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[An Old-Fashioned Girl](#)

[Louisa May Alcott](#)

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Chapter 8 - Six Years Afterward

"WHAT do you think Polly is going to do this winter?" exclaimed Fanny, looking up from the letter she had been eagerly reading.

"Going to deliver lectures on Woman's Rights," said the young gentleman who was carefully examining his luxuriant crop of decidedly auburn hair, as he lounged with both elbows on the chimney-piece.

"Going to set her cap for some young minister and marry him in the spring," added Mrs. Shaw, whose mind ran a good deal upon match-making just now.

"I think she is going to stay at home, and do all the work, 'cause servants cost so much; it would be just like her," observed Maud, who could pronounce the letter R now.

"It 's my opinion she is going to open a school, or something of that sort, to help those brothers of hers along," said Mr. Shaw, who had put down his paper at the sound of Polly's name.

"Every one of you wrong, though papa comes nearest the truth," cried Fanny; "she is going to give music lessons, and support herself, so that Will may go to college. He is the studious one, and Polly is very proud of him. Ned, the other brother, has a business talent, and don't care for books, so he has gone out West, and will make his own way anywhere. Polly says she is n't needed at home now, the family is so small, and Kitty can take her place nicely; so she is actually going to earn her own living, and hand over her share of the family income to Will. What a martyr that girl does make of herself," and Fanny looked as solemn as if Polly had proposed some awful self-sacrifice.

"She is a sensible, brave-hearted girl, and I respect her for doing it," said Mr. Shaw, emphatically. "One never knows what may happen, and it does no harm for young people to learn to be independent."

"If she is as pretty as she was last time I saw her, she 'll get pupils fast enough. I would n't mind taking lessons myself," was the gracious observation of Shaw, Jr., as he turned from the mirror, with the soothing certainty that his objectionable hair actually was growing darker.

"She would n't take you at any price," said Fanny, remembering Polly's look of disappointment and disapproval when she came on her last visit and found him an unmistakable dandy.

"You just wait and see," was the placid reply.

"If Polly does carry out her plan, I wish Maud to take lessons of her; Fanny can do as she likes, but it would please me very much to have one of my girls sing as Polly sings. It suits old people better than your opera things, and mother used to enjoy it so much."

As he spoke, Mr. Shaw's eye turned toward the corner of the fire where grandma used to sit. The easy-chair was empty now, the kind old face was gone, and nothing but a very tender memory remained.

"I 'd like to learn, papa, and Polly is a splendid teacher, I know; she 's always so patient, and makes everything so pleasant. I do hope she will get scholars enough to begin right away," said Maud.

"When is she coming?" asked Mrs. Shaw, quite willing to help Polly, but privately resolving that Maud should be finished off by the most fashionable master in the city.

"She does n't say. She thanks me for asking her here, as usual, but says she shall go right to work and had better begin with her own little room at once. Won't it seem strange to have Polly in town, and yet not with us?"

"We 'll get her somehow. The little room will cost something, and she can stay with us just as well as not, even if she does teach. Tell her I say so," said Mr. Shaw.

"She won't come, I know; for if she undertakes to be independent, she 'll do it in the most thorough manner," answered Fanny, and Mrs. Shaw sincerely hoped she would. It was all very well to patronize the little music-teacher, but it was not so pleasant to have her settled in the family.

"I shall do what I can for her among my friends, and I dare say she will get on very well with young pupils to begin with. If she starts right, puts her terms high enough, and gets a few good names to give her the entrance into our first families, I don't doubt she will do nicely, for I must say Polly has the manners of a lady," observed Mrs. Shaw.

"She 's a mighty taking little body, and I 'm glad she 's to be in town, though I 'd like it better if she did n't bother about teaching, but just stayed here and enjoyed herself," said Tom, lazily.

