

The Mark Twain Duology

A Synopsis/Parody Screenplay with Commentary



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Preface

Hello!

Years ago, *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* were required reading in many schools. Today... not so much. In fact, in this day and age, you might be wondering why I'd write a screenplay/parody about them in the first place.

With that question in mind, here are my basic objectives for this parody:

1. **Overview the events of both novels.** A lot of interesting things happen in these stories. This parody will follow the original events pretty closely, although some things may be combined or omitted for the sake of streamlined storytelling (or jokes). I'll often call out deviations from the original stories, so that you can assume most of the content is directly based on the books.
2. **Enjoy some good-natured laughs at the characters, situations, and perspectives.** You can't make a parody without some jabs at the original material... but in this particular case, it's usually meant in the name of fun.
3. **Carefully choose how to handle the "uncomfortable stuff".** Let's face it: human inspiration is *always* a product of its time. I can't blame the books for being over a century old... but I also can't ignore my own perspective when I'm writing a parody based on it. Fortunately, there are many different ways to handle "uncomfortable" original material in a parody: I hope you enjoy the selections I made.

I think that covers it. Let's get on with the parody!

The Adventures of Tom Sawyer

Chapter 1: The Great Whitewash

Scene 1: In Trouble Again

(It's the 1840's. Tom Sawyer is a mischievous, fun-loving orphan boy. He lives with his Aunt Polly and his half-brother Sid in the town of St. Petersburg, Missouri¹. As the afternoon draws to a close, the family is eating a meal.)

Polly: So, Tom... how was school today?

Tom: Oh, it was great, Aunt Polly!

Polly (*frowning*): Your hair looks damp. You didn't skip school to go swimming, did you?

Tom: No, ma'am! We were just putting our heads under the water pump to cool off.

Sid (*slyly*): That's strange, Tom. I didn't see you at school all day.

Polly (*indignantly*): Tom!

Tom: Dang it, Sid!²

Sid (*smugly*): I also saw him stealing jam from the closet earlier.

Polly: Okay, Tom... this time you're in for it!

Tom (*pointing frantically behind Polly*): Look behind you!

(Polly turns around in alarm, and Tom sprints out of the house.)³

Polly: What is it, Tom!? Tom? *(She turns back, and sees that Tom is gone.)* I can't believe I fell for that.

Sid: Don't feel too bad, Aunt Polly... the "look behind you" trick is brand new, here in 1840! Lots of people haven't even heard of it yet.⁴

Scene 2: The Fight

(Outside, Tom strolls down the dirt street, enjoying the warm evening. He encounters a new boy in the village, who happens to be well-dressed).

Tom: Hey, you! I'll bet I could beat you up!

Boy (*confused*): Huh? That came out of nowhere... are you the town bully, or something?

¹ It's also possible that Tom's cousin, Mary, lives with them... I'm a little unclear on that point.

² In the original scene, Tom's caught because he re-sewed his shirt collar with black thread (whereas Polly had sewn it with white thread earlier). The understanding seems to be that Tom couldn't have gone swimming without unstitching his collar... maybe shirt buttons weren't a "thing" yet. Or maybe stitching collars was a common practice back then, to keep boys in line. I honestly don't know.

³ This really is how Tom escapes.

⁴ I made that up: for all I know, the "look behind you" trick is thousands of years old.

Tom: No, I'm the protagonist! I'm just impulsive and prone to mischief, that's all.

Boy (*skeptically*): But... you don't even know me. Isn't it more likely that you feel threatened by anything new and different?

Tom (*defensively*): You're new and different!

Boy: That's what I just... oh, never mind. Let's get this over with.

(A ferocious scrap ensues. The new boy ultimately concedes defeat.)

Boy (*disgustedly*): Okay, I give up already! Happy now?

Tom (*triumphantly*): You bet I am!

(Tom turns to leave. The moment Tom's back is turned, the boy stoops for a stone, which he hurls at Tom's back. He sprints away before Tom can retaliate.)

Tom (*shrugging*): I probably deserved that. Anyway, time to head home!⁵

(Tom heads home, and climbs into his room through the window. He's immediately caught by Aunt Polly, who was waiting for him.)

Polly (*grinning*): You had to come back eventually. Did you really think I wouldn't punish you for skipping school, just because you ran out of the house earlier?

Tom (*resignedly*): When you put it that way, it *does* seem kind of stupid.

Polly: I see you've been fighting, too. Well, you've really done it this time... you can spend your Saturday whitewashing my fence!

Sid (*gloating*): And he should have to reimburse you for the jam he stole!

Polly (*rolling her eyes*): Oh, hush, Sid. Nobody likes you.

Scene 3: Wheeling and Dealing

(The next morning is Saturday, and Tom is stuck whitewashing the fence. Tom is initially crestfallen about his lost weekend... but as he's approached by a boy named Ben Rogers, he gets an idea.)

Ben: Hey, Tom! Too bad you're stuck doing work on a Saturday.

Tom (*feigning confusion*): Work? You really think this is work?

Ben: Well, of course it's work! You're whitewashing a fence!

Tom (*shrugging*): If you say so, I guess. All I know is, it suits me just fine.

Ben: Don't tell me that you're actually enjoying yourself!

Tom (*earnestly*): Well, why shouldn't I, Ben? After all... it's not every day that a boy gets to paint a fence!

⁵ By the way... I don't think that boy is ever mentioned again, so feel free to forget about him.

(Tom resumes painting and studiously ignores Ben, conveying joy and satisfaction all the while. Ben watches with growing curiosity. Eventually, he pipes up again.)

Ben: Hey, Tom... how about giving me a turn with that?

Tom (*quickly*): Oh, no Ben... no, I couldn't possibly do that! Aunt Polly asked me to whitewash this fence, and she's awfully picky about how it's done.

Ben (*protesting*): Now, don't be that way, Tom! Just let me try it for a few minutes... your aunt doesn't need to know!

Tom (*firmly*): Sorry Ben, but I can't disappoint Aunt Polly. Not just any kid can do this, you know... it takes a special kind of hand to get it right!

Ben: Okay, okay! What if I give you my apple? Can I try whitewashing then?

Tom (*skeptically*): Well... I don't know. I guess you could try it for a few minutes. But you'll have to whitewash it carefully, or we'll both be in trouble.

Ben (*gratefully*): Thanks, Tom! You're the best!

Tom (*smiling duplicitously*): I know, Ben. I know.

(Before long, a full hour has passed with Ben whitewashing the fence under Tom's direction. By now, several other boys have gathered around to watch.)

Billy: Hey, Tom... can I have a turn if I give you my kite?

Tom: Well... I guess so, Billy. Sure.

Johnny: Can I have the next turn? I'll give you my dead rat!⁶

Tom: You're kidding, right?

Johnny: Okay, then... how about a one-eyed kitten?⁷

Tom: No.

Johnny: Okay, okay! You can have this brass doorknob I found!

Tom (*slapping his forehead*): For goodness' sake, man... next time, *lead* with that!

Boy 1: How about a tin soldier?

Tom: Sold!

Boy 2: I've got a key that doesn't unlock anything!

Tom: Works for me!

Boy 3: Do you want my spool cannon?

⁶ This isn't a joke... a dead rat was actually listed among the "treasures" that Tom got from the other boys.

⁷ This isn't a joke, either... what's with these kids and macabre animal gifts?

Tom: I don't know what that is, but absolutely!⁸

Boy 4: I have six firecrackers!

Tom (*enthusiastically*): Now we're talking!

(At noon, Aunt Polly checks up on Tom: she's shocked to find the fence completely whitewashed. Tom has already discreetly dismissed his helpers and stashed his treasures.)

Polly: What in the world... how did you finish so quickly?

Tom (*innocently*): Just hard work and sweat, ma'am!

(Sid approaches the scene.)

Sid: Aw, man... I figured the whitewashing would put you out of commission for most of the weekend! I guess this round goes to you, Tom.

Tom: Thanks, Sid! You're a gentleman and a scholar.

(Without warning, Tom scoops a clod of dirt from the ground and hurls it directly at Sid's head. Sid bellows in protest as he wipes dirt off his face.)

Tom (*grinning*): That's for ratting me out yesterday. *(He jumps the fence and runs away.)*

Sid (*frustrated*): Aunt Polly... why would Tom throw dirt at me when you're right here!? He knows you're going to punish him when he gets back!

Polly (*shaking her head*): He still seems to believe that fleeing the scene erases the consequences of his actions. He'll figure it out one day.⁹

Chapter 2: A Day of Love and War

Scene 1: Conflict in the Square

(Tom has reached the public square of the village, where his close friend Joe Harper is waiting.)

Tom: Ready for today's battle?

Joe: You know it!

(Tom and Joe assume the role of military commanders, and engage in a mock skirmish. From the original narrative, it's unclear whether their "armies" are toy soldiers, other boys, or entirely imaginary¹⁰. In any event, Tom wins the engagement.)

Joe: Well fought, Tom! But next time... Tom?

(Tom's attention has been completely diverted by a blonde girl his age, walking down the street.)

⁸ I Googled it: a spool cannon is a homemade toy that can be used to slingshot pencils and stuff. Cool!

⁹ I actually knew guys like this in high school: they'd deliberately skip school on the day of a test, apparently believing that this would allow them to escape getting a bad grade. I wonder what happened to them.

¹⁰ Charles Dickens does this, too: both authors like to use metaphors and "tongue in cheek" statements in their narrative. It's entertaining to read, but sometimes it comes at the cost of clarity.

Tom: That's the most beautiful girl I've ever seen! I'm completely smitten!

Joe (*cautiously*): Um... what about Amy Lawrence?

Tom (*confused*): Who?

Joe: Amy Lawrence... you know, the girl you've been moaning and groaning about for several months? Why, she finally confessed her feelings for you just last week! Won't it be kind of hard on her if you start chasing someone else?

Tom (*waving dismissively*): Oh, her. Well, she'll get over it.

Joe: You're kind of a cad, Tom.

Tom (*hushing Joe*): Not now, Joe... I need this new girl to like me, so I'm going to cast aside my normal behavior and act like a buffoon!

Joe: Yeah, okay... I'm not sure she'll notice any difference.

(Tom performs an elaborate series of gymnastics in the public square as the girl walks past him. Joe stands nearby, looking uncomfortable.)

Tom: Drat, she's heading home... let's follow her there!

(They approach the girl's house. Joe glances around self-consciously.)

Joe (*nervously*): Are you sure we should be doing this at all, Tom? It feels kind of creepy... and we're, like, 10 years old!

Tom (*defensively*): Hey, it's not my fault if I'm an early bloomer.

Joe: But it *is* your fault if you creep her out.

(Without warning, a flower sails out of the house's window and lands neatly at Tom's feet.)

Tom: Ha ha! Vindicated! It isn't creepy if she's into it.

Joe: Okay, I'm out. Have fun with... whatever this is.

Tom: Don't sweat it, Joe! I'm heading home now, anyway.

Joe: Well... okay. That's a relief.

Tom (*reflectively*): And later this week, I'll probably ask her to marry me.¹¹

Joe: Okay, I'm out again.

Scene 2: Accusations at Dinner

(Tom arrives at home, where he's greeted by Aunt Polly.)

Polly (*scolding*): Tom, just where do you get off, throwing dirt at Sid?

¹¹ No, really! Tom actually does this later.

Tom (*protesting*): But that happened in a completely different scene! And I ran away before you could punish me!

(*Polly rolls her eyes, and raps Tom on the knuckles.*)

Polly: Now get washed up for supper.

(*During supper, Tom slyly tries to steal from the sugar bowl. Polly catches him at it, and raps his knuckles again.*)

Tom (*frustrated*): Aunt Polly! Why don't you ever rap Sid's knuckles when he pinches from the sugar bowl?

Polly: Because Sid doesn't cause me as much trouble, that's why!

(*Tom glares at Sid, who sticks out his tongue when Polly isn't looking. The tension builds around the dinner table. A few minutes later, Polly steps into the kitchen. Sid immediately tries to steal a pinch of sugar, but he accidentally drops the bowl and breaks it. Tom is excited, as he anticipates that Sid will finally get into trouble... but unexpectedly, Sid grins wickedly at Tom.*)

Sid: Oh, you're in for it now, Tom! Aunt Polly's gonna belt you good when she sees the bowl!

Tom (*furious*): What do you talking about, Sid!? You're the one who broke it!

Sid (*smugly*): And who's Aunt Polly going to believe? After all... I don't cause her as much trouble!

(*Before Tom can think of a reply, Polly returns and sees the bowl.*)

Polly (*indignantly*): Tom Sawyer! Didn't I just warn you about the sugar bowl? It's time for a belting!

Tom: But Polly... it was Sid this time!

Sid: Hah! And just why should Aunt Polly blame *me*?

Tom: Because, stupid... the bowl fragments are all on *your* side of the table!

(*Polly glares darkly at Sid.*)

Polly: Sid, what have I told you about being a hypocritical brat?

Sid (*nervously*): Um... uh...

Polly: It's time for a belting!

(*Polly uses her belt to put Sid through an experience, and then sends him to his room.*¹² *Shortly afterward, Tom's cousin Mary enters the room: she's also a do-gooder, but unlike Sid, she's actually nice.*)

Mary: Good evening, Tom!

¹² Let me be honest. In the original scene, Polly realizes that Tom is telling the truth... but she refuses to admit she was wrong because (quote) "discipline forbade that". This pompous, self-defeating interpretation of discipline really annoyed me... and besides, I thought it would be much funnier if the scene ended with Aunt Polly belting Sid. So, here we are.

Tom: Good evening, Mary!

Mary (*eyeing the supper table*): Where's Sid? It's not like him to miss his desserts.

Tom (*grinning*): Don't worry, Mary... he didn't!

Scene 3: A Nighttime Excursion

(That evening, Tom sneaks out the window to visit the blonde girl's house again. He arrives at her house by midnight, and he decides to lay on the grass in front of her window¹³.)

Tom: This is definitely a very normal thing for somebody to do! I sure hope my "dream girl" notices me.

(Suddenly, a house servant spots Tom, and dowses him with a basin full of dirty water.)

Servant: Get out of here, you vagrant!

Tom (*enraged*): Vagrant *this*!

(Tom throws a rock through one of the house's windows, and then sprints away.¹⁴)

Tom: Wait... if I want to impress this girl, I probably shouldn't throw rocks at her house. I guess I didn't think that one all the way through.

(Tom returns to bed through his window. Sid, still smarting from his earlier belting, has enough sense not to challenge Tom about sneaking out.)

Chapter 3: Sunday at Church

Scene 1: Breakfast and Tickets

(Aunt Polly is having breakfast with Tom, Sid, and Mary. After breakfast, they have a brief session of family worship together.¹⁵)

Polly: Okay, Tom... how many scriptures did you memorize this week?

Tom: About that, Aunt Polly. I was just wondering: what if, instead of mechanically memorizing scriptures with no clear goal in mind, we spent the time thinking of ways to apply scriptures in daily life?¹⁶

Polly (*primly*): Don't question the system, Tom. Now get dressed for church.

¹³ In the original story, Tom is super-sulky about being punished for the broken bowl. The chapter digresses into some dark territory, as Tom fantasizes about how people might react if he died. He eventually lies under the girl's window because he's hoping that he'll die overnight (somehow) and be discovered the next day, still holding her flower. Since Tom *isn't* punished for the broken bowl in this parody, this scene basically has him lay outside the girl's window at midnight on a random whim. Let's just agree that this was a weird thing for Tom to do, no matter what led up to it, and move on.

¹⁴ No, I'm not making this up! The narrative's a little indirect, but it really seems to say that Tom threw something at the house in retaliation, resulting in broken glass!

¹⁵ Yes, the book actually uses the term "family worship"!

¹⁶ Tom doesn't actually say this in the book. But it had to be said.

(On the way to church, Mary converses with Tom.¹⁷)

Mary (*cheerfully*): I got 3 blue tickets last week for memorizing scriptures in Sunday school. If I can earn just 5 more red tickets and 2 yellow tickets, I can trade them in for a Bible!

Tom: You've already earned 2 Bibles that way, Mary. Why do you want another one? Is it the prestige?

Mary (*horrified*): Why Tom, of course not! It's just a goal to help me along.

Tom (*reflectively*): Earning a Bible with tickets *does* attract some good attention, though. That might come in handy later.

Mary: I'm still not sure about your motives, Tom... but you know, if you really applied yourself to memorizing scriptures, I'll bet you could earn enough tickets to trade in for a Bible of your own.

Tom (*shrugging*): Oh, I already have plenty of tickets. See? I'm only 1 yellow ticket away from getting a Bible.

(He fans them out in front of Mary, who is shocked.)

Mary: Why, Tom... how in the world did you manage to earn that many tickets already?

Tom (*grinning*): By trading with the other kids, of course! This latest yellow ticket only cost me 3 firecrackers.

Mary (*horrified*): Tom Sawyer! I'm afraid you've completely missed the point of this system.

Tom: You could be right, Mary... all I know is, the system works in my favor!

Mary (*protesting*): But... but you're supposed to earn those tickets through hard work and study!

Tom: You mean like that German kid last year? He studied so hard that his brain gave out, and he's been a simpleton ever since.

Mary: Um... that can't actually happen.

Tom (*surprised*): Really? Then why do so many reputable journals, medical professionals, and prestigious authors from this era insist that it's possible?

Mary (*shrugging helplessly*): It's the 1800's. What can I say?

Tom (*laughing*): You've got me there, Mary.¹⁸

¹⁷ The following scene was originally just narration. Since this is a screenplay, I thought it might work better as a conversation with Mary (besides... Mary could use a little more "presence" in the story).

¹⁸ Back in the era of this book, people had a very different understanding of "brain fatigue" or "overstudy": they actually believed that if you used your brain too hard, for too long, you could permanently go insane or become a simpleton. Charles Dickens and Louisa May Alcott are two other authors who perpetuated this myth. And it wasn't just the world of fiction, either: the idea was also popularized through medical science and (needless to say) the media. Sigh.

Scene 2: A Brilliant Plan Backfires

(Tom and his peers arrive at Sunday school. Mr. Walters, the superintendent, delivers a speech to the children. It is dull and formulaic, and not worth covering in detail.¹⁹)

Mr. Walters (*monotone*): ...to conclude our program today, we have a special guest: Judge Thatcher and his family. So I suppose I actually should have said *special guests*, because there's more than one of them, and that would require a plural tense. Judge Thatcher, if you please?

(Tom glances at the Thatcher family as they enter, and he does a double-take... the daughter is the blonde girl he was flirting with yesterday! Instantly, Tom is struck by an inspiration: earning a Bible would be a great way to show off to her, and he only needs 1 more yellow ticket.²⁰ Tom whispers to the boy next to him.)

Tom: Hey, Billy... I'll trade you a fishhook for that yellow ticket of yours!

Billy: C'mon, Tom... no fishhook's worth a yellow ticket!

Tom (*urgently*): Fine then... a fishhook and a piece of licorice!

Billy: That's more like it! Okay, here you go.

(Tom obtains the yellow ticket, just as Judge Thatcher begins speaking.)

Thatcher: Well, what an impressive assembly of young ones we have here today! (*aside to Mr. Walters*) Mr. Walters, you said somebody here had earned a Bible today?

Mr. Walters (*uneasily*): Well, actually your honor, the child in question ended up a few blue tickets short... they were afraid of getting brain fatigue.

Thatcher (*taken aback*): Well I never, Mr. Walters! I came here with the expectation of presenting a Bible to one of these fine youths!

(Tom, seeing his opening, leaps to his feet excitedly.)

Tom: Oh, Mr. Walters! Pick me! I have enough tickets today!

(There are many startled gasps from both young and old alike, including Mr. Walters. Clearly, no one expected someone like Tom to earn this many tickets.)

Mr. Walters: How the heck did you... uh, never mind. Come on up then, won't you Tom?

(Tom eagerly runs to the front of the room, and proudly presents his tickets to Judge Thatcher. He realizes that Amy Lawrence is proudly beaming at him from the audience, but he studiously ignores her and beams back at Judge Thatcher's blonde daughter, instead. Amy deduces that Tom has fallen for someone else, and becomes angry and tearful.²¹)

¹⁹ This is how the original book covered his speech, too.

²⁰ Well, actually... in the original scene, before Tom gets this idea, he initially tries to impress the daughter by cuffing nearby boys, pulling his hair, and making faces at her. And for what it's worth, all the adults in the scene start showing off in their own little ways to impress the judge. It's comical enough, but I just figured, *nah*.

²¹ But let's be honest: she's probably better off.

Thatcher: What's your name, son?

Tom (*proudly*): Tom Sawyer, sir!

Thatcher (*encouragingly*): So, Tom... would you like to share some of your wisdom with us?

Tom (*confused*): Wisdom, sir?

Thatcher: Well, you had to memorize a lot of scriptures to earn all those tickets, after all! So please, tell the audience some of the things you've learned. We're proud of little boys that learn.

Tom (*panicking*): Um... uh...

Mr. Walters (*jumping in*): Er, heh... I'm sure the boy just has a bit of stage fright, your honor.

Thatcher (*understandingly*): Yes, of course... we can't all be seasoned orators, eh? Very well Tom, then just tell us something simple. Say, the names of 2 disciples?

(There's an awkward silence, as Tom opens and closes his mouth several times. The tension builds as the silence grows unbearably long, and Tom finally blurts out an answer.)

Tom: David and Goliath!

(Fade to black.^{22 23})

Chapter 4: Monday at School

Scene 1: Loose Teeth and Injured Toes

(It's Monday morning. Tom and Sid are getting dressed for school.)

Tom: I hate having to go to stupid school! It's such a waste of a perfectly good day, Sid!²⁴

Sid (*smirking*): So skip it, Tom.

Tom: Oh, no you don't, Sid... and have you rat me out to Aunt Polly again? Not a chance! Unless... unless I was sick, of course. Then I could stay home!

Sid: But you aren't sick.

Tom: We'll just see about that... hey, one of my toes kind of hurts! That could work.

Sid (*curious in spite of himself*): Why don't you tell Aunt Polly about your loose tooth? That's something, isn't it?

Tom: No, a loose tooth doesn't do me any good... Aunt Polly would just pull it out, which hurts like crazy! And anyway, it's not enough to get me out of school.

²² At this point, the actual book says "Let us draw the curtain of charity over the rest of the scene"... so I'm just following suite with the equivalent stage direction.

²³ The next scene has Tom in church, but nothing much happens... the highlight is when a poodle picks a fight with a beetle, and interrupts the sermon. It's amusing enough, but it doesn't translate very well to a parody screenplay.

²⁴ Just wait until Tom gets his first job.

Sid (*sarcastically*): Oh, and hurting toe is? ²⁵

Tom: Well, I remember a doctor once told me about a certain thing that laid up a patient for two or three weeks, and threatened to make him lose a finger. Maybe the same thing can happen with toes... it'll have to do! (*calling down the stairs*) Aunt Polly! Aunt Polly! Come quick!

(*Aunt Polly comes up the stairs, looking skeptical but moving quickly nonetheless.*)

Polly: What is it, Tom? What's the matter?

Tom (*earnestly*): My toe hurts dreadfully, ma'am... I think it might fall off!

(*Polly sinks into a chair, and laughs until she cries.*)

Polly: Tom Sawyer... what a scare you gave me. Now stop this nonsense and get ready for school!

Sid (*slyly*): But Aunt Polly... Tom really does have a loose tooth!

Polly: Well, don't you worry Tom... we'll have that tooth yanked out in no time. You won't even be late for class this morning.

Tom: Dang it, Sid!

(*Polly leaves the room, and returns moments later with a silk string and a half-burned log from the fireplace. She ties one end of the string to Tom's tooth, and the other end to a bedpost. Without warning, she thrusts the burning end of the log dangerously close to Tom's face. Tom jerks back involuntarily, and the tooth pulls free.*)

Tom (*rubbing his jaw gingerly*): Ouch... Aunt Polly, would you really let the log burn my face if I didn't jerk back?

Polly (*shrugging*): It's never come up. Now, off to school with you! Scoot!

