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[An Old-Fashioned Girl](#)

[Louisa May Alcott](#)

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Chapter 5 - Scrapes

AFTER being unusually good, children are apt to turn short round and refresh themselves by acting like Sancho. For a week after Tom's mishap, the young folks were quite angelic, so much so that grandma said she was afraid "something was going to happen to them." The dear old lady need n't have felt anxious, for such excessive virtue does n't last long enough to lead to translation, except with little prigs in the goody story-books; and no sooner was Tom on his legs again, when the whole party went astray, and much tribulation was the consequence.

It all began with "Polly's stupidity," as Fan said afterward. Just as Polly ran down to meet Mr. Shaw one evening, and was helping him off with his coat, the bell rang, and a fine bouquet of hothouse flowers was left in Polly's hands, for she never could learn city ways, and opened the door herself.

"Hey! what's this? My little Polly is beginning early, after all," said Mr. Shaw, laughing, as he watched the girl's face dimple and flush, as she smelt the lovely nosegay, and glanced at a note half hidden in the heliotrope.

Now, if Polly had n't been "stupid," as Fan said, she would have had her wits about her, and let it pass; but, you see, Polly was an honest little soul and it never occurred to her that there was any need of concealment, so she answered in her straightforward way, "Oh, they ain't for me, sir; they are for Fan; from Mr. Frank, I guess. She 'll be so pleased."

"That puppy sends her things of this sort, does he?" And Mr. Shaw looked far from pleased as he pulled out the note, and coolly opened it.

Polly had her doubts about Fan's approval of that "sort of thing," but dared not say a word, and stood thinking how she used to show her father the funny valentines the boys sent her, and how they laughed over them together. But Mr. Shaw did not laugh when he had read the sentimental verses accompanying the bouquet, and his face quite scared Polly, as he asked, angrily, "How long has this nonsense been going on?"

"Indeed, sir, I don't know. Fan does n't mean any harm. I wish I had n't said anything!" stammered Polly, remembering the promise given to Fanny the day of the concert. She had forgotten all about it and had become accustomed to see the "big boys," as she called Mr. Frank and his friends, with the girls on all occasions. Now, it suddenly occurred to her that Mr. Shaw did n't like such amusements, and had forbidden Fan to indulge in them. "Oh, dear! how mad she will be. Well, I can't help it. Girls should n't have secrets from their fathers, then there would n't be any fuss," thought Polly, as she watched Mr. Shaw twist up the pink note and poke it back among the flowers which he took from her, saying, shortly, "Send Fanny to me in the library."

"Now you 've done it, you stupid thing!" cried Fanny, both angry and dismayed, when Polly delivered the message.

"Why, what else could I do?" asked Polly, much disturbed.

"Let him think the bouquet was for you; then there'd have been no trouble."

"But that would have been doing a lie, which is most as bad as telling one."

"Don't be a goose. You 've got me into a scrape, and you ought to help me out."

"I will if I can; but I won't tell lies for anybody!" cried Polly, getting excited.

"Nobody wants you to just hold, your tongue, and let me manage."

"Then I 'd better not go down," began Polly, when a stern voice from below called, like Bluebeard, "Are you coming down?"

"Yes, sir," answered a meek voice; and Fanny clutched Polly, whispering, "You must come; I 'm frightened out of my wits when he speaks like that. Stand by me, Polly; there 's a dear."

"I will," whispered "sister Ann"; and down they went with fluttering hearts.

Mr. Shaw stood on the rug, looking rather grim; the bouquet lay on the table, and beside it a note, directed to "Frank Moore, Esq.," in a very decided hand, with a fierce-looking flourish after the "Esq." Pointing to this impressive epistle, Mr. Shaw said, knitting his black eyebrows as he looked at Fanny, "I 'm going to put a stop to this nonsense at once; and if I see any more of it, I 'll send you to school in a Canadian convent."

