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## Chapter 9 - Lessons

THE first few weeks were hard ones, for Polly had not yet outgrown her natural shyness and going among so many strangers caused her frequent panics. But her purpose gave her courage, and when the ice was once broken, her little pupils quickly learned to love her. The novelty soon wore off, and though she thought she was prepared for drudgery, she found it very tedious to go on doing the same thing day after day. Then she was lonely, for Will could only come once a week, her leisure hours were Fanny's busiest, and the "bits of pleasure" were so few and far between that they only tantalized her. Even her small housekeeping lost its charms, for Polly was a social creature, and the solitary meals were often sad ones. Ashputtel and Nick did their best to cheer her, but they too, seemed to pine for country freedom and home atmosphere. Poor Puttel, after gazing wistfully out of the window at the gaunt city cats skulking about the yard, would retire to the rug, and curl herself up as if all hope of finding congenial society had failed; while little Nick would sing till he vibrated on his perch, without receiving any response except an inquisitive chirp from the pert sparrows, who seemed to twit him with his captivity. Yes, by the time the little teakettle had lost its brightness, Polly had decided that getting one's living was no joke, and many of her brilliant hopes had shared the fate of the little kettle.

If one could only make the sacrifice all at once, and done with it, then it would seem easier; but to keep up a daily sacrifice of one's wishes, tastes, and pleasures, is rather a hard task, especially when one is pretty, young, and gay. Lessons all day, a highly instructive lecture, books over a solitary fire, or music with no audience but a sleepy cat and a bird with his head tucked under his wing, for evening entertainment, was not exactly what might be called festive; so, in spite of her brave resolutions, Polly did long for a little fun sometimes, and after saying virtuously to herself at nine: "Yes, it is much wiser and better for me to go to bed early, and be ready for work tomorrow," she would lie awake hearing the carriages roll to and fro, and imagining the gay girls inside, going to party, opera, or play, till Mrs. Dodd's hop pillow might as well have been stuffed with nettles, for any sleep it brought, or any use it was, except to catch and hide the tears that dropped on it when Polly's heart was very full.

Another thorn that wounded our Polly in her first attempt to make her way through the thicket that always bars a woman's progress, was the discovery that working for a living shuts a good many doors in one's face even in democratic America. As Fanny's guest she had been, in spite of poverty, kindly received wherever her friend took her, both as child and woman. Now, things were changed; the kindly people patronized, the careless forgot all about her, and even Fanny, with all her affection, felt that Polly the music teacher would not be welcome in many places where Polly the young lady had been accepted as "Miss Shaw's friend."

Some of the girls still nodded amiably, but never invited her to visit them; others merely dropped their eyelids, and went by without speaking, while a good many ignored her as entirely as if she had been invisible. These things hurt Polly more than she would confess, for at home every one worked, and every one was respected for it. She tried not to care, but girls feel little slights keenly, and more than once Polly was severely tempted to give up her plan, and run away to the safe shelter at home.

Fanny never failed to ask her to every sort of festivity in the Shaw mansion; but after a few trials, Polly firmly declined everything but informal visits when the family were alone. She soon found that even the new black silk was n't fine enough for Fanny's smallest party, and, after receiving a few of the expressive glances by which women convey their opinion of their neighbor's toilet, and overhearing a joke or two "about that inevitable dress," and "the little blackbird," Polly folded away the once treasured frock, saying, with a choke in her voice: "I 'll wear it for Will, he likes it, and clothes can't change his love for me."

I am afraid the wholesome sweetness of Polly's nature was getting a little soured by these troubles; but before lasting harm was done, she received, from an unexpected source, some of the real help which teaches young people how to bear these small crosses, by showing them the heavier ones they have escaped, and by giving them an idea of the higher pleasures one may earn in the good, old-fashioned ways that keep hearts sweet, heads sane, hands busy.

Everybody has their days of misfortune like little Rosamond, and Polly was beginning to think she had more than her share. One of these ended in a way which influenced her whole life, and so we will record it. It began early; for the hard-hearted little grate would n't behave itself till she had used up a ruinous quantity of kindlings. Then she scalded poor Puttel by upsetting her coffee-pot; and instead of a leisurely, cosy meal, had to hurry away uncomfortably, for everything went wrong even to the coming off of both bonnet strings in the last dreadful scramble. Being late, she of course forgot her music, and hurrying back for it, fell into a puddle, which capped the climax of her despair.

Such a trying morning as that was! Polly felt out of tune herself, and all the pianos seemed to need a tuner as much as she did. The pupils were unusually stupid, and two of them announced that their mamma was going to take them to the South, whither she was suddenly called. This was a blow, for they had just begun, and Polly had n't the face to send in a bill for a whole quarter, though her plans and calculations were sadly disturbed by the failure of that sum.

Trudging home to dinner, tired and disappointed, poor Polly received another blow, which hurt her more than the loss of all her pupils. As she went hurrying along with a big music book in one hand and a paper bag of rolls for tea in the other, she saw Tom and Trix coming. As she watched them while they slowly approached, looking so gay and handsome and happy, it seemed to Polly as if all the sunshine and good walking was on their side of the street, all the wintry wind and mud on hers. Longing to see a friendly face and receive a kind word, she crossed over, meaning to nod and smile at least. Trix saw her first, and suddenly became absorbed in the distant horizon. Tom apparently did not see her, for his eyes were fixed on a fine horse just prancing by. Polly thought that he had seen her, and approached with a curious little flutter at her heart, for if Tom cut her she felt that her cup would be full.

On they came, Trix intent on the view, Tom staring at the handsome horse, and Polly, with red checks, expectant eyes, and the brown bundle, in full sight. One dreadful minute as they came parallel, and no one spoke or bowed, then it was all over, and Polly went on, feeling as if some one had slapped her in the face. "She would n't have believed it of Tom; it was all the doings of that horrid Trix; well, she would n't trouble him any more, if he was such a snob as to be ashamed of her just because she carried bundles and worked for her bread." She clutched the paper bag fiercely as she said this to herself, then her eyes filled, and her lips trembled, as she added, "How could he do it, before her, too?"

Now Tom was quite guiltless of this offence, and had always nodded to Polly when they met; but it so happened he had always been alone till now, and that was why it cut so deeply, especially as Polly never had approved of Trix. Before she could clear her eyes or steady her face, a gentleman met her, lifted his hat, smiled, and said pleasantly, "Good morning, Miss Polly, I 'm glad to meet you." Then, with a sudden change of voice and manner, he added, "I beg pardon is anything the matter can I be of service?"

It was very awkward, but it could n't be helped, and all Polly could do was to tell the truth and make the best of it.

"It 's very silly, but it hurt me to be cut by my old friends. I shall get used to it presently, I dare say."

