

The Fence

by Kevin M Reese

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THE CAST:

Tom - around 12 years old, has to miss ball practice to paint fence

Mom - Tom's Mom

Horace - a typical nerd

Paul - Tom's friend

Janie - a "pain-in-the-neck" girl

Sally - a really nice girl

Time: a Saturday morning during summer vacation.

Setting: The Weaver's front yard picket fence.

At rise: Mrs. Weaver is looking on while Tom paints the fence.

TOM: Gosh, Mom! Why did you have to pick today to make me paint this old fence?

MOM: You've been putting it off for the past week, Tom. As far as I can see, any day would be wrong. You might as well settle down and get it over with.

TOM: But there's baseball practice this morning!

MOM: You have baseball practice every morning. By now you should be as good as that Michael Jordan.

TOM: (correcting her) Michael Jordan plays basketball, Mom!

MOM: Well, no matter--baseball, basketball. Now, get on with that painting, Tom.

TOM: Lousy breaks! Stuck here all day!

MOM: What's that you're saying, Tom?

TOM: Uh... I said... "whatever it takes, I'll do what you say." (speeds up painting)

MOM: Not so fast, there! You've skipped a place. You're about as bad a painter as Tom Sawyer.

TOM: Who was he?

MOM: Tom Weaver, don't tell me you've never heard of TOM SAWYER!

TOM: Is he the guy in "Star Wars the Phantom Menace"?

MOM: Don't you boys know anyone outside of movie characters? Tom Sawyer is a boy in a very famous book written by Mark Twain.

TOM: What has he got to do with painting a fence?

MOM: A lot. He had a fence to paint on a day just like this one. And he didn't want to do it any more than you do.

TOM: Did he find a way to get out of doing it?

MOM: Yes, as a matter of fact, he did. By using his head.

TOM: You can't paint a fence with your head!

MOM: Don't be funny, dear. I meant he used his brains.

TOM: I'd use anything to get me out of this job. What did he do, Mom?

MOM: Well, some of his friends stopped by to watch, ready to tease him, I suppose. But Tom Sawyer paid no attention to them and kept right on at his painting as if he were having the time

of his life.

TOM: That took a lot of acting!

MOM: Yes, but it worked. His friends began to get interested, and the next thing you know, they were begging Tom to let them have a try at painting.

TOM: They must have been a bunch of dopes.

MOM: Well, before long, Tom Sawyer's friends had the fence all painted while he sat in the sun watching them work.

TOM: Not bad, not bad at all! Thanks for telling me about him.

MOM: You're welcome dear. I have to get at my cake now, so I'll leave you. This fence will be painted today, and that's final. (she exits)

TOM: Wish me luck, Mom. (to himself) No sense wasting my time on this old fence if I'm going to hook some poor dope into doing it for me. (offstage whistle. Tom starts painting with great zest. Horace enters)

HORACE: Hi, Tom! Hey why aren't you at ball practice?

TOM: There's something better to do.

HORACE: Are you kidding? (points to fence) You don't mean that? That's a dumb job!

TOM: That's what you think.

HORACE: What's so special about slapping paint around?

TOM: It's nice work, if you can get it.

HORACE: Everybody else is at the ball park for practice.

TOM: I can play ball any old time. (looks at work)

HORACE: (not believing his ears) Wow. You missed a place.

TOM: (pretending to take pride in his work) Where? Show me?

HORACE: Right here. See?

TOM: I can do a post in one stroke. Want to bet on in?

HORACE: So, what if you can?

TOM: It's fun... kind of a game.

HORACE: Well, I hope you win it! I have to go. There's a math quiz on TV that I don't want to miss. So long Michelangelo! (exits)

TOM: Well how do you like that? Boy, that Tom Sawyer sure must have been some actor! (paints. Offstage sound) Oh, here comes Paul. Let's hope I don't blow it this time.

PAUL: (finishing a song) How's that?

TOM: How was what?

PAUL: Are you deaf?

TOM: Oh, that? I'm too busy to listen to kid stuff right now.

PAUL: This isn't kid stuff! This is my new Kazoo.

TOM: Anybody can play a tune on those things. I'll bet you can't paint a whole post in one swoosh. Watch this! (he does)

PAUL: Looks simple to me.

TOM: Sounds simple to me... playing that thing.

PAUL: I'll bet you can't even make a half-way decent noise come out. Here, try it. Give me that brush. We'll trade.

TOM: I don't know if I should take a chance on you messing up this job.

