

Alcott Louisa May

Rose in Bloom



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Louisa May Alcott

Rose in Bloom A Sequel to 'Eight Cousins'

PREFACE

As authors may be supposed to know better than any one else what they intended to do when writing a book, I beg leave to say that there is no moral to this story. Rose is not designed for a model girl: and the Sequel was simply written in fulfilment of a promise; hoping to afford some amusement, and perhaps here and there a helpful hint, to other roses getting ready to bloom.

L. M. Alcott.

September, 1876.

CHAPTER I. *COMING HOME*

Three young men stood together on a wharf one bright October day, awaiting the arrival of an ocean steamer with an impatience which found a vent in lively skirmishes with a small lad, who pervaded the premises like a will-o'-the-wisp, and afforded much amusement to the other groups assembled there.

"They are the Campbells, waiting for their cousin, who has been abroad several years with her uncle, the Doctor," whispered one lady to another, as the handsomest of the young men touched his hat to her as he passed, lugging the boy, whom he had just rescued from a little expedition down among the piles.

"Which is that?" asked the stranger.

"Prince Charlie, as he's called, – a fine fellow, the most promising of the seven; but a little fast, people say," answered the first speaker, with a shake of the head.

"Are the others his brothers?"

"No, cousins. The elder is Archie, a most exemplary young man. He has just gone into business with the merchant uncle, and bids fair to be an honor to his family. The other, with the eye-glasses and no gloves, is Mac, the odd one, just out of college."

"And the boy?"

"Oh, he is Jamie, the youngest brother of Archibald, and the pet of the whole family. Mercy on us! he'll be in if they don't hold on to him."

The ladies' chat came to a sudden end just there; for, by the time Jamie had been fished out of a hogshhead, the steamer hove in sight and every thing else was forgotten. As it swung slowly round to enter the dock, a boyish voice shouted, —

"There she is! I see her and uncle and Phebe! Hooray for Cousin Rose!" and three small cheers were given with a will by Jamie, as he stood on a post waving his arms like a windmill, while his brother held on to the tail of his jacket.

Yes, there they were, – Uncle Alec swinging his hat like a boy, with Phebe smiling and nodding on one side, and Rose kissing both hands delightedly on the other, as she recognized familiar faces and heard familiar voices welcoming her home.

"Bless her dear heart, she's bonnier than ever! Looks like a Madonna, – doesn't she? – with that blue cloak round her, and her bright hair flying in the wind!" said Charlie excitedly, as they watched the group upon the deck with eager eyes.

"Madonnas don't wear hats like that. Rose hasn't changed much, but Phebe has. Why, she's a regular beauty!" answered Archie, staring with all his might at the dark-eyed young woman, with the brilliant color and glossy, black braids shining in the sun.

"Dear old uncle! doesn't it seem good to have him back?" was all Mac said; but he was not looking at "dear old uncle," as he made the fervent remark, for he saw only the slender blonde girl near by, and stretched out his hands to meet hers, forgetful of the green water tumbling between them.

During the confusion that reigned for a moment as the steamer settled to her moorings, Rose looked down into the three faces upturned to hers, and seemed to read in them something that both pleased and pained her. It was only a glance, and her own eyes were full; but through the mist of happy tears she received the impression that Archie was about the same, that Mac had decidedly improved, and that something was amiss with Charlie. There was no time for observation, however; for in a moment the shoreward rush began, and, before she could grasp her travelling bag, Jamie was clinging to her like an ecstatic young bear. She was with difficulty released from his embrace, to fall into the gentler ones of the elder cousins, who took advantage of the general excitement to

welcome both blooming girls with affectionate impartiality. Then the wanderers were borne ashore in a triumphal procession, while Jamie danced rapturous jigs before them even on the gangway.

Archie remained to help his uncle get the luggage through the Custom House, and the others escorted the damsels home. No sooner were they shut up in a carriage, however, than a new and curious constraint seemed to fall upon the young people; for they realized, all at once, that their former playmates were men and women now. Fortunately, Jamie was quite free from this feeling of restraint, and, sitting bodkin-wise between the ladies, took all sorts of liberties with them and their belongings.

"Well, my mannikin, what do you think of us?" asked Rose, to break an awkward pause.