Mr. Sydney glanced back, recognized the couple behind them, and turned round with a disgusted expression. Polly was fumbling for her handkerchief, and without a word he took both book and bundle from her, a little bit of kindness that meant a good deal just then. Polly felt it, and it did her good; hastily wiping the traitorous eyes, she laughed and said cheerfully, "There, I 'm all right again; thank you, don't trouble yourself with my parcels."

"No trouble, I assure you, and this book reminds me of what I was about to say. Have you an hour to spare for my little niece? Her mother wants her to begin, and desired me to make the inquiry."

"Did she, really?" and Polly looked up at him, as if she suspected him of inventing the whole thing, out of kindness.

Mr. Sydney smiled, and taking a note from his pocket, presented it, saying, with a reproachful look, "Behold the proof of my truth, and never doubt again."

Polly begged pardon, read the note from the little girl's mother, which was to have been left at her room if she was absent, and gave the bearer a very grateful look as she accepted this welcome addition to her pupils. Well pleased at the success of his mission, Sydney artfully led the conversation to music, and for a time Polly forgot her woes, talking enthusiastically on her favorite theme. As she reclaimed her book and bag, at her own door, she said, in her honest way, "Thank you very much for trying to make me forget my foolish little troubles."

"Then let me say one thing more; though appearances are against him, I don't believe Tom Shaw saw you. Miss Trix is equal to that sort of thing, but it is n't like Tom, for with all his foppery he is a good fellow at heart."

As Mr. Sydney said this, Polly held out her hand with a hearty "Thank you for that." The young man shook the little hand in the gray woollen glove, gave her exactly the same bow which he did the Honorable Mrs. Davenport, and went away, leaving Polly to walk up stairs and address Puttel with the peculiar remark, "You are a true gentleman! so kind to say that about Tom. I 'll think it 's so, anyway; and won't I teach Minnie in my very best style!"

Puttel purred, Nick chirped approvingly, and Polly ate her dinner with a better appetite than she had expected. But at the bottom of her heart there was a sore spot still, and the afternoon lessons dragged dimly. It was dusk when she got home, and as she sat in the firelight eating her bread and milk, several tears bedewed the little rolls, and even the home honey had a bitter taste.

"Now this won't do," she broke out all at once; "this is silly and wicked, and can't be allowed. I 'll try the old plan and put myself right by doing some little kindness to somebody. Now what shall it be? O, I know! Fan is going to a party to-night; I 'll run up and help her dress; she likes to have me, and I enjoy seeing the pretty things. Yes, and I 'll take her two or three clusters of my daphne, it 's so sweet."

Up got Polly, and taking her little posy, trotted away to the Shaws', determined to be happy and contented in spite of Trix and hard work.

She found Fanny enduring torment under the hands of the hair-dresser, who was doing his best to spoil her hair, and distort her head with a mass of curls, braids, frizzles, and puffs; for though I discreetly refrain from any particular description, still, judging from the present fashions, I think one may venture to predict that six years hence they would be something frightful.

"How kind of you, Polly; I was just wishing you were here to arrange my flowers. These lovely daphnes will give odor to my camellias, and you were a dear to bring them. There 's my dress; how do you like it?" said Fanny, hardly daring to lift her eyes from under the yellow tower on her head.

"It 's regularly splendid; but how do you ever get into it?" answered Polly, surveying with girlish interest the cloud of pink and white lace that lay upon the bed.

"It 's fearfully and wonderfully made, but distractingly becoming, as you shall see. Trix thinks I 'm going to wear blue, so she has got a green one, and told Belle it would spoil the effect of mine, as we are much together, of course. Was n't that sweet of her? Belle came and told me in, time, and I just got pink, so my amiable sister, that is to be, won't succeed in her pretty little plot."

"I guess she has been reading the life of Josephine. You know she made a pretty lady, of whom she was jealous, sit beside her on a green sofa, which set off her own white dress and spoilt the blue one of her guest," answered Polly, busy with the flowers.

"Trix never reads anything; you are the one to pick up clever little stories. I 'll remember and use this one. Am I done? Yes, that is charming, is n't it, Polly?" and Fan rose to inspect the success of Monsieur's long labor.

"You know I don't appreciate a stylish coiffure as I ought, so I like your hair in the old way best. But this is 'the thing,' I suppose, and not a word must be said."

"Of course it is. Why, child, I have frizzed and burnt my hair so that I look like an old maniac with it in its natural state, and have to repair damages as well as I can. Now put the flowers just here," and Fanny laid a pink camellia in a nest of fuzz, and stuck a spray of daphne straight up at the back of her head.

"O, Fan, don't, it looks horridly so!" cried Polly, longing to add a little beauty to her friend's sallow face by a graceful adjustment of the flowers.

"Can't help it, that 's the way, and so it must be," answered Fan, planting another sprig half-way up the tower.

Polly groaned and offered no more suggestions as the work went on; but when Fan was finished from top to toe, she admired all she honestly could, and tried to keep her thoughts to herself. But her frank face betrayed her, for Fanny turned on her suddenly, saying, "You may as well free your mind, Polly, for I see by your eyes that something don't suit."

"I was only thinking of what grandma once said, that modesty had gone out of fashion," answered Polly, glancing at the waist of her friend's dress, which consisted of a belt, a bit of lace, and a pair of shoulder straps.

Fanny laughed good-naturedly, saying, as she clasped her necklace, "If I had such shoulders as yours, I should n't care what the fashion was. Now don't preach, but put my cloak on nicely, and come along, for I 'm to meet Tom and Trix, and promised to be there early."

Polly was to be left at home after depositing Fan at Belle's.

"I feel as if I was going myself," she said, as they rolled along.

"I wish you were, and you would be, Polly, if you weren't such a resolute thing. I 've teased, and begged, and offered anything I have if you 'll only break your absurd vow,

and come and enjoy yourself."

"Thank you; but I won't, so don't trouble your kind heart about me; I'm all right," said Polly, stoutly.

But when they drew up before the lighted house, and she found herself in the midst of the pleasant stir of festivity, the coming and going of carriages, the glimpses of bright colors, forms, and faces, the bursts of music, and a general atmosphere of gayety, Polly felt that she was n't all right, and as she drove away for a dull evening in her lonely little room, she just cried as heartily as any child denied a stick of candy.

"It's dreadful wicked of me, but I can't help it," she sobbed to herself, in the corner of the carriage. "That music sets me all in a twitter, and I should have looked nice in Fan's blue tarlatan, and I know I could behave as well as any one, and have lots of partners, though I'm not in that set. Oh, just one good gallop with Mr. Sydney or Tom! No, Tom would n't ask me there, and I would n't accept if he did. Oh, me! oh, me! I wish I was as old and homely, and good and happy, as Miss Mills!"

