

# *The Ramblings of a Lost Journey*



"Drinkin'? Has I ben a-drinkin'? Has I had a chance to be a-drinkin'?" "Well, then, what makes you talk so wild?" "How does I talk wild?" "How? Why, hain't you been talking about my coming back, and all that stuff, as if I'd been gone away?" "Huck—Huck Finn, you look me in de eye; look me in de eye. Hain't you ben gone away?" "Gone away? Why, what in the nation do you mean? I hain't been gone anywheres. Where would I go to?"

"Well, looky here, boss, dey's sumf'n wrong, dey is. Is I me, or who is I? Is I heah, or whah is I? Now dat's what I wants to know." "Well, I think you're here, plain enough, but I think you're a tangle-headed old fool." "I is, is I? Well, you answer me dis: Didn't you tote out de line in de canoe fer to make fas' to de -head?" "No, I didn't. What -head? I hain't see no -head." "You hain't seen no towhead? Looky here, didn't de line pullloose en de raf' go a-hummin' down de river, en leave you en de canoe behine in de fog?" "What fog?" "Why, de fog!—de fog dat's been aroun' all night.

En didn't you whoop, en didn't I whoop, tell we got mix' up in de islands en one un us got los' en t'other one was jis' as good as los', 'kase he didn't know whah he wuz? En didn't I bust up agin a lot er dem islands en have a turrible time en mos' git drownded? Now ain' dat so, boss—ain't it so? You answer me dat." "Well, this is too many for me. I hain't seen no fog, nor no islands, nor no troubles, nor nothing. I been setting here talking with you all night till you went to sleep about ten minutes ago, and I reckon I done the same.

You couldn't a got drunk in that time, so of course you've been dreaming." "Dad fetch it, how is I gwyne to dream all dat in ten minutes?" "Well, hang it all, you did dream it, because there didn't any of it happen." "But, Huck, it's all jis' as plain to me as—" "It don't make no difference how plain it is; there ain't nothing in it. I know, because I've been here all the time." didn't say nothing for about minutes, but set there studying over it.

Then he says: "Well, den, I reck'n I did dream it, Huck; but dog my cats ef it ain't de powerfulest dream I ever see. En I hain't ever had no dream b'fo' dat's tired me like dis one." "Oh, well, that's all right, because a dream does tire a body like everything sometimes. But this one was a staving dream; tell me all about it." So Jim went to work and told me the whole thing right through, just as it happened, only he painted it up considerable.

Then he said he must start in and "terpret" it, because it was sent for a warning. He said the first towhead stood for a man that would try to do us some good, but the current was another man that would get us away from him. The whoops was warnings that would come to us every now and then, and if we didn't try hard to make out to understand them they'd just take us into bad luck, 'stead of keeping us out of it. The lot of towheads was troubles we was going to get into with quarrelsome people and all kinds of mean folks, but if we minded our business and didn't talk back and aggravate them, we would pull through and get out of the fog and into the big clear river, which was the free States, and wouldn't have no more trouble.

It had clouded up pretty dark just after I got on to the raft, but it was clearing up again now. "Oh, well, that's all interpreted well enough as far as it goes" I says; "but what does these things stand for?" It was the leaves and rubbish on the raft and the smashed oar. You could see them first-rate now. looked at the trash, and then looked at me, and back at the trash again.

He had got the dream fixed so strong in his head that he couldn't seem to shake it loose and get the facts back into its place again right away. But when he did get the thing straightened around he looked at me steady without ever smiling, and says: "What do dey stan' for? I'se gwyne to tell you. When I got all wore out wid work, en wid de callin' for you, en went to sleep, my heart wuz mos' broke bekase you wuz los', en I didn' k'yer no' mo' what become er me en de raf'.

En when I wake up en fine you back agin, all safe en soun', de tears come, en I could a got down on my knees en kiss yo' foot, I's so thankful. En all you wuz thinkin' 'bout wuz how you could make a fool uv ole wid a lie. Dat truck dah is trash; en trash is what people is dat puts dirt on de head er dey fren's en makes 'em ashamed." Then he got up slow and walked to the wigwam, and went in there without saying anything but that. But that was enough.

