An Old-Fashioned Girl

Louisa May Alcott

Preface

AS a preface is the only place where an author can with propriety explain a purpose or apologize for shortcomings, I venture to avail myself of the privilege to make a statement for the benefit of my readers.

As the first part of "An Old-Fashioned Girl" was written in 1869, the demand for a sequel, in beseeching little letters that made refusal impossible, rendered it necessary to carry my heroine boldly forward some six or seven years into the future. The domestic nature of the story makes this audacious proceeding possible; while the lively fancies of my young readers will supply all deficiencies, and overlook all discrepancies.

This explanation will, I trust, relieve those well-regulated minds, who cannot conceive of such literary lawlessness, from the bewilderment which they suffered when the same experiment was tried in a former book.

The "Old-Fashioned Girl" is not intended as a perfect model, but as a possible improvement upon [Page] the Girl of the Period, who seems sorrowfully ignorant or ashamed of the good old fashions which make woman truly beautiful and honored, and, through her, render home what it should be,-a happy place, where parents and children, brothers and sisters, learn to love and know and help one another.

If the history of Polly's girlish experiences suggests a hint or insinuates a lesson, I shall feel that, in spite of many obstacles, I have not entirely neglected my duty toward the little men and women, for whom it is an honor and a pleasure to write, since in them I have always found my kindest patrons, gentlest critics, warmest friends.

AN OLD-FASHIONED GIRL

CHAPTER I. POLLY ARRIVES

"IT 'S time to go to the station, Tom."

"Come on, then."

"Oh, I 'm not going; it 's too wet. Should n't have a crimp left if I went out such a day as this; and I want to look nice when Polly comes."

"You don't expect me to go and bring home a strange girl alone, do you?" And Tom looked as much alarmed as if his sister had proposed to him to escort the wild woman of Australia.

"Of course I do. It 's your place to go and get her; and if you was n't a bear, you 'd like it."

"Well, I call that mean! I supposed I 'd got to go; but you said you 'd go, too. Catch me bothering about your friends another time! No, sir!" And Tom rose from the sofa with an air of indignant resolution, the impressive effect of which was somewhat damaged by a tousled head, and the hunched appearance of his garments generally.

"Now, don't be cross; and I 'll get mamma to let you have that horrid Ned Miller, that you are so fond of, come and make you a visit after Polly 's gone," said Fanny, hoping to soothe his ruffled feelings.

"How long is she going to stay?" demanded Tom, making his toilet by a promiscuous shake.

"A month or two, maybe. She 's ever so nice; and I shall keep her as long as she 's happy."

"She won't stay long then, if I can help it," muttered Tom, who regarded girls as a very unnecessary portion of creation. Boys of fourteen are apt to think so, and perhaps it is a wise arrangement; for, being fond of turning somersaults, they have an opportunity of indulging in a good one, metaphorically speaking, when, three or four years later, they become the abject slaves of "those bothering girls."

"Look here! how am I going to know the creature? I never saw her, and she never saw me. You 'll have to come too, Fan," he added, pausing on his way to the door, arrested by the awful idea that he might have to address several strange girls before he got the right one.

"You 'll find her easy enough; she 'll probably be standing round looking for us. I dare say she 'll know you, though I 'm not there, because I 've described you to her."

"Guess she won't, then;" and Tom gave a hasty smooth to his curly pate and a glance at the mirror, feeling sure that his sister had n't done him justice. Sisters never do, as "we fellows" know too well.

"Do go along, or you 'll be too late; and then, what will Polly think of me?" cried Fanny, with the impatient poke which is peculiarly aggravating to masculine dignity.

"She 'll think you cared more about your frizzles than your friends, and she 'll be about right, too."

Feeling that he said rather a neat and cutting thing, Tom sauntered leisurely away, perfectly conscious that it was late, but bent on not being hurried while in sight, though he ran himself off his legs to make up for it afterward.

"If I was the President, I 'd make a law to shut up all boys till they were grown; for they certainly are the most provoking toads in the world," said Fanny, as she watched the slouchy figure of her brother strolling down the street. She might have changed her mind, however, if she had followed him, for as soon as he turned the corner, his whole aspect altered; his hands came out of his pockets, he stopped whistling, buttoned his jacket, gave his cap a pull, and went off at a great pace.

The train was just in when he reached the station, panting like a race-horse, and as red as a lobster with the wind and the run.

"Suppose she 'll wear a top-knot and a thingumbob, like every one else; and however shall I know her? Too bad of Fan to make me come alone!" thought Tom, as he stood watching the crowd stream through the depot, and feeling rather daunted at the array of young ladies who passed. As none of them seemed looking for any one, he did not accost them, but eyed each new batch with the air of a martyr. "That 's her," he said to himself, as he presently caught sight of a girl in gorgeous array, standing with her hands folded, and a very small hat perched on the top of a very large "chig-non," as Tom pronounced it. "I suppose I 've got to speak to her, so here goes;" and, nerving himself to the task, Tom slowly approached the damsel, who looked as if the wind had blown her clothes into rags, such a flapping of sashes, scallops, ruffles, curls, and feathers was there.

"I say, if you please, is your name Polly Milton?" meekly asked Tom, pausing before the breezy stranger.

"No, it is n't," answered the young lady, with a cool stare that utterly quenched him.

"Where in thunder is she?" growled Tom, walking off in high dudgeon. The quick tap of feet behind him made him turn in time to see a fresh-faced little girl running down the long station, and looking as if she rather liked it. As she smiled, and waved her bag at him, he stopped and waited for her, saying to himself, "Hullo! I wonder if that 's Polly?"