So Polly made her moan, and by the time she got home, was just in the mood to go to bed and cry herself to sleep, as girls have a way of doing when their small affliction becomes unbearable.

But Polly did n't get a chance to be miserable very long, for as she went up stairs feeling like the most injured girl in the world, she caught a glimpse of Miss Mills, sewing away with such a bright face that she could n't resist stopping for a word or two.

"Sit down, my dear, I'm glad to see you, but excuse me if I go on with my work, as I'm in a driving hurry to get these things done to-night," said the brisk little lady, with a smile and a nod, as she took a new needleful of thread, and ran up a seam as if for a wager.

"Let me help you, then; I'm lazy and cross, and it will do me good," said Polly, sitting down with the resigned feeling. "Well, if I can't be happy, I can be useful, perhaps."

"Thank you, my dear; yes, you can just hem the skirt while I put in the sleeves, and that will be a great lift."

Polly put on her thimble in silence, but as Miss Mills spread the white flannel over her lap, she exclaimed, "Why, it looks like a shroud! Is it one?"

"No, dear, thank God, it is n't, but it might have been, if we had n't saved the poor little soul," cried Miss Mills, with a sudden brightening of the face, which made it beautiful in spite of the stiff gray curl that bobbed on each temple, the want of teeth, and a crooked nose.

"Will you tell me about it? I like to hear your adventures and good works so much," said Polly, ready to be amused by anything that made her forget herself.

"Ah, my dear, it's a very common story, and that's the saddest part of it. I'll tell you all about it, for I think you may be able to help me. Last night I watched with poor Mary Floyd. She's dying of consumption, you know," began Miss Mills, as her nimble fingers flew, and her kind old face beamed over the work, as if she put a blessing in with every stitch. "Mary was very low, but about midnight fell asleep, and I was trying to keep things quiet, when Mrs. Finn she's the woman of the house came and beckoned me out, with a scared face. 'Little Jane has killed herself, and I don't know what to do,' she said, leading me up to the attic."

"Who was little Jane?" broke in Polly, dropping her work.

"I only knew her as a pale, shy young girl who went in and out, and seldom spoke to any one. Mrs. Finn told me she was poor, but a busy, honest, little thing, who did n't mix with the other folks, but lived and worked alone. 'She has looked so down-hearted and pale for a week, that I thought she was sick, and asked her about it,' said Mrs. Finn, 'but she thanked me in her bashful way, and said she was pretty well, so I let her alone. But to-night, as I went up late to bed, I was kind of impressed to look in and see how the poor thing did, for she had n't left her room all day. I did look in, and here's what I found.' As Mrs. Finn ended she opened the door of the back attic, and I saw about as sad a sight as these old eyes ever looked at."

"O, what?" cried Polly, pale now with interest.

"A bare room, cold as a barn, and on the bed a little dead, white face that almost broke my heart, it was so thin, so patient, and so young. On the table was a bottle half full of laudanum, an old pocket-book, and a letter. Read that, my dear and don't think hard of little Jane."

Polly took the bit of paper Miss Mills gave her, and read these words:

DEAR MRS. FINN, Please forgive me for the trouble I make you, but I don't see any other way. I can't get work that pays enough to keep me; the Dr. says I can't be well unless I rest. I hate to be a burden, so I'm going away not to trouble anybody anymore. I've sold my things to pay what I owe you. Please let me be as I am, and don't let people come and look at me. I hope it is n't very wicked, but there don't seem any room for me in the world, and I'm not afraid to die now, though I should be if I stayed and got bad because I had n't strength to keep right. Give my love to the baby, and so good-by, good-by.

JANE BRYANT.

"O, Miss Mills, how dreadful!" cried Polly, with her eyes so full she could hardly read the little letter.

"Not so dreadful as it might have been, but a bitter, sad thing to see that child, only seventeen, lying there in her little clean, old night-gown, waiting for death to come and take her, because 'there did n't seem to be any room for her in the world.' Ah, well, we saved her, for it was n't too late, thank heaven, and the first thing she said was, 'Oh, why did you bring me back?' I've been nursing her all day, hearing her story, and trying to show her that there is room and a welcome for her. Her mother died a year ago, and since then she has been struggling along alone. She is one of the timid, innocent, humble creatures who can't push their way, and so get put aside and forgotten. She has tried all sorts of poorly paid work, could n't live on it decently, got discouraged, sick, frightened, and could see no refuge from the big, bad world but to get out of it while she was n't afraid to die. A very old story, my dear, new and dreadful as it seems to you, and I think it won't do you any harm to see and help this little girl, who has gone through dark places that you are never like to know."

"I will; indeed, I will do all I can! Where is she now?" asked Polly, touched to the heart by the story, so simple yet so sad.

"There," and Miss Mills pointed to the door of her own little bedroom. "She was well enough to be moved to-night, so I brought her home and laid her safely in my bed. Poor little soul! she looked about her for a minute, then the lost look went away, and she gave a great sigh, and took my hand in both her thin bits of ones, and said, 'O, ma'am, I feel as if I'd been born into a new world. Help me to begin again, and I'll do better.' So I told her she was my child now, and might rest here, sure of a home as long as I had one."

As Miss Mills spoke in her motherly tone, and cast a proud and happy look toward the warm and quiet nest in which she had sheltered this friendless little sparrow, feeling sure that God meant her to keep it from falling to the ground, Polly put both arms about her neck, and kissed her withered cheek with as much loving reverence as if she

had been a splendid saint, for in the likeness of this plain old maid she saw the lovely charity that blesses and saves the world.

"How good you are! Dear Miss Mills, tell me what to do, let me help you, I 'm ready for anything," said Polly, very humbly, for her own troubles looked so small and foolish beside the stern hardships which had nearly had so tragical an end, that she felt heartily ashamed of herself, and quite burned to atone for them.

Miss Mills stopped to stroke the fresh cheek opposite, to smile, and say, "Then, Polly, I think I 'll ask you to go in and say a friendly word to my little girl. The sight of you will do her good; and you have just the right way of comforting people, without making a fuss."

"Have I?" said Polly, looking much gratified by the words.

"Yes, dear, you 've the gift of sympathy, and the rare art of showing it without offending. I would n't let many girls in to see my poor Jenny, because they 'd only flutter and worry her; but you 'll know what to do; so go, and take this wrapper with you; it 's done now, thanks to your nimble fingers."