This awful threat quite took Polly's breath away; but Fanny had heard it before, and having a temper of her own, said, pertly, "I 'm sure I have n't done anything so very dreadful. I can't help it if the boys send me philopena presents, as they do to the other girls."

"There was nothing about philopenas in the note. But that 's not the question. I forbid you to have anything to do with this Moore. He 's not a boy, but a fast fellow, and I won't have him about. You knew this, and yet disobeyed me."

"I hardly ever see him," began Fanny.

"Is that true?" asked Mr. Shaw, turning suddenly to Polly.

"Oh, please, sir, don't ask me. I promised I would n't that is Fanny will tell you," cried Polly, quite red with distress at the predicament she was in.

"No matter what you promise; tell me all you know of this absurd affair. It will do Fanny more good than harm." And Mr. Shaw sat down looking more amiable, for Polly's dismay touched him.

"May I?" she whispered to Fanny.

"I don't care," answered Fan, looking both angry and ashamed, as she stood sullenly tying knots in her handkerchief.

So Polly told, with much reluctance and much questioning, all she knew of the walks, the lunches, the meetings, and the notes. It was n't much, and evidently less serious than Mr. Shaw expected; for, as he listened, his eyebrows smoothed themselves out, and more than once his lips twitched as if he wanted to laugh, for after all, it was rather comical to see how the young people ape their elders, playing the new-fashioned game, quite unconscious of its real beauty, power, and sacredness.

"Oh, please, sir, don't blame Fan much, for she truly is n't half as silly as Trix and the other, girls. She would n't go sleigh-riding, though Mr. Frank teased, and she wanted to ever so much. She 's sorry, I know, and won't forget what you say any more, if you 'll forgive her this once," cried Polly, very earnestly, when the foolish little story was told.

"I don't see how I can help it, when you plead so well for her. Come here, Fan, and mind this one thing; drop all this nonsense, and attend to your books, or off you go; and Canada is no joke in winter time, let me tell you."

As he spoke, Mr. Shaw stroked his sulky daughter's cheek, hoping to see some sign of regret; but Fanny felt injured, and would n't show that she was sorry, so she only said, pettishly, "I suppose I can have my flowers, now the fuss is over."

"They are going straight back where they came from, with a line from me, which will keep that puppy from ever sending you any more." Ringing the bell, Mr. Shaw despatched the unfortunate posy, and then turned to Polly, saying, kindly but gravely, "Set this silly child of mine a good example and do your best for her, won't you?"

"Me? What can I do, sir?" asked Polly, looking ready, but quite ignorant how to begin.

"Make her as like yourself as possible, my dear; nothing would please me better. Now go, and let us hear no more of this folly."

They went without a word, and Mr. Shaw heard no more of the affair; but poor Polly did, for Fan scolded her, till Polly thought seriously of packing up and going home next day. I really have n't the heart to relate the dreadful lectures she got, the snubs she suffered, or the cold shoulders turned upon her for several days after this. Polly's heart was full, but she told no one, and bore her trouble silently, feeling her friend's ingratitude and injustice deeply.

Tom found out what the matter was, and sided with Polly, which proceeding led to scrape number two.

"Where 's Fan?" asked the young gentleman, strolling into his sister's room, where Polly lay on the sofa, trying to forget her troubles in an interesting book.

"Down stairs, seeing company."

"Why did n't you go, too?"

"I don't like Trix, and I don't know her fine New York friends."

"Don't want to, neither, why don't you say?"

"Not polite."

"Who cares? I say, Polly, come and have some fun."

"I 'd rather read."

"That is n't polite."

Polly laughed, and turned a page. Tom whistled a minute, then sighed deeply, and put his hand to his forehead, which the black plaster still adorned.

"Does your head ache?" asked Polly.

"Awfully."

"Better lie down, then."

"Can't; I 'm fidgety, and want to be 'amused' as Pug says."

"Just wait till I finish my chapter, and then I 'll come," said pitiful Polly.

