

Sheer Genius

TOM is a young boy who is being brought up by his strict Aunt Polly. In this scene, he is not pleased that he has been told to whitewash the fence on a Saturday morning.

TOM: (Grumbling to himself) It's just not fair. It's a lovely morning. Just the day to go fishing! Look at that fence! Thirty yards and nine foot high! I'll never finish it.

(He picks up the long-handled brush, splashes it into the bucket, then puts it back again)

(Sitting down on the ground) I shall be the laughing stock of the town. I *must* try and find a way out of it.

(He empties out his pockets) I haven't even got enough things to trade! A marble... a broken toy... just trash! *(Smiling)* Wait a moment! I've got a plan... a really good plan! There's Ben Rogers now. I'll try it out on him.

(He leaps to his feet, picks up the brush and starts to whitewash the fence) Hmm... he's not even seen me yet. I like the look of the apple he's eating. A big, juicy one! Ah! He's seen me. Now, I'll pretend not to have seen him.

(Tom carries on carefully whitewashing the fence and then suddenly pretending to have just noticed him) Why, it's you Ben. I didn't notice! Are you going swimming? Work! You think I've got to work? This isn't work, it's really interesting and I like it! Does a boy get the chance to whitewash a fence every day? Just watch me and see what I mean. *(Tom carries on, pretending to concentrate very hard)* Do you want a go? No... no, I reckon it would hardly do. You see, Aunt Polly's very particular about this fence because it's on the street. It would have been different if it was the back fence... but, it's got to be done very carefully. I reckon there isn't one boy in a thousand – maybe two thousand – that could do it the way it's got to be done! Jim and Sid wanted to do it but she wouldn't let them. So, you see how I'm fixed! If you did tackle this fence and anything

happened to it... *(Pausing)* Well, I suppose I might let you... if you were to give me your apple. *(Ben bites it and gives him half)*... The whole of it! *(Tom takes it, gives up the brush and sits down on a barrel close by)*

(To himself) What a pushover! That was easy! I'll soon get it finished this way. I'll get all the boys wanting to take a turn *and* I'll get some treasures to keep as well!

(To Ben) Go on, Ben. Make sure it's nice and smooth!

(To himself, munching his newly acquired apple) Sheer genius!

by Mark Twain, adapted by LAMDA from Tom Sawyer