

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
by
Mark Twain

Chapter 41

THE doctor was an old man; a very nice, kind-looking old man when I got him up. I told him me and my brother was over on Spanish Island hunting yesterday afternoon, and camped on a piece of a raft we found, and about midnight he must a kicked his gun in his dreams, for it went off and shot him in the leg, and we wanted him to go over there and fix it and not say nothing about it, nor let anybody know, because we wanted to come home this evening and surprise the folks.

“Who is your folks?” he says.

“The Phelpses, down yonder.”

“Oh,” he says. And after a minute, he says:

“How’d you say he got shot?”

“He had a dream,” I says, “and it shot him.”

“Singular dream,” he says.

So he lit up his lantern, and got his saddle-bags, and we started. But when he sees the canoe he didn’t like the look of her – said she was big enough for one, but didn’t look pretty safe for two. I says:

“Oh, you needn’t be afeard, sir, she carried the three of us easy enough.”

“What three?”

“Why, me and Sid, and – and – and THE GUNS; that’s what I mean.”

“Oh,” he says.

But he put his foot on the gunnel and rocked her, and shook his head,

and said he reckoned he'd look around for a bigger one. But they was all locked and chained; so he took my canoe, and said for me to wait till he come back, or I could hunt around further, or maybe I better go down home and get them ready for the surprise if I wanted to. But I said I didn't; so I told him just how to find the raft, and then he started.

I struck an idea pretty soon. I says to myself, spos'n he can't fix that leg just in three shakes of a sheep's tail, as the saying is? spos'n it takes him three or four days? What are we going to do? – lay around there till he lets the cat out of the bag? No, sir; I know what I'LL do. I'll wait, and when he comes back if he says he's got to go any more I'll get down there, too, if I swim; and we'll take and tie him, and keep him, and shove out down the river; and when Tom's done with him we'll give him what it's worth, or all we got, and then let him get ashore.

So then I crept into a lumber-pile to get some sleep; and next time I waked up the sun was away up over my head! I shot out and went for the doctor's house, but they told me he'd gone away in the night some time or other, and warn't back yet. Well, thinks I, that looks powerful bad for Tom, and I'll dig out for the island right off. So away I shoved, and turned the corner, and nearly ramm'd my head into Uncle Silas's stomach! He says:

“Why, TOM! Where you been all this time, you rascal?”

“I hain't been nowheres,” I says, “only just hunting for the runaway nigger – me and Sid.”

“Why, where ever did you go?” he says. “Your aunt's been mighty uneasy.”

“She needn't,” I says, “because we was all right. We followed the men and the dogs, but they outrun us, and we lost them; but we thought we heard them on the water, so we got a canoe and took out after them and crossed over, but couldn't find nothing of them; so we cruised along up-shore till we got kind of tired and beat out; and tied up the canoe and went to sleep, and never waked up till about an hour ago; then we paddled over here to hear the news, and Sid's at the post-office to see what he can hear, and I'm a-branching out to get something to eat for us, and then we're going home.”

So then we went to the post-office to get "Sid"; but just as I suspicioned, he warn't there; so the old man he got a letter out of the office, and we waited awhile longer, but Sid didn't come; so the old man said, come along, let Sid foot it home, or canoe it, when he got done fooling around – but we would ride. I couldn't get him to let me stay and wait for Sid; and he said there warn't no use in it, and I must come along, and let Aunt Sally see we was all right.

When we got home Aunt Sally was that glad to see me she laughed and cried both, and hugged me, and give me one of them lickings of hern that don't amount to shucks, and said she'd serve Sid the same when he come.

And the place was plum full of farmers and farmers' wives, to dinner; and such another clack a body never heard. Old Mrs. Hotchkiss was the worst; her tongue was a-going all the time. She says:

"Well, Sister Phelps, I've ransacked that-air cabin over, an' I b'lieve the nigger was crazy. I says to Sister Damrell – didn't I, Sister Damrell? – s'I, he's crazy, s'I – them's the very words I said. You all hearn me: he's crazy, s'I; everything shows it, s'I. Look at that-air grindstone, s'I; want to tell ME't any cretur 't's in his right mind 's a goin' to scrabble all them crazy things onto a grindstone, s'I? Here sich 'n' sich a person busted his heart; 'n' here so 'n' so pegged along for thirty-seven year, 'n' all that – natcherl son o' Louis somebody, 'n' sich everlast'n rubbage. He's plumb crazy, s'I; it's what I says in the fust place, it's what I says in the middle, 'n' it's what I says last 'n' all the time – the nigger's crazy – crazy 's Nebokoodneezer, s'I."

