***The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn***

***Chapter 27:***

***Synopsis:***

Huck hides the sack of money in Peter Wilks’s coffin as Mary Jane, crying, enters the front room where her dead father’s body lies. Huck, who doesn’t get another opportunity to remove the money safely, worries about what will happen to it. The next day, a dog barking in the cellar disrupts the funeral. The undertaker slips out and returns after a “whack” is heard from downstairs. In a voice that everyone present can hear, he whispers that the dog has caught a rat. In the next moment, though, Huck watches with horror as the undertaker seals the coffin without looking inside. Huck realizes he will never know whether the duke and the dauphin have gotten the money back. He wonders if he should write to Mary Jane after he has left town to tell her to have the coffin dug up.

Saying he will take the Wilks girls to England, the dauphin sells off the estate and the slaves, sending a slave mother to New Orleans and her two sons to Memphis. The scene at the grief-stricken family’s separation is heart-rending, and the Wilks women are upset. Huck comforts himself with the knowledge that the slave family will be reunited in a week or so when the duke and the dauphin are exposed. When the con men question Huck about the missing money, he manages to make them think the Wilks family slaves were responsible for the disappearance.

### ***Analysis***

Huck finds a hiding place for the gold in Peter's coffin. While he is near the coffin, Mary Jane comes into the room and begins to cry. He plans to leave and to write Mary Jane where the money is. The next day, people begin to come into the parlor, which show cases the coffin. They all sing together. The preacher sings, but it interrupted by a dog. The King then says a few words. Finally, they bury Peter. Afterwards, the King conducts an auction of the property, allowing the slaves to be shipped away and separated from their family. This separation offends many of the townspeople, too. Afterwards, the King finds that the money is missing and Huck blames it on the slaves.

Huck has tremendous sympathy for the family that is being swindled. He doesn't worry about the auction because he knows that, before long, he will expose their lies and the slaves and property will be returned. But now that the royal couple has found that the money is missing, Huck has to lie his way through this new problem.

***Critical Study:***

When the duke and king go to sleep, [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) goes to hide the money. With the door locked and someone coming, Huck places the money in Peter Wilks's coffin. The next morning the funeral service is held. Huck is impressed by the undertaker who handles everything very smoothly. With the money buried along with Wilks, Huck feels like he has made things worse.

Back at the house after the funeral, the king says he needs to get back to England, and he will take his nieces with him. They are thrilled to go. The king puts the estate up for sale and sells the slaves. The girls feel badly that the slave family is broken apart.

On the day of the auction the duke and the king ask Huck if he was in their room or if he saw someone else there. Huck lies and says he saw the slaves go in there. The duke and the king believe him and are impressed with the show of sadness the slaves made when they were sold.

The saying "it takes one to know one" is upended in this chapter. The duke and the king are liars and frauds. When they question [Huck](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/character-analysis/#Huck) about the money and insist he be honest, it is laughable. What do they know about honesty? They are unable to spot Huck's lie and instead believe him. They can be just as easily fooled as those they fool. Similarly when Huck says it was the slaves who took the money, the duke and the king are impressed with what they now believe were false tears. As thieves who care nothing for anything that does not benefit themselves, they cannot recognize genuine feelings. The duke and the king do not recognize the tricks of their own trade.

When the slave family is broken up they are heartbroken. This scene along with [Jim](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/symbols/#Jim)'s reaction to being separated from his family in [Chapter 23](https://www.coursehero.com/lit/The-Adventures-of-Huckleberry-Finn/chapter-23-summary/) reminds the reader of just how much the slaves care for each other. The narrative that the slaves only care about themselves is shown to be completely inaccurate. It is the duke and the king—two white people—who only care about themselves. The nieces are genuinely saddened at seeing the slave family broken up, and this is another example of their kindness and decency. Huck has made a wise decision to stand up for these girls.

***Summary:***

* Huck is all tiptoeing around downstairs when… he hears more footsteps.
* He darts into the parlor where the deceased Peter Wilks is laid out in his coffin. Bingo!
* He shoves the bag of gold in under the dead man's hands and then hides behind the door (of the parlor, not the coffin) while Mary Jane comes in and cries over Peter's body.
* Then Huck tiptoes out again, and worries for a good three paragraphs or so about what he's going to do now that the money is tucked in with the stiff .
* Time for the funeral. Huck spends some time telling us all about the undertaker, who "slid[es] around in his black gloves with his softy soothering ways, […] making no more noise than a cat" and adding that "he was the softest, glidingest, stealthiest man I ever see; and there warn't no more smile to him than there is to a ham" (27.7).
* Okay, we're officially creeped out by that description.
* As the Reverend begins the service, there's a big hullabaloo coming from the basement.
* A dog is barking its head off.
* The undertaker surfaces from the cellar with a rat—that's why the dog was barking.
* Huck wisely comments that this was a good call on the undertaker's part, and that really he's the most popular man in town.
* Getting rather nervous as the ceremony draws to a close, Huck sweats like a madman while the undertaker… slowly… nails the coffin closed without even looking inside.
* Except Huck isn't sure whether the money is still in the coffin or whether someone's taken it out. Yes, that does complicate things a bit.
* The king declares that, really, he must be going, since his church back in England is in desperate need of their preacher.
* (He's pretending to be a preacher now, remember?)
* On account of his hurried departure, he has to start selling off the property right away, including the girls' house, since according to the plan, they're coming with their two uncles back to England.
* The king sells off the girls' slaves without consideration for keeping the black families together.
* This puts everyone off, since it's an inhumane thing to do—even in this culture that sees black people as property.
* The duke is a bit uneasy about this whole thing, but what with playing a deaf-mute and all, he doesn't really say anything.
* The next day, the day of the planned property auction, the king and the duke wake Huck up and interrogate him. It seems they're missing their gold, and they're trying to figure out if he's the one that stole it.
* Huck is all, "Not me," but he does say that he saw the black slaves (the ones that have just been sold and aren't around anymore) go into the king's room.
* The king is all "Oh no!" and Huck is all, "I'm so clever!" since the scapegoats aren't there to get interrogated or punished.

