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[Louisa May Alcott](#)

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Chapter 6 - Grandma

WHERE 'S Polly?" asked Fan one snowy afternoon, as she came into the dining-room where Tom was reposing on the sofa with his boots in the air, absorbed in one of those delightful books in which boys are cast away on desert islands, where every known fruit, vegetable and flower is in its prime all the year round: or, lost in boundless forests, where the young heroes have thrilling adventures, kill impossible beasts, and, when the author's invention gives out, suddenly find their way home, laden with tiger skins, tame buffaloes and other pleasing trophies of their prowess.

"Dun no," was Tom's brief reply, for he was just escaping from an alligator of the largest size.

"Do put down that stupid book, and let 's do something," said Fanny, after a listless stroll round the room.

"Hi, they 've got him!" was the only answer vouchsafed by the absorbed reader.

"Where 's Polly?" asked Maud, joining the party with her hands full of paper dolls all suffering for ball-dresses.

"Do get along, and don't bother me," cried Tom exasperated at the interruption.

"Then tell us where she is. I 'm sure you know, for she was down here a little while ago," said Fanny.

"Up in grandma's room, maybe."

"Provoking thing! you knew it all the time, and did n't tell, just to plague us," scolded Maud.

But Tom was now under water stabbing his alligator, and took no notice of the indignant departure of the young ladies.

"Polly 's always poking up in grandma's room. I don't see what fun there is in it," said Fanny as they went up stairs.

"Polly 's a verwy queer girl, and gwandma pets her a gwreat deal more than she does me," observed Maud, with an injured air.

"Let 's peek and see what they are doing," whispered Fan, pausing at the half-open door.

Grandma was sitting before a quaint old cabinet, the doors of which stood wide open, showing glimpses of the faded relics treasured there. On a stool, at the old lady's feet, sat Polly, looking up with intent face and eager eyes, quite absorbed in the history of a high-heeled brocade shoe which lay in her lap.

"Well, my dear," grandma was saying, "she had it on the very day that Uncle Joe came in as she sat at work, and said, 'Dolly, we must be married at once.' 'Very well, Joe,' says Aunt Dolly, and down she went to the parlor, where the minister was waiting, never stopping to change the dimity dress she wore, and was actually married with her scissors and pin-ball at her side, and her thimble on. That was in war times, 1812, my dear, and Uncle Joe was in the army, so he had to go, and he took that very little pin-ball with him. Here it is with the mark of a bullet through it, for he always said his Dolly's cushion saved his life."

"How interesting that is!" cried Polly, as she examined the faded cushion with the hole in it.

"Why, grandma, you never told me that story," said Fanny, hurrying in, finding the prospect was a pleasant one for a stormy afternoon.

"You never asked me to tell you anything, my dear, so I kept my old stories to myself," answered grandma, quietly.

"Tell some now, please. May we stay and see the funny things?" said Fan and Maud, eyeing the open cabinet with interest.

"If Polly likes; she is my company, and I am trying to entertain her, for I love to have her come," said grandma, with her old-time politeness.

"Oh, yes! do let them stay and hear the stories. I 've often told them what good times we have up here, and teased them to come, but they think it 's too quiet. Now, sit down, girls, and let grandma go on. You see I pick out something in the cabinet that looks interesting, and then she tells me about it," said Polly, eager to include the girls in her pleasures, and glad to get them interested in grandma's reminiscences, for Polly knew how happy it made the lonely old lady to live over her past, and to have the children round her.

"Here are three drawers that have not been opened yet; each take one, and choose something from it for me to tell about," said Madam, quite excited at the unusual interest in her treasures.

So the girls each opened a drawer and turned over the contents till they found something they wanted to know about. Maud was ready first, and holding up an oddly shaped linen bag, with a big blue F embroidered on it, demanded her story. Grandma smiled as she smoothed the old thing tenderly, and began her story with evident pleasure.

"My sister Nelly and I went to visit an aunt of ours, when we were little girls, but we did n't have a very good time, for she was extremely strict. One afternoon, when she had gone out to tea, and old Debby, the maid, was asleep in her room, we sat on the door-step, feeling homesick, and ready for any thing to amuse us.

"What shall we do?" said Nelly.

"Just as she spoke, a ripe plum slipped from the grass below us, as if answering her question. It was all the plum's fault, for if it had n't fallen at that minute, I never should have had the thought which popped into my mischievous mind.

" 'Let 's have as many as we want, and plague Aunt Betsey, to pay her for being so cross,' I said, giving Nelly half the great purple plum.

" 'It would be dreadful naughty,' began Nelly, 'but I guess we will,' she added, as the sweet mouthful slipped down her throat.

" 'Debby 's asleep. Come on, then, and help me shake,' I said, getting up, eager for the fun.

"We shook and shook till we got red in the face, but not one dropped, for the tree was large, and our little arms were not strong enough to stir the boughs. Then we threw stones, but only one green and one half-ripe one came down, and my last stone broke the shed window, so there was an end of that.

" 'It 's as provoking as Aunt Betsey herself,' said Nelly, as we sat down, out of breath.

" 'I wish the wind would come and blow 'em down for us,' panted I, staring up at the plums with longing eyes.

" 'If wishing would do any good, I should wish 'em in my lap at once,' added Nelly.

" 'You might as well wish 'em in your mouth and done with it, if you are too lazy to pick 'em up. If the ladder was n't too heavy we could try that,' said I, determined to have them.

" 'You know we can't stir it, so what is the use of talking about it? You proposed getting the plums, now let 's see you do it,' answered Nelly, rather crossly, for she had bitten the green plum, and it puckered her mouth.