Up came the little girl, with her hand out, and a half-shy, half-merry look in her blue eyes, as she said, inquiringly, "This is Tom, is n't it?"

"Yes. How did you know?" and Tom got over the ordeal of hand-shaking without thinking of it, he was so surprised.

"Oh, Fan told me you 'd got curly hair, and a funny nose, and kept whistling, and wore a gray cap pulled over your eyes; so I knew you directly." And Polly nodded at him in the most friendly manner, having politely refrained from calling the hair "red," the nose "a pug," and the cap "old," all of which facts Fanny had carefully impressed upon her memory.

"Where are your trunks?" asked Tom, as he was reminded of his duty by her handing him the bag, which he had not offered to take.

"Father told me not to wait for any one, else I 'd lose my chance of a hack; so I gave my check to a man, and there he is with my trunk;" and Polly walked off after her one modest piece of baggage, followed by Tom, who felt a trifle depressed by his own remissness in polite attentions. "She is n't a bit of a young lady, thank goodness! Fan did n't tell me she was pretty. Don't look like city girls, nor act like 'em, neither," he thought, trudging in the rear, and eyeing with favor the brown curls bobbing along in front.

As the carriage drove off, Polly gave a little bounce on the springy seat, and laughed like a delighted child. "I do like to ride in these nice hacks, and see all the fine things, and have a good time, don't you?" she said, composing herself the next minute, as if it suddenly occurred to her that she was going a-visiting.

"Not much," said Tom, not minding what he said, for the fact that he was shut up with the strange girl suddenly oppressed his soul.

"How 's Fan? Why did n't she come, too?" asked Polly, trying to look demure, while her eyes danced in spite of her.

"Afraid of spoiling her crinkles;" and Tom smiled, for this base betrayal of confidence made him feel his own man again.

"You and I don't mind dampness. I 'm much obliged to you for coming to take care of me."

It was kind of Polly to say that, and Tom felt it; for his red crop was a tender point, and to be associated with Polly's pretty brown curls seemed to lessen its coppery glow. Then he had n't done anything for her but carry the bag a few steps; yet, she thanked him. He felt grateful, and in a burst of confidence, offered a handful of peanuts, for his pockets were always supplied with this agreeable delicacy, and he might be traced anywhere by the trail of shells he left behind him.

As soon as he had done it, he remembered that Fanny considered them vulgar, and felt that he had disgraced his family. So he stuck his head out of the window, and kept it there so long, that Polly asked if anything was the matter. "Pooh! who cares for a countrified little thing like her," said Tom manfully to himself; and then the spirit of mischief entered in and took possession of him.

"He 's pretty drunk; but I guess he can hold his horses," replied this evil-minded boy, with an air of calm resignation.

"Is the man tipsy? Oh, dear! let 's get out! Are the horses bad? It 's very steep here; do you think it 's safe?" cried poor Polly, making a cocked hat of her little beaver, by thrusting it out of the half-open window on her side.

"There 's plenty of folks to pick us up if anything happens; but perhaps it would be safer if I got out and sat with the man;" and Tom quite beamed with the brilliancy of this sudden mode of relief.

"Oh, do, if you ain't afraid! Mother would be so anxious if anything should happen to me, so far away!" cried Polly, much distressed.

"Don't you be worried. I 'll manage the old chap, and the horses too;" and opening the door, Tom vanished aloft, leaving poor victimized Polly to quake inside, while he placidly revelled in freedom and peanuts outside, with the staid old driver.

Fanny came flying down to meet her "darling Polly," as Tom presented her, with the graceful remark, "I 've got her!" and the air of a dauntless hunter, producing the trophies of his skill. Polly was instantly whisked up stairs; and having danced a double-shuffle on the door-mat, Tom retired to the dining-room, to restore exhausted nature with half a dozen cookies.

"Ain't you tired to death? Don't you want to lie down?" said Fanny, sitting on the side of the bed in Polly's room, and chattering hard, while she examined everything her friend had on.

"Not a bit. I had a nice time coming, and no trouble, except the tipsy coachman; but Tom got out and kept him in order, so I was n't much frightened," answered innocent Polly, taking off her rough-and-ready coat, and the plain hat without a bit of a feather.

"Fiddlestick! he was n't tipsy; and Tom only did it to get out of the way. He can't bear girls," said Fanny, with a superior air.

"Can't he? Why, I thought he was very pleasant and kind!" and Polly opened her eyes with a surprised expression.

"He 's an awful boy, my dear; and if you have anything to do with him, he 'll torment you to death. Boys are all horrid; but he 's the horridest one I ever saw."

Fanny went to a fashionable school, where the young ladies were so busy with their French, German, and Italian, that there was no time for good English. Feeling her confidence much shaken in the youth, Polly privately resolved to let him alone, and changed the conversation, by saying, as she looked admiringly about the large, handsome room, "How splendid it is! I never slept in a bed with curtains before, or had such a fine toilet-table as this."

"I 'm glad you like it; but don't, for mercy sake, say such things before the other girls!" replied Fanny, wishing Polly would wear ear-rings, as every one else did.

"Why not?" asked the country mouse of the city mouse, wondering what harm there was in liking other people's pretty things, and saying so. "Oh, they laugh at everything the least bit odd, and that is n't pleasant." Fanny did n't say "countrified," but she meant it, and Polly felt uncomfortable. So she shook out her little black silk apron with a thoughtful face, and resolved not to allude to her own home, if she could help it.

