

"Tom, Huck & Twain"

extract from screenplay  
by  
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From DARKNESS, a MAN'S VOICE, a gruff Southern drawl:

MAN'S VOICE (TWAIN)  
I came in with Halley's comet in  
1835.

FADE IN:

EXT. SPACE - TRAVELING THROUGH STARS

TEXT appears, SUPERIMPOSED:

TEXT  
The great American writer, Samuel  
Langhorne Clemens, otherwise known  
as MARK TWAIN, was born in Missouri,  
November 10th, 1835, just as the  
comet Halley reached its perihelion  
in the skies above our planet.

Seventy-five years later, the comet  
would return, and Twain's time on  
Earth would end.

He came and went with the comet.

As TEXT ends, an ENORMOUS BLAZING BALL OF FIRE overtakes  
CAMERA, engulfing us in its corona.

WHITE OUT TO:

SNOW, FALLING OVER

EXT. COUNTRY LANE - DAY

A humpback bridge spans a frozen river. Complete silence,  
then a horse-drawn SLEIGH launches into view. Tarpaulin  
covered luggage is piled high behind the DRIVER and one small  
PASSENGER bundled up against the cold. The sleigh races past.

EXT. FROZEN FOREST - DAY

The SOUND of the sleigh approaches along a road canopied by  
trees. Furtive movement. FIGURES peer out: Two MEDIEVAL  
KNIGHTS with swords... an ELIZABETHAN with a crossbow...  
three grubby COWBOY DESPERADOES, pistols drawn, side by side  
with several INDIAN BRAVES with bows and arrows.

The sleigh comes into view.

Desperadoes and Indians hunker down.

The Driver of the sleigh YELLS ON his horses. Does not stop  
as he passes a POLYNESIAN WARRIOR, hiding up a tree with a  
bamboo spear. The Polynesian signals the others to advance.

EXT. WIDE VIEW - FOREST AND STORMFIELD - DAY

Snow continues to fall. The sleigh drives out of the forest, heads on up a hill towards an imposing Georgian home, countryside muted white all around.

A TITLE briefly FADES ON AND OFF:

CONNECTICUT, APRIL, 1910.

EXT. STORMFIELD APPROACH ROAD - DAY

A Model-T Ford, struggling up the hill towards the home, is overtaken by the sleigh.

The MOTORIST at the wheel of the Ford, in scarf and hat and goggles, continues driving unblinking.

INT. LOGGIA - STORMFIELD - DAY

ALBERT BIGELOW PAINE, a spruce little man in his fifties, looks up at NOISE from the hallway. He is seated in an armchair by an open fire, taking notes from a book.

KATY, the housekeeper, also stops clearing two dinner plates, one untouched.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The FOOTMAN enters from outside, arms full of luggage. The Ford Motorist follows, shaking snow from her hat: a striking woman in her thirties, her hair disheveled but bearing it no mind: CLARA CLEMENS.

PAINÉ

Clara! I'm glad you made it.

Paine exits from the Loggia, kisses Clara. Katy hurries past, pulling the Footman with her.

CLARA

How is he?

PAINÉ

Oh... undefeated. He has been frustrated he can't keep up with his dictation.

CLARA

I became concerned the way he sounded on the telephone. So distant.

PAINÉ

That's just his medication. He says it makes him dream. Come on up. He'll be pleased to see you.

CLARA

How are you?

PAINE

Me? I'm fine.

BACK TO LOGGIA

As Paine takes Clara upstairs, his NOTEBOOK lies open on his chair beside the NOVEL he was reading.

The notebook page is full, the margin full of sketches of a craggy, frowning face with walrus moustache and a shock of hair.

The novel is "The Mysterious Stranger" by Mark Twain.

A burning log in the fireplace CRACKS.

INT. BEDROOM - DAY

COUGHING (O.C.) as a CIGAR burns to a stub in an ashtray by the window. BOOKS are stacked nearby, with piles of MANUSCRIPT... a handsome GLOBE... an old brass MICROSCOPE.

TWAIN continues COUGHING, sitting up in bed, a pale ghost in his white nightshirt, with angry agate eyes. Clara waits for him to finish. Paine watches by the door. Katy clears away a HYPODERMIC. Clara eases Twain back, strokes his hair. Katy exits. Paine hesitates, goes with her.