" 'Wait a minute, and you will see me do it,' cried I, as a new thought came into my naughty head.

" 'What are you taking your shoes and socks off for? You can't climb the tree, Fan.' " 'Don't ask questions, but be ready to pick 'em up when they fall, Miss Lazybones.' "With this mysterious speech I pattered into the house bare-footed and full of my plan. Up stairs I went to a window opening on the shed roof. Out I got, and creeping carefully along till I came near the tree, I stood up, and suddenly crowed like the little rooster. Nelly looked up, and stared, and laughed, and clapped her hands when she saw what I was going to do.

" 'I 'm afraid you 'll slip and get hurt.' " 'Don't care if I do; I 'll have those plums if I break my neck doing it,' and half sliding, half walking I went down the sloping roof, till the boughs of the tree were within my reach.

"Hurrah!" cried Nelly, dancing down below, as my first shake sent a dozen plums rattling round her.

"Hurrah!" cried I, letting go one branch and trying to reach another. But as I did so my foot slipped, I tried to catch something to hold by, but found nothing, and with a cry, down I fell, like a very big plum on the grass below.

"Fortunately the shed was low, the grass was thick and the tree broke my fall, but I got a bad bump and a terrible shaking. Nelly thought I was killed, and began to cry with her mouth full. But I picked myself up in a minute, for I was used to such tumbles; and did n't mind the pain half as much as the loss of the plums.

" 'Hush! Debby will hear and spoil all the fun. I said I 'd get 'em and I have. See what lots have come down with me.' "So there had, for my fall shook the tree almost as much as it did me, and the green and purple fruit lay all about us.

"By the time the bump on my forehead had swelled as big as a nut, our aprons were half full, and we sat down to enjoy ourselves. But we did n't. O dear, no! for many of the plums were not ripe, some were hurt by the birds, some crushed in falling, and many as hard as stones. Nelly got stung by a wasp, my head began to ache, and we sat looking at one another rather dismally, when Nelly had a bright idea.

" 'Let 's cook 'em, then they 'll be good, and we can put some away in our little pails for to-morrow.' " 'That will be splendid! There 's a fire in the kitchen, Debby always leaves the kettle on, and we can use her saucepan, and I know where the sugar is, and we 'll have a grand time.' "In we went, and fell to work very quietly. It was a large, open fire-place, with the coals nicely covered up, and the big kettle simmering on the hook. We raked open the fire, put on the saucepan, and in it the best of our plums, with water enough to spoil them. But we did n't know that, and felt very important as we sat waiting for it to boil, each armed with a big spoon, while the sugar box stood between us ready to be used.

"How slow they were, to be sure! I never knew such obstinate things, for they would n't soften, though they danced about in the boiling water, and bobbed against the cover as if they were doing their best.

"The sun began to get low, we were afraid Debby would come down, and still those dreadful plums would n't look like sauce. At last they began to burst, the water got a lovely purple, we put lots of sugar in, and kept tasting till our aprons and faces were red, and our lips burnt with the hot spoons.

" 'There 's too much juice,' said Nelly, shaking her head wisely. 'It ought to be thick and nice like mamma's.' " 'I 'll pour off some of the juice, and we can drink it,' said I, feeling that I 'd made a mistake in my cooking.

"So Nelly got a bowl, and I got a towel and lifted the big saucepan carefully off. It was heavy and hot, and I was a little afraid of it, but did n't like to say so. Just as I began to pour, Debby suddenly called from the top of the stairs, 'Children, what under the sun are you doing?' It startled us both. Nelly dropped the bowl and ran. I dropped the saucepan and did n't run, for a part of the hot juice splashed upon my bare feet, and ankles, and made me scream with dreadful pain.

"Down rushed Debby to find me dancing about the kitchen with a great bump on my forehead, a big spoon in my hand, and a pair of bright purple feet. The plums were lying all over the hearth, the saucepan in the middle of the room, the basin was broken, and the sugar swimming about as if the bowl had turned itself over trying to sweeten our mess for us.

"Debby was very good to me, for she never stopped to scold, but laid me down on the old sofa, and bound up my poor little feet with oil and cotton wool. Nelly, seeing me lie white and weak, thought I was dying, and went over to the neighbor's for Aunt Betsey, and burst in upon the old ladies sitting primly at, their tea, crying, distractedly, ' 'Oh, Aunt Betsey, come quick! for the saucepan fell off the shed, and Fan's feet are all boiled purple!' "Nobody laughed at this funny message, and Aunt Betsey ran all the way home with a muffin in her hand and her ball in her pocket, though the knitting was left behind.

"I suffered a great deal, but I was n't sorry afterward, for I learned to love Aunt Betsey, who nursed me tenderly, and seemed to forget her strict ways in her anxiety for

me.

"This bag was made for my special comfort, and hung on the sofa where I lay all those weary days. Aunt kept it full of pretty patchwork or, what I liked better, ginger-nuts, and peppermint drops, to amuse me, though she did n't approve of cossetting children up, any more than I do now."

"I like that vevy well, and I wish I could have been there," was Maud's condescending remark, as she put back the little bag, after a careful peep inside, as if she hoped to find an ancient ginger-nut, or a well-preserved peppermint drop still lingering in some corner.

"We had plums enough that autumn, but did n't seem to care much about them, after all, for our prank became a household joke, and, for years, we never saw the fruit, but Nelly would look at me with a funny face, and whisper, 'Purple stockings, Fan!'"

"Thank you, ma'am," said Polly. "Now, Fan, your turn next."

"Well, I 've a bundle of old letters, and I 'd like to know if there is any story about them," answered Fanny, hoping some romance might be forthcoming.

