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TOM SAWYER, DETECTIVE

MARK TWAIN



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MARK TWAIN



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Tom Sawyer, Detective

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"Look!—what's that?"

"Don't!" I says. "Don't take a person by surprise that way. I'm 'most ready to die, anyway, without you doing that."

"Look, I tell you. It's something coming out of the sycamores."

"Don't, Tom!"

"It's terrible tall!"

"Oh, lordy-lordy! let's—"

"Keep still—it's a-coming this way."

He was so excited he could hardly get breath enough to whisper. I had to look. I couldn't help it. So now we was both on our knees with our chins on a fence-rail and gazing—yes, and gasping, too. It was coming down the road—coming in the shadder of the trees, and you couldn't see it good; not till it was pretty close to us; then it stepped into a bright splotch of moonlight and we sunk right down in our tracks—it was Jake Dunlap's ghost!

The Life of Mark Twain

Mark Twain, like so many of the works of Samuel Langhorne Clemens, was an invention of creative genius. The name on the spine of books like *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer*, *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn*, and *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* was a pseudonym, a false name that a master craftsman of language named Samuel Clemens created, edited, and placed calculatedly in the public eye. From the 1860's, when the byline Mark Twain started popping up in newspapers across the nation, until the early 1900's, when the author paraded frequently down Fifth Avenue in New York in spotless white suits, Mark Twain was as much a character as Tom Sawyer or Huck Finn, and as symbolic of American life.

Samuel Langhorne Clemens was born in Florida, Missouri on November 30, 1835, the youngest of four children in his family. Haley's Comet was flaming in the sky at his birth. His father, John Marshall Clemens, was a Virginian who never seemed to be able to settle down in one place. He had a penchant for failing at business. When Sam was born, John Clemens had just moved his

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family from East Tennessee to Florida, Missouri—a town so small that Sam later claimed to have increased the population by one percent with his birth. As he said, “It was more than many of the best men in history could have done for a town.” John and family moved on to Hannibal, Missouri when Sam was four. It looked like things were finally going to work out for John Clemens. He was respected in the community. He went by the honorific “Judge” Clemens, headed the library association and was chairman of some of Hannibal’s most important committees, when he died young and unexpectedly in 1847. Sam Clemens was twelve years old when his father passed away. The Clemens family was left in the throes of genteel poverty. Despite the family’s fancy talk of titled English ancestors, of being landowners and slaveholders, the only assets the Clemens had when John died were the house they lived in and a large acreage in Fentress County, Tennessee that had so far only produced large crops of swamp grass and mosquitos. The land was so barren that the Clemens family was still trying to sell the acreage fifty years later.

Sam was faced with the necessity of earning a living for himself and helping to support his family. He apprenticed himself for room, board, and two suits of clothes a year to a man named Ament, who owned and edited the *Hannibal Courier*. After a while, his older brother Orion bought a small newspaper business, which was installed in the family home. Sam returned from his job at the printers to help out. The idea was that Orion would handle the writing and Sam would typeset. This worked pretty well as long as Orion was watching, but as soon as he turned his back, Sam filled the pages of the *Hannibal Journal* with pointed, exceedingly funny sketches of local life. The paper was Orion’s baby—and in his opinion, his little brother Sam was much too unskilled to write for it. On Orion’s return, Sam was suitably punished for daring to include his essays. The sketches were good for circulation, but not for Orion’s ego. Like many older brothers, Orion had little respect for his younger brother’s talents. The feeling was mutual—Sam was convinced that Orion didn’t have enough clear-headed, cold-hearted business sense to keep

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the paper afloat. Sam was right. Five years after Orion bought the *Journal*, it still hadn't made any money, and Orion gave it up. In 1853, when Sam was eighteen, the paper went under, freeing him from his obligation to help Orion. Sam left his family and went off into the world to find himself.

