***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 25:***

***Synopsis:***

A crowd gathers before the Wilks home to watch Wilks’s three nieces tearfully greet the duke and the dauphin, whom they believe to be their English uncles. The entire town then joins in the “blubbering.” Huck has “never seen anything so disgusting.” The letter Wilks has left behind bequeaths the house and $3,000 to his nieces. His brothers stand to inherit another $3,000, along with more than double that amount in real estate. After finding Wilks’s money in the basement, where the letter had said it would be, the duke and the dauphin privately count the money. They add $415 of their own money when they discover that the stash comes up short of the letter’s promised $6,000. Then, they hand all the money over to the Wilks sisters in a great show before a crowd of townspeople. Doctor Robinson, an old friend of the deceased, interrupts to declare the duke and the dauphin frauds, noting that their accents are ridiculously phony. He asks Mary Jane, the eldest Wilks sister, to listen to him as a friend and dismiss the impostors. In reply, Mary Jane hands the dauphin the $6,000 to invest as he sees fit.

### ***Analysis: Chapters 23–25***

Although the duke and the dauphin become increasingly malicious and cruel in their scams, Twain continues to portray the victims of the con men’s schemes as unflatteringly as the con men themselves. The duke and the dauphin’s production of The Royal Nonesuch, for example, is a complete farce, a brief, insubstantial show for which the audience is grossly overcharged. But what makes the con men’s show a real success, however, is not any ingenuity on their part—they are as inept as ever—but rather the audience’s own selfishness and vindictiveness. Rather than warn the other townspeople that the show was terrible, the first night’s ticketholders would rather see everyone else get ripped off in the same way they did. Thus, the con men’s scheme becomes even more successful because the townspeople display vindictiveness rather than selflessness.

[Read more about the Royal Nonesuch scam.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/huckfinn/key-questions-and-answers/#how-do-the-duke-and-king-work-their-royal-nonesuch-scam)

In much the same way, the cruel scheme to steal the Wilks family’s inheritance succeeds only because of the stupidity and gullibility of the Wilks sisters, particularly Mary Jane. Admittedly, the grieving Wilks sisters likely are not in the best frame of mind to think rationally after their loss. Nonetheless, despite the fact that the duke and the dauphin are hilariously inept in their role-playing and fake in their accents, the only person who even begins to suspect them is Doctor Robinson—and Mary Jane dismisses his advice without a thought. But even the Doctor comes across as annoyingly self-righteous. Together, these episodes contribute to the overall sense of moral confusion in the world of *Huckleberry Finn*. Although the con men’s audacity and maliciousness are sometimes shocking, Twain’s portrayal of the victims is often equally unsympathetic.

[Read important quotes from this section of chapters.](https://www.sparknotes.com/lit/huckfinn/quotes/section/chapters-2325/)

Jim, meanwhile, displays an honest sensitivity that contrasts him ever more strongly with the debased white characters who surround him. Jim bares himself emotionally to Huck, expressing a poignant longing for his family and admitting his errors as a father when he tells of the time he beat his daughter when she did not deserve it. Jim’s willingness to put himself in a vulnerable position and admit his failings to Huck adds a new dimension of humanity to his character. Jim’s nobility becomes even more apparent when we recall that he has been willing to forgive others throughout the novel, even though he is unable to forgive himself for one honest mistake. As we see in these chapters, Jim’s honesty and emotional openness have a profound effect on Huck. Having been brought up among racist white assumptions, Huck is surprised to see that ties of familial love can be as strong among blacks as among whites. Although Huck’s development is still incomplete—he still qualifies his observations a bit, noting that it doesn’t seem “natural” for Jim to be so attached to his family—his mind is open and he clearly views Jim more as a human and less as a slave.

***Critical Study:***

Word has gotten around that the King and the Duke have gotten to town and they are Peter Wilks' brothers. Her nieces are very happy to see their "uncles" and jump into their arms. Moments later, they put on a big act of crying in front of the coffin. The King invites them to a family supper, but two of his best friends, the Reverend Hobson and Dr. Robinson, were away. They are, of course, very happy to read the letter that gave them $3000 in gold as well as dividing assets amongst the rest of the family. They decide to win the girls' favor by pretending to give the girls their own money. That is, before they steal all of it. Then, Doctor Robinson comes back and calls the King an imitation and a fraud. One of the nieces responds by asking the King and the Duke to invest all their money. Doctor Robinson leaves, disgusted by the royal thieves.