"I 'm so poorly, mamma says I need n't go to school regularly, while you are here, only two or three times a week, just to keep up my music and French. You can go too, if you like; papa said so. Do, it 's such fun!" cried Fanny, quite surprising her friend by this unexpected fondness for school.

"I should be afraid, if all the girls dress as finely as you do, and know as much," said Polly, beginning to feel shy at the thought.

"La, child! you need n't mind that. I 'll take care of you, and fix you up, so you won't look odd."

"Am I odd?" asked Polly, struck by the word and hoping it did n't mean anything very bad.

"You are a dear, and ever so much prettier than you were last summer, only you 've been brought up differently from us; so your ways ain't like ours, you see," began Fanny, finding it rather hard to explain.

"How different?" asked Polly again, for she liked to understand things.

"Well, you dress like a little girl, for one thing."

"I am a little girl; so why should n't I?" and Polly looked at her simple blue merino frock, stout boots, and short hair, with a puzzled air.

"You are fourteen; and we consider ourselves young ladies at that age," continued Fanny, surveying, with complacency, the pile of hair on the top of her head, with a fringe of fuzz round her forehead, and a wavy lock streaming down her back; likewise, her scarlet-and-black suit, with its big sash, little pannier, bright buttons, points, rosettes, and, heaven knows what. There was a locket on her neck, ear-rings tinkling in her ears, watch and chain at her belt, and several rings on a pair of hands that would have been improved by soap and water.

Polly's eye went from one little figure to the other, and she thought that Fanny looked the oddest of the two; for Polly lived in a quiet country town, and knew very little of city fashions. She was rather impressed by the elegance about her, never having seen Fanny's home before, as they got acquainted while Fanny paid a visit to a friend who lived near Polly. But she did n't let the contrast between herself and Fan trouble her; for in a minute she laughed and said, contentedly, "My mother likes me to dress simply, and I don't mind. I should n't know what to do rigged up as

you are. Don't you ever forget to lift your sash and fix those puffy things when you sit down?"

Before Fanny could answer, a scream from below made both listen. "It 's only Maud; she fusses all day long," began Fanny; and the words were hardly out of her mouth, when the door was thrown open, and a little girl, of six or seven, came roaring in. She stopped at sight of Polly, stared a minute, then took up her roar just where she left it, and cast herself into Fanny's lap, exclaiming wrathfully, "Tom 's laughing at me! Make him stop!"

"What did you do to set him going? Don't scream so, you 'll frighten Polly!" and Fan gave the cherub a shake, which produced an explanation.

"I only said we had cold cweam at the party, last night, and he laughed!"

"Ice-cream, child!" and Fanny followed Tom's reprehensible example.

"I don't care! it was cold; and I warmed mine at the wegister, and then it was nice; only, Willy Bliss spilt it on my new Gabwielle!" and Maud wailed again over her accumulated woes.

"Do go to Katy! You 're as cross as a little bear to-day!" said Fanny, pushing her away.

"Katy don't amoose me; and I must be amoosed, 'cause I 'm fwactious; mamma said I was!" sobbed Maud, evidently laboring under the delusion that fractiousness was some interesting malady.

"Come down and have dinner; that will amuse you;" and Fanny got up, pluming herself as a bird does before its flight.

Polly hoped the "dreadful boy" would not be present; but he was, and stared at her all dinner-time, in a most trying manner. Mr. Shaw, a busy-looking gentleman, said, "How do you do, my dear? Hope you 'll enjoy yourself;" and then appeared to forget her entirely. Mrs. Shaw, a pale, nervous woman, greeted her little guest kindly, and took care that she wanted for nothing. Madam Shaw, a quiet old lady, with an imposing cap, exclaimed on seeing Polly, "Bless my heart! the image of her mother a sweet woman how is she, dear?" and kept peering at the new-comer over her glasses, till, between Madam and Tom, poor Polly lost her appetite.

Fanny chatted like a magpie, and Maud fidgeted, till Tom proposed to put her under the big dish-cover, which

produced such an explosion, that the young lady was borne screaming away, by the much-enduring Katy. It was altogether an uncomfortable dinner, and Polly was very glad when it was over. They all went about their own affairs; and after doing the honors of the house, Fan was called to the dressmaker, leaving Polly to amuse herself in the great drawing-room.

Polly was glad to be alone for a few minutes; and, having examined all the pretty things about her, began to walk up and down over the soft, flowery carpet, humming to herself, as the daylight faded, and only the ruddy glow of the fire filled the room. Presently Madam came slowly in, and sat down in her arm-chair, saying, "That 's a fine old tune; sing it to me, my dear. I have n't heard it this many a day." Polly did n't like to sing before strangers, for she had had no teaching but such as her busy mother could give her; but she had been taught the utmost respect for old people, and having no reason for refusing, she directly went to the piano, and did as she was bid.

"That 's the sort of music it 's a pleasure to hear. Sing some more, dear," said Madam, in her gentle way, when she had done.

Pleased with this praise, Polly sang away in a fresh little voice, that went straight to the listener's heart and nestled there. The sweet old tunes that one is never tired of were all Polly's store; and her favorites were Scotch airs, such as, "Yellow-Haired Laddie," "Jock o' Hazeldean," "Down among the Heather," and "Birks of Aberfeldie." The more she sung, the better she did it; and when she wound up with "A Health to King Charlie," the room quite rung with the stirring music made by the big piano and the little maid.

"By George, that 's a jolly tune! Sing it again, please," cried Tom's voice; and there was Tom's red head bobbing up over the high back of the chair where he had hidden himself.