"You've both grown so pretty, I can't decide which I like best. Phebe is the biggest and brightest looking, and I was always fond of Phebe; but, somehow you are so kind of sweet and precious, I really think I *must* hug you again," and the small youth did it tempestuously.

"If you love me best, I shall not mind a bit about your thinking Phebe the handsomest, because she *is*. Isn't she, boys?" asked Rose, with a mischievous look at the gentlemen opposite, whose faces expressed a respectful admiration which much amused her.

"I'm so dazzled by the brilliancy and beauty that has suddenly burst upon me, I have no words to express my emotions," answered Charlie, gallantly dodging the dangerous question.

"I can't say yet, for I have not had time to look at any one. I will now, if you don't mind;" and, to the great amusement of the rest, Mac gravely adjusted his eye-glasses and took an observation.

"Well?" said Phebe, smiling and blushing under his honest stare, yet seeming not to resent it as she did the lordly sort of approval which made her answer the glance of Charlie's audacious blue eyes with a flash of her black ones.

"I think if you were my sister, I should be very proud of you, because your face shows what I admire more than its beauty, — truth and courage, Phebe," answered Mac, with a little bow, full of such genuine respect that surprise and pleasure brought a sudden dew to quench the fire of the girl's eyes, and soothe the sensitive pride of the girl's heart.

Rose clapped her hands just as she used to do when any thing delighted her, and beamed at Mac approvingly, as she said, —

"Now that's a criticism worth having, and we are much obliged. I was sure *you'd* admire my Phebe when you knew her: but I didn't believe you would be wise enough to see it at once; and you have gone up many pegs in my estimation, I assure you."

"I was always fond of mineralogy you remember, and I've been tapping round a good deal lately, so I've learned to know precious metals when I see them," Mac said with his shrewd smile.

"That is the last hobby, then? Your letters have amused us immensely; for each one had a new theory or experiment, and the latest was always the best. I thought uncle would have died of laughing over the vegetarian mania: it was so funny to imagine you living on bread and milk, baked apples, and potatoes roasted in your own fire," continued Rose, changing the subject again.

"This old chap was the laughing-stock of his class. They called him Don Quixote; and the way he went at windmills of all sorts was a sight to see," put in Charlie, evidently feeling that Mac had been patted on the head quite as much as was good for him.

"But in spite of that the Don got through college with all the honors. Oh, wasn't I proud when Aunt Jane wrote us about it! and didn't she rejoice that her boy kept at the head of his class, and won the medal!" cried Rose, shaking Mac by both hands in a way that caused Charlie to wish "the old chap" had been left behind with Dr. Alec.

"Oh come, that's all mother's nonsense. I began earlier than the other fellows and liked it better: so I don't deserve any praise. Prince is right, though: I did make a regular jack of myself; but, on the whole, I'm not sure that my wild oats weren't better than some I've seen sowed. Anyway, they didn't cost much, and I'm none the worse for them," said Mac, placidly.

"I know what 'wild oats' mean. I heard Uncle Mac say Charlie was sowing 'em too fast, and I asked mamma, so she told me. And I know that he was suspelled or expended, I don't remember

which, but it was something bad, and Aunt Clara cried," added Jamie, all in one breath; for he possessed a fatal gift of making *malapropos* remarks, which caused him to be a terror to his family.

"Do you want to go on the box again?" demanded Prince, with a warning frown.

"No, I don't."

"Then hold your tongue."

"Well, Mac needn't kick me; for I was only" – began the culprit, innocently trying to make a bad matter worse.

"That will do," interrupted Charlie, sternly, and James subsided a crushed boy, consoling himself with Rose's new watch for the indignities he suffered at the hands of the "old fellows," as he vengefully called his elders.

Mac and Charlie immediately began to talk as hard as their tongues could wag, bringing up all sorts of pleasant subjects so successfully that peals of laughter made passers-by look after the merry load with sympathetic smiles.

An avalanche of aunts fell upon Rose as soon as she reached home, and for the rest of the day the old house buzzed like a beehive. Evening found the whole tribe collected in the drawing-rooms, with the exception of Aunt Peace, whose place was empty now.

Naturally enough, the elders settled into one group after a while, and the young fellows clustered about the girls, like butterflies round two attractive flowers. Dr. Alec was the central figure in one room and Rose in the other; for the little girl, whom they had all loved and petted, had bloomed into a woman; and two years of absence had wrought a curious change in the relative positions of the cousins, especially the three elder ones, who eyed her with a mixture of boyish affection and manly admiration that was both new and pleasant.