Grandma turned over the little packet tied up with a faded pink ribbon; a dozen yellow notes written on rough, thick paper, with red wafers still adhering to the folds, showing plainly that they were written before the day of initial note-paper and self-sealing envelopes.

"They are not love-letters, deary, but notes from my mates after I left Miss Cotton's boarding-school. I don't think there is any story about them," and grandma turned them over with spectacles before the dim eyes, so young and bright when they first read the very same notes.

Fanny was about to say, "I 'll choose again," when grandma began to laugh so heartily that the girls felt sure she had caught some merry old memory which would amuse them.

"Bless my heart, I have n't thought of that frolic this forty years. Poor, dear, giddy Sally Pomroy, and she 's a great-grandmother now!" cried the old lady, after reading one of the notes, and clearing the mist off her glasses.

"Now, please tell about her; I know it 's something funny to make you laugh so," said Polly and Fan together.

"Well, it was droll, and I 'm glad I remembered it for it 's just the story to tell you young things.

"It was years ago," began grandma, briskly, "and teachers were very much stricter than they are now. The girls at Miss Cotton's were not allowed lights in their rooms after nine o'clock, never went out alone, and were expected to behave like models of propriety from morning till night.

"As you may imagine, ten young girls, full of spirits and fun, found these rules hard to keep, and made up for good behavior in public by all sorts of frolics in private.

"Miss Cotton and her brother sat in the back parlor after school was over, and the young ladies were sent to bed. Mr. John was very deaf, and Miss Priscilla very near-sighted, two convenient afflictions for the girls on some occasions, but once they proved quite the reverse, as you shall hear.

"We had been very prim for a week, and our bottled up spirits could no longer be contained; so we planed a revel after our own hearts, and set our wits to work to execute it.

"The first obstacle was surmounted in this way. As none of us could get out alone, we resolved to lower Sally from the window, for she was light and small, and very smart.

"With our combined pocket-money she was to buy nuts and candy, cake and fruit, pie, and a candle, so that we might have a light, after Betsey took ours away as usual. "We were to darken the window of the inner chamber, set a watch in the little entry, light up, and then for a good time.

"At eight o'clock on the appointed evening, several of us professed great weariness, and went to our room, leaving the rest sewing virtuously with Miss Cotton, who read Hannah More's Sacred Dramas aloud, in a way that fitted the listeners for bed as well as a dose of opium would have done.

"I am sorry to say I was one of the ringleaders; and as soon as we got up stairs, produced the rope provided for the purpose, and invited Sally to be lowered. It was an old-fashioned house, sloping down behind, and the closet window chosen by us was not many feet from the ground.

"It was a summer evening, so that at eight o'clock it was still light; but we were not afraid of being seen, for the street was a lonely one, and our only neighbors two old ladies, who put down their curtains at sunset, and never looked out till morning.

"Sally had been bribed by promises of as many 'goodies' as she could eat, and being a regular madcap, she was ready for anything.

"Tying the rope round her waist she crept out, and we let her safely down, sent a big basket after her, and saw her slip round the corner in my big sun bonnet and another girl's shawl, so that she should not be recognized.

"Then we put our night-gowns over our dresses, and were laid peacefully in bed when Betsey came up, earlier than usual; for it was evident that Miss Cotton felt a little suspicious at our sudden weariness.

"For half an hour we lay laughing and whispering, as we waited for the signal from Sally. At last we heard a cricket chirp shrilly under the window, and flying up, saw a little figure below in the twilight.

"'O, quick! quick!' cried Sally, panting with haste. 'Draw up the basket and then get me in, for I saw Mr. Cotton in the market, and ran all the way home, so that I might get in before he came.' "Up came the heavy basket, bumping and scraping on the way, and smelling, O, so nice! Down went the rope, and with a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together, we hoisted poor Sally half-way up to the window, when, sad to tell, the rope slipped and down she fell, only being saved from broken bones by the hay-cock under the window.

"'He 's coming! he 's coming! O pull me up, for mercy sake!' cried Sally, scrambling to her feet unhurt, but a good deal shaken.

"We saw a dark figure approaching, and dragged her in with more bumping and scraping, and embraced her with rapture, for we had just escaped being detected by Mr. John, whose eyes were as sharp as his ears were dull.

"We heard the front-door shut, then a murmur of voices, and then Betsey's heavy step coming up stairs.

"Under the bed went the basket, and into the beds went the conspirators, and nothing could have been more decorous than the appearance of the room when Betsey popped her head in.

"Master's an old fidget to send me travelling up again, just because he fancied he saw something amiss at the window. Nothing but a curtain flapping, or a shadder, for the poor dears is sleeping like lambs." "We heard her say this to herself, and a general titter agitated the white coverlets as she departed.

"Sally was in high feather at the success of her exploit, and danced about like an elf, as she put her night-gown on over her frock, braided her hair in funny little tails all over her head, and fastened the great red pin-cushion on her bosom for a breastpin in honor of the feast.

"The other girls went to their rooms as agreed upon, and all was soon dark and still up stairs, while Miss Cotton began to enjoy herself below, as she always did when 'her young charges' were safely disposed of.

"Then ghosts began to walk, and the mice scuttled back to their holes in alarm, for white figures glided from room to room, till all were assembled in the little chamber.

"The watch was set at the entry door, the signal agreed upon, the candle lighted, and the feast spread forth upon a newspaper on the bed, with the coverlet arranged so that it could be whisked over the refreshments at a moment's notice.

"How good everything was, to be sure! I don't think I 've eaten any pies since that had such a delicious flavor as those broken ones, eaten hastily, in that little oven of a room, with Sally making jokes and the others enjoying stolen sweets with true girlish relish. Of course it was very wicked, but I must tell the truth.

