The novel opens with Aunt Polly scouring the house in search of her nephew, Tom Sawyer. She finds him in the closet, discovers that his hands are covered with wax, 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 naughtiness and how she lets him get away with too much.

Tom comes home at suppertime, looking sulky and red in the face. Aunt Polly asks him about his adventures. During supper, Aunt Polly tells Tom he will be whipped if he is found guilty of skipping school that afternoon and every afternoon before that. He swears he did not do it. Aunt Polly is satisfied. Tom bourne of the house to chase his friend, Ben Blank. Tom has learned the secret of playing hooky and eventually chooses the newcomers as the way home.

When he returns home, 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 snuffbox. Jim almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and chases him off, leaving Tom alone with his travail.
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