



## S t r o n g   D e s i r e — W i s e   A c t i o n

SATURDAY MORNING CAME. ALL THE SUMMER WORLD WAS BRIGHT and fresh and full of life.

Tom appeared in front of the house with paint and a big **brush**. He looked at the fence, and all joy left him. A deep sadness settled upon his heart. The fence was long and high. He wet the brush and moved it along the top board. He did it again, and did it again. He looked at what he had done. The painted part was very, very small. The whole fence was very large. He sat down. He felt that he could not continue.

Jim, a boy who worked for the family, came through the gate. He was going to get water, and he was singing happily.

Tom said, "Jim, I will get the water, if you will paint."

Jim said, "No. I must get the water."

"Are you afraid of Aunt Polly? She won't hurt you. She talks about it, but talk never hurts. It never hurts except when she weeps, also. You should not be afraid of her. Jim, I will give you one of my playthings. And I will show you my foot. I will show you where I hurt it."

Jim was only human. He took the plaything and he put his head

down to look at the foot.

In another moment he was running down the street. Tom was painting as fast as possible. And Aunt Polly was returning to the house.

But Tom began to think of the pleasure planned for this day. His hands moved more slowly. Soon the other boys would come and laugh at him for working. From his pocket he took everything that he owned. He looked at it. There was nothing of real value. It was not enough to buy another boy's help.

At this dark moment, a wonderful idea came to him. It was like a great, bright light.

He took his brush and went quietly to work.

Ben Rogers appeared soon. Tom had been especially afraid of Ben's laugh.

Ben was eating an apple. Also as he walked, he was making noises like those of a big riverboat. He would shout loudly. Then he would say, "Ding-dong-dong," like a bell. Then he would shout again, and say, "Ding-dong-dong," again, and make other strange noises. He was the boat, and he was the captain of the boat, and the boat bell.

"Turn her!" he shouted. "Slow her! Stop!" He made a slow, careful turn, came close beside Tom, and stopped.

Tom continued his painting. He did not look at the boat.

Ben said, "Hello! You are in trouble."

No answer. Tom moved his brush gently, and looked at the result. Ben came nearer. Tom wished for the apple, but he did not turn from his work. Ben said:

"Hello, you must work, must you?"

Tom turned suddenly. "Oh, Ben, is it you? I did not see you."

"I am going swimming, *I* am. Do you wish you could go with me? Or would you rather work?"

Tom said, "What do you mean? Work?"

"That is work."

Tom returned to his painting. "It may be work and it may not be. But it is fine for Tom Sawyer."

"Do you mean that you enjoy it?"

“Enjoy it? Does a boy have a chance to paint a fence every day?”

Here was a new idea. Ben stopped eating his apple. Tom moved his brush—stepped away to look at the result—added a little paint here and there—stepped away again. Ben watched. He was more and more interested. Then he said:

“Tom, let me paint a little.”

Tom thought. Then he said, “No, Ben. Aunt Polly wants this fence to be perfect. If it was the fence behind the house, you could help. But this fence, beside the street, must be done very carefully. There is not one boy in a thousand who can do it well.”

“Oh, Tom, let me try. Only a little. I will be careful. Tom, I will give you part of my apple.”

“No, Ben. I am afraid—”

“I will give you all of it!”

Tom gave the brush to Ben slowly, but with joy in his heart. And, while the boy who a few moments before had been a riverboat worker and became hot in the sun, Tom sat under the tree, eating the apple and planning how to get more help.

There were enough boys. They came along the street, stopped to laugh, but remained to paint. After Ben, Bill Fisher painted. Then Johnny Miller came. Each one paid to be allowed to work. In the middle of the afternoon, Tom was very rich. He had many playthings, a small cat with one eye, a piece of broken blue glass, and much more.

And he had not worked, and the whole fence had been painted three times. There was no more paint. With more paint, Tom would soon have owned everything belonging to the other boys. And the other boys in the village would have owned nothing.

Tom had discovered a great law of human action. A man or a boy will desire something if it is not easy to get.