



L i f e w i t h P a p

PAP AGAIN WENT TO COURT TO TRY TO FORCE JUDGE THATCHER TO give him my money. He also tried to stop me from attending school. When he saw me going to school, he would catch me and beat me. But I continued to go to school, and tried to prevent Pap from seeing me. I wasn't happy going to school before, but now I went because I knew that it made Pap unhappy. Some days I would ask Judge Thatcher for two or three dollars, which I gave to Pap. He would buy whiskey with the money and get very drunk and start fights with men in town.

Pap began coming to the Widow's house to see me. She told him to stay away or she would cause trouble for him. This made him very angry. He told her that he had authority over his son and she couldn't tell him how he must act around his son, what he could and could not do to me.

The next day, Pap caught me alone near the river. He pushed me into a small boat, and we traveled three miles up the Mississippi. We crossed to the Illinois shore to a place where there were many trees and no houses. Pap took me to a small **cabin** made of logs. This cabin was so hidden in the trees that no one could see it from the river.

Pap stayed with me all the time, and I never had the opportunity to run away. Whenever Pap left the cabin, he would lock me inside and take the key with him. At night, he slept with the key under his pillow. He had a gun, which he had stolen, and we used it to hunt animals for our food. We also fished in the river. Every two or three days, Pap took some fish to a store where he traded them for whiskey. When he returned to the cabin, he would be very drunk and would beat me. I didn't like the beatings, but otherwise life with Pap wasn't difficult. I never had to do any work or any studying and could smoke whenever I wished. We spent most of the time fishing or just sitting and watching the river. I never had to wash or put on clean clothes and could sleep whenever I wanted. We ate our meals when we were hungry and not when someone told us to.

Pap stayed away from the cabin often. Once he stayed away for three days, and I was locked inside alone. I didn't enjoy that. Whenever Pap returned from a trip, he would be very drunk and beat me more and more. When he was away for long periods of time, I began to worry that he would never return. What would happen to me? I could die locked inside the cabin. I began to think of a way to escape. I found an old dirty saw that Pap didn't know was in the cabin. With this tool, I began to saw a hole through one of the logs in the wall behind my bed. I wanted to make a hole large enough to climb through and escape. Making such a hole was going to take a long time, and I worked at it whenever Pap was out of the cabin. I kept the saw hidden while Pap was home. When Pap would leave, I pushed the bed away from the wall and sawed at the log. When I heard him returning, I hid the saw and pushed the bed back to its normal position. Pap never knew about the hole that I was making.

One day, Pap returned from a trip to the store feeling very angry. He began to shout and knock furniture to the floor. His lawyer had told him that he would never be able to force Judge Thatcher to give him the money. He also said that he heard that the Widow Douglas was again asking the court to take me away from him, and this time the lawyer thought that the Widow would succeed.

I knew that I did not want to return to living with the Widow. I could never return to living in a proper house and going to school. I had become accustomed to the type of life that Pap and I lived and I didn't want to change again.

Pap said that he would never allow the courts to take me away from him. He would hide me in another cabin six or seven miles away, and no one would ever find me. I began to worry. I knew that I had to escape before we moved out of our present cabin.

Pap told me to go to his boat and bring the food and whiskey that he had bought at the store. I carried one heavy load into the cabin and returned for a second. I sat by the boat and thought about my problem. Where would I go once I escaped from the cabin? I began to make a plan; I would take Pap's gun and walk through the forest as far as I could go. I would walk mostly at night and would hunt animals for food. I would travel far away, and neither Pap nor the Widow would find me again. If Pap drank a bottle of whiskey and got very drunk, I would complete the job of sawing through the log and could leave tonight. That was my plan.

I finished unloading the boat and carried the last of Pap's things to the cabin. It was beginning to get dark and Pap was very angry because I had taken a very long time to unload the boat. He shouted at me to cook his supper. Then he drank some whiskey and began to shout about the government.

"I hate this government and I hate its laws. The law wants to take my son away from me—my very own son. I had all the trouble and all the worry and all the expense of raising him, and now the government wants to take him away from me. Now that my son is old enough to work and give me money, the government wants to take that son away from me. The law and the courts help Judge Thatcher to keep my son's money. I could be a rich man if the law would force Judge Thatcher to give me the 6,000 dollars. I have to live in this dirty cabin and wear old, torn clothes and eat food that pigs will not eat, all because the government won't force Judge Thatcher to give me my son's money."

Pap continued to shout about the government and the wrongs

that it had done to him. Finally, he ate the supper that I had prepared and drank some more whiskey. I expected him to be very drunk and asleep soon, and then I would steal his key and unlock the door and run away. Pap drank almost a complete bottle of whiskey, but he didn't go to sleep. He shouted and threw furniture against the walls and made many loud noises like those an animal makes, but he didn't sleep.

It was late at night, and I became very tired. I could no longer keep myself awake. I don't know how long I slept, but suddenly I heard a loud scream and was awake. Pap looked wild and was running around the cabin shouting about poisonous **snakes** that were attempting to kill him. He was having a dream, but I had never seen him act this wild before.

"Take the snakes off me! Take them off! They're biting my neck!" Pap screamed and threw chairs against the wall and knocked down the table. He ran around the room, waving his knife in the air and threatening to kill me. He held onto my jacket and would have killed me with his knife, but I slipped out of the jacket and ran away before his knife cut me. Finally, he was too tired to move. He took a blanket and wrapped it around himself and lay on the floor. He would cry quietly, then shout, then would cry again. I had had many bad experiences with him in the past, but nothing had ever been as bad as this. He finally said that he was too tired to chase me anymore. He would sleep and then would kill me in the morning when he felt stronger.

I knew that I had to protect myself. When Pap was asleep, I took his gun and sat with it in my arms. I would shoot Pap if he awakened and threatened me with his knife again. I didn't sleep again that night.