

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn
by
Mark Twain

Chapter 28

BY and by it was getting-up time. So I come down the ladder and started for down-stairs; but as I come to the girls' room the door was open, and I see Mary Jane setting by her old hair trunk, which was open and she'd been packing things in it – getting ready to go to England. But she had stopped now with a folded gown in her lap, and had her face in her hands, crying. I felt awful bad to see it; of course anybody would. I went in there and says:

“Miss Mary Jane, you can't a-bear to see people in trouble, and I can't – most always. Tell me about it.”

So she done it. And it was the niggers – I just expected it. She said the beautiful trip to England was most about spoiled for her; she didn't know HOW she was ever going to be happy there, knowing the mother and the children warn't ever going to see each other no more – and then busted out bitterer than ever, and flung up her hands, and says:

“Oh, dear, dear, to think they ain't EVER going to see each other any more!”

“But they WILL – and inside of two weeks – and I KNOW it!” says I.

Laws, it was out before I could think! And before I could budge she throws her arms around my neck and told me to say it AGAIN, say it AGAIN, say it AGAIN!

I see I had spoke too sudden and said too much, and was in a close place. I asked her to let me think a minute; and she set there, very impatient and excited and handsome, but looking kind of happy and eased-up, like a person that's had a tooth pulled out. So I went to studying it out. I says to myself, I reckon a body that ups and tells the truth when he is in a tight place is taking considerable many resks, though I ain't had no experience, and can't say for certain; but it looks

so to me, anyway; and yet here's a case where I'm blest if it don't look to me like the truth is better and actuly SAFER than a lie. I must lay it by in my mind, and think it over some time or other, it's so kind of strange and unregular. I never see nothing like it. Well, I says to myself at last, I'm a-going to chance it; I'll up and tell the truth this time, though it does seem most like setting down on a kag of powder and touching it off just to see where you'll go to. Then I says:

"Miss Mary Jane, is there any place out of town a little ways where you could go and stay three or four days?"

"Yes; Mr. Lothrop's. Why?"

"Never mind why yet. If I'll tell you how I know the niggers will see each other again inside of two weeks – here in this house – and PROVE how I know it – will you go to Mr. Lothrop's and stay four days?"

"Four days!" she says; "I'll stay a year!"

"All right," I says, "I don't want nothing more out of YOU than just your word – I druther have it than another man's kiss-the-Bible." She smiled and reddened up very sweet, and I says, "If you don't mind it, I'll shut the door – and bolt it."

Then I come back and set down again, and says:

"Don't you holler. Just set still and take it like a man. I got to tell the truth, and you want to brace up, Miss Mary, because it's a bad kind, and going to be hard to take, but there ain't no help for it. These uncles of yourn ain't no uncles at all; they're a couple of frauds – regular dead-beats. There, now we're over the worst of it, you can stand the rest middling easy."

It jolted her up like everything, of course; but I was over the shoal water now, so I went right along, her eyes a-blazing higher and higher all the time, and told her every blame thing, from where we first struck that young fool going up to the steamboat, clear through to where she flung herself on to the king's breast at the front door and he kissed her sixteen or seventeen times – and then up she jumps, with her face afire like sunset, and says:

“The brute! Come, don’t waste a minute – not a SECOND – we’ll have them tarred and feathered, and flung in the river!”

Says I:

“Cert’nly. But do you mean BEFORE you go to Mr. Lothrop’s, or –”

“Oh,” she says, “what am I THINKING about!” she says, and set right down again. “Don’t mind what I said – please don’t – you WON’T, now, WILL you?” Laying her silky hand on mine in that kind of a way that I said I would die first. “I never thought, I was so stirred up,” she says; “now go on, and I won’t do so any more. You tell me what to do, and whatever you say I’ll do it.”

“Well,” I says, “it’s a rough gang, them two frauds, and I’m fixed so I got to travel with them a while longer, whether I want to or not – I druther not tell you why; and if you was to blow on them this town would get me out of their claws, and I’d be all right; but there’d be another person that you don’t know about who’d be in big trouble. Well, we got to save HIM, hain’t we? Of course. Well, then, we won’t blow on them.”

