



## T H E D U K E a n d t h e D a u p h i n

TWO OR THREE DAYS AND NIGHTS PASSED; ACTUALLY THEY MOVED along quiet and smooth and lovely. The river was very wide; sometimes a mile and a half wide. We traveled at night and hid during the day. When we saw the first signs of early morning, we would tie the raft to shore and cover it with branches. Then we would fish and have a swim in the river to cool ourselves. We would sit in the part of the river where the water was not deep and watch the sun rise. Not a sound anywhere—perfectly still—just like the whole world was asleep, though sometimes we heard the call of a single bird.

The first thing that we saw in the pale light of morning, looking far across the water, was a kind of dull line. It was the trees on the other side. We could see nothing else. Then a pale space appeared in the sky; then more paleness spreading out from the first. Then the river seemed to soften, turning from black to gray. We could see little dark spots moving on the water very far away—boats—and long black streaks—rafts. Then a gentle wind would blow, cooling us. The air smelled sweet because of the flowers and trees.

The day was bright now. A little smoke would not be noticed, so we built a fire and cooked some fish and other food for breakfast. Afterwards, we sat and watched the loneliness of the river until we were asleep.

As soon as it was dark, we would push the raft out into the river again. Sometimes we would be the only people on the river for hours and hours. It was lovely to live on a raft. The sky above us was filled with stars. We lay on our backs and looked at the stars and discussed whether they were made or just happened. Jim said that they were made, but I said that they just happened. It would have taken a long time to make so many stars. Jim said that the moon could have laid them. That seemed reasonable to me when I thought about all the eggs that birds have laid. We watched falling stars, too, and Jim said that they were stars that were spoiled and were thrown out of the nest.

Once or twice during the night, a large boat would pass us in the dark. After a while, the waves made by the large boat would reach our raft and shake it a little; then all would be quiet again.

After midnight the people who lived in the houses on the shore went to bed. Then for two or three hours the shore was black—no lights in the house windows. The lights in the windows acted as our clock—the first light that appeared again meant that morning was coming, so we needed to find a place to hide the raft immediately.

One morning after sunrise, I found a canoe and went a mile up a stream that flowed into the river. I was searching for fruit for Jim and me. Suddenly, two men came running and shouting to me to save their lives. They said that men with dogs were running after them. They jumped into the canoe with me, and soon I was rowing as quickly as I could toward our raft hidden on the river.

One of the men had gray hair and appeared to be nearly 70 years old. He wore an old town hat, a dirty blue wool shirt, and torn blue trousers stuffed into his boots.

The other man was much younger—about 30. He was dressed in dirty old clothes, too. After Jim and I fed the two men their breakfasts, we realized that they didn't know each other.

“What were you doing that caused you to be in trouble?” the older man asked.

“I was selling a substance for cleaning teeth—and it did clean them, but it ruined them too. I stayed in that town one night longer than I should. I was leaving when I met you. You said that men with dogs were running after you. Since I was expecting trouble also, I decided to run with you. And what caused your trouble?”

“I was giving talks on the evils of drinking whiskey and was earning as much as five or six dollars each night. Women, especially, enjoyed what I had to say. Then, somehow, it was discovered that I often drink whiskey myself. I learned this morning that people were quietly gathering with their dogs and planning to run me out of town.”

“Old man,” said the young one, “would you care to become part of a team with me?”

“I might. What do you do?”

“I’ve worked at a variety of jobs—printing, teaching music, giving speeches—but what I enjoy most is acting in the theater. I like to think of myself as an **actor**. What kind of work do you do?”

“I give a lot of speeches in churches—I talk about religion and the evils of drinking whiskey. I also attempt to cure diseases. I’m not a real doctor, but I heal the sick by laying my hands on them.”

No one said anything for a while. Then the younger man sighed a long, sad sigh.

“Why are you sighing?”

