

CHAPTER III POLLY'S TROUBLES

POLLY soon found that she was in a new world, a world where the manners and customs were so different from the simple ways at home, that she felt like a stranger in a strange land, and often wished that she had not come. In the first place, she had nothing to do but lounge and gossip, read novels, parade the streets, and dress; and before a week was gone, she was as heartily sick of all this, as a healthy person would be who attempted to live on confectionery. Fanny liked it, because she was used to it, and had never known anything better; but Polly had, and often felt like a little wood-bird shut up in a gilded cage. Nevertheless, she was much impressed by the luxuries all about her, enjoyed them, wished she owned them, and wondered why the Shaws were not a happier family. She was not wise enough to know where the trouble lay; she did not attempt to say which of the two lives was the right one; she only knew which she liked best, and supposed it was merely another of her "old-fashioned" ways.

Fanny's friends did not interest her much; she was rather afraid of them, they seemed so much older and wiser than herself, even those younger in years. They talked about things of which she knew nothing and when Fanny tried to explain, she did n't find them interesting; indeed, some of them rather shocked and puzzled her; so the girls let her alone, being civil when they met, but evidently feeling that she was too "odd" to belong to their set. Then she turned to Maud for companionship, for her own little sister was excellent company, and Polly loved her dearly. But Miss Maud was much absorbed in her own affairs, for she belonged to a "set" also; and these mites of five and six had their "musicals," their parties, receptions, and promenades, as well as their elders; and, the chief idea of their little lives seemed to be to ape the fashionable follies they should have been too innocent to understand. Maud had her tiny card-case, and paid calls, "like mamma and Fan"; her box of dainty gloves, her jewel-drawer, her crimping-pins, as fine and fanciful a wardrobe as a Paris doll, and a French maid to dress her. Polly could n't get on with her at first, for Maud did n't seem like a child, and often corrected Polly in her conversation and manners, though little mademoiselle's own were anything but perfect. Now and then, when Maud felt poorly, or had a "fwactious" turn, for she had "nerves" as well as mamma, she would go to Polly to "be amooosed," for her gentle ways and kind forbearance soothed the little fine lady better than anything else. Polly enjoyed these times, and told stories, played games, or went out walking, just as Maud liked, slowly and surely winning the

child's heart, and relieving the whole house of the young tyrant who ruled it.

Tom soon got over staring at Polly, and at first did not take much notice of her, for, in his opinion, "girls did n't amount to much, anyway"; and, considering, the style of girl he knew most about, Polly quite agreed with him. He occasionally refreshed himself by teasing her, to see how she 'd stand it, and caused Polly much anguish of spirit, for she never knew where he would take her next. He bounced out at her from behind doors, booed at her in dark entries, clutched her feet as she went up stairs, startled her by shrill whistles right in her ear, or sudden tweaks of the hair as he passed her in the street; and as sure as there was company to dinner, he fixed his round eyes on her, and never took them off till she was reduced to a piteous state of confusion and distress. She used to beg him not to plague her; but he said he did it for her good; she was too shy, and needed toughening like the other girls. In vain she protested that she did n't want to be like the other girls in that respect; he only laughed in her face, stuck his red hair straight up all over his head, and glared at her, till she fled in dismay.

Yet Polly rather liked Tom, for she soon saw that he was neglected, hustled out of the way, and left to get on pretty much by himself. She often wondered why his mother did n't pet him as she did the girls; why his father ordered him about as if he was a born rebel, and took so little interest in his only son. Fanny considered him a bear, and was ashamed of him; but never tried to polish him up a bit; and Maud and he lived together like a cat and dog who did not belong to a "happy family." Grandma was the only one who stood by poor old Tom; and Polly more than once discovered him doing something kind for Madam, and seeming very much ashamed when it was found out. He was n't respectful at all; he called her "the old lady," and told her he "would n't be fussed over"; but when anything was the matter, he always went to "the old lady," and was very grateful for the "fussing." Polly liked him for this, and often wanted to speak of it; but she had a feeling that it would n't do, for in praising their affection, she was reproaching others with neglect; so she held her tongue, and thought about it all the more.