"I 've no doubt she would feel highly honored to be allowed to devote her time to your amusement; but she can't afford expensive luxuries, and she don't approve of flirting, so you will have to let her go her own way, and refresh herself with such glimpses of you as her engagements permit," answered Fanny, in the sarcastic tone which was becoming habitual to her.

"You are getting to be a regular old maid, Fan; as sharp as a lemon, and twice as sour," returned Tom, looking down at her with an air of calm superiority.

"Do be quiet, children; you know I can't bear anything like contention. Maud, give me my Shetland shawl, and put a cushion at my back."

As Maud obeyed her mother, with a reproving look at her erring brother and sister, a pause followed, for which every one seemed grateful. They were sitting about the fire after dinner, and all looked as if a little sunshine would do them good. It had been a dull November day, but all of a sudden the clouds lifted, and a bright ray shot into the room. Every one turned involuntarily to welcome it, and every one cried out, "Why, Polly!" for there on the threshold stood a bright-faced girl, smiling as if there was no

such thing as November weather in the world.

"You dear thing, when did you come?" cried Fanny, kissing both the blooming cheeks with real affection, while the rest hovered near, waiting for a chance.

"I came yesterday, and have been getting my nest in order; but I could n't keep away any longer, so I ran up to say 'How do you do?'" answered Polly, in the cheery voice that did one's heart good to hear.

"My Polly always brings the sunshine with her," and Mr. Shaw held out his hands to his little friend, for she was his favorite still.

It was good to see her put both arms about his neck, and give him a tender kiss, that said a great deal, for grandma had died since Polly met him last and she longed to comfort him, seeing how gray and old he had grown.

If Tom had had any thoughts of following his father's example, something in Polly's manner made him change his mind, and shake hands with a hearty "I 'm very glad to see you, Polly," adding to himself, as he looked at the face in the modest little bonnet: "Prettier than ever, by Jove!"

There was something more than mere prettiness in Polly's face, though Tom had not learned to see it yet. The blue eyes were clear and steady, the fresh mouth frank and sweet, the white chin was a very firm one in spite of the dimple, and the smooth forehead under the little curls had a broad, benevolent arch; while all about the face were those unmistakable lines and curves which can make even a plain countenance comely, by breathing into it the beauty of a lovely character. Polly had grown up, but she had no more style now than in the days of the round hat and rough coat, for she was all in gray, like a young Quakeress, with no ornament but a blue bow at the throat and another in the hair. Yet the plain suit became her excellently, and one never thought of the dress, looking at the active figure that wore it, for the freedom of her childhood gave to Polly that good gift, health, and every movement was full of the vigor, grace, and ease, which nothing else can so surely bestow. A happy soul in a healthy body is a rare sight in these days, when doctors flourish and every one is ill, and this pleasant union was the charm which Polly possessed without knowing it.

"It does seem so good to have you here again," said Maud, cuddling Polly's cold hand, as she sat at her feet, when she was fairly established between Fanny and Mr. Shaw, while Tom leaned on the back of his mother's chair, and enjoyed the prospect.

"How do you get on? When do you begin? Where is your nest? Now tell all about it," began Fanny, who was full of curiosity about the new plan.

"I shall get on very well, I think, for I 've got twelve scholars to begin with, all able to pay a good price, and I shall give my first lesson on Monday."

"Don't you dread it?" asked Fanny.

"Not much; why should I?" answered Polly, stoutly.

"Well, I don't know; it 's a new thing, and must be a little bit hard at first," stammered Fanny, not liking to say that working for one's living seemed a dreadful hardship to her.

"It will be tiresome, of course, but I shall get used to it; I shall like the exercise, and the new people and places I must see will amuse me. Then the independence will be delightful, and if I can save a little to help Kitty along with, that will be best of all."

Polly's face shone as if the prospect was full of pleasure instead of work, and the hearty good will with which she undertook the new task, seemed to dignify her humble hopes and plans, and make them interesting in the sight of others.

"Who have you got for pupils?" asked Mrs. Shaw, forgetting her nerves for a minute.

