

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
by  
Mark Twain

Chapter 29

THEY was fetching a very nice-looking old gentleman along, and a nice-looking younger one, with his right arm in a sling. And, my souls, how the people yelled and laughed, and kept it up. But I didn't see no joke about it, and I judged it would strain the duke and the king some to see any. I reckoned they'd turn pale. But no, nary a pale did THEY turn. The duke he never let on he suspicioned what was up, but just went a goo-gooing around, happy and satisfied, like a jug that's googling out buttermilk; and as for the king, he just gazed and gazed down sorrowful on them new-comers like it give him the stomach-ache in his very heart to think there could be such frauds and rascals in the world. Oh, he done it admirable. Lots of the principal people gethered around the king, to let him see they was on his side. That old gentleman that had just come looked all puzzled to death. Pretty soon he begun to speak, and I see straight off he pronounced LIKE an Englishman – not the king's way, though the king's WAS pretty good for an imitation. I can't give the old gent's words, nor I can't imitate him; but he turned around to the crowd, and says, about like this:

“This is a surprise to me which I wasn't looking for; and I'll acknowledge, candid and frank, I ain't very well fixed to meet it and answer it; for my brother and me has had misfortunes; he's broke his arm, and our baggage got put off at a town above here last night in the night by a mistake. I am Peter Wilks' brother Harvey, and this is his brother William, which can't hear nor speak – and can't even make signs to amount to much, now't he's only got one hand to work them with. We are who we say we are; and in a day or two, when I get the baggage, I can prove it. But up till then I won't say nothing more, but go to the hotel and wait.”

So him and the new dummy started off; and the king he laughs, and blethers out:

“Broke his arm – VERY likely, AIN'T it? – and very convenient, too,

for a fraud that's got to make signs, and ain't learnt how. Lost their baggage! That's MIGHTY good! – and mighty ingenious – under the CIRCUMSTANCES!

So he laughed again; and so did everybody else, except three or four, or maybe half a dozen. One of these was that doctor; another one was a sharplooking gentleman, with a carpet-bag of the oldfashioned kind made out of carpet-stuff, that had just come off of the steamboat and was talking to him in a low voice, and glancing towards the king now and then and nodding their heads – it was Levi Bell, the lawyer that was gone up to Louisville; and another one was a big rough husky that come along and listened to all the old gentleman said, and was listening to the king now. And when the king got done this husky up and says:

“Say, looky here; if you are Harvey Wilks, when'd you come to this town?”

“The day before the funeral, friend,” says the king.

“But what time o' day?”

“In the evenin' – 'bout an hour er two before sundown.”

“HOW'D you come?”

“I come down on the Susan Powell from Cincinnati.”

“Well, then, how'd you come to be up at the Pint in the MORNIN' – in a canoe?”

“I warn't up at the Pint in the mornin'.”

“It's a lie.”

Several of them jumped for him and begged him not to talk that way to an old man and a preacher.

“Preacher be hanged, he's a fraud and a liar. He was up at the Pint that mornin'. I live up there, don't I? Well, I was up there, and he was up there. I see him there. He come in a canoe, along with Tim Collins and a

boy.”

The doctor he up and says:

“Would you know the boy again if you was to see him, Hines?”

“I reckon I would, but I don’t know. Why, yonder he is, now. I know him perfectly easy.”

It was me he pointed at. The doctor says:

“Neighbors, I don’t know whether the new couple is frauds or not; but if THESE two ain’t frauds, I am an idiot, that’s all. I think it’s our duty to see that they don’t get away from here till we’ve looked into this thing. Come along, Hines; come along, the rest of you. We’ll take these fellows to the tavern and affront them with t’other couple, and I reckon we’ll find out SOMETHING before we get through.”

It was nuts for the crowd, though maybe not for the king’s friends; so we all started. It was about sundown. The doctor he led me along by the hand, and was plenty kind enough, but he never let go my hand.

We all got in a big room in the hotel, and lit up some candles, and fetched in the new couple. First, the doctor says:

“I don’t wish to be too hard on these two men, but I think they’re frauds, and they may have complices that we don’t know nothing about. If they have, won’t the complices get away with that bag of gold Peter Wilks left? It ain’t unlikely. If these men ain’t frauds, they won’t object to sending for that money and letting us keep it till they prove they’re all right – ain’t that so?”