***Critical Analysis:***

Huck is afraid he will be caught with the stolen money, so he hides it inside [Peter Wilks](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#peter-wilks)'s coffin. That day, the funeral service is held, and is interrupted by loud barking from a dog locked in the cellar. The undertaker goes to silence the dog, returns, and tells the audience the dog caught a rat. Huck remarks that the service was long and tiresome, but is relieved when Peter Wilks and the money are finally buried.

[The King](https://www.gradesaver.com/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/study-guide/character-list#the-king) and Duke immediately begin selling everything they can, including the slave family owned by the household. To sell the slaves faster, they break up the family. The girls are extremely upset by this insensitivity. Many of the townspeople also expressed disapproval, but the men are not swayed.

On the day of the auction, the King realizes the money is gone. He questions Huck, who cleverly blames the slaves who were sold. Both the Duke and King feel extremely foolish for selling the slaves at such low prices considering all their money is now lost.

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

***Summary Part 1:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) tries to take the money outside. He makes it as far as the parlor, where [Peter Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s corpse lies in its coffin and sleeping men sit around, before he hears footsteps coming toward him. Huck quickly hides the money in the open coffin and then hides himself behind a door. The footsteps are those of [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters), who comes into the parlor, stands before her uncle’s coffin, and quietly mourns.

***Analysis Part 1:***

This scene, maybe more than any other, exemplifies Huck’s indifference to social norms and his commitment to fluid, practical solutions. His act of hiding the money in the coffin is a minor desecration, a fact revealed all the more starkly by Mary Jane’s respectful, loving mourning. That doesn’t diminish, however, the goodness of the act.

***Summary Part 2:***

[Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) creeps back up to his room, and night turns to day. In the afternoon, [Peter Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s funeral is held. Mourners walk past Wilks’s coffin, looking down, some crying. Huck notices how often people blow their noses, how soft and gliding and stealthy the undertaker is, and he concludes that Peter Wilks “was the only one that had a good thing.” As the preacher is speaking, a dog begins to bark. The undertaker goes out reassuringly, hits the dog till it’s silent, and comes back in. The townspeople appreciate the undertaker’s actions; he’s a very popular man in town.

***Analysis Part 2:***

Huck, with his love of life, is disturbed by how mawkishly miserable the mourners are, and also by the undertaker, who is cruel to a harmless dog and whose cruelty is bizarrely appreciated. Mourning seems a mere societal convention to Huck, who is free from sentimentality, thinking as he does that Peter is better off than the living in this case because he is free from self-imposed miseries.

***Summary Part 3:***

After the [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) “got off some of his usual rubbage” by giving another speech, the undertaker seals the coffin. [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) can’t be sure whether the bag of gold is still in there or if somebody took it out, and he’s worried that [Mary Jane](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) and her sisters might never get it back. The king says he and the [duke](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) must be leaving for England, and tells the [Wilks girls](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters) that they’re welcome to come. The two con men, meanwhile, are in the process of selling all of the Wilks estate, house and slaves and all—they plan to keep the money from the sale, then leave the unlucky buyer to discover once they are gone that the purchase is null and void because it was sold by men who had no right to sell it. Huck’s heart aches to see the girls get fooled like this, but can’t think of a way to safely expose the duke and king.

***Analysis Part 3:***

After ingratiating himself even more with the townspeople by exploiting their mawkish sadness, the king along with the duke prepares to complete the scam. Huck aches to see the girls, who are so good, get hurt, but he is not an idealist who would expose the con men without having figured out the logistics first. Huck has morally matured, but his sense of the practical is a constant in his decision-making.

***Summary Part 4:***In selling the [Wilks](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters)’s family of slaves, the [king](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/the-duke-and-king) separates a mother from her children. The Wilks girls are distraught at this, and, if [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) hadn’t known that “the sale was of no account” and that the family of slaves would soon be reunited, he figures he would have had to tell on the duke and king.

***Analysis Part 4:***

In one of his cruelest, most selfish acts, the king separates a black family for profit, just as Jim was separated from his family. The Wilks girls are nobly distraught, just as Huck is, who has matured into recognizing that black people are just people with feelings like everyone else.

***Summary Part 5:***Later, 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) also question [Huck](https://www.litcharts.com/lit/the-adventures-of-huckleberry-finn/characters/huckleberry-finn) about whether he’s been in their room. Huck lies and says that he hasn’t, but that he did see some black slaves go in there several times. The duke and king are upset to learn this, thinking the slaves stole the bag of money hidden in the mattress, but the two also know they can’t do anything because the slaves have already been sold. The duke and king yell at each other and, as they walk off, Huck is glad to have made it seem like the slaves stole the money without bringing harm to them.

***Analysis Part 5:***

It is hard to say whether Huck’s lie reveals Huck’s own racism, that blacks are predisposed to wrongdoing, or whether it merely exploits the duke and king’s own racist assumptions. Such a question does not concern Huck, however, who is just happy to have pragmatically protected his identity as the thief and to have done so without hurting anybody else. Huck cares about consequences, not means.