Polly named her list, and took a secret satisfaction in seeing the impression which certain names made upon her hearers.

"How in the world did you get the Davenports and the Greys, my dear?" said Mrs. Shaw, sitting erect in her surprise.

"Mrs. Davenport and mother are relations, you know."

"You never told us that before!" "The Davenports have been away some years, and I forgot all about them. But when I was making my plan, I knew I must have a good name or two to set me going, so I just wrote and asked Mrs. D. if she would help me. She came and saw us and was very kind, and has got these pupils for me, like a dear, good woman as she is."

"Where did you learn so much worldly wisdom, Polly?" asked Mr. Shaw, as his wife fell back in her chair, and took out her salts, as if this discovery had been too much for her.

"I learnt it here, sir," answered Polly, laughing. "I used to think patronage and things of that sort very disagreeable and not worth having, but I 've got wiser, and to a certain extent I 'm glad to use whatever advantages I have in my power, if they can be honestly got."

"Why did n't you let us help you in the beginning? We should have been very glad to, I 'm sure," put in Mrs. Shaw, who quite burned to be known as a joint patroness with Mrs. Davenport.

"I know you would, but you have all been so kind to me I did n't want to trouble you with my little plans till the first steps were taken. Besides, I did n't know as you would like to recommend me as a teacher, though you like me well enough as plain Polly."

"My dear, of course I would, and we want you to take Maud at once, and teach her your sweet songs. She has a fine voice, and is really suffering for a teacher."

A slight smile passed over Polly's face as she returned her thanks for the new pupil, for she remembered a time when Mrs. Shaw considered her "sweet songs" quite unfit for a fashionable young lady's repertoire. "Where is your room?" asked Maud.

"My old friend Miss Mills has taken me in, and I am nicely settled. Mother did n't like the idea of my going to a strange boarding-house, so Miss Mills kindly made a place for me. You know she lets her rooms without board, but she is going to give me my dinners, and I 'm to get my own breakfast and tea, quite independently. I like that way, and it 's very little trouble, my habits are so simple; a bowl of bread and milk night and morning, with baked apples or something of that sort, is all I want, and I can have it when I like."

"Is your room comfortably furnished? Can't we lend you anything, my dear? An easy-chair now, or a little couch, so necessary when one comes in tired," said Mrs. Shaw,

taking unusual interest in the affair.

"Thank you, but I don't need anything, for I brought all sorts of home comforts with me. Oh, Fan, you ought to have seen my triumphal entry into the city, sitting among my goods and chattels, in a farmer's cart." Polly's laugh was so infectious that every one smiled and forgot to be shocked at her performance. "Yes," she added, "I kept wishing I could meet you, just to see your horrified face when you saw me sitting on my little sofa, with boxes and bundles all round me, a bird-cage on one side, a fishing basket, with a kitten's head popping in and out of the hole, on the other side, and jolly old Mr. Brown, in his blue frock, perched on a keg of apples in front. It was a lovely bright day, and I enjoyed the ride immensely, for we had all sorts of adventures."

"Oh, tell about it," begged Maud, when the general laugh at Polly's picture had subsided.

"Well, in the first place, we forgot my ivy, and Kitty came running after me, with it. Then we started again, but were soon stopped by a great shouting, and there was Will racing down the hill, waving a pillow in one hand and a squash pie in the other. How we did laugh when he came up and explained that our neighbor, old Mrs. Dodd, had sent in a hop-pillow for me, in case of headache, and a pie to begin house-keeping with. She seemed so disappointed at being too late that Will promised to get them to me, if he ran all the way to town. The pillow was easily disposed of, but that pie! I do believe it was stowed in every part of the wagon, and never staid anywhere. I found it in my lap, then on the floor, next, upside down among the books, then just on the point of coasting off a trunk into the road, and at last it landed in my rocking-chair. Such a remarkable pie as it was, too, for in spite of all its wanderings, it never got spilt or broken, and we finally ate it for lunch, in order to be left in peace. Next, my kitty got away, and I had a chase over walls and brooks before I got her, while Mr. Brown sat shaking with fun, to see me run. We finished off by having the book-shelves tumble on our heads as we went down a hill, and losing my chair off behind, as we went up a hill. A shout made us pause, and, looking back, there was the poor little chair rocking all by itself in the middle of the road, while a small boy sat on the fence and whooped. It was great fun, I do assure you."