Scene 2: Huckleberry Finn's Dubious Plan

(*On the way to school, Tom encounters Huckleberry Finn, son of the town drunkard. Huckleberry comes and goes as he pleases, which makes him a pariah to the adults and the envy of every small boy.*)

Tom: Hello, Huckleberry! What's in the bag?

Huckleberry: A dead cat. ²⁶

Tom: What do you need a dead cat for, Huck?

Huckleberry: I'm going to use it in a superstitious graveyard ritual to cure warts with a special chant.

²⁵ The original scene mostly had Tom thinking all this stuff to himself. I turned it into a conversation with Sid: in the process, I gave Sid another opportunity to be a jerk.

²⁶ In this book, dead animals are consistently portrayed as boyish trophies. You have to wonder how this impacted the general population's health.

Tom (*alarmed*): Whoa, whoa! Isn't this supposed to be a children's book? What's with this sudden digression into the occult?²⁷

Huckleberry: Hey, it's not just me! I could talk for several pages about other people in town and *their* superstitious rituals.

Tom: Please don't.

Huckleberry (*sniffing*): Well, look who's on their high horse! Just what's wrong with superstitious rituals, anyway?

Tom (*scratching his head*): I dunno... isn't there supposed to be a Bible verse about not practicing magic or looking for omens? In theory, we take the Bible pretty seriously around here.²⁸

Huckleberry: I don't know what to tell you, Tom.

(*Awkward silence.*)

Tom: So anyway... can I have that tick you've caught? I'll trade my tooth for it.

Huckleberry (*enthusiastically*): Sure!

Scene 3: Shameless Flirting

(*Tom's brief encounter with Huckleberry has made him late for school. He tries to slip into class unnoticed, but the teacher immediately catches him.*)

Teacher (*challengingly*): So! Late again, Tom Sawyer... what's your excuse this time?

(*Tom wracks his brain for a reply, and he suddenly notices the blonde girl in the girl's section. Tom instantly realizes two things: first, the punishment for a major infraction is to sit with the girls. Second, the only empty seat in the girl's section is next to the blonde girl.*²⁹)

Tom (*boldly*): I was talking to Huckleberry Finn!

(*Gasps sweep across the room... apparently, Huckleberry Finn is so disreputable that simply talking to him is a punishable offense.*³⁰)

Teacher (*astonished*): I can't believe you actually admitted that! As punishment, go sit with the girls!

Tom (*grinning*): Yes, sir!

Teacher: But first, a swift beating.

Tom (*crestfallen*): Aw, man.

²⁷ In the original book, Tom is just as superstitious as Huckleberry. Instead, I've used Tom here (somewhat indulgently) as a sounding board.

²⁸ I'm not pulling any punches on this particular topic. What's the point of all these "scripture memorization" competitions, if the community at large still can't grasp basic principles like the Bible's stance on superstition?

²⁹ Say what you will about Tom, but his spontaneous tactical planning here is impressive.

³⁰ I wonder what the equivalent offence would be today? Having lunch with a drug dealer?

(One swift beating later, Tom is dumped in the empty seat next to the blonde girl. Tom spends a few minutes drawing on his slate. When the girl's not looking, Tom slyly slides her a peach. She looks up quizzically, and Tom discreetly shows her part of his slate, where he's written "Please take it: I got more".³¹)

Girl (*quietly gushing*): Oh... a ripe clingstone fruit! How romantic!

Tom (*whispering*): That's not all! Would you like to learn how to draw like *this*?

(Tom proudly shows the rest of his slate, where he's drawn a crude picture of a house.)

Girl: Ooh, an artist too! Can you teach me at lunch?

Tom: You bet! My name's Tom Sawyer... what's yours?

Girl: I'm Becky Thatcher.³²

Tom: Did you notice the inscription I drew under the house?

(Becky looks closely, and realizes it says "I love you". She raps Tom's hand in a pretense of anger, but she looks pleased.)

Tom (*thinking to himself*): Man, it took months to get this far with Amy Lawrence... this girl is way easier! Nothing can spoil my morning now!

(Suddenly, the teacher appears right next to Tom's desk.)

Teacher: Fraternizing with the girls, Tom? As punishment, go sit with the boys!

Tom (*sourly*): Yes, sir.

Teacher: But first, a swift beating.

Tom (*crestfallen*): Aw, c'mon!

Scene 4: A Spontaneous Game

(Back in the boy's section of the classroom, Tom grapples with boredom during the morning's lessons. Suddenly, he remembers the tick that he obtained from Huckleberry earlier that day. He slyly lets it out of its box, so that it can crawl around his desk. When it starts wandering too close to an edge, he uses a pin to turn it aside in a new direction.)

Tom (*musings*): Why can't geography be as engaging as *this*?

(Joe Harper, who's sitting next to Tom, eventually takes notice of the game. Joe cautiously looks up to ensure the teacher isn't paying attention, and then he joins Tom in harassing the tick with his own pin. They begin to get in each other's way.)

Tom: Mind yourself, Joe! It's my tick!

³¹ Hey, wow... the kids back then had personal tablets. We've practically come full circle!

³² Thank goodness... it was getting clunky to call her "the blonde girl" all the time.

Joe: What if we share? We'll split the desk fifty-fifty, and then I can only poke at the tick when he's on my side of the desk!

Tom: Okay, let's try it!

(The game begins in earnest, with each boy trying to maneuver the tick into staying on their side of the desk. Eventually, the tick ends up deep in Joe's territory, and Tom goes several minutes without getting to play. Frustrated, Tom breaks the rules and reaches onto Joe's side of the desk to guide the tick back toward him.)

Joe: Hey! That's cheating, Tom!

Tom: It's my tick, so it's my rules!

Joe: You should get a penalty for interfering on my side!

Tom: Technically, the whole *desk* is mine!

(The boys are so absorbed in their argument that they fail to notice the entire classroom has gone quiet. The teacher storms up to Tom's desk.)

Teacher (*indignantly*): So... this *tick* is more interesting than my digression on calcium formations... is that it?

Tom: Do you really want an honest answer to that?

Teacher (*angrily*): Beatings! Beatings for both of you! And three days of detention for the tick. ³³

Scene 5: Tom Messes Up

(At lunch, Tom meets Becky for her art lesson. After a while, they forget about drawing and start to talk.)

Tom: Do you love rats?³⁴

Becky: Um... not really.

Tom: Oh.

Becky: I prefer chewing gum.³⁵

Tom: Got it. Becky, I'd like you to take my greatest treasure... this brass doorknob!

Becky (*beaming*): Thank you, Tom! You're so nice... not like the other boys.

Tom (*smiling*): Thanks, Becky.

Becky: Why, just the other day, some horrible boy hurled a rock through our window! I know you'd never do something like that.

³³ One of the best things about parodies is the ever-present opportunity to be silly. In all seriousness, though: as a child, I remember wondering what became of the tick. It's never mentioned again after the boys are caught.

³⁴ This is a direct quote from the original scene. What a classic pickup line!

³⁵ This isn't quite a direct quote, but it's still pretty close.

Tom (*nervously*): Heh... uh, no. No, of course not.³⁶ Um... say Becky, have you ever been engaged?

Becky: Engaged, as in employed?

Tom: Uh, no.

Becky: Oh... you mean engaged, as in busy and involved?

Tom: No.

Becky: Then no, I guess not. What kind of engaged did *you* mean?

Tom: It's easy! You just tell a boy that you won't ever have anybody but him, ever ever, and then you kiss and that's all. Anybody can do it.³⁷

Becky: Wow, anybody?

Tom: Yeah! Why, me and Amy Lawrence -

Becky (*aghast*): Oh, Tom! So I'm not the first one you've ever been engaged to?³⁸

Tom: Uh... technically no. But in my defense, I callously abandoned her to be with you!

Becky: *That's your defense!?* (*She runs away sobbing.*)

Tom (*dismayed*): Shucks! This whole scene was unfortunate for everybody.

Scene 6: Games in the Woods

(Tom flees school, and runs off into the woods. He has a series of boyish fantasies.)

Tom: This is the worst day of my life! I wish that I was dead. No, wait! I wish I was a solider: that would be awesome! Or better yet... I could join the native Americans³⁹, and live off the land!

(As Tom continues his indecisive soliloquy, Joe approaches.)

Tom: No, wait... a pirate! Yes, that's the life for me! I'll become the most fearsome pirate on the seven seas. I've finally found my purpose in life... I'll start tomorrow. I am a pirate!

Joe: Want to play "Robin Hood" instead?

Tom: Sure! You can be the evil Guy of Guisborne!

(They commence sword fighting with sticks. Ten minutes go by, and neither boy lands a blow.)

Tom (*panting*): Here, now! You have to get stabbed eventually, you know!

Joe (*indignant*): Why should I?

³⁶ I'll bet you forgot about that. The book never mentions it again, though, so I wouldn't blame you.

³⁷ I'm still not sure about these kids. They seem either too innocent, or not innocent enough.

³⁸ In the original book, they actually kissed before Becky found out about Amy. Sorry, but there won't be any kissing 10-year-olds on my watch!

³⁹ I'm not calling them "Indians", because North America is not India (citation: any map produced since the 1600's).

Tom: Because that's what happens in the book! Robin Hood kills Guy of Guisborne.

Joe (*shrugging*): You've got me there. Next time I'm playing Friar Tuck.

Tom: You know, Joe, it just occurred to me... I ran away from school at lunch. Has enough time passed that school is out for the day, or did you skip school too?

Joe: Don't worry about it.⁴⁰

Chapter 5: Tragedy in the Graveyard

Scene 1: The Outrage

(It's late at night, and Tom is waiting for the opportunity to sneak out again.⁴¹ Eventually, Tom decides that everyone is asleep, and he slips out to meet Huckleberry at the graveyard.)

Tom: Wait... what are we doing out here, anyway?

Huckleberry: I thought we could try my creepy graveyard ritual tonight.

Tom: Ugh, can't we do something else? How about a game of marbles, instead?

(Before Huckleberry can reply, three figures appear out of the gloom, bearing a light. The boys swiftly take cover behind some old tombstones. Huckleberry frantically points at the light.)

Huckleberry (*in a strangled whisper*): Tom! It's three spirits! And devil-fire!

Tom (*rolling his eyes*): It's three guys and a lantern, Huck. Let's hide here, and see what they're up to.

Huckleberry: Why, that's young Dr. Robinson! I can't quite make out the other two.

Tom (*squinting*): It looks like the old drunk, Muff Potter⁴². And I think the other one's Injun Joe.

Huckleberry: I'm really not a fan of that name. Maybe we could call him "Stabby Joe", instead.

Tom: "Stabby Joe"! That's a ridiculous name!

Huckleberry (*shrugging*): I don't know... somehow, I think it suits him.⁴³

Tom: Okay, fine! Now, pipe down... if they're out this late, they're probably up to no good.

(Tom and Huckleberry silently watch the men.)

Dr. Robinson: Will you two hurry up with that grave?

Potter: Hey, digging up corpses isn't light work. And I'm already drunk!

⁴⁰ Joe has indeed skipped school... this will be called out later. By the way, I skipped a brief scene where Tom employs a superstitious ritual to find his lost marbles (which doesn't work). You're welcome.

⁴¹ The original scene has some well-written poetry about night sounds, such as "the tiresome chirping of a cricket that no human ingenuity could locate".

⁴² Incidentally... Muff Potter isn't Huckleberry's dad, even though Huckleberry was originally described as the son of the town drunk. Apparently, this town has at least two drunks.

⁴³ Foreshadowing. :)

Stabby Joe: And I'm evil!

Dr. Robinson: Fine. Just make it quick.

(From their hiding place, Tom recoils.)

Tom: Why would anybody want to rob a grave, Huck? What good is a corpse?

Huckleberry: Beats me, Tom. They make terrible gifts.⁴⁴

(The corpse is finally lifted out of the grave, but Potter deliberately lets it drop on the ground.)

Potter: We want another five, or the corpse stays right where it is.

Dr. Robinson *(fuming)*: I paid you both in advance!

Potter: I know! I already blew it on alcohol!

Stabby Joe: Forget the money! I want revenge!

Potter: Huh? Revenge on who?

Stabby Joe *(dramatically pointing to Dr. Robinson)*: Dr. Robinson: five years ago, I asked if you had any food to spare... and you told me "no"⁴⁵!

(Tense silence.)

Potter: You're kind of an idiot, Joe.

Dr. Robinson *(disgusted)*: You're both the worst henchmen ever.

(Enraged, Stabby Joe attacks Dr. Robinson: Dr. Robinson immediately lays him flat with a punch to the face. Potter drops the knife he'd been holding in surprise, but he rushes to Stabby Joe's defense.)

Potter: Don't kill Stabby Joe! He owes me money!

(As Dr. Robinson and Muff Potter struggle, Stabby Joe gets back to his feet and picks up Potter's knife, with murder in his eyes. Dr. Robinson shoves Potter against a tombstone, knocking him out, but Stabby Joe comes up from behind and fatally stabs Dr. Robinson. Tom and Huckleberry, still hidden from view, are transfixed in horror.)

Dr. Robinson *(weakly)*: You're fired! *(He dies.)*

⁴⁴ What was Dr. Robinson's plan for the corpse, anyway? Medical research? Mad science? A macabre prank?

⁴⁵ No, really! That's the entire motivation for "Stabby Joe's" revenge. The book seems to imply that these senseless grudges are caused by... er, his heritage. Honestly, though... plenty of literature from this time period features ludicrously long grudges. Even L. M. Montgomery's quaint characters from Prince Edward Island would sometimes hold grudges for decades at a time! I dunno... maybe this is just what miserable people did before we had social media trolls.

Stabby Joe (*defiantly*): You can't fire me... I quit! No, wait... that doesn't make any sense in this context. Dang.⁴⁶

(Stabby Joe patiently waits for Muff Potter to wake up.)

Potter (*groggily*): Oh, man... I can't remember a thing. Have I been drinking?

Stabby Joe (*slyly*): No, Potter... you've been murdering. See! Look what you did to poor Dr. Robinson with that knife of yours!

(Potter looks at Dr. Robinson's body in horror, and then back at Stabby Joe in confusion.)

Potter: But then, why are you holding the murder weapon?

(Stabby Joe does a face palm.)

Stabby Joe: Dang it, I forgot! Hang on, let's try this again!

(Stabby Joe shoves Potter against the tombstone, knocking him out again. This time, Stabby Joe plants the knife in Potter's outstretched hand, and patiently waits for Muff Potter to wake up.⁴⁷)

Potter (*groggily*): Oh, man... I can't remember a thing. Have I been drinking?

Stabby Joe (*slyly*): No, Potter... you've been murdering. See! Look what you did to poor Dr. Robinson with that knife of yours!

(Potter looks at Dr. Robinson's body in horror, and then at the knife in his own hand.)

Potter: You're right! It's the only possible explanation! You won't tell anyone, right?

Stabby Joe: Of course I won't. If you can't trust a graverobbing co-conspirator, who can you trust? Now, let's get out of here!

(Muff Potter flees drunkenly, with Stabby Joe a short distance behind him. In their haste, Potter's knife is left behind.)

Tom: We just witnessed a murder, Huck! What are we going to do!?

Huckleberry: Frisk the body for fishing lures?

Tom (*frustrated*): Huck!

Huckleberry: I don't know, then! Let's just get out of here!

Tom: Okay, let's head for the old tannery... we can hide there, and figure out what to do next!

⁴⁶ Some adaptations go out of their way to make Dr. Robinson as unlikable as possible, presumably to "soften the blow" when he's killed... but this seems kind of unnecessary. He's already hired two guys to rob a grave for him, right? And anyway, this is a *murder*... it isn't supposed to feel good!

⁴⁷ I was just being silly here. Obviously, in the original story, Muff Potter is framed correctly the first time.

(They run into the night.⁴⁸)

Scene 2: Now What?

(Tom and Huckleberry arrive at the old tannery. Inside, they discuss what to do next.)

Tom: Huckleberry... what's going to come of all this?

Huckleberry: A hanging, I reckon. Dr. Robinson's been killed.

Tom (*hesitating*): So... so, should we tell everyone what happened?

Huckleberry: Are you serious, Tom? You want us to point the finger at Stabby Joe? That's well and good if Stabby Joe's hanged... but what if something happens, and he isn't? He'd come after us next!

Tom: I was thinking the same thing, Huck. But we can't let Stabby Joe get away with this, can we?

Huckleberry: So, let Muff Potter tell everyone what happened!

Tom: That's no good, Huck... Muff Potter doesn't know. He thinks he did it!

Huckleberry (*adamant*): Well, I'm not risking both our lives to save one old drunk. You've gotta promise to keep quiet about this, Tom.

Tom: I guess so, Huck. It just doesn't feel right, that's all.

Huckleberry: Fine, then. I guess I'll have to describe, in great detail, how howling dogs can be used to predict when people will die.

Tom (*exasperated*): Alright, already! I won't say a word, okay? Good grief, Huck... can't you go one hour without saying something superstitious?

Huckleberry (*reflectively*): How long has it been since our conversation at the graveyard?

Tom: About 45 minutes.

Huckleberry (*shrugging*): Then no... I guess I can't.

Scene 3: Worst Morning Ever

(Tom wakes up the next morning: his peace is quickly shattered as the events of the night come flooding back to him. Next, it dawns on him that even though it's past breakfast time, nobody's called him downstairs. And Sid is already gone. Filled with foreboding, Tom gets dressed and heads down the stairs.)

Tom (*nervously*): Am I in trouble, Aunt Polly?

Polly (*forlornly*): What's the use in punishing you, Tom? You just go ahead, and keep ruining yourself. You're bringing my gray hairs down to the grave in sorrow.

Tom (*very nervously*): What are you saying, Aunt Polly?

⁴⁸ In the original book, Tom and Huck flee immediately after the murder, so they don't see "Stabby Joe" deliberately framing Muff Potter. But many adaptations (including this one) keep Tom and Huck around for the whole scene: it just seems simpler (and perhaps more direct) to have them fully aware of the situation from the outset.

Polly (*sharply*): Don't play innocent with me, Tom! I know all about last night!

Tom (*panicking*): You do!?

Polly: Yes! You snuck out of the house again!

Tom (*weak with relief*): Oh, thank goodness... yes, I suppose I did. For a minute there, I thought you knew about the "murder thing".

Polly (*startled*): "Murder thing"!?

Tom: Not murder! Uh... birder! Yeah, the "birder thing". I snuck outside last night to... watch nocturnal birds.

Polly (*relieved*): Whew. Okay, then.⁴⁹ Well, I still don't know what to do with you, Tom... you've caused me a lot of grief lately.

Tom: I'll do better, Aunt Polly. I swear I will!

Polly (*shaking her head sadly*): I wish I could believe that.

(Tom heads to school, severely depressed about his standing with Aunt Polly. Once he's in the classroom, he's confronted by the teacher.)

Teacher (*challengingly*): You and Joe Harper skipped school yesterday afternoon!⁵⁰

Tom (*resignedly*): I suppose if I try to run away, I'll just be punished later?

Teacher: Now you're catching on! Swift beatings for both of you!

(Two swift beatings later, Tom and Joe are sent to their seats. Tom realizes that his brass doorknob has been left on his chair, indicating that Becky returned his gift. He looks over at Becky, but she refuses to return his glance.)

Tom (*despairing*): This is the worst morning ever! I never thought I'd say this... but today, all I want is to lay low and quietly pay attention to school. Maybe, just maybe, class will take my mind off things!

(Just then, a townsman bursts into the schoolroom.)

Townsperson: Dr. Robinson's been murdered in the graveyard!

Teacher: Class is cancelled today! Everybody wander over to the scene of the crime. I'm sure that won't be awkward for any of us!

Tom: Sigh.⁵¹

⁴⁹ Of course, Tom doesn't slip up like this in the book. I just thought it would be funny.

⁵⁰ I'm impressed with Mark Twain's follow-up on this relatively trivial detail.

⁵¹ This actually happens: the entire town basically shuts down for the day. Remember that it's the 1840's, where people aren't used to hearing about killings on the news every evening. And it's a local murder in a small town.

Scene 4: The News Breaks

(Everyone in town has drifted toward the graveyard. As they wander around aimlessly, they gossip among themselves.)

Townsperson 1: I heard that they found Muff Potter's knife at the scene! That's pretty suspicious!

Townsperson 2: Well, I heard that someone found Muff Potter washing himself in a stream early this morning.

Townsperson 3: Now *that's* suspicious!

Townsperson 2: I'll say! Since when does Muff Potter bathe?⁵²

Townsperson 1: Hey... here comes the murderer right now!

Potter (*sobbing*): I didn't do it, friends... I swear I didn't!⁵³

Stabby Joe (*pointing at Potter*): This man is the murderer! I saw it myself, when we were robbing this grave!

(An awkward silence follows.)

Townsperson 3: Uh... grave robbing is also a crime, you know.

Stabby Joe (*taken aback*): Uh, maybe so... but we need to stay focused on the topic at hand, which is blaming Muff Potter for the murder!

Townsperson 1: Good point, Stabby Joe!

Townsperson 2: Yeah! Let's throw Muff Putter in jail... we can have a proper trial later!

(Muff Potter is arrested, and his trial is planned for a later date. Later that day, Tom visits Muff Potter through the jail cell's window.)

Tom: Here, sir... I brought you some biscuits and a crossword puzzle.⁵⁴

Potter (*gruffly*): All I really want is my freedom. And maybe a beer.

Tom: Sorry, sir. It's the best I can do.

Potter (*curiously*): Do I know you, kid? Why are you doing this for me?

Tom: I can't say, sir! Please just take the gifts... it would make me feel better!

Potter: Well... okay, kid. You seem like a good, honest sort. Not like me.

⁵² The original narrative basically says this about Potter. How could I resist including it here as a joke?

⁵³ This part always seemed strange to me: thanks to "Stabby Joe's" lies last night, Potter actually believes he's the murderer, right? So, why is Potter protesting his innocence here so earnestly? Is he drunk and confused? Or does he still believe he's guilty, and he's just trying to get out of trouble? Food for thought!

⁵⁴ The book simply says that Tom brought Potter some "small comforts", so I had to make them up... although a later chapter reveals they're giving him tobacco. Personally, I'd prefer crossword puzzles (even though they weren't invented until the 1900's).

(On hearing this, Tom bursts into tears and runs away. Muff Potter regards Tom's fleeing form in confusion.)

Potter: What the Huckleberry Finn just happened?

Scene 5: Tom Gets Really Depressed

(The days and weeks wear on. Tom's conscience continues to gnaw on him, and even his dreams are tormented by the knowledge that because he hasn't spoken up, an innocent man is in jail.⁵⁵ In addition, Becky hasn't been at school because she's ill. Tom spends most of his free time moping around the house, and Polly is getting worried.)

Polly: Tom... what you need is a homespun quack remedy that I purchased from a travelling grifter!⁵⁶

Tom *(listlessly)*: I'd really rather not, Aunt Polly.

Polly *(insistent, as she offers him a spoon of liquid)*: Come now, Tom! It's good for what ails you. This is supposed to calm your nerves, and make you feel better!

(Tom reluctantly takes the spoon, but he makes no move to drink the liquid.)

Polly: The salesman assured me that 9 out of 10 doctors are urging people to throw out their other medicines, and take this instead!

(Tom's eyes fall on the cat, Peter, who's pawing at his leg.)

Tom: Let's test it, first.

(Before Polly can grasp Tom's intent, he pops the spoon of liquid into the cat's mouth.)

Polly *(horrified)*: Tom!

Tom *(smiling faintly)*: If the medicine's any good, then it shouldn't be a problem. Let's see what Peter does next.

(Polly watches Peter the cat with growing apprehension. For a few minutes, nothing happens. Suddenly, Peter lets out an inarticulate screech and begins racing around the room. As he picks up speed, he begins to add random summersaults and jumping jacks. Tiring of this, Peter races across the mantelpiece and shelving units, topping all of the potted plants and antique plates. Peter finds himself on the cabinet next to the kitchen entrance: with a mighty heave, he pulls open the silverware drawer and begins juggling the forks and knives. After dropping one of the forks, Peter howls with rage and hurls the remaining silverware through a windowpane. Then he leaps back to the floor, where he begins clawing German swear words into the sofa. Having desecrated the sofa, Peter leaps on top of it, stands on his hind legs, and meows several bars of the overture to Mozart's The Marriage of Figaro before finally flopping down onto the cushions and collapsing into a deep sleep, completely exhausted.)

