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The secret opens with Aunt Polly crossing the fence in search of her nephew, Tom Sawyer. She finds him in the city that his hands are covered with jam, and prepares to give him a whipping. Tom runs out fearfully, "Look behind" when Aunt Polly turns. Tom escapes over the fence. After Tom is gone, Aunt Polly reflects carefully on Tom's secret she lets him get away with too much.

Tom crosses fence at supper time. During supper, Aunt Polly tells Tom that he must be obedient and work around the house as well as go to school. Tom's collar is still wet from jam. Aunt Polly says that she will not let Tom go to school if he has jam on his collar. Tom's half brother, Sid, tells Tom to do what he wants to do and let Aunt Polly do what she wants to do. Tom then tells Aunt Polly that he will do what she wants to do if she will let him go to school.

Tom goes out of the fence to play in the streets of St. Petersburg. He meets a boy named Huckleberry Finn and they go to a cave to find treasure. Tom and the new arrival escape the cave and return to the town of St. Petersburg.

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

On Saturday morning, Aunt Polly sends Tom out to whitewash the fence. Tom goes by, and Tom tries to get him to do the whitewashing in return for a "white alley," a kind of excuse. Tom almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and she leaves Tom alone with his labor.

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