Everybody agreed to that. So I judged they had our gang in a pretty tight place right at the outstart. But the king he only looked sorrowful, and says:

“Gentlemen, I wish the money was there, for I ain’t got no disposition to throw anything in the way of a fair, open, out-and-out investigation o’ this miserable business; but, alas, the money ain’t there; you k’n send and see, if you want to.”

“Where is it, then?”

“Well, when my niece give it to me to keep for her I took and hid it inside o’ the straw tick o’ my bed, not wishin’ to bank it for the few days we’d be here, and considerin’ the bed a safe place, we not bein’ used to niggers, and suppos’n’ ‘em honest, like servants in England. The niggers stole it the very next mornin’ after I had went down stairs; and when I sold ‘em I hadn’t missed the money yit, so they got clean away with it. My servant here k’n tell you ‘bout it, gentlemen.”

The doctor and several said “Shucks!” and I see nobody didn’t altogether believe him. One man asked me if I see the niggers steal it. I said no, but I see them sneaking out of the room and hustling away, and I never thought nothing, only I reckoned they was afraid they had waked up my master and was trying to get away before he made trouble with them. That was all they asked me. Then the doctor whirls on me and says:

“Are YOU English, too?”

I says yes; and him and some others laughed, and said, “Stuff!”

Well, then they sailed in on the general investigation, and there we had it, up and down, hour in, hour out, and nobody never said a word about supper, nor ever seemed to think about it – and so they kept it up, and kept it up; and it WAS the worst mixed-up thing you ever see. They made the king tell his yarn, and they made the old gentleman tell his’n; and anybody but a lot of prejudiced chuckleheads would a SEEN that the old gentleman was spinning truth and t’other one lies. And by and by they had me up to tell what I knowed. The king he give me a left-handed look out of the corner of his eye, and so I knowed enough to talk on the right side. I begun to tell about Sheffield, and how we lived there, and all about the English Wilkses, and so on; but I didn’t get pretty fur till the doctor begun to laugh; and Levi Bell, the lawyer, says:

“Set down, my boy; I wouldn’t strain myself if I was you. I reckon you ain’t used to lying, it don’t seem to come handy; what you want is practice. You do it pretty awkward.”

I didn’t care nothing for the compliment, but I was glad to be let off,

anyway.

The doctor he started to say something, and turns and says:

“If you’d been in town at first, Levi Bell – ” The king broke in and reached out his hand, and says:

“Why, is this my poor dead brother’s old friend that he’s wrote so often about?”

The lawyer and him shook hands, and the lawyer smiled and looked pleased, and they talked right along awhile, and then got to one side and talked low; and at last the lawyer speaks up and says:

“That ‘ll fix it. I’ll take the order and send it, along with your brother’s, and then they’ll know it’s all right.”

So they got some paper and a pen, and the king he set down and twisted his head to one side, and chawed his tongue, and scrawled off something; and then they give the pen to the duke – and then for the first time the duke looked sick. But he took the pen and wrote. So then the lawyer turns to the new old gentleman and says:

“You and your brother please write a line or two and sign your names.”

The old gentleman wrote, but nobody couldn’t read it. The lawyer looked powerful astonished, and says:

“Well, it beats ME – and snaked a lot of old letters out of his pocket, and examined them, and then examined the old man’s writing, and then THEM again; and then says: “These old letters is from Harvey Wilks; and here’s THESE two handwritings, and anybody can see they didn’t write them” (the king and the duke looked sold and foolish, I tell you, to see how the lawyer had took them in), “and here’s THIS old gentleman’s hand writing, and anybody can tell, easy enough, HE didn’t write them – fact is, the scratches he makes ain’t properly WRITING at all. Now, here’s some letters from –”

The new old gentleman says:

“If you please, let me explain. Nobody can read my hand but my brother there – so he copies for me. It’s HIS hand you’ve got there, not mine.”

“WELL!” says the lawyer, “this IS a state of things. I’ve got some of William’s letters, too; so if you’ll get him to write a line or so we can com –”

“He CAN’T write with his left hand,” says the old gentleman. “If he could use his right hand, you would see that he wrote his own letters and mine too. Look at both, please – they’re by the same hand.”

