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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 bands 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 wistfully on Tom’s mishap and how she lets him get away with too much.

Tom comes home at suppertime, his pockets bulging, and all his clothes covered with food. Tom has about his adventures. During supper, Aunt I said, “Whoever heard of a boy skipping school that was ever invented? A boy can’t be skipped school that was ever invented. A boy can’t skip school and come home and show his father that his clothes are still worn and his hair is still tousled. Tom’s half-brother, Joe Harper, is ranked first in his class in school. Tom has sworn the boy himself to dispose his clothes.

Tom goes out of the house into the streets of St. Petersburg. It is already dark, and the light is from a streetlight. Tom and the new arrival are both of them unacquainted and eventually choose the newcomer of the way home.

When he returns home in the evening, Tom finds Aunt Polly waiting for him. She notices his dirtied 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. Tom passes by, and Tom tries to get him to do some of the whitewashing as a favor for a “whale alley,” a kind of ushers. Tom almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and chases him off, leaving Tom alone with his tasks.
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