Polly threw the warm garment over her arm, feeling a thrill of gratitude that it was to wrap a living girl in, and not to hide away a young heart that had grown cold too soon. Pushing open the door, she went quietly into the dimly lighted room, and on the pillow saw a face that drew her to it with an irresistible power, for it was touched by a solemn shadow that made its youth pathetic. As she paused at the bedside, thinking the girl asleep, a pair of hollow, dark eyes opened wide, and looked up at her; startled at first, then softening with pleasure, at sight of the bonny face before them, and then a humble, beseeching expression filled them, as if asking pardon for the rash act nearly committed, and pity for the hard fate that prompted it. Polly read the language of these eyes, and answered their mute prayer with a simple eloquence that said more than any words for she just stooped down and kissed the poor child, with her own eyes full, and lips that trembled with the sympathy she could not tell. Jenny put both arms about her neck, and began to shed the quiet tears that so refresh and comfort heavy hearts when a tender touch unseals the fountain where they lie.

"Everybody is so kind," she sobbed, "and I was so wicked, I don't deserve it."

"Oh, yes, you do; don't think of that, but rest and let us pet you. The old life was too hard for such a little thing as you, and we are going to try and make the new one ever so much easier and happier," said Polly, forgetting everything except that this was a girl like herself, who needed heartening up.

"Do you live here?" asked Jenny, when her tears were wiped away, still clinging to the new-found friend.

"Yes, Miss Mills lets me have a little room up stairs, and there I have my cat and bird, my piano and my posy pots, and live like a queen. You must come up and see me to-morrow if you are able. I 'm often lonely, for there are no young people in the house to play with me," answered Polly, smiling hospitably.

"Do you sew?" asked Jenny.

"No, I 'm a music teacher, and trot round giving lessons all day."

"How beautiful it sounds, and how happy you must be, so strong and pretty, and able to go round making music all the time," sighed Jenny, looking with respectful admiration at the plump, firm hand held in both her thin and feeble ones.

It did sound pleasant even to Polly's ears, and she felt suddenly so rich, and so contented, that she seemed a different creature from the silly girl who cried because she could n't go to the party. It passed through her mind like a flash, the contrast between her life, and that of the wan creature lying before her, and she felt as if she could not give enough out of her abundance to this needy little sister, who had nothing in the wide world but the life just saved to her. That minute did more for Polly than many sermons, or the wisest books, for it brought her face to face with bitter truths, showed her the dark side of life, and seemed to blow away her little vanities, her frivolous desires, like a wintry wind, that left a wholesome atmosphere behind. Sitting on the bedside, Polly listened while Jane told the story, which was so new to her listener, that every word sank deep into her heart, and never was forgotten.

"Now you must go to sleep. Don't cry nor think, nor do anything but rest. That will please Miss Mills best. I 'll leave the doors open, and play you a lullaby that you can't resist. Good night, dear." And with another kiss, Polly went away to sit in the darkness of her own room, playing her softest airs till the tired eyes below were shut, and little Jane seemed to float away on a sea of pleasant sounds, into the happier life which had just dawned for her.

Polly had fully intended to be very miserable, and cry herself to sleep; but when she lay down at last, her pillow seemed very soft, her little room very lovely, with the fire-light flickering on all the home-like objects, and her new-blown roses breathing her a sweet good-night. She no longer felt an injured, hard-working, unhappy Polly, but as if quite burdened with blessings, for which she was n't half grateful enough. She had heard of poverty and suffering, in the vague, far-off way, which is all that many girls, safe in happy homes, ever know of it; but now she had seen it, in a shape which she could feel and understand, and life grew more earnest to her from that minute. So much to do in the great, busy world, and she had done so little. Where should she begin? Then, like an answer came little Jenny's words, now taking a 'new significance' to Polly's mind, "To be strong, and beautiful, and go round making music all the time." Yes, she could do that; and with a very earnest prayer, Polly asked for the strength of an upright soul, the beauty of a tender heart, the power to make her life a sweet and stirring song, helpful while it lasted, remembered when it died.

Little Jane's last thought had been to wish with all her might, that "God would bless the dear, kind girl up there, and give her all she asked." I think both prayers, although too humble to be put in words, went up together, for in the fulness of time they were beautifully answered.

#### CHAPTER X BROTHERS AND SISTERS

POLLY'S happiest day was Sunday, for Will never failed to spend it with her. Instead of sleeping later than usual that morning, she was always up bright and early, flying round to get ready for her guest, for Will came to breakfast, and they made a long day of it. Will considered his sister the best and prettiest girl going, and Polly, knowing well that a time would come when he would find a better and a prettier, was grateful for his good opinion, and tried to deserve it. So she made her room and herself as neat and inviting as possible, and always ran to meet him with a bright face and a motherly greeting, when he came tramping in, ruddy, brisk, and beaming, with the brown loaf and the little pot of beans from the bake-house near by.

They liked a good country breakfast, and nothing gave Polly more satisfaction than to see her big boy clear the dishes, empty the little coffee-pot, and then sit and laugh at her across the ravaged table. Another pleasure was to let him help clear away, as they used to do at home, while the peals of laughter that always accompanied this performance did Miss Mills' heart good to hear, for the room was so small and Will so big that he seemed to be everywhere at once, and Polly and Puttel were continually dodging his long arms and legs. Then they used to inspect the flower pots, pay Nick a visit, and have a little music as a good beginning for the day, after which they went to church and dined with Miss Mills, who considered Will "an excellent young man." If the afternoon was fair, they took a long walk together over the bridges into the country, or about the city streets full of Sabbath quietude. Most people meeting them would have seen only an awkward young man, with a boy's face atop of his tall body, and a quietly dressed, fresh faced little woman hanging on his arm; but a few people, with eyes to read romances and pleasant histories everywhere, found something very attractive in this couple, and smiled as they passed, wondering if they were young, lovers, or country cousins "looking round."

If the day was stormy, they stayed at home, reading, writing letters, talking over their affairs, and giving each other good advice; for, though Will was nearly three years

younger than Polly, he could n't for the life of him help amusingly venerable airs, when he became a Freshman. In the twilight he had a good lounge on the sofa, and Polly sung to him, which arrangement he particularly enjoyed, it was so "cosy and homey." At nine o'clock, Polly packed his bag with clean clothes, nicely mended, such remnants of the festive tea as were transportable, and kissed him "good-night," with many injunctions to muffle up his throat going over the bridge, and be sure that his feet were dry and warm when he went to bed. All of which Will laughed at, accepted graciously, and did n't obey; but he liked it, and trudged away for another week's work, rested, cheered, and strengthened by that quiet, happy day with Polly, for he had been brought up to believe in home influences, and this brother and sister loved one another dearly, and were not ashamed to own it.

One other person enjoyed the humble pleasures of these Sundays quite as much as Polly and Will. Maud used to beg to come to tea, and Polly, glad to do anything for those who had done a good deal for her, made a point of calling for the little girl as they came home from their walk, or sending Will to escort her in the carriage, which Maud always managed to secure if bad weather threatened to quench her hopes. Tom and Fanny laughed at her fancy, but she did not tire of it, for the child was lonely, and found something in that little room which the great house could not give her.