"All right," returned the perjured boy, who had discovered that a broken head was sometimes more useful than a whole one, and exulting in his base stratagem, he roved about the room, till Fan's bureau arrested him. It was covered with all sorts of finery, for she had dressed in a hurry, and left everything topsy-turvy. A well-conducted boy would have let things alone, or a moral brother would have put things to rights; being neither, Tom rummaged to his hearts content, till Fan's drawers looked as if some one had been making hay in them. He tried the effect of ear-rings, ribbons, and collars; wound up the watch, though it was n't time; burnt his inquisitive nose with smelling-salts; deluged his grimy handkerchief with Fan's best cologne; anointed his curly crop with her hair-oil; powdered his face with her violet-powder; and finished off by pinning on a bunch of false ringlets, which Fanny tried, to keep a profound secret. The ravages committed by this bad boy are beyond the power of language to describe, as he revelled in the interesting drawers, boxes, and cases, which held his sister's treasures.

When the curls had been put on, with much pricking of fingers, and a blue ribbon added, . la Fan, he surveyed himself with satisfaction, and considered the effect so fine, that he was inspired to try a still greater metamorphosis. The dress Fan had taken off lay on a chair, and into it got Tom, chuckling with suppressed laughter, for Polly was absorbed, and the bed-curtains hid his iniquity. Fan's best velvet jacket and hat, ermine muff, and a sofa-pillow for pannier, finished off the costume, and tripping along with elbows out, Tom appeared before the amazed Polly just as the chapter ended. She enjoyed the joke so heartily, that Tom forgot consequences, and proposed going down into the parlor to surprise, the girls.

"Goodness, no! Fanny never would forgive us if you showed her curls and things to those people. There are gentlemen among them, and it would n't be proper," said Polly, alarmed at the idea.

"All the more fun. Fan has n't treated you well, and it will serve her right if you introduce me as your dear friend, Miss Shaw. Come on, it will be a jolly lark."

"I would n't for the world; it would be so mean. Take 'em off, Tom, and I 'll play anything else you like."

"I ain't going to dress up for nothing; I look so lovely, someone must admire me. Take me down, Polly, and see if they don't call me 'a sweet creature.' "

Tom looked so unutterably ridiculous as he tossed his curls and pranced, that Polly went off into another gale of merriment; but even while she laughed, she resolved not to let him mortify his sister.

"Now, then, get out of the way if you won't come; I 'm going down," said Tom.

"No, you 're not."

"How will you help it, Miss Prim?"

"So." And Polly locked the door, put the key in her pocket, and nodded at him defiantly.

Tom was a pepper-pot as to temper, and anything like opposition always had a bad effect. Forgetting his costume, he strode up to Polly, saying, with a threatening wag of the head, "None of that. I won't stand it."

"Promise not to plague Fan, and I 'll let you out."

"Won't promise anything. Give me that key, or I 'll make you."

"Now, Tom, don't be savage. I only want to keep you out of a scrape, for Fan will be raging if you go. Take off her things, and I 'll give up."

Tom vouchsafed no reply, but marched to the other door, which was fast, as Polly knew, looked out of the three-story window, and finding no escape possible, came back with a wrathful face. "Will you give me that key?"

"No, I won't," said Polly, valiantly.

"I 'm stronger than you are; so you 'd better hand over."

"I know you are; but it 's cowardly for a great boy like you to rob a girl."

"I don't want to hurt you; but, by George! I won't stand this!"

Tom paused as Polly spoke, evidently ashamed of himself; but his temper was up, and he would n't give in. If Polly had cried a little just here, he would have yielded; unfortunately she giggled, for Tom's fierce attitude was such a funny contrast to his dress that she could n't help it. That settled the matter. No girl that ever lived should giggle at him, much less lock him up like a small child. Without a word, he made a grab at Polly's arm, for the hand holding the key was still in her, pocket. With her other hand she clutched her frock, and for a minute held on stoutly. But Tom's strong fingers were irresistible; rip went the pocket, out came the hand, and with a cry of pain from Polly, the key fell on the floor.

