

Chapter 23

In Chapter 23, the journey is interrupted as the river becomes too choppy for travel, leading the King to claim he would get sick from the rough sea. While he and the Duke relax, Huck and Jim catch fish, observing the men's odd conversation devoid of substance. Huck humorously notes the men's talk reminds him of preachers. The Duke expresses a desire for liquor, suggesting that when they reach the next town, they should indulge. They discuss their plan to sell Jim, who is suggested to be sold by the King and made to escape to the other side of a town that straddles the Missouri and Illinois border.

As they walk towards the town, Jim struggles with a limp from previous beatings as the Duke scolds him about his gait. They soon arrive at the outskirts where enslaved individuals dig potatoes under watch. Jim's perspective fluctuates between numbness and sorrow regarding their situation, even as he acknowledges it could change slightly, dependent on who he might end up with if sold.

Waiting outside a tavern, the Duke instructs Huck and Jim to stay put while he and the King enter for drinks. Huck expresses concern about their vulnerability. Eventually, a drunken man emerges, and Huck cleverly asks for directions to the Mississippi. The man confirms the river's direction but his drunken rambling renders little clarity, leading to some humorous exchanges between Huck and Jim about the river, catfish, and the man's incoherent assistance.

After the man falls asleep, Huck and Jim strategize about their next moves. Huck considers that running back to the raft might be their best option despite the long distance. Jim reflects on his pain and acknowledges he has the ability to run, but true escape requires a plan. The chapter concludes with Jim contemplating the importance of freedom not just for himself but for his family, emphasizing a deeper emotional toll as he wrestles with the harsh reality of slavery and his longing for freedom .