Saying them words put a good idea in my head. I see how maybe I could get me and Jim rid of the frauds; get them jailed here, and then leave. But I didn’t want to run the raft in the daytime without anybody aboard to answer questions but me; so I didn’t want the plan to begin working till pretty late to-night. I says:

“Miss Mary Jane, I’ll tell you what we’ll do, and you won’t have to stay at Mr. Lothrop’s so long, nuther. How fur is it?”

“A little short of four miles – right out in the country, back here.”

“Well, that ‘ll answer. Now you go along out there, and lay low till nine or half-past to-night, and then get them to fetch you home again – tell them you’ve thought of something. If you get here before eleven put a candle in this window, and if I don’t turn up wait TILL eleven, and THEN if I don’t turn up it means I’m gone, and out of the way, and safe. Then you come out and spread the news around, and get these beats jailed.”

“Good,” she says, “I’ll do it.”

“And if it just happens so that I don’t get away, but get took up along with them, you must up and say I told you the whole thing beforehand, and you must stand by me all you can.”

“Stand by you! indeed I will. They sha’n’t touch a hair of your head!” she says, and I see her nostrils spread and her eyes snap when she said it, too.

“If I get away I sha’n’t be here,” I says, “to prove these rascallions ain’t your uncles, and I couldn’t do it if I WAS here. I could swear they was beats and bummers, that’s all, though that’s worth something. Well, there’s others can do that better than what I can, and they’re people that ain’t going to be doubted as quick as I’d be. I’ll tell you how to find them. Gimme a pencil and a piece of paper. There – ‘Royal Nonesuch, Bricksville.’ Put it away, and don’t lose it. When the court wants to find out something about these two, let them send up to Bricksville and say they’ve got the men that played the Royal Nonesuch, and ask for some witnesses – why, you’ll have that entire town down here before you can hardly wink, Miss Mary. And they’ll come a-biling, too.”

I judged we had got everything fixed about right now. So I says:

“Just let the auction go right along, and don’t worry. Nobody don’t have to pay for the things they buy till a whole day after the auction on accounts of the short notice, and they ain’t going out of this till they get that money; and the way we’ve fixed it the sale ain’t going to count, and they ain’t going to get no money. It’s just like the way it was with the niggers – it warn’t no sale, and the niggers will be back before long. Why, they can’t collect the money for the NIGGERS yet – they’re in the worst kind of a fix, Miss Mary.”

“Well,” she says, “I’ll run down to breakfast now, and then I’ll start straight for Mr. Lothrop’s.”

”Deed, THAT ain’t the ticket, Miss Mary Jane,” I says, “by no manner of means; go BEFORE breakfast.”

“Why?”

“What did you reckon I wanted you to go at all for, Miss Mary?”

“Well, I never thought – and come to think, I don’t know. What was it?”

“Why, it’s because you ain’t one of these leatherface people. I don’t want no better book than what your face is. A body can set down and read it off like coarse print. Do you reckon you can go and face your uncles when they come to kiss you goodmorning, and never –”

“There, there, don’t! Yes, I’ll go before breakfast – I’ll be glad to. And leave my sisters with them?”

“Yes; never mind about them. They’ve got to stand it yet a while. They might suspicion something if all of you was to go. I don’t want you to see them, nor your sisters, nor nobody in this town; if a neighbor was to ask how is your uncles this morning your face would tell something. No, you go right along, Miss Mary Jane, and I’ll fix it with all of them. I’ll tell Miss Susan to give your love to your uncles and say you’ve went away for a few hours for to get a little rest and change, or to see a friend, and you’ll be back to-night or early in the morning.”

“Gone to see a friend is all right, but I won’t have my love given to them.”

“Well, then, it sha’n’t be.” It was well enough to tell HER so – no harm in it. It was only a little thing to do, and no trouble; and it’s the little things that smooths people’s roads the most, down here below; it would make Mary Jane comfortable, and it wouldn’t cost nothing. Then I says: “There’s one more thing – that bag of money.”

“Well, they’ve got that; and it makes me feel pretty silly to think HOW they got it.”

“No, you’re out, there. They hain’t got it.”

“Why, who’s got it?”