Maud was twelve now; a pale, plain child, with sharp, intelligent eyes, and a busy little mind, that did a good deal more thinking than anybody imagined. She was just at the unattractive, fidgety age when no one knew what to do with her, and so let her fumble her way up as she could, finding pleasure in odd things, and living much alone, for she did not go to school, because her shoulders were growing round, and Mrs. Shaw would not "allow her figure to be spoiled." That suited Maud excellently; and whenever her father spoke of sending her again, or getting a governess, she was seized with bad headaches, a pain in her back, or weakness of the eyes, at which Mr. Shaw laughed, but let her holiday go on. Nobody seemed to care much for plain, pug-nosed little Maudie; her father was busy, her mother nervous and sick, Fanny absorbed in her own affairs, and Tom regarded her as most young men do their younger sisters, as a person born for his amusement and convenience, nothing more. Maud admired Tom with all her heart, and made a little slave of herself to him, feeling well repaid if he merely said, "Thank you, chicken," or did n't pinch her nose, or nip her ear, as he had a way of doing, "just as if I was a doll, or a dog, and had n't got any feelings," she sometimes said to Fanny, when some service or sacrifice had been accepted without gratitude or respect. It never occurred to Tom, when Maud sat watching him with her face full of wistfulness, that she wanted to be petted as much as ever he did in his neglected boyhood, or that when he called her "Pug" before people, her little feelings were as deeply wounded as his used to be, when the boys called him "Carrots." He was fond of her in his fashion, but he did n't take the trouble to show it, so Maud worshipped him afar off, afraid to betray the affection that no rebuff could kill or cool.

One snowy Sunday afternoon Tom lay on the sofa in his favorite attitude, reading "Pendennis" for the fourth time, and smoking like a chimney as he did so. Maud stood at the window watching the falling flakes with an anxious countenance, and presently a great sigh broke from her.

"Don't do that again, chicken, or you 'll blow me away. What's the matter?" asked Tom, throwing down his book with a yawn that threatened dislocation.

"I 'm afraid I can't go to Polly's," answered Maud, disconsolately.

"Of course you can't; it 's snowing hard, and father won't be home with the carriage till this evening. What are you always cutting off to Polly's for?"

"I like it; we have such nice times, and Will is there, and we bake little johnny-cakes in the baker before the fire, and they sing, and it is so pleasant."

"Warbling johnny-cakes must be interesting. Come and tell me all about it."

"No, you 'll only laugh at me."

"I give you my word I won't, if I can help it; but I really am dying of curiosity to know what you do down there. You like to hear secrets, so tell me yours, and I 'll be as dumb as an oyster."

"It is n't a secret, and you would n't care for it. Do you want another pillow?" she added, as Tom gave his a thump.

"This will do; but why you women always stick tassels and fringe all over a sofa-cushion, to tease and tickle a fellow, is what I don't understand."

"One thing that Polly does Sunday nights, is to take Will's head in her lap, and smooth his forehead. It rests him after studying so hard, she says. If you don't like the pillow, I could do that for you, 'cause you look as if you were more tired of studying than Will," said Maud, with some hesitation, but an evident desire to be useful and agreeable.

"Well, I don't care if you do try it, for I am confoundedly tired." And Tom laughed, as he recalled the frolic he had been on the night before.

Maud established herself with great satisfaction, and Tom owned that a silk apron was nicer than a fuzzy cushion.

"Do you like it?" she asked, after a few strokes over the hot forehead, which she thought was fevered by intense application to Greek and Latin.

"Not bad; play away," was the gracious reply, as Tom shut his eyes, and lay so still that Maud was charmed at the success of her attempt. Presently, she said, softly, "Tom, are you asleep?"

"Just turning the comer."

"Before you get quite round would you please tell me what a Public Admonition is?"

"What do you want to know for?" demanded Tom, opening his eyes very wide.

"I heard Will talking about Publics and Privates, and I meant to ask him, but I forgot."

"What did he say?"

"I don't remember; it was about somebody who cut prayers, and got a Private, and had done all sorts of bad things, and had one or two Publics. I did n't hear the name and did n't care; I only wanted to know what the words meant."

"So Will tells tales, does he?" and Tom's forehead wrinkled with a frown.

"No, he did n't; Polly knew about it and asked him."

"Will's a 'dig,'" growled Tom, shutting his eyes again, as if nothing more could be said of the delinquent William.

"I don't care if he is; I like him very much, and so does Polly."

"Happy Fresh!" said Tom, with a comical groan.

"You need n't sniff at him, for he is nice, and treats me with respect," cried Maud, with an energy that made Tom laugh in her face.

"He 's good to Polly always, and puts on her cloak for her, and says 'my dear,' and kisses her 'goodnight,' and don't think it 's silly, and I wish I had a brother just like him, yes, I do!" And Maud showed signs of woe, for her disappointment about going was very great.

"Bless my boots! what's the chicken ruffling up her little feathers and pecking at me for? Is that the way Polly soothes the best of brothers?" said Tom, still laughing.

"Oh, I forgot! there, I won't cry; but I do want to go," and Maud swallowed her tears, and began to stroke again.

Now Tom's horse and sleigh were in the stable, for he meant to drive out to College that evening, but he did n't take Maud's hint. It was less trouble to lie still, and say in a conciliatory tone, "Tell me some more about this good boy, it 's very interesting."

"No, I shan't, but I 'll tell about Puttel's playing on the piano," said Maud, anxious to efface the memory of her momentary weakness. "Polly points to the right key with a little stick, and Puttel sits on the stool and pats each key as it 's touched, and it makes a tune. It 's so funny to see her, and Nick perches on the rack and sings as if he 'd kill himself."

"Very thrilling," said Tom, in a sleepy tone.

Maud felt that her conversation was not as interesting as she hoped, and tried again.

"Polly thinks you are handsomer than Mr. Sydney."

"Much obliged."

"I asked which she thought had the nicest face, and she said yours was the handsomest, and his the best."

"Does he ever go there?" asked a sharp voice behind them; and looking round Maud saw Fanny in the big chair, cooking her feet over the register.

"I never saw him there; he sent up some books one day, and Will teased her about it."

"What did she do?" demanded Fanny. "Oh, she shook him."

"What a spectacle!" and Tom looked as if he would have enjoyed seeing it, but Fanny's face grew so forbidding, that Tom's little dog, who was approaching to welcome her, put his tail between his legs and fled under the table.

"Then there is n't any 'Sparking Sunday night'?" sung Tom, who appeared to have waked up again.

"Of course not. Polly is n't going to marry anybody; she 's going to keep house for Will when he 's a minister, I heard her say so," cried Maud, with importance.

"What a fate for pretty Polly!" ejaculated Tom.

