**Painting the Fence**

From: Mark Twain

Tom arrived home late and he was very dirty.

When Aunt Polly saw his dirty clothes,she thought, "What can I do with this boy? Well, tomorrow is Saturday, and he must work."

Saturday morning was beautiful and sunny.

It was summer and the world was happy.

Tom sat in front of the fence and looked at it.

It was thirty yards long and nine feet high.

He was very unhappy.

"It's Saturday and I must paint this long fence. All my friends will laugh at me," he thought.

He put his long brush in the white paint and started painting.

He stopped and looked at his work.

Then he continued painting.

After a few minutes he had a great idea.

He continued painting the fence.

He saw his friend Ben Rogers in the street.

Ben had an apple in his hand. He came to look at the fence.

"You're working for your aunt," said Ben.

Tom said nothing. He continued painting.

"I'm going swimming but you can't come with me. You're working." said Ben.

"Do you call this work?" asked Tom.

"Of course it's work. You're painting a fence," said Ben.

"Maybe it's work but maybe it isn't. I like it!" said Tom, "I can swim every day, but I can't paint a fence every day."

Ben watched Tom.

He painted slowly and carefully.

He often stopped and moved back from the fence.

He looked at his work and smiled.

Ben was suddenly interested in the fence and said, "Let me paint a little, Tom."

Tom thought for a moment.

"I'm sorry, Ben. Aunt Polly wants me to do it because I'm very good at painting. My brother Sid wanted to doit, but he's not good at painting."

"Oh please, Tom! Please can I paint? I'm good at painting too. Here, you can have some of my apple."

"No, Ben, I can't."

"Then take all of my apple!"

Tom was happy but he did not smile.

He gave Ben the brush and sat down to eat the apple.

Tom's other friends came by.

At first they laughed at him.

But soon they all wanted to paint the fence.

Billy Fisher gave Tom a kite and Johnny Miller bought him a dead rat.

His other friends gave him an old knife, a cat with one eye, an old blue bottle, and an old key and other interesting things.

His friends painted the fence and Tomnow had a lot of interesting things.

He went back home.

"Aunt Polly, can I go to play now?"

When Aunt Polly saw the beautiful white fence she was very happy.

She gave Tom a big apple and said, "Yes, go and play! But don't come home late!"