“To think that I should now be in such shameful company.” And he wiped a tear from his eye with a dirty piece of cloth.

“What’s wrong with us? Why would you want better company than we are?” asked the older man.

“I don’t blame you gentlemen. I brought myself down to this low state.”

“Brought yourself down from where? Where were you brought down from?”

“You won’t believe me. No one wants to believe me. I’ll reveal to you my true name because I have confidence in you. I’m the **Duke** of Bridgewater. My great-grandfather, the oldest son of the Duke of

Bridgewater, came to America to breathe the pure air of freedom. He married, had a son, and died—at the same time that his father died back in England. I'm directly related to that baby boy. I'm the real Duke of Bridgewater, though someone else now holds that title. Here I am, hated by the world, hunted by men with dogs, shamed into living on a raft with such low company.” And he began to cry.

Jim and I pitied him. We tried to comfort him, but he said that the only thing that would make him feel better was if we would recognize him as a duke. We said that we would be happy to do this, if he would tell us how to act.

“You must bow when you speak to me and call me ‘Your Grace’ or ‘My Lord’ or simply ‘Bridgewater.’ One of you must serve me my meals and do any jobs that I need done.”

Throughout dinner, Jim stood and served Bridgewater his food. “Will Your Grace like some fish? Will My Lord like some corn bread?” Bridgewater seemed very pleased with this attention.

I noticed that the old man was not pleased. He was very quiet and didn't seem happy with all the attention being shown to Bridgewater. That afternoon he said, “I'm sorry about your troubles, Bridgewater, but you're not the only person with troubles of that kind. No, you aren't the only person who has fallen from a high position.”

“What do you mean?”

“You're not the only person who has a secret—who is of noble birth. Can I trust you?”

“To the bitter death!” He took the old man's hand in his and said, “That secret of yours—speak!”

“Bridgewater, I'm the Dauphin.”

Jim and I stared.

The duke said, “You're who?”

“Yes, my friend, it's true. Your eyes are looking this very moment at the long lost Dauphin, Louis the Seventeenth, son of Louis the Sixteenth and Marie Antoinette.”

“But you're too old to be the Dauphin.”

“Trouble has aged me. Trouble has caused my gray hairs. This

unhappy person that you see before you in these dirty old clothes is the rightful King of France.”

He cried and looked so unhappy that Jim and I decided that the only way we could make *him* feel good was to tell him how happy and proud we were that he was with us. We told him that we would gladly treat him in the same manner that we were treating the duke. He thanked us and said that there was not much we could do to help him feel happy. However, he said that it often made him feel better if people treated him like a king, if they got down on one knee whenever they spoke to him and always called him “Your Majesty,” and if they served him first at meals, and always remained standing until he told them that they could sit.

Jim and I thought that we could manage that, and always said “Your Majesty” when we spoke to him, and always remained standing until he told us to sit down. This made him feel much happier, but we soon noticed that the duke was looking unhappy and not the least bit pleased with the way we were treating the old man.

When the old man noticed the change in the duke, he said, “We’ll be together on this raft for a long time, and we can’t be unpleasant and unfriendly to each other. That would only make us all feel uncomfortable. It’s not my fault that I wasn’t born a duke and it’s not your fault that you weren’t born a king. We’ll have to make the best of this situation. Give me your hand and let’s be friends.”

The duke shook the old man’s hand. Jim and I were happy to see that they were friends again. We couldn’t permit any unfriendliness or uncomfortableness on the raft. What’s needed on a raft, more than anything else, is for everyone to be satisfied and to feel kindly toward the others.

I knew from the beginning that these men were not kings or dukes, but just liars. I never said anything, never let them know, but kept this information to myself. I didn’t want to have quarrels on the raft, didn’t want to have trouble. If they wanted Jim and me to call them king and duke, I wouldn’t object. What I wanted was to keep peace in the family. I learned one thing from Pap and that was the best way to get along with this kind of people is to let them have their own way.