Huck is disgusted as the King and the Duke carry on. Their cleverness is underscored as they give their portion of Peter Wilks' legacy back to his children. This gives them additional favor when Doctor Robinson tries to expose them. Huck and Jim have run into two of the most immoral scoundrels of their journey.

***Summary:***

* The first thing Huck tells us about the people in town is that Mary Jane, the oldest of the nieces, is beautiful. And a redhead.
* The nieces fall for the plot hook, line, and sinker, thanks to all the info that the king got from the young man he met earlier.
* They embrace the duke and king as their long-absent uncles.
* Huck thinks it's disgusting the way the duke and king kneel and pray over the dead body, pretending to be distraught.
* Then they get to the business of the will; Peter allotted $3,000 and the house to the three nieces, and another three thousand and other property (worth seven grand) to his brothers.
* The two conmen go down into the cellar where the six thousand in gold is hidden. They're all Scrooge-McDuck-excited and get to counting it right away.
* The money ends up being short: it's not quite six thousand as it should be. Actually, it's $415 short.
* The cons are worried that the townsfolk will start to get suspicious if money is missing; they might think the brothers stole it. So the duke suggests making up the deficit using their own money (the profits from The Royal Nonesuch).
* We're getting a good whiff of foreshadowing right here.
* The duke decides it would be even more impressively magnanimous of them to go upstairs and publicly give all $6,000 to the girls.
* The king does so, but being the king, of course, he has to couch the presentation in all sorts of pomp and circumstance.
* One little problem: the king doesn't actually know much about pomp. Like, he keeps referring to the "funeral orgies" they're going to hold the next day.
* The duke, who is apparently less of a fool than the king, keeps trying to get his attention and tell him that, actually, the word is "obsequies."
* The king then has to publicly explain to the world that "orgies" is the British term.
* Everyone is all, "Oh, OK," except for one particularly not-stupid man, a doctor named Robinson, who acts quite the skeptic.
* Actually, he directly calls the king a fraud with "the worst imitation" of a British accent he's ever heard (25.40).
* No one likes a skeptic, and the townspeople rally behind the cons.
* To prove her faith in the two men, Mary Jane gives them back the $6,000 back and says she doesn't even want a receipt.

***Critical Analysis:***

The duke and the king make their way to the Wilkses' home, and the townspeople gather. At the house the nieces hug them and cry. The townspeople cry too. The duke and the king look at their "brother" who is in the coffin. The king gives a speech thanking everyone for their sympathy and talks to people individually to learn more details. Meanwhile the duke, who is supposed to be impersonating the deaf and dumb William Wilks, says nothing but makes signs with his hands and spouts gibberish, like "Goo-goo—goo-goo-goo."

Mary Jane, a niece of the deceased whom [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) describes as beautiful, brings the will to the king who reads it aloud. The will notes where $6000 in gold is hidden. The duke and king get the money but find it is a little short. They make up the money with their own, so things don't seem suspicious. The king makes a speech and then gives the money to the nieces in order to win the townspeople over.

Doctor Robinson, a family friend, finds the king's British accent laughable and accuses the men of being frauds. The nieces defend the king and give him the money to invest. The doctor walks away, telling the sisters they'll pay for their mistake.

The king manipulates the crowd with his words and tears. Like an actor who has remembered his lines, the king uses the information he has gained to his advantage. Giving away the money to the nieces comes off as selfless. It proves to be a wise investment because, when accusations are hurled at the duke and the king, the townspeople defend them and the nieces give them the money as a show of faith. The townspeople lap up the king's flattery and have no suspicions that they are being lied to. Their simplicity is pathetic.

Doctor Robinson, however, recognizes the king and the duke for the frauds they are. The British accent is awful and the duke's impersonation of someone deaf and blind is ridiculous. Like Sherburn he has a keen sense of human behavior and is spot on in his assessment of people. Also like Sherburn the doctor comes off as a lone wolf, and his intelligence sets him above the people even though his words go unheeded.

[Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) is sick of the duke and the king at this point and finds their act pathetic. However, the reader cannot help but suspect that if Huck were in the crowd, he would act similarly. While Huck has shown himself to be perceptive, he is also unworldly and therefore gullible like the townspeople.