Something sweet yet spirited about her charmed them and piqued their curiosity; for she was not quite like other girls, and rather startled them now and then by some independent little speech or act, which made them look at one another with a sly smile, as if reminded that Rose was "uncle's girl."

Let us listen, as in duty bound, to what the elders are saying first; for they are already building castles in the air for the boys and girls to inhabit.

"Dear child! how nice it is to see her safely back, so well and happy and like her sweet little self!" said Aunt Plenty, folding her hands as if giving thanks for a great happiness.

"I shouldn't wonder if you found that you'd brought a firebrand into the family, Alec. Two, in fact; for Phebe is a fine girl, and the lads have found it out already, if I'm not mistaken," added Uncle Mac, with a nod toward the other room.

All eyes followed his, and a highly suggestive tableau presented itself to the paternal and maternal audience in the back parlor.

Rose and Phebe, sitting side by side on the sofa, had evidently assumed at once the places which they were destined to fill by right of youth, sex, and beauty; for Phebe had long since ceased to be the maid and become the friend, and Rose meant to have that fact established at once.

Jamie occupied the rug, on which Will and Geordie stood at ease, showing their uniforms to the best advantage; for they were now in a great school, where military drill was the delight of their souls. Steve posed gracefully in an arm-chair, with Mac lounging over the back of it; while Archie leaned on one corner of the low chimney-piece, looking down at Phebe as she listened to his chat with smiling lips, and cheeks almost as rich in color as the carnations in her belt.

But Charlie was particularly effective, although he sat upon a music-stool, that most trying position for any man not gifted with grace in the management of his legs. Fortunately Prince was, and had fallen into an easy attitude, with one arm over the back of the sofa, his handsome head bent a little, as he monopolized Rose, with a devoted air and a very becoming expression of contentment on his face.

Aunt Clara smiled as if well pleased; Aunt Jessie looked thoughtful; Aunt Jane's keen eyes went from dapper Steve to broad-shouldered Mac with an anxious glance; Mrs. Myra murmured something about her "blessed Caroline;" and Aunt Plenty said warmly, —

"Bless the dears! any one might be proud of such a bonny flock of bairns as that."

"I am all ready to play chaperon as soon as you please, Alec; for I suppose the dear girl will come out at once, as she did not before you went away. My services won't be wanted long, I fancy; for with her many advantages she will be carried off in her first season or I'm much mistaken," said Mrs. Clara, with significant nods and smiles.

"You must settle all those matters with Rose: I am no longer captain, only first mate now, you know," answered Dr. Alec, adding soberly, half to himself, half to his brother, — "I wonder people are in such haste to 'bring out' their daughters, as it's called. To me there is something almost pathetic in the sight of a young girl standing on the threshold of the world, so innocent and hopeful, so ignorant of all that lies before her, and usually so ill prepared to meet the ups and downs of life. We do our duty better by the boys; but the poor little women are seldom provided with any armor worth having; and, sooner or later, they are sure to need it, for every one must fight her own battle, and only the brave and strong can win."

"You can't reproach yourself with neglect of that sort, Alec, for you have done your duty faithfully by George's girl; and I envy you the pride and happiness of having such a daughter, for she is that to you," answered old Mac, unexpectedly betraying the paternal sort of tenderness men seldom feel for their sons.

"I've tried, Mac, and I *am* both proud and happy; but with every year my anxiety seems to increase. I've done my best to fit Rose for what may come, as far as I can foresee it; but now she must stand alone, and all my care is powerless to keep her heart from aching, her life from being saddened by mistakes, or thwarted by the acts of others. I can only stand by, ready to share her joy and sorrow, and watch her shape her life."

"Why, Alec, what is the child going to do, that you need look so solemn?" exclaimed Mrs. Clara, who seemed to have assumed a sort of right to Rose already.

"Hark! and let her tell you herself," answered Dr. Alec, as Rose's voice was heard saying very earnestly, —

"Now you have all told your plans for the future, why don't you ask us ours?"

"Because we know that there is only one thing for a pretty girl to do, — break a dozen or so of hearts before she finds one to suit, then marry and settle," answered Charlie, as if no other reply was possible.

