***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 22:***

***Translation:***

The crowd ran up toward Sherburn’s house in a swarm, whooping and yelling like Indians. It was awful to see—everyone and everything had to move out of their path or they’d get trampled. Children were running ahead of the mob to get away, and women were popping their heads out of every window along the road. Little n----- boys sat in every tree and young men and women looked over every fence. When the mob was almost on top of them, they’d back away and scatter to get out of reach. Many women and girls were crying and carrying on, scared to death. They swarmed up to the front of Sherburn’s fence and crammed into the little twenty-foot yard. You couldn’t hear yourself think through all the noise they made. Some people cried out, “Tear down the fence! Tear down the fence!” Then you could hear the awful racket of people ripping and tearing and smashing wood, and the fence was gone. The wall of people in the front of the crowd began to push forward as if they were a wave. Just then, Sherburn stepped out on to the roof of his little front porch with a double-barrelled shotgun in his hand. He took his stand, perfectly calm and deliberate, without saying a word. The racket of the mob stopped, and the wave of people pulled back. Sherburn never said a word. He just stood there, looking down, slowly running his eyes over the crowd. The stillness was awfully creepy and uncomfortable. The people tried to meet his gaze, but they couldn’t. They dropped their eyes as if they were trying to hide something. Pretty soon, Sherburn let out a sort of laugh. It wasn’t a pleasant laugh, but the kind laugh that makes you feel as if you’d been eating bread that had sand in it. Slowly and scornfully, he said: “The idea of YOU lynching anybody—it’s amusing! The idea of you thinking that you had enough guts to lynch a man! You think you have what it takes simply because you’re brave enough to tar and feather poor, friendless outcast women who come through here. Does that make you think you have the stomach to lay your hands on a MAN? Why, as long as there’s daylight and you’re not creeping behind him, a MAN would be safe even if there were ten thousand of you. “Do I know your kind? Of course I do. I know all about you—I was born and raised in the South and lived in the North. I know what men everywhere are like. The average man is a coward. In the North he lets anyone who wants to walk all over him, and then he goes home and prays for the strength to take it. In the South, one man alone has stopped a stagecoach full of men in broad daylight and robbed all the passengers. Just because your newspapers call you brave, you now think that makes you braver than everyone else. But you’re only AS brave—not braver. Why don’t southern juries hang murderers? Because the jury members are afraid the murderer’s friends will shoot them in the back in the dark. And they WOULD. “So the juries always acquit. Then some MAN goes out into the night with a hundred masked cowards behind him and lynches the scoundrel. Your first mistake is that you didn’t bring a MAN with you. The second is that you didn’t come in the dark and bring your masks to hide behind. You brought PART of a man—Buck Harkness there—and if he hadn’t been there to get you all riled up, you would have just blown off a bunch of hot air. “You didn’t want to come here—average men don’t like trouble and danger. YOU don’t like trouble and danger. But if only HALF a man, such as Buck Harkness there, shouts, “Lynch him! Lynch him!” then you’re afraid to back down. You’re afraid that everyone will found out what you really are: COWARDS. So you raise a ruckus and yell and latch on to that half-man’s coattails. You come raging up here, yelling about all the things you’re going to do. The most pitiful thing in the world is a mob. That’s what an army is, a mob. They don’t fight with the courage they’re born with. They fight with courage borrowed from their numbers and from the leaders. But a mob without any MAN in charge is WORSE than pitiful. Now, tuck your tails between your legs and go home and crawl in a hole. If there’s going to be an actual lynching it’s going to be done in the dark, Southern style. And when they come, they’ll bring their masks and bring a MAN with them. Now LEAVE—and take your half-man with you.” As he said this, he tossed his gun up across his left arm and cocked it. The crowd drifted back suddenly and broke apart. People went running off in every direction. Buck Harkness followed after them looking rather pitiful. I could have stayed, but I didn’t want to. I went to the circus and loafed around in back until the watchman came by and drove under the tent. I had my twenty-dollar gold piece and some other money, but I decided I should save it. There was no telling when or how soon I might need it, especially since I was away from home and among strangers. You can’t be too careful. I’m not opposed to spending money on circuses when there’s no other way around it, but there’s no use WASTING money on them either. It was a real good circus. The parade was the most splendid thing I’ve ever seen. Performers came riding in, two-by-two, man and lady. The men wore only their underwear and undershirts (no shoes or stirrups) and rested their hands on their thighs easily and comfortably. There must have been twenty of them. And every lady was beautiful with lovely complexions and millions dollars outfits that were littered with diamonds—they looked like real queens. It was