleberry-finn) finds a suspicious footprint in the snow outside of the widow's house. Because of a cross carved in the heel, the print looks exactly like Pap Finn's boot, and Huck begins to worry that Pap has returned. To protect the reward money from Pap, Huck goes to see Judge Thatcher and tries to persuade Judge Thatcher to take the money for his own.

Because [Jim](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/character-analysis/jim) is rumored to have the ability to do magic, Huck asks him if he can predict what Pap will do and where he will stay. When Huck asks Jim about Pap's plans, Jim places a hairball on the ground and listens for Huck's fortune. Jim says that there are two angels hovering over Pap — one white and one black — and he does not know which way Pap will decide to live his life. Jim also says that, just like Pap Finn, Huck has two angels over him, trying to help him decide the right path. When Huck returns to his room that night, he finds Pap waiting for him.

When Pap's tracks appear, Huck would rather give his money away than risk confronting Pap. He knows that Pap is inspired only by whisky or greed, and if Huck is poor, perhaps Pap will leave him alone. In the previous chapter, Pap is described as a town vagrant who "used to lay drunk with the hogs in the tanyard" and Huck is not affected by the description. But Huck's indifference to Pap's reputation changes when he realizes Pap is back in town. Huck's fear is understated, but it suggests that his previous life with Pap was violent and dysfunctional. Moreover, the subtle threat of abuse underscores the theme of a chaotic and violent environment after the Civil War, an environment that Huck cannot entirely avoid despite his plans and cunning.

Chapter 4 continues to document that Huck and Jim are superstitious and are products of their society and their circumstances. When Jim uses the hairball to discover Pap's intentions, Jim ends up forecasting Huck's future more than Pap's, and the similarities between the two are obvious. According to Jim, both Pap and Huck have "two angels hoverin'" over them, and the future is uncertain. Jim warns Huck to stay away from the water because it is his fate to be hanged. The darkness in Huck's future, then, relates directly to the Mississippi River, and it is predestined ("down in de bills") that Huck will suffer because of it. The inclusion of predestination reflects [Twain](https://www.cliffsnotes.com/literature/a/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/mark-twain-biography)'s Calvinist background. More important, however, the battle of the two angels foreshadows Huck's future battle with his conscience in terms of Jim's freedom.

Glossary

**irish potato**the common white potato; so called because extensively cultivated in Ireland.

**down in de bills**predestined, foreordained by divine decree or intent.

***Critical Analysis:***

A few months have passed. [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) has progressed in reading and writing and is adjusting to the [Widow Douglas](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Widow_Douglas)'s ways. Huck says, "I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too."

Huck is sure he will have bad luck after an incident with a salt shaker. Footprints (he thinks they are his father's) in the freshly fallen snow also worry Huck, and he rushes off to Judge Thatcher. Huck insists the judge keep his money but refuses to explain why.

Huck goes to [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim) who allegedly has a hairball with a spirit inside of it that knows the future. After making Huck pay [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) tells him his fortune, Jim says that hovering around [Pap](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Pap) are two angels—a good white one and a bad black one. Jim also tells Huck that he is going to have considerable trouble and considerable joy in his life because he also has two angels—a black and white one—hovering over him.

When Huck returns to his room, his father is sitting there.

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck)'s innate ability to reason shows him to be a wise person. In this chapter he shows book smarts as well. After only a few months of school Huck is prospering and has made great progress. Despite his progress Huck lacks confidence, which is understandable due to his background.

Huck's history of abuse continues to haunt him, and this is clearly shown in his reaction to the footsteps. He is so spooked about [Pap](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Pap)'s possible presence that he runs off to Judge Thatcher. Huck figures that his father is ultimately only interested in him because of his money. In the absence of money Huck hopes his father will move on and leave him alone.

Superstition plays a regular role in the novel and shows up in [Chapter 4](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/chapter-4-summary/). Huck's fear leads him to ask [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim) to predict his future. Like his father Huck has to do battle with his conscience. While Pap clearly has chosen the bad black angel, Huck has not yet had to make a choice. That choice will come later in the book when Huck must decide whether to help [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Jim) escape slavery or turn him in. Much of the fortune that Jim presents to Huck comes to pass.

***Significance:***

Huck spends the next three months living with the widow and getting acclimated to his new life. He starts to attend school and remarks, "I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too."