"She likes it, and I 'm sure I should think she would; it 's beautiful to hear 'em plan it all out."

"Any more gossip to retail, Pug?" asked Tom a minute after, as Maud seemed absorbed in visions of the, future.

"He told a funny story about blowing up one of the professors. You never told us, so I suppose you did n't know it. Some bad fellow put a torpedo, or some sort of powder thing, under the chair, and it went off in the midst of the lesson, and the poor man flew up, frightened most to pieces, and the boys ran with pails of water to put the fire out. But the thing that made Will laugh most was, that the very fellow who did it got his trousers burnt trying to put out the fire, and he asked the is it Faculty or President? "

"Either will do," murmured Tom, who was shaking with suppressed laughter.

"Well, he asked 'em to give him some new ones, and they did give him money enough, for a nice pair; but he got some cheap ones, with horrid great stripes on 'em, and always wore 'em to that particular class, 'which was one too many for the fellows,' Will said, and with the rest of the money he had a punch party. Was n't it dreadful?"

"Awful!" And Tom exploded into a great laugh, that made Fanny cover her ears, and the little dog bark wildly.

"Did you know that bad boy?" asked innocent Maud.

"Slightly," gasped Tom, in whose wardrobe at college those identical trousers were hanging at that moment.

"Don't make such a noise, my head aches dreadfully," said Fanny, fretfully.

"Girls' heads always do ache," answered Tom, subsiding from a roar into a chuckle.

"What pleasure you boys can find in such ungentlemanly things, I don't see," said Fanny, who was evidently out of sorts.

"As much a mystery to you as it is to us, how you girls can like to gabble and prink from one week's end to the other," retorted Tom.

There was a pause after this little passage-at-arms, but Fan wanted to be amused, for time hung heavily on her hands, so she asked, in a more amiable tone, "How 's Trix?"

"As sweet as ever," answered Tom, gruffly.

"Did she scold you, as usual?"

"She just did."

"What was the matter?"

"Well, I 'll leave it to you if this is n't unreasonable: she won't dance with me herself, yet don't like me to go it with anybody else. I said, I thought, if a fellow took a girl to a party, she ought to dance with him once, at least, especially if they were engaged. She said that was the very reason why she should n't do it; so, at the last hop, I let her alone, and had a gay time with Belle, and to-day Trix gave it to me hot and heavy, coming home from church."

"If you go and engage yourself to a girl like that, I don't know what you can expect. Did she wear her Paris hat to-day?" added Fan, with sudden interest in her voice.

"She wore some sort of a blue thing, with a confounded bird of Paradise in it, that kept whisking into my face every time she turned her head."

"Men never know a pretty thing when they see it. That hat is perfectly lovely."

"They know a lady when they see her, and Trix don't look like one; I can't say where the trouble is, but there 's too much fuss and feathers for my taste. You are twice as stylish, yet you never look loud or fast."

Touched by this unusual compliment, Fanny drew her chair nearer as she replied with complacency, "Yes, I flatter myself I do know how to dress well. Trix never did; she 's fond of gay colors, and generally looks like a walking rainbow."

"Can't you give her a hint? Tell her not to wear blue gloves anyway, she knows I hate 'em."

"I 've done my best for your sake, Tom, but she is a perverse creature, and don't mind a word I say, even about things much more objectionable than blue gloves."

"Maudie, run and bring me my other cigar case, it 's lying round somewhere."

Maud went; and as soon as the door was shut, Tom rose on his elbow, saying in a cautiously lowered voice, "Fan, does Trix paint?"

"Yes, and draws too," answered Fanny, with a sly laugh.

"Come, you know what I mean; I 've a right to ask and you ought to tell," said Tom, soberly, for he was beginning to find that being engaged was not unmitigated bliss.

"What makes you think she does?"

"Well, between ourselves," said Tom, looking a little sheepish, but anxious to set his mind at rest, "she never will let me kiss her on her cheek, nothing but an unsatisfactory peck at her lips. Then the other day, as I took a bit of heliotrope out of a vase to put in my button-hole, I whisked a drop of water into her face; I was going to wipe it off, but she pushed my hand away, and ran to the glass, where she carefully dabbed it dry, and came back with one cheek redder than the other. I did n't say anything, but I had my suspicions. Come now, does she?"

"Yes, she does; but don't say a word to her, for she 'll never forgive my telling if she knew it."

"I don't care for that; I don't like it, and I won't have it," said Tom, decidedly.

"You can't help yourself. Half the girls do it, either paint or powder, darken their lashes with burnt hair-pins, or take cologne on lumps of sugar or belladonna to make their eyes bright. Clara tried arsenic for her complexion, but her mother stopped it," said Fanny, betraying the secrets of the prison-house in the basest manner.

"I knew you girls were a set of humbugs, and very pretty ones, too, some of you, but I can't say I like to see you painted up like a lot of actresses," said Tom, with an air of disgust.

"I don't do anything of the sort, or need it, but Trix does; and having chosen her, you must abide your choice, for better or worse."

"It has n't come to that yet," muttered Tom, as he lay down again with a rebellious air.

Maud's return put an end to these confidences, though Tom excited her curiosity by asking the mysterious question, "I say, Fan, is Polly up to that sort of thing?"

"No, she thinks it 's awful. When she gets pale and dragged out she will probably change her mind."

"I doubt it," said Tom.

"Polly says it is n't proper to talk secrets before people who ain't in 'em," observed Maud, with dignity.

"Do, for mercy sake, stop talking about Polly, I 'm sick to death of it," cried Fanny, snappishly.

"Hullo!" and Tom sat up to take a survey. "I thought you were bosom friends, and as spoony as ever."

"Well, I am fond of Polly, but I get tired of hearing Maud sing her praises everlastingly. Now don't go and repeat that, chatterbox."

"My goodness, is n't she cross?" whispered Maud to Tom.

"As two sticks; let her be. There 's the bell; see who it is, Pug," answered Tom, as a tingle broke the silence of the house.

Maud went to peep over the banisters, and came flying back in a rapture.

"It 's Will come for me! Can't I go? It don't snow hard, and I 'll bundle up, and you can send for me when papa comes."

"I don't care what you do," answered Fan, who was in a very bad temper.

Without waiting for any other permission, Maud rushed away to get ready. Will would n't come up, he was so snowy, and Fanny was glad, because with her he was bashful,

awkward, and silent, so Tom went down and entertained him with Maud's report. They were very good friends, but led entirely different lives, Will being a "dig," and Tom a "bird," or, in plain English, one was a hard student, and the other a jolly young gentleman. Tom had rather patronized Will, who did n't like it, and showed that he did n't by refusing to borrow money of him, or accept any of his invitations to join the clubs and societies to which Tom belonged. So Shaw let Milton alone, and he got on very well in his own way, doggedly sticking to his books, and resisting all temptations but those of certain libraries, athletic games, and such inexpensive pleasures as were within his means; for this benighted youth had not yet discovered that college nowadays is a place in which to "sky-lark," not to study.