"We were just beginning on the cake when the loud scratching of a rat disturbed us.

"The signal! fly! run! hide! Hush, don't laugh!" cried several voices, and we scuttled into bed as rapidly and noiselessly as possible, with our mouths and hands full.

"A long pause, broken by more scratching; but as no one came, we decided on sending to inquire what it meant. I went and found Mary, the picket guard half asleep, and longing for her share of the feast.

"It was a real rat; I 've not made a sound. Do go and finish; I 'm tired of this," said Mary, slapping away at the mosquitoes.

"Back I hurried with the good news. Every one flew up, briskly. We lighted the candle again, and returned to our revel. The refreshments were somewhat injured by Sally's bouncing in among them, but we did n't care, and soon finished the cake.

"Now let 's have the nuts," I said, groping for the paper bag.

"They are almonds and peanuts, so we can crack them with our teeth. Be sure you get the bag by the right end," said Sally.

"I know what I 'm about," and to show her that it was all right, I gave the bag a little shake, when out flew the nuts, rattling like a hail-storm all over the uncarpeted floor.

"Now you 've done it," cried Sally, as Mary scratched like a mad rat, and a door creaked below, for Miss Cotton was not deaf.

"Such a flurry as we were in! Out went the candle, and each one rushed away with as much of the feast as she could seize in her haste. Sally dived into her bed, recklessly demolishing the last pie, and scattering the candy far and wide.

"Poor Mary was nearly caught for Miss Cotton was quicker than Betsey, and our guard had to run for her life.

"Our room was the first, and was in good order, though the two flushed faces on the pillows were rather suspicious. Miss Cotton stood staring about her, looking so funny, without her cap, that my bedfellow would have gone off in a fit of laughter, if I had not pinched her warningly.

"Young ladies, what is this unseemly noise?" "No answer from us but a faint snore. Miss Cotton marched into the next room, put the same question and received the same reply.

"In the third chamber lay Sally, and we trembled as the old lady went in. Sitting up, we peeped and listened breathlessly.

"Sarah, I command you to tell me what this all means?" "But Sally only sighed in her sleep, and muttered, wickedly, 'Ma, take me home. I 'm starved at Cotton's.' " 'Mercy on me! is the child going to have a fever?' cried the old lady, who did not observe the tell tale nuts at her feet.

"So dull, so strict! O take me home!" moaned Sally, tossing her arms and gurgling, like a naughty little gypsy.

"That last bit of acting upset the whole concern, for as she tossed her arms she showed the big red cushion on her breast. Near-sighted as she was, that ridiculous object could not escape Miss Cotton, neither did the orange that rolled out from the pillow, nor the boots appearing at the foot of the bed.

"With sudden energy the old lady plucked off the cover, and there lay Sally with her hair dressed . In Topsy, her absurd breast-pin and her dusty boots, among papers of candy, bits of pie and cake, oranges and apples, and a candle upside down burning a hole in the sheet.

"At the sound of Miss Cotton's horrified exclamation Sally woke up, and began laughing so merrily that none of us could resist following her example, and the rooms rang with merriment far many minutes. I really don't know when we should have stopped if Sally had not got choked with the nut she had in her mouth, and so frightened us nearly out of our wits."

"What became of the things, and how were you punished?" asked Fan, in the middle of her laughter.

"The remains of the feast went to the pig, and we were kept on bread and water for three days."

"Did that cure you?"

"Oh, dear, no! we had half a dozen other frolics that very summer; and although I cannot help laughing at the remembrance of this, you must not think, child, that I approve of such conduct, or excuse it. No, no, my dear, far from it."

"I call that a, tip-top story! Drive on, grandma, and tell one about boys," broke in Tom, and Tom astride of a chair listening and laughing with all his might, for his book had come to an end, and he had joined the party unobserved.

"Wait for your turn, Tommy. Now, Polly, dear, what will you have?" said grandma, looking, so lively and happy, that it was very evident "reminiscing" did her good.

"Let mine come last, and tell one for Tom next," said Polly, looking round, and beckoning him nearer.

He came and sat himself cross-legged on the floor, before the lower drawer of the cabinet, which grandma opened for him, saying, with a benign stroke of the curly head, "There, dear, that 's where I keep the little memorials of my brother Jack. Poor lad, he was lost at sea, you know. Well, choose anything you like, and I 'll try to remember a story about it."

Tom made a rapid rummage, and fished up a little broken pistol.

"There, that 's the chap for me! Wish it was n't spoilt, then we 'd have fun popping away at the cats in the yard. Now, then, grandma."

"I remember one of Jack's pranks, when that was used with great effect," said grandma, after a thoughtful pause, during which Tom teased the girls by snapping the lock of the pistol in their faces.

"Once upon a time," continued Madam, much flattered by the row of interested faces before her, "my father went away on business, leaving mother, aunt, and us girls to Jack's care. Very proud he was, to be sure, of the responsibility, and the first thing he did was to load that pistol and keep it by his bed, in our great worryment, for we feared he 'd kill himself with it. For a week all went well; then we were startled by the news that robbers were about. All sorts of stories flew through the town (we were living in the country then); some said that certain houses were marked with a black cross, and those were always robbed; others, that there was a boy in the gang, for windows, so small that they were considered safe, were entered by some little rogue. At one place the thieves had a supper, and left ham and cake in the front yard. Mrs. Jones found Mrs. Smith's shawl in her orchard, with a hammer and an unknown teapot near it. One man reported that some one tapped at his window, in the night, saying, softly, 'Is anyone here?' and when he looked out, two men were seen to run down the road.

