

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
by
Mark Twain

Chapter 42

THE old man was uptown again before breakfast, but couldn't get no track of Tom; and both of them set at the table thinking, and not saying nothing, and looking mournful, and their coffee getting cold, and not eating anything. And by and by the old man says:

“Did I give you the letter?”

“What letter?”

“The one I got yesterday out of the post-office.”

“No, you didn't give me no letter.”

“Well, I must a forgot it.”

So he rummaged his pockets, and then went off somewheres where he had laid it down, and fetched it, and give it to her. She says:

“Why, it's from St. Petersburg – it's from Sis.”

I allowed another walk would do me good; but I couldn't stir. But before she could break it open she dropped it and run – for she see something. And so did I. It was Tom Sawyer on a mattress; and that old doctor; and Jim, in HER calico dress, with his hands tied behind him; and a lot of people. I hid the letter behind the first thing that come handy, and rushed. She flung herself at Tom, crying, and says:

“Oh, he's dead, he's dead, I know he's dead!”

And Tom he turned his head a little, and muttered something or other, which showed he warn't in his right mind; then she flung up her hands, and says:

“He’s alive, thank God! And that’s enough!” and she snatched a kiss of him, and flew for the house to get the bed ready, and scattering orders right and left at the niggers and everybody else, as fast as her tongue could go, every jump of the way.

I followed the men to see what they was going to do with Jim; and the old doctor and Uncle Silas followed after Tom into the house. The men was very huffy, and some of them wanted to hang Jim for an example to all the other niggers around there, so they wouldn’t be trying to run away like Jim done, and making such a raft of trouble, and keeping a whole family scared most to death for days and nights. But the others said, don’t do it, it wouldn’t answer at all; he ain’t our nigger, and his owner would turn up and make us pay for him, sure. So that cooled them down a little, because the people that’s always the most anxious for to hang a nigger that hain’t done just right is always the very ones that ain’t the most anxious to pay for him when they’ve got their satisfaction out of him.

They cussed Jim considerble, though, and give him a cuff or two side the head once in a while, but Jim never said nothing, and he never let on to know me, and they took him to the same cabin, and put his own clothes on him, and chained him again, and not to no bed-leg this time, but to a big staple drove into the bottom log, and chained his hands, too, and both legs, and said he warn’t to have nothing but bread and water to eat after this till his owner come, or he was sold at auction because he didn’t come in a certain length of time, and filled up our hole, and said a couple of farmers with guns must stand watch around about the cabin every night, and a bulldog tied to the door in the daytime; and about this time they was through with the job and was tapering off with a kind of generl good-bye cussing, and then the old doctor comes and takes a look, and says:

“Don’t be no rougher on him than you’re obleeged to, because he ain’t a bad nigger. When I got to where I found the boy I see I couldn’t cut the bullet out without some help, and he warn’t in no condition for me to leave to go and get help; and he got a little worse and a little worse, and after a long time he went out of his head, and wouldn’t let me come a-nigh him any more, and said if I chalked his raft he’d kill me, and no end of wild foolishness like that, and I see I couldn’t do anything at all with him; so I says, I got to have HELP somehow; and the minute I says it out

crawls this nigger from somewheres and says he'll help, and he done it, too, and done it very well. Of course I judged he must be a runaway nigger, and there I WAS! and there I had to stick right straight along all the rest of the day and all night. It was a fix, I tell you! I had a couple of patients with the chills, and of course I'd of liked to run up to town and see them, but I dasn't, because the nigger might get away, and then I'd be to blame; and yet never a skiff come close enough for me to hail. So there I had to stick plumb until daylight this morning; and I never see a nigger that was a better nuss or faithfuller, and yet he was risking his freedom to do it, and was all tired out, too, and I see plain enough he'd been worked main hard lately. I liked the nigger for that; I tell you, gentlemen, a nigger like that is worth a thousand dollars – and kind treatment, too. I had everything I needed, and the boy was doing as well there as he would a done at home – better, maybe, because it was so quiet; but there I WAS, with both of 'm on my hands, and there I had to stick till about dawn this morning; then some men in a skiff come by, and as good luck would have it the nigger was setting by the pallet with his head propped on his knees sound asleep; so I motioned them in quiet, and they slipped up on him and grabbed him and tied him before he knowed what he was about, and we never had no trouble. And the boy being in a kind of a flighty sleep, too, we muffled the oars and hitched the raft on, and towed her over very nice and quiet, and the nigger never made the least row nor said a word from the start. He ain't no bad nigger, gentlemen; that's what I think about him."

Somebody says:

"Well, it sounds very good, doctor, I'm obleeged to say."