It gave Polly quite a turn, for she thought no one was hearing her but the old lady dozing by the fire. "I can't sing any more; I 'm tired," she said, and walked away to Madam in the other room. The red head vanished like a meteor, for Polly's tone had been decidedly cool.

The old lady put out her hand, and drawing Polly to her knee, looked into her face with such kind eyes, that Polly forgot the impressive cap, and smiled at her confidingly; for

she saw that her simple music had pleased her listener, and she felt glad to know it.

"You must n't mind my staring, dear," said Madam, softly pinching her rosy cheek. "I have n't seen a little girl for so long, it does my old eyes good to look at you."

Polly thought that a very odd speech, and could n't help saying, "Are n't Fan and Maud little girls, too?"

"Oh, dear, no! not what I call little girls. Fan has been a young lady this two years, and Maud is a spoiled baby. Your mother 's a very sensible woman, my child."

"What a very queer old lady!" thought Polly; but she said "Yes 'm" respectfully, and looked at the fire.

"You don't understand what I mean, do you?" asked Madam, still holding her by the chin.

"No 'm; not quite."

"Well, dear, I 'll tell you. In my day, children of fourteen and fifteen did n't dress in the height of the fashion; go to parties, as nearly like those of grown people as it 's possible to make them; lead idle, giddy, unhealthy lives, and get blas at twenty. We were little folks till eighteen or so; worked and studied, dressed and played, like children; honored our parents; and our days were much longer in the land than now, it seems to, me."

The old lady appeared to forget Polly at the end of her speech; for she sat patting the plump little hand that lay in her own, and looking up at a faded picture of an old gentleman with a ruffled shirt and a queue.

"Was he your father, Madam?

"Yes, dear; my honored father. I did up his frills to the day of his death; and the first money I ever earned was five dollars which he offered as a prize to whichever of his six girls would lay the handsomest darn in his silk stockings."

"How proud you must have been!" cried Polly, leaning on the old lady's knee with an interested face.

"Yes, and we all learned to make bread, and cook, and wore little chintz gowns, and were as gay and hearty as kittens. All lived to be grandmothers and fathers; and I 'm the last, seventy, next birthday, my dear, and not worn out yet; though daughter Shaw is an invalid at forty."

"That 's the way I was brought up, and that 's why Fan calls me old-fashioned, I suppose. Tell more about your papa, please; I like it," said Polly.

"Say 'father.' We never called him papa; and if one of my brothers had addressed him as 'governor,' as boys do now, I really think he 'd have him cut off with a shilling."

Madam raised her voice in saying this, and nodded significantly; but a mild snore from the other room seemed to assure her that it was a waste of shot to fire in that direction.

Before she could continue, in came Fanny with the joyful news that Clara Bird had invited them both to go to the theatre with her that very evening, and would call for them at seven o'clock. Polly was so excited by this sudden plunge into the dissipations of city life, that she flew about like a distracted butterfly, and hardly knew what happened, till she found herself seated before the great green curtain in the brilliant theatre. Old Mr. Bird sat on one side, Fanny on the other, and both let her alone, for which she was very grateful, as her whole attention was so absorbed in the scene around her, that she could n't talk.

Polly had never been much to the theatre; and the few plays she had seen were the good old fairy tales, dramatized to suit young beholders, lively, bright, and full of the harmless nonsense which brings the laugh without the blush. That night she saw one of the new spectacles which have lately become the rage, and run for hundreds of nights, dazzling, exciting, and demoralizing the spectator by every allurement French ingenuity can invent, and American prodigality execute. Never mind what its name was, it was very gorgeous, very vulgar, and very fashionable; so, of course, it was much admired, and every one went to see it. At first, Polly thought she had got into fairy-land, and saw only the sparkling creatures who danced and sung in a world of light and beauty; but, presently, she began to listen to the songs and conversation, and then the illusion vanished; for the lovely phantoms sang negro melodies, talked slang, and were a disgrace to the good old-fashioned elves whom she knew and loved so well.

Our little girl was too innocent to understand half the jokes, and often wondered what people were laughing at; but, as the first enchantment subsided, Polly began to feel uncomfortable, to be sure her mother would n't like to have her there, and to wish she had n't come. Somehow, things seemed to get worse and worse, as the play went on; for our small spectator was being rapidly enlightened by the

gossip going on all about her, as well as by her own quick eyes and girlish instincts. When four-and-twenty girls, dressed as jockeys, came prancing on to the stage, cracking their whips, stamping the heels of their topboots, and winking at the audience, Polly did not think it at all funny, but looked disgusted, and was glad when they were gone; but when another set appeared in a costume consisting of gauze wings, and a bit of gold fringe round the waist, poor unfashionable Polly did n't know what to do; for she felt both frightened and indignant, and sat with her eyes on her play-bill, and her cheeks getting hotter and hotter every minute.

"What are you blushing so for?" asked Fanny, as the painted sylphs vanished.

"I 'm so ashamed of those girls," whispered Polly, taking a long breath of relief.

"You little goose, it 's just the way it was done in Paris, and the dancing is splendid. It seems queer at first; but you 'll get used to it, as I did."

"I 'll never come again," said Polly, decidedly; for her innocent nature rebelled against the spectacle, which, as yet, gave her more pain than pleasure. She did not know how easy it was to "get used to it," as Fanny did; and it was well for her that the temptation was not often offered. She could not explain the feeling; but she was glad when the play was done, and they were safe at home, where kind grandma was waiting to see them comfortably into bed.

