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The novel opens with Aunt Polly scrounging the house in search of her nephew, Tom Sawyer. She finds him in the closet, discovers that his hands are covered with jam, and prepares 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 ruefully on Tom's escapade and how she lets him get away with too much.

Tom comes home at supper time, looking a little sadder and wiser. He has been told that he must be good, or he will not be allowed to play. Aunt Polly is satisfied.

Tom goes out of the house into the streets of St. Petersburg. He has a sense of power that is not altogether honest and magnanimous. He feels the breeze on his face, and the sun on his neck, and he hears the whirring of the streetcar as it rounds the corner. Tom is beginning to feel that he is a man.

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 meal. Jim almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and drives him off, leaving Tom alone with his tasks.
The novel opens with Aunt Polly scrounging the house in search of her nephew, Tom Sawyer. She finds him in the closet, discovers that his hands are covered with jam, and prepares 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 misdeeds and how she let him get away with too much.

Tom runs home at suppertime with a sore eye and a blackened face. He tells his mother about his adventures. During supper, Aunt Polly is satisfied, and Tom is almost relieved to be skipped school that afternoon and not have to go to Widow Douglas’s for dinner. He tells her that his collar is still sore from the blows, but that Tom’s half-brother, Sid, is in trouble. Tom’s mother makes him go down to the dock and eventually chasing the rowdies all the way home.

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