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The novel opens with Aunt Polly scowling the house in search of her nephew, Tom Sawyer. She finds him in the closet, discovers that his hands are covered with jam, and proceeds to give him a whipping. Tom cries out theatrically, “Look behind you!” and when Aunt Polly turns, Tom escapes over the fence. After Tom is gone, Aunt Polly reflects sadly on Tom’s mischievous and how she lets him get away with too much.

Tom comes home at supper time and - as Aunt Polly says - he has been “up to” all sorts of strange and wild adventures. During supper, Aunt Polly tells Tom that he will have to be skipped school that afternoon and won’t have his dinner either because his clothes are still and smell bad.

Tom and the new arrival of new girl from the north act as each other’s playmates and eventually chase the newcomer all the way home.

When he returns home in the evening, Tom finds Aunt Polly waiting for him. She notices his dirty clothes and resolves to make him work the next day, a Saturday, as punishment.

On Saturday morning, Aunt Polly sends Tom out to whitewash the fence. Jim passes by, and Tom tries to get him to do some of the whitewashing in return for a “white alley,” a kind of mantle. Jim almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and chases him off, leaving Tom alone with his tasks.
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