⁵⁵ Okay, fine... a grave-robbing drunk of a man. But still.

⁵⁶ I'm not embellishing this by much. According to the book, Polly's a sucker for quack medicine.

Polly: Wow. The peddler wasn't kidding when he said "actual results may vary".⁵⁷

Tom (*shrugging*): For what it's worth, after seeing all that... I do feel slightly better.

(The next day, Tom is walking to school. As Tom passes Becky's house, he sees her come out the front door. Overjoyed that she's recovered from her illness, Tom laughs and does some gymnastics for her.)

Becky (*sniffing disdainfully*): Hmph! Some boys think they're pretty smart... always showing off!

(Distraught, Tom runs away, in the opposite direction of school. Becky continues walking to school in a huff. Half a minute passes. Tom comes running back, and he throws a rock through one of Becky's windows.)

Tom (*baffled frustration*): What do you want from me!?

(Tom turns around and resumes running away.⁵⁸)

Chapter 6: The Pirates of Jackson's Island

Scene 1: Pirate Preparations

(Tom runs blindly down a forest path, distraught from recent events. He stops to catch his breath in a clearing near the Mississippi river.)

Tom: That tears it! Stabby Joe, Aunt Polly, school, and now Becky... I can't stand this anymore! There's only one thing left to do... abandon civilization, and become a pirate! For real this time!

(Joe Harper bounds onto the scene.⁵⁹)

Joe: And I'm coming with you!

Tom (*overjoyed*): Joe... it's great to have you aboard! And what's *your* reason for abandoning civilization?

Joe: My mom whipped me for taking some cream, even though I was completely innocent. Also, if we never return to civilization, the teacher can't beat me for skipping school yet again.

Tom (*laughing*): That works for me! Let's be allies and best friends until the end of time!

Joe (*enthusiastically*): Yeah!

Tom: Although if I'm being honest, Huckleberry Finn will steal a lot of your thunder for the rest of the story.

Joe: Wait, what?

⁵⁷ The original scene also described Peter's antics in comic detail... I just cranked things up a little. At first, I wanted the punchline here to "turn the tables" on the original scene, by asserting that the cat was *always* like this (in other words, the medicine didn't do anything)... but it took too much explanation to pull off, so I decided to go with a more straightforward punchline.

⁵⁸ In the book, Tom doesn't actually break her window in this scene... although I still think it's remarkable that he really *did* throw a rock through her window in the earlier chapter!

⁵⁹ Joe Harper is Tom's friend, not to be confused with the murderous "Stabby Joe"... I don't think the two Joes share any scenes together, but I still think it's kind of confusing to have "duplicate" character names.

(Huckleberry Finn comes crashing through some bushes.)

Huckleberry: Hi, gang!

Tom: Okay, everyone... here's the plan! Three miles below St. Petersburg, there's a small, uninhabited landmass called "Jackson's Island". We're going to make it our base of operations!

Joe: What'll we eat there?

Tom *(grinning diabolically)*: Aren't you forgetting, Joe? We're pirates now! We're going to steal provisions from town before we set sail!⁶⁰

Huckleberry *(skeptically)*: And what are we going to set sail in?

Tom *(gleefully)*: We'll steal a local log raft!⁶¹

Joe: Hey, I'm starting to see how this works... being a pirate is awesome!

Tom *(dramatically)*: Okay, lads... we'll meet back here with our loot after dark, and then set sail!

Joe and Huckleberry *(enthusiastically)*: Arrrrrrr!

Scene 2: The Pirates Set Sail

(It's near midnight: Tom, Joe, and Huckleberry meet at the Mississippi's riverbank to set sail.)

Tom: Okay, me hearties! Before we set sail on our captured raft, what sort of loot have you pillaged for the voyage?

Huckleberry: I've pillaged a skillet, some half-cured leaf tobacco, and some corncobs to make pipes from!

Tom *(approvingly)*: Equipment and drugs... well done, Huck! I've pillaged an entire ham, for cooking later! How about you, Joe?

Joe *(proudly)*: I've pillaged a side of bacon, and Widow Doulgas' entire silverware drawer!

Tom *(alarmed)*: Whoa, Joe! Too far!

Joe *(baffled)*: But... we're pirates.

Huckleberry *(exasperated)*: Joe... stealing silverware is a *crime*!

Joe *(regarding the other stolen items)*: I am so confused right now.

Tom: Just return the silverware, Joe... and get back quick! We need to head out soon!⁶²

⁶⁰ They actually do this in the book, in case you're wondering.

⁶¹ I'm pretty sure they do this in the book, too... the narrative said they intended to "capture" the raft, which seems to indicate theft. Although I suppose "captured" could also mean that they commandeered the raft and executed its previous owners, just like real pirates would. But probably not.

⁶² The silverware is just a joke. The other items aren't, though.

(Joe returns the silverware, and then the boys load the raft with their loot, and launch away from the shore. 20 minutes pass.)

Joe: Rafting on a river is kind of boring.

Huckleberry: It is not! I'll bet it would make a great spin-off story!⁶³

Tom: Relax, guys... Jackson's Island is just ahead!

(They soon make landfall, and establish camp. The meat is cooked over a roaring fire, and the boys eat their fill. Satisfied, they sprawl in the grass around the campfire to relax.)

Tom: Heh. What would the other schoolboys say if they could see us now?

Huckleberry *(contentedly)*: Why, they'd just die to be here! I don't want nothing better than this.

Joe: I was thinking, though... what if, instead of being pirates, we became hermits instead?

Tom *(dismissively)*: Because hermits don't have any fun, Joe. A hermit has to sleep on the hardest place he can find, and put sackcloth and ashes on his head, and stand out in the rain.⁶⁴

Huckleberry: Why does he put sackcloth and ashes on his head?

Tom: I dunno. But hermits *have* to. You'd have to do that if you were a hermit, too.

Huckleberry: Well, I just wouldn't stand for that. I'd run away!

Tom *(primly)*: Then you'd be a *disgrace* of a hermit, Huck. Anyway, it doesn't matter, because we're pirates.

Huckleberry: Okay, then... what do pirates have to do?

Tom *(authoritatively)*: They take ships and burn them, and get the money and bury it in awful places on their island, and they drown everybody in the ships. But they're too noble to drown the women, so they let them live on their island⁶⁵. And they have the most wonderful clothes!

Joe: The women?

Tom *(rolling his eyes)*: The pirates, Joe! The women are always beautiful, though.

Huckleberry *(smiling vaguely)*: You know... I think I'm going to enjoy piracy.

Joe: I do feel kind of bad about all the stuff we stole, though.

Tom: Confound it, Joe! What's the point of being pirates if we don't steal anything?

Huckleberry: Actually, even I feel kind of guilty about that. It's one thing to pinch a sweet now and then, but taking bacon and ham just feels wrong.

⁶³ And it will.

⁶⁴ I'm not sure where Tom gets his notions... he seems to be confusing a few different ideas here. At any rate, this conversation is almost straight out of the book. It's a wonderful sample of how the boys' minds work.

⁶⁵ It's a good thing Tom never meets an actual pirate.

Tom (*sighing*): Yeah... I guess I feel kind of bad about it, too. Very well, then: our pirate careers shall never again be sullied with the crime of stealing!

Joe: Agreed!

Huckleberry: We're still going to do the burning and drowning part, though... right?

Tom: Of course we are!

Joe: Yeah, I don't have a problem with that.

Huckleberry: Good.

Tom: Now then... let's get some shut-eye!⁶⁶

Scene 3: The Pirates and the Cannon

(Tom wakes up slightly earlier than Huckleberry and Joe, and he spends an enjoyable hour watching bugs. Eventually they're all awake, and they realize that their raft has gone missing.)

Joe (*dismayed*): Our raft is gone! The tide must've carried it off!

Tom (*laughing*): Well, there you have it! Our last link to civilization is gone!

Huckleberry (*reasonably*): I mean, we could still swim back to town whenever we wanted. We only needed the raft to carry our loot.

Tom (*adamantly*): The last link is *gone*, I say! And good riddance.

Joe: But Tom... how are we supposed to be pirates without some kind of ship? Don't pirates usually operate on the water?

Tom (*shrugging*): What's the hurry? Next week we can cut down some trees, and build a proper schooner or something. For today, why don't we survey our new land?

Huckleberry: Sounds good to me!

(They spend an enjoyable morning exploring the limits of Jackson's Island. They find plenty of things to be delighted at, but nothing to be astonished at. After some fishing, they settle down to rest for the afternoon. Homesickness is beginning to grow in each of the boys, but none of them are brave enough to admit it. Presently, their rest is disturbed by the sound of a cannon being fired.)

Joe (*delighted*): Ooh! Maybe it's real pirates!

Tom (*indignantly*): We *are* real pirates, Joe!

Huckleberry: Well, c'mon! Let's see what they want!

(They rush to the island's edge, sticking to the cover of the foliage. From their concealment, they see a ferryboat drifting around the river. Its deck is crowded with people, and its cannon periodically fires.)

⁶⁶ I added that last part about "we'll still burn and drown people" as a punchline for the scene. But then again... even the original narrative refers to them as "curiously inconsistent pirates".

Joe: Who are they shooting at?

Tom: Nobody, Joe... it's an old navy trick. Somebody must've drowned in the river, and now they're looking for the body. When a body's sunk to the bottom, they fire a cannon over it, and that makes the body float to the surface where they can retrieve it.

Huckleberry: Wow! How does that work?

Tom (*flatly*): It doesn't. But for some reason, people keep trying it anyway.⁶⁷

Joe: Well, I'd just like to know who's drowned. It's not fun to be out of the loop.

(The boys watch the ferry in silence for a while. Suddenly, a thought flashes through Tom's mind.)

Tom (*excitedly*): Boys, I know who's drowned... it's us!

Joe (*slapping his face*): By golly, you're right! The three of us went missing yesterday! They probably found our raft washed up somewhere, and assumed the worst.

Huckleberry: Cool, we're famous now! Just imagine the whole town talking about us!

Tom: And we're missed, too! I'll bet everyone feels terrible for mistreating us now!

Joe: Yeah... we're the best pirates ever! But, uh... do you think maybe we should return to civilization someday?

Tom (*firmly*): Not a chance, Joe! Now that everyone thinks we're dead, we're completely free of that tired old town. I'm never going back!

(That night, as Joe and Huckleberry sleep, Tom swims back across the river. Just to check things out, of course. He's definitely not homesick.⁶⁸)

Scene 4: Tom's Stealthy Visit Home

(It's after midnight. Tom steals across the sleeping town of St. Petersburg, making a beeline for his house. He's surprised to find a light on in the kitchen: he risks a peek through the window, and he sees Aunt Polly, Sid, Mary, and Mrs. Harper gathered around the table. Tom decides to eavesdrop.)

Polly (*shaken*): ...and that's about it. If the boys aren't found by Sunday, all hope will be given up, and the funeral will be held the same morning.

Mary (*comforting*): Why, it's only Wednesday night, Polly... they might be found yet!

Polly (*distraught*): Don't try to give me hope, child... I can't bear it! Tom never meant any harm, you know... I'll admit he was full of mischief, but he had a good heart.

Mrs. Harper: I know, Polly. It was the same with my dear little Joe.

⁶⁷ This particular myth is actually more "quack science" than superstition. It was once believed that a cannon's concussion could break a body's gall bladder, and thus cause it to float. This truly doesn't work, and you'd think that the 0% success rate would have discredited it faster. Many different factors can influence whether a body floats or sinks, so perhaps the occasional coincidence kept the myth going for longer than it should have lasted.

⁶⁸ Is it unprofessional to put sarcasm in the stage directions? What about putting meta-humor in the footnotes?

Sid: You know, if Tom had been better in some ways -

Mary and Polly (*indignantly*): Shut up, Sid!

(*From his vantage point, Tom smiles.*)

Mrs. Harper: I suppose I'd better get home. Take care of yourselves, dears... I'll come by again tomorrow.

(*As soon as Mrs. Harper leaves, Polly breaks down crying. Eventually, everyone goes to bed.*)

Tom: Poor Aunt Polly... I can't let her suffer that way. I should leave her a note to explain that I'm still alive!

(*He composes the note, and prepares to leave it conspicuously near the house... but then he hesitates. He's just had a new idea.*)

Tom (*slyly*): Unless... yes, our funerals are already set for Sunday if they don't find us. Which they certainly won't! Oh, this is going to be epic!

(*He puts the note in his pocket, and prepares to return to the island.*⁶⁹)

Tom (*grinning*): Just wait until the boys hear my new plan! Oh... but before I go back, I should stop by Becky's house. Maybe she has something nice to say about me, too!⁷⁰

(*Tom cautiously approaches Becky's house. As he approaches, he's delighted to see her silhouette in the window. He cautiously steals into her yard, but a twig snaps under his foot and betrays his presence.*)

Becky (*eagerly*): Tom? Tom, is that you?

(*Tom ducks behind a bush, and frantically looks around for inspiration. He grabs a nearby rock and throws it through one of Becky's windows.*)

Becky (*disappointed*): No, I guess not... it's just that stupid rock-throwing boy.

Thatcher (*roaring from within the house*): DID HE BREAK THE WINDOW AGAIN!?

(*Wordlessly, Tom bolts for the shore, and begins swimming for Jackson's island. Moments later, Mr. Thatcher bursts out the front door, brandishing a shot gun. Ready for trouble, he angrily scans the street, but he doesn't see anyone.*)

Thatcher (*muttering*): Tomorrow morning, I'm putting down some bear traps.⁷¹

Scene 5: The Pirates Plan their Return

(*Tom returns to Jackson's Island in time for breakfast, but he keeps the details of his town visit to himself. The boys pass an enjoyable morning hunting for turtle eggs, horsing around in the sand, and playing*

⁶⁹ Try not to hate Tom *too* much for not comforting his aunt here. He is, after all, just a child.

⁷⁰ Just to be clear: in the original book, Tom does not visit Becky's house at this juncture. I just thought it would make for a funny scene on the way back to the island.

⁷¹ I've probably milked the "window breaking joke" for all it's worth at this point. You have my word that I've used it for the last time, unless I change my mind.

marbles. They eventually tire out, and try to relax by the shore. However, homesickness is steadily growing in the boys. Tom tries to rally them.)

Tom (*with forced enthusiasm*): I'll bet pirates have visited this island before, boys! Let's explore it again... I'll bet we can find some hidden treasure!

Huckleberry: I really don't think the Mississippi river gets many pirates, Tom.

Joe (*blandly*): Besides us, that is.

Tom: Okay, then let's build that schooner! We'll cut down some trees -

Huckleberry: Did you bring an axe?

Tom: Well... no.

(A melancholy silence descends upon the boys.)

Joe: Oh, let's give it up. I want to go home. It's so lonesome here.

Tom (*mockingly*): Ohh... homesick, are we? Want to go home and see your *mommy*, Joe?

Joe: Of course I do... and you would too, if you had one!

Huckleberry: Ooh... burned!⁷²

Joe: Anyway, you're one to talk about being homesick, Tom! Look... you've spent the last minute writing "Becky" in the sand with your big toe!

Tom (*defensively*): Well... I wasn't done writing yet! The full message was going to say "Becky is stupid"!

Huckleberry: C'mon, Tom. This caper was fun while it lasted, but enough's enough. It's time to head back.

Tom: Okay, wait! Just wait... I was saving this for later, but I guess I'd better spill the beans now. Last night, I snuck back into town to eavesdrop... and guess what I heard?

Joe (*curious*): What's that, Tom?

Tom (*grinning*): Our funerals are planned for this very Sunday! Do you realize what that means?

(Tom pauses expectantly.)

Joe: I want to say, "my sister gets my old room", but something tells me that's not what you had in mind.

Tom: We can crash our own funerals, you dolt! Just think of how cool that'll be... and everyone will be so happy to see us, they'll never take us for granted again!

Huckleberry (*skeptically*): Are you sure about that, Tom? It seems to me that once they get over the initial joy of seeing us alive, they'll be seething with rage for being emotionally manipulated.

⁷² Joe really does say that in the book. It's interesting that Tom never directly acknowledges Joe's "orphan reference": if someone said that in a modern book, the conversation would probably end in a fight.

Tom (*dismissively*): Don't be silly! How can a person be relieved *and* furious at the same time? That's impossible.

Joe: I *guess* that makes sense.⁷³

Tom: Then it's decided! We'll saunter into our own funerals at the last possible second, and make a big public spectacle of ourselves at the town's expense!

Huckleberry: Cool!

Tom: And as a nice little bonus, we can still party on Jackson's Island for the rest of the week!

Joe: Ha ha! This is going to be great!

(Without warning, there's a deafening thunderclap, followed by a torrential downpour. The boys are instantly soaked to the skin.)

Joe (*yelling over the storm*): Hey, Huck... do your superstition notions have anything to say about sudden thunderstorms?

Huckleberry (*yelling over the storm*): Nah. This is probably just a coincidence.

Chapter 7: Life Goes On

Scene 1: Crashing a Funeral

(It's Sunday, and the entire town has gathered in church for the funeral of the 3 boys.)

Becky: Oh, why didn't I keep that brass doorknob? Now, I have nothing to remember him by!

Polly: They were so *young*!

Teacher: Poor Tom and Joe! Now they'll never get their beatings for skipping school all week!

Amy: When I wished that Tom was dead for ditching me, I didn't *mean* it! At least, not mostly!

(The clergyman begins delivering a long eulogy which extolls the boys and their many escapades. Midway through, there is a gasp in the crowd: Tom, Joe, and Huckleberry come walking down the aisle. Pandemonium breaks loose, and everyone rushes in to greet the boys.)

Townsperson 1: It's a miracle!

Townsperson 2: They're alive!

Townsperson 3: I guess I made 50 ham sandwiches for nothing.

Mrs. Harper: Joe! Joe, my little Joe!

Polly: Tom! I thought I'd lost you!

⁷³ It's worth noting that the original book keeps us in the dark about Tom's plan until their actual appearance at the funeral. But I personally think it's "cheating" just a little, to have a scene where Tom reveals his plan to the other characters without actually telling the readers what was said.

Tom (*whispering*): Aunt Polly... somebody should be glad to see Huck, too!⁷⁴

Polly: And so they shall. I'll be glad to see him, poor motherless thing!

Huckleberry: Gee... thanks, ma'am! Does this mean that I'm not the town pariah anymore?

Polly: Well, I didn't say *that*.

Scene 2: Dreaming Tom

(It's the next day. Tom is enjoying breakfast with Polly and Mary⁷⁵. Polly has had more time to reflect on Tom's recent antics.)

Polly: Well, I don't say it wasn't a fine joke Tom, but it's a pity you could be so hard-hearted as to let *me* suffer so. Don't you ever think of anyone but yourself?

Mary: Oh, Aunt Polly... Tom's just impulsive! He's always in such a rush that he never thinks of anything.

(Tom suddenly gets an idea, and a sly grin momentarily crosses his face.)

Tom: Oh, but I did think of you, Aunt Polly! In fact, I dreamt about you while I was away! That's something, isn't it?

Polly: Hmph, it isn't much. What did you dream?

Tom: Well, I dreamt that you, Mary, Sid, and Mrs. Harper were gathered around this very table, talking about us!

Polly (*curious*): Why, so we were! What else did you dream?

Tom (*feigning thoughtfulness*): Let's see... it's so hazy now. Um... you mentioned that I never meant any harm, and I think Mrs. Harper agreed with you.

Polly (*excited*): Exactly so! Then what happened?

Tom: Well, then Sid tried to badmouth me, and you and Mary both told him to shut up!

Polly (*astounded*): Incredible!

Tom (*grinning*): And boy, did Sid deserve it.

Polly: I couldn't agree more! Tom, I do believe you were granted a vision of us while you were away!

Tom (*smugly*): It sure seems that way, ma'am.

Polly: This is so exciting... just wait until Mrs. Harper hears about this!

Tom (*uneasy*): Uh... maybe we should just keep this to ourselves, Aunt Polly.

Polly: I'll be right back!

⁷⁴ Tom really says this in the book. He definitely has his moments.

⁷⁵ Sid isn't in this scene, because I didn't need him. Maybe he went to school early, or something.

(Polly excitedly leaves the house, while Tom squirms uneasily on his chair. Several minutes later, Polly returns, fuming.)

Polly: Tom, I've a notion to skin you alive! Here I am, making a fool of myself to Mrs. Harper about visions and whatnot, and what do you think she tells me?

Tom (*hopefully*): That it's all true?

Polly: Joe already told her what really happened, Tom! You *were* here that night, eavesdropping on us! How dare you knowingly let me march over there and make a fool of myself!

Mary (*shaking her head*): You really need to think before you act, Tom... you've made things much worse for yourself!

Tom (*woefully*): Oh, Aunt Polly... the night I was here, I really was going to leave you a note that explained everything! But then I thought of the funeral idea, and... I guess I got carried away.

Polly (*ruefully*): I wish I could believe that, Tom.

Tom: Wait, though... you can! I still have the note in my pocket!

(He pulls the note out of his pocket, and hands it to Polly. As she reads it, her expression gradually softens.)

Polly: You should've just left the note in the first place, Tom... but I'm glad to see you actually thought of me. Maybe there's hope for you yet. Go on, now... you'll be late for school.

Tom: Yes, Aunt Polly!

(She smacks him upside the head.)

Polly (*primly*): That's for lying about the dream, and making me look foolish in front of Mrs. Harper!

Tom (*amenably*): That's fair.

Scene 3: Tom vs. Becky

(Tom and Joe are walking to school together.)

Joe: I heard that Becky was really excited to hear you're alive. Maybe you can get a second chance with her!

Tom (*dismissively*): Oh, Becky. Who needs *her*, now that I have glory and popularity from our little stunt last Sunday?

Joe: That sounded pretty arrogant. But honestly, I'm relieved to hear it! I mean, we are *way* too young to be worried about girls...

Tom: Actually, I thought I'd get close to Amy Lawrence again.

Joe (*rolling his eyes*): ...and there it is.

Tom: Yeah... Becky's going to be *so* jealous when she sees us together.

Joe: Wait, *what?* So you haven't lost interest in Becky at all!

Tom (*defensively*): What? No, Becky means nothing to me!

Joe: Then why do you care about making her jealous!?

Tom (*shrugging in exasperation*): I don't know, Joe... I'm 10 years old! I get terrible ideas and then I act on them.

Joe (*dryly*): You'd better work on that before you're actually old enough to date.

(That very recess, the charade is carried out. Tom hangs out with Amy to make Becky jealous. In retaliation, Becky hangs out with Alfred Temple to make Tom jealous. Alfred figures out that Becky's just using him to make Tom upset. In retaliation, Alfred sneaks into the classroom and pours ink all over Tom's spelling book. Becky happens to see Alfred do this, but she decides to let him get away with it because she's still angry at Tom. Everyone is miserable.⁷⁶ Eventually, recess ends.)

Teacher⁷⁷: Tom, would you like to recite the first words from today's lesson?

Tom (*nervous*): Um... I'm afraid I can't, sir.

Teacher (*challengingly*): And why exactly is that?

Tom (*very nervous*): Because my spelling book is covered with ink.

Teacher: Defacing your spelling book? That'll fetch you a swift beating, Tom!

Tom: But I didn't do it, sir! I swear!

Teacher: Now you've earned a *second* swift beating... for either lying to my face, or failing to prevent someone else from defacing your spelling book!

Tom (*protesting*): That doesn't even make sense!

Teacher: Listen, Tom, you're getting a bargain here... I never did get around to punishing you for the week you spent on Jackson's Island, skipping school and playing pirate.

Tom (*resigned*): That's true.

(Tom receives two swift beatings: Alfred and Becky look on with poorly concealed satisfaction. The morning lessons eventually conclude, and everyone leaves for lunch. As it happens, Becky is the first to return to the classroom. The teacher isn't back yet, but Becky notices that he's left his drawer unlocked.)

Becky: Hey... that's where the teacher keeps the weird book he's always reading to himself during class. I wonder what it is?