an amazing sight—I’d never seen anything so lovely. And then they stood up one by one and went weaving around the ring, in a gentle and graceful wave. The men looked tall and light and straight with their heads bobbing and skimming along way up there under the tent roof. And every lady’s rose-leafy dress was flapping soft and silky around her hips, which made her look like the loveliest pink parasol. They all danced around faster and faster. First they’d stick one foot out in the air and then the other, while the horses leaned more and more to the side. The ringmaster would go round and round the center, cracking his whip and shouting, “Hyah! Hyah!” while the clown cracked jokes behind him. Eventually, everyone dropped their reins and every lady put her knuckles on her hips and every gentleman folded his arms as the horses leaned in and started sprinting! One after the other they all skipped off into the ring. They made the sweetest bow I’d ever seen, and then they scampered out. Everybody clapped their hands and went wild. They did the most astonishing things in that circus, all while the clown performed and nearly killed the audience with laughter. The ringmaster would scold him, but before you knew it, the clown would give him a wink and start saying the funniest things ever said. I couldn’t understand how he could COME UP with so many funny things to say and deliver them so perfectly. Why, I couldn’t have thought of the things he said if I tried for a whole year. Pretty soon, a drunk man tried to step into the ring—he said he wanted a ride and that he could ride as well as anyone ever could. They argued and tried to keep him out of the ring, but the man wouldn’t listen and the whole show came to a stop. The audience began to yell at him and make fun of him, which made him mad and violent. That roused everyone in the audience, and a lot of the men began to come down from the benches and swarm toward the ring saying, “Knock him down! Throw him out!” One or two women began to scream. So the ringmaster made a little speech saying that he hoped there wouldn’t be a scene. He said he’d let the man ride a horse as long as he thought he was able and wouldn’t make any more trouble. Everyone laughed and agreed, and the man got on the horse. The moment he got on, the horse began to jump and thrash around, even though two circus men held his bridle to keep him steady. The drunk man hung on to the horse’s neck. His heels flew into the air every time the horse jumped. The whole crowd was on its feet shouting and laughing with tears rolling down their faces. At last, despite the best efforts of the circus men, the horse broke loose and went running round and round the ring with that drunk lying on him and hanging on to his neck. First one leg would drag to the ground on one side of the horse, and then the other leg would drag on the other side. The crowd was going crazy. It wasn’t funny to me, though. I was scared because he was in so much danger. Soon he managed to sit up and straddle the horse and grabbed the bridle as the horse reeled this way and that. And then he jumped up, dropped the bridle, and stood up on the back of the horse as it ran round and round like it was on fire! He just stood there, sailing around as if he didn’t have a care in the world and had never been drunk once in his life. Then he began to throw off his clothes. He tore them off so quickly that all you could see were clothes flying around in the air. He took off seventeen suits altogether! And then, there he was, dressed in the gaudiest and most flamboyant outfit you ever saw. He started beating the horse with his whip and made him run even faster. Then he jumped off the horse, took a bow, and danced off to the dressing room with everyone howling with laughter and astonishment. The ringmaster looked sick when he realized he’d been fooled. He was probably the sickest ringmaster you’ve ever seen since he had been tricked by one of his own men! The guy had thought up that whole joke by himself and hadn’t told anyone. Well, I felt pretty foolish for having been taken, but I wouldn’t have wanted to be in the ringmaster’s shoes, not for a thousands dollars. I don’t know—maybe there are better circuses than this one, but I’d never seen one. Anyway, this circus was good enough for ME, and you bet that they’ll be getting my business whenever I come across it again. That night we put on our OWN show, even though there was only about twelve people there—just enough to break even. Everyone laughed throughout the whole show, which made the duke mad. And the entire crowd left before the show was even over, except for one boy who’d fallen asleep. The duke said that these Arkansas lunkheads weren’t good enough for Shakespeare. He said he knew all about their type. He figured that what they wanted was low comedy—and maybe something even worse than that. So, next morning he took some big sheets of wrapping paper and some black paint and drew some new [handbills](javascript:void(0);). Then he stuck them up all over the village. The handbills said: AT THE COURTHOUSE! FOR 3 NIGHTS ONLY! The World Renowned Tragedians DAVID GARRICK THE YOUNGER! AND EDMUND KEAN THE ELDER! Of the London and Continental Theatres, In their Thrilling Tragedy of THE KING’S CAMEL-LEOPARD, OR, THE ROYAL NOTHINGNESS!!! Admission 50 cents. The biggest line of all was written at the bottom. It said: The biggest line of all was written at the bottom. It said: “There,” he said. “If that last line doesn’t bring them in, then I don’t know a thing about Arkansas!”