Grandma was rather neglected, too, and perhaps that is the reason why Tom and she were such good friends. She was even more old-fashioned than Polly; but people did n't seem to mind it so much in her, as her day was supposed to be over, and nothing was expected of her but to keep out of everybody's way, and to be handsomely dressed when she appeared "before people." Grandma led a quiet, solitary life in her own rooms, full of old furniture, pictures, books, and relics of a past for which no one cared but herself. Her son went up every evening for a little call, was very kind to her,

and saw that she wanted nothing money could buy; but he was a busy man, so intent on getting rich that he had no time to enjoy what he already possessed. Madam never complained, interfered, or suggested; but there was a sad sort of quietude about her, a wistful look in her faded eyes, as if she wanted something which money could not buy, and when children were near, she hovered about them, evidently longing to cuddle and caress them as only grandmothers can. Polly felt this; and as she missed the home-petting, gladly showed that she liked to see the quiet old face brighten, as she entered the solitary room, where few children came, except the phantoms of little sons and daughters, who, to the motherly heart that loved them, never faded or grew up. Polly wished the children would be kinder to grandma; but it was not for her to tell them so, although it troubled her a good deal, and she could only try to make up for it by being as dutiful and affectionate as if their grandma was her own.

Another thing that disturbed Polly was the want of exercise. To dress up and parade certain streets for an hour every day, to stand talking in doorways, or drive out in a fine carriage, was not the sort of exercise she liked, and Fan would take no other. Indeed, she was so shocked, when Polly, one day, proposed a run down the mall, that her friend never dared suggest such a thing again. At home, Polly ran and rode, coasted and skated, jumped rope and raked hay, worked in her garden and rowed her boat; so no wonder she longed for something more lively than a daily promenade with a flock of giddy girls, who tilted along in high-heeled boots, and costumes which made Polly ashamed to be seen with some of them. So she used to slip out alone sometimes, when Fanny was absorbed in novels, company, or millinery, and get fine brisk walk round the park, on the unfashionable side, where the babies took their airings; or she went inside, to watch the boys coasting, and to wish she could coast too, as she did at home. She never went far, and always came back rosy and gay.

One afternoon, just before dinner, she felt so tired of doing nothing, that she slipped out for a run. It had been a dull day; but the sun was visible now, setting brightly below the clouds. It was cold but still and Polly trotted down the smooth, snow-covered mall humming to herself, and trying not to feel homesick. The coasters were at it with all their might, and she watched them, till her longing to join the fun grew irresistible. On the hill, some little girls were playing with their sleds, real little girls, in warm hoods and coats, rubber boots and mittens, and Polly felt drawn toward them in spite of her fear of Fan.

"I want to go down, but I dars n't, it 's so steep," said one of these "common children," as Maud called them.

"If you 'll lend me your sled, and sit in my lap, I 'll take you down all nice," answered Polly, in a confidential tone.

The little girls took a look at her, seemed satisfied, and accepted her offer. Polly looked carefully round to see that no fashionable eye beheld the awful deed, and finding all safe, settled her freight, and spun away down hill, feeling all over the delightful excitement of swift motion which makes coasting such a favourite pastime with the more sensible portion of the child-world. One after another, she took the little girls down the hill and dragged them up again, while they regarded her in the light of a gray-coated angel, descended for their express benefit. Polly was just finishing off with one delicious "go" all by herself, when she heard a familiar whistle behind her, and before she could get off, up came Tom, looking as much astonished as if he had found her mounted, on an elephant.

"Hullo, Polly! What 'll Fan say to you?" was his polished salutation.

"Don't know, and don't care. Coasting is no harm; I like it, and I 'mgoing to do it, now I 've got a chance; so clear the lul-la!" And away went independent Polly, with her hair blowing in the wind, and an expression of genuine enjoyment, which a very red nose did n't damage in the least.