***Significance:***The two con artists are taken by the crowd that greeted them upon arrival to visit the family, which consists of three orphaned girls: Mary Jane, Susan, and Joanna. Everyone exchanges hugs and cries, and then the King and Duke go to view the coffin. The two men burst out crying again, and finally the King makes a speech about how sad the whole situation is. They finish off by kissing all the women on the forehead and acting heartbroken. Huck comments that the whole scene is "disgusting."

The King and Duke discover they have received the bulk of the estate holdings as well as three thousand dollars cash. The three girls have also received three thousand dollars and the house they live in. Wilks's will tells them where in the cellar to find the cash, and the two men go downstairs and find it. The King and Duke count the money and come up four hundred and fifteen dollars short. To alleviate any suspicion, they add the money they made from the Royal Nonesuch to the pile. Then, to permanently win the town over to their side, they graciously give their share of the money to the three girls, knowing they can steal it back at anytime.

The King gives a speech and foolishly digresses. A [Doctor Robinson](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#doctor-robinson) enters the crowd, hears the King and laughs heartily, calling the King a fraud because his British accent is such a bad imitation. The townspeople rally around the King, who has been so generous, and defend him. The Doctor warns Mary Jane directly, but in response, she hands the bag of money to the King and tells him to invest it for her. The doctor warns them one final time of the mistakes they are making, and then departs.

***Analysis(ch21-25)***

In these chapters, Twain again provides commentary on human nature and presents a scathing portrayal of society. Twain's 'version' of Shakespeare, Boggs's death, Jim's feelings about his family, and the Royal Nonesuch all seek to provoke the reader into analyzing the foolish ways of society. Huck assists in this encouragement by adding commentary that brings Twain's critiques into sharper focus.

The use of Shakespeare is at once funny and tragic. In describing the butchered Hamlet's soliloquy, it is immediately obvious that the Duke has muddled the lines. Moreover, the vision of the King, with his white hair and whiskers, playing fair Juliet makes even more of a mockery of the plays.

Boggs's death focuses the reader's attention on a much more serious aspect of the society. Boggs is shot to death in front of a crowd of people, including his daughter. The disrespect Boggs showed to Colonel Sherburn hardly justifies murder. Twain further derides the society for is cowardly actions, as the mob ready to lynch Sherburn is easily manipulated and succumbs to cowardice.

Twain also makes several pointed comments about the general attitude towards blacks when Jim discusses his family. Huck comments that he is surprised to find that Jim is almost as concerned about his family as a white person. This prevailing attitude, often invoked to justify breaking up slave families, is something Huck is beginning to overcome. Jim's touching story about his daughter Elizabeth, in which he hits her for not obeying him, is a powerful indication to Huck that Jim is in fact more concerned about his children than Huck's father ever was about him.

The Royal Nonesuch is perhaps Twain's most brilliant philosophical creation, a show in which the audience sees exactly what it pays for: nothing. Not only does the title accurately describe the show, but Twain cleverly has the Duke and King add the line, "Ladies and Children Not Admitted." Thus the show comments on human nature, namely that we cannot imagine a show being about nothing, even when the very title states it. The men are further fooled into thinking the Nonesuch must be some great, sexual thing, since their wives are excluded. Moreover, to avoid embarrassment, the duped men then talk up the show to their friends. Again, Twain gives a scathing review of his fellow citizens by demonstrating how fragile human egos are. The final showing, which truly is non-existent since the Duke and King run off before it starts, is a coup for the two conmen, who once again give the citizens exactly what they pay for. One wonders whether it is possible to hold them guilty of a crime, considering that in reality, they were honest about the content of the show.

However, the conmen's next adventure proves them highly despicable individuals. The Duke and King sink even lower in their abuse of human gullibility and nature by pretending to be the uncles of three orphaned girls in order to steal their inheritance. Huck's views on this scheme are clear, as he calls the King and Duke "disgusting" and remarks that he is "ashamed of the human race."

These chapters offer us a great deal of new insight into Huck Finn. He is obviously maturing in his views, as evidenced by his belief that black and white people are not so different. He is also changing from a boy who lacks firm morals to a man with a commitment to values. Thus, his commentary is no longer merely descriptive, but increasingly evaluative. It is becoming obvious that Huck will soon not be content to stand aside and let things slide past, as the metaphor of gliding down the river suggests. Instead, Huck will take a stand and assert himself as an individual. Huck's attitudes will eventually bear fruit in his actions, marking the final step in his journey towards maturity.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

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), pretending to be [Harvey](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) and [William Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters), are received by [Peter Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s family, including his niece [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters), whom [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) thinks is very beautiful. When the duke and king approach Peter’s coffin, all the people gathered go quiet, and the two con men begin to cry their eyes out, and everyone else starts to cry too. The duke and king work the crowd, and Huck finds the situation “disgusting.”

