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opening extract from

Huckleberry Finn

written by

Mark Twain

– retold by Anna Kirwan

published by

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HUCKLEBERRY FINN

If you read *Tom Sawyer*, you'll remember Huckleberry Finn. Huck saved the Widow Douglas' life and she gave him a home. Tom and Huck found robbers' gold and became rich. But Huck wasn't used to living in a house and always wearing shoes, doing lessons, praying, not swearing. When he couldn't stand it any more, he escaped and felt free and satisfied. He got a dollar a day allowance – he didn't want more. Tom found him, though, and talked him back into being civilised. Huck said he'd try respectability again.

The widow's sister moved in. Miss Watson had slaves and was forever telling Huck what to do. She warned him about hell until Huck wished he could be there instead of listening to her. The widow's ideas of goodness seemed less mean-spirited. Huck reckoned he'd go with the widow's way – if that was possible, him being so ignorant, ornery and low-down.

Huck's Pap had been missing more than a year. Huck didn't want to see him, 'cos he used to beat Huck. Maybe he'd drowned – but Huckleberry judged he'd turn up.

Tom invented games out of books he read, about genies, robbers, and kings. It made Huck want to learn to read. He thought Tom stretched the truth, but he did it nice as pie. Huck went to school now. He could read, write, and spell some, was up to six times seven is thirty-five. The widow said he was coming along – she wasn't ashamed of him.

But then three things happened that Huck saw meant bad luck. He accidentally killed a spider. He spilled salt, and Miss Watson kept him from throwing any over his left shoulder. Then, worst of all, he saw his Pap's footprints, with the cross on the heel, so devils wouldn't follow.

Huck ran to Judge Thatcher's, fast as he could. 'Please, take all my money,' he begged the Judge. 'I want to give it to you.'

'Is something the matter?' the Judge asked.

'Don't ask me nothing,' Huck said, 'then I won't have to tell no lies.'

'I think I see.' Judge Thatcher knew something was up. 'You want to sell me control of all your property.' He wrote a contract and paid Huck a dollar to settle it. He estimated Huck would explain presently.

Huck sought out Jim, one of Miss Watson's slaves. Jim had children of his own, and was always friendly to Huck. Jim knew about fortune-telling and other magic. Huck asked what Pap was up to, now he was back. Jim told him, 'Yo' ole father doan' know yit what he's a-gwyne to do.' Jim saw good luck and bad competing around Huck.

Huck walked home to the widow's house. He crept into his room. There sat Pap. Huck was scared of him.

'Starchy clothes,' growled Pap. 'Think you're better'n me?'

'Maybe I ain't,' Huck said.

‘I’ll learn this widow to meddle! You drop that school! Puttin’ on airs! Your mother couldn’t read or write, none of the family couldn’t. I can’t! I won’t stand it! Say, lemme hear you read!’ Huck read about George Washington. Pap listened a minute, then knocked the book away. ‘You’re rich. Heard about it downriver. That’s why I come. Git me that money.’

‘I hain’t got money, ask Judge Thatcher.’

‘How about in your pocket?’ Pap took Huck’s only dollar and went to buy whisky.

Next day, Pap went to the Judge, but couldn’t get the money. Judge Thatcher and the widow tried to get the court to declare one of them Huck’s guardian, but a judge who didn’t know Pap Finn said courts mustn’t separate families. That pleased Pap. He told Huck he’d cowhide him black-and-blue unless he got money. Huck borrowed three dollars from Judge Thatcher. Pap took it and got drunk.

Huck didn't quit school. Pap thrashed him a few times and Huck still wouldn't give in. Pap demanded money, got drunk, got jailed, got out, thrashed Huck, demanded money. The widow told Pap to leave. Pap said he was Huck's boss, and forced Huck to live with him in an old timber cabin.

They hunted and fished, and hardly washed. Huck enjoyed that, but Pap got drunk all the time, and thrashed Huck often. Huck couldn't leave, though. Whenever Pap went to town, he locked Huck in; at night, Pap slept with the key under his head.

The widow sent a man to find Huck, but Pap's gun drove him off. Once Pap got so drunk in town, he forgot his son for three days – Huck was locked in without food. One night, Pap was so drunk he was seeing visions. He almost killed Huck with the shotgun he was aiming at his 'devils'.

Next time Pap left, Huck used an old saw-blade to cut an escape route through the logs at the cabin's far end. Pap never noticed Huck's planned escape-route.