"It 's your own fault if you 're hurt. I did n't mean to," muttered Tom, as he hastily departed, leaving Polly to groan over her sprained wrist. He went down, but not into the parlor, for somehow the joke seemed to have lost its relish; so he made the girls in the kitchen laugh, and then crept up the back way, hoping to make it all right with Polly. But she had gone to grandma's room, for, though the old lady was out, it seemed a refuge. He had just time to get things in order, when Fanny came up, crosser than ever; for Trix had been telling her of all sorts of fun in which she might have had a share, if Polly had held her tongue.

"Where is she?" asked Fan, wishing to vent her vexation on her friend.

"Moping in her room, I suppose," replied Tom, who was discovered reading studiously.

Now, while this had been happening, Maud had been getting into hot water also; for when her maid left her, to see a friend below, Miss Maud paraded into Polly's room, and solaced herself with mischief. In an evil hour Polly had let her play boat in her big trunk, which stood empty. Since then Polly had stored some of her most private treasures in the upper tray, so that she might feel sure they were safe from all eyes. She had forgotten to lock the trunk, and when Maud raised the lid to begin her voyage, several objects of interest met her eyes. She was deep in her researches when Fan came in and looked over her shoulder, feeling too cross with Polly to chide Maud.

As Polly had no money for presents, she had exerted her ingenuity to devise all sorts of gifts, hoping by quantity to atone for any shortcomings in quality. Some of her attempts were successful, others were failures; but she kept them all, fine or funny, knowing the children at home would enjoy anything new. Some of Maud's cast-off toys had been neatly mended for Kitty; some of Fan's old ribbons and laces were converted into dolls' finery; and Tom's little figures, whittled out of wood in idle minutes, were laid away to show Will what could be done with a knife.

"What rubbish!" said Fanny.

"Queer girl, is n't she?" added Tom, who had followed to see what was going on.

"Don't you laugh at Polly's things. She makes nicer dolls than you, Fan; and she can wite and dwar ever so much better than Tom," cried Maud. "How do you know? I never saw her draw," said Tom.

"Here 's a book with lots of pictures in it. I can't wead the witing; but the pictures are so funny."

Eager to display her friend's accomplishments, Maud pulled out a fat little book, marked "Polly's Journal," and spread it in her lap.

"Only the pictures; no harm in taking a look at 'em," said Tom.

"Just one peep," answered Fanny; and the next minute both were laughing at a droll sketch of Tom in the gutter, with the big dog howling over him, and the velocipede running away. Very rough and faulty, but so funny, that it was evident Polly's sense of humor was strong. A few pages farther back came Fanny and Mr. Frank, caricatured; then grandma, carefully done; Tom reciting his battle-piece; Mr. Shaw and Polly in the park; Maud being borne away by Katy; and all the school-girls turned into ridicule with an unsparing hand.

"Sly little puss, to make fun of us behind our backs," said Fan, rather nettled by Polly's quiet retaliation for many slights from herself and friends.

"She does draw well," said Tom, looking critically at the sketch of a boy with a pleasant face, round whom Polly had drawn rays like the sun, and under which was written, "My dear Jimmy."

"You would n't admire her, if you knew what she wrote here about you," said Fanny, whose eyes had strayed to the written page opposite, and lingered there long enough to read something that excited her curiosity.

"What is it?" asked Tom, forgetting his honorable resolves for a minute.

"She says, 'I try to like Tom, and when he is pleasant we do very well; but he don't stay so long. He gets cross and rough, and disrespectful to his father and mother, and plagues us girls, and is so horrid I almost hate him. It 's very wrong, but I can't help it.' How do you like that?" asked Fanny.

"Go ahead, and see how she comes down on you, ma'am," retorted Tom, who had read on a bit.