"Did you have a good time, dear?" she asked, looking at Polly's feverish cheeks and excited eyes.

"I don't wish to be rude, but I did n't," answered Polly. "Some of it was splendid; but a good deal of it made me want to go under the seat. People seemed to like it, but I don't think it was proper."

As Polly freed her mind, and emphasized her opinion with a decided rap of the boot she had just taken off, Fanny laughed, and said, while she pirouetted about the room, like Mademoiselle Therese, "Polly was shocked, grandma. Her eyes were as big as saucers, her face as red as my sash, and once I thought she was going to cry. Some of it was rather queer; but, of course, it was proper, or all our set would n't go. I heard Mrs. Smythe Perkins say, 'It was charming; so like dear Paris;' and she has lived abroad; so, of course, she knows what is what."

"I don't care if she has. I know it was n't proper for little girls to see, or I should n't have been so ashamed!" cried sturdy Polly, perplexed, but not convinced, even by Mrs. Smythe Perkins.

"I think you are right, my dear; but you have lived in the country, and have n't yet learned that modesty has gone out of fashion." And with a good-night kiss, grandma left Polly to dream dreadfully of dancing in jockey costume, on a great stage; while Tom played a big drum in the orchestra; and the audience all wore the faces of her father and mother, looking sorrowfully at her, with eyes like saucers, and faces as red as Fanny's sash.

CHAPTER II. NEW FASHIONS

"I 'M going to school this morning; so come up and get ready," said Fanny, a day or two after, as she left the late breakfast-table.

"You look very nice; what have you got to do?" asked Polly, following her into the hall.

"Prink half an hour, and put on her wad," answered the irreverent Tom, whose preparations for school consisted in flinging his cap on to his head, and strapping up several big books, that looked as if they were sometimes used as weapons of defence.

"What is a wad?" asked Polly, while Fanny marched up without deigning any reply.

"Somebody's hair on the top of her head in the place where it ought not to be;" and Tom went whistling away with an air of sublime indifference as to the state of his own "curly pow."

"Why must you be so fine to go to school?" asked Polly, watching Fan arrange the little frizzles on her forehead, and settle the various streamers and festoons belonging to her dress.

"All the girls do; and it 's proper, for you never know who you may meet. I 'm going to walk, after my lessons, so I wish you 'd wear your best hat and sack," answered Fanny, trying to stick her own hat on at an angle which defied all the laws of gravitation.

"I will, if you don't think this is nice enough. I like the other best, because it has a feather; but this is warmer, so I wear it every day." And Polly ran into her own room, to prink also, fearing that her friend might be ashamed of her plain costume. "Won't your hands be cold in kid gloves?" she said, as they went down the snowy street, with a north wind blowing in their faces.

"Yes, horrid cold; but my muff is so big, I won't carry it. Mamma won't have it cut up, and my ermine one must be kept for best;" and Fanny smoothed her Bismark kids with an injured air.

"I suppose my gray squirrel is ever so much too big; but it 's nice and cosy, and you may warm your hands in it if you want to," said Polly, surveying her new woollen gloves with

a dissatisfied look, though she had thought them quite elegant before.

"Perhaps I will, by and by. Now, Polly, don't you be shy. I 'll only introduce two or three of the girls; and you need n't mind old Monsieur a bit, or read if you don't want to. We shall be in the anteroom; so you 'll only see about a dozen, and they will be so busy, they won't mind you much."

"I guess I won't read, but sit and look on. I like to watch people, everything is so new and queer here."

But Polly did feel and look very shy, when she was ushered into a room full of young ladies, as they seemed to her, all very much dressed, all talking together, and all turning to examine the new-comer with a cool stare which seemed to be as much the fashion as eye-glasses. They nodded affably when Fanny introduced her, said something civil, and made room for her at the table round which they sat waiting for Monsieur. Several of the more frolicsome were imitating the Grecian Bend, some were putting their heads together over little notes, nearly all were eating confectionery, and the entire twelve chattered like magpies. Being politely supplied with caramels, Polly sat looking and listening, feeling very young and countrified among these elegant young ladies.

"Girls, do you know that Carrie has gone abroad? There has been so much talk, her father could n't bear it, and took the whole family off. Is n't that gay?" said one lively damsel, who had just come in.

"I should think they 'd better go. My mamma says, if I 'd been going to that school, she 'd have taken me straight away," answered another girl, with an important air.

"Carrie ran away with an Italian music-teacher, and it got into the papers, and made a great stir," explained the first speaker to Polly, who looked mystified.

"How dreadful!" cried Polly.

"I think it was fun. She was only sixteen, and he was perfectly splendid; and she has plenty of money, and every one talked about it; and when she went anywhere, people looked, you know, and she liked it; but her papa is an old poke, so he 's sent them all away. It 's too bad, for she was the jolliest thing I ever knew."

Polly had nothing to say to lively Miss Belle; but Fanny observed, "I like to read about such things; but it 's so inconvenient to have it happen right here, because it makes

it harder for us. I wish you could have heard my papa go on. He threatened to send a maid to school with me every day, as they do in New York, to be sure I come all right. Did you ever?" "That 's because it came out that Carrie used to forge excuses in her mamma's name, and go promenading with her Oreste, when they thought her safe at school. Oh, was n't she a sly minx?" cried Belle, as if she rather admired the trick.

"I think a little fun is all right; and there 's no need of making a talk, if, now and then, some one does run off like Carrie. Boys do as they like; and I don't see why girls need to be kept so dreadfully close. I 'd like to see anybody watching and guarding me!" added another dashing young lady.