Polly had run on in her lively way, not because she thought her adventures amounted to much, but from a wish to cheer up her friends, who had struck her as looking rather dull and out of sorts, especially Mr. Shaw; and when she saw him lean back in his chair with the old hearty laugh, she was satisfied, and blessed the unlucky pie for amusing him.

"Oh, Polly, you do tell such interesting things!" sighed Maud, wiping her eyes.

"I wish I 'd met you, I 'd have given you three cheers and a tiger, for it must have been an imposing spectacle," said Tom.

"No, you would n't; you 'd have whisked round the corner when you saw me coming or have stared straight before you, utterly unconscious of the young woman in the baggage wagon."

Polly laughed in his face just as she used to do, when she said that, and, in spite of the doubt cast upon his courtesy, Tom rather liked it, though he had nothing to say for himself but a reproachful, "Now, Polly, that 's too bad."

"True, nevertheless. You must come and see my pets, Maud, for my cat and bird live together as happily as brother and sister," said Polly, turning to Maud, who devoured every word she said.

"That 's not saying much for them," muttered Tom, feeling that Polly ought to address more of her conversation to him.

"Polly knows what she 's talking about; her brothers appreciate their sisters," observed Fanny, in her sharp tone.

"And Polly appreciates her brothers, don't forget to add that, ma'am," answered Tom.

"Did I tell you that Will was going to college?" broke in Polly, to avert the rising storm.

"Hope he 'll enjoy himself," observed Tom, with the air of a man who had passed through all the mysteries, and reached that state of sublime indifference which juniors seem to pride themselves upon.

"I think he will, he is so fond of study, and is so anxious to improve every opportunity. I only hope he won't overwork and get sick, as so many boys do," said simple Polly, with such a respectful belief in the eager thirst for knowledge of collegians as a class, that Tom regarded the deluded girl with a smile of lofty pity, from the heights of his vast and varied experience.

"Guess he won't hurt himself. I 'll see that he don't study too hard." And Tom's eyes twinkled as they used to do, when he planned his boyish pranks.

"I 'm afraid you can't be trusted as a guide, if various rumors I 've heard are true," said Polly, looking up at him with a wistful expression, that caused his face to assume the sobriety of an owl's.

"Base slanders; I 'm as steady as a clock, an ornament to my class, and a model young man, ain't I, mother?" And Tom patted her thin cheek with a caressing hand, sure of one firm friend in her; for when he ceased to be a harum-scarum boy, Mrs. Shaw began to take great pride in her son, and he, missing grandma, tried to fill her place with his feeble mother.

"Yes, dear, you are all I could ask," and Mrs. Shaw looked up at him with such affection and confidence in her eyes, that Polly gave Tom the first approving look she had vouchsafed him since she came.

Why Tom should look troubled and turn grave all at once, she could n't understand, but she liked to see him stroke his mother's cheek so softly, as he stood with his head resting on the high back of her chair, for Polly fancied that he felt a man's pity for her weakness, and was learning a son's patient love for a mother who had had much to bear with him.

"I 'm so glad you are going to be here all winter, for we are to be very gay, and I shall enjoy taking you round with me," began Fanny, forgetting Polly's plan for a moment.

Polly shook her head decidedly. "It sounds very nice, but it can't be done, Fan, for I 've come to work, not play; to save, not spend; and parties will be quite out of the question for me."