"Does she?" And Fanny continued, rapidly: "As for Fan, I don't think we can be friends any more; for she told her father a lie, and won't forgive me for not doing so too. I used to think her a very fine girl; but I don't now. If she would be as she was when I first knew her, I should love her just the same; but she is n't kind to me; and though she is always talking about politeness, I don't think it is polite to treat company as she does me. She thinks I am odd and countrified, and I dare say I am; but I should n't laugh at a girl's clothes because she was poor, or keep her out of the way because she did n't do just as other girls do here. I see her make fun of me, and I can't feel as if I did; and I 'd go home, only it would seem ungrateful to Mr. Shaw and grandma, and I do love them dearly."

"I say, Fan, you 've got it now. Shut the book and come away," cried Tom, enjoying this broadside immensely, but feeling guilty, as well he might.

"Just one bit more," whispered Fanny, turning on a page or two, and stopping at a leaf that was blurred here and there as if tears had dropped on it.

"Sunday morning, early. Nobody is up to spoil my quiet time, and I must. write my journal, for I 've been so bad lately, I could n't bear to do it. I 'm glad my visit is most done, for things worry me here, and there is n't any one to help me get right when I get wrong. I used to envy Fanny; but I don't now, for her father and mother don't take care of her as mine do of me. She is afraid of her father, and makes her mother do as she likes. I 'm glad I came though, for I see money don't give people everything; but I 'd like a little all the same, for it is so comfortable to buy nice things. I read over my journal just now, and I 'm afraid it 's not a good one; for I have said all sorts of things about the people here, and it is n't kind. I should tear it out, only I promised to keep my diary, and I want to talk over things that puzzle me with mother. I see now that it is my fault a good deal; for I have n't been half as patient, and pleasant as I ought to be. I will truly try for the rest of the time, and be as good and grateful as I can; for I want them to like me, though I 'm only 'an old-fashioned country girl.'"

That last sentence made Fanny shut the book, with a face full of self-reproach; for she had said those words herself, in a fit of petulance, and Polly had made no answer, though her eyes filled and her cheeks burned. Fan opened her lips to say something, but not a sound followed, for there stood Polly looking at them with an expression they had never seen before.

"What are you doing with my things?" she demanded, in a low tone, while her eyes kindled and her color changed.

"Maud showed us a book she found, and we were just looking at the pictures," began Fanny, dropping it as if it burnt her fingers.

"And reading my journal, and laughing at my presents, and then putting the blame on Maud. It 's the meanest thing I ever saw; and I 'll never forgive you as long as I live!"

Polly said, this all in one indignant breath, and then as if afraid of saying too much, ran out of the room with such a look of mingled contempt, grief, and anger, that the three culprits stood dumb with shame. Tom had n't even a whistle at his command; Maud was so scared at gentle Polly's outbreak, that she sat as still as a mouse; while Fanny, conscience stricken, laid back the poor little presents with a respectful hand, for somehow the thought of Polly's poverty came over her as it never had done before; and these odds and ends, so carefully treasured up for those at home, touched Fanny, and grew beautiful in her eyes. As she laid by the little book, the confessions in it reproached her more sharply than any words Polly could have spoken; for she had laughed at her friend, had slighted her sometimes, and been unforgiving for an innocent offence. That last page, where Polly took the blame on herself, and promised to "truly try" to be more kind and patient, went to Fanny's heart, melting all the coldness away, and she could only lay her head on the trunk, sobbing, "It was n't Polly's fault; it was all mine."

Tom, still red with shame at being caught in such a scrape, left Fanny to her tears, and went manfully away to find the injured Polly, and confess his manifold transgressions. But Polly could n't be found. He searched high and low in every room, yet no sign of the girl appeared, and Tom began to get anxious. "She can't have run away home, can she?" he said to himself, as he paused before the hat-tree. There was the little round hat, and Tom gave it a remorseful smooth, remembering how many times he had tweaked it half off, or poked it over poor Polly's eyes. "Maybe she 's gone down to the office, to tell pa. 'T is n't a bit like her, though. Anyway, I 'll take a look round the corner."

