

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
by
Mark Twain

Chapter 13

WELL, I caught my breath and most fainted. Shut up on a wreck with such a gang as that! But it warn't no time to be sentimentering. We'd GOT to find that boat now – had to have it for ourselves. So we went a-quaking and shaking down the stabboard side, and slow work it was, too – seemed a week before we got to the stern. No sign of a boat. Jim said he didn't believe he could go any further – so scared he hadn't hardly any strength left, he said. But I said, come on, if we get left on this wreck we are in a fix, sure. So on we prowled again. We struck for the stern of the texas, and found it, and then scrabbled along forwards on the skylight, hanging on from shutter to shutter, for the edge of the skylight was in the water. When we got pretty close to the cross-hall door there was the skiff, sure enough! I could just barely see her. I felt ever so thankful. In another second I would a been aboard of her, but just then the door opened. One of the men stuck his head out only about a couple of foot from me, and I thought I was gone; but he jerked it in again, and says:

“Heave that blame lantern out o' sight, Bill!”

He flung a bag of something into the boat, and then got in himself and set down. It was Packard. Then Bill HE come out and got in. Packard says, in a low voice:

“All ready – shove off!”

I couldn't hardly hang on to the shutters, I was so weak. But Bill says:

“Hold on – 'd you go through him?”

“No. Didn't you?”

“No. So he's got his share o' the cash yet.”

“Well, then, come along; no use to take truck and leave money.”

“Say, won’t he suspicion what we’re up to?”

“Maybe he won’t. But we got to have it anyway. Come along.”

So they got out and went in.

The door slammed to because it was on the careened side; and in a half second I was in the boat, and Jim come tumbling after me. I out with my knife and cut the rope, and away we went!

We didn’t touch an oar, and we didn’t speak nor whisper, nor hardly even breathe. We went gliding swift along, dead silent, past the tip of the paddlebox, and past the stern; then in a second or two more we was a hundred yards below the wreck, and the darkness soaked her up, every last sign of her, and we was safe, and knowed it.

When we was three or four hundred yards downstream we see the lantern show like a little spark at the texas door for a second, and we knowed by that that the rascals had missed their boat, and was beginning to understand that they was in just as much trouble now as Jim Turner was.

Then Jim manned the oars, and we took out after our raft. Now was the first time that I begun to worry about the men – I reckon I hadn’t had time to before. I begun to think how dreadful it was, even for murderers, to be in such a fix. I says to myself, there ain’t no telling but I might come to be a murderer myself yet, and then how would I like it? So says I to Jim:

“The first light we see we’ll land a hundred yards below it or above it, in a place where it’s a good hiding-place for you and the skiff, and then I’ll go and fix up some kind of a yarn, and get somebody to go for that gang and get them out of their scrape, so they can be hung when their time comes.”

But that idea was a failure; for pretty soon it begun to storm again, and this time worse than ever. The rain poured down, and never a light showed; everybody in bed, I reckon. We boomed along down the river,

watching for lights and watching for our raft. After a long time the rain let up, but the clouds stayed, and the lightning kept whimpering, and by and by a flash showed us a black thing ahead, floating, and we made for it.

It was the raft, and mighty glad was we to get aboard of it again. We seen a light now away down to the right, on shore. So I said I would go for it. The skiff was half full of plunder which that gang had stole there on the wreck. We hustled it on to the raft in a pile, and I told Jim to float along down, and show a light when he judged he had gone about two mile, and keep it burning till I come; then I manned my oars and shoved for the light. As I got down towards it three or four more showed – up on a hillside. It was a village. I closed in above the shore light, and laid on my oars and floated. As I went by I see it was a lantern hanging on the jackstaff of a double-hull ferryboat. I skimmed around for the watchman, awondering whereabouts he slept; and by and by I found him roosting on the bitts forward, with his head down between his knees. I gave his shoulder two or three little shoves, and begun to cry.

He stirred up in a kind of a startlish way; but when he see it was only me he took a good gap and stretch, and then he says:

“Hello, what’s up? Don’t cry, bub. What’s the trouble?”

I says:

“Pap, and mam, and sis, and –”

Then I broke down. He says:

“Oh, dang it now, DON’T take on so; we all has to have our troubles, and this ‘n ‘ll come out all right. What’s the matter with ‘em?”

“They’re – they’re – are you the watchman of the boat?”

