

## Readers' Theater

Taken from Chapter 29 of *The Adventures of Huckleberry Finn* by Mark Twain

### Roles

Harvey Wilkes: Old gentleman from England who claims to be the later Peter Wilks's brother

Narrator: Huck Finn (this part could be divided into several different narrators)

King: Huck's traveling companion who is claiming to be Peter Wilks's brother

Hines: A big, rough husky townsman who thinks the king and the duke are frauds

Doctor: A local doctor who is trying to sort out the identity of the real heirs

Levi Bell: A local lawyer

Townsperson: Man who helped lay out Peter's body

Ab Turner: Another man who helped lay out Peter's body

Townspople: Group of citizens who speak as one

Harvey: This is a surprise to me which I wasn't looking for; and I'll acknowledge, candid and frank, I ain't very well fixed to meet it and answer it; for my brother and me has had misfortunes, he's broke his arm, and our baggage got put off at a town above here, last night in the night by a mistake. I am Peter Wilks's brother Harvey, and this is his brother Wiliam, which can't hear not speak—and can't even make signs to amount to much, now't he's only got one hand to work them with. We are who we say we are; and in a day or two, when I get the baggage, I can prove it. But, up till then, I won't say nothing more, but go to the hotel and wait.

King: Broke his arm—very likely, ain't it—and very convenient, too, for a fraud that's got to make signs, and hain't learnt how. Lost their baggage! That's might good!—and mighty ingenious—under the circumstances!

Narrator: So he laughed again; and so did everybody else, except three or four, or maybe  
(Huck) half a dozen. One of these was that doctor; another was a sharp looking gentleman, with a carpet-bag of the old-fashioned kind made out of carpet-stuff, that had just come off of the steamboat and was talking to him in a low voice, and glancing towards the king now and then and nodding their heads—it was Levi Bell, the lawyer that was gone up to Louisville; and another one was a big rough husky that come along and listened to all the old gentleman said, and was listening to the king now. And when the king got done, this husky up and says:

Hines: Say, looky here; if you are Harvey Wilks, when'd you come to this town?

King: The day before the funeral, friend.

Hines: But what time o' day?

King: In the evenin'—bout an hour er two before sundown.

Hines: How'd you come?

King: I come down on the Susan Powell, from Cincinnati.

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Hines: Well, then, how'd you come to be up at the Pint in the mornin'—in a canoe?

King: I warn't up at the Pint in the morning.

Hines: It's a lie.

Townspeople: Don't talk that way to an old man and a preacher.

Hines: Preacher be hanged, he's a fraud and a liar. He was up at the Pint that mornin'. I live up there, don't I? Well, I was up there, and he was up there. I see him there. He come in a canoe, along with Tim Collins and a boy.

Doctor: Would you know the boy again if you was to see him, Hines?

Hines: I reckon I would, but I don't know. Why, yonder he is, now. I know him perfectly easy.

Narrator:  
(Huck) It was me he pointed it.

Doctor: Neighbors, I don't know whether the new couple is frauds or not; but if these two ain't frauds, I am an idiot, that's all. I think it's our duty to see that they don't get away from here till we've looked into this thing. Come along, Hines; come along, the rest of you. We'll take these fellows to the tavern and front them with t'other couple, and I reckon we'll find out something before we get through.

Narrator:  
(Huck) It was nuts for the crowd, though maybe not for the king's friends; so we all started. It was about sundown. The doctor he led me along by the hand, and was plenty kind enough, but he never let go my hand. We all got in a big room in the hotel, and lit up some candles, and fetched in the new couple. First, the doctor says:

Doctor: I don't wish to be too hard on these two men, but I think they're frauds, and they may have complices that we don't know nothing about. If they have, won't the complices get away with that bag of gold Peter Wilks left? It ain't unlikely. If these men aren't frauds, they won't object to sending for that money and letting up keep it till they prove they're all right—ain't that so?

King: Gentlemen, I wish the money was there, for I ain't got no disposition to throw anything in the way of a fair, open, out-and-out investigation o' this miserable business; but alas, the money ain't there; you k'n send and see, if you want to.

Doctor: Where is it, then?

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King: Well, when my niece give it to me to keep for her, I took and hid it inside o' the straw tick o' my bed, not wishin' to bank it for the few days we'd be here, and considerin' the bed a safe place, we not being' used to niggers, and suppos'n' 'em honest, like servants in England. The niggers stole it the very next mornin' after I had went dow strair; and when I sold 'em, I hadn't missed the money yit, so they got clean away with it. My servant here k'n tell you 'bout it gentlemen.

Doctor and  
Townpeople: Shucks!

Narrator:  
(Huck) I see nobody didn't altogether believe him. One man asked me if I see the niggers steal it. I said no, but I se them sneaking out of the room and hustling away, and I never thought nothing, only I reckoned they was afraid they had waked up my master and was trying to get away before he made trouble with them. That was all they asked me. Then the doctor whirls on me and says:

Doctor: Are you English too?

