

*The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*  
by  
Mark Twain

Chapter 35

IT would be most an hour yet till breakfast, so we left and struck down into the woods; because Tom said we got to have SOME light to see how to dig by, and a lantern makes too much, and might get us into trouble; what we must have was a lot of them rotten chunks that's called fox-fire, and just makes a soft kind of a glow when you lay them in a dark place. We fetched an armful and hid it in the weeds, and set down to rest, and Tom says, kind of dissatisfied:

“Blame it, this whole thing is just as easy and awkward as it can be. And so it makes it so rotten difficult to get up a difficult plan. There ain't no watchman to be drugged – now there OUGHT to be a watchman. There ain't even a dog to give a sleeping-mixture to. And there's Jim chained by one leg, with a ten-foot chain, to the leg of his bed: why, all you got to do is to lift up the bedstead and slip off the chain. And Uncle Silas he trusts everybody; sends the key to the punkin-headed nigger, and don't send nobody to watch the nigger. Jim could a got out of that windowhole before this, only there wouldn't be no use trying to travel with a ten-foot chain on his leg. Why, drat it, Huck, it's the stupidest arrangement I ever see. You got to invent ALL the difficulties. Well, we can't help it; we got to do the best we can with the materials we've got. Anyhow, there's one thing – there's more honor in getting him out through a lot of difficulties and dangers, where there warn't one of them furnished to you by the people who it was their duty to furnish them, and you had to contrive them all out of your own head. Now look at just that one thing of the lantern. When you come down to the cold facts, we simply got to LET ON that a lantern's resky. Why, we could work with a torchlight procession if we wanted to, I believe. Now, whilst I think of it, we got to hunt up something to make a saw out of the first chance we get.”

“What do we want of a saw?”

“What do we WANT of a saw? Hain't we got to saw the leg of Jim's bed off, so as to get the chain loose?”

“Why, you just said a body could lift up the bedstead and slip the chain off.”

“Well, if that ain’t just like you, Huck Finn. You CAN get up the infant-schooliest ways of going at a thing. Why, hain’t you ever read any books at all? – Baron Trenck, nor Casanova, nor Benvenuto Chelleeny, nor Henri IV., nor none of them heroes? Who ever heard of getting a prisoner loose in such an oldmaidly way as that? No; the way all the best authorities does is to saw the bed-leg in two, and leave it just so, and swallow the sawdust, so it can’t be found, and put some dirt and grease around the sawed place so the very keenest seneskal can’t see no sign of it’s being sawed, and thinks the bed-leg is perfectly sound. Then, the night you’re ready, fetch the leg a kick, down she goes; slip off your chain, and there you are. Nothing to do but hitch your rope ladder to the battlements, shin down it, break your leg in the moat – because a rope ladder is nineteen foot too short, you know – and there’s your horses and your trusty vassles, and they scoop you up and fling you across a saddle, and away you go to your native Langudoc, or Navarre, or wherever it is. It’s gaudy, Huck. I wish there was a moat to this cabin. If we get time, the night of the escape, we’ll dig one.”

I says:

“What do we want of a moat when we’re going to snake him out from under the cabin?”

But he never heard me. He had forgot me and everything else. He had his chin in his hand, thinking. Pretty soon he sighs and shakes his head; then sighs again, and says:

“No, it wouldn’t do – there ain’t necessity enough for it.”

“For what?” I says.

“Why, to saw Jim’s leg off,” he says.

“Good land!” I says; “why, there ain’t NO necessity for it. And what would you want to saw his leg off for, anyway?”

“Well, some of the best authorities has done it. They couldn’t get the

chain off, so they just cut their hand off and shoved. And a leg would be better still. But we got to let that go. There ain't necessity enough in this case; and, besides, Jim's a nigger, and wouldn't understand the reasons for it, and how it's the custom in Europe; so we'll let it go. But there's one thing – he can have a rope ladder; we can tear up our sheets and make him a rope ladder easy enough. And we can send it to him in a pie; it's mostly done that way. And I've et worse pies.”

“Why, Tom Sawyer, how you talk,” I says; “Jim ain't got no use for a rope ladder.”

“He HAS got use for it. How YOU talk, you better say; you don't know nothing about it. He's GOT to have a rope ladder; they all do.”

