

Louisa May Alcott

AN OLD-FASHIONED  
GIRL

Lingua



## PREFACE

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As a preface is the only place where an author can with propriety explain a purpose or apologize for shortcomings, I venture to avail myself of the privilege, to make a statement for the benefit of my readers.

As the first part of "An Old-Fashioned Girl" was written in 1869, the demand for a sequel, in beseeching little letters that made refusal impossible, rendered it necessary to carry my heroine boldly forward some six or seven years into the future. The domestic nature of the story makes this audacious proceeding possible; while the lively fancies of my young readers will supply all deficiencies, and overlook all discrepancies.

This explanation will, I trust, relieve those well-regulated minds, who cannot conceive of such literary lawlessness, from the bewilderment which they suffered when the same experiment was tried in a former book.

The "Old-Fashioned Girl" is not intended as a perfect model, but as a possible improvement upon the Girl of the Period, who seems sorrowfully ignorant or ashamed of the good old fashions which make woman truly beautiful and honored,

and through her, render home what it should be,—a happy place, where parents, and children, brothers and sisters, learn to love and know and help one another.

If the history of Polly's girlish experiences suggests a hint or insinuates a lesson, I shall feel that, in spite of many obstacles, I have not entirely neglected my duty toward the little men and women, for whom it is an honor and a pleasure to write, since in them I have always found my kindest patrons, gentlest critics, warmest friends.

L. M. A.

## 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. Shouldn'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 wasn'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 hadn’t done him justice. Sisters never do, as “we fellow’s” 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 “chignon,” 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 isn’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, isn’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 isn’t a bit of a young lady, thank goodness! Fan didn’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 didn’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 hadn'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 wasn'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 isn't pleasant." Fanny didn't say "countryfied," 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 needn'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 needn’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 didn’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 shouldn’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 didn't let the contrast between herself and Fan trouble her; for in a minute, she laughed and said, contentedly, "My mother likes me to dress simply, and I don't mind. I shouldn'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 laboring 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. Every one 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.