Then the others softened up a little, too, and I was mighty thankful to that old doctor for doing Jim that good turn; and I was glad it was according to my judgment of him, too; because I thought he had a good heart in him and was a good man the first time I see him. Then they all agreed that Jim had acted very well, and was deserving to have some notice took of it, and reward. So every one of them promised, right out and hearty, that they wouldn't cuss him no more.

Then they come out and locked him up. I hoped they was going to say he could have one or two of the chains took off, because they was rotten heavy, or could have meat and greens with his bread and water; but they

didn't think of it, and I reckoned it warn't best for me to mix in, but I judged I'd get the doctor's yarn to Aunt Sally somehow or other as soon as I'd got through the breakers that was laying just ahead of me – explanations, I mean, of how I forgot to mention about Sid being shot when I was telling how him and me put in that dratted night paddling around hunting the runaway nigger.

But I had plenty time. Aunt Sally she stuck to the sick-room all day and all night, and every time I see Uncle Silas mooning around I dodged him.

Next morning I heard Tom was a good deal better, and they said Aunt Sally was gone to get a nap. So I slips to the sick-room, and if I found him awake I reckoned we could put up a yarn for the family that would wash. But he was sleeping, and sleeping very peaceful, too; and pale, not fire-faced the way he was when he come. So I set down and laid for him to wake. In about half an hour Aunt Sally comes gliding in, and there I was, up a stump again! She motioned me to be still, and set down by me, and begun to whisper, and said we could all be joyful now, because all the symptoms was first-rate, and he'd been sleeping like that for ever so long, and looking better and peacefuller all the time, and ten to one he'd wake up in his right mind.

So we set there watching, and by and by he stirs a bit, and opened his eyes very natural, and takes a look, and says:

“Hello! – why, I'm at HOME! How's that? Where's the raft?”

“It's all right,” I says.

“And JIM?”

“The same,” I says, but couldn't say it pretty brash. But he never noticed, but says:

“Good! Splendid! NOW we're all right and safe! Did you tell Aunty?”

I was going to say yes; but she chipped in and says: “About what, Sid?”

“Why, about the way the whole thing was done.”

“What whole thing?”

“Why, THE whole thing. There ain’t but one; how we set the runaway nigger free – me and Tom.”

“Good land! Set the run – What IS the child talking about! Dear, dear, out of his head again!”

“NO, I ain’t out of my HEAD; I know all what I’m talking about. We DID set him free – me and Tom. We laid out to do it, and we DONE it. And we done it elegant, too.” He’d got a start, and she never checked him up, just set and stared and stared, and let him clip along, and I see it warn’t no use for ME to put in. “Why, Aunty, it cost us a power of work – weeks of it – hours and hours, every night, whilst you was all asleep. And we had to steal candles, and the sheet, and the shirt, and your dress, and spoons, and tin plates, and case-knives, and the warming-pan, and the grindstone, and flour, and just no end of things, and you can’t think what work it was to make the saws, and pens, and inscriptions, and one thing or another, and you can’t think HALF the fun it was. And we had to make up the pictures of coffins and things, and nonnamous letters from the robbers, and get up and down the lightning-rod, and dig the hole into the cabin, and made the rope ladder and send it in cooked up in a pie, and send in spoons and things to work with in your apron pocket –”

“Mercy sakes!”

”– and load up the cabin with rats and snakes and so on, for company for Jim; and then you kept Tom here so long with the butter in his hat that you come near spiling the whole business, because the men come before we was out of the cabin, and we had to rush, and they heard us and let drive at us, and I got my share, and we dodged out of the path and let them go by, and when the dogs come they warn’t interested in us, but went for the most noise, and we got our canoe, and made for the raft, and was all safe, and Jim was a free man, and we done it all by ourselves, and WASN’T it bully, Aunty!”

“Well, I never heard the likes of it in all my born days! So it was YOU, you little rapsallions, that’s been making all this trouble, and turned everybody’s wits clean inside out and scared us all most to death. I’ve as

good a notion as ever I had in my life to take it out o' you this very minute. To think, here I've been, night after night, a – YOU just get well once, you young scamp, and I lay I'll tan the Old Harry out o' both o' ye!"

But Tom, he WAS so proud and joyful, he just COULDN'T hold in, and his tongue just WENT it – she a-chipping in, and spitting fire all along, and both of them going it at once, like a cat convention; and she says:

“WELL, you get all the enjoyment you can out of it NOW, for mind I tell you if I catch you meddling with him again –”

“Meddling with WHO?” Tom says, dropping his smile and looking surprised.

“With WHO? Why, the runaway nigger, of course. Who'd you reckon?”

Tom looks at me very grave, and says:

“Tom, didn't you just tell me he was all right? Hasn't he got away?”