When Maud came down and trotted contentedly away, holding Will's hand, Tom watched them out of sight, and then strolled about the house whistling and thinking, till he went to sleep in his father's arm-chair, for want of something better to do. He awoke to the joys of a solitary tea, for his mother never came down, and Fanny shut herself and her headache up in her own room.

"Well, this is cheerful," he said, as the clock struck eight, and his fourth cigar came to an end. "Trix is mad, and Fan in the dumps, so I 'll take myself off. Guess I 'll go round to Polly's, and ask Will to drive out with me, and save him the walk, poor chap. Might bring Midget home, it will please her, and there 's no knowing when the governor will be back."

With these thoughts in his head, Tom leisurely got under way, and left his horse at a neighboring stable, for he meant to make a little call, and see what it was Maud enjoyed so much.

"Polly is holding forth," he said to himself, as he went quietly up stairs, and the steady murmur of a pleasant voice came down to him. Tom laughed at Polly's earnest way of talking when she was interested in anything. But he liked it because it was so different from the coquettish clatter of most of the girls with whom he talked. Young men often laugh at the sensible girls whom they secretly respect, and affect to admire the silly ones whom they secretly despise, because earnestness, intelligence, and womanly dignity are not the fashion.

The door was ajar, and pausing in the dark entry Tom took a survey before he went in. The prospect was not dazzling, but home-like and pleasant. The light of a bright fire filled the little room, and down on a stool before it was Maud tending Puttel, and watching with deep interest the roasting of an apple intended for her special benefit. On the couch lounged Will, his thoughtful eyes fixed on Polly, who, while she talked, smoothed the broad forehead of her "yellow-haired laddie" in a way that Tom thought an immense improvement on Maud's performance. They had evidently been building castles in the air, for Polly was saying in her most impressive manner, "Well, whatever you do, Will, don't have a great, costly church that takes so much money to build and support it that you have nothing to give away. I like the plain, old-fashioned churches, built for use, not show, where people met for hearty praying and preaching, and where everybody made their own music instead of listening to opera singers, as we do now. I don't care if the old churches were bare and cold, and the seats hard, there was real piety in them, and the sincerity of it was felt in the lives of the people. I don't want a religion that I put away with my Sunday clothes, and don't take out till the day comes round again; I want something to see and feel and live by day-by-day, and I hope you 'll be one of the true ministers, who can teach by precept and example, how to get and keep it."

"I hope I shall be, Polly, but you know they say that in families, if there is a boy who can't do anything else, they make a minister of him. I sometimes think I ain't good for much, and that seems to me the reason why I should n't even try to be a minister," said Will, smiling, yet looking as if with all his humility he did have faith in the aspirations that came to him in his best moments.

"Some one said that very thing to father once, and I remember he answered, 'I am glad to give my best and brightest son to the service of God.' "

"Did he say that?" and Will's color rose, for the big, book-loving fellow was as sensitive as a girl to the praise of those dearest to him.

"Yes," said Polly, unconsciously giving the strongest stimulus to her brother's hope and courage. "Yes, and he added, 'I shall let my boys follow the guide that is in them, and only ask of them to use their gifts conscientiously, and be honest, useful men.' "

"So we will! Ned is doing well out West, and I 'm hard at it here. If father does his best to give us the chance we each want, the least we can do is to work with a will."

"Whatever you do, you can't help working with a Will," cried Tom, who had been so interested, that he forgot he was playing eavesdropper.

Polly flew up, looking so pleased and surprised, that Tom reproached himself for not having called oftener.

"I 've come for Maud," he announced, in a paternal tone, which made that young lady open her eyes.

"I can't go till my apple is done; besides, it is n't nine yet, and Will is going to take me along, when he goes. I 'd rather have him."

"I 'm going to take you both in the cutter. The storm is over, but it is heavy walking, so you 'll drive out with me, old man?" said Tom, with a nod at Will.

"Of course he will; and thank you very much. I 've been trying to keep him all night; Miss Mills always manages to find a corner for stray people, but he insists on going, so as to get to work early to-morrow," said Polly, delighted to see that Tom was taking off his coat, as if he meant to wait for Maud's apple, which Polly blessed for being so slow to cook.

Putting her guest into the best chair, Polly sat down and beamed at him with such hospitable satisfaction, that Tom went up several pegs in his own estimation.

"You don't come very often, so we are rather over-powered when you do honor us," she said, demurely.

"Well, you, know we fellows are so busy, we have n't much time to enjoy ourselves," answered Tom.

"Ahem!" said Will, loudly.

"Take a troche," said Tom.

Then they both burst out laughing, and Polly, fully understanding the joke, joined them, saying, "Here are some peanuts, Tom; do enjoy yourself while you can."

"Now I call that a delicate compliment!" And Tom, who had not lost his early relish for this sort of refreshment, though he seldom indulged his passion nowadays, because peanuts are considered vulgar, fell to cracking and munching with great satisfaction.

"Do you remember the first visit I made at your house, how you gave me peanuts, coming from the depot, and frightened me out of my wits, pretending the coachman was tipsy?" asked Polly.

"Of course I do, and how we coasted one day," answered Tom, laughing.



"Yes, and the velocipede; you 've got the scar of that yet, I see."

"I remember how you stood by me while it was sewed up; that was very plucky, Polly."

"I was dreadfully afraid, but I remember I wanted to seem very brave, because you 'd called me a coward."

"Did I? Ought to have been ashamed of myself. I used to rough you shamefully, Polly, and you were so good-natured, you let me do it."

"Could n't help myself," laughed Polly. "I did use to think you were an awful boy, but seems to me I rather liked it."

"She had so much of it at home, she got used to it," put in Will, pulling the little curl behind Polly's ear.

"You boys never teased me as Tom did, that 's the reason it amused me, I suppose; novelty hath charms, you know."

"Grandma used to lecture Tom for plaguing you, Polly, and he used to say he 'd be a tip-top boy, but he was n't," observed Maud, with a venerable air.

"Dear old grandma: she did her best, but I 'm a bad lot," said Tom, with a shake of the head and a sober face.

"It always seems as if she must be up in her rooms, and I can't get used to finding them empty," added Polly, softly.

"Father would n't have anything moved, and Tom sits up there sometimes; it makes him feel good, he says," said Maud, who had a talent for betraying trifles which people preferred should not be mentioned in public.

"You 'd better hurry up your apple, for if it is n't done pretty soon, you 'll have to leave it, Pug," said Tom, looking annoyed.