It made me feel so mean I could almost kissed his foot to get him to take it back. It was minutes before I could work myself up to go and humble myself to a nigger; but I done it, and I warn't ever sorry for it afterwards, neither. I didn't do him no more mean tricks, and I wouldn't done that one if I'd a knowed it would make him feel that way. WE slept most all day, and started out at night, a little ways behind a monstrous long raft that was as long going by as a procession.

She had four long sweeps at each end, so we judged she carried as many as men, likely. She had big wigwams aboard, wide apart, and an open camp fire in the middle, and a tall flag-pole at each end. There was a power of style about her. It amounted to something being a raftsman on such a craft as that. We went drifting down into a big bend, and the night clouded up and got hot.

The river was very wide, and was walled with solid timber on both sides; you couldn't see a break in it hardly ever, or a light. We talked about Cairo, and wondered whether we would know it when we got to it. I said likely we wouldn't, because I had heard say there warn't but about a dozen houses there, and if they didn't happen to have them lit up, how was we going to know we was passing a town? said if the two big rivers joined together there, that would show. But I said maybe we might think we was passing the foot of an island and coming into the same old river again. That disturbed—and me too.

So the question was, what to do? I said, paddle ashore the time a light showed, and tell them pap was behind, coming along with a trading-scow, and was a green hand at the business, and wanted to know how far it was to Cairo. thought it was a good idea, so we took a smoke on it and waited. There warn't nothing to do now but to look out sharp for the town, and not pass it without seeing it.

He said he'd be mighty sure to see it, because he'd be a free man the minute he seen it, but if he missed it he'd be in a slave country again and no more show for freedom. Every little while he jumps up and says: "Dah she is?" But it warn't. It was Jack-o'-lanterns, or lightning bugs; so he set down again, and went to watching, same as before. Jim said it made him all over trembly and feverish to be so close to freedom. Well, I can tell you it made me all over trembly and feverish, too, to hear him, because I begun to get it through my head that he was most free—and who was to blame for it? Why, me.

I couldn't get that out of my conscience, no how nor no way. It got to troubling me so I couldn't rest; I couldn't stay still in one place. It hadn't ever come home to me before, what this thing was that I was doing. But now it did; and it stayed with me, and scorched me more and more. I tried to make out to myself that I warn't to blame, because I didn't run Jim off from his rightful owner; but it warn't no use, conscience up and says, every time, "But you knowed he was running for his freedom, and you could a paddled ashore and told somebody." That was so —I couldn't get around that noway.

That was where it pinched. Conscience says to me, "What had poor done to you that you could see her nigger go off right under your eyes and never say one single word? What did that poor old woman do to you that you could treat her so mean? Why, she tried to learn you your book, she tried to learn you your manners, she tried to be good to you every way she knowed how. That's what she done."

I got to feeling so mean and so miserable I most wished I was dead. I fidgeted up and down the raft, abusing myself to myself, and Jim was fidgeting up and down past me. We neither of us could keep still. Every time he danced around and says, "Dah's Cairo!" it went through me like a shot, and I thought if it was Cairo I reckoned I would die of miserableness.

talked out loud all the time while I was talking to myself. He was saying how the first thing he would do when he got to a free State he would go to saving up money and never spend a single cent, and when he got enough he would buy his wife, which was owned on a farm close to where lived; and then they would both work to buy the children, and if their master wouldn't sell them, they'd get an Ab'litionist to go and steal them. It most froze me to hear such talk. He wouldn't ever dared to talk such talk in his life before. Just see what a difference it made in him the minute he judged he was about free.

It was according to the old saying, "Give a nigger an inch and he'll take an ell." Thinks I, this is what comes of my not thinking. Here was this nigger, which I had as good as helped to run away, coming right out flatfooted and saying he would steal his children—children that belonged to a man I didn't even know; a man that hadn't ever done me no harm. I was sorry to hear say that, it was such a lowering of him. My conscience got to stirring me up hotter than ever, until at last I says to it, "Let up on me—it ain't too late yet—I'll paddle ashore at the first light and tell."

I felt easy and happy and light as a feather right off. All my troubles was gone. I went to looking out sharp for a light, and sort of singing to myself. By and by one showed. sings out: "We's safe, Huck, we's safe! Jump up and crack yo' heels! Dat's de good ole Cairo at las', I jis knows it!" I says: "I'll take the canoe and go and see. It mightn't be, you know."

