

## CHAPTER I POLLY ARRIVES

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

"Come on, then."

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

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

"Of course I do. It 's your place to go and get her; and if you was n't

a bear, you 'd like it."

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

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

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

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

"She won't stay long then, if I can help it," muttered Tom, who regarded girls as a very unnecessary portion of creation. Boys of fourteen are apt to think so, and perhaps it is a wise arrangement; for, being fond of turning

somersaults, they have an opportunity of indulging in a good one, metaphorically speaking, when, three or four years later, they become the abject slaves of "those bothering girls."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As soon as he had done it, he remembered that Fanny considered them

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Not a bit. I had a nice time coming, and no trouble, except the tipsy coachman; but Tom got out and kept him in order, so I wasn't much frightened," answered innocent Polly, taking off her rough-and-ready coat,

and the plain hat without a bit of a feather.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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



Fanny chatted like a magpie, and Maud fidgeted, till Tom proposed to put her under the big dish-cover, which produced such an explosion, that the young lady was borne screaming away, by the much-enduring Katy. It was altogether an uncomfortable dinner, and Polly was very glad when it was over. They all went about their own affairs; and after doing the honors of the house, Fan was called to the dressmaker, leaving Polly to amuse herself in the great drawing-room.

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

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

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

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

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

The old lady put out her hand, and drawing Polly to her knee, looked into

her face with such kind eyes, that Polly forgot the impressive cap, and smiled at her confidingly; for she saw that her simple music had pleased her listener, and she felt glad to know it.

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

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

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

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

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

"No 'm; notquite."

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

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

"Was he your father, Madam?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Polly had never been much to the theatre; and the few plays she had seen were the good old fairy tales, dramatized to suit young beholders, lively, bright, and full of the harmless nonsense which brings the laugh without the blush. That night she saw one of the new spectacles which have lately

become the rage, and run for hundreds of nights, dazzling, exciting, and demoralizing the spectator by every allurements French ingenuity can invent, and American prodigality execute. Never mind what its name was, it was very gorgeous, very vulgar, and very fashionable; so, of course, it was much admired, and every one went to see it. At first, Polly thought she had got into fairy-land, and saw only the sparkling creatures who danced and sung in a world of light and beauty; but, presently, she began to listen to the songs and conversation, and then the illusion vanished; for the lovely phantoms sang negro melodies, talked slang, and were a disgrace to the good old-fashioned elves whom she knew and loved so well.

Our little girl was too innocent to understand half the jokes, and often wondered what people were laughing at; but, as the first enchantment subsided, Polly began to feel uncomfortable, to be sure her mother would n't like to have her there, and to wish she had n't come. Somehow, things seemed to get worse and worse, as the play went on; for our small spectator was being rapidly enlightened by the gossip going on all about her, as well as by her own quick eyes and girlish instincts. When four-and-twenty girls, dressed as jockeys, came prancing on to the stage, cracking their whips, stamping the heels of their topboots, and winking at the audience, Polly did not think it at all funny, but looked disgusted, and was glad when they were gone; but when another set appeared in a costume consisting of gauze wings, and a bit of gold fringe round the waist, poor unfashionable Polly did n't know what to do; for she felt both frightened and indignant, and sat with her eyes on her play-bill, and her cheeks getting hotter and hotter every minute.

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

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

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

"I 'll never come again," said Polly, decidedly; for her innocent nature rebelled against the spectacle, which, as yet, gave her more pain than pleasure. She did not know how easy it was to "get used to it," as Fanny did; and it was well for her that the temptation was not often offered. She could

not explain the feeling; but she was glad when the play was done, and they were safe at home, where kind grandma was waiting to see them comfortably into bed.

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

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

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

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

"I think you are right, my dear; but you have lived in the country, and have n't yet learned that modesty has gone out of fashion." And with a good-night kiss, grandma left Polly to dream dreadfully of dancing in

jockey costume, on a great stage; while Tom played a big drum in the orchestra; and the audience all wore the faces of her father and mother, looking sorrowfully at her, with eyes like saucers, and faces as red as Fanny's sash.