CLARA

Poor Papa. Is there anything you need?

Twain takes a pencil and paper, scribbles a note, spidery writing, barely intelligible. Clara reads it out:

CLARA (CONT'D)

"Bring me... my spectacles, bring me my... glass pitcher"?

Twain nods, exhausted. Clara looks around for Katy, then kisses her father before starting out.

CLARA (CONT'D)

One minute. I'll be one minute.

Twain takes up his pocket watch as if to time her. Clara hesitates, then hurries out.

Twain lays back. Stares at the ceiling. Looks down at his watch:

The hands have stopped at six thirty-two.

Twain shakes the watch, to no avail, peers across at his mantle clock, cannot read it. He tosses the watch aside, folds his arms.

All sounds HAVE STOPPED.

Twain looks to the window, A peaceful afternoon is ending outside, the sun low.

Twain grumbles, re-reads his note to Clara, attempts to call out, but only COUGHS again, this time long and hard. He starts to rise, does not have the strength.

TWAIN

Ohhhh... -Hell!

Twain continues to stare helpless at the ceiling. His eyelids droop, then he hears a LONG, LOW "GRIBBET". Twain's eyes open. He looks down towards his feet.

A fat FROG is perched on the blankets. Its eyes blink at Twain, then it GRIBBETS again.

Twain SCREAMS at the top of his lungs, kicks the Frog away. It hops off the bed, jumps out of the door.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

Clara! Clara!

Twain throws back the sheets, swings out of bed, stubs his naked toe on a porcelain commode. He YELLS then hobbles to the door in his nightshirt to HOLLER down the stairs.

INT. UPSTAIRS LANDING - DAY

TWAIN

Clara!

No answer from downstairs. Twain peers over the banister, looks around him. No sign of the Frog.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

Damnation...

Supporting himself against the stair rail, he makes his way down, one step at a time.

INT. HALLWAY - DAY

The hallway is deserted, sunlight slanting in through the fan-light above the front door.

TWAIN

Hey. Where is everybody? What is this? Sardines?

Twain descends the stairs to gaze into the loggia. This room too appears deserted. No fire in the grate.

Twain does not enter. KITTEN scampers out. Twain bends to scoop it up, then looks up at a grandfather clock towering beside him in the hall.

The time has stopped at six thirty-two. Twain goes to open the clock's casing door, sees the pendulum frozen at the apex of its swing.

Twain pulls back; then starts at a SHARP CRACK and CLATTER – the sounds of play on the billiards room table.

Twain stares, mouth agape.

The doorway to the billiards room reveals part of the table inside, across which is bent the MAN from the sleigh, his trench coat and goggles now removed. The Man is only visible a brief moment before he rises and moves out of sight. Another CLICK, then CLATTER as he takes his next shot.

Twain does not move for a long moment, then walks slowly forward to the billiards room doorway.

INT. BILLIARDS ROOM - DAY

Twain stands in his nightshirt, apparently unnoticed. The Man shoots again, this time without scoring. He is balding, in his fifties, somewhat overweight, but a snappy dresser in a suit and bola tie.

MAN

Darn.

Twain's kitten MIAOWS The Man at the table stops, looks up. Twain remains silent, still uncertain.

MAN (CONT'D)

Mr. Twain... Please, excuse me. I couldn't resist. Best game on Earth.

The Man grins a huge boyish grin, then approaches, still smiling, extending his hand. Twain offers no response. The kitten jumps out of his arms.

MAN (CONT'D)

You don't recognize me?

Twain yells over his shoulder:

TWAIN

Clara! ...Paine!

MAN

Mr. Twain, it's me. Tom. Tom Sawyer.

Twain fixes his intruder with a hostile glare. A SMALL VOICE makes them turn.

SMALL VOICE

Is he coming now or what?

The Passenger from the sleigh, a sullen, pretty, dark-eyed girl in her early teens, has appeared through the French doors to the garden.

MAN/TOM

Not yet, Susy. Wait outside.

The kitten runs out past SUSY. She chases after it.

SUSY

Sour Mash! Come back here!

TWAIN

What... What is this? I can talk! -  
Who are you? My daughter... Susy...  
died...

TOM

Of spinal meningitis. Keep your voice  
down, Mr. Twain, she doesn't like to  
be reminded. Come on. Come with me.  
We don't have much time.