He jumped and got the canoe ready, and put his old coat in the bottom for me to set on, and give me the paddle; and as I shoved off, he says: "Pooty soon I'll be a-shout'n' for joy, en I'll say, it's all on accounts o' Huck; I's a free man, en I couldn't ever ben free ef it hadn' ben for Huck; Huck done it. Jim won't ever forgit you, Huck; you's de bes' fren' Jim's ever had; en you's de only fren' ole got now." I was paddling off, all in a sweat to tell on him; but when he says this, it seemed to kind of take the tuck all out of me. I went along slow then, and I warn't right down certain whether I was glad I started or whether I warn't.

When I was yards off, says: "Dah you goes, de ole true Huck; de on'y white genlman dat ever kep' his promise to ole ." Well, I just felt sick. But I says, I got to do it—I can't get out of it. Right then along comes a skiff with men in it with guns, and they stopped and I stopped. One of them says: "What's that yonder?" "A piece of a raft," I says. "Do you belong on it?" "Yes, sir." "Any men on it?" "Only one, sir." "Well, there's niggers run off to-night up yonder, above the head of the bend.

"Is your man white or black?" I didn't answer up prompt. I tried to, but the words wouldn't come. I tried for a second or to brace up and out with it, but I warn't man enough—hadn't the spunk of a rabbit. I see I was weakening; so I just give up trying, and up and says: "He's white." "I reckon we'll go and see for ourselves." "I wish you would," says I, "because it's that's there, and maybe you'd help me tow the raft ashore where the light is. He's sick—and so is ."

"Oh, the devil! we're in a hurry, boy. But I s'pose we've got to. Come, buckle to your paddle, and let's get along." I buckled to my paddle and they laid to their oars. When we had made a stroke or, I says: "I'll be mighty much obligeed to you, I can tell you.

Everybody goes away when I want them to help me tow the raft ashore, and I can't do it by myself." "Well, that's infernal mean. Odd, too. Say, boy, what's the matter with your father?" "It's the—a—the—well, it ain't anything much." They stopped pulling. It warn't but a mighty little ways to the raft now. One says: "Boy, that's a lie. What is the matter with your pap? Answer up square now, and it'll be the better for you."

"I will, sir, I will, honest—but don't leave us, please. It's the—the— Gentlemen, if you'll only pull ahead, and let me heave you the headline, you won't have to come a-near the raft—please do." "Set her back, John, set her back!" says one. They backed water. "Keep away, boy—keep to looard. Confound it, I just expect the wind has blowed it to us. Your pap's got the small-pox, and you know it precious well. Why didn't you come out and say so? Do you want to spread it all over?" "Well," says I, a-blubbering, "I've told everybody before, and they just went away and left us."

"Poor devil, there's something in that. We are right down sorry for you, but we—well, hang it, we don't want the small-pox, you see. Look here, I'll tell you what to do. Don't you try to land by yourself, or you'll smash everything to pieces. You float along down about miles, and you'll come to a town on the left-hand side of the river. It will be long after sun-up then, and when you ask for help you tell them your folks are all down with chills and fever. Don't be a fool again, and let people guess what is the matter. Now we're trying to do you a kindness; so you just put miles between us, that's a good boy. It wouldn't do any good to land yonder where the light is—it's only a wood-yard.

Good-bye, boy; you do as told you, and you'll be all right." "That's so, my boy—good-bye, good-bye. If you see any runaway niggers you get help and nab them, and you can make some money by it." "Good-bye, sir," says I; "I won't let no runaway niggers get by me if I can help it." They went off and I got aboard the raft, feeling bad and low, because I knowed very well I had done wrong, and I see it warn't no use for me to try to learn to do right; a body that don't get started right when he's little ain't got no show—when the pinch comes there ain't nothing to back him up and keep him to his work, and so he gets beat.

Then I thought a minute, and says to myself, hold on; s'pose you'd a done right and give Jim up, would you felt better than what you do now? No, says I, I'd feel bad—I'd feel just the same way I do now. Well, then, says I, what's the use you learning to do right when it's troublesome to do right and ain't no trouble to do wrong, and the wages is just the same? I was stuck. I couldn't answer that. So I reckoned I wouldn't bother no more about it, but after this always do whichever come handiest at the time. I went into the wigwam; warn't there. I looked all around; he warn't anywhere. I says: "Here I is, Huck. Is dey out o'sight yit? Don't talk loud."