"An' look at that-air ladder made out'n rags, Sister Hotchkiss," says old Mrs. Damrell; "what in the name o' goodness COULD he ever want of –"

"The very words I was a-sayin' no longer ago th'n this minute to Sister Utterback, 'n' she'll tell you so herself. Sh-she, look at that-air rag ladder, sh-she; 'n' s'I, yes, LOOK at it, s'I – what COULD he a-wanted of it, s'I. Sh-she, Sister Hotchkiss, sh-she –"

"But how in the nation'd they ever GIT that grindstone IN there, ANYWAY? 'n' who dug that-air HOLE? 'n' who –"

“My very WORDS, Brer Penrod! I was a-sayin’ – pass that-air sasser o’ m’lasses, won’t ye? – I was a-sayin’ to Sister Dunlap, jist this minute, how DID they git that grindstone in there, s’I. Without HELP, mind you – ‘thout HELP! THAT’S wher ‘tis. Don’t tell ME, s’I; there WUZ help, s’I; ‘n’ ther’ wuz a PLENTY help, too, s’I; ther’s ben a DOZEN a-helpin’ that nigger, ‘n’ I lay I’d skin every last nigger on this place but I’D find out who done it, s’I; ‘n’ moreover, s’I –”

“A DOZEN says you! – FORTY couldn’t a done every thing that’s been done. Look at them case-knife saws and things, how tedious they’ve been made; look at that bed-leg sawed off with ‘m, a week’s work for six men; look at that nigger made out’n straw on the bed; and look at –”

“You may WELL say it, Brer Hightower! It’s jist as I was a-sayin’ to Brer Phelps, his own self. S’e, what do YOU think of it, Sister Hotchkiss, s’e? Think o’ what, Brer Phelps, s’I? Think o’ that bed-leg sawed off that a way, s’e? THINK of it, s’I? I lay it never sawed ITSELF off, s’I – somebody SAWED it, s’I; that’s my opinion, take it or leave it, it mayn’t be no ‘count, s’I, but sich as ‘t is, it’s my opinion, s’I, ‘n’ if any body k’n start a better one, s’I, let him DO it, s’I, that’s all. I says to Sister Dunlap, s’I –”

“Why, dog my cats, they must a ben a house-full o’ niggers in there every night for four weeks to a done all that work, Sister Phelps. Look at that shirt – every last inch of it kivered over with secret African writ’n done with blood! Must a ben a raft uv ‘m at it right along, all the time, amost. Why, I’d give two dollars to have it read to me; ‘n’ as for the niggers that wrote it, I ‘low I’d take ‘n’ lash ‘m t’ll –”

“People to HELP him, Brother Marples! Well, I reckon you’d THINK so if you’d a been in this house for a while back. Why, they’ve stole everything they could lay their hands on – and we a-watching all the time, mind you. They stole that shirt right off o’ the line! and as for that sheet they made the rag ladder out of, ther’ ain’t no telling how many times they DIDN’T steal that; and flour, and candles, and candlesticks, and spoons, and the old warming-pan, and most a thousand things that I disremember now, and my new calico dress; and me and Silas and my Sid and Tom on the constant watch day AND night, as I was a-telling you, and not a one of us could catch hide nor hair nor sight nor sound of them; and here at the last minute, lo and behold you, they slides right in

under our noses and fools us, and not only fools US but the Injun Territory robbers too, and actuly gets AWAY with that nigger safe and sound, and that with sixteen men and twentytwo dogs right on their very heels at that very time! I tell you, it just bangs anything I ever HEARD of. Why, SPERITS couldn't a done better and been no smarter. And I reckon they must a BEEN sperits – because, YOU know our dogs, and ther' ain't no better; well, them dogs never even got on the TRACK of 'm once! You explain THAT to me if you can! – ANY of you!”