"We lived just out of town, in a lonely place; the house was old, with convenient little back windows, and five outside doors. Jack was the only man about the place, and he was barely thirteen. Mother and aunt were very timid, and the children weren't old enough to be of any use, so Jack and I were the home-guard, and vowed to defend the family manfully."

"Good for you! Hope the fellows came!" cried Tom, charmed with this opening.

"One day, an ill-looking man came in and asked for food," continued grandma, with a mysterious nod; "and while he ate, I saw him glance sharply about from the wooden buttons on the back-doors, to the silver urn and tankards on the dining-room sideboard. A strong suspicion took possession of me, and I watched him as a cat does a mouse.

"He came to examine the premises, I 'm sure of it, but we will be ready for him," I said, fiercely, as I told the family about him.

"This fancy haunted us all, and our preparations were very funny. Mother borrowed a rattle, and kept it under her pillow. Aunt took a big bell to bed with her; the children had little Tip, the terrier, to sleep in their room; while Jack and I mounted guard, he with the pistol, and I with a hatchet, for I did n't like fire-arms. Bidy, who slept in the attic, practised getting out on the shed roof, so that she might run away at the first alarm. Every night we arranged pit-falls for the robbers, and all filed up to bed, bearing plate, money, weapons, and things to barricade with, as if we lived in war times.

"We waited a week and no one came, so we began to feel rather slighted, for other people got 'a scare,' as Tom says, and after all our preparations we really felt a trifle disappointed that we had had no chance to show our courage. At last a black mark was found upon our door, and a great panic ensued, for we felt that now our time had come.

"That night we put a tub of water at the bottom of the back-stairs, and a pile of tin pans at the top of the front stairs, so that any attempt to come up would produce a splash or a rattle. Bells were hung on door handles, sticks of wood piled up in dark corners for robbers to fall over, and the family retired, all armed and all provided with lamps and matches.

"Jack and I left our doors open, and kept asking one another if we did n't hear something, till he fell asleep. I was wakeful and lay listening to the crickets till the clock struck twelve; then I got drowsy, and was just dropping off when the sound of steps outside woke me up staring wide awake. Creeping to the window I was in time to see by the dim moonlight a shadow glide round the corner and disappear. A queer little thrill went over me, but I resolved to keep quiet till I was sure something was wrong, for I had given so many false alarms, I did n't want Jack to laugh at me again. Popping my head out of the door, I listened, and presently heard a scraping sound near the shed.

" 'There they are; but I won't rouse the house till the bell rings or the pans fall. The rogues can't go far without a clatter of some sort, and if we could only catch one of them we should get the reward and a deal of glory,' I said to myself, grasping my hatchet firmly.

"A door closed softly below, and a step came creeping towards the back-stairs. Sure now of my prey, I was just about to scream 'Jack!' when something went splash into the tub at the foot of the back-stairs.

"In a minute every one was awake and up, for Jack fired his pistol before he was half out of bed, and roared 'Fire!' so loud it roused the house. Mother sprung her rattle, aunt rang her bell, Jip barked like mad, and we all screamed, while from below came up a regular Irish howl.

"Some one brought a lamp, and we peeped anxiously down, to see our own stupid Bidy sitting in the tub wringing her hands and wailing dismally.

" 'Och, murther, and it 's kilt I am! The saints be about us! how iver did I come forninst this say iv wather, just crapin in quiet afther a bit iv sthroll wid Mike Mahoney, me own b'y, that 's to marry me intirely, come Saint Patrick's day nixt.' "We laughed so we could hardly fish the poor thing up, or listen while she explained that she had slipped out of her window for a word with Mike, and found it fastened when she wanted to come back, so she had sat on the roof, trying to discover the cause of this mysterious barring out, till she was tired, when she prowled round the house till she found a cellar window unfastened, after all our care, and got in quite cleverly, she thought; but the tub was a new arrangement which she knew nothing about; and when she fell into the 'say,' she was bewildered and could only howl.

"This was not all the damage either, for aunt fainted with the fright, mother cut her hand with a broken lamp, the children took cold hopping about on the wet stairs, Jip barked himself sick, I sprained my ankle, and Jack not only smashed a looking-glass with his bullets, but spoilt his pistol by the heavy charge put in it. After the damages were repaired and the flurry was well over, Jack confessed that he had marked the door for fun, and shut Bidy out as a punishment for 'gallivanting,' of which he did n't approve. Such a rogue as that boy was!"

"But did n't the robbers ever come?" cried Tom, enjoying the joke, but feeling defrauded of the fight.

"Never, my dear; but we had our 'scare,' and tested our courage, and that was a great satisfaction, of course," answered grandma, placidly.

"Well, I think you were the bravest of the lot. I 'd like to have seen you flourishing round there with your hatchet," added Tom, admiringly, and the old lady looked as much pleased with the compliment as if she had been a girl.

"I choose this," said Polly, holding up a long white kid glove, shrunken and yellow with time, but looking as if it had a history.

"Ah, that now has a story worth telling!" cried grandma; adding, proudly, "Treat that old glove respectfully, my children, for Lafayette's honored hand has touched it."

"Oh, grandma, did you wear it? Did you see him? Do tell us all about it, and that will be the best of the whole," cried Polly, who loved history, and knew a good deal about the gallant Frenchman and his brave life.

Grandma loved to tell this story, and always assumed her most imposing air to do honor to her theme. Drawing herself up, therefore, she folded her hands, and after two or three little "hems," began with an absent look, as if her eyes beheld a far-away time, which brightened as she gazed.