The lawyer done it, and says:

“I believe it’s so – and if it ain’t so, there’s a heap stronger resemblance than I’d noticed before, anyway. Well, well, well! I thought we was right on the track of a slution, but it’s gone to grass, partly. But anyway, one thing is proved – THESE two ain’t either of ‘em Wilkses” – and he wagged his head towards the king and the duke.

Well, what do you think? That muleheaded old fool wouldn’t give in THEN! Indeed he wouldn’t. Said it warn’t no fair test. Said his brother William was the cussedest joker in the world, and hadn’t tried to write – HE see William was going to play one of his jokes the minute he put the pen to paper. And so he warmed up and went warbling right along till he was actuly beginning to believe what he was saying HIM- SELF; but pretty soon the new gentleman broke in, and says:

“I’ve thought of something. Is there anybody here that helped to lay out my br – helped to lay out the late Peter Wilks for burying?”

“Yes,” says somebody, “me and Ab Turner done it. We’re both here.”

Then the old man turns towards the king, and says:

“Peraps this gentleman can tell me what was tattooed on his breast?”

Blamed if the king didn’t have to brace up mighty quick, or he’d a squashed down like a bluff bank that the river has cut under, it took him so sudden; and, mind you, it was a thing that was calculated to make most ANYBODY squish to get fetched such a solid one as that without

any notice, because how was HE going to know what was tattooed on the man? He whitened a little; he couldn't help it; and it was mighty still in there, and everybody bending a little forwards and gazing at him. Says I to myself, NOW he'll throw up the sponge – there ain't no more use. Well, did he? A body can't hardly believe it, but he didn't. I reckon he thought he'd keep the thing up till he tired them people out, so they'd thin out, and him and the duke could break loose and get away. Anyway, he set there, and pretty soon he begun to smile, and says:

“Mf! It's a VERY tough question, AIN'T it! YES, sir, I k'n tell you what's tattooed on his breast. It's jest a small, thin, blue arrow – that's what it is; and if you don't look clost, you can't see it. NOW what do you say – hey?”

Well, I never see anything like that old blister for clean out-and-out cheek.

The new old gentleman turns brisk towards Ab Turner and his pard, and his eye lights up like he judged he'd got the king THIS time, and says:

“There – you've heard what he said! Was there any such mark on Peter Wilks' breast?”

Both of them spoke up and says:

“We didn't see no such mark.”

“Good!” says the old gentleman. “Now, what you DID see on his breast was a small dim P, and a B (which is an initial he dropped when he was young), and a W, with dashes between them, so: P – B – W” – and he marked them that way on a piece of paper. “Come, ain't that what you saw?”

Both of them spoke up again, and says:

“No, we DIDN'T. We never seen any marks at all.”

Well, everybody WAS in a state of mind now, and they sings out:

“The whole BILIN' of 'm 's frauds! Le's duck 'em! le's drown 'em! le's

ride ‘em on a rail!” and everybody was whooping at once, and there was a rattling powwow. But the lawyer he jumps on the table and yells, and says:

“Gentlemen – gentleMEN! Hear me just a word – just a SINGLE word – if you PLEASE! There’s one way yet – let’s go and dig up the corpse and look.”

That took them.

“Hooray!” they all shouted, and was starting right off; but the lawyer and the doctor sung out:

“Hold on, hold on! Collar all these four men and the boy, and fetch THEM along, too!”

“We’ll do it!” they all shouted; “and if we don’t find them marks we’ll lynch the whole gang!”

I WAS scared, now, I tell you. But there warn’t no getting away, you know. They gripped us all, and marched us right along, straight for the graveyard, which was a mile and a half down the river, and the whole town at our heels, for we made noise enough, and it was only nine in the evening.

As we went by our house I wished I hadn’t sent Mary Jane out of town; because now if I could tip her the wink she’d light out and save me, and blow on our dead-beats.