In a single year, Sam lived in St. Louis, New York, and Philadelphia, earning his keep in print shops along the way. He rejoined his family for a short while, but in 1856, when Sam was twenty-one, wanderlust hit him again. He set out with the intention of going to Brazil because he'd read Lieutenant Herndon's account of his exploration of the Amazon River basin, and thought the place sounded fascinating. He particularly liked the stories of the men who had made fortunes in the coca trade. Sam was always looking for a good way to get rich. He needed a stake to get there, so he did what he knew best. He worked as a printer. He went first to Cincinnati, worked there for a bit, then took the steamer Paul Jones to New Orleans. On the trip, he became fascinated with the lifestyle of the Mississippi riverboat captains. He got side-tracked. In 1858, he began an eighteen month apprenticeship on the river. He became one of the best and safest pilots on the treacherous waters of the mighty Mississippi. It was, he often said, the happiest period of his life. Here he met many of the people and heard many of the stories that he later incorporated into his fiction. He also heard the words that became the name he adopted for his writing: Mark Twain. In river parlance, it means water two fathoms deep—enough for clear passage for a river steamer. Fate soon intervened in Sam's career path when the Civil War broke out in 1861, ending the era of paddlewheel boats.

Sam enlisted in the Confederacy, but two weeks of drills and marching in dust and heat changed his mind about the military. He deserted and headed for the western frontier. His brother Orion had formed a mining venture in Nevada, so Sam joined up to try his hand at finding a fortune. He was a systematic miner, but not a successful one. He had better luck with his sketches of mining life. He sold them to the *Enterprise* in Virginia City, Nevada. The owner of the paper was so impressed by Sam's work,

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he offered the young writer the job of editor. In early 1863, Sam walked over a hundred miles through rough country to accept the position. Here, at twenty-eight years of age, he finally found a perfect outlet for his distinctive form of biting humor. Since he worried about getting shot, bludgeoned, or otherwise wounded by the people he lampooned, he published his essays under the name Mark Twain. It was, after all, a rowdy frontier town with its share of armed citizens. People who were ridiculed in the paper sometimes took more decisive action than firing off a letter to the editor.

Sam needed a larger horizon. Virginia City was a boom town, but the opportunities for advancement were limited for a writer on the only paper in town. He couldn't afford to buy it, and he already had the best job on it, so he was unlikely to ever make a fortune at the *Enterprise*. He left for San Francisco. He got a job working for the *Morning Call*. Here he ran into many kindred spirits, including Bret Hart and Artemus Ward, who become famous writers and speakers a few years later. Sam also contributed to the *Golden Era* and the *California*. San Francisco was a wild, rowdy, corrupt town in 1864. People from all over the world had come to the city to make a fortune in gold. Only a few made a fortune mining. Many more made money by preying on the people who had come to town to outfit themselves for the gold fields. It was a place where everybody was out to make a buck, even the police and politicians, and few of the people looking to get rich cared if they did it honestly or dishonestly. Sam's ferocious print attacks on government corruption and police brutality kept his life from being boring—police reprisals were frequent and unpleasant. Often, he'd end up spending the night in jail after his more vicious articles were printed. Since he wasn't terribly popular with the powers that ran San Francisco, he made frequent forays out of the city to escape from persecution. On one of these journeys, he spent time learning pocket mining at Angel's Camp in Calaveras County. He didn't find gold, but he did hear a yarn that he later polished and sent off to the East Coast. Printed in New York's *Saturday Press* on November 18, 1865, "The Notorious Jumping Frog of Calaveras County" was

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an immediate hit. The East was starved for stories of the wild and foreign (to them, at least) West. The short story was reprinted often and everywhere.

In the meantime, the story's author was broke, depressed, hounded by the police, and an inch away from suicide. He felt that his life had gone nowhere in his first thirty years. He'd come to San Francisco to get rich—all he'd managed to do was to keep from starving and to get the police on his case. He felt he hadn't made a success of anything he'd tried, from mining to writing, so he spent a long night with a gun at his temple, trying to get up the nerve to pull the trigger. He later said of that night, "Many times I have been sorry I did not succeed, but I was never ashamed of having tried." He knew he had to make some changes in his life if he was to survive. He accepted a commission from the *Sacramento Union* to travel to the Sandwich Islands (which later became the state of Hawaii) and write a series of letters to the paper describing his journey. He boarded ship in March, 1886, at the age of thirty-one. His letters were widely read, and he was able to cap off his literary coup with a real news story. The crew of the ship *The Hornet*, lost at sea, arrived in Honolulu in an open lifeboat. Sam Clemens was there, interviewed the survivors, and sent home their story, entitled "Forty-three Days in an Open Boat." He came back to San Francisco covered in glory.