"The first visit of Lafayette was before my time, of course, but I heard so much about it from my grandfather that I really felt as if I 'd seen it all. Our Aunt Hancock lived in the Governor's house, on Beacon Hill, at that time." Here the old lady bridled up still more, for she was very proud of "our aunt." "Ah, my dears, those were the good old times!" she continued, with a sigh. "Such dinners and tea parties, such damask table cloths and fine plate, such solid, handsome furniture and elegant carriages; aunt's was lined with red silk velvet, and when the coach was taken away from her at the Governor's death, she just ripped out the lining, and we girls had spencers made of it. Dear heart, how well I remember playing in aunt's great garden, and chasing Jack up and down those winding stairs; and my blessed father, in his plum-colored coat and knee buckles, and the queue I used to tie up for him every day, handing aunt in to dinner, looking so dignified and splendid."

Grandma seemed to forget her story for a minute, and become a little girl again, among the playmates dead and gone so many years. Polly motioned the others to be quiet, and no one spoke till the old lady, with a long sigh, came back to the present, and went on.

"Well, as I was saying, the Governor wanted to give a breakfast to the French officers, and Madam, who was a hospitable soul, got up a splendid one for them. But by some mistake, or accident, it was discovered at the last minute that there was no milk.

"A great deal was needed, and very little could be bought or borrowed, so despair fell upon the cooks and maids, and the great breakfast would have been a failure, if Madam, with the presence of mind of her sex, had not suddenly bethought herself of the cows feeding on the Common.

"To be sure, they belonged to her neighbors, and there was no time to ask leave, but it was a national affair; our allies must be fed; and feeling sure that her patriotic friends would gladly lay their cows on the altar of their country, Madam Hancock covered herself with glory, by calmly issuing the command, 'Milk 'em!' "It was done, to the great astonishment of the cows, and the entire satisfaction of the guests, among whom was Lafayette.

"This milking feat was such a good joke, that no one seems to have remembered much about the great man, though one of his officers, a count, signaled himself by getting very tipsy, and going to bed with his boots and spurs on, which caused the destruction of aunt's best yellow damask coverlet, for the restless sleeper kicked it into rags by morning.

"Aunt valued it very much, even in its tattered condition, and kept it a long while, as a memorial of her distinguished guests.

"The time when I saw Lafayette was in 1825, and there were no tipsy counts then. Uncle Hancock (a sweet man, my dears, though some call him mean now-a-days) was dead, and aunt had married Captain Scott.

"It was not at all the thing for her to do; however, that 's neither here nor there. She was living in Federal Street at the time, a most aristocratic street then, children, and we lived close by.

"Old Josiah Quincy was mayor of the city, and he sent aunt word that the Marquis Lafayette wished to pay his respects to her.

"Of course she was delighted, and we all flew about to make ready for him. Aunt was an old lady, but she made a grand toilet, and was as anxious to look well as any girl."

"What did she wear?" asked Fan, with interest.

"She wore a steel-colored satin, trimmed with black lace, and on her cap was pinned a Lafayette badge of white satin.

"I never shall forget how b-e-a-utifully she looked as she sat in state on the front parlor sofa, right under a great portrait of her first husband; and on either side of her sat Madam Storer and Madam Williams, elegant to behold, in their stiff silks, rich lace, and stately turbans. We don't see such splendid old ladies now-a-days "

"I think we do sometimes," said Polly, slyly.

Grandma shook her head, but it pleased her very much to be admired, for she had been a beauty in her day.

"We girls had dressed the house with flowers; old Mr. Coolidge sent in a clothes-basket full. Joe Joy provided the badges, and aunt got out some of the Revolutionary wine from the old Beacon Street cellar.

"I wore my green and white palmyrine, my hair bowed high, the beautiful leg-o'-mutton sleeves that were so becoming, and these very gloves.

"Well, by-and-by the General, escorted by the Mayor, drove up. Dear me, I see him now! a little old man in nankeen trousers and vest, a long blue coat and ruffled shirt, leaning on his cane, for he was lame, and smiling and bowing like a true Frenchman.

"As he approached, the three old ladies rose, and courtesied with the utmost dignity. Lafayette bowed first to the Governor's picture, then to the Governor's widow, and kissed her hand.

"That was droll; for on the back of her glove was stamped Lafayette's likeness, and the gallant old gentleman kissed his own face.

"Then some of the young ladies were presented, and, as if to escape any further self-salutations, the marquis kissed the pretty girls on the cheek.

"Yes, my dears, here is just the spot where the dear old man saluted me. I 'm quite as proud of it now as I was then, for he was a brave, good man, and helped us in our trouble.

"He did not stay long, but we were very merry, drinking his health, receiving his compliments, and enjoying the honor he did us.

"Down in the street there was a crowd, of course, and when he left they wanted to take out the horses and drag him home in triumph. But he did n't wish it; and while that affair was being arranged, we girls had been pelting him with the flowers which we tore from the vases, the walls, and our own topknots, to scatter over him.

"He liked that, and laughed, and waved his hand to us, while we ran, and pelted, and begged him to come again.

"We young folks quite lost our heads that night, and I have n't a very clear idea of how I got home. The last thing I remember was hanging out of the window with a flock of girls, watching the carriage roll away, while the crowd cheered as if they were mad.

"Bless my heart, it seems as if I heard 'em now! 'Hurrah for Lafayette and Mayor Quincy! Hurrah for Madam Hancock and the pretty girls! Hurrah for Col. May!' 'Three cheers for Boston! Now, then! Hurrah! Hurrah! Hurrah! "

And here the old lady stopped, out of breath, with her cap askew, her spectacles on the end of her nose, and her knitting much the worse for being waved enthusiastically in the air, while she hung over the arm of her chair, shrilly cheering an imaginary Lafayette. The girls clapped their hands, and Tom hurrahed with all his might, saying, when he got his breath, "Lafayette was a regular old trump; I always liked him."