“HIM?” says Aunt Sally; “the runaway nigger? ‘Deed he hasn't. They've got him back, safe and sound, and he's in that cabin again, on bread and water, and loaded down with chains, till he's claimed or sold!”

Tom rose square up in bed, with his eye hot, and his nostrils opening and shutting like gills, and sings out to me:

“They hain't no RIGHT to shut him up! SHOVE! – and don't you lose a minute. Turn him loose! he ain't no slave; he's as free as any cretur that walks this earth!”

“What DOES the child mean?”

“I mean every word I SAY, Aunt Sally, and if somebody don't go, I'LL go. I've knowed him all his life, and so has Tom, there. Old Miss Watson died two months ago, and she was ashamed she ever was going to sell him down the river, and SAID so; and she set him free in her will.”

“Then what on earth did YOU want to set him free for, seeing he was already free?”

“Well, that IS a question, I must say; and just like women! Why, I wanted the ADVENTURE of it; and I’d a waded neck-deep in blood to – goodness alive, AUNT POLLY!”

If she warn’t standing right there, just inside the door, looking as sweet and contented as an angel half full of pie, I wish I may never!

Aunt Sally jumped for her, and most hugged the head off of her, and cried over her, and I found a good enough place for me under the bed, for it was getting pretty sultry for us, seemed to me. And I peeped out, and in a little while Tom’s Aunt Polly shook herself loose and stood there looking across at Tom over her spectacles – kind of grinding him into the earth, you know. And then she says:

“Yes, you BETTER turn y’r head away – I would if I was you, Tom.”

“Oh, deary me!” says Aunt Sally; “IS he changed so? Why, that ain’t TOM, it’s Sid; Tom’s – Tom’s – why, where is Tom? He was here a minute ago.”

“You mean where’s Huck FINN – that’s what you mean! I reckon I hain’t raised such a scamp as my Tom all these years not to know him when I SEE him. That WOULD be a pretty howdy-do. Come out from under that bed, Huck Finn.”

So I done it. But not feeling brash.

Aunt Sally she was one of the mixed-upest-looking persons I ever see – except one, and that was Uncle Silas, when he come in and they told it all to him. It kind of made him drunk, as you may say, and he didn’t know nothing at all the rest of the day, and preached a prayer-meeting sermon that night that gave him a rattling reputation, because the oldest man in the world couldn’t a understood it. So Tom’s Aunt Polly, she told all about who I was, and what; and I had to up and tell how I was in such a tight place that when Mrs. Phelps took me for Tom Sawyer – she chipped in and says, “Oh, go on and call me Aunt Sally, I’m used to it now, and ‘tain’t no need to change” – that when Aunt Sally took me for

Tom Sawyer I had to stand it – there warn't no other way, and I knowed he wouldn't mind, because it would be nuts for him, being a mystery, and he'd make an adventure out of it, and be perfectly satisfied. And so it turned out, and he let on to be Sid, and made things as soft as he could for me.

And his Aunt Polly she said Tom was right about old Miss Watson setting Jim free in her will; and so, sure enough, Tom Sawyer had gone and took all that trouble and bother to set a free nigger free! and I couldn't ever understand before, until that minute and that talk, how he COULD help a body set a nigger free with his bringing-up.

Well, Aunt Polly she said that when Aunt Sally wrote to her that Tom and SID had come all right and safe, she says to herself:

“Look at that, now! I might have expected it, letting him go off that way without anybody to watch him. So now I got to go and trapse all the way down the river, eleven hundred mile, and find out what that creetur's up to THIS time, as long as I couldn't seem to get any answer out of you about it.”

“Why, I never heard nothing from you,” says Aunt Sally.

“Well, I wonder! Why, I wrote you twice to ask you what you could mean by Sid being here.”

“Well, I never got 'em, Sis.”

Aunt Polly she turns around slow and severe, and says:

“You, Tom!”

“Well – WHAT?” he says, kind of pettish.

“Don t you what ME, you impudent thing – hand out them letters.”

“What letters?”

“THEM letters. I be bound, if I have to take aholt of you I'll –”

“They’re in the trunk. There, now. And they’re just the same as they was when I got them out of the office. I hain’t looked into them, I hain’t touched them. But I knowed they’d make trouble, and I thought if you warn’t in no hurry, I’d –”

“Well, you DO need skinning, there ain’t no mistake about it. And I wrote another one to tell you I was coming; and I s’pose he –”

“No, it come yesterday; I hain’t read it yet, but IT’S all right, I’ve got that one.”

I wanted to offer to bet two dollars she hadn’t, but I reckoned maybe it was just as safe to not to. So I never said nothing.