Twain follows TOM outside, bewildered.

EXT. ITALIAN SUNKEN GARDEN - DUSK

It has stopped snowing. Suspended in a MIST, a HOT AIR BALLOON is looming huge above the garden. Susy runs out to retrieve her kitten, SOUR MASH, then stuffs him into a basket hung from the gondola above.

Twain halts with Tom, still not believing his eyes.

Susy hoists Sour Mash up towards the gondola.

TOM

Huck's in trouble, Mr. Twain.

Tom reaches into a pocket and pulls out the front page of the 'Hannibal Revue':

*MAN-HUNT FOR HUCK FINN!*

*Mark Twain Estate Appeals*

Twain slowly takes the page from Tom.

TOM (CONT'D)

If you don't help us save him...

Twain glares at Tom. Tom takes the newspaper back.

TOM (CONT'D)

You'll never see your wife and family again.

Susy SCREAMS (O.C.). An arrow FLASHES PAST and THUNKS into a nearby tree. Tom and Twain both stare.

From between a row of cypress trees, the INDIANS from the forest have appeared with bows and arrows. MEDIEVAL ARCHERS join them, taking aim at Tom and Twain.

TWAIN

Who in hell is--?

TOM

Duck!

TWAIN

What? Where? There was a blasted frog here a moment ago--

ARROWS fly past, Tom pulls Twain down behind a Grecian urn.

TOM

Other people from your books want to stop you reaching Huck! They're holding you responsible!

TWAIN

Responsible for what?

TOM

I'll show you! I've a map in the balloon! Will you help us, Mr. Twain?

Susy SCREAMS again, begins to climb a rope ladder to the gondola. TWO WESTERN DESPERADOES run up and attempt to shake her down.

TWAIN

This is madness. Let me go.

TOM

No, Mr. Twain!

More SCREAMS (O.C.) from Susy. Twain pulls away from Tom, strides out towards the Desperadoes.

TWAIN

You there!

The Desperadoes turn to stare at Twain. He continues his approach, invulnerable, wrath aflame.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

Who do you think you are? Get off of  
my property!

The Desperadoes meet each other's gaze, one draws a PISTOL.

Other FOREST FIGURES stare in horror. The Desperado aims at Twain. Twain continues walking. The pistol trembles in the Desperado's hand. A single SHOT. The Desperado falls. Twain halts, looks back at Tom.

Tom lowers a smoking REVOLVER of his own.

Twain faces the second Desperado, looks up at Susy.

SUSY

Look out, Papa!

The second Desperado grabs hold of Twain, pulls a knife and holds it to the old man's throat.

Tom runs up with his gun, but halts.

DESPERADO

Back off Sawyer. He's ours now!

A sandbag falls from above and hits the Desperado on the head. Susy peers down, continues climbing. Tom dives and wrestles for possession of the knife.

Twain backs away from the struggle at his feet, sees and picks up the first Desperado's gun, uses it to club the second Desperado on the head.

Tom sits up. Both he and Twain see other Forest Figures advancing all around them. Twain views the rope ladder, starts to climb. Tom YELLS UP.

TOM

Get us out of here, Susy!

INT. GONDOLA

Susy SLAMS the burner valve full open. Gas jets FLARE.

EXT. ITALIAN SUNKEN GARDEN

Tom FIRES at the Forest Figures, grabs hold of the rope ladder.

Twain is almost jolted off as the anchor line snaps taut. A CRY goes up:

VOICE

Aim at the balloon!

Arrows, guns and spears aim up at the balloon.

INT. GONDOLA

Susy CHOPS the anchor rope with a machete.

The anchor line whips free past Tom and Twain, who are clinging for their lives. Spears and arrows LET FLY but fall short.

Susy cowers as BULLETS fray ropes and splinter wood around her. CRIES and GUNFIRE grow fainter below, leaving just the ROARING GUSH OF BURNERS.

Sour Mash looks out from his basket, MEWS. Susy scrambles to switch the burner valve to half power, then peers down over the gondola side. Sour Mash MEWS again.

EXT. ANGLE UP WITH GONDOLA - RISING

Twain clings to the rope ladder, nightshirt flapping in the breeze, Tom a few rungs behind viewing the scene below.