"It would take a policeman to do that, Trix, or a little man in a tall hat," said Fanny, slyly, which caused a general laugh, and made Beatrice toss her head coquettishly.

"Oh, have you read 'The Phantom Bride'? It 's perfectly thrilling! There 's a regular rush for it at the library; but some prefer 'Breaking a Butterfly.' Which do you like best?" asked a pale girl of Polly, in one of the momentary lulls which occurred.

"I have n't read either."

"You must, then. I adore Guy Livingston's books, and Yates's. 'Ouida's' are my delight, only they are so long, I get worn out before I 'm through."

"I have n't read anything but one of the Muhlbach novels since I came. I like those, because there is history in them," said Polly, glad to have a word to say for herself.

"Those are well enough for improving reading; but I like real exciting novels; don't you?"

Polly was spared the mortification of owning that she had never read any, by the appearance of Monsieur, a gray-headed old Frenchman, who went through his task with the resigned air of one who was used to being the victim of giggling school-girls. The young ladies gabbled over the lesson, wrote an exercise, and read a little French history. But it did not seem to make much impression upon them, though Monsieur was very ready to explain; and Polly quite blushed for her friend, when, on being asked what famous Frenchman fought in our Revolution, she answered Lamartine, instead of Lafayette.

The hour was soon over; and when Fan had taken a music lesson in another room, while Polly looked on, it was time for recess. The younger girls walked up and down the court, arm in arm, eating bread an butter; others stayed in the school-room to read and gossip; but Belle, Trix, and Fanny went to lunch at a fashionable ice-cream saloon near by, and Polly meekly followed, not daring to hint at the ginger-bread grandma had put in her pocket for luncheon. So the honest, brown cookies crumbled away in obscurity, while Polly tried to satisfy her hearty appetite on one ice and three macaroons.

The girls seemed in great spirits, particularly after they were joined by a short gentleman with such a young face that Polly would have called him a boy, if he had not worn a tall beaver. Escorted by this impressive youth, Fanny left her unfortunate friends to return to school, and went to walk, as she called a slow promenade down the most crowded streets. Polly discreetly fell behind, and amused herself looking into shop-windows, till Fanny, mindful of her manners, even at such an interesting time, took her into a picture gallery, and bade her enjoy the works of art while they rested. Obedient Polly went through the room several times, apparently examining the pictures with the interest of a connoisseur, and trying not to hear the mild prattle of the pair on the round seat. But she could n't help wondering what Fan found so absorbing in an account of a recent German, and why she need promise so solemnly not to forget the concert that afternoon.

When Fanny rose at last, Polly's tired face reproached her; and taking a hasty leave of the small gentleman, she turned homeward, saying, confidentially, as she put one hand in Polly's muff, "Now, my dear, you must n't say a word about Frank Moore, or papa will take my head off. I don't care a bit for him, and he likes Trix; only they have quarrelled, and he wants to make her mad by flirting a little with me. I scolded him well, and he promised to make up with her. We all go to the afternoon concerts, and have a gay time, and Belle and Trix are to be there to-day; so just keep quiet, and everything will be all right."

"I 'm afraid it won't," began Polly, who, not being used to secrets, found it very hard to keep even a small one.

"Don't worry, child. It 's none of our business; so we can go and enjoy the music, and if other people flirt, it won't be our fault," said Fanny, impatiently.

"Of course not; but, then, if your father don't like you to do so, ought you to go?"

"I tell mamma, and she don't care. Papa is fussy, and grandma makes a stir about every blessed thing I do. You will hold your tongue, won't you?"

"Yes; I truly will; I never tell tales." And Polly kept her word, feeling sure Fan did n't mean to deceive her father, since she told her mother everything.

"Who are you going with?" asked Mrs. Shaw, when Fanny mentioned that it was concert-day, just before three o'clock.

"Only Polly; she likes music, and it was so stormy I could n't go last week, you know," answered Fan; adding, as they left the house again, "If any one meets us on the way, I can't help it, can I?"

"You can tell them not to, can't you?"

"That 's rude. Dear me! here 's Belle's brother Gus he always goes. Is my hair all right, and my hat?"

Before Polly could answer, Mr. Gus joined them as a matter of course, and Polly soon found herself trotting on behind, feeling that things were not "all right," though she did n't know how to mend them. Being fond of music, she ignorantly supposed that every one else went for that alone, and was much disturbed by the whispering that went on among the young people round her. Belle and Trix were there in full dress; and, in the pauses between different pieces, Messrs. Frank and Gus, with several other "splendid fellows," regaled the young ladies with college gossip, and bits of news full of interest, to judge from the close attention paid to their eloquent remarks. Polly regarded these noble beings with awe, and they recognized her existence with the condescension of their sex; but they evidently considered her only "a quiet little thing," and finding her not up to society talk, blandly ignored the pretty child, and devoted themselves to the young ladies. Fortunately for Polly, she forgot all about them in her enjoyment of the fine music, which she felt rather than understood, and sat listening with such a happy face, that several true music-lovers watched her smilingly, for her heart gave a blithe welcome to the melody which put the little instrument in tune. It was dusk when they went out, and Polly was much relieved to find the carriage waiting for them, because playing third fiddle was not to her taste, and she had had enough of it for one day.

"I 'm glad those men are gone; they did worry me so talking, when I wanted to hear," said Polly, as they rolled away.

"Which did you like best?" asked Fanny, with a languid air of superiority.