Interest in his Sandwich Island letters was rampant when he returned to California. At a time when local entertainment was pretty well limited to preaching, hangings, drinking, and saloon burlesques, travelling speakers could make a good deal of money. Sam Clemens—or Mark Twain, as he was becoming known—decided to take his act and put it on the road. He spent the summer touring the west coast, speaking to packed houses about his experiences. Flush with both fame and ready cash, he decided it was time to take on the civilized world, including the East Coast literary establishment. In December, 1866, he headed from San Francisco to New York.

If the voyage he went through to get there was any omen of his future success, he was in trouble. The first night at sea, it

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land that spawned him. The effect of that focus is clear. Ralph Waldo Emerson issued a call in one of his essays for Americans to “cease listening to the courtly Muses of Europe, to speak their own minds, to make their own pasts.” Mark Twain did this automatically and instinctively.

When Sam returned to the United States in 1868, he had everything he needed to make him a great writer. He had all the raw material he needed, between his memories of his youth on the Mississippi River, his rambling travels as an impecunious printer, his years as a river pilot, his newspaper days, and his wild days spent mining in the territories. He also had tremendous motivation. He was in love with Olivia Langdon, and her parents wouldn't let him court her until he could prove that he could support her. He needed money. In a flurry of productivity brought on by financial necessity, he wrote *Innocents Abroad* in 1868. The book sold eighty thousand copies in eighteen months—providing Sam with an income of thirteen thousand dollars in 1869. In those days before income tax, when a loaf of bread was five cents, this was a lot of money. Clemens got his girl. Sam and Livy were married in 1870. His new father-in-law bought the newlyweds a large and luxurious house in Buffalo. Now Sam had to maintain his wife and her mansion in the style to which her wealthy parents had accustomed her. He turned to his pen. The books flowed fast and furiously from it. In order, he wrote *Roughing It* (1872), *The Gilded Age* (1873), *Sketches New and Old* (1875), and *The Adventures of Tom Sawyer* (1875), all of which were financial and critical successes. Mark Twain was the best known author in America, and was gaining a world-wide audience. Sam's binge of creativity was marred by tragedy, however. In the same five year period (1870–1875), he nearly lost his wife twice to complications of pregnancy and then to typhoid, buried his father-in-law, buried a house guest who contracted typhoid and then died while staying with them, witnessed the death of James Henry Riley, who died of cancer while collaborating with Twain on a book on the South African diamond rush, then watched his first child, an eighteen-month-old son named Langdon, die of diphtheria. It was enough to break anyone. Sam

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sold the mansion in Buffalo and moved his whole family to Hartford, Connecticut in 1871, attempting to flee from his problems. It wasn't far enough. The people he loved seemed marked by death, and while he earned a tremendous amount of money, he always seemed to need more than he had.

After 1874, Sam hit a dry spell in his writing. He was both worn out by tragedy, and very involved with day-to-day family life. Olivia gave birth to three daughters—Suzy, Clara, and Jean. Sam moved his family into a huge, exotic, ostentatious mansion in Hartford, which was finished in 1874, then enlarged in 1881. In an attempt to break the writing deadlock and acquire much needed income from lecturing, Sam and his family headed to Europe in 1878 and 1879. The trip was successful—Sam went back into his study in Hartford when he returned from Europe and churned out *A Tramp Abroad* (1880), *The Prince and the Pauper* (1882), *Life on the Mississippi* (1883), and *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* (1884). The period was prosperous in many ways. Royalties on all of Sam's books rolled in regularly. Sam bought part-ownership in his publisher, Charles L. Webster and Co., increasing his profits on each book sold. But Sam's growing family expenses—his daughters were in their teens, becoming fashion conscious, travelling abroad often, and going to private schools—and Sam's terrible fondness for investing in the latest new-fangled inventions, nearly brought him to bankruptcy many times. Sam was frequently forced back onto the lecture circuit to pay his debts. Even the massive success of Grant's autobiography, which Twain published in 1885, was not able to save him from bankruptcy when he bankrolled a firm that manufactured a typesetting machine invented by James W. Paige. After consuming hundreds of thousands of dollars of Sam's hard-earned money, the company went bust in 1891, and took Twain with it.