EXT. WIDE ANGLE - STORMFIELD - DUSK

The BALLOON rises like a planet over the house and disappears into the cloudy sky, rope ladder trailing Tom and Twain. It has begun to snow again.

CUT TO:

INT. STORMFIELD - LOGGIA - DUSK

Paine adds another log to the fire in the grate, then returns to his chair. He finds just the novel, his notebook has gone. He looks around. Stops at a SOUND: TICKING.

The clock on the mantelpiece reads six thirty-three.

CUT TO:

INT. GONDOLA - IN FLIGHT - DUSK/NIGHT

Susy keeps her distance as Twain clambers on board.

He stumbles and then falls into a pile of trunks and luggage. Cooking utensils CLATTER out. Sour Mash SQUEALS and darts from under him.

Tom climbs up and looks in. Twain YELLS at the cat.

TWAIN

Get away, infernal creature!

SUSY

It's Sour Mash, Papa!

Tom climbs over into the gondola. Twain regains his feet and steadies himself, avoiding Tom's assistance.

TWAIN

I can see it's Sour Mash.

Susy looks hurt.

Twain recovers the kitten, inspects it for damage and hands it to her. Twain meets eyes with Tom.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

And I can see you're Tom, and I can see you're Susy!

Tom turns away to straighten trunks and luggage.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

It's a wonder and a miracle what the human mind can do, but I am old and I am tired, and I have had it with you all!

Twain spins Tom round to face him.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

Are you listening to me?

TOM

Don't you want to see your wife and family again?

TWAIN

My wife is--

Twain sees Susy, lowers his voice.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

My wife is...

TOM

Dead, I know. And I'm a lawyer, married with five children. Life goes on, Mr. Twain, even in your books. Your wife is paying me to fetch you, then we're taking you to Huck.

TWAIN

How much is she paying you?

TOM

I'm not cheap. Do you mind?

Twain releases Tom. Tom goes to a leather case. Twain sees Susy staring, then she turns away.

Tom takes out a rolled scroll, unrolls it at Twain's feet, pins the corners down with pots and pans. Twain stands looking down, then lowers himself to study the intricate design.

The scroll is a 'Map of MarkTwainia', a projection of a craggy landmass in the shape of a silhouette of Twain, criss-crossed with indecipherable Da Vinci-esque notations.

TWAIN

How long have you been a lawyer?

TOM

Since flunking med- school. Hand me that lamp, would you?

Twain passes Tom a lamp, which he lights and places near the map. Twain stares very close.

The image on the parchment appears to SMUDGE and EDDY here and there, then reform changed. Twain blinks, rubs his eyes. It HAPPENS AGAIN.

TOM (CONT'D)

Don't look at it too long.

Tom peers out at the clouds, frowns. It is darkening to night. Silent LIGHTNING dances, far off.

TWAIN

And where is Huck? No, let me guess.

Twain at last has Tom's attention.

TWAIN (CONT'D)

He was president of Cameroon when an international coup toppled his régime.

Tom regards Twain coldly.

TOM

No one knows where Huck is. He's gone into hiding, since cabling your wife - Here...

Tom reaches into his pocket, pulls out a crumpled TELEGRAM. Twain unfolds it to read:

*Need help. Ergent please. Send Mr. Twain. Yors trooly Huck.*

Twain crumples up the telegram, throws it out of the balloon, swipes away a saucepan. The map springs shut.

TWAIN

Tom Sawyer never grew up! Huck Finn never turned to crime! I didn't write a word of this! None of this is me!

TOM

That is what we have to prove!

Twain stands, no longer listening, peers over the gondola edge. Clouds have darkened all around. He stares at Susy.

TWAIN  
Susy. Take me back.

TOM  
She can't.

TWAIN  
No...? Then we'll just have to land!

Twain grabs the emergency burner control.

TOM  
Mr. Twain!

TWAIN  
Get away from me, you fiction!

Twain throws the lever down. The HISS above cuts off. Both Tom and Twain stare up. The burner flame gutters then dies. RAIN blows in. The balloon is sinking fast. They drop out of the mist. Twain looks down.

EXT. GONDOLA - DOWN VIEW - NIGHT

Sheets of rain fall past the gondola into a dizzying bowl of churning storm cloud, a gaping hole far beneath them, the vortex of the maelstrom.

INT. GONDOLA - NIGHT

TOM  
Oh, no...