***Synopsis:***

The lynch mob charges through the streets, proceeds to Sherburn’s house, and knocks down the front fence. The crowd quickly backs away, however, as Sherburn greets them from the roof of his front porch, rifle in hand. After a chilling silence, Sherburn delivers a haughty speech on human nature in which he attacks the cowardice and mob mentality of the average person. Sherburn tells the crowd that no one will lynch him in the daytime. The mob, chastened, disperses.

Huck then goes to the circus, a “splendid” show with a quick-witted clown. A performer, pretending to be a drunk, forces himself into the ring and tries to ride a horse, apparently hanging on for dear life. The crowd roars in amusement, except for Huck, who cannot bear to watch the poor man in danger. That night, only twelve people attend the duke’s performance, and they jeer throughout the entire show. The duke then prints another handbill, this time advertising a performance of The King’s Cameleopard [Giraffe] or The Royal Nonesuch. Bold letters across the bottom read, “Women and Children Not Admitted.”

Although these chapters involving the duke and the dauphin appear purely comic on the surface, a dark commentary undercuts the comedy in virtually every episode. On the surface, the duke and the dauphin seem to be just two bumbling con artists, but they present an immediate threat to Huck and Jim. The two men constantly and cruelly toy with Jim’s precarious status as a runaway slave and even use this fact to their own advantage when they print the fake leaflet advertising a reward for Jim’s capture. Moreover, the fact that the duke and the dauphin run their first scam at a sacred event—a religious meeting—demonstrates their incredible malice. At the same time, however, it also suggests that the religious revival meeting may be as much of a scam as any of the “royal” pair’s shenanigans. Continuing the pattern that we have seen throughout *Huckleberry Finn*, nearly everyone Huck and Jim encounter on the river is an unsavory character or a fake in one way or another. Sherburn’s murder of the drunk and the subsequent mob scene continue this vein of simultaneous absurdity and seriousness in the novel and contribute to the sense of moral confusion in the town. Although Sherburn’s shooting of the drunk is cold-blooded, his speech to the angry mob is among the most profound meditations on human nature in *Huckleberry Finn*. Sherburn’s criticisms of the cowardice and despicable behavior of his fellow citizens are accurate, and his eloquence is impressive. Furthermore, much of what he has to say about cowardice applies directly to the townspeople's deplorable behavior, which has put Huck and Jim in peril in the first place. All the while, however, we are aware that this thoughtful speech comes from the mouth of a man who has just shot a defenseless drunk. Like Huck, we are confused and disoriented. Rather than provide some relief from this world of malice and chaos, Huck’s leisurely trip to the circus only complicates matters further. Coming between the religious revival and the con men’s performance, the circus illustrates just how fine the line is between spiritually enriching experience, legitimate entertainment, and downright fraud. Huck’s concern for the seemingly drunk horseman is an elegantly constructed ending to this set of chapters. In a world like the one Twain depicts in the novel, one can no longer distinguish between reality and fakery, doom and deliverance.

***Synopsis:***

So, the angry mob makes its way over to Sherburn's house.

Sherburn promptly steps out on his porch with a double-barreled gun, calm and composed.

He proceeds to stare the mob down, which is pretty impressive if you think about it.

Then he laughs at them and proceeds, in what again is an oddly Shakespearean moment, to deliver a [soliloquy](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=RzuEKkPVeBQ) of sorts.

Essentially, he says that the mob doesn't have the mojo to lynch anyone, much less a man like himself. They're all cowards, he says, except for that one guy Buck Harkness, but even he is only half of a man.

So, taunting an angry mob may seem like a questionable decision, but it seems to work in this case. The mob leaves with its tails between its collective legs.

And now, off to the circus!

And what a fine circus it is—horsemen and dancers and beautiful women and all. About halfway through, a drunken man tries to make his way into the center of the stage.

The ringmaster tries and fails to stop the drunk as he climbs on one of the circus horses, which tears about the stage.

While everyone else is laughing at the man's near-death experience, Huck is concerned for his safety, at least until he jumps off the horse, sober as can be, sheds seventeen suits from underneath his overcoat and reveals himself to be, actually, part of the act.

That night, the duke and the king perform their "Shakespeare" to a group of poor, uneducated Arkansas townsfolk.

In a twist that isn't surprising to anyone, anywhere, they don't get it.

In fact, they don't like it at all.

So the con artists rethink their plan. They put up a sign for the next night that essentially says "Low-Brow Comedy Show! XXX!"

***Summary:***

The loud angry mob goes to Sherburn's house and is ready to extract revenge. Sherburn appears on the roof with a gun in his hand and looks down on the crowd. They stop in their tracks. Sherburn stands tall and insults the crowd, calling them cowards and telling them they do not have the guts to take action. Cowed by his speech and his gun, the mob breaks up and leaves.