Narrator:  
(Huck) I say yes; and him and some others laughed, and said, "Stuff!" Well, then they sailed in on the general investigation, and there we had it, up and down, hour in, hour out, and nobody never said a word about supper, nor ever seemed to think about it—and so they kept it up, and kept it up' and it was the worst mixed-up thing you ever see. They made the king tell his yarn, and they made the old gentleman tell his'n; and anybody but a lot of prejudiced chuckleheads would a seen that the old gentleman was spinning truth and t'other one lies. And by-and-by they had me up to tell what I knowed. The king he give me a left-handed look out of the corner of his eye, and so I knowed enough to talk on the right side. I begun to tell about Sheffield, and how we lived there, and all about the English Wilkses, and so on; but I didn't get pretty fur till the doctor begun to laugh; and Levi Bell, the lawyer says:

Levi: Set down, my boy, I wouldn't strain myself, if I was you. I reckon you ain't used to lying, it don't seem to come handy; what you want is practice. You do it pretty awkward.

Doctor: If you'd been in town at first, Levi Bell—

King: Why, is this my poor dead brother's old friend that he's wrote so often about?

Narrator:  
(Huck) The lawyer and him shook hands, and the lawyer smiled and looked pleased, and they talked right along a while, and then got to one side and talked low; and at last the lawyer speaks up and says:

Levi: That'll fix it. I'll take the order and send it, along with your brother's, and then they'll know it's all right.

Narrator:  
(Huck) So they got some paper and a pen, and the king he set down and twisted his head to one side, and chawed his tongue, and scrawled off something; and then they give the pen to the duke—and then for the first time, the duke looked sick. But he took the pen and wrote. so then the lawyer turns to the new old gentleman and says:

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- Levi: You and your brother please write a line or two and sign your names.
- Narrator: The old gentleman wrote, but nobody couldn't read it. The lawyer looked  
(Huck) powerful astonished, and says:
- Levi: Well, it beats me—
- Narrator: He snaked a lot of old letters out of his pocket, and examined them, and then  
(Huck) examined the old man's writing, and then them again; and then says:
- Levi: These old letters is from Harvey Wilks; and here's these two's handwritings, and anybody can see they didn't write them and here's this old gentleman's handwriting, and anybody can tell, easy enough, he didn't write them—fact is, the scratches he makes ain't properly writing, at all. Now here's some letter from—
- Harvey: If you please, let me explain. Nobody can read my hand but my brother there—so he copies for me. It's his hand you've got there, not mine.
- Levi: Well! This is a state of things. I've got some of William's letters too; so if you'll get him to write a line or so we can com—
- Harvey: He can't write with his left hand. If he could use his right hand, you would see that he wrote his own letters and mine too. Look at both, please—they're by the same hand.
- Levi: I believe it's so—and if it ain't so, there's a heap stronger resemblance than I'd noticed before, anyway. Well, well, well! I thought we was right on the track of a slution, but it's gone to grass, partly. But anyway, one thing is proved—these two ain't either of 'em Wilkses.
- Narrator: Well, what do you think?—that muleheaded old fool wouldn't give in then! Indeed he wouldn't. Said it warn't no fair test. Said his brother William was the cussedest joker in the world, and hidn't tried to write—he see William was going toplay one of his jokes the minute he put the pen to paper. And so he warmed up and went warbling and warbling right along, till he was actuly beginning to believe what he was saying, himself—but pretty soon the new old gentleman broke in, and says:
- Harvey: I've thought of something. Is there anybody here that helped to lay out my br—helped to lay out the late Peter Wilks for burying?
- Townsperson: Yes, me and Ab Turner done it. We're both here.
- Harvey: Perhaps this gentleman can tell me what was tattoood on his breast?  
(turning to the king)
- Narrator: Blamed if the king didn't have to brace up mighty quick, or he'd squshed down  
(Huck) like a bluff bank that the river has but under, it took him so sudden—and mind you, it was a thing that was calculated to make most anybody sqush to get fetched such a solid one as that

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without any notice—because how was he going to know what was tattooed on the man? He whitened a little; he couldn't help it; and it was mighty still in there, and everybody bending a little forwards and gazing at him. Says I to myself, Now he'll throw up the sponge—there ain't no more use. Well, did he? A body can't hardly believe it, but he didn't. I reckon he thought he'd keep the thing up till he tired them people out, so they'd thin out, and him and the duke could break loose and get away. Anyway, he set there, and pretty soon he begun to smile, and says:

King: Mf! It's a very tough question, ain't it! Yes, sir, I k'n tell you what's tattooed on his breast. It's jest a small, thin, blue arrow—that's what it is; and if you don't look clost, you can't see it. Now what do you say—hey?

Harvey: There—you've heard what he said! Was there any such mark on Peter Wilks's breast?

Ab and

Townsperson: We didn't see no such mark.

Harvey: Good! Now, what you did see on his breast was a small dim P, and a B )which is an initial he dropped when he was young), and a W, with dashes between them, so: P-B-W. Come—ain't that what you saw?

Ab and

Townsperson: No, we didn't. We never seen any marks at all.

Townspeople: The whole bilin' of 'm's frauds! Le's duck 'em! le's drown 'em! le's ride 'em on a rail!

Levi: Gentlemen—gentlemen! Hear me just a word—just a single word—if you PLEASE! There's one way yet—let's go and dig up the corpse and look.

Townspeople: Hooray!

Doctor and

Levi: Hold on, hold on! Collar all these four men and the boy, and fetch them along, too!

Townspeople: We'll do it! and if we don't find them marks we'll lynch the whole gang!

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