Everything goes fairly well until one day when Huck accidentally overturns a salt-shaker at the breakfast table. Miss Watson does not let him throw any salt over his left shoulder (as a way of avoiding the bad luck), and as a result Huck starts to get worried that something bad will happen. As soon as Huck leaves the house, he notices boot prints in the fresh snow. Upon closer inspection he realizes that there is a cross on the left boot-heel, which he has only ever seen in his Pap's. Huck's Pap has returned.

Aware that Pap is probably after his money (the $6,000 that he got from sharing the treasure with Tom), Huck goes to Judge Thatcher and begs the Judge to take all his money as a gift. The Judge is quite surprised by the request, but when Huck refuses to reveal why he wants to give away his money, Judge Thatcher agrees to "buy" it for one dollar, saying he will take the money "for a consideration."

Huck, still quite worried over what is going to happen now that Pap has returned, goes to the Miss Watson's slave Jim for advice. Jim takes out a hair-ball in order to do some magic with it for Huck. When the hair-ball refuses to work properly, Jim suggest that Huck give it some money. Huck offers a counterfeit quarter, which Jim takes and places under the ball. Jim tells Huck that Pap is torn between two angels, a good white angel and a bad black angel. He also explains that Huck will have considerable pain in his life and at the same time considerable joy. Huck returns to his room that night and finds his Pap sitting there.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

Three or four months pass since the Gang’s raid on the Sunday school. [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) has been going to school and learning reading, writing, and arithmetic, though he “don’t take no stock in mathematics.” He hated school at first, but gets used to it. He is also getting used to the regularity of the [Widow](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson)’s household, and even coming to like it.

***Analysis Part 1:***

It is telling that Huck finds reading and writing valuable, both social subjects concerned with communication in the real world, but not arithmetic, a rigidly abstract subject. That said, Huck is adaptable enough that he soon comes to like what he hated at first.

***Summary Part 2:***

One morning, [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) overturns a saltcellar at breakfast. To ward off bad luck, he reaches for the spilt contents to throw some salt over his left shoulder, but [Miss Watson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-widow-douglas-and-miss-watson) prevents him from doing so, telling him that he is a mess-maker. As Huck uneasily heads out of the house, he keeps a lookout for bad things coming his way. As he walks, he sees in the snow somebody’s tracks, the left boot-heel of which, because studded with nails, leaves crosses in the ground to ward off the devil.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Miss Watson is always telling Huck about her Christian superstitions, but she sees his superstitions as ridiculous. That said, Huck does indeed encounter something bad: the telltale marks of his father’s tracks in the snow (though the novel builds suspense by not revealing just what the bad thing is yet). Huck’s logical misstep is in thinking that spilling the salt caused his father to reappear.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) nervously makes his way to [Judge Thatcher](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s house. The judge tells Huck that the six thousand dollars he has left in the bank has collected interest, and warns him against taking any money out of the bank. Huck replies he wants Judge Thatcher to have all of his money. The Judge, not quite understanding Huck’s intentions, buys Huck’s property for a dollar.

***Analysis Part 3:***

In response to seeing Pap’s tracks, Huck does something both reasonable and practical: he gives his money to Judge Thatcher so that the greedy Pap can’t take it from him, which would otherwise be allowed by the backwards custody laws of society.

***Summary Part 4:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) goes on to tell how [Jim](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/jim) has a hairball, taken from the belly of an ox, that Jim does magic with. Huck goes to Jim, tells him that he saw [Pap](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/pap)’s tracks in the snow (those that leave the cross), and asks what Pap is going to do and how long he is going to be around. Jim says something over the hairball and drops it on the ground, but the hairball doesn’t talk. Jim explains that the hairball sometimes needs money to talk. Huck gives the hairball a badly counterfeited quarter with brass showing through the silver, saying nothing of the dollar he got from [Judge Thatcher](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters). After Jim puts the quarter in a split raw potato to cover the brass, he and Huck put it under the hairball, Jim tells Huck that the hairball prophesies that Pap doesn’t know what he is going to do, and that Huck is going to have troubles and joys in his life. When Huck goes up to his room, he finds Pap sitting there.