"You don't intend to work all the time, without a bit of fun, I hope," cried Fanny, dismayed at the idea.

"I mean to do what I 've undertaken, and not to be tempted away from my purpose by anything. I should n't be fit to give lessons if I was up late, should I? And how far would my earnings go towards dress, carriages, and all the little expenses which would come if I set up for a young lady in society? I can't do both, and I 'm not going to try, but I can pick up bits of fun as I go along, and be contented with free concerts and lectures, seeing you pretty often, and every Sunday Will is to spend with me, so I shall

have quite as much dissipation as is good for me."

"If you don't come to my parties, I 'll never forgive you," said Fanny, as Polly paused, while Tom chuckled inwardly at the idea of calling visits from a brother "dissipation."

"Any small party, where it will do to wear a plain black silk, I can come to; but the big ones must n't be thought of, thank you."

It was charming to see the resolution of Polly's face when she said that; for she knew her weakness, and beyond that black silk she had determined not to go. Fanny said no more, for she felt quite sure that Polly would relent when the time came, and she planned to give her a pretty dress for a Christmas present, so that one excuse should be removed.

"I say, Polly, won't you give some of us fellows music lessons? Somebody wants me to play, and I 'd rather learn of you than any Senor Twankydlilo," said Tom, who did n't find the conversation interesting.

"Oh, yes; if any of you boys honestly want to learn, and will behave yourselves, I 'll take you; but I shall charge extra," answered Polly, with a wicked sparkle of the eye, though her face was quite sober, and her tone delightfully business-like.

"Why, Polly, Tom is n't a boy; he 's twenty, and he says I must treat him with respect. Besides, he 's engaged, and does put on such airs," broke in Maud who regarded her brother as a venerable being.

"Who is the little girl?" asked Polly taking the news as a joke.

"Trix; why, did n't you know it?" answered Maud, as if it had been an event of national importance.

"No! is it true, Fan?" and Polly turned to her friend with a face full of surprise, while Tom struck an imposing attitude, and affected absence of mind.

"I forgot to tell you in my last letter; it 's just out, and we don't like it very well," observed Fanny, who would have preferred to be engaged first herself.

"It 's a very nice thing, and I am perfectly satisfied," announced Mrs. Shaw, rousing from a slight doze.

"Polly looks as if she did n't believe it. Have n't I the appearance of 'the happiest man alive?'" asked Tom, wondering if it could be pity which he saw in the steady eyes fixed on him.

"No, I don't think you have," she said, slowly.

"How the deuce should a man look, then?" cried Tom, rather nettled at her sober reception of the grand news.

"As if he had learned to care for some one a great deal more than for himself," answered Polly, with sudden color in her cheeks, and a sudden softening of the voice, as her eyes turned away from Tom, who was the picture of a complacent dandy, from the topmost curl of his auburn head to the tips of his aristocratic boots.

"Tommy 's quenched; I agree with you, Polly; I never liked Trix, and I hope it 's only a boy-and-girl fancy, that will soon die a natural death," said Mr. Shaw, who seemed to find it difficult to help falling into a brown study, in spite of the lively chatter going on about him.

Shaw, Jr., being highly incensed at the disrespectful manner in which his engagement was treated, tried to assume a superb air of indifference, and finding that a decided failure, was about to stroll out of the room with a comprehensive nod, when his mother called after him: "Where are you going, dear?"

"To see Trix, of course. Good-by, Polly," and Mr. Thomas departed, hoping that by the skillful change of tone, from ardent impatience to condescending coolness, he had impressed one hearer at least with the fact that he regarded Trix as the star of his existence, and Polly as a presuming little chit.

If he could have heard her laugh, and Fanny's remarks, his wrath would have boiled over; fortunately he was spared the trial, and went away hoping that the coquetries of his Trix would make him forget Polly's look when she answered his question.