"My dear! what a disrespectful way to speak of that great man," said grandma, shocked at Young America's irreverence.

"Well, he was a trump, anyway, so why not call him one?" asked Tom, feeling that the objectionable word was all that could be desired.

"What queer gloves you wore then," interrupted Fanny, who had been trying on the much-honored glove, and finding it a tight fit.

"Much better and cheaper than we have now," returned grandma, ready to defend "the good old times" against every insinuation. "You are an extravagant set now-a-days, and I really don't know what you are coming to. By the way, I 've got somewhere two letters written by two young ladies, one in 1517, and the other in 1868. The contrast between the two will amuse you, I think."

After a little search, grandma produced an old portfolio, and selecting the papers, read the following letter, written by Anne Boleyn before her marriage to Henry VIII, and now in the possession of a celebrated antiquarian:

DEAR MARY, I have been in town almost a month, yet I cannot say I have found anything in London extremely agreeable. We rise so late in the morning, seldom before six o'clock, and sit up so late at night, being scarcely in bed before ten, that I am quite sick of it; and was it not for the abundance of fine things I am every day getting I should be impatient of returning into the country.

My indulgent mother bought me, yesterday, at a merchant's in Cheapside, three new shifts, that cost fourteen pence an ell, and I am to have a pair of new stuff shoes, for my Lord of Norfolk's ball, which will be three shillings.

The irregular life I have led since my coming to this place has quite destroyed my appetite. You know I could manage a pound of bacon and a tankard of good ale for my breakfast, in the country, but in London I find it difficult to get through half the quantity, though I must own I am generally eager enough for the dinner hour, which is here delayed till twelve, in your polite society.

I played at hot cockles, last night, at my Lord of Leicester's. The Lord of Surrey was there, a very elegant young man, who sung a song of his own composition, on the "Lord of Kildare's Daughter." It was much approved, and my brother whispered me that the fair Geraldine, for so my Lord of Surrey calls his sweetheart, is the finest woman of the age. I should be glad to see her, for I hear she is good as she is beautiful.

Pray take care of the poultry during my absence. Poor things! I always fed them myself; and if Margery has knitted me the crimson worsted mittens, I should be glad if they were sent up the first opportunity.

Adieu, dear Mary. I am just going to mass, and you shall speedily have the prayers, as you have now the kindest love of your own ANNE BOLEYN.

"Up before six, and think it late to go to bed at ten! What a countrified thing Anne must have been. Bacon and ale for breakfast, and dinner at twelve; how very queer to live so!" cried Fanny. "Lord Surrey and Lord Leicester sound fine, but hot cockles, and red mittens, and shoes for three shillings, are horrid."

"I like it," said Polly, thoughtfully, "and I 'm glad poor Anne had a little fun before her troubles began. May I copy that letter some time, grandma?"

"Yes, dear, and welcome. Now, here 's the other, by a modern girl on her first visit to London. This will suit you better, Fan," and grandma read what a friend had sent her as a pendant to Anne's little picture of London life long ago:

MY DEAREST CONSTANCE, After three months of intense excitement I snatch a leisure moment to tell you how much I enjoy my first visit to London. Having been educated abroad, it really seems like coming to a strange city. At first the smoke, dirt and noise were very disagreeable, but I soon got used to these things, and now find all I see perfectly charming.

We plunged at once into a whirl of gayety and I have had no time to think of anything but pleasure. It is the height of the season, and every hour is engaged either in going to balls, concerts, theatres, f^tes and church, or in preparing for them. We often go to two or three parties in an evening, and seldom get home till morning, so of course we don't rise till noon next day. This leaves very little time for our drives, shopping, and calls before dinner at eight, and then the evening gayeties begin again.

At a ball at Lady Russell's last night, I saw the Prince of Wales, and danced the set with him. He is growing stout, and looks dissipated. I was disappointed in him, for neither in appearance nor conversation was he at all princely. I was introduced to a very brilliant and delightful young gentleman from America. I was charmed with him, and rather surprised to learn that he wrote the poems which were so much admired last season, also that he is the son of a rich tailor. How odd these Americans are, with their money, and talent, and independence!

O my dear, I must not forget to tell you the great event of my first season. I am to be presented at the next Drawing Room! Think how absorbed I must be in preparation for this grand affair. Mamma is resolved that I shall do her credit, and we have spent the last two weeks driving about from milliners to mantua-makers, from merchants to jewellers. I am to wear white satin and plumes, pearls and roses. My dress will cost a hundred pounds or more, and is very elegant.

My cousins and friends lavish lovely things upon me, and you will open your unsophisticated eyes when I display my silks and laces, trinkets and French hats, not to mention billet doux, photographs, and other relics of a young belle's first season.

You ask if I ever think of home. I really have n't time, but I do sometimes long a little for the quiet, the pure air and the girlish amusements I used to enjoy so much. One gets pale, and old, and sadly fagged out, with all this dissipation, pleasant as it is. I feel quite blas, already.

If you could send me the rosy cheeks, bright eyes, and gay spirits I always had at home, I 'd thank you. As you cannot do that, please send me a bottle of June rain water, for my maid tells me it is better than any cosmetic for the complexion, and mine is getting ruined by late hours.

I fancy some fruit off our own trees would suit me, for I have no appetite, and mamma is quite desol,e about me. One cannot live on French cookery without dyspepsia, and one can get nothing simple here, for food, like everything else, is regulated by the fashion.

Adieu, ma chSre, I must dress for church. I only wish you could see my new hat and go with me, for Lord Rockingham promised to be there.