"The plain one, who did n't say much; he picked up my muff when it tumbled down, and took care of me in the crowd; the others did n't mind anything about me."

"They thought you were a little girl, I suppose."

"My mother says a real gentleman is as polite to a little girl as to a woman; so I like Mr. Sydney best, because he was kind to me."

"What a sharp child you are, Polly. I should n't have thought you 'd mind things like that," said Fanny, beginning to understand that there may be a good deal of womanliness even in a little girl.

"I 'm used to good manners, though I do live in the country," replied Polly, rather warmly, for she did n't like to be patronized even by her friends.

"Grandma says your mother is a perfect lady, and you are just like her; so don't get in a passion with those poor fellows, and I 'll see that they behave better next time. Tom has no manners at all, and you don't complain of him," added Fan, with a laugh.

"I don't care if he has n't; he 's a boy, and acts like one, and I can get on with him a great deal better than I can with those men."

Fanny was just going to take Polly to task for saying "those men" in such a disrespectful tone, when both were startled by a smothered "Cock-a-doodle-doo!" from under the opposite seat.

"It 's Tom!" cried Fanny; and with the words out tumbled that incorrigible boy, red in the face, and breathless with suppressed laughter. Seating himself, he surveyed the girls as if well satisfied with the success of his prank, and waiting to be congratulated upon it. "Did you hear what we were saying?" demanded Fanny, uneasily.

"Oh, did n't I, every word?" And Tom exulted over them visibly.

"Did you ever see such a provoking toad, Polly? Now, I suppose you 'll go and tell papa a great story."

"P'r'aps I shall, and p'r'aps I shan't. How Polly did hop when I crowed! I heard her squeal, and saw her cuddle up her feet."

"And you heard us praise your manners, did n't you?" asked Polly, slyly.

"Yes, and you liked 'em; so I won't tell on you," said Tom, with a re-assuring nod.

"There 's nothing to tell."

"Ain't there, though? What do you suppose the governor will say to you girls going on so with those dandies? I saw you."

"What has the Governor of Massachusetts to do with us?" asked Polly, trying to look as if she meant what she said.

"Pooh! you know who I mean; so you need n't try to catch me up, as grandma does."

"Tom, I 'll make a bargain with you," cried Fanny, eagerly. "It was n't my fault that Gus and Frank were there, and I could n't help their speaking to me. I do as well as I can, and papa need n't be angry; for I behave ever so much better than some of the girls. Don't I, Polly?"

"Bargain?" observed Tom, with an eye to business.

"If you won't go and make a fuss, telling what you 'd no right to hear it was so mean to hide and listen; I should think you 'd be ashamed of it! I 'll help you tease for your velocipede, and won't say a word against it, when mamma and granny beg papa not to let you have it."

"Will you?" and Tom paused to consider the offer in all its bearings.

"Yes, and Polly will help; won't you?"

"I 'd rather not have anything to do with it; but I 'll be quiet, and not do any harm."

"Why won't you?" asked Tom, curiously.

"Because it seems like deceiving."

"Well, papa need n't be so fussy," said Fan, petulantly.

"After hearing about that Carrie, and the rest, I don't wonder he is fussy. Why don't you tell right out, and not do it any more, if he don't want you to?" said Polly, persuasively.

"Do you go and tell your father and mother everything right out?"

"Yes, I do; and it saves ever so much trouble."

"Ain't you afraid of them?"

"Of course I 'm not. It 's hard to tell sometimes; but it 's so comfortable when it 's over."

"Let 's!" was Tom's brief advice.

"Mercy me! what a fuss about nothing!" said Fanny, ready to cry with vexation.

"T is n't nothing. You know you are forbidden to go gallivanting round with those chaps, and that 's the reason you 're in a pucker now. I won't make any bargain, and I will tell," returned Tom, seized with a sudden fit of moral firmness.

"Will you if I promise never, never to do so any more?" asked Fanny, meekly; for when Thomas took matters into his own hands, his sister usually submitted in spite of herself.

"I 'll think about it; and if you behave, maybe I won't do it at all. I can watch you better than papa can; so, if you try it again, it 's all up with you, miss," said Tom, finding it impossible to resist the pleasure of tyrannizing a little when he got the chance.

"She won't; don't plague her any more, and she will be good to you when you get into scrapes," answered Polly, with her arm round Fan.

"I never do; and if I did, I should n't ask a girl to help me out."

"Why not? I 'd ask you in a minute, if I was in trouble," said Polly, in her confiding way.

"Would you? Well, I 'd put you through, as sure as my name 's Tom Shaw. Now, then, don't slip, Polly," and Mr. Thomas helped them out with unusual politeness, for that friendly little speech gratified him. He felt that one person appreciated him; and it had a good effect upon manners and temper made rough and belligerent by constant snubbing and opposition.

After tea that evening, Fanny proposed that Polly should show her how to make molasses candy, as it was cook's holiday, and the coast would be clear. Hoping to propitiate her tormentor, Fan invited Tom to join in the revel, and Polly begged that Maud might sit up and see the fun; so all four descended to the big kitchen, armed with aprons, hammers, spoons, and pans, and Polly assumed command of the forces. Tom was set to cracking nuts, and Maud to picking out the meats, for the candy was to be "tip-top."

Fan waited on Polly cook, who hovered over the kettle of boiling molasses till her face was the color of a peony. "Now, put in the nuts," she said at last; and Tom emptied his plate into the foamy syrup, while the others watched with deep interest the mysterious concoction of this well-beloved sweetmeat. "I pour it into the buttered pan, you see, and it cools, and then we can eat it," explained Polly, suiting the action to the word.