“What in the nation can he DO with it?”

“DO with it? He can hide it in his bed, can't he?” That's what they all do; and HE'S got to, too. Huck, you don't ever seem to want to do anything that's regular; you want to be starting something fresh all the time. S'pose he DON'T do nothing with it? ain't it there in his bed, for a clew, after he's gone? and don't you reckon they'll want clews? Of course they will. And you wouldn't leave them any? That would be a PRETTY howdy-do, WOULDN'T it! I never heard of such a thing.”

“Well,” I says, “if it's in the regulations, and he's got to have it, all right, let him have it; because I don't wish to go back on no regulations; but there's one thing, Tom Sawyer – if we go to tearing up our sheets to make Jim a rope ladder, we're going to get into trouble with Aunt Sally, just as sure as you're born. Now, the way I look at it, a hickry-bark ladder don't cost nothing, and don't waste nothing, and is just as good to load up a pie with, and hide in a straw tick, as any rag ladder you can start; and as for Jim, he ain't had no experience, and so he don't care what kind of a –”

“Oh, shucks, Huck Finn, if I was as ignorant as you I'd keep still – that's what I'D do. Who ever heard of a state prisoner escaping by a hickry-bark ladder? Why, it's perfectly ridiculous.”

“Well, all right, Tom, fix it your own way; but if you'll take my advice, you'll let me borrow a sheet off of the clothesline.”

He said that would do. And that gave him another idea, and he says:

“Borrow a shirt, too.”

“What do we want of a shirt, Tom?”

“Want it for Jim to keep a journal on.”

“Journal your granny – JIM can’t write.”

“S’pose he CAN’T write – he can make marks on the shirt, can’t he, if we make him a pen out of an old pewter spoon or a piece of an old iron barrelhoop?”

“Why, Tom, we can pull a feather out of a goose and make him a better one; and quicker, too.”

“PRISONERS don’t have geese running around the donjon-keep to pull pens out of, you muggins. They ALWAYS make their pens out of the hardest, toughest, troublesomest piece of old brass candlestick or something like that they can get their hands on; and it takes them weeks and weeks and months and months to file it out, too, because they’ve got to do it by rubbing it on the wall. THEY wouldn’t use a goose-quill if they had it. It ain’t regular.”

“Well, then, what’ll we make him the ink out of?”

“Many makes it out of iron-rust and tears; but that’s the common sort and women; the best authorities uses their own blood. Jim can do that; and when he wants to send any little common ordinary mysterious message to let the world know where he’s captivated, he can write it on the bottom of a tin plate with a fork and throw it out of the window. The Iron Mask always done that, and it’s a blame’ good way, too.”

“Jim ain’t got no tin plates. They feed him in a pan.”

“That ain’t nothing; we can get him some.”

“Can’t nobody READ his plates.”

“That ain’t got anything to DO with it, Huck Finn. All HE’S got to do is to write on the plate and throw it out. You don’t HAVE to be able to read it. Why, half the time you can’t read anything a prisoner writes on a tin plate, or anywhere else.”

“Well, then, what’s the sense in wasting the plates?”

“Why, blame it all, it ain’t the PRISONER’S plates.”

“But it’s SOMEBODY’S plates, ain’t it?”

“Well, spos’n it is? What does the PRISONER care whose –”

He broke off there, because we heard the breakfasthorn blowing. So we cleared out for the house.

Along during the morning I borrowed a sheet and a white shirt off of the clothes-line; and I found an old sack and put them in it, and we went down and got the fox-fire, and put that in too. I called it borrowing, because that was what pap always called it; but Tom said it warn’t borrowing, it was stealing. He said we was representing prisoners; and prisoners don’t care how they get a thing so they get it, and nobody don’t blame them for it, either. It ain’t no crime in a prisoner to steal the thing he needs to get away with, Tom said; it’s his right; and so, as long as we was representing a prisoner, we had a perfect right to steal anything on this place we had the least use for to get ourselves out of prison with. He said if we warn’t prisoners it would be a very different thing, and nobody but a mean, ornery person would steal when he warn’t a prisoner. So we allowed we would steal everything there was that come handy. And yet he made a mighty fuss, one day, after that, when I stole a watermelon out of the nigger-patch and eat it; and he made me go and give the niggers a dime without telling them what it was for. Tom said that what he meant was, we could steal anything we NEEDED. Well, I says, I needed the watermelon. But he said I didn’t need it to get out of prison with; there’s where the difference was. He said if I’d a wanted it to hide a knife in, and smuggle it to Jim to kill the seneskal with, it would a been all right. So I let it go at that, though I couldn’t see no advantage in my representing a prisoner if I got to set down and chaw over a lot of gold-leaf distinctions like that every time I see a chance to hog a watermelon.