"How is Fan?" asked Polly, with tact.

"Well, Fan is rather under the weather; says she 's dyspeptic, which means cross."

"She is cross, but she 's sick too, for I found her crying one day, and she said nobody cared about her, and she might as well be dead," added Maud, having turned her apple with tender care.

"We must try to cheer her up, among us. If I was n't so busy I 'd like to devote myself to her, she has done so much for me," said Polly, gratefully.

"I wish you could. I can't understand her, for she acts like a weathercock, and I never know how I 'm going to find her. I hate to have her mope so, but, upon my life, I don't know what to do," said Tom; but as he uttered the words, something was suggested by the sight before him. Chairs were few, and Polly had taken half of Will's when they drew round the fire. Now she was leaning against him, in a cosy, confiding way, delightful to behold, while Will's strong arm went round her with a protecting air, which said, as plainly as any words, that this big brother and small sister knew how to love and help one another. It was a pleasant little picture, all the pleasanter for its unconsciousness, and Tom found it both suggestive and agreeable.

"Poor old Fan, she don't get much petting; maybe that 's what she wants. I 'll try it and see, for she stands by me like a trump. If she was a rosy, cosy little woman, like Polly, it would come easier, though," thought Tom, as he meditatively ate his last nut, feeling that fraternal affection could not be very difficult of demonstration, to brothers blessed with pretty, good-tempered sisters.

"I told Tom about the bad fellow who blew up the professor, and he said he knew him, slightly; and I was so relieved, because I had a kind of a feeling that it was Tom himself, you and Will laughed so about it."

Maud had a queer way of going on with her own thoughts, and suddenly coming out with whatever lay uppermost, regardless of time, place, or company. As this remark fell from her, there was a general smile, and Polly said, with mock solemnity, "It was a sad thing, and I 've no doubt that misguided young man is very sorry for it now."

"He looked perfectly bowed down with remorse last time I saw him," said Will, regarding Tom with eyes full of fun, for Will was a boy as well as a bookworm, and relished a joke as well as scatter-brained Tom.

"He always is remorseful after a scrape, I 've understood, for he is n't a very bad fellow, only his spirits are one too many for him, and he is n't as fond of his book as another fellow I know."

"I 'm afraid he 'll be expelled if he don't mind," said Polly, warningly.

"Should n't wonder if he was, he 's such an unlucky dog," answered Tom, rather soberly.

"I hope he 'll remember that his friends will be very much disappointed if he is. He might make them so proud and happy; that I guess he will, for he is n't half as thoughtless as he makes himself out," said Polly, looking across at Tom with such friendly eyes that he was quite touched, though of course he did n't show it.

"Thank you, Polly; he may pull through, but I have my doubts. Now old man, let us 'pud' along; it 's getting late for the chicken," he added, relapsing into the graceful diction with which a classical education gifts its fortunate possessor.

Taking advantage of the moment while Will was wrestling with his boots in the closet, and Maud was absorbed in packing her apple into a large basket, Polly said to Tom in a low tone, "Thank you very much, for being so kind to Will."

"Bless your heart, I have n't done anything; he 's such a proud fellow he won't let me," answered Tom.

"But you do in many little ways; to-night, for example. Do you think I don't know that the suit of clothes he 's just got would have cost a good deal more, if your tailor had n't made them? He 's only a boy, and don't understand things yet; but I know your way of helping proud people; so that they don't find it out, and I do thank you, Tom, so much."

"Oh, come, Polly, that won't do. What do you know about tailors and college matters?" said Tom, looking as much confused as if she had found him out in something reprehensible.

"I don't know much, and that 's the reason why I 'm grateful for your kindness to Will. I don't care what stories they tell about you, I 'm sure, you won't lead him into trouble, but keep him straight, for my sake. You know I 've lost one brother, and Will takes Jimmy's place to me now."

The tears in Polly's eyes as she said that made Tom vow a tremendous vow within himself to stand by Will through thick and thin, and "keep him straight for Polly's sake"; feeling all the time how ill-fitted he was for such a task.

"I 'll do my best," he said, heartily, as he pressed the hand Polly gave him, with a look which assured her that he felt the appeal to his honor, and that henceforth the country lad was safe from all the temptations Tom could have offered him.

"There! now I shall give that to mamma to take her pills in; it 's just what she likes, and it pleases her to be thought of," said Maud, surveying her gift with complacency, as she put on her things.

"You 're a good little soul, to remember poor mum, said Tom, with an approving nod.

"Well, she was so pleased with the grapes you brought her, I thought I 'd try something, and maybe she 'd say 'Thank you, darling,' to me too. Do you think she will?" whispered Maud, with the wistful look so often seen on her little plain face.

"See if she don't;" and to Maud's great surprise Tom did n't laugh at her project.

"Good night, dear; take care of yourself, and keep your muffler round your mouth going over the bridge, or you 'll be as hoarse as a crow to-morrow," said Polly, as she kissed her brother, who returned it without looking as if he thought it "girl's nonsense" Then the three piled into the sleigh and drove off, leave Polly nodding on the doorstep.

Maud found the drive altogether too short, but was consoled by the promise of a longer one if the sleighing lasted till next Saturday: and when Tom ran up to bid his mother good-by, and give her a hint about Maud's gift, she stayed below to say, at the last minute, in unconscious imitation of Polly.

"Good night; take care of yourself, my dear."

Tom laughed, and was about to pinch the much enduring little nose; but, as if the words reminded him of something, he gave her a kiss instead, a piece of forbearance which almost took Maud's breath away with surprise and gratification.

It was rather a silent drive, for Will obediently kept his muffler up, and Tom fell into a brown study.

He was not much given to reflection, but occasionally indulged when something gave him a turn in that direction, and at such times he was as sober and sincere as could be desired. Any one might have lectured him for an hour without doing as much good as that little call and the chat that grew out of it, for, though nothing very wise or witty was said, many things were suggested, and every one knows that persuasive influences are better than any amount of moralizing. Neither Polly nor Will tried to do anything of the sort, and that was the charm of it. Nobody likes to be talked to, but nobody can resist the eloquence of unconscious preaching. With all his thoughtlessness, Tom was quick to see and feel these things, and was not spoilt enough yet to laugh at them. The sight of Will and Polly's simple affection for one another reminded him of a neglected duty so pleasantly, that he could not forget it. Talking of early days made him wish he could go back and start again, doing better. Grandma's name recalled the tender memory that always did him good, and the thought that Polly trusted her dearest brother to his care stirred up a manful desire to deserve the confidence. Tortures would n't have drawn a word of all this from him, but it had its effect, for boys don't leave their hearts and consciences behind them when they enter college, and little things of this sort do much to keep both from being damaged by the four years' scrimmage which begins the battle of life for most of them.