⁷⁶ These kids need a Nintendo or something.

⁷⁷ In the original book, the person presiding over the classroom is sometimes a schoolteacher, and sometimes a "master". They're apparently separate characters, but I've mostly combined them for simplicity.

(Becky quickly goes to the drawer and pulls out the book. To her surprise, it's a book on anatomy.⁷⁸ Just then, Tom walks into the classroom. Embarrassed, she quickly closes the book, but in her haste, she tears one of its pages. Frantic, Becky shoves the book back into the drawer and rushes to her desk.)

Becky (*tearful*): I'll never forgive you, Tom Sawyer!

Tom (*baffled*): For walking into the classroom?

Becky (*sobbing*): For catching me at breaking into the teacher's drawer, and making me feel so embarrassed that I accidentally damaged his private property! It's all your fault!

Tom: I'm sorry you're in trouble, Becky, but I really had nothing to do with this.

Becky (*sobbing*): I know. I guess it's just a matter of time before the teacher finds out.

(The afternoon classes begin. Eventually, the students are wrapped up in an assignment, and the teacher gets his book out of the drawer. He immediately notices the torn page.)

Teacher: Which one of you little hooligans tore my book!? We're going to go around the entire room until we get to the bottom of this. Susan Harper, was it you⁷⁹?

Susan: No, sir!

Teacher: Okay, then. Amy Lawrence! Did you tear my book?

Amy: Are you kidding? I'm only in this story when Tom needs someone to cast aside or use against Becky.

Teacher: Fair enough. Gracie Miller... did you tear my book?

(As the teacher makes his way through the girl's section, Tom steals a glance at Becky. One look at Becky's face confirms that she will definitely break down and admit everything when she's asked. On impulse, Tom leaps to his feet.)

Tom: It was me, sir... I did it!

Teacher (*glaring ominously*): I've never had to administer *three* swift beatings against the same boy in one day, Tom Sawyer... but you, sir, have crossed all boundaries! Come here and take your punishment!

(Tom receives yet another swift beating, but this time Becky admires him for his bravery. After school, Becky approaches him.)

Becky (*smiling*): Tom, how *could* you be so noble!

Tom: I just couldn't let him thrash you, Becky. And anyhow, what's one more beating today?

Becky (*dismayed*): Oh, Tom... your spelling book! Alfred did it! I saw him do it, and... and I didn't even stick up for you!

⁷⁸ The original story seems to be implying that the teacher ogles the pictures in his anatomy book during class. Really!

⁷⁹ This is likely Joe Harper's sister. She's mentioned here and there, but we know nothing about her.

Tom (*magnanimously*): All is forgiven, Becky.

Becky (*beaming*): Thank you, Tom!

Tom (*smirking*): Now Alfred, on the other hand... that little rat is getting a rock through his window!

Becky: Wait... are *you* the boy who's been throwing rocks at my house?

Tom: Oops.

(*Awkward silence.*)

Becky: For some reason, I find that inexplicably romantic.

Tom (*relieved*): Oh, thank goodness! Because I really didn't have a good answer for that one.⁸⁰

Scene 4: Scene Missing

(*The next two chapters honestly don't offer much material for a streamlined parody: none of their events impact the overall story. Even so, I'd be remiss to omit them completely.*⁸¹

*In the first chapter, there's some kind of "end of year" recital at the school: it mostly consists of students reciting poetry, and narrative commentary. Tom has a seemingly uncharacteristic bout of stage fright, and the students prank the schoolmaster by dangling a cat from a string so that it snatches his wig.*⁸²

*In the next chapter, Tom promises to refrain from smoking, chewing, and swearing, but he's apparently allowed to resume doing these things once an old judge dies.*⁸³ *Then Tom attempts to keep a diary, but he swiftly grows bored of it. The fourth of July celebration is rained out, a circus visits town, Becky's family vacations in Constantinople, and Tom gets the measles. Everyone becomes religious for a while, and then things go back to normal. And there's a thunderstorm.*

I think that about covers it. Now, let's forge ahead!)

Scene 5: A Fateful Trial

(*The town has gathered in the courthouse for Muff Potter's trial.*⁸⁴)

Prosecution: ...and early in the morning, on the very day the murder was discovered, what did you see?

Witness 1: I saw Muff Potter washing himself in a brook, looking mighty guilty!

Judge: Defense, would you like to question the witness?

Defense: No.

(*The next witness takes the stand.*)

⁸⁰ It's worth noting that the "dreaming Tom" sequence and "Tom vs. Becky" sequence are intercut together in the original book, across three chapters. I decided to retell them as two separate, self-contained scenes. It just seemed tidier.

⁸¹ Although many adaptations do exactly that.

⁸² I'm not making that up. I'd never have the audacity to make up something like that.

⁸³ I truly don't understand the connection, but perhaps it was self-evident in 1875.

⁸⁴ I'll bet you forgot about this, between all the "pirate stuff" and that episode with Becky!

Prosecution (*gesturing to a knife on display*): Have you seen this knife before, sir?

Witness 2: Yes. This knife was found near Dr. Robinson's body. I saw it with my own eyes.

Judge: Defense, would you like to question the witness?

Defense: No.

(The next witness takes the stand.)

Prosecution (*gesturing to a knife on display*): Sir, do you know who owns this knife?

Witness 3: Yes. I've often seen it in Muff Potter's possession.

Judge: Defense... would you like to question the witness?

Defense: No. But I have my own witness I'd like to call.

Judge: Oh! Well, okay then. I was starting to think you were deliberately throwing this case, or something.

Defense: Nope! I'd like to call Thomas Sawyer to the stand.

Huckleberry (*urgently*): Tom, don't! What about Stabby Joe?

Tom: I'm sorry, Huck... I told the defense lawyer everything last night. I just can't let Muff Potter hang for something he didn't do.

Defense: Thomas Sawyer, where were you on the seventeenth of June, about an hour after midnight?

(Tom begins to recite what he saw at the graveyard. The entire courthouse is spellbound by his story. Stabby Joe watches Tom cautiously, initially with contempt, but then with growing alarm as Tom's narrative continues.)

Tom: ...and as the doctor knocked out Muff Potter, Stabby Joe jumped up with the knife and -

(Quick as lightning, Stabby Joe leaps out of his chair and jumps through the window with a terrific crash. A stunned silence descends upon the courthouse.)

Judge (*reflectively*): You know, we should really improve our security measures to prevent that sort of thing.

Prosecution (*indignant*): Well, I never! I can't believe that Stabby Joe, a villainous, grave-robbing low-life, was *lying* about Muff Potter this entire time! The *nerve* of that guy!

Defense: You've done a brave thing today, Tom. You took a stand for truth and justice.

Huckleberry: Yeah, but now a murderer's on the loose... and he has it in for us!

Tom: Everything's going to be okay, Huck! We can just enter the Witness Protection Program... right, your honor?

Judge: I'm afraid we won't have *that* program for at least another hundred years.

Tom: Uh oh.

Chapter 8: Treasure Hunters

Scene 1: A Fruitless Search

(It's been two weeks since the fateful trial, and no one has seen any sign of Stabby Joe. Tom has decided to go digging for hidden treasure, and so he tries to sell Huckleberry on the idea.)

Tom: You trust me, Huck... I know all the places where people like to hide treasure: on islands, under the floors of abandoned houses, and under the limbs of old dead trees, just where the shadow falls at midnight!⁸⁵

Huckleberry: Who hides these treasures, anyway?

Tom: Why, robbers of course! Who else?

Huckleberry: I don't know, Tom. If it was my treasure, I wouldn't hide it: I'd spend it, and have a good time!

Tom: So would I! But robbers don't do it that way. They always hide it and leave it there.

Huckleberry: And they never come back for it?

Tom: Well, they probably mean to... but they generally forget where it is, or else they die. And eventually, someone finds an old yellow paper that explains where to find the treasure, and they spend a week deciphering all the clues, and then off they go!

Huckleberry: Wow... so, have you got one of those papers, Tom?

Tom: No.

Huckleberry: Then, how are you going to know the clues!?

Tom: I don't *need* any clues. I already told you: they always hide the treasure on islands, under the floors of abandoned houses, and under the limbs of old dead trees.

Huckleberry: Oh... so treasure's always buried at those places?

Tom: No, not always.

Huckleberry: Then, how are we supposed to know *which* old houses and dead trees to go for?

Tom: We don't know, Huck... we'll just have to check all of 'em.

Huckleberry: Aw Tom... that'll take the rest of our summer!

Tom: Well, what of it? We only need to guess right once, and then we're set for life!

Huckleberry: Hm... that's a good point. Okay, let's do it!

(They spend a fruitless afternoon digging around trees, but they don't find any treasure.)

⁸⁵ This is another conversation that's taken more or less straight from the book. Tom has a lot of preposterous notions, but he delivers them with such *authority*!

Huckleberry (*panting*): Shucks, Tom... I hope nobody's cleaned out these trees already!

Tom: Oh wait... I know what the matter is! We're a bunch of fools, Huck! We need to know where the shadow of a limb falls at midnight, and *that's* where you dig!

Huckleberry: Confound it, Tom... we've done all this work for nothing!

Tom: Well, there's nothing for it, Huck... we'll have to come back at midnight, and try again.

(They return to the general area at about midnight, and try digging around some more trees. However, they fail to strike any treasure.)

Huckleberry: I don't get it, Tom... we've dug around a bunch of trees, and it's midnight now!

Tom: Why, Huck... you're the one who said this might take the rest of our summer!

Huckleberry: That doesn't mean I actually *want* it to take that long!

Tom: Fair enough. Tomorrow, we'll shake things up and search abandoned houses, instead!

Huckleberry (*resignedly*): I was afraid you might say that.

Scene 2: Sudden Danger

(The next day, Tom and Huckleberry approach an abandoned house to search it for treasure.)

Tom: Whew! This place is practically falling apart. What do you say we explore the upper floor?

Huckleberry: That seems pretty reckless, but sure! Count me in.

(The boys make a sweep of the upper floor, but they don't find any treasure.)

Tom (*shrugging*): Well, I suppose that stands to reason. I said robbers *bury* the treasure in abandoned houses, didn't I? Let's head back to the main floor.

Huckleberry (*whispering*): Tom, wait... do you hear something downstairs?

Tom (*horrified*): Voices! Someone else just got here!

Huckleberry (*hopeful*): Well... maybe they're just treasure hunters like us!

(Downstairs, two men begin talking. The boys can clearly hear them through the floorboards.)

Thug: No, I've thought it over, and I don't like it. It's too dangerous, Stabby Joe!

(The boys turn rigid with fear.)

Tom (*whispering urgently*): Oh, that's just *great*... here we've been worrying about Stabby Joe coming after us, and we've gone and blundered right into his hideout!

Stabby Joe: You worry too much. Just leave the details to me: we'll do that "dangerous" job once the timing's right, then we'll flee to Texas!

Thug: Well... okay. Where should we stash our swag in the meantime? 650 in silver's a lot to carry.⁸⁶

Stabby Joe: Just bury it in the fireplace for now. We'll come back for it later.

(The two boys exchange looks of pure delight. Tom mouths the words "six hundred and fifty", and Huckleberry nods in eager agreement⁸⁷. The thug starts digging in the fireplace, but his knife strikes something that's already buried there.)

Thug: What the... something's already buried here! It's some kind of box.

Stabby Joe: Dig it out! Let's see what it is!

(The box is quickly excavated and opened. Both criminals gasp in amazement.)

Thug: Gold!... there must be thousands of dollar's worth here!

Stabby Joe *(reflectively)*: They say that Murrel's gang was hanging around here one summer... I'll bet you anything this is part of their stash!⁸⁸

(Tom and Huckleberry's jaws drop. Tom mouths the words "thousands in gold". Huckleberry nods again.)

Thug: So, what do we do now?

Stabby Joe *(grinning)*: Bury it with our loot, of course... finders keepers! We'll come back for it after we do the job.

(The thug gets up to stretch, but he suddenly notices some tools stacked in the corner of the room.)

Thug *(wary)*: Hey, wait a minute... what are these tools doing in the corner!?

(Tom turns back to face Huckleberry.)

Tom *(whispering furiously)*: Why'd you leave our tools downstairs!?

Huckleberry *(whispering defensively)*: Because I didn't think we'd be doing any digging up here!

Stabby Joe: Now, that's *mighty* suspicious... someone's been here recently. I reckon this isn't a safe place for the loot, after all... let's take it all to our cache!

Thug: Got it. Number two, under the cross.

Huckleberry *(whispering)*: What do you suppose that means?

Tom *(whispering bitterly)*: I don't care right now. I'm still ticked off that our digging tools cost us *two* treasure hordes!

Thug: Say, Stabby Joe... do you suppose the owners of those tools could be upstairs?

⁸⁶ I don't know how much "650 in silver" would be worth today... but I'm guessing it would be worth substantially more.

⁸⁷ Of course, neither boy entertains the idea of returning this loot to its rightful owners... but hey, that's just the way with treasure in these stories.

⁸⁸ This is all we ever learn about Murrel's gang. I guess Mark Twain was just doing some worldbuilding.

(Once again, the boys turn rigid with fear.)

Stabby Joe: Oh, give me a break. What kind of idiot explores the upper story of a dilapidated, flimsy old house for no good reason?

Thug: I'm just saying... if there *is* anybody up there, then they've overheard everything we've said!

Stabby Joe (*disgusted*): Fine then, crybaby... *you* check upstairs!

(Tense, expectant silence.)

Thug (*shrugging*): Nah. Maybe later.⁸⁹

(The boys practically wilt in relief.)

Thug: Well, look on the bright side, Stabby Joe... now that we have all this treasure, we don't need to do that dangerous job anymore!

Stabby Joe (*angry*): We're doin' the job, and that's final! I'm not doing this for the money... I just want revenge! Now let's get going.

(The two criminals depart.)

Huckleberry: Well, I hope you've learned a valuable lesson today, Tom.

Tom: I'll say! Robbers really *do* bury their treasure in abandoned houses! Let's meet again later... we can figure out how to steal Stabby Joe's treasure from him!

Huckleberry: Are you crazy!? He already wants to kill us!

Tom: Exactly! So, stealing his treasure won't make things any worse.

Huckleberry (*thoughtfully*): Huh. In a reckless, over-the-top sort of way, that actually makes sense!

Tom (*proudly*): It's what made me the boy I am today!

Scene 3: War Plans

(The next day, Tom approaches Huckleberry.)

Tom (*grinning*): Huck, I've figured it out! I know what "number two under the cross" means!

Huckleberry (*curious*): Okay, where is it?

Tom: Follow me on this one. At first, I thought it might be a house number... but this is a one-horse town, and it doesn't have any house numbers, right?

Huckleberry: Right.

Tom: So then I thought to myself, maybe it's the number of a tavern room!

Huckleberry: Hey... that's not a bad guess! And there's only two taverns in town.

⁸⁹ This isn't far off from how the book plays things: "Stabby Joe's" argument for not checking upstairs basically boils down to "who cares?"

Tom: Exactly! So, I checked out the good tavern first... nothing to report there. Room 2's been occupied by some young lawyer for weeks now.

Huckleberry (*eagerly*): And the bad tavern?

Tom (*grinning*): Ah, that's where it gets interesting! At the bad tavern, room 2 is a mystery. The tavern-keeper's son said it's always locked, and nobody goes in or out, except at night.

Huckleberry: Sounds like it could be Stabby Joe, alright! That's some pretty good sleuthing, Tom.

Tom: I know! So all that's left is to sneak into room 2, and -

Huckleberry: Whoa, whoa! You're just going to heedlessly barge into the room? What if Stabby Joe's in there?

Tom (*blanching*): Uh... I'd probably die. Gosh, Huck, what do we do?

Huckleberry: That's easy. We "stake out" the place, and wait for Stabby Joe to leave! Once he's gone, we make our move.⁹⁰

Tom: Great thinking, Huck! And since it was your idea, you can have the first watch.

Huckleberry (*shrugging*): I guess I walked into that one.

Tom: This works out really well for me, anyway. Becky's back from vacation, and she's invited a bunch of kids to a picnic today... including me. So, you know... treasure hunting's kind of "priority two" right now.

Huckleberry (*raising an eyebrow*): You really should've stopped talking after "take the first watch because it's your idea".

Tom (*laughing*): Yeah, probably! Anyway, have fun with your surveillance shift. We'll catch up tomorrow!

Huckleberry: Okay, Tom. Enjoy your picnic.

Scene 4: Huck Saves the Widow

(Huckleberry is staking out the tavern where Stabby Joe is staying. At around 11 o'clock, Huckleberry sees two men leave the tavern, and one of them has something tucked under his arm.)

Huckleberry (*to himself*): This is it... and it looks like they're moving the treasure! Oh, why did Tom have to be at a picnic today? I guess it's up to me!

(Huckleberry discreetly follows them at a distance, out of town and past the old quarry. Presently, he realizes that they're on the outskirts of Widow Douglas's grounds. Stabby Joe and the thug have paused here to hold a last-minute consultation, and Huckleberry listens in.)

Stabby Joe: Here we are... we'll have our revenge on Widow Douglas⁹¹ as soon as her lights go out.

⁹⁰ In the book, Tom really does heedlessly barge into the room. He comes across "Stabby Joe" (flat-out drunk), and runs away scared... leading us right back to the "stakeout plan" outlined in this scene. I thought I'd save a step.

⁹¹ No, you haven't missed anything: this is basically the first significant mention of Widow Douglas, although I think her name's been dropped here and there earlier.

Thug: Can't we just take our money and run? What do you have against the widow?

Stabby Joe: It's not her... it's her late husband! He once had me publicly horsewhipped in front of the jail!

Thug: Did you deserve it?

Stabby Joe: That's not the point! The whipping made me feel bad, and since her husband's already dead, I'm going to make *her* feel bad... by killing her!⁹²

(Huckleberry runs as fast as he can to the nearest neighbor).

Huckleberry: Sir, quick! Two men are trying to kill Widow Douglas! We have to save her!

Old Man: And save her we shall! C'mon boys... let's teach those scumbags some manners! By which I mean shoot 'em!

(Within minutes, the man and his sons come charging out of the house, well-armed. Huckleberry hears shouting and gunshots. A tense half hour goes by, and Huckleberry waits nervously around the old man's house for news. Finally, the old man returns with his boys.⁹³)

Old Man: The thuggish-looking one is toast, but his partner got away⁹⁴. It was a close thing, boy... you've saved that widow's life, and no mistake!

Huckleberry: Thank you, sir. By any chance, were those ruffians carrying something of interest?

Old Man *(raising an eyebrow)*: Just a bundle of burglar's tools. Why?

(Huckleberry realizes that Stabby Joe and the thug weren't carrying the treasure with them: it's still out there, either back at the inn or somewhere else.)

Huckleberry: Oh... nothing. I've just got an interesting story for Tom tomorrow.

(The old man eyes Huckleberry keenly.)

Old Man: Tom... you don't mean Tom Sawyer, do you?

Huckleberry: Yes sir, why? Is something wrong?

Old Man *(gravely)*: I guess you haven't heard. Tom Sawyer and Becky Thatcher disappeared at a picnic today! Most folks believe they've gotten lost in McDougal's cave. We... we might never see them again.⁹⁵

⁹² In the original book, "Stabby Joe" has some surprisingly gruesome ideas about disfiguring Widow Douglas. I don't feel like reproducing them here.

⁹³ The original book has Huckleberry meet up with them again the next day, but I've combined it into one scene.

⁹⁴ In the original book, we don't learn that the thuggish one died until a later chapter. I just figured... why not reveal it now, on the occasion when it's actually happened? We don't really lose any suspense, because "Stabby Joe" is still out there.

⁹⁵ (Insert dramatic music cue here)

Chapter 9: The Secret of McDougal's Cave

Scene 1: Earlier That Day

(It's noon, on the same day that Huck would eventually save Widow Douglas. The picnic is in full swing: there's been feasting, games, and all manner of fun. Tom and Becky are relaxing at a table with some other children.⁹⁶)

Tom (*enthusiastically*): This has been a great picnic so far, Becky!

Becky: I just hope things haven't been awkward for you... after all, Amy Lawrence is here, too.

Tom: Well, I can't let that ruin our day together. Amy has to understand that I've moved on, for real this time. It's for the best, really.

Amy (*icily*): I'm *right* here, you know.

Tom: Okay, maybe this *is* a little awkward.⁹⁷

Child 1: Who's ready for the cave?

Adult 1: You mean McDougal's cave... that vast, unknowable natural labyrinth of underground rifts and bottomless pits that could devour a person forever with its unyielding darkness?

Child 2: Yeah!

Adult 1: Okay, but play safe in there! And be back by suppertime!

All Children: Yayyyyyy!

(The children play in the cave, keeping well within the "familiar" areas. Becky and Tom wander away from the main group, admiring the many natural wonders of the cave. Upon reaching an underground stream, Tom realizes that he can't hear the shouts of the other children anymore.)

Tom: I suppose we'd better head back before we're missed.

Becky: Yes, let's.

(Tom leads Becky through a series of passageways and intersections, before they eventually return to the same underground stream.)

Becky: Isn't that the same stream as before?

Tom: Er... ha ha, yes it is. Sorry about that. I must've missed a turn back there.

Becky (*nervous*): Tom, I want to go home!

Tom (*reassuring*): Me too, Becky! Okay, let's head out!

⁹⁶ In the original book, the "cave sequence" is intercut throughout a few chapters, and from several points of view. For simplicity's sake (this is just a parody, after all), I'm going to tell it as one uninterrupted sequence from Tom's point of view.

⁹⁷ This conversation never happens in the original book. I just thought it would be funny.

(Tom leads Becky through a series of passageways and intersections, before they come across a completely different underground stream.)

Becky (*resignedly*): We're lost, aren't we?

Tom (*sighing*): Oh, to Huck with it⁹⁸... yeah, we're completely lost.

Scene 2: Struggles in the Cave

(After Tom and Becky realize they're lost in McDougal's cave, Tom struggles to come up with a plan.)

Tom: Well, we're down to our last candle, but at least we have a stream down here... so we won't die of thirst. That's something.

Becky: In that case, maybe we should wait here to be rescued.

Tom (*diplomatically*): Um, right. But you know, I don't think anyone's ever been down this deep, so we should probably find some way to explore the nearby passages. Just in case.

Becky (*desperately*): Be honest with me, Tom! Are we going to die down here?

Tom (*firmly*): Not if I can help it, Becky. Wait here by the stream, and hang onto this kite string... I'll hold the other end, and try some of these other passages. The string will make sure we don't get separated.

Becky: Well, okay... but be careful, Tom!

Tom: Of course, Becky!⁹⁹

(Systematically, Tom begins to explore each of the passages which branch off from the stream. In one of the tunnels, Tom is surprised to see two lines burned into the cavern wall. Before Tom can ponder this mystery any further, a person holding a candle suddenly walks into view. Tom gives a shout... only to recognize the person as Stabby Joe! Stabby Joe, mistaking Tom's echoing voice for a challenge from an adult, flees back down the tunnel where he came from.)

Tom (*mystified*): Unbelievable... I want nothing to do with this guy, and yet I've accidentally bumped into him at a graveyard, an abandoned house, and the forgotten bowels of a cavern! What are the odds of that happening, anyway?

(Tom returns to the underground stream.)

Becky (*weakly*): I heard a shout, Tom! Did you find anything?

Tom: Nah, it was just Stabby Joe.

Becky: What!?

Tom: Oh, right... it's the 1800's, so I'm not supposed to tell girls frightening details like that.

⁹⁸ Rim shot.

⁹⁹ I just wanted to mention that this simplified/consolidated version of the "cave sequence" really doesn't do justice to the mood created by the original scenes: they do a terrific job of conveying the suspense and looming despair of being lost in a cave.

Becky (*annoyed*): Hey, are you saying I can't handle it?

Tom (*evenly*): No, but at least I got your mind off Stabby Joe.

Becky: Dash it all, Tom! Now I'm scared again! And I'm still mad at you!

Tom: Uh... I'm just going to explore another passage before this gets any worse.

(Tom begins exploring the next passage. In the distance, Becky hears another shout. In under a minute, Tom is back again.)

Becky: What was it this time?

Tom (*grinning*): Sunlight, Becky! I've found a way out. We're saved!

Scene 3: Recovery

(It's the day after Tom and Becky returned from the cave. Tom has mostly recovered from the ordeal, and he's enjoying a hearty breakfast at home.)

Polly: Judge Thatcher is here to see you, Tom... do you mind?

Tom: Of course not, let him in!

(Judge Thatcher enters the kitchen.)

Thatcher: Well, Tom, I guess a word of thanks is in order. You helped my dear little Becky escape from that dreadful cave.

Sid (*protesting*): But, sir... if it weren't for Tom, she wouldn't have wandered away in the first place!

Thatcher: Shut up, Sid!

Sid: Yes, sir.

Thatcher: Now then, Tom... I have some important news for you. Are you well enough to hear it?

Tom: I... I think so, sir.

Thatcher: As I understand it, you've been living in fear of Stabby Joe, ever since you testified at Muff Potter's trial... is that correct?

Tom: Yes, sir!

Thatcher: Well Tom, your worries are over: Stabby Joe is dead. We found him near the cave entrance, shortly before you escaped. It seems that he lost his footing in the cave, and fell on his own knife.¹⁰⁰

¹⁰⁰ In the original story, Judge Thatcher has the cave sealed up after Tom and Becky return, unwittingly trapping "Stabby Joe" inside. Tom doesn't learn that the cave has been sealed up until two weeks later, and by then "Stabby Joe" has starved to death. The problem here, in terms of streamlined storytelling, is that it requires the plot to explain *why* it took two weeks for Tom to learn that the cave was sealed after he escaped. It also means we have to assume that "Stabby Joe" didn't know about the back entrance (and failed to find it), or else he could have escaped that way. For the purposes of this parody, it was just simpler and more expedient to have the guy fall on his own knife.

(Shocked silence.)

Tom: You know... I think I'm okay with that.

Mary: Yeah, me too.

Polly: Good riddance!

Thatcher (*shrugging mildly*): I thought you might feel that way. Anyway, I just wanted to bid a "hero's welcome home" to Tom. Come visit us sometime.

(Judge Thatcher leans in close and whispers to Tom.)

Thatcher (*whispering*): But from now on, you stay away from my windows. Understood?

(A stricken Tom nods wordlessly.)

Thatcher (*loudly*): Good man! Well, I'd better be going!

(Judge Thatcher leaves.)

Polly (*admiringly*): That man doesn't miss much. I'm glad he's on our side!

Tom (*slightly shaken*): Me too. ¹⁰¹

Scene 4: Treasure at Last

(That same day, Tom goes looking for Huckleberry Finn. Tom hasn't had a chance to speak with Huckleberry since he got back, and he's eager to compare notes about the missing treasure.)

Tom: Huckleberry! There you are... how'd your stakeout go?

Huckleberry (*ruefully*): Well... we saved an old widow, but we lost the treasure. It wasn't with Stabby Joe when he left the tavern. And after all the ruckus died down, I went back to the tavern to search his room, but the treasure wasn't there... we'll probably never see it again!

Tom (*triumphantly*): Don't be so sure, Huck... I think I know where Stabby Joe stashed it!

Huckleberry: What!? How could you possibly know that?

Tom: It was bugging me, Huck... why was Stabby Joe skulking around McDougal's Cave in the first place? Then I remembered the two lines burned into the cavern wall where I ran into him, and it hit me... "number two, under the cross!" That mark on the wall is where he's hidden the treasure! ¹⁰²

Huckleberry (*excited*): Well, then what are we waiting for? Let's dig it up!

(Tom and Huckleberry pull together some supplies, and then Tom leads Huckleberry to the secret cave exit he'd found when he escaped.)

¹⁰¹ I wanted a tidy end to that "rock through the window" running gag from earlier.

¹⁰² The fact that "Stabby Joe" stayed in room 2 of a tavern was actually a red herring!

Tom: You've gotta promise to keep this entrance a secret, Huck. No one else knows about it, and we're only going to tell Joe Harper and Ben Rogers. This will be our hideout: we can be a gang of robbers, and call ourselves "Tom Sawyer's Gang"! Sounds pretty good, doesn't it?¹⁰³

Huckleberry (*skeptically*): I don't know... what's it like to be a robber?

Tom: It's a lot like being a pirate, Huck... only better, because you're closer to home and circuses and stuff like that. Now, c'mon! Let's go in and get that treasure!

(They enter the cave through the secret entrance. Taking great care to mark their path with string, Tom leads Huck past the underground stream, and down the passage where he came across Stabby Joe. In the dim candlelight, Tom points at two lines burned into the cavern wall.)

Tom (*grinning at Huck*): Feel like one last dig?

Huckleberry: You bet!

(Tom and Huckleberry eagerly dig into the clay floor. About ten minutes later, they unearth the same box that Stabby Joe unearthed from the abandoned house earlier. They open the box: to their delight, it's still filled to the brim with gold coins, along with Stabby Joe's silver.)

Huckleberry: Tom... we've done it! We've actually *done* it!

Tom: Thank goodness! I was afraid we'd get stuck with one of those lame endings, where we lose the gold at the last minute and have to swallow some life lesson like "the treasure was inside you all along".

Scene 5: Conclusion

(It's three weeks after Tom and Huckleberry found their treasure. Both boys are more popular in town than ever. Tom and Becky are still an "item".¹⁰⁴ Widow Douglas has adopted Huckleberry, out of gratitude for his intervention. Just as everything seems to be going great, however, Huckleberry disappears. As soon as Tom hears about it, he begins searching Huckleberry's favorite haunts. By noon, Tom has found Huckleberry in the abandoned slaughterhouse.)

Huckleberry: If you're here to talk me into coming back, Tom, then you can save your breath. I'm staying on the fringes of civilization, where I belong!

Tom: Come now, Huck! What's so bad about being raised by Widow Douglas? Why don't you give yourself some more time to get used to things?

Huckleberry: I've tried it for weeks, Tom, and it's just no good for me! I have to comb and wash all the time, I can't sleep in the woodshed, I get three regular meals every day, and *everything* has to be done on a schedule!

Tom (*reasonably*): Well, everybody does things that way, Huck.

¹⁰³ Most of Tom's fantasies seem to involve establishing a vicious criminal organization. Thank goodness for his short attention span.

¹⁰⁴ Although they're still just children, so I'm honestly not sure if that's a good thing.

Huckleberry: I'm not everybody, Tom, and I can't stand it! And if this is what it's like to be rich, then I don't want it! You can have my share of the treasure.

Tom: Look here, Huck... being rich won't hold *me* back from being a robber. We have "Tom Sawyer's Gang" to think about, remember? But we really can't let you join the gang if you aren't respectable.

Huckleberry: What? Why not!? Didn't you let me join when we were pirates?

Tom: Yes, but that's different. A robber is more high-class than a pirate, as a general rule. In most countries they're pretty high up in the nobility: dukes and such.¹⁰⁵

Huckleberry (*protesting*): Aw, c'mon Tom! You wouldn't shut out your old friend, would you?

Tom (*shrugging*): Huck, I wouldn't want to shut you out... but what would people say? Why, they'd say "Mph! Tom Sawyer's Gang! Pretty low characters in it!" And they'd mean *you*, Huck! You wouldn't like that, and neither would I.

(Huckleberry ponders this for a few moments.)

Huckleberry: Well... I reckon I can try the widow for another month if I get to join your gang, Tom.

Tom: Perfect! Then we need to start planning a formal initiation with all the gang members!¹⁰⁶

Huckleberry: What's an initiation?

Tom: That's where we all swear to stand by one another, and never tell the gang's secrets, even under pain of death!

Huckleberry: Okay, but what kind of secrets does the gang keep?

Tom (*grinning*): Beats me. We'll figure them out as we go.

Huckleberry (*laughing*): I can work with that!

THE END

¹⁰⁵ The book is almost over, and I will miss reading Tom's outrageous notions.

¹⁰⁶ Apparently, "Tom Sawyer's Gang" hasn't been founded yet. This is surprising, because Tom first proposed it in the previous scene, which happened 3 weeks ago. Maybe everyone's been busy with other things.

The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn

Chapter 1: The Previous Book Wraps Up

Scene 1: Notice

(The original story opens with the following notice, which I will quote word for word:

“Persons attempting to find a motive in this narrative will be prosecuted; persons attempting to find a moral in it will be banished; persons attempting to find a plot in it will be shot.

By Order of the Author

Per G. G., Chief of Ordnance”

There’s nothing I can add here to improve on this.)

Scene 2: Tom Sawyer’s Gang

(It’s nighttime, immediately following the events of the previous book¹⁰⁷. Huckleberry sneaks out of his room in Widow Douglas’ house, by climbing out the window. On the lawn, he meets Tom Sawyer. They head for the secret cave entrance Tom discovered earlier, where they plan to hold the initiation for Tom Sawyer’s Gang.¹⁰⁸ As they cross Widow Douglas’ property, however, they’re overheard by Jim, a slave who works for the family.¹⁰⁹)

Jim: Who goes there!?

Tom (*whispering to Huckleberry*): Hold still! Don’t make a sound!

(They wait in tense silence, while Huckleberry struggles not to scratch a bad itch. Eventually, Jim dozes off, and they resume heading to the secret cave entrance.¹¹⁰ They finally arrive at the cave: Joe Harper and Ben Rogers are already there.¹¹¹)

¹⁰⁷ The original book recaps the events of the previous book... but here, I’m assuming you already read the previous book’s parody.

¹⁰⁸ I can already see that Huckleberry’s perspective will be a handful to manage: before he sneaks out in the original book, he declares that it’s pointless to learn about people who lived in the past, and then he gets superstitious about accidentally killing a spider. But let’s press on!

¹⁰⁹ More on this later. For now, I just have one question: where was Jim in the previous book, when “Stabby Joe” was trying to kill the widow?

¹¹⁰ Well... actually, in the original story, they hide Jim’s hat on a tree limb while he’s asleep, and he blames the whole thing on witches. But I’ve decided to make Jim non-superstitious in this version: partially because I find all this superstitious stuff tiresome, and also because this gives Jim more contrast against Huckleberry, whom we already established as the “superstitious guy” in the previous story. But again, let’s press on... really, there’s good stuff ahead!

¹¹¹ The narrative also says “two or three more of the boys” were present, but I’m just going to stick to named characters for this scene. Besides: in the previous book, Tom had indicated that he only wanted Huckleberry, Joe, and Ben in the gang. I know... too many footnotes.

Tom: Okay, everyone, here's our gang's oath! If anyone does anything bad to anyone in our gang, they should be killed. If anyone outside our gang uses our gang's sign, they should be killed. And if anyone within our gang reveals our secrets, they should be killed.¹¹²

Joe: Awesome! I'm in!

Huckleberry: Me too!

Ben: I'm in, but I'd like to make an addendum to that oath. If anyone within our gang reveals our secrets, then their families should be killed, too!

Tom (*shrugging*): Sure, why not?

(*Tom scrawls the addition into the gang's oath.*)

Joe: Wait, though... that isn't fair! What if Huckleberry reveals our secrets? He doesn't have a family we could kill!

Tom (*matter-of-factly*): He does now... Widow Douglas.

Joe: Oh, right! Okay, fair enough.

Tom: Good, then that's settled! Let's meet next week, and we can rob somebody and kill some people.¹¹³

Ben: Well, I can't get out much... only on Sundays. Let's do something next Sunday!

Joe: We can't rob and kill people on a *Sunday*... that would be wicked!

Tom: Alright, already! We'll fix a day as soon as we can. Now, I'm electing myself first captain, and Joe Harper second captain... does anyone want to second that?

Ben: I will. I'm just happy to get a scene in the second book.¹¹⁴

Tom: Motion carried! I think that does it for today, everyone... let's call it a night!

Huckleberry: I'm not sure what we accomplished here, but I'm proud of it!

(*Everyone heads home. Their clothes are dirty from crawling around in the cave.*)

Scene 3: Widow Douglas is Upset

(*The next morning, Widow Douglas is upset with Huckleberry Finn for wandering out last night and getting his clothes dirty.*)

Widow: Huckleberry, you need to be more civilized! Try praying more.

Huckleberry: I tried that, ma'am... I prayed for fishhooks, but I didn't get any.

¹¹² Can you imagine putting that in a "children's book" now? :)

¹¹³ In case you were wondering, I'm not making up any of this conversation. However, I did skip some dialog around how robbers work, since it's mostly a retread of "how pirates work" from the previous book. That's not a criticism; I'm just keeping the parody lean.

¹¹⁴ In the first book, Ben's only claim to fame was being the first kid that Tom suckered into whitewashing the fence.

Widow: Well, you need to think more spiritually, and spend your time helping other people.

Huckleberry: I see how that would help other people, but I don't see how that would help *me*.

Widow (*getting frustrated*): I don't know how else to explain it! Just memorize some scriptures, okay?

Huckleberry (*speculatively*): You know, maybe praying for fishhooks isn't the biggest problem here.¹¹⁵

Scene 4: The Gang Disbands

(A month has passed. Tom leads Huckleberry to a grassy hill, where Joe and Ben are already waiting.)

Ben: Okay Tom, what's the big emergency?

Tom: It's time for our gang's first big score!

Huckleberry: About time!

Tom (*dramatically*): We're up against a vast host of Spanish warriors and Arabs, riding on elephants and camels! But they're loaded with gold and diamonds.

Joe: Oh, boy!

Tom: We'll need to arm ourselves. Here you go, men... guns and swords for everybody!

Huckleberry (*confused*): These are twigs and broomsticks.

Tom: After this score, Huck, we can buy any weapons we want! Now... our target is in that valley, just over the hill.

(The boys eagerly crowd the top of the hill, and peer over.)

Ben (*confused*): All I see are kindergarten kids having a picnic.¹¹⁶

Tom (*authoritatively*): The enemy! Charrrrrge!

(The confused boys hesitate, and then reluctantly charge down the hill. They force the little kids to scatter from their picnic.)

Tom (*triumphantly*): Victory! And the spoils go to us... help yourselves to the gold and diamonds!

Joe (*confused*): All I see are donuts and turnips.

Tom: Well, um... our *real* enemies are magicians, and they've enchanted everything to appear commonplace!

Huckleberry: Then shouldn't we go after the magicians, instead?

¹¹⁵ The townsfolk would've done better to memorize half as many scriptures, but apply them twice as well.

¹¹⁶ The original book calls them a "primer" class.

Tom: Don't be a numbskull.¹¹⁷

Joe: Okay, uh... I'm out.

Ben: Yeah, me too.

Tom: Whoa, wait guys! What did you *think* we'd be doing in this gang?

(Awkward silence.)

Tom (*horrified*): You didn't think we were *actually* going to kill and rob people, did you?

(Very awkward silence.)

Joe (*earnestly*): Well, Tom... it's just that breaking up a picnic of little kids seems so *mean*!

Tom (*disgustingly doing a face palm*): Okay, I'm out too. This gang is officially disbanded! Let's go fishing, instead.

Huckleberry: Now *there's* something I can understand! No imagination, no fantastical notions... I'm going to catch myself a catfish the size of a small boat!

Scene 5: Foreboding

(Several months pass: it's now winter, and Huckleberry is gradually getting used to school. One day, as Huckleberry is coming home, he notices unfamiliar tracks in the snow. He examines them closely.)

Huckleberry (*scared*): Oh, no... these are my *pap's* tracks! He must be back in town. He probably heard that I'd gotten rich... and now he's hoping to beat the money out of me!

(Huckleberry runs over to Judge Thatcher, who is managing his money.)

Huckleberry: Mr. Thatcher, sir... I need you to take all my money, right away!

Thatcher (*surprised*): Um, pardon?

Huckleberry (*imploringly*): Please take it... and don't ask me any questions! Then I won't have to tell any lies.

Thatcher: Oh, okay... you want to *sell* me your property, not give it. That's the correct idea. Just sign this paper, here: I'll buy your fortune for a dollar.¹¹⁸

(Huckleberry signs the paper and dashes back home, where he encounters Jim.)

¹¹⁷ This is basically what happens in the book, including the insult "numbskull". And just for the record, I found this turn of events very unexpected: in the previous book, the boys were always fully onboard with Tom's fantastical imaginings and outrageous notions... so what happened here? The book's narrative even seems to indicate that Huckleberry sees Tom as a lying moron. I'm just saying: it would be sad indeed if Tom lost his touch before he finished primary school.

¹¹⁸ I don't quite understand this: Huckleberry is trying to get rid of his *money*, right? Can you actually "sell" thousands of dollars in exchange for one dollar? Whatever Judge Thatcher does here, it seems to adequately protect Huckleberry's money, so the judge must've known what he was doing.

Huckleberry: Jim! I think my pap might be back in town, so I've just relinquished all of my money to keep it out of his hands... and now I need a superstitious ritual to tell me my future!

Jim (*raising an eyebrow*): So... first you signed away all your money without consulting anyone, and *now* you want a sketchy omen to tell you what to do next?

Huckleberry: Yeah, exactly! Why?

Jim: Maybe you need to reevaluate your decision-making paradigm.

Huckleberry: No time for that! I gotta go, Jim!

(Huckleberry dashes into Widow Douglas' house, and up to his room... but to his shock, his pap is waiting there for him.)

Pap (*ominously*): Hello, Huckleberry.¹¹⁹

Chapter 2: Pap Ruins Everything

Scene 1: Confrontation with Pap

(For a moment, Huckleberry stares incredulously at his pap.)

Huckleberry: How did you get here? Is Mrs. Douglas aware that you're in her house?

Pap (*smugly*): That's for me to know, and for the readers to never find out.¹²⁰ So, look who's been putting on airs! You think you're better than your old man?... with your clean clothes, and your books, and your hygiene, and your ability to hang onto a dollar for more than an hour without blowing it on alcohol?

Huckleberry: When you put it that way, yes.¹²¹

Pap: Well, not for long! School's been putting a bunch of frills in your head... so you just stay out of class from now on, or I'll tan you good!

Huckleberry: Let me be honest: knowing that you hate school kind of makes me want to go even more.

Pap: And another thing! Stop reading books! Books are stupid!

Huckleberry (*rolling his eyes*): How would you even know that, pap?

Pap: I'm not done yet! I've heard around town that you're rich!

Huckleberry: Nope.

Pap: You get that money for me by tomorrow! I want it!

Huckleberry: Nope. It's Judge Thatcher's money now.

Pap: Get it for me anyways! I want that fortune!

¹¹⁹ (Insert dramatic music cue here)

¹²⁰ The book doesn't seem to explain pap's presence in Widow Douglas' house.

¹²¹ I'm going to be a little indulgent here, and make this scene go the way I always *wished* it had gone.

Huckleberry: Nope. But I'll give you the dollar I traded him for it. Fetch!

(Huckleberry tosses the dollar out the window. Pap eagerly dives after it, landing in an untidy heap on the lawn.)

Pap: Owwww! That was a rough landing. But I'll be back, boy! Just you wait... I'll be back when you least expect it! But first, I have to use this dollar to purchase alcohol.

(Widow Douglas enters Huckleberry's room.)

Widow: Was that really wise, Huckleberry? Now your pap's madder than ever!

Huckleberry: Yes, but did you see him dive out the window after my dollar? Classic!

Widow *(shaking her head)*: Just keep your wits about you, Huckleberry... I don't know of any way to reform a man like that.

Jim *(quipping from outside)*: With a shotgun, maybe!

Huckleberry *(grinning)*: Good one, Jim! ¹²²

Scene 2: Technically Not a Kidnapping

(Several days pass. On the way home from school, Huckleberry is suddenly nabbed from behind by his pap, who begins dragging him toward the river, where a skiff is waiting.)

Pap: C'mon, boy... you're going to cool your heels for a while in my cabin!

Huckleberry *(protesting)*: This is *kidnapping*!

Pap *(grinning)*: Not technically, boy: I'm still your guardian, remember? And I say you're coming home!

(They take the skiff three miles down the river, and cross over to the Illinois shore, where pap has an old log cabin hidden deep in the woods. The cabin's walls are solidly built, and it's pretty much escape-proof.¹²³)

Huckleberry: You can't keep me here forever, pap! Eventually you'll let your guard down, and then I'll find a way to break free!

Pap: No, I really don't think so. I may be an idiot drunk, boy, but I'm not an idiot.

Huckleberry *(incredulous)*: Do you even *hear* yourself when you're talking?

Pap: Okay, wait! Let me start again. I know you won't run back to the widow, boy... because I know *you*! You're sick and tired of the widow's rules and chores... aren't you? And you're sick and tired of the teacher's ramblings and arbitrary beatings... aren't you?

¹²² I'm skipping a few scenes: first pap fails to get the money from Judge Thatcher, then Widow Douglas fails to wrest guardianship of Huckleberry away from pap, then a different judge attempts to reform pap and fails (the latter scene is the original source of the joke about "reforming" pap with a shotgun). In any event, the original narrative only mentioned these occasions in passing, so I don't feel too bad about skipping them here.

¹²³ I assume that pap didn't build the cabin himself, since it isn't ramshackle and falling to pieces.

Huckleberry: ...

Pap (*laughing*): Yeah, that's what I thought! So, here's what's going to happen. You're going to stay at my cabin... and you'll follow my rules, help me with my chores, listen to my ramblings, and endure my arbitrary beatings!

Huckleberry (*indignant*): Are you kidding me!? How is *that* any better!?

Pap: Can't you count, boy? You used to worry about the widow *and* a teacher! Now you only have to worry about *me*! By my reckoning, you have one less thing to worry about!¹²⁴

Huckleberry (*acidly*): I'd choose school and civilization over *you* any day.

Pap: Tough beans, boy... you don't get to choose! I'm still your guardian, and I'll do as I please. And if any townsfolk come nosing around here, I'll chase them off with my gun! Now get in the cabin and make yourself useful.

Huckleberry (*innocently*): If you need some chores done, I should start by helping you unload your supplies from the skiff.

Pap: And give you the chance to sail away? Not a chance, boy... into the cabin with you! Once you're safely locked in, I'll unload the skiff myself.

Huckleberry (*muttering*): Why can't pap be stupid when it *really* counts?¹²⁵

Scene 3: Escape

(Some time has passed.¹²⁶ Pap has been taking increasingly long trips away from the cabin. One day, pap leaves for yet another trip, and Huckleberry decides to make his move.¹²⁷ Huckleberry escapes through the hole that he'd secretly been digging in the cabin's dirt floor, in a hidden spot against the wall.)

Huckleberry (*thoughtfully*): Of course, if I run away, pap'll just come after me again. He'll only leave me alone if he thinks I'm dead!

(Huckleberry uses an axe to chop through the cabin's door¹²⁸. Then he hunts a wild pig in the woods, and kills it. He drags the wild pig corpse from the cabin down to the river's edge, leaving a trail of blood. The

¹²⁴ I need to mention that pap doesn't say anything *nearly* this clever in the original book. He really is just hanging onto Huckleberry in the hopes of obtaining his fortune.

¹²⁵ In the original book, there were several occasions when Huckleberry was outside the cabin, either helping with various tasks or fishing. I never understood why he couldn't try to escape during those times. Maybe he was afraid his pap would take a shot at him while he was fleeing, or something?

¹²⁶ To be specific: you might remember that Huckleberry first saw his pap's footprints in the snow, but at this point in the story, it appears to be warm again. It's unclear to me where most of the time elapsed... maybe some of it passed during those scenes I skipped with pap and Judge Thatcher.

¹²⁷ As with the previous book's "lost in a cave" sequence, I'm really not doing justice to this book's "trapped in an abusive drunkard's cabin" sequence. But c'mon... the "meat" of this parody is definitely going to be Huckleberry's adventures as he rafts down the river, and we need to get him there!

¹²⁸ I assume the axe was stored outside the cabin, or else Huckleberry's secret tunnel would be absurdly unnecessary.

clear implication is that a random maniac hacked his way into the cabin, killed Huckleberry, and then dragged his body into the river.)

Huckleberry: Now I just need to loot the cabin... it's what a random maniac would've done, and I need those supplies anyway. And pap deserves to be robbed.

(Huckleberry carries many of the cabin's supplies to a spare canoe that's docked at the shore. On impulse, he goes back to the cabin and carves the words "you're next" into the log walls.)

Huckleberry *(grinning mischievously)*: That'll have pap quaking in his boots for weeks! *(Suddenly, Huckleberry frowns.)* Oh, wait... pap can't read. Rats. Oh well... time to go!¹²⁹

(Huckleberry skillfully sails the canoe to Jackson's Island, where he hides it in the woods.)

Huckleberry *(satisfied)*: Piece of cake! Now it's time for a nap... ah, sweet freedom! *(Huckleberry frowns again.)* Mind you, I can't help hoping that I run into someone tomorrow. It's weird and clunky to keep talking to myself like this.

Scene 4: The Mysterious Murder House

(Huckleberry wakes up on Jackson's Island, to find himself staring up at Jim.)

Jim *(wryly)*: Morning, Huckleberry. You seem pretty healthy, for a dead guy.

Huckleberry: Jim! What brings you to Jackson's Island?

Jim: I overheard Widow Douglas planning to sell me to a slave trader downstream, so I ran away!¹³⁰

Huckleberry: Oh, okay. Makes sense, I guess.¹³¹

Jim: Now we'd better find shelter, Huckleberry... there's a storm coming!

Huckleberry: Oh! How do you know that? Did you use some kind of superstitious ritual, or something?

Jim *(rolling his eyes)*: No, Huckleberry: I used my eyes, and saw storm clouds blowing this way. Now, c'mon! There's a cave on the other side of the island!

(Huckleberry and Jim bring the canoe and other provisions to the cave. It's already starting to rain, and by the time they're settled into the cave, the storm is in full swing.¹³² The heavy rain and thunderstorms continue over the next several days, gradually raising the river until it finally floods its banks. Huckleberry

¹²⁹ Huckleberry doesn't actually carve this in the wall in the original story. I just thought it would be funny.

¹³⁰ I know: Jim is supposed to be Miss Watson's slave. But in the original book, Miss Watson never has any meaningful scenes or dialog with anyone... despite the fact that she's Widow Douglas' sister! And I figured, if Miss Watson's just going to "phone it in" as a largely unseen background character, then I'm benching her for this parody. :) As a consequence, Jim is now Widow Douglas' slave.

¹³¹ I know: Huckleberry is supposed to be horrified that Jim is breaking the law by running away, which leads to a whole character arc where Huckleberry gradually understands Jim's side of the slavery issue. And in the context of 1840 Missouri, Huckleberry's perspective is probably understandable. But honestly, I just didn't *feel* like writing for a main protagonist who's okay with slavery, let alone attempt to write a parody around it. For what it's worth, this change in Huckleberry's perspective really doesn't impact the story's events as much as you might think.

¹³² In the previous book, Tom and gang were also smashed by a big storm on Jackson's Island. They had actually explored the island by then... but I assume they didn't find this cave, since they didn't take shelter in it.

and Jim continue to shelter in the cave, which is fortunately high above the water level. Finally, the rain begins to subside one morning.)

Huckleberry: Whew! That was a long haul, but at least we didn't starve. Thank goodness for those provisions I brought with me, eh?

Jim: That is definitely the last time I want to be trapped in a confined cave for several days with nothing to eat but wild pig and beans.

(Huckleberry leaves the cave, and he looks at the flooded river.)

Huckleberry: Whoa, Jim... look at *this*! The floodwaters have actually carried a house down the river! And it's beached itself on our island!

Jim (*cautiously*): You'd better let me explore it first, Huckleberry... that river could carry the house away at any moment!

(Jim walks into the beached house, moving swiftly but carefully. A few minutes later, he comes back out of the house with an armful of clothes and other provisions. Without warning, the house is suddenly wrenched away from the shore by the river again, and it resumes being swept downstream.)

Jim: Phew! That was a close one. It looks like whoever lived in that house got out in a hurry! I found a bundle of clothes, a broken baby bottle, and a speckled straw hat.¹³³

Huckleberry (*grinning*): Dibs on the straw hat. Was there anything else in there?

Jim: Yeah... there were greasy cards scattered all over the floor, old whisky bottles, and some black masks.

Huckleberry: Whoa. That took a mysterious turn. Anything else?

Jim: Yeah... the walls were covered with ignorant pictures and words, drawn in charcoal.

Huckleberry (*fascinated*): That's just *bizarre*! Anything else?

Jim: Yeah... a horseshoe, some unlabeled vials of medicine, a ratty old fiddle-bow, and a wooden leg.

Huckleberry: Okay, there *must* be some kind of deep, macabre story behind all this stuff! Anything else?

Jim: Nope. Oh wait, yes! Just your pap's naked corpse, shot through the back.

Huckleberry (*incredulous*): *What!?*

Jim: I was going to wait until the very end of the story to tell you, but then I figured... now's good.¹³⁴

Huckleberry: But... I just have *so* many questions about this! I mean, we found my pap naked and murdered in the middle of that *freaky* floating house! What the Samuel Clemens happened in there!?

¹³³ The following information is taken directly from the book. Take your time with this part, and really let it sink in.

¹³⁴ This is true. For whatever reason, Jim doesn't tell Huckleberry that the corpse was his father until the very last page of the original story!

Jim: I dunno, Huckleberry. Maybe he was gambling with a gang of thieves who'd just robbed a mother, some doctors, a fiddler, and a pirate, and then they shot him during a game of strip poker. And there was a horseshoe.

Huckleberry: That's the stupidest thing I've ever heard. And how do you explain the mysterious charcoal drawings all over the walls?

Jim: Okay, I give up. It looks like your father got mixed up in something weird, but we'll probably never know the details for sure.

Huckleberry: But... but that's so unsatisfying! What kind of person leaves a significant character naked and murdered in the middle of the world's most unsettling crime scene, and then never provides any explanation for it?

Jim (*shrugging*): Hey, don't blame me. Blame Mark Twain.¹³⁵

Chapter 3: The River Journey Begins

Scene 1: An Urgent Flight

(A few days pass. As evening falls, Huckleberry and Jim have an argument about superstition.)

Huckleberry: But touching snakeskin *is* bad luck, Jim! I touched a snakeskin on Tuesday... and now, just *three days* later, what happens? I stub my toe!¹³⁶

Jim: Yeah, that's my point... three *days* later! That's how superstition works. Once you've decided that bad luck is coming, you're just going to blame the next bad thing which happens to you on luck!

Huckleberry: But something bad *did* happen!

Jim (*exasperated*): Something bad *always* happens if you wait long enough! That doesn't mean there's some cosmic connection between handling a snake corpse and stubbing your toe... on completely different days!

Huckleberry: Alright, fine... maybe the toe thing was a coincidence! Anyway, it's getting dull around here. Maybe I could slip across the river and find out what's going on in town.

Jim: Great idea!

Huckleberry: You think so?

Jim: Absolutely! But you'll need a disguise. You should put on the dress and sunbonnet that we got from the "murder house", and pretend you're a girl while you talk to the townsfolk.

¹³⁵ This is not a joke. The original story really does leave the mystery completely unresolved. And the crazy thing is, it's such a footnote to the story that you might actually miss it: growing up, I actually thought the floating house was pap's cabin, and he died in it when the river flooded. But no: this is a completely different house, and it's anyone's guess as to what pap was doing there, or who murdered him, or why. Why did you do this to us, Mark Twain!?

¹³⁶ In the original story, the "bad luck" was actually Jim getting bitten by a snake... but if I covered that, then I'd also have to spend a bunch of time on Jim's gradual recovery. So instead, it's just a stubbed toe, and a free shot at superstition.

Huckleberry: Uh... are you sure about that? I don't think I'd make a convincing girl.

Jim: Don't worry about it, Huckleberry! This is will be the best disguise ever!

(Awkward silence.)

Huckleberry: You're trying to make a fool of me, aren't you?

Jim *(laughing)*: Yeah, you caught me! There's no way you'd fool anyone with a flimsy disguise like that.

Huckleberry: Wait, do you hear something?

(They listen intently, and they hear some voices in the distance.)

Man 1: I don't know what Judith was talking about... I don't see any campfires, do you?

Man 2: No, but let's search anyway. If that slave's hiding on this island, we'll find him!

Man 1 *(grumbling)*: We'd better... this is a lot of legwork for three hundred dollars.

Huckleberry *(whispering urgently to Jim)*: Get to your raft, and keep low to the ground! I'll grab some provisions from the cave and meet you there!¹³⁷

(Jim nods wordlessly. A few tense minutes later, they load up the raft and push away from Jackson's Island in the dark.)

Jim *(irritably)*: I suppose you think *this* was caused by the snakeskin, too?

Huckleberry *(mildly)*: No, apparently this was caused by building campfires that were visible all the way from town.

Jim *(smiling faintly)*: Now you're learning.

Scene 2: The Steamboat Gang

(Huckleberry and Jim spend several days drifting down the river, with no particular goal in mind. One stormy night, they see a steamboat that's been wrecked in the middle of the river.)

Huckleberry: Hey, Jim... let's explore that wrecked steamboat!

Jim: That seems incredibly dangerous. In this stormy weather, it could sink or be swept away at any moment.

Huckleberry: C'mon! I'll bet Tom Sawyer would want to explore the wrecked steamboat!

Jim *(shaking his head)*: It's a miracle that boy's still alive. But fine... we'll indulge your inexplicable thirst for low-returning risks this *one* time, okay?

¹³⁷ In the original story, Huckleberry does attempt to disguise himself as a girl and talk with the townsfolk. A woman figures out that he's actually a boy... apparently because all girls have terrible throwing arms and they thread needles differently from men (her words, not mine). Fortunately, the woman still doesn't realize that he's Huckleberry Finn, and Huckleberry manages to learn that some men are about to search Jackson's Island for Jim. It's almost a shame to skip that scene, because it's the first of many occasions when Huckleberry attempts to solve a problem by telling an outrageous web of lies to a complete stranger... but expedience demands that we press on.

(They make their way to the steamboat, and tie off the raft. Jim stays with the raft while Huckleberry takes a quick look around the steamboat. It isn't long before Huckleberry comes across a cabin with a light in it. He cautiously approaches the cabin and eavesdrops.)

Turner (*pleading*): Oh, please don't, boys! I swear I'll never tell!

Bill (*threatening*): You always say that, Turner... and you usually end up with more than your share of the loot, too! But not this time.

Jake (*reluctant*): Do we have to kill him though, Bill?

Bill (*indignant*): We kill people for money all the time, Jake!

Jake: I know... but killing one of our fellow criminals just seems kind of low.

Bill (*rolling his eyes*): Fine then, I won't kill him outright. We'll just leave him here on the steamboat, take off in our lifeboat, and let the river kill him for us... you got a problem with *that*, Jake?

Jake: Oh, not at all! That suits me just fine.

(Not waiting to hear more, Huckleberry races back to Jim... only to find that their raft is missing.)

Huckleberry: What happened to our raft!?

Jim: We're in big trouble, Huckleberry... the storm swept it loose, and now it's gone!

Huckleberry: Are you telling me that we're stranded in the middle of the river on a wrecked steamboat!?

Jim: Yes! I told you this was a bad idea!

Huckleberry (*determined*): Well, then there's only one way out of this: we'll just have to steal the criminal's lifeboat!

Jim (*alarmed*): What criminals?

Huckleberry: No time to explain... let's find that lifeboat!

(They find the lifeboat and cut it free, and quickly sail away from the steamboat.)

Huckleberry: Hey, sweet! The criminals already loaded half their loot on this lifeboat! We're rich! Again!

Jim: Shouldn't we do something to help the criminals, though? I know they're evil, but we *did* kind of strand them on a sinking ship to die.

Huckleberry: Eh? Oh, right... yeah, I guess.

Jim: Hey, I see our raft up ahead on the river!

Huckleberry: Perfect! Okay, here's the plan: you board our raft, and wait for me downstream. I'll row this lifeboat to the nearest town, and try to get help for the guys on the steamboat!

(Huckleberry's plan is swiftly carried out, and he soon finds himself talking to a dock worker at a nearby town.)

Dock Worker: Can I help you?¹³⁸

Huckleberry: Oh sir, it's awful! I was travelling with my pap and sis and Miss Hooker, and we lost our oar on the river because pap's arthritis took him for a bad spell, and the boat was pinwheeling everywhere and we managed to fetch up on that wrecked steamboat over yonder, and pap told me to come get help, so for some reason I took the only lifeboat for myself instead of bringing everyone with me and -

(The river is shaken by a deafening blast: the steamboat has sunk and then exploded. Tiny charred steamboat pieces rain down over a three-mile radius.¹³⁹)

Huckleberry: Dang it. Well, never mind!

Dock Worker (aghast): But what about your pap and sis and Miss Hooker?

Huckleberry (flatly): They're at peace now. Gotta go!

(Huckleberry leaves the horrified dock worker behind, and paddles his lifeboat downstream to where Jim is waiting with the raft. Huckleberry quickly explains to Jim what happened.)

Jim (raising an eyebrow): You *do* realize that even if your plan had worked, the lies you were telling would have sent innocent, unsuspecting people to rescue a gang of murderous criminals... right?

Huckleberry: Whoa, you're right! Maybe it's a good thing the steamboat exploded with the criminals onboard, after all!¹⁴⁰

Jim (sighing): Let's just agree that this encounter had some morally ambiguous decisions, and leave it at that.

Huckleberry: Yeah, okay.

(Awkward pause.)

Huckleberry: Anyway... at least we have the criminal's loot! That makes everything feel better, doesn't it?

Jim: You know... it kind of does.

Scene 3: Whoppers Save the Day

(Huckleberry and Jim resume rafting down the Mississippi River.¹⁴¹ Huckleberry is trying to figure out how to help Jim.)

Huckleberry: I'm just saying, we need a plan here: the longer we stay on the Mississippi river, the further south we'll travel. That's bad news when you're a runaway slave!

¹³⁸ Huckleberry's about to tell one of his spontaneous whoppers. I've embellished it a little, but not as much as you might think.

¹³⁹ In the book, the steamboat really does sink with the loss of all hands... the only difference is it doesn't explode.

¹⁴⁰ Clearly, Huckleberry didn't think things through before he told that whopper.

¹⁴¹ I'm skipping an aggravating chapter where Jim makes a moron of himself. First, Jim stubbornly insists that King Solomon had a baby chopped in half because he didn't care about children, and then Jim declares that everyone in the entire world should just speak English. I'm also skipping a chapter where they run into dense fog, and as a prank, Huckleberry tries to convince Jim that he's dreaming or something. Although I am going to reuse the "fog idea" a little later.

Jim: I know Huckleberry, I know. We'll need to make a decision soon. Wait... what's that up ahead?

(Huckleberry squints, and sees a skiff in the distance.)

Huckleberry: I see a skiff with men on it... and they're armed! Jim, you'd better hide in the raft's tent... they might be looking for you! I'll take the canoe out and talk to them.

Jim: What are you going tell them?

Huckleberry *(grinning)*: Another whopper. Lying saved the day during that "steamboat incident", didn't it?

Jim: Not really.

Huckleberry: I'm doing it anyway!

(Huckleberry launches the canoe off the raft, and deliberately paddles up to the skiff. The armed men on the skiff eye him warily.)

Man 1 *(challengingly pointing to the distant raft)*: Is that your raft, boy?

Huckleberry: Yes, sir!

Man 1: Well, are there any men onboard? We're looking for 5 runaway slaves.

Huckleberry: No, sir... just my pap!

Man 2 *(suspiciously)*: I reckon we'll go see for ourselves.

Huckleberry *(earnestly)*: Oh, I wish you would, sir! My pap's dreadful sick with smallpox, and we can't get anyone to help us!

Man 1 *(alarmed)*: Smallpox!?

Man 3: Hey, I'm not getting involved with that.

Man 2: Listen, boy... we can't risk getting smallpox. But I'll tell you what: you keep drifting about 20 miles downstream, and then you'll come across a town called Cairo. You can get help there.

Huckleberry: Isn't there a risk that we'll spread smallpox to Cairo?

Man 1: Yeah, but at least you won't spread smallpox to us!

Man 3: We'll dreadful cowards!

Man 2: Now off with you, boy!

(Huckleberry paddles the canoe back to the raft, looking very satisfied.)

Jim *(from inside the raft's tent)*: Are we good, Huckleberry?

Huckleberry: We're good, Jim! Those cowards won't be coming anywhere near us. And I think I've figured out what to do next.

Jim: Oh?

Huckleberry: Those men said we're just 20 miles from Cairo... that's on the tip of Illinois! We can sail our raft there, and then take the Ohio river to the northern states: you'll be safe there!

Jim (*skeptically*): I don't know, Huckleberry... Illinois is a free state, and it's already on our east shore right now! Maybe we'd be better off ditching the Mississippi river, and just escaping across Illinois on foot.¹⁴²

Huckleberry: C'mon, Jim... if we can get to Ohio, they have the Underground Railroad and everything!

Jim: Yeah... but if we *miss* Cairo and the Ohio River, the Mississippi river's going to take us into the deep south, in the opposite direction of the northern states!

Huckleberry: We're not going to miss Cairo, Jim. I won't let that happen.

Jim: Are you sure? Because if you miss Cairo, it's going to put a serious wrench in my escape plans.

Huckleberry (*insistently*): I'm telling you, we won't miss Cairo! Everything will be fine!

Jim (*reluctantly*): Well... okay.

Scene 4: We Miss Cairo¹⁴³

(*Huckleberry and Jim continue to travel down the Mississippi river in their raft, bound for Cairo. Huckleberry sees another raft with a man on it, so he calls out to him.*)

Huckleberry: Hey there, sir! Is Cairo close?

Man (*insolently*): Figure it out yourself, loser! And if you bother me again, I'll beat you to death with my paddle!

Jim (*mystified*): What was *that* about?

Huckleberry (*shrugging*): Raft rage. It's everywhere these days.¹⁴⁴

Jim: Well, we have to keep looking. We *can't* miss Cairo.

Huckleberry: I know, Jim, I know. We'll find it.

Jim: Well, it's getting dark.

Huckleberry (*reassuring*): That'll make it easier to see Cairo's lights!

Jim: And there's a fog rolling in.

Huckleberry (*reassuring*): That'll keep us from becoming complacent!

¹⁴² The book never explains why Jim couldn't do this. I googled it, and this is apparently *still* a subject of scholarly debate. Various explanations have been offered, including arguments against Illinois (i.e., fugitive slave laws and bounty hunters), and arguments in favor of Ohio (i.e., a successful Underground Railroad), but we'll probably never know for sure. Whatever the reason, escaping through Illinois on foot is never even considered as an option.

¹⁴³ Rim shot.

¹⁴⁴ I made up the term "raft rage", but I didn't make up this encounter. For whatever reason, this guy is rude and threatening to them.

Jim: We can't see anything, Huckleberry... this is crazy! We need to stop for the night, or we're going to miss Cairo!

Huckleberry: Okay, maybe you're right. Let's look for a safe place to dock the raft.

(Several tense minutes pass, while Huckleberry and Jim try to find the shore in the fog.)

Huckleberry: Oh, wait... I can hear someone else on the water. Maybe they know where we are.
(shouting through the fog) Hey, sir! Is Cairo close?

Man *(shouting through the fog):* You missed it!

Jim *(outraged):* Are you kidding me!?

Huckleberry *(sheepishly):* Um... maybe those idiots on the skiff gave us bad directions.

Jim *(frustrated):* Well, that's just great! We've passed Illinois, we've missed the fork to the Ohio River, and *now* the Mississippi river's carrying us into the deep south. And in case you've forgotten, I'm a runaway slave! Things can't get any worse!

(Without warning, a steamboat comes bearing down on top of them, cutting through the raft and crushing the raft's canoe. Huckleberry and Jim are thrown into the river.)

Huckleberry *(sputtering in the water):* Jim? Jim! Where are you!? Jim!?

(Huckleberry swims to the shore, and finds himself in front of an old-fashioned log house.)

Huckleberry: Okay... there's no need to panic. I should still be able to find Jim and salvage this disaster, as long as nothing stupid happens!

(Without warning, a pack of guard dogs crest the top of the bank and surround Huckleberry. They bear their fangs at him and growl ominously.)

Huckleberry *(disgustedly):* Why did I even say that?

Chapter 4: Grangerford vs. Shepherdson

Scene 1: A Warm Welcome

(Huckleberry is surrounded by guard dogs outside of the log house. A voice calls out from the house's window.)

Man: Who goes there?

Huckleberry *(lying):* George Jackson, sir! I was travelling on a steamboat, but I fell overboard and swam to shore!

Man *(challenging):* You a Shepherdson?

Huckleberry *(warily):* What's a Shepherdson?

Man: That's just what a Shepherdson would say! Prime your guns, boys!

Huckleberry (*frantic*): Wait, no! I'm not a Shepherdson! I'm George Jackson! Pap and me and the family were living on a little farm down in Arkansaw, and my sister Mary Ann run off and got married and never was heard of no more, and Bill went to hunt them down and he wasn't heard of no more, and Tom and Mort died, and then pap died of grief, so when he died I took everything that was left, because the farm didn't belong to us, so I started up the river, deck passage, and fell overboard, and that's how I came to be here!¹⁴⁵

(Long silence.)

Man: Well, okay then. I don't reckon a Shepherdson would say something like *that*. Come in, boy.

(The door on the house opens a crack, and an arm beckons Huckleberry inside. Huckleberry enters the house, and is somewhat shocked to find himself facing down three shotguns.)

Man: Sorry, boy... can't be too careful around here, with the Shepherdsons and all. We need to frisk you for weapons.

(Huckleberry grimaces, but he knows better than to protest. He's swiftly frisked for weapons.)

Man: He's clean, Colonel.

Colonel: Good, good. Well then... welcome, son! Welcome to the Grangerford home. You can join us for a family meal, and then young Buck here will show you around.

Buck: Yes, sir! We treat strangers proper around here... unless you're a Shepherdson, of course. Then we blow your head off. But you don't have to worry, because you're not a Shepherdson!

Huckleberry (*nervously*): I feel safer already.

Scene 2: The Great Feud

(After a hearty dinner, young Buck and Huckleberry are left alone to chat.)

Huckleberry: So, why are you out to kill the Shepherdsons, anyway?

Buck: Well, it's all on account of this feud. The way it works is, a man has a quarrel with another man and kills him, and then that man's brother kills him, and then the brothers on both sides, then the cousins, and by and by everyone's killed off. But it's kind of slow, and it takes a long time.¹⁴⁶

Huckleberry: I see. And how did this feud start?

Buck: I don't really know. It started at least thirty years ago... something about a lawsuit I think, but I don't know which side started it.

Huckleberry: Has it occurred to anybody that this is a ludicrous waste of human life?¹⁴⁷

¹⁴⁵ This is mostly a direct extract from the book. Elaborate, ad-libbed lies will be Huckleberry's go-to strategy for most of the story.

¹⁴⁶ This is pretty much exactly how Buck explains it in the book.

¹⁴⁷ Huckleberry doesn't make any objections to the feud in the book... but this seemed like a good juncture to rip into how dumb it is.

Buck (*shrugging*): I reckon it is, but what can you do?

Huckleberry: Stop killing Shepherdsons, maybe?

Buck (*obstinately*): Only if the Shepherdsons stop killing us first.

Huckleberry: Couldn't you move somewhere else, where you don't have to deal with the Shepherdsons?

Buck (*indignantly*): And why should we have to move? We haven't done anything wrong!

Huckleberry: You *do* realize that murder is extremely illegal, right?

Buck: If that's true, then why have none of us ever been arrested for this?

Huckleberry: Hm... that *does* raise some interesting questions about law enforcement in this region. But honestly... (*he glances around the room for inspiration*) ...hey now, that's a nice big family Bible!

Buck: Yep. We're all religious people.

Huckleberry: Well, isn't there a scripture somewhere about not murdering people? Or about not holding grudges?¹⁴⁸

Buck (*laughing*): I think I would've heard of something like *that*, George! You're a strange one.

Huckleberry (*rolling his eyes*): Well, I tried. For tonight, let's just get some shut-eye.

Buck: Sounds good, George! Sleep tight, and don't let the Shepherdsons shoot you in the face!

Huckleberry (*thinking to himself*): I've got to get out of here.¹⁴⁹

Scene 3: Moving On

(*The next morning, the Grangerfords treat Huckleberry to a hearty breakfast. Huckleberry has the opportunity to ask the family some more questions.*)

Huckleberry: I noticed one of the rooms here was empty last evening. Is somebody away?

Colonel (*sadly*): You might say that... it was poor Emmeline's room. I'm afraid she's no longer with us.

Huckleberry (*dismayed*): Oh, no... was she killed by a Shepherdson, too?

Colonel: No. She was a masterful poet, you see: every time a man, woman or child around here died, she'd be on hand with a poetic tribute for them. The neighbors used to say that when someone was dying, you'd see a doctor, then Emmeline, then the undertaker.

Huckleberry: I... I *guess* that's touching, in a grim sort of way. But what happened to her?

Colonel: One time the undertaker reached the dying man *before* she did, and she was never the same after that. She pined away and didn't last the year.¹⁵⁰

¹⁴⁸ Seriously.

¹⁴⁹ I'm being slightly harder on the Grangerfords than the book was. In all fairness, they were perfectly hospitable to Huckleberry. But still.

¹⁵⁰ I swear I didn't make that up: that's the exact explanation they give in the book!

(Awkward pause.)

Huckleberry: You guys are kind of extreme. I think I'm going to go outside and get some air.

Colonel: Sure thing, George... and if you see any Shepherdsons, just give a shout! We'll kill 'em for you.

Huckleberry *(awkwardly)*: Um... yeah.

(Huckleberry exits the log house and sits on the porch for a while, to collect his thoughts. Presently, he's approached by one of the Grangerford slaves.)

Grangerford Slave: Hey... I found something that you have to see! Follow me!

Huckleberry: Oh! Uh, okay.

(The slave leads Huckleberry away from the house and across a swamp. Presently, they reach a sheltered clearing. Huckleberry is surprised to find Jim there! Jim gives the slave a "thank you" nod, and the slave discreetly leaves as Huckleberry and Jim catch up.)

Jim *(grinning)*: Hey, Huckleberry! Guess what? I salvaged our raft last night and patched it up!

Huckleberry: Oh, that's fantastic news, Jim! Let me tell you, I'm pretty eager to get away from here! Let me just say my goodbyes, and then we can go.¹⁵¹

Jim: Um... about that. We should probably skedaddle right now, Huckleberry! I've been eavesdropping on the local gossip, and it seems that one of the young Grangerford women ran off with a man from the Shepherdson clan.

Huckleberry: Huh. Kind of like a "deep south" version of Romeo and Juliet.

Jim: Yeah, not exactly. The young couple got away safely, but now both families are furious... they're lining up for an all-out war on each other!

Huckleberry *(horrified)*: Are you kidding me!? They *should* be using this opportunity to unite their families once and for all! Jim, we have to talk some sense into them, before -

(In the distance, the peaceful background noises of nature are savagely interrupted by three full minutes of gunfire, screams, explosions, and harsh southern cuss words. The Grangerford and Shepherdson estates are both consumed by a small mushroom cloud.¹⁵²)

Huckleberry *(disgusted)*: Never mind. Let's just get out of here. I have to say, that was a pretty unsatisfying ending to this little side-trip.

Jim: Well, maybe... but wouldn't you agree this was a poignant lesson about the futility of hatred?

Huckleberry *(flatly)*: I meant what I said.

¹⁵¹ I'm simplifying and combining some scenes in this whole "Grangerford sequence"... in the original book, he spends a little more time with this clan, but for the purposes of this parody there isn't much else to say.

¹⁵² I may be exaggerating just a little... but the end result is the same in the book. Both clans are effectively wiped out.

Chapter 5: A Duke and a King

Scene 1: Two Grifters Join Us

(Huckleberry and Jim have been drifting downstream on their raft for a few days after the “Grangerford incident”.)

Huckleberry: You know, it occurs to me... the Mississippi River is taking us further and further south. Shouldn't we try to get back to Cairo, or at least get off this river and start heading north again?

Jim (*casually*): Oh yeah, I'd forgotten about that. I don't know what to tell you, Huckleberry: for some reason, heading north isn't a priority anymore.

Huckleberry (*baffled*): What are you talking about!? You're a runaway slave! The whole point of this journey was to help you escape *north*, where the free states are. If we keep heading *south*, it's only a matter of time before you're captured!

Jim: Yep, that's true. But for some inexplicable reason, we will never speak about heading north again. It's just one of life's many mysteries.

Huckleberry (*scratching his head*): Uh... okay. Follow your dreams, I guess.¹⁵³

(Just then, Huckleberry spots two men running along the shore, calling to them.)

Young Man: Help us! We're being pursued by an angry mob!

Old Man: For goodness sake, sonny boy! Bring that raft ashore and let us onboard!

Jim: Wait, why is a mob chasing you in the first place?

Huckleberry: No time for that! Let's take them with us!

(Jim reluctantly steers the raft to shore and allows the men onboard. They quickly push off, and leave the shore behind. In the distance, the people from the mob begin to arrive at the shore. They jump up and down in a rage, and make angry gestures at the raft.¹⁵⁴)

Jim: So, uh... what did you do to get that crowd so riled up?

Young Man: It's not fair! I was selling medicine that's supposed to take the tartar off teeth, but it took the enamel off too. How is that *my* fault!?

Huckleberry: Did you know it would do that when you sold it to them?

Young Man: Of course I did! But that's not the point!

¹⁵³ This is another unexplained problem from the original book. After Huckleberry and Jim miss Cairo, the original goal of getting Jim to the northern states isn't mentioned anymore. The book doesn't seem to offer any explanation for this, either: as far as I can tell, Huckleberry and Jim are just abruptly okay with letting the Mississippi river take them further and further south. It gets even stranger: in the original book's chapter “What Royalty Did to Parkville”, Huckleberry comments that a runaway slave wouldn't normally flee south... in other words, he's clearly aware that Jim should be fleeing north. So, why don't they ever try to head north again!?

¹⁵⁴ Use your imagination. :)

Huckleberry: Um... actually, it probably is.

Jim (*addressing the old man*): Well, what about you? What's your tale of woe?

Old Man: It's not fair! I was making a ton of money preaching temperance to people, even though I was drinking on the sly! How is that *my* fault!?

Huckleberry: Seriously?

(*Without warning, the young man breaks down crying.*)

Young Man (*sobbing*): Oh, how far I've fallen! By right of birth, I am actually a duke!

(*Without warning, the old man breaks down crying.*)

Old Man (*sobbing*): You're not the only one with problems, "duke"! By right of birth, I am actually a king!

Young Duke (*indignantly*): Hey, no fair! You only said that to upstage me!

Old King (*grinning*): Go big or go home, sonny boy!

Jim (*reconciliatory*): Now, now... I'm sure there's plenty of room on this raft for both, um, dukes and kings. It's getting dark. Why don't we decide what to do in the morning?

Old King and Young Duke: Works for me!

(*They immediately fall asleep.*)

Jim (*disgustedly*): What a lying pair of weasels. Let's just leave them at the next town, and call it even.

Huckleberry (*reflectively*): I don't know... something tells me if we keep these guys around, we're in for some wacky adventures.

Jim: Oh, fine. But I hope those two can pull their weight: our supplies are a little low.¹⁵⁵

Huckleberry: Wait a minute... didn't we have a bunch of loot from those steamboat criminals at one point?

Jim: Maybe we spent it offscreen.¹⁵⁶

Scene 2: Learning from Liars

(*The next morning, the king and duke wake up. They converse with Huckleberry and Jim on the raft.*¹⁵⁷)

¹⁵⁵ In the book, Jim is convinced that these two frauds are a real king and duke, but Huckleberry avoids telling Jim the truth to spare his feelings, or something. Unfortunately, this makes Jim seem like a gullible bozo... so in this parody, both Huckleberry and Jim are aware of the truth.

¹⁵⁶ The book never seems to mention the criminal's loot after the chapter where they get it. Of course, it's possible that I just missed the reference: Huckleberry's narration meanders sometimes, and Jim's original dialog is written phonetically... the net result is that it's sometimes hard to find specific details in this story.

¹⁵⁷ I'm going to try a little experiment here: in the next several chapters from the original book, Huckleberry and Jim just kind of tag along while the king and duke swindle people. I'm going to introduce a little "character arc" for Huckleberry: he'll initially be taken in by the charm of swindling (since he's already prone to telling whoppers), but then he'll be properly horrified by his course of action when the king and duke go too far. See what you think!

Old King (*eyeing Jim*): Say, there... are you a runaway slave?

Huckleberry (*lying*): Of course he's not! What kind of runaway slave would flee *south*?¹⁵⁸

Young Duke (*coolly*): Oh, really? So, why *are* you two rafting down the Mississippi River, all on your own?

Huckleberry: Well, my folks were living in Pike Country, in Missouri, but they all died off except me and Pa and my brother Ike. Pa's pretty poor, so we decided to sell our land and go live with our Uncle Ben in Orleans. We set out on a raft with the last of our belongings and our slave Jim -

Old King (*grinning*): That's enough, sonny boy. We're both professional liars... you think we don't know a whopper when we hear one?

Jim: Um... are we in trouble?

Old King: Not at all! What do I care whether you're a runaway slave or not? (*to Huckleberry*) I'll tell you what, though: instead of wasting your whoppers on the likes of us, what do you say we put 'em to good use?

Huckleberry: I'm not sure I understand, sir.

Young Duke: It's quite simple, lad... we propose to teach you the art of grifting. In exchange, we can all work together to get rich!

Huckleberry: That *does* sound like a pretty good deal.

Old King: Then it's settled! At the next town we come across, we'll show you how it's done. By the way... what's your name, sonny boy?

Huckleberry: Huckleberry Finn, sir!

Young Duke (*dubiously*): "Huckleberry"? As in the small, tart berry that's the official fruit of Idaho?

Huckleberry (*shrugging*): My pap was a drunk.

Old King: Fair enough.¹⁵⁹

Scene 3: The Preacher and the Pirate

(*They beach the raft near a town, and come across a preacher enthusiastically working a crowd.*)

Young Duke: See this, Huckleberry? A crowd of inspired people is always ripe pickings!

Jim: But if we're taking advantage of people's goodwill, isn't that... evil?

Old King (*dismissively*): Balderdash! Haven't you ever heard the old saying, "a fool and his money are soon parted"? Well, if these fools are gullible enough to part with their money, then they must deserve it!

¹⁵⁸ See? Huckleberry's aware of how *weird* it is that they're still heading south!

¹⁵⁹ There's no official explanation for Huckleberry's name, and it was much too early in history to suggest that his pap was a hippie.

Huckleberry: I guess that makes sense.

Old King (*grinning*): I'll show you!

(The king walks up to the preacher's platform, and respectfully asks for a moment to speak to the people. The preacher briefly hesitates, but then he lets the king speak.)

Old King (*dramatically*): Brothers and sisters! For the last thirty years, I was a pirate on the Indian Ocean... I was only in the area to take on a fresh crew. But after hearing this preacher's magnificent sermon, I am now a changed man! I will steal and rob no more, and for the first time in my life I am happy! And now, I must return to the Indian Ocean... it will be a long and dangerous trip without money, but I must return to my former brethren, and turn as many pirates as I can to the true path! And every time one of them repents, I'll say, "don't thank me, matey... thank that magnificent preacher I found down south: the best friend a pirate ever had!"¹⁶⁰

(The king breaks down into dramatic sobs, and the audience is completely taken in.)

Man 1: Let's take up a collection for the pirate!

Man 2: We'll help you get home, good sir!

Preacher: You can have my gold watch!

(After an hour of heartfelt goodbyes and farewells, a very satisfied king returns to Jim, Huckleberry, and the duke with an armful of money.)

Old King (*triumphantly*): See what I mean? It can be that simple for you too, Huckleberry!

Huckleberry (*eagerly*): Count me in!

Young Duke (*ominously*): Good, good... join us on our quest to fleece the weak and stupid, and your journey toward the dark side will be complete!

Huckleberry: Wait, what?

Young Duke: Uh, I mean... welcome aboard!¹⁶¹

Scene 4: Worst Town Ever

(The next day, the raft drifts toward a ramshackle, disreputable-looking town. The king and duke eagerly beach the raft nearby.)

Young Duke (*grinning*): Hey, Huckleberry : if this place doesn't destroy your faith in humanity, nothing will!

Old King (*disdainfully*): This might've been a fine town once, but look! They've let every last building fall into a disgraceful state of disrepair!

Young Duke (*dramatically*): It's a realm of cussing freeloaders, worthless drunks, and bickering fools!

¹⁶⁰ This shameless tall tale is directly from the book, in case you were wondering.

¹⁶¹ I'm sure I don't need to explain that the "dark side" reference isn't in the original book. Right?

Old King: And that's just in the sheriff's office! The rest of the town is even *worse*.

Jim (*dubiously*): Why are you telling us this?

Young Duke (*grinning*): Because we don't want you to feel bad when we fleece them for everything they're worth!

Huckleberry (*reluctantly*): They can't *all* be that bad, though...

Townsmen (*laughing*): Hey, here comes Boggs! Back for another drinking spree, I see!

Boggs: You know it! The town sheriff won't stop me, because he's stupid!

Sheriff: Call me "stupid" again and I'll shoot you.

Boggs (*gleefully*): You're stupid!

(*The sheriff shoots him.*)

Townsmen: Hey! You can't shoot people just for mouthing off!

Townswoman: Let's lynch the sheriff!

Sheriff: You can't lynch me, because you're all a bunch of spineless losers.

Townsmen: Yeah, you're right. Let's get blackout drunk or something, instead.

Jim (*disgusted*): Wow. This place is kind of the worst.

Old King (*slyly*): Ready for some fleecing?

Huckleberry (*grimly*): Let's do it!¹⁶²

Scene 5: The Royal Nonsuch

(*The king and duke have posted advertisements all over the disreputable town, proclaiming a play that will be held at the courthouse for just 3 nights called "The Royal Nonsuch". The bottom of the advertisement dramatically proclaims, "Ladies and Children not Admitted".*)

Young Duke (*satisfied*): There... if that last line don't fetch 'em, then I don't know Arkansaw!¹⁶³

(*That night, the courthouse is packed with about half the town's men. The duke appears on stage and spends several minutes talking up the play, to heighten everyone's expectations. Then he draws the curtains: the king prances out on the stage on all fours, naked and painted different colors. The audience laughs heartily and demands an encore of the opening scene, and the king complies. The crowd is in a great mood. Abruptly, the duke closes the curtains.*)

¹⁶² I'm saving you a couple of chapters, here: the real book's depiction of this town is *much* worse. One guy even sets a stray dog on fire! This part of the story is supposed to take place in Arkansaw, so I dunno... maybe Mark Twain had a really bad experience there or something.

¹⁶³ So, yeah... Mark Twain really doesn't seem to have a favorable impression of Arkansaw.

Young Duke: Thank you. Our play will only be performed for two more nights, due to pressing engagements in London. Please tell all your friends to come see it!¹⁶⁴

Man 1: What the Samuel Clemens!? You mean that's the entire play!?

Man 2: I spent half my week's drinking money on this! What a rip-off!

Man 1: Let's tar and feather these frauds!

Man 3: Wait! Hold everything! If word gets out that we were swindled this badly, we'll be the laughingstock of the entire town.

Man 1: What are you suggesting?

Man 3: We need to sell the *rest* of the town on seeing this show, so that they'll be in the same boat as us!

Man 2: You mean, we let these thieving weasels continue to drain our town's wealth, just so that the other losers living here won't make us feel bad?

Man 3: Yep!

Man 2: That works for me!

Man 1: We're pretty much the *worst*!

Old King (*tenting his fingers in satisfaction*): Excellent.

(*The next night's performance for the other half of the town's men goes the same way.*)

Man 4: What the Samuel Clemens!? You mean that's the entire play!?

Man 5: I spent my daughter's medicine money on this! What a rip-off!

Man 4: Let's tar and feather these frauds!

Man 6: Wait! Hold everything! The other half of the town swindled us into seeing this stupid play! If we leave things as they are, we'll be the laughingstock of the entire town.

Man 4: What are you suggesting?

Man 6: The entire *town* should attend tomorrow's performance, so that, uh... we all have an opportunity to show our "appreciation" for the performance together!

Man 5: I don't get it.

Man 6: Sigh... I'll explain after you sober up.

Man 5: That works for me!

¹⁶⁴ I wasn't shortening things for expediency: that really is the entire play. It's worth noting that in the original book, the king and duke initially tried to put on a legitimate Shakespeare play, but they were basically laughed off the stage. Afterward, they staged the "The Royal Nonsuch" to rip-off everyone in revenge.

Man 4: We're pretty much the worst!

Old King (*tenting his fingers in satisfaction*): Excellent.

(Another day goes by, and all the town's men grimly file into the courthouse for the final night's performance. Anticipation runs high as they wait for the curtain to go up. The air is rank with the stench of rotten vegetables, spoiled eggs, and other garbage. Ten minutes go by without a sign from the stage, and the audience's tension steadily mounts.)

Man 1: Any minute now... when those thieving weasels show their faces, let 'em have it!

Man 2: I have a bushel of rotten tomatoes with their name on it!

Man 3: I've got a drum of burning tar, all ready to go!

Man 4: Wait... I thought I was bringing the tar. You were supposed to bring feathers!

Man 5: Man, we're stupid!

Man 6: Don't worry about it, guys... just use whatever you've brought. This is going to be great!

(Meanwhile, the king, duke, Jim, and Huckleberry are already rafting down the river to the next town.)

Young Duke: Ha ha ha ha! What a bunch of greenhorns! They're probably *still* waiting in the audience!

Huckleberry (*awed*): Wow... so, you *knew* that the first audience would talk themselves into roping in the rest of the town, and that the second audience would talk themselves into deferring their attack until the final night?

Old King: Actually, we figured we'd have to flee an angry mob after the first night. But this was even better!¹⁶⁵

Jim: I'm still not sure how I feel about fleecing people this way... even if they were a bunch of losers.

Old King (*grinning*): Don't worry about it, Jim... if those fools start getting hungry, they can have themselves a picnic with all the rotten food they brought!

Huckleberry (*grinning*): Classic!

Young Duke: Now, then... let's divide the profits!

Huckleberry: Sounds good to me! I can't wait for our next caper!

(Jim looks at Huckleberry in concern, but he says nothing.)

Chapter 6: The Inheritance Caper

Scene 1: A Chance Meeting at the Docks

(The next day, Huckleberry listens raptly as the king and duke plan their next caper.)

¹⁶⁵ In the original book, the fraudsters insist that they knew exactly what the crowd would do on both nights! I decided to play it off as a joke, because this claim seems a tad farfetched. If they know their target audience so well, then why'd they initially try a poorly-received Shakespeare play in the original story?

Young Duke: Why don't we hit the next town with "The Royal Nonsuch", too? It's already worked once!

Old King: No, it's too risky to use it again this soon. Until we're further downstream, we need to think of something new! You got any other quack medicines up your sleeve, besides that "tartar stuff" you were selling?

Young Duke: I used to sell a sham tonic which made cats flip out. But I sold my last bottle in St. Petersburg, about a year ago.¹⁶⁶

Old King: Ah, that's no good. We need to set our sights on something bigger.

Jim (*dryly*): What if we provide a service or product that people would actually *like*, and sell it to them at a reasonable price?

Young Duke (*dismissive*): That's crazy talk. Let's just beach our raft at the next town, and trust in providence to lead us to something profitable.

Jim (*rolling his eyes*): Yes, I'm sure "providence" would just love to help you with your schemes.

(As planned, they beach their raft at the next town. Almost immediately, they spot an innocent-looking country boy by the docks. The king motions at the others to wait in the raft, while he takes the lead.)

Old King: Good afternoon, sonny boy! Where are you bound for?

Boy: I'm catching a steamship to Orleans, sir! (*The boy squints at him.*) By any chance, are you Mr. Wilks? If you are, then you're a little too late.

Old King: No, I'm not Mr. Wilks... though I'm sorry for him, if he's missed something important.

Boy: Actually, sir, there's two of them: Harvey and William Wilks. And they won't miss any property by it... but I'm afraid they've missed seeing their brother Peter die. It's such a shame, too: the family hasn't seen them together since they were just boys.

Old King: You don't say! Well, that's sad news indeed. But I believe you said Harvey and William are going to inherit some property?

Boy: Oh yes, sir! Quite a fortune, actually.

Old King (*smiling*): Well, that's good news, at least. I wonder if I would've met this Peter before... which town did you say he was from?

Jim (*listening from the raft*): I can guess where *this* is going... and I already hate it.

(Over the next half hour, the king casually pumps the unsuspecting boy for information about the deceased man, his family, the people from his town, and so on. Eventually, the steamboat arrives, and the boy departs in it. The king returns to the raft, grinning triumphantly.)

¹⁶⁶ There's nothing in the original books to suggest that the duke is the same guy who sold Aunt Polly the infamous medicine from "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer"... I just thought it would be funny to make a connection.

Old King: We've struck gold, everyone! This Peter fellow lived just downstream from here... and nobody's seen his brothers Harvey or William since they were boys! If we show up and pretend to be his brothers, that inheritance is as good as ours!

Huckleberry (*alarmed*): Whoa! You aren't actually thinking of poaching that poor guy's fortune, are you?

Young Duke (*shrugging*): Hey... if Harvey and William cared that much about Peter's inheritance, then they should've showed up on time to claim it!

Old King (*earnestly*): Listen, Huckleberry: small-time scams like "The Royal Nonsuch" are a dime a dozen... but opportunities like this are once in a lifetime!

Young Duke (*grinning*): It was once in a lifetime for ol' Peter, that's for sure!

(The king and duke roar with hearty laughter, and begin maneuvering the raft toward Peter's town. Jim and Huckleberry exchange uneasy glances.)

Jim (*quietly*): Still looking forward to their next caper, Huckleberry?

(Huckleberry stares pensively at his feet.)

Scene 2: Meeting Peter's Family

(The duke beaches the raft in some tall reeds, at the outskirts of Peter's town.)

Old King: Now, if anyone asks... I'm "Harvey Wilks", the duke is "William Wilks", and Huckleberry is... uh, travelling with us.

Jim: What about me?

Young Duke (*dismissively*): You're the guy who minds our raft and stays out of sight.

(The king, duke, and Huckleberry begin walking away from the raft. Jim calls after Huckleberry.)

Jim: Be careful out there, Huckleberry!

Huckleberry: I will, Jim!

(Jim watches the retreating forms of the king and duke disapprovingly.)

Jim (*quietly*): I just hope you're watching for the right dangers.

(After a brief walk, the king, duke, and Huckleberry arrive at Peter's town. Several people regard them curiously.)

Young Duke: Can any of you tell me where Peter Wilks lives?¹⁶⁷

Man (*sadly*): The Wilks brothers, I presume? I'm sorry, sir, but the best I can do is tell you where he *did* live yesterday evening.

Old King (*weeping*): My dear, dear brother! Oh, and we never got to see him!

¹⁶⁷ In the original book, William is deaf and dumb... but I honestly think it's more interesting if he can have dialog.

(The duke puts a comforting arm around the king.)

Man: Come... let me take you to Peter's home. The whole family's waiting.

(The king, duke, and Huckleberry enter Peter's home, where Peter's family and closest friends are waiting. The king makes a big show of hugging everyone, and inquiring after various people in the village, using the information he got from the boy at the docks. Eventually, Mary Jane, one of the daughters, brings out the will.)

Mary Jane: Here it is, uncle. He's left you the tan yard, and some houses and land, worth about \$7000. He's also left \$6000 in gold: half of it goes to you, and half of it goes to myself and my sisters.¹⁶⁸

Huckleberry: Speaking of your sisters... I see that one of them has a physical deformity. Is it okay if I use *that* to identify her throughout my narrative, instead of using her real name?¹⁶⁹

Mary Jane: Don't be a jerk. Now uncle... I believe the will explains where the gold is hidden in the basement. Would you do the honor of bringing it up for us?

Old King: Of course, dear... we'll be right back!

Scene 3: A Fortune in Gold

(The king, duke, and Huckleberry enter the basement, and quickly uncover a large bag of money. The king and duke gloat as they begin counting through it.)

Old King: Ha! Now *this* beats "The Royal Nonsuch", wouldn't you say?

Young Duke (grinning): I reckon it does.

Old King: Wait... oh, blast! It's \$400 short¹⁷⁰!

Young Duke: What's the big deal? That's still \$5600 in gold!

Old King (grimly): In Peter's will, it said \$6000 even... how do you think it's going to look if we come up the stairs \$400 short? We can't afford any suspicions here!¹⁷¹

Young Duke: Fine, then! Let's add our "nonsuch" money to the bag. As long as we're walking away with \$3000 in gold, we still come out ahead, right?

Old King: Brilliant! Okay, let's do it!

Huckleberry: I'm just glad we're only taking Mr. Wilk's half... those daughters seem nice.

Young Duke: Sure kid, whatever. Let the daughters keep their half of the gold... you heard the will! We're also getting \$7000 worth of property!

Huckleberry (taken aback): Oh... do we really need to take their property from them, though? They'd be destitute!

¹⁶⁸ Wow! An intelligent, level-headed female character... maybe this story is more forward-thinking than I thought.

¹⁶⁹ Never mind.

¹⁷⁰ Actually, it was \$413 short. But that doesn't roll off the tongue as easily, and this is just a parody.

¹⁷¹ It's never really explained why the inheritance was short. Maybe Peter was just bad at math.

Old King: Don't be foolish, sonny boy! Listen up: we're going to sell the property and then slide out of here. Eventually, it'll come out that we didn't legally own it, and then it'll go right back to the daughters. It's a victimless crime, see?¹⁷²

Huckleberry: What about the people who actually bought the property from you? They'll have nothing!

Young Duke (*crisply*): To blazes with 'em.

(Huckleberry frowns, but says nothing. They come back up the stairs, proudly bearing the bag of gold. In front of the family and friends, the king counts \$3000 out from the bag, and gives the remainder to the daughters.)

Old King: Here you are, my dears... \$3000 in gold for you!

Mary Jane: Thank you, uncle! We're honored to have you here.

Doctor: "Honored"? Hah! That's a laugh!

(There's a shocked silence in the room, and everyone turns to face the doctor. He angrily points at the king and duke.)

Mary Jane: Sir... how can you speak to my uncle Harvey that way!?

Doctor: This man is a fraud! He doesn't even speak like an Englishman. And what does he offer, to prove his identity? Only some names and facts, which he could've picked up from anywhere. I was Peter's friend... and as his friend, I'm urging you to turn this rascal out. Won't you do it, Mary Jane?

(Mary Jane stubbornly thrusts her bag of gold into the king's hands.)

Mary Jane: Here's my answer! Uncle, please take our \$3000, too: invest it for my sisters and me! I won't even ask for a receipt.

(The room is filled with applause, and the king looks down at the doctor triumphantly. Huckleberry's face falls, as he realizes that Mary Jane has just entrusted her entire inheritance to a fraud.)

Doctor: So be it! I wash my hands of the matter. But there's a time coming when you'll look back on this day, and feel sick!

Old King (*grinning*): All right, doctor... and when that happens, we'll get 'em to send for you!¹⁷³

(The doctor angrily storms out of the house, amidst a chorus of laughter. Huckleberry already looks sick.)

Scene 4: Turning the Tables

(After the altercation with the doctor, the other people gradually file out of the house. Eventually, only the king, duke, and Huckleberry are left with the daughters. Mary Jane provides them with rooms where they can sleep overnight, in preparation for the funeral tomorrow. Meanwhile, Huckleberry's conscience is tormenting him.)

¹⁷² The king also uses this reasoning in the book, but in a later scene. I've consolidated and simplified some of these events.

¹⁷³ This rejoinder is right from the book. It's pretty good, even though it's delivered by a fraudulent weasel.

Huckleberry (*thinking to himself*): Bad enough that those crooks are going to steal Harvey's share, and trick someone into buying property they don't own... but now they've even got the daughters' inheritance! I'm sick of this!

(*Huckleberry sneaks into the room where the king will be sleeping.*)

Huckleberry (*thinking to himself*): At the very least, those two villains aren't cheating the girls out of their gold... I'm stealing it back!

(*Huckleberry quickly and carefully searches the king's room, and eventually finds the bag with \$6000 in gold. Before he can escape the room, however, he hears footsteps. Huckleberry hides in the closet just as the king and duke walk in.*)

Young Duke: That doctor made me pretty uncomfortable this evening. Maybe we should just slip out tonight, before things can turn on us.

Old King (*scoffing*): What... and leave the \$7000 in property behind? Don't be a coward!

Young Duke: What good is \$7000 in property if we're caught? I'd rather *escape* with the \$6000 in gold, here and now!

(*Huckleberry grits his teeth nervously: he realizes that if the con men decide to run with the gold right now, they'll discover their bag of gold is missing.*)

Old King: Listen: you're worrying about nothing. That fool of a doctor already played his best hand against us... and he *lost*! All he managed to do was put the friends and family squarely on our side. Who's going to listen to him now, eh?

Young Duke (*reluctantly*): Well... that might be so. I'm just saying: the sooner we're out of here, the better!

Old King (*reassuring*): And I completely agree with you! We'll leave tomorrow, okay? The funeral's in the morning, and then we can arrange to sell the property immediately afterward. We'll be long gone from here by sundown, and we'll be \$13000 richer! Now, are you in?

Young Duke: Yeah, I'm still in! I guess I'll see you in the morning, then.

Old King (*smirking*): Get a good night's sleep. And remember to look extra sad for that funeral!

(*The duke leaves the room, and the king eventually goes to sleep.¹⁷⁴ Huckleberry breathes a silent sigh of relief, and stealthily leaves the king's room with the bag of gold. Huckleberry pauses for a moment, as he considers where to stash the gold. A sly look crosses his face, and he sneaks downstairs to the parlor, where Peter's coffin is resting. The coffin is mostly closed, so that only the dead man's face is visible. Bracing himself, Huckleberry carefully shoves the bag of gold far under the closed part of the lid, out of sight.*)

¹⁷⁴ In the original book, both villains leave the king's room, and Huckleberry uses that opportunity to escape. But I couldn't find a clear reason why the king would leave his room at this juncture... and for the purposes of this scene, it's actually a lot tidier if both villains are already asleep in their beds, instead of wandering around the house.

Huckleberry (*satisfied*): There! Once this is all over, I can just write an anonymous letter to the Wilks family, and let them know where I hid it.

(Without warning, Mary Jane enters the room.)

Mary Jane: I heard that! What are you hiding from us?¹⁷⁵

Huckleberry (*sighing resignedly*): Well... you've all been had. Those two men I'm travelling with really *are* imposters. I stashed the gold in the coffin with Peter just now, to prevent them from running away with it.

Mary Jane (*eyeing him coolly*): I see. And how were you planning to prevent them from stealing our property?

Huckleberry (*shrugging with embarrassment*): I don't know... I'm sort of figuring this out as I go along. I wish my friend Tom Sawyer was here: he always had a knack for plans.

Mary Jane (*smiling slightly*): Well... don't sell yourself short just yet. But why are you going along with this at all? Why don't you just expose those imposters here and now?

Huckleberry: There's a fourth person travelling with us, and he's my friend. I can't tell you much about him, but... well, let's just say he'll be in trouble if we call too much attention to ourselves.

Mary Jane (*raising an eyebrow*): And *we'll* be in trouble if those con men sell our property.

Huckleberry: Right. I know. Give me until the funeral to think of something, okay? If I don't have a plan by then, I promise I'll expose those two myself.¹⁷⁶

Mary Jane (*smiling*): Deal. And for whatever it's worth, you've made a friend today. Just try to keep better company in the future, will you?

Huckleberry: Yes, ma'am!

Scene 5: Comeuppance

(Everyone is seated around the breakfast table, anticipating the morning's funeral. Suddenly, there is a knock at the door.)

Young Duke: Mary Jane, would you mind getting that?

Mary Jane: Of course, uncle.

(Mary Jane walks to the door and opens it. From the breakfast table, they overhear a very brief whispered exchange, and then Mary Jane returns.)

Mary Jane: Sorry to trouble you... but could everyone join me outside for a moment?

¹⁷⁵ The book already established Mary Jane as a smart character, so I had her catch Huckleberry looking suspicious. The same conversation happens in book (mostly)... except that she was only in the parlor to mourn, and Huckleberry decided to tell her everything anyway. I also decided to have Huckleberry tell her about the gold here and now, since it seemed tidier.

¹⁷⁶ This concludes the unofficial "character arc" I started earlier: Huckleberry's taking responsibility to end the trouble that he'd been supporting up to now.

(Everyone leaves the breakfast table, and follows Mary Jane out the door. They see the doctor with two respectable-looking gentlemen behind him. A small crowd has begun to gather.)

Doctor (*grinning*): Good morning, sirs... may I proudly present the *real* Wilks brothers, Harvey and William!¹⁷⁷

(The king and duke freeze for a moment, their minds racing.)

Young Duke (*stalling for time*): If you're actually Harvey and William, then perhaps you'd care to explain why you didn't get here earlier?

Harvey: There was a storm at sea, and it washed most of our luggage overboard.

(The king seizes his chance, and draws himself up to his full height.)

Old King: "Storm at sea", my foot... a likely story! You have a lot of nerve coming here: late, unannounced, no luggage, no identification, and no *proof*! How dare you insult this town's intelligence with such a flimsy scheme!

William (*coldly*): And where's *your* identification, sir?

Young Duke (*indignantly*): We didn't think we'd need it! We're just here to attend our dear brother's funeral. I never guessed that we'd have to defend our identity against a pair of frauds!

Doctor (*smiling*): Gentlemen, gentlemen... there's an easy way to resolve this. What sort of tattoo did Peter have on his chest? I'd wager only the real brothers would know *that*.

Old King (*quickly*): It was a tiny blue arrow!

Harvey: No, it wasn't! It was the initials P.B.W! Peter had that since he was just a lad.

Doctor (*grinning*): Very well. If the town lawyer and a couple of witnesses could follow me into Peter's parlor, we will examine the body right now and set this straight. (*addressing the crowd*) The rest of you... don't let *either* pair leave until we have an answer.

Mary Jane (*whispering to Huckleberry*): Get behind me.

(The doctor, lawyer, and two other men enter Peter's house, while the rest of the crowd surrounds the two pairs of brothers. Several tense minutes pass. Finally, the men emerge from the house.¹⁷⁸)

Doctor (*grandly*): It was the initials P.B.W. (*he dramatically gestures to the king and duke, who are staring at the ground in stoney silence*) Ladies and gentlemen, I give you your frauds!

Mary Jane (*whispering to Huckleberry*): Run along, now! Go find your friend.

(Huckleberry nods gratefully at Mary Jane, and slips away unnoticed as the increasingly irate crowd closes around the king and duke, led by the town's sheriff.)

¹⁷⁷ The doctor doesn't get to make this introduction in the book, but I think he would've liked to.

¹⁷⁸ It's worth noting that by the time this happens in the original book, Peter's already been buried, so he has to be dug up again. As noted earlier, I'm streamlining and simplifying some things.

Sheriff (*grimly*): You two are under arrest.

Young Duke (*angrily*): I *told* you we should just grab the gold and run!

Old King (*rolling his eyes*): Well *excuse* me, “mister hindsight”!

(Meanwhile, Huckleberry is almost back at the raft.)

Huckleberry (*excitedly calling ahead*): Jim! Jim, we’re free and clear of those scoundrels! And I learned some valuable life lessons in the process! Now, let’s get going!

(Huckleberry reaches the raft, but he’s surprised to find that Jim isn’t there. After a few anxious minutes of searching, the cold truth dawns on him.)

Huckleberry: Oh, cattywampus... I think Jim’s been captured!¹⁷⁹

Chapter 7: Freedom

Scene 1: Looking for Answers

(Huckleberry sits despondently by the raft, wondering what to do next.)

Huckleberry: What am I supposed to do now? I don’t have any idea where Jim is, let alone how to rescue him! Now I *really* wish I had Tom Sawyer here, to help me plan my next move.

(Huckleberry sails downriver for a while. Eventually, he sees another town. He beaches the raft near the docks, and approaches a small boy who’s playing nearby.)

Huckleberry: Excuse me... uh, I don’t suppose, by any chance, you’ve seen a runaway slave lately?

Boy: Sure have! He was caught and taken to Silas Phelps’ place, just two miles south of here. The word on that street is that he was caught on a raft, just a little upstream!

Huckleberry (*surprised*): Well, *that* was incredibly easy!¹⁸⁰ Uh, I mean... thanks, kid! Nice talking to you!

(Huckleberry starts down the road, and eventually he comes across a modest plantation with a sign that says “Phelp’s Planation”. Unsure of what to do next, he cautiously approaches the farmhouse. Without warning, the front door is thrown open, and a middle-aged woman comes bounding out excitedly.)

Aunt Sally: It’s you at last, isn’t it? Don’t you recognize your Aunt Sally?

Huckleberry: Uh... yes!

Aunt Sally: I knew it, I knew it! Just wait’ll the family hears that Tom Sawyer is here!

¹⁷⁹ In the original book, Jim is still at the raft, but the two scoundrels catch up with them (it’s unclear how they escaped the angry crowd). The king and duke force Huckleberry and Jim to accompany them for another chapter and a half, but nothing really happens: eventually, Huckleberry gets away from them again, but he finds that Jim’s been captured. And then later on, while Huckleberry’s looking for Jim, he runs into the scoundrels again, but nothing really comes of it... and then later after *that*, he sees them in the distance being tarred and feathered by an angry mob. So this parody arrives at a similar net result, only much faster (many adaptations do the same thing).

¹⁸⁰ No, I’m not being lazy... in the book, Huckleberry really does obtain all the information he needs from the first person he talks to.

(Huckleberry's eyes briefly bug out, but he manages to regain his composure. In a flash, Huckleberry realizes that if Tom Sawyer's still expected to arrive here, he could show up at any moment... and when he does, he'll likely give away who Huckleberry actually is.)

Huckleberry: Uh... anyway, I'll be back shortly! I just wanted to say "hi" as soon as I got here, but I still need to get my bags from town.

Aunt Sally: Do you want me to send someone with you?

Huckleberry: No thanks, just let me borrow your wagon and I can handle it! I'll be right back!

Scene 2: Reunion with Tom Sawyer

(Huckleberry drives the wagon back in the direction of town. Sure enough, he meets Tom Sawyer on the road, travelling in a cart of his own.)

Tom *(staring incredulously)*: Are you a ghost?

Huckleberry *(rolling his eyes)*: Yes, Tom. A *ghost* is driving your Aunt Sally's wagon down the road in broad daylight. I thought I was supposed to be the superstition one!

Tom *(recovering)*: Sorry, Huck... but everyone said you'd been murdered! What happened to you?

(Huckleberry briefly relates his adventures to Tom, who closely listens to the wild tale.)

Tom: Wow... so all of your adventures to help Jim escape have ultimately led you to the very same family farm where I'm spending my vacation! What are the *odds* of that happening, anyway?

Huckleberry *(shrugging)*: Who cares? Now that I've got Tom Sawyer in my corner, we can come up with a plan to find Jim, and help him escape!

Tom: You know it!

Huckleberry: Oh, one more thing... I already told your Aunt Sally that I'm Tom Sawyer. Can you pretend to be somebody else?

Tom *(grinning mischievously)*: I think I'll pretend to be my half-brother, Sid.

Huckleberry: Are you planning to cause some mischief and ruin Sid's reputation?

Tom: I don't have to. Sid will already be mad when he hears about this.

(After a hearty family dinner at the Phelps' place, Tom Sawyer leads Huckleberry around the back of the property.)

Tom: I'll bet anything they're keeping Jim in the hut near the edge of the plantation. Let's check it out!

(Tom and Huckleberry head for the hut. Upon reaching it, Huckleberry calls out quietly.)

Huckleberry *(quietly)*: Jim... Jim, are you in there?

Jim: Yeah, it's me... is that you, Huckleberry?

Huckleberry: It sure is! We're going to find a way to set you free, okay?

Jim: Thank goodness!

Tom: Now... let's see what we're up against.

(They spend twenty minutes carefully examining the hut that's holding Jim prisoner.)

Huckleberry *(eagerly)*: Well, Tom? What do you think?

Tom: I think we'd better cut a scene break here... 'cause this is about to get technical!

Huckleberry: Suits me.

Scene 3: Worst Plan Ever

(Tom is preparing to tell Huckleberry about his plans to rescue Jim.)

Tom *(shaking his head)*: It's no good, I tell you... this whole setup is just no good.

Huckleberry: Huh? What are you talking about? The way I see it, there's only one board nailed over the hut's window: we just pull that off to make an opening, and then crawl inside the hut. And Jim's chain isn't even anchored to anything: it's just looped under the bed's leg! So we lift the bed leg, slip off the chain, and waltz right out of there. I mean, they haven't even posted a guard! By all accounts, we should be in and out in about 5 minutes.

Tom *(exasperated)*: That's exactly what I mean, Huckleberry! This whole thing's too dang *easy*! We'll have to manufacture all the difficulties on our own, just to make this worthwhile!

Huckleberry: Um... a man's freedom is at stake here. Shouldn't *that* make it worthwhile?

Tom *(ignoring him)*: So, here's what we do. Instead of just pulling a board off the window like a pair of incompetent carpenters, we're going to cut a hole in the wall. No, wait! I have an even better idea: the hut has a dirt floor, so we'll tunnel under the wall using spoons... the same way you did, when you escaped your pap's cabin!

Huckleberry: Can't we at least use shovels? There must be a shovel or two around this farm that no one would miss for a few hours.

Tom: Don't be foolish, Huck: shovels are too quick and easy. We'll use spoons! But you make a good point about people noticing their missing tools: we'll need an elaborate charade where we keep sneaking spoons out of Aunt Sally's cupboard and then putting some back, so that she's never sure how many she actually has.

Huckleberry *(protesting)*: But if we used shovels, we could just dig the hole in one night, and then nobody would miss them to begin with! Or we could just pry the board off the window, and we wouldn't need *any* tools!

Tom *(ignoring him)*: And speaking of tools, we'll need a saw. We'll have to pretend that Jim's bed is anchored to the floor, so that we're obligated to cut through the bed leg, instead of just lifting it off the ground.

Huckleberry *(getting frustrated)*: But the bed *isn't* anchored to the ground! We can just lift it! And the more complicated we make this, the more likely we are to fail!

Tom (*ignoring him*): Now, let's address the real elephant in the room... the complete lack of security! We'll need to send some anonymous letters to the family, warning them in advance that someone will try to free Jim. That should get these complacent fools to post a guard or two.

Huckleberry (*angry*): Those "complacent fools" are your relatives! And I don't really *want* to risk having a guard shoot at me for no good reason!

Tom (*ignoring him*): The letters should be written in blood, to put everyone on edge. I'll bet they'll put the hounds on patrol, too.

Huckleberry (*angry*): Are you serious!? I definitely don't want to outrun angry hounds!

Tom (*grinning*): You won't have to. They're my family's hounds, so they won't bother us.

Huckleberry (*throwing his hands in the air*): Then why bother getting them involved at all!? It doesn't seem like the hounds will make this stupid plan any harder for us!

Tom (*grinning*): Yeah, but they won't know that.

(*A brittle silence follows.*)

Tom: What's the matter, Huckleberry? Is the plan still too easy?

Huckleberry (*flatly*): No, the plan is plenty hard. I'm just trying to decide whether you're an inconsiderate sociopath, or a reckless idiot.

Tom (*reflectively*): We'll also need to steal a sheet, fashion it into a rope ladder, hide it in a pie, and then smuggle it to Jim.

Huckleberry: Right now, I'm leaning toward "reckless idiot".

Jim (*from inside the hut*): Um... do I get a say in this?

(*Without warning, Tom bursts out laughing.*)

Huckleberry (*warily*): What's so funny?

Tom: I was just *messing* with you, Huck! Obviously, we aren't going to do any of that.

Huckleberry (*taken aback*): Oh. Right. Well, of course!

Tom (*grinning*): In fact, there's no need to rescue Jim at all. See? (*he produces a letter from his pocket*) It's a letter from Widow Douglas, confirming that she decided to set Jim free.¹⁸¹

Huckleberry (*enthusiastically*): Well, that's great news! Let's tell Aunt Sally right away, so that we can get Jim out of this hut!

Tom: Of course! What could be more important than *that*?

¹⁸¹ Just a reminder... in the original book, Jim was Miss Watson's slave. But she's such a marginal character that I benched her from the parody. This means that Widow Douglas had to set Jim free, instead.

Jim: Exactly!¹⁸²

Scene 4: Nothing More to Write

(Tom and Huckleberry are sitting on Aunt Sally's porch, unwinding after a long adventure.)

Tom: Heh. Can you imagine if we'd actually tried my harebrained scheme to free Jim from that hut? I could've been shot in the leg or something!

Huckleberry (*wryly*): Yeah... and you would've deserved it, too.

Tom: Well, the important thing is that Jim's free now. So, what are you going to do, Huckleberry? Your pap is dead now, so you could come back to St. Petersburg and reclaim your fortune.

Huckleberry (*musings*): I don't know, Tom... what if Widow Douglas wants to adopt me again? I've been there before, and I just can't stand it.

(Aunt Sally appears on the porch.)

Aunt Sally: Well, now that I know who you *actually* are, Huckleberry... you could always stay here! My family would be happy to take you in.

Huckleberry: Thanks, ma'am... but if it's a choice between being adopted in one place or the other, I'd just as soon live where all my friends are.¹⁸³

Aunt Sally: That's understandable. But a friend of Tom's is always welcome here!

(Aunt Sally goes back inside. There's a brief silence.)

Tom: Want to start a detective agency? I'll bet they're even more respectable than pirates or robbers!

Huckleberry (*laughing*): Sure, why not?¹⁸⁴

THE END

¹⁸² So, uh... yeah. In the original book, Tom is dead serious about all of those bonehead suggestions, and he insists on going through with them! In fact, Tom includes some additional complications which I haven't even mentioned here (to name just two: stealing candles for night work, and writing journals on tin plates which nobody actually reads). This kind of nonsense was amusing enough in "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer", when the kids were basically just messing around... but for crying out loud, Jim's freedom is on the line! Anyway, Tom spends about seven chapters making the entire family jump through hoops... and when he finally stages the jailbreak, guess what happens? Tom's shot in the leg, so *Jim* has to stay behind and help him... and as a result, Jim is re-captured! And after all that, Tom reveals that he already knew Jim had been freed this whole time! So not only was Tom's plan a ludicrous failure, but he was fully aware that it wasn't even *necessary*! I just couldn't bear to end the parody on a note which makes Tom Sawyer look like a sociopathic moron with delusions of grandeur.

¹⁸³ This decision isn't really resolved in the book, so this seemed like as good a place as any to leave Huckleberry's direction.

¹⁸⁴ Tom doesn't actually say this in the book, but this seems like a cheerful way to end things... and it even references an obscure novel that Mark Twain wrote later on! Read this document's conclusion for more details.

Conclusion

Thanks for reading!

I hope you enjoyed this parody! Now that I've analyzed both books in detail, I'll be the first to admit that they aren't perfect... and they definitely show their age.

Despite their shortcomings, though, I stand by what I said earlier: a lot of interesting things happen in these stories which are worth retelling. And that is the primary reason I wrote this parody (the secondary reason was a general compulsion toward creative projects).

One final point. Although I've referred to "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" as a duology, Mark Twain actually wrote other books with Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn in them. For example:

- **"Tom Sawyer Abroad"**, which features Tom Sawyer and Huckleberry Finn in a parody of adventure stories like those of Jules Verne.
- **"Tom Sawyer, Detective"**, in which Tom Sawyer attempts to solve a mysterious murder. The book is a parody of the popular detective novels of the time.

It's curious that these other books have apparently fallen into complete obscurity, whereas "The Adventures of Tom Sawyer" and "The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn" are still famous worldwide... but literature can be like that.

In any event, thanks again for reading, and see you in the next parody!