“Yes,” he says, kind of pretty-well-satisfied like. “I’m the captain and the owner and the mate and the pilot and watchman and head deck-hand; and sometimes I’m the freight and passengers. I ain’t as rich as old Jim Hornback, and I can’t be so blame’ generous and good to Tom, Dick, and Harry as what he is, and slam around money the way he does; but

I've told him a many a time 't I wouldn't trade places with him; for, says I, a sailor's life's the life for me, and I'm derved if I'D live two mile out o' town, where there ain't nothing ever goin' on, not for all his spondulicks and as much more on top of it. Says I –"

I broke in and says:

"They're in an awful peck of trouble, and –"

"WHO is?"

"Why, pap and mam and sis and Miss Hooker; and if you'd take your ferryboat and go up there –"

"Up where? Where are they?"

"On the wreck."

"What wreck?"

"Why, there ain't but one."

"What, you don't mean the Walter Scott?"

"Yes."

"Good land! what are they doin' THERE, for gracious sakes?"

"Well, they didn't go there a-purpose."

"I bet they didn't! Why, great goodness, there ain't no chance for 'em if they don't git off mighty quick! Why, how in the nation did they ever git into such a scrape?"

"Easy enough. Miss Hooker was a-visiting up there to the town –"

"Yes, Booth's Landing – go on."

"She was a-visiting there at Booth's Landing, and just in the edge of the evening she started over with her nigger woman in the horse-ferry to

stay all night at her friend's house, Miss What-you-may-call-her I disremember her name – and they lost their steeringoar, and swung around and went a-floating down, stern first, about two mile, and saddle-baggsed on the wreck, and the ferryman and the nigger woman and the horses was all lost, but Miss Hooker she made a grab and got aboard the wreck. Well, about an hour after dark we come along down in our trading-scow, and it was so dark we didn't notice the wreck till we was right on it; and so WE saddle-baggsed; but all of us was saved but Bill Whipple – and oh, he WAS the best cretur ! – I most wish 't it had been me, I do."

"My George! It's the beatenest thing I ever struck. And THEN what did you all do?"

"Well, we hollered and took on, but it's so wide there we couldn't make nobody hear. So pap said somebody got to get ashore and get help somehow. I was the only one that could swim, so I made a dash for it, and Miss Hooker she said if I didn't strike help sooner, come here and hunt up her uncle, and he'd fix the thing. I made the land about a mile below, and been fooling along ever since, trying to get people to do something, but they said, 'What, in such a night and such a current? There ain't no sense in it; go for the steam ferry.' Now if you'll go and _"

"By Jackson, I'd LIKE to, and, blame it, I don't know but I will; but who in the dingnation's a-going' to PAY for it? Do you reckon your pap _"

"Why THAT'S all right. Miss Hooker she tole me, PARTICULAR, that her uncle Hornback _"

"Great guns! is HE her uncle? Looky here, you break for that light over yonder-way, and turn out west when you git there, and about a quarter of a mile out you'll come to the tavern; tell 'em to dart you out to Jim Hornback's, and he'll foot the bill. And don't you fool around any, because he'll want to know the news. Tell him I'll have his niece all safe before he can get to town. Hump yourself, now; I'm agoing up around the corner here to roust out my engineer."

I struck for the light, but as soon as he turned the corner I went back and

got into my skiff and bailed her out, and then pulled up shore in the easy water about six hundred yards, and tucked myself in among some woodboats; for I couldn't rest easy till I could see the ferryboat start. But take it all around, I was feeling ruther comfortable on accounts of taking all this trouble for that gang, for not many would a done it. I wished the widow knowed about it. I judged she would be proud of me for helping these rascallions, because rascallions and dead beats is the kind the widow and good people takes the most interest in.

Well, before long here comes the wreck, dim and dusky, sliding along down! A kind of cold shiver went through me, and then I struck out for her. She was very deep, and I see in a minute there warn't much chance for anybody being alive in her. I pulled all around her and hollered a little, but there wasn't any answer; all dead still. I felt a little bit heavy-hearted about the gang, but not much, for I reckoned if they could stand it I could.

Then here comes the ferryboat; so I shoved for the middle of the river on a long down-stream slant; and when I judged I was out of eye-reach I laid on my oars, and looked back and see her go and smell around the wreck for Miss Hooker's remainders, because the captain would know her uncle Hornback would want them; and then pretty soon the ferryboat give it up and went for the shore, and I laid into my work and went a-booming down the river.

It did seem a powerful long time before Jim's light showed up; and when it did show it looked like it was a thousand mile off. By the time I got there the sky was beginning to get a little gray in the east; so we struck for an island, and hid the raft, and sunk the skiff, and turned in and slept like dead people.