"Why, it 's all full of shells!" exclaimed Maud, peering into the pan.

"Oh, thunder! I must have put 'em in by mistake, and ate up the meats without thinking," said Tom, trying to conceal his naughty satisfaction, as the girls hung over the pan with faces full of disappointment and despair.

"You did it on purpose, you horrid boy! I 'll never let you have anything to do with my fun again!" cried Fan, in a passion, trying to catch and shake him, while he dodged and chuckled in high glee.

Maud began to wail over her lost delight, and Polly gravely poked at the mess, which was quite spoilt. But her attention was speedily diverted by the squabble going on in the corner; for Fanny, forgetful of her young-ladyism and her sixteen years, had boxed Tom's ears, and Tom, resenting the insult, had forcibly seated her in the coal-hod, where he held her with one hand while he returned the compliment with the other. Both were very angry, and kept twitting one another with every aggravation they could invent, as they scolded and scuffled, presenting a most unlovely spectacle.

Polly was not a model girl by any means, and had her little pets and tempers like the rest of us; but she did n't fight, scream, and squabble with her brothers and sisters in this disgraceful way, and was much surprised to see her elegant friend in such a passion. "Oh, don't! Please, don't! You 'll hurt her, Tom! Let him go, Fanny! It 's no matter about the candy; we can make some more!" cried Polly, trying to part them, and looking so distressed, that they stopped ashamed, and in a minute sorry that she should see such a display of temper.

"I ain't going to be hustled round; so you 'd better let me alone, Fan," said Tom, drawing off with a threatening wag of the head, adding, in a different tone, "I only put the shells in for fun, Polly. You cook another kettleful, and I 'll pick you some meats all fair. Will you?"

"It 's pretty hot work, and it 's a pity to waste things; but I 'll try again, if you want me to," said Polly, with a patient sigh, for her arms were tired and her face uncomfortably hot.

"We don't want you; get away!" said Maud, shaking a sticky spoon at him.

"Keep quiet, cry-baby. I 'm going to stay and help; may n't I, Polly?"

"Bears like sweet things, so you want some candy, I guess. Where is the molasses? We 've used up all there was in the jug," said Polly, good-naturedly, beginning again.

"Down cellar; I 'll get it;" and taking the lamp and jug, Tom departed, bent on doing his duty now like a saint.

The moment his light vanished, Fanny bolted the door, saying, spitefully, "Now, we are safe from any more tricks. Let him thump and call, it only serves him right; and when the candy is done, we 'll let the rascal out."

"How can we make it without molasses?" asked Polly, thinking that would settle the matter.

"There 's plenty in the store-room. No; you shan't let him up till I 'm ready. He 's got to learn that I 'm not to be shaken by a little chit like him. Make your candy, and let him alone, or I 'll go and tell papa, and then Tom will get a lecture."

Polly thought it was n't fair; but Maud clamored for her candy, and finding she could do nothing to appease Fan, Polly devoted her mind to her cookery till the nuts were safely in, and a nice panful set in the yard to cool. A few bangs at the locked door, a few threats of vengeance from the prisoner, such as setting the house on fire, drinking up the wine, and mashing the jelly-pots, and then all was so quiet that the girls forgot him in the exciting crisis of their work.

"He can't possibly get out anywhere, and as soon we 've cut up the candy, we 'll unbolt the door and run. Come and get a nice dish to put it in," said Fan, when Polly proposed to go halves with Tom, lest he should come bursting in somehow, and seize the whole.

When they came down with the dish in which to set forth their treat, and opened the back-door to find it, imagine their dismay on discovering that it was gone, pan, candy, and all, utterly and mysteriously gone!

A general lament arose, when a careful rummage left no hopes; for the fates had evidently decreed at candy was not to prosper on this unpropitious night.

"The hot pan has melted and sunk in the snow perhaps," said Fanny, digging into the drift where it was left.

"Those old cats have got it, I guess," suggested Maud, too much overwhelmed by this second blow to howl as usual.

"The gate is n't locked, and some beggar has stolen it. I hope it will do him good," added Polly, turning from her exploring expedition.

"If Tom could get out, I should think he 'd carried it off; but not being a rat, he can't go through the bits of windows; so it was n't him," said Fanny, disconsolately, for she began to think this double loss a punishment for letting angry passions rise, "Let 's open the door and tell him about it," proposed Polly.

"He 'll crow over us. No; we 'll open it and go to bed, and he can come out when he likes. Provoking boy! if he had n't plagued us so, we should have had a nice time."

Unbolting the cellar door, the girls announced to the invisible captive that they were through, and then departed much depressed. Half-way up the second flight, they all stopped as suddenly as if they had seen a ghost; for looking over the banisters was Tom's face, crocky but triumphant, and in either hand a junk of candy, which he waved above them as he vanished, with the tantalizing remark, "Don't you wish you had some?"

"How in the world did he get out?" cried Fanny, steadying herself after a start that nearly sent all three tumbling down stairs.

"Coal-hole!" answered a spectral voice from the gloom above.

"Good gracious! He must have poked up the cover, climbed into the street, stole the candy, and sneaked in at the shed-window while we were looking for it."

"Cats got it, did n't they?" jeered the voice in a tone that made Polly sit down and laugh till she could n't laugh any longer.

"Just give Maud a bit, she 's so disappointed. Fan and I are sick of it, and so will you be, if you eat it all," called Polly, when she got her breath.