"My dear, that boy is the most deluded creature you ever saw," began Fanny, as soon as the front door banged. "Belle and Trix both tried to catch him, and the slyest got him; for, in spite of his airs, he is as soft-hearted as a baby. You see Trix has broken off two engagements already, and the third time she got jilted herself. Such a fuss as she made! I declare, it really was absurd. But I do think she felt it very much, for she would n't go out at all, and got thin, and pale, and blue, and was really quite touching. I pitied her, and had her here a good deal, and Tom took her part; he always does stand up for the crushed ones, and that 's good of him, I allow. Well, she did the forsaken very prettily: let Tom amuse her, and led him on till the poor fellow lost his wits, and finding her crying one day (about her hat, which was n't becoming), he thought she was mourning for Mr. Banks, and so, to comfort her, the goose proposed. That was all she wanted; she snapped him up at once, and there he is in a nice scrape; for since her engagement she is as gay as ever, flirts awfully with any one who comes along, and keeps Tom in a fume all the time. I really don't think he cares for her half as much as he makes believe, but he 'll stand by her through thick and thin, rather than do as Banks did."

"Poor Tom!" was all Polly said, when Fan had poured the story into her ear, as they sat whispering in the sofa corner.

"My only consolation is that Trix will break off the affair before spring; she always does, so that she may be free for the summer campaign. It won't hurt Tom, but I hate to have him make a fool of himself out of pity, for he is more of a man than he seems, and I don't want any one to plague him."

"No one but yourself," said Polly, smiling.

"Well, that 's all fair; he is a torment sometimes, but I 'm rather fond of him in spite of it. I get so tired of the other fellows, they are such absurd things and when Tom is in his good mood he is very nice and quite refreshing."

"I 'm glad to hear it," said Polly, making a mental note of the fact.

"Yes, and when grandma was ill he was perfectly devoted. I did n't know the boy had so much gentleness in him. He took her death sadly to heart, for, though he did n't say much, he was very grave and steady for a long time. I tried to comfort him, and we had two or three real sweet little talks together, and seemed to get acquainted for the first time. It was very nice, but it did n't last; good times never do with us. We soon got back into the old way, and now we hector one another just as before."

Fanny sighed, then yawned, and fell into her usual listless attitude, as if the brief excitement of Polly's coming had begun to subside.

"Walk now with me and see my funny little room. It 's bright now, and the air will do you good. Come, both of you, and the air will do you good," said Polly, for the red sunset now burning in the west seemed to invite them out.

They agreed, and soon the three were walking briskly away to Polly's new home, in a quiet street, where a few old trees rustled in the summer, and the morning sun shone pleasantly in winter time.

"The way into my parlor is up a winding stair."

sang Polly, running up two flights of broad, old-fashioned steps, and opening the door of a back room, out of which streamed the welcome glow of firelight.

"These are my pets, Maud," she added, pausing on the threshold, and beckoning the girls to look in quietly.

On the rug, luxuriously basking in the warmth, lay a gray kitten, and close by, meditatively roosting on one leg, stood a plump canary, who cocked his bright eye at the new-comers, gave a loud chirp as if to wake his comrade, and then flew straight to Polly's shoulder, where he broke into a joyful song to welcome his mistress home.

"Allow me to introduce my family," said Polly; "this noisy little chap the boys named Nicodemus; and this dozy cat is called Ashputtel, because the joy of her life is to get among the cinders. Now, take off your things, and let me do the honors, for you are to stop to tea, and the carriage is to come for you at eight. I arranged it with your mother while you were up-stairs."

"I want to see everything," said Maud, when the hats were off, and the hands warmed.

"So you shall; for I think my housekeeping arrangements will amuse you."

Then Polly showed her kingdom, and the three had a merry time over it. The big piano took up so much room there was no place for a bed; but Polly proudly displayed the resources of her chintz-covered couch, for the back let down, the seat lifted up, and inside were all the pillows and blankets. "So convenient, you see, and yet out of the way in the daytime, for two or three of my pupils come to me," explained Polly.