Well, as I was saying, we waited that morning till everybody was settled down to business, and nobody in sight around the yard; then Tom he carried the sack into the lean-to whilst I stood off a piece to keep watch. By and by he come out, and we went and set down on the woodpile to talk. He says:

“Everything’s all right now except tools; and that’s easy fixed.”

“Tools?” I says.

“Yes.”

“Tools for what?”

“Why, to dig with. We ain’t a-going to GNAW him out, are we?”

“Ain’t them old crippled picks and things in there good enough to dig a nigger out with?” I says.

He turns on me, looking pitying enough to make a body cry, and says:

“Huck Finn, did you EVER hear of a prisoner having picks and shovels, and all the modern conveniences in his wardrobe to dig himself out with? Now I want to ask you – if you got any reasonableness in you at all – what kind of a show would THAT give him to be a hero? Why, they might as well lend him the key and done with it. Picks and shovels – why, they wouldn’t furnish ‘em to a king.”

“Well, then,” I says, “if we don’t want the picks and shovels, what do we want?”

“A couple of case-knives.”

“To dig the foundations out from under that cabin with?”

“Yes.”

“Confound it, it’s foolish, Tom.”

“It don’t make no difference how foolish it is, it’s the RIGHT way – and

it's the regular way. And there ain't no OTHER way, that ever I heard of, and I've read all the books that gives any information about these things. They always dig out with a case-knife – and not through dirt, mind you; generly it's through solid rock. And it takes them weeks and weeks and weeks, and for ever and ever. Why, look at one of them prisoners in the bottom dungeon of the Castle Deef, in the harbor of Marseilles, that dug himself out that way; how long was HE at it, you reckon?"

"I don't know."

"Well, guess."

"I don't know. A month and a half."

"THIRTY-SEVEN YEAR – and he come out in China. THAT'S the kind. I wish the bottom of THIS fortress was solid rock."

"JIM don't know nobody in China."

"What's THAT got to do with it? Neither did that other fellow. But you're always a-wandering off on a side issue. Why can't you stick to the main point?"

"All right – I don't care where he comes out, so he COMES out; and Jim don't, either, I reckon. But there's one thing, anyway – Jim's too old to be dug out with a case-knife. He won't last."

"Yes he will LAST, too. You don't reckon it's going to take thirty-seven years to dig out through a DIRT foundation, do you?"

"How long will it take, Tom?"

"Well, we can't resk being as long as we ought to, because it mayn't take very long for Uncle Silas to hear from down there by New Orleans. He'll hear Jim ain't from there. Then his next move will be to advertise Jim, or something like that. So we can't resk being as long digging him out as we ought to. By rights I reckon we ought to be a couple of years; but we can't. Things being so uncertain, what I recommend is this: that we really dig right in, as quick as we can; and after that, we can LET

ON, to ourselves, that we was at it thirty-seven years. Then we can snatch him out and rush him away the first time there's an alarm. Yes, I reckon that 'll be the best way."

"Now, there's SENSE in that," I says. "Letting on don't cost nothing; letting on ain't no trouble; and if it's any object, I don't mind letting on we was at it a hundred and fifty year. It wouldn't strain me none, after I got my hand in. So I'll mosey along now, and smouch a couple of case-knives."

"Smouch three," he says; "we want one to make a saw out of."

"Tom, if it ain't unregular and irreligious to sejest it," I says, "there's an old rusty saw-blade around yonder sticking under the weather-boarding behind the smoke-house."

He looked kind of weary and discouraged-like, and says:

"It ain't no use to try to learn you nothing, Huck. Run along and smouch the knives – three of them." So I done it.