***Analysis Part 4:***

It might seem that Jim is trying to con Huck out of money by telling him that sometimes his hairball requires payment before it speaks, but it must be remembered that Jim himself is superstitious, and that he gladly accepts Huck’s counterfeited quarter, as though to con not Huck but the hairball itself. Huck is, again, practical here, as an adult would be, in saying nothing about his actual dollar, thereby protecting it. Finally, note that, while Jim and Huck are superstitious about the hairball, they do not attribute a supernatural explanation to the re-silvering of the counterfeited quarter. What is considered magical in Huck’s world is arbitrary

***Quotations:***

***Quotation 1:***

At first I hated the school, but by and by I got so I could stand it. Whenever I got uncommon tired I played hookey, and the hiding I got next day done me good and cheered me up. So the longer I went to school the easier it got to be. I was getting sort of used to the widow's ways, too, and they warn't so raspy on me. Living in a house and sleeping in a bed pulled on me pretty tight mostly, but before the cold weather I used to slide out and sleep in the woods sometimes, and so that was a rest to me. I liked the old ways best, but I was getting so I liked the new ones, too, a little bit. The widow said I was coming along slow but sure, and doing very satisfactory. She said she warn't ashamed of me. (4.2)

***Explanation 1:***

Huck may be more comfortable sleeping in the woods, but he's starting to think that this civilization thing isn't so bad. And what's up with liking the "hiding" ("beating") that he gets for playing hookey? Why does being punished cheer him up?

***Quotation 2:***

"Please take it," says I, "and don't ask me nothing—then I won't have to tell no lies." (4.15)

***Explanation 2:***

Oh, Huck. There's nothing like the open road to rob a boy of his scruples. Pretty soon this kid is going to be lying like [Frank W. Abagnale](http://www.amazon.com/Catch-Me-If-You-Can/dp/0767905385).

***Quotation 3:***

Jim tried it again, and then another time, and it acted just the same. Jim got down on his knees, and put his ear against it and listened. But it warn't no use; he said it wouldn't talk. He said sometimes it wouldn't talk without money. (4.21)

***Explanation 3:***

Huck appears foolish in his inability to recognize that Jim uses the hairball to make money.

***Quotation 4:***

One morning I happened to turn over the salt-cellar at breakfast. I reached for some of it as quick as I could to throw over my left shoulder and keep off the bad luck, but Miss Watson was in ahead of me, and crossed me off. She says, "Take your hands away, Huckleberry; what a mess you are always making!" The widow put in a good word for me, but that warn't going to keep off the bad luck, I knowed that well enough. I started out, after breakfast, feeling worried and shaky, and wondering where it was going to fall on me, and what it was going to be. There is ways to keep off some kinds of bad luck, but this wasn't one of them kind; so I never tried to do anything, but just poked along low-spirited and on the watch-out. (4.3)

***Explanation***

Huck’s superstitious beliefs seem to revolve around bad luck rather than good. He follows his superstitions as a sort of precaution against certain bad events. We see it as Huck’s desire to blame bad happenings on bad luck, whereas he thinks good things are natural or have been earned in some way. Since Huck doesn't trust in religion to explain life’s negative moments, he uses superstitions instead.

***Quotation 5:***

I went down to the front garden and clumb over the stile where you go through the high board fence. There was an inch of new snow on the ground, and I seen somebody's tracks. They had come up from the quarry and stood around the stile a while, and then went on around the garden fence. It was funny they hadn't come in, after standing around so. I couldn't make it out. It was very curious, somehow. I was going to follow around, but I stooped down to look at the tracks first. I didn't notice anything at first, but next I did. There was a cross in the left boot-heel made with big nails, to keep off the devil. (4.4)

***Explanation:***

Huck’s father is also a superstitious man. Check out our "[Character Analysis" of Pap](https://www.shmoop.com/huckleberry-finn/pap.html) for more on him.

***Quotation 6:***

Miss Watson's n\*\*\*\*\*, Jim, had a hair-ball as big as your fist, which had been took out of the fourth stomach of an ox, and he used to do magic with it. He said there was a spirit inside of it, and it knowed everything. So I went to him that night and told him pap was here again, for I found his tracks in the snow. What I wanted to know was, what he was going to do, and was he going to stay? Jim got out his hair-ball and said something over it, and then he held it up and dropped it on the floor. (4.21)

***Explanation:***

Jim is Huck’s main source of superstitious beliefs.

***Quotation 7:***

Jim put the quarter under the hair-ball, and got down and listened again. This time he said the hair-ball was all right. He said it would tell my whole fortune if I wanted it to. I says, go on. So the hair-ball talked to Jim, and Jim told it to me. (4.22)

***Explanation:***

Jim and Huck are both rendered vulnerable by their superstitions. Superstitifous beliefs are something that they both believe in to explain what they otherwise find inexplicable. Huck and Jim follow their superstitious beliefs blindly; they must obey the rules, or else be punished.