Then there was a bright drugget over the faded carpet, the little rocking-chair and sewing-table stood at one window, the ivy ran all over the other, and hid the banqueting performances which went on in that corner. Book-shelves hung over the sofa, a picture or two on the walls, and a great vase of autumn leaves and grasses beautified the low chimney-piece. It was a very humble little room, but Polly had done her best to make it pleasant, and it already had a home-like look, with the cheery fire, and the household pets chirping and purring confidently on the rug.

"How nice it is!" exclaimed Maud, as she emerged from the big closet where Polly kept her stores. "Such a cunning teakettle and saucepan, and a t^te--t^te set, and lots of good things to eat. Do have toast for tea, Polly, and let me make it with the new toasting fork; it 's such fun to play cook."

Fanny was not so enthusiastic as her sister, for her eyes saw many traces of what seemed like poverty to her; but Polly was so gay, so satisfied with her small establishment, so full of happy hopes and plans, that her friend had not the heart to find a fault or suggest an improvement, and sat where she was told, laughing and talking while the others got tea.

"This will be a country supper, girls," said Polly, bustling about. "Here is real cream, brown bread, home-made cake, and honey from my own beehives. Mother fitted me out with such a supply, I 'm glad to have a party, for I can't eat it all quick enough. Butter the toast, Maudie, and put that little cover over it. Tell me when the kettle boils, and don't step on Nicodemus, whatever you do."

"What a capital house-keeper you will make some day," said Fanny, as she watched Polly spread her table with a neatness and despatch which was pleasant to behold.

"Yes, it 's good practice," laughed Polly, filling her tiny teapot, and taking her place behind the tray, with a matronly air, which was the best joke of the whole.

"This is the most delicious party I ever went to," observed Maud, with her mouth full of honey, when the feast was well under way. "I do wish I could have a nice room like this, and a cat and a bird that would n't eat each other up, and a dear little teakettle, and make just as much toast as I like."

Such a peal of laughter greeted Maud's pensive aspiration, that Miss Mills smiled over her solitary cup of tea, and little Nick burst into a perfect ecstasy of song, as he sat on the sugar-bowl helping himself.

"I don't care for the toast and the kettle, but I do envy you your good spirits, Polly," said Fanny, as the merriment subsided. "I 'm so tired of everybody and everything, it seems sometimes as if I should die of ennui. Don't you ever feel so?"

"Things worry me sometimes, but I just catch up a broom and sweep, or wash hard, or walk, or go at something with all my might, and I usually find that by the time I get through the worry is gone, or I 've got courage enough to bear it without grumbling," answered Polly, cutting the brown loaf energetically.

"I can't do those things, you know; there 's no need of it, and I don't think they 'd cure my worrying," said Fanny, languidly feeding Ashputtel, who sat decorously beside her, at the table, winking at the cream pot.

"A little poverty would do you good, Fan; just enough necessity to keep you busy till you find how good work is; and when you once learn that, you won't complain of ennui any more," returned Polly, who had taken kindly the hard lesson which twenty years of cheerful poverty had taught her.

"Mercy, no, I should hate that; but I wish some one would invent a new amusement for rich people. I 'm dead sick of parties, and flirtations, trying to out-dress my neighbors, and going the same round year after year, like a squirrel in a cage."

Fanny's tone was bitter as well as discontented, her face sad as well as listless, and Polly had an instinctive feeling that some trouble, more real than any she had ever known before, was lying heavy at her friend's heart. That was not the time to speak of it, but Polly resolved to stand ready to offer sympathy, if nothing more, whenever the confidential minute came; and her manner was so kind, so comfortable, that Fanny felt its silent magic, grew more cheerful in the quiet atmosphere of that little room, and when they said good-night, after an old-time gossip by the fire, she kissed her hostess warmly, saying, with a grateful look, "Polly, dear, I shall come often, you do me so much good."