Twain owed nearly half a million dollars, and vowed to pay back every penny. In 1891, when Twain was fifty-six, he and Olivia closed the Hartford house and moved to Europe to save money. Writing by day and lecturing by night, he made the fortune he needed to repay his creditors. He published *A Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court* (1889), *The American*

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Claimant (1892), *The Tragedy of Pudd'nhead Wilson* (1894), *Tom Sawyer Abroad* (1894), *The Personal Reflections of Joan of Arc* (1896), and *Tom Sawyer, Detective* (1896). In 1895 he embarked on a very lucrative world lecture tour. He was getting close to paying off his debts. Just as it looked like he would triumph completely over adversity, word reached him in 1896 that his beloved daughter Suzy had died of meningitis on the way to join her parents in Europe. It was too much. He continued to write and lecture, but the joy that was so much a part of his earlier work departed. His later writings include *Following the Equator* (1897), *The Man That Corrupted Hadleyburg* (1898), *What is Man?* (1906), and *The Mysterious Stranger*, revised many times and published posthumously in various forms. The books are still brilliant, biting, and memorable, but they lack the glowing humor that made Twain a household word. He and Livy returned to America in 1900. In 1903, Livy became very ill, so on the advice of her physician, the Clemens family moved to Italy. Livy died in 1904, and Sam returned to the United States. He spent much of the rest of his life there, parading up and down the streets of New York in blinding white suits, reveling in his role as the "best known man in the universe." In October, 1909, he attended the wedding of his daughter Clara to the pianist Ossip Gabrilowitsch. He spent some time with his other daughter, Jean, enjoying her company now that she had reached adulthood. Jean died of an epileptic seizure in her bath on Christmas Eve, 1909. Twain was saddened and tired. "I have never envied anyone but the dead," he said, "But I always envy the dead." Four months later after some recurring trouble with his heart, he died in his sleep on April 21, 1910. Fittingly enough, Haley's Comet flamed in the sky at his passing.

Foreword

In *Tom Sawyer, Detective*, Huckleberry Finn says that he wants to “go wandering to strange countries where everything is mysterious and wonderful and romantic.” In the book, Mark Twain lets his readers do just that. He takes us back to his boyhood days, to a time and place that we could never find without a native guide. Twain spent his summers until he was twelve years old with his uncle on a five-hundred-acre farm in Florida. It was, according to Twain, a heavenly place for a boy. Full of fields and brooks and swimming holes, forbidden, of course, but all the sweeter because of it. As Twain said—“We were little Christian children, who had early been taught the value of forbidden fruit.” Twain stole the farm, memories and all, moved it six hundred miles north to Arkansas, and sent Tom and Huck to it—ripe for mischief. From the very beginning, when Tom and Huck travel five hundred adventurous miles down the Mississippi River from Missouri to Arkansas, the boys found trouble to be their most faithful companion.

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This book has everything the most demanding reader of adventure stories could ask for: from diamond thieves to murder, from a villain in disguise to an innocent man who confesses to a bloody crime, from hidden treasure to missing corpses. Huck and Tom are so blessed with excitement that they barely have time to play on the farm. All of this makes for a rare treat for the reader, no matter what age or maturity level said reader may lay claim to. The book is breathlessly paced, amusingly plotted, and has a knock-down, drag-out surprise ending. If this were all the story had to offer, it would be more than enough. But Mark Twain gives a reader more than just action.