"Good for you, Polly!" And casting himself upon his sled, with the most reckless disregard for his ribs, off whizzed Tom after her, and came alongside just as she reined up "General Grant" on the broad path below. "Oh, won't you get it when we go home?" cried the young gentleman, even before he changed his graceful attitude.

"I shan't, if you don't go and tell; but of course you will," added Polly, sitting still, while an anxious expression began to steal over her happy face.

"I just won't, then," returned Tom, with the natural perversity of his tribe.

"If they ask me, I shall tell, of course; if they don't ask, I think there 's no

harm in keeping still. I should n't have done it, if I had n't known my mother was willing; but I don't wish to trouble your mother by telling of it. Do you think it was very dreadful of me?" asked Polly, looking at him.

"I think it was downright jolly; and I won't tell, if you don't want me to. Now, come up and have another," said Tom, heartily.

"Just one more; the little girls want to go, this is their sled."

"Let 'em take it, it is n't good for much; and you come on mine. Mazeppa's a stunner; you see if he is n't."

So Polly tucked herself up in front, Tom hung on behind in some mysterious manner, and Mazeppa proved that he fully merited his master's sincere if inelegant praise. They got on capitally now, for Tom was in his proper sphere, and showed his best side, being civil and gay in the bluff boy- fashion that was natural to him; while Polly forgot to be shy, and liked this sort of "toughening" much better than the other. They laughed and talked, and kept taking "just one more," till the sunshine was all gone, and the clocks struck dinner-time.

"We shall be late; let 's run," said Polly, as they came into the path after the last coast.

"You just sit still, and I 'll get you home in a jiffy;" and before she could unpack herself, Tom trotted off with her at a fine pace.

"Here 's a pair of cheeks! I wish you 'd get a color like this, Fanny," said Mr. Shaw, as Polly came into the dining-room after smoothing her hair.

"Your nose is as red as that cranberry sauce," answered Fan, coming out of the big chair where she had been curled up for an hour or two, deep in "Lady Audley's Secret."

"So it is," said Polly, shutting one eye to look at the offending feature. "Never mind; I 've had a good time, anyway," she added, giving a little prance in her chair.

"I don't see much fun in these cold runs you are so fond of taking," said Fanny, with a yawn and a shiver.

"Perhaps you would if you tried it;" and Polly laughed as she glanced at Tom.

"Did you go alone, dear?" asked grandma, patting the rosy cheek beside her.

"Yes 'm; but I met Tom, and we came home together." Polly's eyes twinkled when she said that, and Tom choked in his soup.

"Thomas, leave the table!" commanded Mr. Shaw, as his incorrigible son gurgled and gasped behind his napkin.

"Please don't send him away, sir. I made him laugh," said Polly, penitently.

"What's the joke?" asked Fanny, waking up at last.

"I should n't think you 'd make him laugh, when he 's always making you cwy," observed Maud, who had just come in.

"What have you been doing now, sir?" demanded Mr. Shaw, as Tom emerged, red and solemn, from his brief obscurity.

"Nothing but coast," he said, gruffly, for papa was always lecturing

him, and letting the girls do just as they liked.

"So 's Polly; I saw her. Me and Blanche were coming home just now, and we saw her and Tom widing down the hill on his sled, and then he dwagged her ever so far!" cried Maud, with her mouth full.

"You did n't?" and Fanny dropped her fork with a scandalized face.

"Yes, I did, and liked it ever so much," answered Polly, looking anxious but resolute.

"Did any one see you?" cried Fanny.

"Only some little girls, and Tom."

"It was horridly improper; and Tom ought to have told you so, if you did n't know any better. I should be mortified to death if any of my friends saw you," added Fan, much disturbed.

"Now, don't you scold. It 's no harm, and Polly shall coast if she wants to; may n't she, grandma?" cried Tom, gallantly coming to the rescue, and securing a powerful ally.

"My mother lets me; and if I don't go among the boys, I can't see what harm there is in it," said Polly, before Madam could speak.

"People do many things in the country that are not proper here," began Mrs. Shaw, in her reproving tone.