Well, we swarmed along down the river road, just carrying on like wildcats; and to make it more scary the sky was darking up, and the lightning beginning to wink and flutter, and the wind to shiver amongst the leaves. This was the most awful trouble and most dangerous I ever was in; and I was kinder stunned; everything was going so different from what I had allowed for; stead of being fixed so I could take my own time if I wanted to, and see all the fun, and have Mary Jane at my back to save me and set me free when the close-fit come, here was nothing in the world betwixt me and sudden death but just them tattoo-marks. If they didn’t find them –

I couldn't bear to think about it; and yet, somehow, I couldn't think about nothing else. It got darker and darker, and it was a beautiful time to give the crowd the slip; but that big husky had me by the wrist – Hines – and a body might as well try to give Goliath the slip. He dragged me right along, he was so excited, and I had to run to keep up.

When they got there they swarmed into the graveyard and washed over it like an overflow. And when they got to the grave they found they had about a hundred times as many shovels as they wanted, but nobody hadn't thought to fetch a lantern. But they sailed into digging anyway by the flicker of the lightning, and sent a man to the nearest house, a half a mile off, to borrow one.

So they dug and dug like everything; and it got awful dark, and the rain started, and the wind swished and swushed along, and the lightning come brisker and brisker, and the thunder boomed; but them people never took no notice of it, they was so full of this business; and one minute you could see everything and every face in that big crowd, and the shovelfuls of dirt sailing up out of the grave, and the next second the dark wiped it all out, and you couldn't see nothing at all.

At last they got out the coffin and begun to unscrew the lid, and then such another crowding and shouldering and shoving as there was, to scrouge in and get a sight, you never see; and in the dark, that way, it was awful. Hines he hurt my wrist dreadful pulling and tugging so, and I reckon he clean forgot I was in the world, he was so excited and panting.

All of a sudden the lightning let go a perfect sluice of white glare, and somebody sings out:

“By the living jingo, here's the bag of gold on his breast!”

Hines let out a whoop, like everybody else, and dropped my wrist and give a big surge to bust his way in and get a look, and the way I lit out and shinned for the road in the dark there ain't nobody can tell.

I had the road all to myself, and I fairly flew – leastways, I had it all to myself except the solid dark, and the now-and-then glares, and the buzzing of the rain, and the thrashing of the wind, and the splitting of the thunder; and sure as you are born I did clip it along!

When I struck the town I see there warn't nobody out in the storm, so I never hunted for no back streets, but humped it straight through the main one; and when I begun to get towards our house I aimed my eye and set it. No light there; the house all dark – which made me feel sorry and disappointed, I didn't know why. But at last, just as I was sailing by, FLASH comes the light in Mary Jane's window! and my heart swelled up sudden, like to bust; and the same second the house and all was behind me in the dark, and wasn't ever going to be before me no more in this world. She WAS the best girl I ever see, and had the most sand.

The minute I was far enough above the town to see I could make the towhead, I begun to look sharp for a boat to borrow, and the first time the lightning showed me one that wasn't chained I snatched it and shoved. It was a canoe, and warn't fastened with nothing but a rope. The towhead was a rattling big distance off, away out there in the middle of the river, but I didn't lose no time; and when I struck the raft at last I was so fagged I would a just laid down to blow and gasp if I could afforded it. But I didn't. As I sprung aboard I sung out:

“Out with you, Jim, and set her loose! Glory be to goodness, we're shut of them!”

Jim lit out, and was a-coming for me with both arms spread, he was so full of joy; but when I glimpsed him in the lightning my heart shot up in my mouth and I went overboard backwards; for I forgot he was old King Lear and a drowneded A-rab all in one, and it most scared the livers and lights out of me. But Jim fished me out, and was going to hug me and bless me, and so on, he was so glad I was back and we was shut of the king and the duke, but I says:

“Not now; have it for breakfast, have it for breakfast! Cut loose and let her slide!”

So in two seconds away we went a-sliding down the river, and it DID seem so good to be free again and all by ourselves on the big river, and nobody to bother us. I had to skip around a bit, and jump up and crack my heels a few times – I couldn't help it; but about the third crack I noticed a sound that I knowed mighty well, and held my breath and listened and waited; and sure enough, when the next flash busted out over the water, here they come! – and just alaying to their oars and

making their skiff hum! It was the king and the duke.

So I wilted right down on to the planks then, and give up; and it was all I could do to keep from crying.