“I wish I knowed, but I don’t. I HAD it, because I stole it from them; and I stole it to give to you; and I know where I hid it, but I’m afraid it ain’t there no more. I’m awful sorry, Miss Mary Jane, I’m just as sorry

as I can be; but I done the best I could; I did honest. I come nigh getting caught, and I had to shove it into the first place I come to, and run – and it warn't a good place."

"Oh, stop blaming yourself – it's too bad to do it, and I won't allow it – you couldn't help it; it wasn't your fault. Where did you hide it?"

I didn't want to set her to thinking about her troubles again; and I couldn't seem to get my mouth to tell her what would make her see that corpse laying in the coffin with that bag of money on his stomach. So for a minute I didn't say nothing; then I says:

"I'd ruther not TELL you where I put it, Miss Mary Jane, if you don't mind letting me off; but I'll write it for you on a piece of paper, and you can read it along the road to Mr. Lothrop's, if you want to. Do you reckon that 'll do?"

"Oh, yes."

So I wrote: "I put it in the coffin. It was in there when you was crying there, away in the night. I was behind the door, and I was mighty sorry for you, Miss Mary Jane."

It made my eyes water a little to remember her crying there all by herself in the night, and them devils laying there right under her own roof, shaming her and robbing her; and when I folded it up and give it to her I see the water come into her eyes, too; and she shook me by the hand, hard, and says:

"GOOD-bye. I'm going to do everything just as you've told me; and if I don't ever see you again, I sha'n't ever forget you. and I'll think of you a many and a many a time, and I'll PRAY for you, too!" – and she was gone.

Pray for me! I reckoned if she knowed me she'd take a job that was more nearer her size. But I bet she done it, just the same – she was just that kind. She had the grit to pray for Judus if she took the notion – there warn't no back-down to her, I judge. You may say what you want to, but in my opinion she had more sand in her than any girl I ever see; in my opinion she was just full of sand. It sounds like flattery, but it ain't no

flattery. And when it comes to beauty – and goodness, too – she lays over them all. I hain't ever seen her since that time that I see her go out of that door; no, I hain't ever seen her since, but I reckon I've thought of her a many and a many a million times, and of her saying she would pray for me; and if ever I'd a thought it would do any good for me to pray for HER, blamed if I wouldn't a done it or bust.

Well, Mary Jane she lit out the back way, I reckon; because nobody see her go. When I struck Susan and the hare-lip, I says:

“What's the name of them people over on t'other side of the river that you all goes to see sometimes?”

They says:

“There's several; but it's the Proctors, mainly.”

“That's the name,” I says; “I most forgot it. Well, Miss Mary Jane she told me to tell you she's gone over there in a dreadful hurry – one of them's sick.”

“Which one?”

“I don't know; leastways, I kinder forget; but I thinks it's –”

“Sakes alive, I hope it ain't HANNER?”

“I'm sorry to say it,” I says, “but Hanner's the very one.”

“My goodness, and she so well only last week! Is she took bad?”

“It ain't no name for it. They set up with her all night, Miss Mary Jane said, and they don't think she'll last many hours.”

“Only think of that, now! What's the matter with her?”

I couldn't think of anything reasonable, right off that way, so I says:

“Mumps.”

“Mumps your granny! They don’t set up with people that’s got the mumps.”

“They don’t, don’t they? You better bet they do with THESE mumps. These mumps is different. It’s a new kind, Miss Mary Jane said.”

“How’s it a new kind?”

“Because it’s mixed up with other things.”

“What other things?”

“Well, measles, and whooping-cough, and erysiplas, and consumption, and yaller janders, and brain-fever, and I don’t know what all.”

“My land! And they call it the MUMPS?”

“That’s what Miss Mary Jane said.”

“Well, what in the nation do they call it the MUMPS for?”

“Why, because it IS the mumps. That’s what it starts with.”

“Well, ther’ ain’t no sense in it. A body might stump his toe, and take pison, and fall down the well, and break his neck, and bust his brains out, and somebody come along and ask what killed him, and some numskull up and say, ‘Why, he stumped his TOE.’ Would ther’ be any sense in that? NO. And ther’ ain’t no sense in THIS, nuther. Is it ketching?”