He was in the river under the stern oar, with just his nose out. I told him they were out of sight, so he come aboard. He says: "I was a-listenin' to all de talk, en I slips into de river en was gwyne to shove for sho' if dey come aboard. Den I was gwyne to swim to de raf' agin when dey was gone. But lawsy, how you did fool 'em, Huck! Dat wuz de smartes' dodge! I tell you, chile, I spec it save' ole Jim—ole ain't going to forgit you for dat, honey." Then we talked about the money. It was a pretty good raise—dollars apiece. said we could take deck passage on a steamboat now, and the money would last us as far as we wanted to go in the free States.

He said mile more warn't far for the raft to go, but he wished we was already there. Towards daybreak we tied up, and was mighty particular about hiding the raft good. Then he worked all day fixing things in bundles, and getting all ready to quit rafting. That night about ten we hove in sight of the lights of a town away down in a left-hand bend. I went off in the canoe to ask about it. Pretty soon I found a man out in the river with a skiff, setting a trot-line. I ranged up and says: "Mister, is that town Cairo?" "Cairo? no. You must be a blame' fool."

"What town is it, mister?" "If you want to know, go and find out. If you stay here botherin' around me for about a half a minute longer you'll get something you won't want." I paddled to the raft. Jim was awful disappointed, but I said never mind, Cairo would be the next place, I reckoned. We passed another town before daylight, and I was going out again; but it was high ground, so I didn't go. No high ground about Cairo, said. I had forgot it. We laid up for the day on a towhead tolerable close to the left-hand bank. I begun to suspicion something. So did.

I says: "Maybe we went by Cairo in the fog that night." He says: "Doan' le's talk about it, Huck. Po' niggers can't have no luck. I awluz 'spected dat rattlesnake-skin warn't done wid its work." "I wish I'd never seen that snake-skin,—I do wish I'd never laid eyes on it." "It ain't yo' fault, Huck; you didn't know. Don't you blame yo'self 'bout it." When it was daylight, here was the clear Ohio water inshore, sure enough, and outside was the old regular Muddy! So it was all up with Cairo.

We talked it all over. It wouldn't do to take to the shore; we couldn't take the raft up the stream, of course. There warn't no way but to wait for dark, and start back in the canoe and take the chances. So we slept all day amongst the cottonwood thicket, so as to be fresh for the work, and when we went back to the raft about dark the canoe was gone! We didn't say a word for a good while. There warn't anything to say. We both knowed well enough it was some more work of the rattlesnake-skin; so what was the use to talk about it? It would only look like we was finding fault, and that would be bound to fetch more bad luck—and keep on fetching it, too, till we knowed enough to keep still. The place to buy canoes is off of rafts laying up at shore.

But we didn't see no rafts laying up; so we went along during three hours and more. Well, the night got gray and ruther thick, which is the next meanest thing to fog. You can't tell the shape of the river, and you can't see no distance. It got to be very late and still, and then along comes a steamboat up the river. We lit the lantern, and judged she would see it. Up-stream boats didn't generly come close to us; they go out and follow the bars and hunt for easy water under the reefs; but nights like this they bull right up the channel against the whole river.

We could hear her pounding along, but we didn't see her good till she was close. She aimed right for us. Often they do that and try to see how close they can come without touching; sometimes the wheel bites off a sweep, and then the pilot sticks his head out and laughs, and thinks he's mighty smart. Well, here she comes, and we said she was going to try and shave us; but she didn't seem to be sheering off a bit. She was a big one, and she was coming in a hurry, too, looking like a black cloud with rows of glow-worms around it; but all of a sudden she bulged out, big and scary, with a long row of wide-open furnace doors shining like red-hot teeth, and her monstrous bows and guards hanging right over us.

There was a yell at us, and a jingling of bells to stop the engines, a powwow of cussing, and whistling of steam—and as went overboard on one side and I on the other, she come smashing straight through the raft. I dived—and I aimed to find the bottom, too, for a thirty-foot wheel had got to go over me, and I wanted it to have plenty of room. I could always stay under water a minute; this time I reckon I stayed under a minute and a half. Then I bounced for the top in a hurry, for I was nearly busting. I popped out to my armpits and blowed the water out of my nose, and puffed a bit. Of course there was a booming current; and of course that boat started her engines again seconds after she stopped them, for they never cared much for raftsmen; so now she was churning along up the river, out of sight in the thick weather, though I could hear her.