PAUL: Don't be silly. I could do it with my eyes closed. Here, give me the brush, and I'll show you.

TOM: You have to do it just right.

PAUL: Come on! Take this. We'll see which one is easier. (they trade)

TOM: (playing badly) There! Hear that?

PAUL: Man! I wish I hadn't!

TOM: Well, let's see you put some paint on.

PAUL: (missing part of the post) You can't do it with just one swish.

TOM: I can. (continues playing off-key)

PAUL: Why don't you try another song... maybe I can recognize that! (tries again)

TOM: You'll catch on to it. Put more paint in next time.

PAUL: You try keeping on key!

TOM: I just need more practice.

PAUL: You're telling me.

TOM: I think I'm getting it!

PAUL: How am I doing?

TOM: Not bad. Not bad at all. You still need a little more paint.

PAUL: I put too much on last time. Look! It's spilled all over.

TOM: Don't worry about spilling as long as you get the paint on the fence.

PAUL: What do you mean, worry? Whose job is this? Not mine, pal! (starts to put down brush)

TOM: (hastily) I was only kidding! You're doing great. Almost as good as me. (Paul starts painting again)

JANIE: (enters on bike, surprises the boys) What's going on?

TOM: Janie! What are you doing here? Paul and I are busy. Get lost.

JANIE: Looks like Paul is doing the work part of it.

PAUL: Tom said there was a trick to painting a fence.

TOM: You said there was a trick to playing this old harmonica.

JANIE: From what I see--and hear-- neither one of you has mastered the trick. Don't you boys know the team is practicing today?

TOM: Sure. What of it?

JANIE: What's up? I thought baseball was your life.

TOM: A guy can want a change sometimes, can't he?

JANIE: What are you changing to? The kazoo?

PAUL: (putting down brush) He'd better not quit his day job! Whew, it's hot!

TOM: Take it easy a minute. Mom said she'd bring out some lemonade.

JANIE: You know, I've been thinking about something.

PAUL: About what?

JANIE: Something very cool.

PAUL: Yeah?

TOM: (hopefully) Like lemonade?

JANIE: (flatly) Like water.

TOM: You mean you want a drink? I'll get you one in a jiffy.

JANIE: I don't want to drink it I want to swim in it. The city pool is open.

PAUL: Say, that's not a bad thought, Janie.

TOM: Oh, stick around. There won't be anybody at the pool now.

JANIE: I know some people who could be there.

PAUL: Me and Tom?

JANIE: You, and me--and Tom.

TOM: You know, Paul, now that I look at it, your part looks better than mine. Hey, Mom, how about some lemonade!

MOM: (off) You'll have to wait a few minutes, Tom. I haven't had time to make it yet.

JANIE: You didn't answer my question about going swimming, Paul.

PAUL: Tom, let's call it quits and get cooled off.

TOM: I'm not hot.

JANIE: You don't look like a Nestea ad to me. Your face is as red as an apple.

TOM: I don't care how I look. I'm still not hot!

PAUL: Well, don't get sore about it. It's no crime to get hot.

JANIE: If it is, then I'm a criminal, because I'm about to melt. A swim would feel great!

PAUL: I've had enough of this stalling around. Come on, Janie.

JANIE: (knows that he can't) Can't you come with us, Tom?

TOM: I can, but I don't want to. Once I start a job, I finish it. (glares at Paul)

PAUL: Don't look at me. After all, it's not my job. I didn't start it. I was just helping out.

JANIE: I'm not going to hang around listening to you two argue. I'm off to the pool. So long, you two.
(exits)

PAUL: (starting off) I'll help you tomorrow, Tom.

TOM: Tomorrow will be too late! Thanks a lot for nothing! (starts to paint)

PAUL: Wait for me, Janie! See you later, Tom.

TOM: Much later.

PAUL: (offended) OK, if that's the way you feel about it. (exits)

MOM: (enters with lemonade and cookies) Poor boy. You look hot. Did you think I was never coming? I'm sorry, dear. I know it seems harsh, but the fence will never get painted unless I am firm about your finishing it today. (thinks) Tom...?

TOM: What?

MOM: I just thought... why don't you get the extra brush. Two hands can work faster than one.

TOM: Gosh, Mom! It's tough enough with one brush in one hand!

MOM: Oh, you! I mean when I finish the cake, I'll come out and help you finish. I'll leave the lemonade here just in case you get thirsty. (starts off) Don't forget the extra brush! (exits)

TOM: OK, I'll get it now. (exits. Horace enters, inspects paint. Tom reenters) Well... what's the verdict, Mr. Math Expert?