"Let the child do it if she likes, and take Maud with her. I should be glad to have one hearty girl in my house," interrupted Mr. Shaw, and that was the end of it.

"Thank you, sir," said Polly, gratefully, and nodded at Tom, who telegraphed back "All right!" and fell upon his dinner with the appetite of a young wolf.

"Oh, you sly-boots! you 're getting up a flirtation with Tom, are you?" whispered Fanny to her friend, as if much amused.

"What!" and Polly looked so surprised and indignant, that Fanny was ashamed of herself, and changed the subject by telling her mother she needed some new gloves.

Polly was very quiet after that, and the minute dinner was over, she left the

room to go and have a quiet "think" about the whole matter. Before she got half-way up stairs, she saw Tom coming after, and immediately sat down to guard her feet. He laughed, and said, as he perched himself on the post of the banisters, "I won't grab you, honor bright. I just wanted to say, if you 'll come out to-morrow some time, we 'll have a good coast."

"No," said Polly, "I can't come."

"Why not? Are you mad? I did n't tell." And Tom looked amazed at the change which had come over her.

"No; you kept your word, and stood by me like a good boy. I 'm not mad, either; but I don't mean to coast any more. Your mother don't like it."

"That is n't the reason, I know. You nodded to me after she 'd freed her mind, and you meant to go then. Come, now, what is it?"

"I shan't tell you; but I 'm not going," was Polly's determined answer.

"Well, I did think you had more sense than most girls; but you have n't, and I would n't give a sixpence for you."

"That 's polite," said Polly, getting ruffled.

"Well, I hate cowards."

"I ain't a coward."

"Yes, you are. You 're afraid of what folks will say; ain't you, now?"

Polly knew she was, and held her peace, though she longed to speak; but how could she?

"Ah, I knew you 'd back out." And Tom walked away with an air of scorn that cut Polly to the heart.

"It 's too bad! Just as he was growing kind to me, and I was going to have a good time, it 's all spoilt by Fan's nonsense. Mrs. Shaw don't like it, nor grandma either, I dare say. There 'll be a fuss if I go, and Fan will plague me; so I 'll give it up, and let Tom think I'm afraid. Oh, dear! I never did see such ridiculous people."

Polly shut her door hard, and felt ready to cry with vexation, that her pleasure should be spoilt by such a silly idea; for, of all the silly freaks of this fast age, that of little people playing at love is about the silliest. Polly had been taught that it was a very serious and sacred thing; and, according to her notions, it was far more improper to flirt with one boy than to coast with a dozen. She had been much amazed, only the day before, to hear Maud say to her mother, "Mamma, must I have a beau? The girls all do, and say I ought to have Fweddy Lovell; but I don't like him as well as Hawry Fiske."

"Oh, yes; I 'd have a little sweetheart, dear, it 's so cunning," answered Mrs. Shaw. And Maud announced soon after that she was engaged to "Fweddy, 'cause Hawry slapped her" when she proposed the match.

Polly laughed with the rest at the time; but when she thought of it afterward, and wondered what her own mother would have said, if little Kitty had put such a question, she did n't find it cunning or funny, but ridiculous and unnatural. She felt so now about herself; and when her first petulance was over, resolved to give up coasting and everything else, rather than have any nonsense with Tom, who, thanks to his neglected education, was as ignorant as herself of the charms of this new amusement for school-children. So Polly tried to console herself by jumping rope in the back-yard, and playing tag with Maud in the drying-room, where she likewise gave lessons in "nas-gim-nics," as Maud called it, which did that little person good. Fanny came up sometimes to teach them a new dancing step, and more than once was betrayed into a game of romps, for which she was none the worse. But Tom turned a cold shoulder to Polly, and made it evident, by his cavalier manner that he really did n't think her "worth a sixpence."

Another thing that troubled Polly was her clothes, for, though no one said anything, she knew they were very plain; and now and then she wished that her blue and mouse colored merinos were rather more trimmed, her sashes had bigger bows, and her little ruffles more lace on them. She sighed for a

locket, and, for the first time in her life, thought seriously of turning up her pretty curls and putting on a "wad." She kept these discontents to herself, however, after she had written to ask her mother if she might have her best dress altered like Fanny's, and received this reply: "No, dear; the dress is proper and becoming as it is, and the old fashion of simplicity the best for all of us. I don't want my Polly to be loved for her clothes, but for herself; so wear the plain frocks mother took such pleasure in making for you, and let the panniers go. The least of us have some influence in this big world; and perhaps my little girl can do some good by showing others that a contented heart and a happy face are better ornaments than any Paris can give her. You want a locket, deary; so I send one that my mother gave me years ago. You will find father's face on one side, mine on the other; and when things trouble you, just look at your talisman, and I think the sunshine will come back again."

Of course it did, for the best of all magic was shut up in the quaint little case that Polly wore inside her frock, and kissed so tenderly each night and morning. The thought that, insignificant as she was, she yet might do some good, made her very careful of her acts and words, and so anxious to keep head contented and face happy, that she forgot her clothes, and made others do the same. She did not know it, but that good old fashion of simplicity made the plain gowns pretty, and the grace of unconsciousness beautified their little wearer with the charm that makes girlhood sweetest to those who truly love and reverence it. One temptation Polly had already yielded to before the letter came, and repented heartily of afterward.

"Polly, I wish you 'd let me call you Marie," said Fanny one day, as they were shopping together.

"You may call me Mary, if you like; but I won't have any ie put on to my name. I 'm Polly at home and I 'm fond of being called so; but Marie is Frenchified and silly."

"I spell my own name with an ie, and so do all the girls."

"And what a jumble of Netties, Nellies, Hatties, and Sallies there is. How 'Pollie' would look spelt so!"

"Well, never mind; that was n't what I began to say. There 's one thing you

must have, and that is, bronze boots," said Fan, impressively.

"Why must I, when I 've got enough without?"

"Because it 's the fashion to have them, and you can't be finished off properly without. I 'm going to get a pair, and so must you."

"Don't they cost a great deal?"

"Eight or nine dollars, I believe. I have mine charged; but it don't matter if you have n't got the money. I can lend you some."

"I 've got ten dollars to do what I like with; but it 's meant to get some presents for the children." And Polly took out her purse in an undecided way.

"You can make presents easy enough. Grandma knows all sorts of nice contrivances. They 'll do just as well; and then you can get your boots."

"Well; I 'll look at them," said Polly, following Fanny into the store, feeling rather rich and important to be shopping in this elegant manner.

"Are n't they lovely? Your foot is perfectly divine in that boot, Polly. Get them for my party; you 'll dance like a fairy," whispered Fan.

Polly surveyed the dainty, shining boot with the scalloped top, the jaunty heel, and the delicate toe, thought her foot did look very well in it, and after a little pause, said she would have them. It was all very delightful till she got home, and was alone; then, on looking into her purse, she saw one dollar and the list of things she meant to get for mother and the children. How mean the dollar looked all alone! and how long the list grew when there was nothing to buy the articles.

"I can't make skates for Ned, nor a desk for Will; and those are what they have set their hearts upon. Father's book and mother's collar are impossible now; and I 'm a selfish thing to go and spend all my money for myself. How

could I do it?" And Polly eyed the new boots reproachfully, as they stood in the first position as if ready for the party. "They are lovely; but I don't believe they will feel good, for I shall be thinking about my lost presents all the time," sighed Polly, pushing the enticing boots out of sight. "I'll go and ask grandma what I can do; for if I've got to make something for every one, I must begin right away, or I shan't get done;" and off she bustled, glad to forget her remorse in hard work.

Grandma proved equal to the emergency, and planned something for every one, supplying materials, taste, and skill in the most delightful manner.

Polly felt much comforted; but while she began to knit a pretty pair of white bed-socks, to be tied with rose-colored ribbons, for her mother, she thought some very sober thoughts upon the subject of temptation; and if any one had asked her just then what made her sigh, as if something lay heavy on her conscience, she would have answered, "Bronze boots."