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The secret opens with Aunt Polly arriving the house 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 she has a new dress she will wear to church tomorrow and want someone to help her make it. Tom's collar is still wet from jam, Aunt Polly notices and Tom says he had had, Tom's half brother, Sid, had told Tom to do it. Aunt Polly says she will let Tom do it if he can do it himself to discipline him.

Tom goes out of the house to find Sid. Sid tells Tom to go to the streets of St. Petersburg. Tom and the new secret escape Sid's house. Tom goes to school and closes the gates all the way home.

When he returns home in the evening, Tom finds Aunt Polly waiting for him. She notices his dirty clothes and asks him to make 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 marble. Tom almost agrees, but Aunt Polly appears and she leaves Tom alone with his labor.

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