Adieu, yours eternally, FLORENCE.

"Yes, I do like that better, and I wish I had been in this girl's place, don't you, Polly?" said Fan, as grandma took off her glasses.

"I should love to go to London, and have a good time, but I don't think I should care about spending ever so much money, or going to Court. Maybe I might when I got there, for I do like fun and splendor," added honest Polly, feeling that pleasure was a very tempting thing.

"Grandma looks tired; let 's go and play in the dwying-woom," said Maud, who found the conversation getting beyond her depth.

"Let us all kiss and thank grandma, for amusing us so nicely, before we go," whispered Polly. Maud and Fanny agreed, and grandma looked so gratified by their thanks, that Tom followed suit, merely waiting till "those girls" were out of sight, to give the old lady a hearty hug, and a kiss on the very cheek Lafayette had saluted.

When he reached the play-room Polly was sitting in the swing, saying, very earnestly, "I always told you it was nice up in grandma's room, and now you see it is. I wish you 'd go oftener; she admires to have you, and likes to tell stories and do pleasant things, only she thinks you don't care for her quiet sort of fun. I do, anyway, and I think she 's the kindest, best old lady that ever lived, and I love her dearly!"

"I did n't say she was n't, only old people are sort of tedious and fussy, so I keep out of their way," said Fanny.

"Well, you ought not to, and you miss lots of pleasant times. My mother says we ought to be kind and patient and respectful to all old folks just because they are old, and I always mean to be."

"Your mother 's everlastingly preaching," muttered Fan, nettled by the consciousness of her own shortcomings with regard to grandma.

"She don't preach!" cried Polly, firing up like a flash; "she only explains things to us, and helps us be good, and never scolds, and I 'd rather have her than any other mother in the world, though she don't wear velvet cloaks and splendid bonnets, so now!"

"Go it, Polly!" called Tom, who was gracefully hanging head downward from the bar put up for his special benefit.

"Polly 's mad! Polly 's mad!" sung Maud, skipping rope round the room.

"If Mr. Sydney could see you now he would n't think you such an angel any more," added Fanny, tossing a bean-bag and her head at the same time.

Polly was mad, her face was very red, her eyes very bright and her lips twitched, but she held her tongue and began to swing as hard as she could, fearing to say something she would be sorry for afterward. For a few minutes no one spoke, Tom whistled and Maud hummed but Fan and Polly were each soberly thinking of something, for they had reached an age when children, girls especially, begin to observe, contrast, and speculate upon the words, acts, manners, and looks of those about them. A good deal of thinking goes on in the heads of these shrewd little folks, and the elders should mind their ways, for they get criticised pretty sharply and imitated very closely.

Two little things had happened that day, and the influence of a few words, a careless action, was still working in the active minds of the girls.

Mr. Sydney had called, and while Fanny was talking with him she saw his eye rest on Polly, who sat apart watching the faces round her with the modest, intelligent look which many found so attractive. At that minute Madam Shaw came in, and stopped to speak to the little girl. Polly rose at once, and remained standing till the old lady passed on.

"Are you laughing at Polly's prim ways?" Fanny had asked, as she saw Mr. Sydney smile.

"No, I am admiring Miss Polly's fine manners," he answered in a grave, respectful tone, which had impressed Fanny very much, for Mr. Sydney was considered by all the girls as a model of good breeding, and that indescribable something which they called "elegance."

Fanny wished she had done that little thing, and won that approving look, for she valued the young man's good opinion, because it was so hard to win, by her set at least. So, when Polly talked about old people, it recalled this scene and made Fan cross.

Polly was remembering how, when Mrs. Shaw came home that day in her fine visiting costume, and Maud ran to welcome her with unusual affection, she gathered up her lustrous silk and pushed the little girl away saying, impatiently, "Don't touch me, child, your hands are dirty." Then the thought had come to Polly that the velvet cloak did n't cover a right motherly heart, that the fretful face under the nodding purple plumes was not a tender motherly face, and that the hands in the delicate primrose gloves had put away something very sweet and precious. She thought of another woman, whose dress never was too fine for little wet cheeks to lie against, or loving little arms to press; whose face, in spite of many lines and the gray hairs above it, was never sour or unsympathetic when children's eyes turned towards it; and whose hands never were too busy, too full or too nice to welcome and serve the little sons and daughters who freely brought their small hopes and fears, sins and sorrows, to her, who dealt out justice and mercy with such wise love. "Ah, that 's a mother!" thought Polly, as the memory came warm into her heart, making her feel very rich, and pity Maud for being so poor.

This it was that caused such sudden indignation at Fanny's dreadful speech, and this it was that made quick-tempered Polly try to calm her wrath before she used toward Fanny's mother the disrespectful tone she so resented toward her own. As the swing came down after some dozen quick journeys to and fro, Polly seemed to have found a smile somewhere up aloft, for she looked toward Fan, saying pleasantly, as she paused a little in her airy exercise, "I 'm not mad now, shall I come and toss with you?"

"No, I 'll come and swing with you," answered Fanny, quick to feel the generous spirit of her friend.

"You are an angel, and I 'll never be so rude again," she added, as Polly's arm came round her, and half the seat was gladly offered.

"No, I ain't; but if I ever get at all like one, it will be 'mother's preaching' that did it," said Polly, with a happy laugh.

"Good for you, Polly Peacemaker," cried Tom, quoting his father, and giving them a grand push as the most appropriate way of expressing his approbation of the sentiment.

Nothing more was said; but from that day there slowly crept into the family more respect for grandma, more forbearance with her infirmities, more interest in her little stories, and many a pleasant gossip did the dear old lady enjoy with the children as they gathered round her fire, solitary so long.