Eager to get his boots, Tom pulled open the door of a dark closet under the stairs, and nearly tumbled over backward with surprise; for there, on the floor, with her head pillowed on a pair of rubbers, lay Polly in an attitude of despair. This mournful spectacle sent Tom's penitent speech straight out of his head, and with an astonished "Hullo!" he stood and stared in impressive silence. Polly was n't crying, and lay so still, that Tom began to think she might be in a fit or a faint, and bent anxiously down to inspect the pathetic bunch. A glimpse of wet eyelashes, a round cheek redder than usual, and lips parted by quick, breathing, relieved his mind upon that point; so, taking courage, he sat down on the boot-jack, and begged pardon like a man.

Now, Polly was very angry, and I think she had a right to be; but she was not resentful, and after the first flash was over, she soon began to feel better about it. It was n't easy to forgive; but, as she listened to Tom's honest voice, getting gruff with remorse now and then, she could n't harden her heart against him, or refuse to make up when he so frankly owned that it "was confounded mean to read her book that way." She liked his coming and begging pardon at once; it was a handsome thing to do; she appreciated it, and forgave him in her heart some time before she did with her lips; for, to tell the truth, Polly had a spice of girlish malice, and rather liked to see domineering Tom eat humble-pie, just enough to do him good, you know. She felt that atonement was proper, and considered it no more than just that Fan should drench a handkerchief or two with repentant tears, and that Tom should sit on a very uncomfortable seat and call himself hard names for five or ten minutes before she relented.

"Come, now, do say a word to a fellow. I 'm getting the worst of it, anyway; for there 's Fan, crying her eyes out upstairs, and here are you stowed away in a dark closet as dumb as a fish, and nobody but me to bring you both round. I 'd have cut over to the Smythes and got ma home to fix things, only it looked like backing out of the scrape; so I did n't," said Tom, as a last appeal.

Polly was glad to hear that Fan was crying. It would do her good; but she could n't help softening to Tom, who did seem in a predicament between two weeping damsels. A little smile began to dimple the cheek that was n't hidden, and then a hand came slowly out from under the curly head, and was stretched toward him silently. Tom was just going to give it a hearty shake, when he saw a red mark on the wrist, and knew what made it. His face changed, and he took the chubby hand so gently, that Polly peeped to see what it meant.

"Will you forgive that, too?" he asked, in a whisper, stroking the red wrist.

"Yes, it don't hurt much now." And Polly drew her hand away, sorry he had seen it.

"I was a beast, that 's what I was!" said Tom, in a tone of great disgust. And just at that awkward minute down tumbled his father's old beaver over his head and face, putting a comical quencher on his self-reproaches. Of course, neither could help laughing at that; and when he emerged, Polly was sitting up, looking as much better for her shower as he did for his momentary eclipse.

"Fan feels dreadfully. Will you kiss and be friends, if I trot her down?" asked Tom, remembering his fellow-sinner.

"I 'll go to her." And Polly whisked out of the closet as suddenly as she had whisked in, leaving Tom sitting on the boot-jack, with a radiant countenance.

How the girls made it up no one ever knew. But after much talking and crying, kissing and laughing, the breach was healed, and peace declared. A slight haze still lingered in the air after the storm, for Fanny was very humble and tender that evening; Tom a trifle pensive, but distressingly polite, and Polly magnanimously friendly to every one; for generous natures like to forgive, and Polly enjoyed the petting after the insult, like a very human girl.

As she was brushing her hair at bedtime there came a tap on her door and, opening it, she beheld nothing but a tall black bottle, with a strip of red flannel tied round it like a cravat, and a cocked-hat note on the cork. Inside were these lines, written in a sprawling hand with very black ink:

DEAR POLLY, Opydilldock is first-rate for sprains. You put a lot on the flannel and do up your wrist, and I guess it will be all right in the morning. Will you come a sleigh-ride tomorrow? I 'm awful sorry I hurt you.

TOM