HORACE: Mixture's too thin.

TOM: How do you know so much about it?

HORACE: I just finished whitewashing our cellar.

TOM: (flatteringly) You painted a whole cellar? Wow! Some job, I'll bet.

HORACE: Nothing to it. With the right brush. This one's too small.

TOM: How about this one (reveals extra brush)?

HORACE: (not impressed) Better.

TOM: But what's wrong with the mixture?

HORACE: I told you. Too thin.

TOM: How do you thicken it?

HORACE: Can't. You've just got to put the paint on heavier.

TOM: Like this?

HORACE: That's the general idea. Say, why aren't you out for practice?

TOM: I like doing this. Did you have fun painting your cellar?

HORACE: (sarcastic) Sure I did. Good sport...painting. (urging Tom on) Now you're getting somewhere!

TOM: Ever tried painting a fence?

HORACE: No. It looks simple, though.

TOM: It's not as simple as it looks!

HORACE: How hard can it be? You're taking too long a stroke.

TOM: How would you do it?

HORACE: For one thing, I'd start at the bottom.

TOM: I can't see much difference between these brushes.

HORACE: Here. Take this one. You'll notice the difference, all right.

TOM: Don't you want it?

HORACE: Why should I want it?

TOM: Well, you said it was fun and you seem to know how it's done. Why don't you try out your own theories?

HORACE: I'm wearing good clothes.

TOM: Oh, go ahead! You won't spill paint on yourself if you're such a great painter.

HORACE: If I did, I'd never hear the end of it. Hey! Take it easy on the down stroke!

TOM: Yes, sir, boss.

HORACE: Well, it's beginning to look like something now.

TOM: (sarcastically) Thanks to your expert advise. Don't strain yourself!

HORACE: If I had on working clothes, I could show you!

TOM: I could lend you an old shirt.

HORACE: (disregarding offer. noticing lemonade) May I help myself?

TOM: Go ahead. Have a swig. I'll go get a shirt.

HORACE: Don't rush. I don't want to bother you.

TOM: It's no trouble. Be back in a jiffy. Have some lemonade. (exits)

HORACE: (drinks lemonade. tries painting then puts down brush) Ahhh!

TOM: 'Atta boy. Here. Put this on and you can really go to town.

HORACE: I wouldn't want to mess it up for you. Anyway, it's getting late. I have to be on my way.

The Mensa channel is having a call-in trivia quiz. Thanks for the lemonade. Sorry there isn't any left. I guess watching you made me thirsty.

TOM: (disgusted) Watching was sure all you did!

HORACE: (insulted) Well, excuse me! (feeling sorry for Tom) OK, OK! I'll paint!

TOM: Great! See ya! (Tom takes off before Horace can change his mind)

HORACE: Good riddance. I wish I had one of those cellular phones. (resumes painting. Whistles. Sally enters)

SALLY: Hi, Horace! What are you doing?

HORACE: What does it look like I'm doing?

SALLY: Where's Tom?

HORACE: He's at baseball practice.

SALLY: Why aren't you there, too?

HORACE: Baseball practice! (laughs) Me? I don't play-- (on second thought) I don't play enough!

Yeah, that's where I ought to be--baseball practice.

SALLY: I shouldn't think they could spare you.

HORACE: (lying through his teeth) They can't. They'll find that out.

SALLY: How come you're here then?

HORACE: Tom asked me to take over for him. It's very complicated work. (testing her ego) Nothing a girl could do.

SALLY: (not interested) I suppose not.

HORACE: Of course, with a little practice, and someone to help her get started, she might get the hang of it.

SALLY: Maybe having some experience, even on porch furniture, might make a difference. I did that once.

HORACE: It might, at that. One you get started, you have to keep on going, though.

SALLY: (faking worry) I would think your arm might get tired. Going up and down, over and over.

HORACE: Oh, yeah, it might.

SALLY: (seeing other brush) What's this for, Horace?

HORACE: Oh...that? I just left it there in case somebody else turned up who liked painting.

SALLY: Would you mind if I tried to do a little?

HORACE: Mind? (hiding eagerness) Sure, go ahead. Put plenty of paint on the brush.

SALLY: Down or up first?

HORACE: Any old way that suits you. That's the girl! You're alright for a beginner.

SALLY: Have I put too much paint on my brush?

HORACE: Looks about right to me. Take your time. Slow and easy does it.