Twain loved the American language, with all of its quirks, regional variants, and fractured grammar. In his years as a riverboat captain, as a miner, and as a reporter, he got to hear some of the wildest, woolliest words available in all parts of the country. He plays them back in this book. Twain's love of dialect and regional phrasing shines through in every line of *Tom Sawyer, Detective*. Characters talk like real people, in voices Twain had heard and could reproduce with uncanny accuracy. Whether he was expressing anger, joy, or sheer bewilderment, Twain didn't need to resort to profanity to get the job done. He could bend the language sufficiently to his purposes to succeed without ever using a word that would make a lady blush. The same man who referred to an enemy as a "wide-mouthed, mud-eating, toad-faced puke" had no trouble putting sufficient sleaze into a slick lawyer's mouth, or sterling common sense into the untaught phrases of Huck Finn. For example, here's how Huck explains Tom Sawyer's knack for finding trouble:

"It was always nuts for Tom—a mystery was. If you'd lay out a mystery and a pie before me and him, you wouldn't have to say take your choice; it was a thing

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that would regulate itself. Because in my nature I have always run to pie, whilst in his nature, he has always run to mystery. People are made different."

Tom Sawyer, Detective shows Mark Twain at the height of his powers as a linguist.

The book also works on a third, more subtle level. The bulk of the novel was written in 1894–1895 and published in 1896. At that time, Twain was living in Europe, and the Sherlock Holmes novels of Arthur Conan Doyle had taken the continent—and the world—by storm. People lined up in droves to get the newest adventures of Holmes and Watson, and Twain saw the lines from his hotel window. The furor over Holmes had gotten so intense that Doyle tried to kill off the character in 1893, just to get a little peace in his life. Twain watched this with interest. It seemed to Twain that the detective novel could be quite a commercial success. Since Twain needed the money, he decided it would be a worthy exercise to tie his two most successful characters to a detective story in the Holmes/Watson mode. A book along those lines would, he quite correctly surmised, sell a lot of copies. Naturally, Twain was not content to simply mirror the format perfected by Doyle. He put his own twist to the story—a charming, tongue-in-check look at the alarms, excursions, last-minute confessions, and stunning inspirations that occur in the pages of the average detective novel. There are a lot of spoofs on the world of Sherlock Holmes, but this is one of the finest. Huck Finn was the perfect vehicle with which to take gentle jabs at Watson's doglike devotion to Holmes. And Tom Sawyer was practically born to show how downright silly Sherlock Holmes could be—with his mysterious moods, his lightning-like inspirations, and his fevered chase after phantom clues. Best of all is the climatic trial scene, where Tom (à la Homes) manufactures a grand and glorious tale

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from almost no evidence—inspiring the judge to ask, “My boy, did you *see* all the various details of this strange conspiracy and tragedy that you’ve been describing?” Tom replies with perfect candor: “No, your Honor, I didn’t see any of them.” The reader can almost hear Twain chuckling in the background as he lampoons the “revelation of truth” scenes so popular in Sir Arthur Conan Doyle’s stories. Justice, Tom, and Huck carry the day, of course, no matter how irregular the court proceedings become under Tom’s guidance. The book is good, solid fun, from the first line to the last delicious plot twist. So turn the page, and see what happens when Tom and Huck head down the Mississippi to try their hands at detecting. It’s too much fun to miss.

Chapter 1

An Invitation for Tom and Huck

Well, it was the next spring after me and Tom Sawyer set our old nigger Jim free, the time he was chained up for a runaway slave down there on Tom's uncle Silas's farm in Arkansaw. The frost was working out of the ground, and out of the air, too, and it was getting closer and closer onto barefoot time every day; and next it would be marble-time, and next mumblety-peg, and next tops and hoops, and next kites, and then right away it would be summer and going in a-swimming. It just makes a boy homesick to look ahead like that and see how far off summer is. Yes, and it sets him to

AUTHOR'S NOTE:

Strange as the incidents of this story are, they are not inventions, but facts—even to the public confession of the accused. I take them from an old-time Swedish criminal trial, change the actors, and transfer the scenes to America. I have added some details, but only a couple of them are important ones.—M.T.