***Analysis Part 1:***

Huck seems especially disgusted by this scene because the duke and king are not exploiting the badness of society, as they did with their Royal Nonesuch con, but rather its goodness, the love of people for other people. This is an important lesson for Huck in determining how to act well and live a good life.

***Summary Part 2:***

The [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) addresses the crowd, saying how hard it was to lose [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) and how grateful he is to those gathered. Someone begins to play music, and the king resumes, inviting close friends of the family to supper that night. As the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) makes signs with his hands and goo-goos like a baby, the king goes to the townspeople and addresses mostly all of them by name, and informs them about what Peter had written to him.

***Analysis Part 2:***

One of the duke and king’s strategies to protect their cover is to ingratiate themselves with society, to make people like them so that, if their integrity comes into question, people trust their own emotional responses rather than the facts. The con men do so by inviting people to dinner, for example, and personally addressing them; in general, by making people feel special.

***Summary Part 3:***

[Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) fetches the letter her uncle left behind, and the [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) reads it and cries. In the letter, [Peter Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) bequeaths to his nieces his house and three thousand dollars in gold, and, to his brothers, three thousand dollars in gold. The letter also says where the gold is hidden.

***Analysis Part 3:***

The duke and king’s scam appears to have a significant payoff: lots of gold, which in turn promises to free the duke and king from financial worries. The king’s tears may seem false, but could they also be tears of vulgar joy?

***Summary Part 4:***The duke and [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king), along with [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn), go to the cellar and find the hidden bag full of gold, and, even though anybody else would be satisfied with the mere sight of that much gold, the duke and king count it. They discover that there’s about four hundred dollar worth of gold missing. The two agree to make up the deficit with their own money so that, when counting the sum before the townspeople to prove that everything is being done fairly, no one will question what happened to the missing gold. The duke and king also agree to give their part of the treasure to [Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s nieces so that no one will even suspect them of fraud.

***Analysis Part 4:***

The duke and king express their greed in several ways here, from counting the money to counter-intuitively agreeing to give their part of the treasure to the Wilks girls. Of course, they do so to further ingratiate themselves with society and to gain more with that trust than they would be able to do otherwise. The duke and king manage to make seemingly good deeds serve selfish, wicked ends.

***Summary Part 5:***Upstairs before the townspeople, 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) announce that they are giving what [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) seemingly bequeathed them to his nieces, because otherwise the two would feel as though they were robbing the girls. The [Wilks girls](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) hug the two con men, thinking the two their very loving uncles. The king goes on to invite all the townspeople to Peter’s funeral obsequies, which he mistakenly refers to as “orgies” until the duke discreetly corrects him. The king explains he uses “orgies” instead of “obsequies” because that is the word used in England, based on Greek and Hebrew etymology.

***Analysis Part 5:***

The duke and king’s ploy to earn the trust of society works with devastating efficacy, demonstrating again just how skillful the con men are at exploiting the folly of society. When the king almost blows his cover by referring to obsequies as “orgies,” with dark wit he covers his error by exploiting the language of worldly learning, which he rightly assumes to be over his audience’s head.

***Summary Part 6:***A man, [Doctor Robinson](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters), laughs in the [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king)’s face after he gives his etymology of “orgies.” The townspeople are shocked, but the undeterred doctor goes on to accuse the king of being a fraud. The townspeople tell him he’s wrong, and the [Wilks girls](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) cling to the king and begin to cry. But Doctor Robinson tells the girls that, as their father’s friend, he begs them to get the king out of their house. [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) responds by giving the king [Peter](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s six thousand dollars to invest on her and her sister’s behalf. Doctor Robinson tells the girls that they will regret this day and takes his leave.

***Analysis Part 6:***Doctor Robinson stands apart from society in his learnedness and shrewd evaluation of other people. These qualities allow him to expose the king, but they also lend him a condescending air that is shocking and abrasive. Even though the doctor is right in this case, he is not as good as earning people’s trust as the king, and so he fails to help people see the error of their ways. He would better be able to serve the greater good were he more empathetic.