SALLY: You do it so smoothly, Horace. Mine's sort of blotchy.

HORACE: Take a longer stroke. Like this, see?

SALLY: Like this?

HORACE: Now you've got it. You're doing fine!

SALLY: I guess you have to set a kind of rhythm.

HORACE: You certainly catch on to it quickly...for a girl. I'll bet Janie couldn't paint the broad side of a barn.

SALLY: (stops painting) What made you think of her?

HORACE: Hey! Don't get out of rhythm!

SALLY: (paints) What did?

HORACE: What did what?

SALLY: Made you think of Janie.

HORACE: Oh, her? She's nothing but trouble. Hey! Easy there! You'd better give that one more lick.

SALLY: Did you have a fight with her?

HORACE: Me? Fight with her? She wouldn't have a chance.

SALLY: Do you like her?

HORACE: What?? You've got to be kidding!

SALLY: (smiling) Oh, I see.

HORACE: Yeah, Tom was crazy to get to ball practice. I saw him messing up the job so I told him to take off. He wasn't even as good as you are!

SALLY: (demurely) It's very nice of you to help him out, especially when it makes you miss practice yourself, Horace.

HORACE: Oh, it's nothing....

SALLY: (deciding to be nice) Horace...

HORACE: Yes?

SALLY: I was just thinking... as long as you think I'm getting along alright, I might as well finish up by myself.

HORACE: Is that a hint for me to get back to work?

SALLY: (innocently) Why no, Horace. It's only that there's still time enough for you to sneak in an inning or two. They'll be practicing until lunchtime, won't they?

HORACE: (Trying not to appear too eager) Gosh! You want to paint that much? All by yourself?

SALLY: I really like doing this, honest!

HORACE: I sure hate to miss the Mensa-- I mean I'd hate to miss playing with the men!

SALLY: Oh, I know that. I know how much you love baseball.

TOM: (starting off) Well... as long as you insist. I guess I'd better beat it before you change your--I mean... before practice is over. 'Bye now. Keep up the good work. (exits)

SALLY: Put one over the plate for me.

MOM: (entering with more lemonade) Why Sally Long! What are you doing here all alone? And working so hard. Where's Tom? Don't tell me he talked you into taking over!

SALLY: Well, no, Mrs. Weaver. Tom didn't-- Horace did.

MOM: Horace??? Where's Tom?

Sally Oh, he's at ball practice. Evidently, Tom talked Horace into painting the fence and Horace thinks he talked me into it. What he doesn't know is, I've read Tom Sawyer too!

MOM: Well, Tom Sawyer or no, it's very nice of you to take over for Tom, Sally.

SALLY: (embarrassed) I'm not doing this just for Tom. I'm really doing it for the team. Tom is our star pitcher, you know. And besides, Horace wasn't doing a very good job. I was afraid Tom would get in

trouble if it wasn't done right.

MOM: I just hope Tom wasn't trying to back out.

SALLY: He wasn't thinking of himself. He was just thinking of the team. That's all.

MOM: Well, Sally, let's you and I enjoy this lemonade. (pours) I forget how important sports are to boys. I guess Tom can finish this up when he gets back from practice.

SALLY: Thanks, Mrs. Weaver. I guess I am a little thirsty.

TOM: (enters) Hi, Mom. Hi, Sally.

SALLY: For heaven's sakes! Ball game over?

TOM: Nope. It's still going strong.

SALLY: Why did you come back, then?

TOM: I got to worrying.

SALLY: Worrying? About what?

TOM: The fence.

SALLY: Well! I like that! I was doing all right by your dumb old fence.

TOM: Horace told me he got you to paint and it just doesn't look right.

SALLY: (enraged) Doesn't look right!?

TOM: I don't mean the fence doesn't look right. I mean you!

SALLY: (checking hair) And what's wrong with the way I look, may I ask?

TOM: You look OK, Sally. You aren't getting the point.

SALLY: What is the point?

MOM: Yes, what is the point, Tom?

TOM: It doesn't look right for you to be working on a job like this all alone. That's the point.

MOM: And a very good one, Tom. I'm glad you came back in time. If you two will excuse me... (exits)

TOM: There's not much left to do, anyway. (grabs brush)

SALLY: Would it look alright for me to work with you?

TOM: (laughing) I don't know. I have an image to keep up!

SALLY: (Splattering him with paint) Here this will improve your image!

TOM: Hey! (and they have a paint fight....)

THE END

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