"That may be the case with many, but not with us; for Phebe and I believe that it is as much a right and a duty for women to do something with their lives as for men; and we are not going to be satisfied with such frivolous parts as you give us," cried Rose, with kindling eyes. "I mean what I say, and you cannot laugh me down. Would *you* be contented to be told to enjoy yourself for a little while, then marry and do nothing more till you die?" she added, turning to Archie.

"Of course not: that is only a part of a man's life," he answered decidedly.

"A very precious and lovely part, but not *all*," continued Rose; "neither should it be for a woman: for we've got minds and souls as well as hearts; ambition and talents, as well as beauty and accomplishments; and we want to live and learn as well as love and be loved. I'm sick of being told that is all a woman is fit for! I won't have any thing to do with love till I prove that I am something beside a housekeeper and baby-tender!"

"Heaven preserve us! here's woman's rights with a vengeance!" cried Charlie, starting up with mock horror, while the others regarded Rose with mingled surprise and amusement, evidently fancying it all a girlish outbreak.

"Ah, you needn't pretend to be shocked: you will be in earnest presently; for this is only the beginning of my strong-mindedness," continued Rose, nothing daunted by the smiles of good-natured

incredulity or derision on the faces of her cousins. "I have made up my mind not to be cheated out of the real things that make one good and happy; and, just because I'm a rich girl, fold my hands and drift as so many do. I haven't lived with Phebe all these years in vain: I know what courage and self-reliance can do for one; and I sometimes wish I hadn't a penny in the world so that I could go and earn my bread with her, and be as brave and independent as she will be pretty soon."

It was evident that Rose was in earnest now; for, as she spoke, she turned to her friend with such respect as well as love in her face that the look told better than any words how heartily the rich girl appreciated the virtues hard experience had given the poor girl, and how eagerly she desired to earn what all her fortune could not buy for her.

Something in the glance exchanged between the friends impressed the young men in spite of their prejudices; and it was in a perfectly serious tone that Archie said, —

"I fancy you'll find your hands full, cousin, if you want work; for I've heard people say that wealth has its troubles and trials as well as poverty."

"I know it, and I'm going to try and fill my place well. I've got some capital little plans all made, and have begun to study my profession already," answered Rose, with an energetic nod.

"Could I ask what it is to be?" inquired Charlie, in a tone of awe.

"Guess!" and Rose looked up at him with an expression half-earnest, half-merry.

"Well, I should say that you were fitted for a beauty and a belle; but, as that is evidently not to your taste, I am afraid you are going to study medicine and be a doctor. Won't your patients have a heavenly time though? It will be easy dying with an angel to poison them."

"Now, Charlie, that's base of you, when you know how well women have succeeded in this profession, and what a comfort Dr. Mary Kirk was to dear Aunt Peace. I did want to study medicine; but uncle thought it wouldn't do to have so many M.D.'s in one family, since Mac thinks of trying it. Besides, I seem to have other work put into my hands that I am better fitted for."

"You are fitted for any thing that is generous and good; and I'll stand by you, no matter what you've chosen," cried Mac heartily; for this was a new style of talk from a girl's lips, and he liked it immensely.

"Philanthropy is a generous, good, and beautiful profession; and I've chosen it for mine because I have much to give. I'm only the steward of the fortune papa left me; and I think, if I use it wisely for the happiness of others, it will be more blest than if I keep it all for myself."

Very sweetly and simply was this said, but it was curious to see how differently the various hearers received it.

Charlie shot a quick look at his mother, who exclaimed, as if in spite of herself, —

"Now, Alec, *are* you going to let that girl squander a fine fortune on all sorts of charitable nonsense and wild schemes, for the prevention of pauperism and crime?"

"'They who give to the poor lend to the Lord,' and practical Christianity is the kind He loves the best," was all Dr. Alec answered; but it silenced the aunts, and caused even prudent Uncle Mac to think with sudden satisfaction of certain secret investments he had made, which paid him no interest but the thanks of the poor.

Archie and Mac looked well pleased, and promised their advice and assistance with the enthusiasm of generous young hearts. Steve shook his head, but said nothing; and the lads on the rug at once proposed founding a hospital for invalid dogs and horses, white mice and wounded heroes.

"Don't you think that will be a better way for a woman to spend her life, than in dancing, dressing, and husband-hunting, