

Huckleberry Finn

by Mark Twain

Easy English words by Dave McKay

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About the Book and the Writer

Mark Twain's real name was Samuel Langhorne Clemens. He was born into a rich family in 1835, and he died 75 years later. His family owned many slaves.

He grew up on the Mississippi River, and went to work as a printer when he was 16. In his early 20s he started working on riverboats on the Mississippi. In 1861, when he was 26 years old, he joined the army from the South in the war between the States, but the men in his group ran away from the war because they did not believe in it.

He moved to Nevada with his brother, to look for silver, but two years later he started writing, at the age of 28. The Adventures of Tom Sawyer, printed in 1876, when he was 41, was, at the time, believed to be his best book.

He hired people to sell his books from door to door and made a lot of money; but he also wasted it. In 1884, when he was 49 years old, The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn was printed. It was much longer, and more serious than the earlier book. In this book Twain tries to get people to see the evils of slavery in an entertaining way.

Sadly, today there is much anger at his use of the word "nigger" in the book, because it has now become a very bad word. At a time when most great writers were using perfect English, Mark Twain chose to use the language of the people. This book is full of bad English, but it is the way that real people talked in real life in those days and in that part of the world.

Chapter 1

You don't know about me without you have read a book by the name of Tom Sawyer; but don't worry none about that. That other book was made by Mr. Mark Twain, and he told the truth, mostly. There was things which he put on a little, but mostly he told the truth. And putting on is nothing. I never seen anyone but lied one time or another, without it was Aunt Polly, or the widow, or maybe Mary.

Mary, Aunt Polly -- Tom's Aunt Polly, that is -- and the Widow Douglas is all told about in that book, which is mostly a true book, with some putting on, as I said before.

Now the way that the book finishes up is this: Tom and me found the money that the robbers was hiding in the cave, and it made us rich. We got six thousand dollars each -- all gold. It was an awful mountain of money when it was all there in front of us. Well, Judge Thatcher he took it and put it out at interest, and it give us a dollar a day each all the year round -- more than a body could tell what to do with. The Widow Douglas she took me for her son, and believed she would make me straight; but it was rough living in the house all the time, seeing as how boringly straight and good the widow was in all her ways; and so when I couldn't take it no longer I took off. I got into my old clothes and took up sleeping in my old sugar barrel again, and was free and happy.

But Tom Sawyer he looked me up and said he was going to start up a gang of robbers, and I might join if I would go back to the widow and be straight for a time. So I went back, and that's where this story starts.

The widow she cried over me when I come back, and called me a poor lost lamb, and she called me a lot of other names, too, but she never meant to hurt me by it. She put me in them new clothes again, and I couldn't do nothing but feel hot and scratchy and all tied up. Well, then, the old troubles started again.

The widow would ring a bell for meals, and you had to come to time. When you got to the table you couldn't go right to eating, but you had to wait for the widow to bend down her head and whisper a little over the food, when there weren't really anything wrong with it, -- that is, nothing only that everything was cooked by itself. It's different when it's cooked in a barrel of this and that all together; things get mixed up, and the juice kind of moves around it all, and the things go down better.



After eating she got out her book and taught me about Moses and the Bulrushes, and I was in a hurry to find out all about him; but by and by she let it out that Moses had been dead a very long time; so then I didn't care no more about him, because I don't take no interest in dead people.

When I wanted to smoke, I asked the widow to let me, but she wouldn't. She said it was a low act and wasn't clean, and I must try to not do it any more. That is just the way with some people. They get down on a thing when they don't know nothing about it. Here she was a-worrying about Moses, who was no family to her, and no use to anyone, being gone, you see, yet finding a lot of wrong with me for doing a thing that had some good in it. And she took tobacco herself too (breathed it up her nose, she did); but that was all right, because she done it.

Her sister, Miss Watson, a thin old woman with glasses, and no husband, had just come to live with her, and got herself worked up trying to teach me good English. She worked me hard for about an hour, and then the widow made her back off. I couldn't of stood it much longer. Then for an hour it was nothing... just boring, and I was having trouble just sitting still.

Miss Watson would say, "Don't put your feet up there, Huckleberry;" and

"Don't squeeze up like that, Huckleberry -- sit up straight;" and a minute later she would say, "Don't open your arms and put your legs out like that, Huckleberry -- why don't you try to be good?"

Then she told me all about the bad place, and I said I wished I was there. She got angry then, but I didn't mean no trouble. All I wanted was to go somewhere; all I wanted was a change, I wasn't big on where it had to be. She said it was evil to say what I said; said she wouldn't say it for the whole world; she was going to live so as to go to the good place. Well, I couldn't see no help in going where she was going, so I made up my mind I wouldn't try for it. But I never said so, because it would only make trouble, and wouldn't do no good.

Now she had got a start, and she went on and told me all about the good place. She said all a body would have to do there was to go around all day long with a harp and sing, forever and ever. So I didn't think much of it, but I never said so. I asked her if she thought Tom Sawyer would go there, and she said not by a long way. I was glad about that, because I wanted him and me to be together.



Miss Watson

Miss Watson she never let up that night, and it got very hard to put up with it all. By and by they asked the slaves to come in and had prayers, and then everyone was off to bed. I went up to my room with a piece of candle, and put it on the table. Then I sat down in a chair by the window and tried to think of something to make me happy, but it weren't no use. I felt so much alone I almost wished I was dead. The stars were out, and the leaves moving in the trees sounded ever so sad; and I heard an owl, away off, who-whooping about someone that was dead, and a dog crying about someone that was going to die; and the wind was trying to whisper something to me, and I couldn't make out what it was, and so it made the cold shakes run over me. Then away out in the trees I heard that kind of a sound that a ghost makes when it wants to tell about something that's on its mind and can't make itself understood, and so it can't rest easy in the ground, and has to go about that way every night feeling sad.

I got so low and scared I did wish I had some company. Soon a spider went walking up my shoulder, and I hit it off and it landed in the candle; and before I

could move an inch it was all burned up. I didn't need anyone to tell me that that was an awful bad sign and would bring me some bad luck, so I was scared and was almost shaking the clothes off of me. I got up and turned around on the spot three times and crossed my chest every time; and then I tied up a little piece of my hair with a thread to keep witches away. But I hadn't no confidence. You can do that when you've lost a horseshoe that you've found, instead of nailing it up over the door, but I hadn't never heard anyone say it was any way to keep off bad luck when you'd killed a spider.

I sat down again, a-shaking all over, and got out my pipe for a smoke; for the house was all as quiet as death now, so the widow wouldn't know. Well, after a long time I heard the clock away off in the town go boom -- boom -- boom -- twelve hits; and all quiet again -- quieter than ever. Pretty soon I heard a little branch break down in the dark between the trees -- something was a moving. I sat quiet and listened. I could only just hear a "me-yow! me-yow!" down there. That was good!

Says I, "me-yow! me-yow!" as soft as I could, and then I put out the light and climbed out of the window onto the roof of the tool room. Then I jumped down to the ground and moved on my hands and knees into the trees, and, sure enough, there was Tom Sawyer waiting for me.



"I climbed out the window."

Chapter 2

We went walking on our toes on our way through the trees back toward the end of the widow's garden, bending down so as the branches wouldn't hit our heads.



"Walking on our toes."

When we was passing by the kitchen I fell over a root and made a noise. We dropped down and laid still.

Miss Watson's big slave, named Jim, was sitting in the kitchen door; we could see him pretty clear, because there was a light behind him.

He got up and put his neck out about a minute, listening. Then he says: "Who dere?"

He listened some more; then he come walking quietly down and stood right between us; we could a touched him, nearly. Well, likely it was minutes and minutes that there weren't a sound, and us all there so close together. There was a place on my ankle that needed to be scratched; and then my ear started to feel the same; and next my back, right between my shoulders. Seemed like I'd die if I couldn't scratch. Well, I've seen that same thing happen lots of times since. If you are with high quality people, or at a funeral, or trying to go to sleep when you aren't sleepy -- if you are anywhere where it won't do for you to scratch, why you will feel like scratching all over in close to a thousand places.

Pretty soon Jim says:

"Say, who is you? Where is you? Dog my cats if I didn't hear sumfin. Well, I know what I's gwyne to do: I's gwyne to sit down here and listen until I hears it again."

So he sat down on the ground between me and Tom. He leaned his back up against a tree, and put his legs out until one of them almost touched one of mine. My nose started to feel like scratching. It went on until the tears come into my eyes. But I didn't scratch. Then it started on the inside of my ear. Next I got to feeling the same way under my bottom. I didn't know how I was going to keep from moving. This pain went on as much as six or seven minutes; but it seemed a lot longer than that. I was feeling it in eleven different places now. I thought I couldn't stand it more than a minute longer, but I set my teeth hard and got ready to try. Just then Jim started to breathe heavy; next he started to snore -- and then I was pretty soon comfortable again.

Tom he made a sign to me -- kind of a little noise with his mouth -- and we went quietly away on our hands and knees. When we was ten foot off Tom whispered to me, and wanted to tie Jim to the tree for fun. But I said no; he might wake and make a noise, and then they'd find out I wasn't in. Then Tom said he hadn't got candles enough, and he would go secretly in the kitchen and get some more. I didn't want him to try.

I said Jim might wake up and come. But Tom wanted to try; so we went in there real quiet like and got three candles, and Tom put five cents on the table to pay for it. Then we got out, and I was in a hurry to get away; but nothing would make Tom happy if he couldn't go up secretly to where Jim was, on his hands and knees, and play a trick on him. I waited, and it seemed a good while, everything was so dark and quiet.

As soon as Tom was back we cut along the footpath, around the garden fence, and by and by finished up on the steep top of the hill the other side of the house. Tom said he took Jim's hat off of his head and hanged it on a

branch right over him, and Jim moved a little, but he didn't wake. The next day Jim said the witches took hold of him and controlled his mind so that they could ride him all over the towns around there, and then put him back under the trees again, and hanged his hat on a branch to show who done it. And next time Jim told it he said they forced him to carry them down to New Orleans; and, after that, every time he told it he put on more and more, until by and by he said they were riding him all over the world, and tired him most to death, and his back was all over saddle-sores. Jim was powerful proud about it, and he got so he wouldn't so much as look at the other slaves. Black people would come miles to hear Jim tell about it, and he was more looked up to than any black man in that country. Slaves who never knew him would stand with their mouths open and look him all over, same as if he was a miracle. Slaves is always talking about witches in the dark by the kitchen fire; but whenever one was talking and letting on to know all about such things, Jim would happen in and say, "Hmm! What you know about witches?" and that slave was stopped up and had to take a back seat.



"What you know about witches?"

Jim always kept that five-cent piece round his neck with a string, and said it was magic the devil give to him with his own hands, and told him he could heal anyone with it and bring in witches whenever he wanted to just by saying something to it; but he never told what it was he said to it. Black people would

come from all around there and give Jim anything they had, just for a look at that five-cent piece; but they wouldn't touch it, because the devil had had his hands on it. Jim was not much good for a servant after that. He got a big head all because of having seen the devil and having witches ride on him.

Well, when Tom and me got to the top of the hill we looked away down into the village and could see three or four lights showing, where there was sick people maybe; and the stars over us was looking ever so nice; and down by the village was the river, a whole mile across, and awful quiet and powerful. We went down the hill and found Jo Harper and Ben Rogers, and two or three more of the boys hiding in the old leather works. So we cut loose a flat bottomed boat and pulled down the river two mile and a half, to the big cutting on the side of the hill, and pulled up on the beach.

We went to a big group of bushes growing close together, and Tom made everybody swear to keep it secret, before he showed them a hole in the hill, right behind the thickest part of the bushes. We put a match to the candles, and went in on our hands and knees. We went like this for about two hundred yards, and then the cave opened up. Tom went around from opening to opening, and pretty soon went down under a wall where you wouldn't a seen that there was a hole. We followed him there, along a narrow place, and got into a kind of room, all wet and cold, and there we stopped. Tom says: "Now, we'll start this gang of robbers and call it Tom Sawyer's Gang. Everybody that wants to join has got to make a holy promise, and write his name in blood."

Everybody was willing. So Tom got out a piece of paper that he had wrote the promise on, and read it. It said every boy would promise to stick to the gang, and never tell any of the secrets; and if anyone done anything to any boy in the gang, any boy who was told to kill that person and his family must do it, and he mustn't eat and he mustn't sleep until he had killed them and cut a cross on their chest, which was the sign of the gang. And nobody that didn't belong to the gang could use that mark, and if he did he must be taken to court; and if he done it again he must be killed. And if anyone that belonged to the gang told the secrets, he must have his throat cut, and then have his dead body burned up and the ashes thrown all around, and his name taken off of the list with blood and never said again by the gang, but have a curse put on it forever.

Everybody said it was a real beautiful promise, and asked Tom if he got it out of his own head. He said, some of it, but other parts was out of pirate-books and robber-books, and every gang that was high quality had it.



Some thought it would be good to kill the families of boys that told the secrets. Tom said it was a good one, so he took a pencil and wrote it in. Then Ben Rogers says:

“Here’s Huck Finn, he ain’t got no family; what you going to do about him?”
“Well, ain’t he got a father?” says Tom Sawyer.

“Yes, he’s got a father, but you can’t never find him these days. He used to lie drunk with the pigs in the leather yard, but he ain’t been seen in these parts for a year or more.”

They talked it over, and they was going to rule me out, because they said every boy must have a family or someone to kill, or else it wouldn’t be fair and square for the others. Well, nobody could think of anything to do, and they sat there saying nothing. I was almost ready to cry; but all at once I thought of a way, and so I said they could have Miss Watson -- they could kill her. Everybody said: “Oh, she’ll do. That’s perfect. Huck can come in.”

Then they all stuck a needle in their fingers to get blood to sign with, and I made my mark on the paper.

“Now,” says Ben Rogers, “what’s the line of business of this gang?”

“Nothing, only robbing and killing,” Tom says.

“But who are we going to rob? -- houses, or cows, or -- “

“No way! Robbing cows and such things ain’t robbing; it’s burglary,” says Tom Sawyer. “We ain’t burglars. That ain’t no kind of quality. We are true robbers.

We stop coaches on the road, with masks on, and kill the people and take their jewelry and money."

"Must we always kill the people?"

"Oh, for sure. It's best. Some people think different, but mostly it's believed to be best to kill them -- all but some that you bring to the cave here, and keep them until they're ransomed."

"Ransomed? What's that?"

"I don't know. But that's what they do. I've seen it in books; and so it's only right that's what we've got to do."

"But how can we do it if we don't know what it is?"

"Why, end it all, we've got to do it. Didn't I tell you it's in the books? Do you want to go to doing different from what's in the books, and get things all confused?"

"Oh, that's all very nice to say, Tom Sawyer, but how in the world are these people going to be ransomed if we don't know how to do it to them? -- that's the thing I want to get at. Now, what do you think it is?"

"Well, I don't know. But maybe if we keep them until they're ransomed, it means that we keep them until they're dead. "

"Now, that's more like it. That'll do. Why couldn't you a said that before? We'll keep them until they're ransomed to death; and a pain in the neck they'll be, too -- eating up everything, and always trying to get loose."

"How you talk, Ben Rogers. How can they get loose when there's one of us watching them, ready to shoot them down if they move an inch?"

"Watching them? Well, that's good. So someone's got to sit up all night and never get any sleep, just so as to watch them. I think that's foolishness. Why can't a body take a big strong club and ransom them to death as soon as they get here?"

"Because it ain't in the books so -- that's why. Now, Ben Rogers, do you want to do things right, or don't you? -- that's the question. Don't you think that the people that made the books knows what's the right thing to do? Do you think you can learn 'em anything? Not by a good way. No, sir, we'll just go on and ransom them in the right way."

"All right. I don't mind; but I say it's foolishness, anyway. Say, do we kill the women, too?"

"Well, Ben Rogers, if I was as stupid as you I wouldn't let on. Kill the women? No; nobody ever saw anything in the books like that. You bring them to the

cave, and you're always nice as pie to them; and by and by they fall in love with you, and never want to go home any more."

"Well, if that's the way, I'm agreed, but I don't put no hope in it. Pretty soon we'll have the cave so full up with women, and people waiting to be ransomed, that there won't be no place for the robbers. But go ahead, I ain't got nothing to say."

Little Tommy Barnes was asleep by then, and when they waked him up he was scared, and cried, and said he wanted to go home to his mama and didn't want to be a robber any more.

So they all made fun of him, and called him cry-baby, and that made him angry, and he said he would go straight and tell all the secrets. But Tom give him five cents to keep quiet, and said we would all go home and meet next week, and rob someone and kill some people.

Ben Rogers said he couldn't get out much, only Sundays, and so he wanted to start next Sunday; but all the boys said it would be very bad to do it on Sunday, and that ended the thing. They agreed to get together and fix a day as soon as they could, and then we chose Tom Sawyer first leader and Jo Harper second leader of the gang, and so we started home.



I climbed up the tool room and into my window just before day was breaking. My new clothes was all dirtied up, and I was dog-tired.

Chapter 3

I got a good going-over in the morning from old Miss Watson because of my clothes; but the widow she didn't say nothing, only cleaned off the mud and clay, and looked so sad that I thought I would try to be good for a while if I could.



"a good going over"

Then Miss Watson took me in a room and prayed, but nothing come of it. She told me to pray, and whatever I asked for I'd get. But it wasn't so. I tried it. Once I got a fish-line, but no hooks. It was no good to me without hooks. I tried praying for them three or four times, but one way or another I couldn't make it work. By and by, I asked Miss Watson to try for me, but she said that was foolish. She never said why, and I couldn't make it out no way.

I sat down one time back in the trees, and had a long think about it. I says to myself, if a body can get anything they pray for, why don't Deacon Winn get back the money he lost on pigs? Why can't the widow get back her silver tobacco box that was robbed? Why can't Miss Watson fat up? No, says I, there ain't nothing in it. I went and told the widow about it, and she said the only thing a body could get by praying was "spiritual gifts." This was too much for me, but she told me the deeper mean- ing -- I must help other people, and do everything I could for them, and look out for them all the time, and never think about myself. Miss Watson had to be one of them, as I took it. I went out in the trees and turned it over in my mind a long time, but I couldn't see no point of it -- only for the other people; so at last I said I wouldn't worry about it no more, but just let it go.

Sometimes the widow would take me one side and talk about God giving

things in a way to make a body's mouth water; but maybe next day Miss Watson would take hold and knock it all down again. I judged I could see that there was two ways God could give things, and a poor boy would stand a much better show with the widow's way, but if Miss Watson got him there weren't no help for him any more. I thought it all out, and thought I would belong to the widow's God if he wanted me, but I couldn't make out how he was going to be any better off then than what he was before, seeing I was so kind of low-down and bad.

Pap hadn't been seen for more than a year, and that was okay by me; I didn't want to see him no more. He used to always hit into me when he wasn't drunk and could get his hands on me; but I used to take to running into the trees most of the time when he was around.

Well, about this time he was found in the river drowned, about twelve mile above town, so people said. They judged it was him, anyway; said this drowned man was just his size, and was in old dirty clothes, and had hair that was too long, which was all like pap; but they couldn't make nothing out of the face, because it had been in the water so long it wasn't much like a face at all. They said he was lying on his back in the water. They took him and buried him on the beach. But I wasn't comfortable, because I knowed mighty well that a drowned man don't lie in the water on his back, but on his face. So I knowed, then, that this wasn't pap, but a woman dressed up in a man's clothes. I judged the old man would turn up again by and by, but I wished he wouldn't.

We played robber now and then about a month, and then I quit. All the boys did. We hadn't robbed nobody, hadn't killed any people, but only just acted like we did. We used to jump out of the bushes and go running down on people driving pigs and women in wagons taking garden food to market, but we never took any of them. Tom Sawyer called the pigs "gold," and he called the vegetables "jewelry," and we would go to the cave and talk over what we had done, and how many people we had killed and marked. But I couldn't see no good in it.

One time Tom sent a boy to run about town with a burning stick, which he said was the sign for the gang to get together, and then he said he had got secret news that next day a whole group of Spanish businessmen and rich Muslims was going to camp on Cave Beach with two hundred elephants, and six hundred camels, and over a thousand donkeys, all weighed down with diamonds, and they didn't have only four hundred soldiers to protect them, and so we would surprise them, and kill the lot and take the things. He said we must clean up our swords and guns, and get ready. He never would go after even a potato cart but he must have the swords and guns all cleaned up for it, even if they was only flat sticks and broom-sticks, and you might wash them until you died, and even then they wasn't worth a mouth full of ashes more than what they was before. I didn't believe we could win against such a crowd of Spanish men and Muslims, but I wanted to see the camels and elephants, so I was on hand next day, Saturday, in the hiding place; and when we got the word we raced out of the trees and down the hill. But there weren't

no Spanish people or Muslims, and there weren't no camels or no elephants. It weren't anything but a Sunday-school outing, and only the littlest children at that.

We broke it up, and the children ran up the beach; but we never got anything but some biscuits and jam, and Ben Rogers found a cloth doll, and Jo Harper got a song-book. But then the teacher ran in, and made us drop everything and cut.



I didn't see no diamonds, and I told Tom Sawyer so. He said there was barrels of them there; and he said there was Muslims there, too, and elephants and things. I said, why couldn't we see them, then? He said if I wasn't so stupid, but had read a book called Don Quixote, I would know without asking. He said it was all done by magic. He said there was hundreds of soldiers there, and elephants and great wealth, and so on, but we had enemies which he called magicians; and they had turned the whole thing into little Sunday-school children, just to hurt us. I said, all right; then the thing for us to do was to go for the magicians. Tom Sawyer said I was stupid.

"Why," says he, "a magician could call up a lot of spirit people, and they would cut you up like nothing before you could say Jack Robinson. They're tall as a tree and big around as a church."

"Well," I says, "what if we got some spirit people to help us -- can't we win against the other crowd then?"

"How you going to get them?"

"I don't know. How do they get them?"

"Why, they rub an old tin lantern or an iron ring, and then the spirit people come pouring out, with lightning shooting around and smoke everywhere; and anything they're told to do they up and do it. They don't think nothing of pulling a whole brick tower up by the roots, and hitting a Sunday-school teacher over the head with it -- or any other person."

"Who makes them run around so?"

"Why, whoever rubs the lantern. They belong to whoever rubs the lantern or the ring, and they've got to do whatever he says. If he tells them to build a king's palace forty miles long out of diamonds, and fill it full of lollies, or whatever you want, and bring a king's daughter from China for you to marry, they've got to do it -- and they've got to do it before the sun comes up the next morning, too. And more: they've got to dance that house around over the country wherever you want it, you understand."

"Well," says I, "I think they're a gang of empty heads for not keeping the palace themselves instead of giving it away like that. And what's more -- if I was one of them I would see a man in Jericho before I'd drop my business and come to him for the rubbing of an old tin lantern."

"How you talk, Huck Finn. Why, you'd have to come when he rubbed it, if you wanted to or not."

"What! and I as tall as a tree and as big as a church? All right, then; I would come; but I promise I'd make that man climb the highest tree there was in the country."

"Shoot, it ain't no use to talk to you, Huck Finn. You don't seem to know anything, for some reason. You're a perfect air head."

I thought this over for a few days, and then I thought I would see if there was anything in it. I got an old tin lantern and an iron ring, and went out in the trees and rubbed and rubbed until I was as hot as an Indian, planning to build a palace and sell it; but it weren't no use, none of the spirit people come. So then I judged that all that talk was just one of Tom Sawyer's lies. I could see that he believed in the Muslims and the elephants, but as for me I think different. It had all the marks of a Sunday-school story.

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