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) goes to the circus and is very impressed with it. After the circus the Shakespeare play goes on and only a handful of people show up. The duke has a new sign printed up about a show entitled "Royal Nonesuch." The sign includes a note at the bottom: "LADIES AND CHILDREN NOT ADMITTED."

Sherburn is fearless and shows guts when he delivers his speech. Rather than being a man who feels threatened and is concerned for his life, Sherburn delivers a blistering takedown of the crowd. While previous chapters have poked fun at Southern honor, this speech essentially says there is no such thing. Men pretend to be brave, fear vengeance, and only act at night with masks and other cowardly apparel. The takedown is thorough and thought provoking.

Not surprisingly the duke and the king's play is a big failure. This contrasts with the circus, which had a big crowd. The circus audience exhibits an odd sense of humor when they laugh at the drunken man riding the wild horse. Based on the crowd responses the duke and the king change their act. The townspeople are a hard and odd lot.

***Synopsis:***

The crowd travels to Sherburn's store and rips down the front fence. They halt when Sherburn emerges with a shotgun and calmly stands in front of them. He lectures the mob on how pathetic they are, tells them they are being led by half of a man, [Buck Harkness](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#buck-harkness), and calls them all cowards. When he finishes his speech, he cocks his gun and the crowd runs off in every direction.

Huck leaves and goes to the circus which is in town until late that night, and after which the Duke and King plan to perform their show. He sneaks in and watches all the fun activities, such as the clown and showgirls. Huck then remarks that it is the best circus he has ever witnessed and the most fun.

That night, the Shakespearean show is a disaster, with only twelve people showing up and none of them staying until the end. In response, the Duke prints up some new handbills touting a show titled the Royal Nonesuch. He then cleverly adds the line, "Ladies and Children Not Admitted" and comments that if such a line does not bring an audience, then he does not know Arkansas.

***Summary and Analysis Part by Part:***

***Summary Part 1:***

The lynch mob tromps through town, scaring women and children as they go, till they arrive at [Sherburn](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/colonel-sherburn)’s home, where they tear down his fence. Sherburn calmly steps out onto the roof above his porch with a gun in hand, and is silent for a long time. Then he slowly and scornfully addresses the mob. He says he is safe from them as long as it is daytime and they are not behind him, because they are cowards and he is a “‘man’.” He tells them they are not really courageous but borrow courage from their mass. Sherburn goes back into his house and the mob, humiliated, disperses.

***Analysis Part 1:***

Sherburn calls the mob out on their hypocrisy, giving a psychological explanation for their (false) sense of empowerment as a group and a critique of their deficiencies as individuals. This is the most persuasive analysis of society in the novel. But its source, Sherburn himself, has just murdered a man in cold blood. Sherburn is free, but a danger to society in his freedom, a dark vision of what Huck could become if he follows a path of violence.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) goes to the circus, which he thinks splendid. A drunk man approaches the ringmaster of the circus and says he wants to ride a horse, impeding the progress of the circus such that the men in the audience swarm to throw the drunk man out. But the ringmaster lets him ride. The audience laughs save Huck, who trembles to see the drunk man endangered. But soon the drunk man stands on top of his horse and does tricks; he himself is a member of the circus. Huck is deeply impressed.

***Analysis Part 2:***

If Sherburn reveals the mob’s cowardice, the circus reveals its audience’s cruelty. Everyone save Huck laughs at the drunk man’s endangerment, when Huck’s empathetic trembling is maybe the more humane response to such a spectacle. But, we learn, the man is part of the circus all along. The boundary between the real and artificial is disturbingly porous in Huck’s world.

***Summary Part 3:***

That night, the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) and [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) put on their performance of Shakespeare in town, but only twelve people show up, and they laugh the whole time. The duke says that the people of Arkansas aren’t cultured enough to appreciate Shakespeare, and he devises a way to give them the low comedy they want. He posts another bill in town, advertising: “THE KING’S CAMELEOPARD [giraffe] OR THE ROYAL NONESUCH.” The biggest line of the bill announces that ladies and children will not be admitted to see the show.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The duke and king’s performance of Shakespeare invites comparison with the circus: what makes the latter fun but the former ridiculous? The circus misrepresents itself just as the duke and king do, and the duke and king don’t endanger anyone as the circus does. It seems that the novel concludes that The Royal Nonesuch is harmless enough as a money-making scheme, and that the duke and king’s unique vice is in their ruthlessness when it comes to exploiting innocent people.