“Well, it does beat –”

“Laws alive, I never –”

“So help me, I wouldn't a be –”

“HOUSE-thieves as well as –”

“Goodnessgracioussakes, I'd a ben afeard to live in sich a –”

”Fraid to LIVE! – why, I was that scared I dasn't hardly go to bed, or get up, or lay down, or SET down, Sister Ridgeway. Why, they'd steal the very – why, goodness sakes, you can guess what kind of a fluster I was in by the time midnight come last night. I hope to gracious if I warn't afraid they'd steal some o' the family! I was just to that pass I didn't have no reasoning faculties no more. It looks foolish enough NOW, in the daytime; but I says to myself, there's my two poor boys asleep, 'way up stairs in that lonesome room, and I declare to goodness I was that uneasy 't I crep' up there and locked 'em in! I DID. And anybody would. Because, you know, when you get scared that way, and it keeps running on, and getting worse and worse all the time, and your wits gets to addling, and you get to doing all sorts o' wild things, and by and by you think to yourself, spos'n I was a boy, and was away up there, and the door ain't locked, and you –” She stopped, looking kind of wondering, and then she turned her head around slow, and when her eye lit on me – I got up and took a walk.

Says I to myself, I can explain better how we come to not be in that room this morning if I go out to one side and study over it a little. So I done it. But I dasn't go fur, or she'd a sent for me. And when it was late in the day the people all went, and then I come in and told her the noise

and shooting waked up me and “Sid,” and the door was locked, and we wanted to see the fun, so we went down the lightningrod, and both of us got hurt a little, and we didn’t never want to try THAT no more. And then I went on and told her all what I told Uncle Silas before; and then she said she’d forgive us, and maybe it was all right enough anyway, and about what a body might expect of boys, for all boys was a pretty harum-scarum lot as fur as she could see; and so, as long as no harm hadn’t come of it, she judged she better put in her time being grateful we was alive and well and she had us still, stead of fretting over what was past and done. So then she kissed me, and patted me on the head, and dropped into a kind of a brown study; and pretty soon jumps up, and says:

“Why, lawsamercy, it’s most night, and Sid not come yet! What HAS become of that boy?”

I see my chance; so I skips up and says:

“I’ll run right up to town and get him,” I says.

“No you won’t,” she says. “You’ll stay right wher’ you are; ONE’S enough to be lost at a time. If he ain’t here to supper, your uncle ‘ll go.”

Well, he warn’t there to supper; so right after supper uncle went.

He come back about ten a little bit uneasy; hadn’t run across Tom’s track. Aunt Sally was a good DEAL uneasy; but Uncle Silas he said there warn’t no occasion to be – boys will be boys, he said, and you’ll see this one turn up in the morning all sound and right. So she had to be satisfied. But she said she’d set up for him a while anyway, and keep a light burning so he could see it.

And then when I went up to bed she come up with me and fetched her candle, and tucked me in, and mothered me so good I felt mean, and like I couldn’t look her in the face; and she set down on the bed and talked with me a long time, and said what a splendid boy Sid was, and didn’t seem to want to ever stop talking about him; and kept asking me every now and then if I reckoned he could a got lost, or hurt, or maybe drowned, and might be laying at this minute somewheres suffering or dead, and she not by him to help him, and so the tears would drip down

silent, and I would tell her that Sid was all right, and would be home in the morning, sure; and she would squeeze my hand, or maybe kiss me, and tell me to say it again, and keep on saying it, because it done her good, and she was in so much trouble. And when she was going away she looked down in my eyes so steady and gentle, and says:

“The door ain’t going to be locked, Tom, and there’s the window and the rod; but you’ll be good, WON’T you? And you won’t go? For MY sake.”

Laws knows I WANTED to go bad enough to see about Tom, and was all intending to go; but after that I wouldn’t a went, not for kingdoms.

But she was on my mind and Tom was on my mind, so I slept very restless. And twice I went down the rod away in the night, and slipped around front, and see her setting there by her candle in the window with her eyes towards the road and the tears in them; and I wished I could do something for her, but I couldn’t, only to swear that I wouldn’t never do nothing to grieve her any more. And the third time I waked up at dawn, and slid down, and she was there yet, and her candle was most out, and her old gray head was resting on her hand, and she was asleep.