



T r i c k i n g J i m

JIM AND I PLANNED TO TRAVEL TO THE CITY OF CAIRO, AT THE SOUTHERN tip of Illinois. The Ohio River joins the Mississippi River at Cairo. We planned to sell our raft there and use the money to pay to travel north on the Ohio River to the Free States. Once Jim reached the Free States in the North, he would be a free man and would not have to worry about being sold ever again. We figured that it would take us three more days to reach Cairo.

On the second night, a heavy **fog** surrounded us. We couldn't see where we were traveling in the fog and had to stop. I took hold of a rope tied to the raft, got into the canoe, and started moving toward shore. I could find only a small tree to tie the rope around. The current was very strong, and soon the raft pulled the tree out of the ground and went racing down the river. I was shocked. In half a minute, Jim and the raft were lost in the thick fog.

I tried to untie my canoe, but my hands were shaking. Finally, I began following after the raft, but I was soon lost in the thick, white fog. I didn't know which direction to row; therefore, I simply allowed the current to carry me downstream.

I shouted to Jim, and from faraway came Jim's answer. I went toward the sound of Jim's voice. The next time Jim shouted, he was again far away, and again I tried to reach him. Sometimes it seemed that Jim was to the left of me, while at other times he seemed to be on the right.

Then all was quiet. I called out to Jim many times but heard nothing. I was puzzled because I seemed too close to a shore, yet I knew that I was traveling near the middle of the river. Then I understood what had happened. I was not along the shore of the river, but along the shore of a large island in the river. I saw some dark forms in the fog, which were large trees. This meant that the island was very large. I was traveling on one side of the island, while Jim was traveling on the other side. Often my canoe hit against logs and trees floating down the river. I knew that Jim was having the same problem on the raft.

After a long while, I was traveling in the open river again. I called to Jim again and again, but heard nothing. I knew that the raft must be caught against some logs or floating trees. I was certain that I would never see Jim again. I could think of nothing more I could do, and I lay down in the canoe and fell asleep. I must have slept a long time, for when I awoke the fog had disappeared and there were stars in the sky.

The river was very wide here, and huge trees grew on both shores. I looked for the raft and thought that I saw it far ahead. I went as fast as I could, but when I reached the dark spot that I thought was the raft, I found only a large tree floating on the water. For the next hour, I moved toward many other dark spots on the river, but each time I found only floating trees. Finally, I found the raft. Jim was asleep on it. Part of the raft had been broken by the force of the river current, and branches and pieces of dirty wood covered the deck.

I tied my canoe to the raft and lay down beside Jim. I stretched my arms and acted as though I were simply awakening.

"Hello, Jim. I've been asleep."

"Is that you, Huck? You aren't dead? You aren't drowned? I can't believe that you're alive. Is this really you? I'm so happy. I didn't expect to see you ever again."

“Why are you talking like that, Jim? Are you **drunk**?”

“Drunk? I never had time to drink.”

“Then why are you talking in this crazy manner? Why are you talking as though I’ve been away?”

“Huck—Huck Finn, look into my eyes and tell me that you have been on this raft this entire night—that you never left the raft.”

“Left the raft? Why would I have left the raft? Where would I have gone?”

“Huck, do you remember tying the rope from the raft to that small tree when we were in the thick fog?”

“What small tree, Jim? And what fog? What are you talking about?”

“I’m talking about the fog that was here most of the night. I’m talking about how we were separated—you were in the canoe and I was on the raft, and my raft was nearly destroyed when it struck some big logs being pushed by the river current.”

“You must have been dreaming, Jim. That didn’t happen. There was no fog, and we were never separated. I’ve been sitting on this raft talking to you all night, until you went to sleep.”

“But how could I have dreamed all that? That makes no sense.”

“Well, you must have dreamed it because I’ve been sitting here on the raft and never left it.”

Jim rubbed his hand over his face. “If that was a dream, Huck, that was the strangest dream I ever had. That dream must have been sent to me as a warning. If we are going to prevent bad luck, we must understand exactly what each part of the dream means. That dream tried to tell me that we were going to meet much trouble and have many problems with bad people, but if we are careful and are nice to people who are mean to us, we’ll finally come out of the fog and have no more problems and will end in the big, clear river, which represents the Free States of the North, where I’ll finally be a free man.”

“That sounds fine, Jim, but how do you explain all these branches and pieces of dirty wood on the deck of the raft? How do you explain that part of the raft that is broken?”

Jim looked at me, then at the broken part of the raft and the dirty wood on the deck, then he looked at me again. He never smiled, but had the saddest look on his face that I had ever seen.

“I’ll tell you how I explain them, Huck. After I made my throat sore from calling and calling to you in the fog, and after searching for you until I thought that I wouldn’t be able to move another muscle again, I began to cry. I knew that you were drowned and I would never see you again. In that condition I went to sleep. When I awoke and saw you safe in the raft, I was so happy that I wanted to get down on my knees and kiss your feet. But what were you thinking? Only how you could trick old Jim and make him seem to be a fool. The branches and dirty wood on this raft are worthless, and a friendship is worthless if the friend plays a trick like the one you played. What you did is shameful, Huck.”

Jim stood up and slowly walked into the tent. He said nothing more, but what he had said was enough to make me feel deep shame. I wanted to kiss his feet and have his friendship again.

It was fifteen minutes before I went in to tell Jim that I was sorry about the trick. I was always happy that I told Jim how sorry I felt, and I never again played an unkind trick on him.