“Is it KETCHING? Why, how you talk. Is a HARROW catching – in the dark? If you don’t hitch on to one tooth, you’re bound to on another, ain’t you? And you can’t get away with that tooth without fetching the whole harrow along, can you? Well, these kind of mumps is a kind of a harrow, as you may say – and it ain’t no slouch of a harrow, nuther, you come to get it hitched on good.”

“Well, it’s awful, I think,” says the hare-lip. “I’ll go to Uncle Harvey and –”

“Oh, yes,” I says, “I WOULD. Of COURSE I would. I wouldn’t lose no time.”

“Well, why wouldn’t you?”

“Just look at it a minute, and maybe you can see. Hain’t your uncles obleegd to get along home to England as fast as they can? And do you reckon they’d be mean enough to go off and leave you to go all that journey by yourselves? YOU know they’ll wait for you. So fur, so good. Your uncle Harvey’s a preacher, ain’t he? Very well, then; is a PREACHER going to deceive a steamboat clerk? is he going to deceive a SHIP CLERK? – so as to get them to let Miss Mary Jane go aboard? Now YOU know he ain’t. What WILL he do, then? Why, he’ll say, ‘It’s a great pity, but my church matters has got to get along the best way they can; for my niece has been exposed to the dreadful pluribus-unum mumps, and so it’s my bounden duty to set down here and wait the three months it takes to show on her if she’s got it.’ But never mind, if you think it’s best to tell your uncle Harvey –”

“Shucks, and stay fooling around here when we could all be having good times in England whilst we was waiting to find out whether Mary Jane’s got it or not? Why, you talk like a muggins.”

“Well, anyway, maybe you’d better tell some of the neighbors.”

“Listen at that, now. You do beat all for natural stupidity. Can’t you SEE that THEY’D go and tell? Ther’ ain’t no way but just to not tell anybody at ALL.”

“Well, maybe you’re right – yes, I judge you ARE right.”

“But I reckon we ought to tell Uncle Harvey she’s gone out a while, anyway, so he won’t be uneasy about her?”

“Yes, Miss Mary Jane she wanted you to do that. She says, ‘Tell them to give Uncle Harvey and William my love and a kiss, and say I’ve run over the river to see Mr.’ – Mr. – what IS the name of that rich family your uncle Peter used to think so much of? – I mean the one that –”

“Why, you must mean the Apthorps, ain’t it?”

“Of course; bother them kind of names, a body can’t ever seem to remember them, half the time, somehow. Yes, she said, say she has run over for to ask the Apthorps to be sure and come to the auction and buy this house, because she allowed her uncle Peter would rather they had it than anybody else; and she’s going to stick to them till they say they’ll come, and then, if she ain’t too tired, she’s coming home; and if she is, she’ll be home in the morning anyway. She said, don’t say nothing about the Proctors, but only about the Apthorps – which ‘ll be perfectly true, because she is going there to speak about their buying the house; I know it, because she told me so herself.”

“All right,” they said, and cleared out to lay for their uncles, and give them the love and the kisses, and tell them the message.

Everything was all right now. The girls wouldn’t say nothing because they wanted to go to England; and the king and the duke would rather Mary Jane was off working for the auction than around in reach of Doctor Robinson. I felt very good; I judged I had done it pretty neat – I reckoned Tom Sawyer couldn’t a done it no neater himself. Of course he would a throwed more style into it, but I can’t do that very handy, not being brung up to it.

Well, they held the auction in the public square, along towards the end of the afternoon, and it strung along, and strung along, and the old man he was on hand and looking his level pisonest, up there longside of the auctioneer, and chipping in a little Scripture now and then, or a little goody-goody saying of some kind, and the duke he was around goo-gooing for sympathy all he knowed how, and just spreading himself generly.

But by and by the thing dragged through, and everything was sold – everything but a little old trifling lot in the graveyard. So they’d got to work that off – I never see such a girafft as the king was for wanting to swallow EVERYTHING. Well, whilst they was at it a steamboat landed, and in about two minutes up comes a crowd a-whooping and yelling and laughing and carrying on, and singing out:

“HERE’S your opposition line! here’s your two sets o’ heirs to old Peter Wilks – and you pays your money and you takes your choice!”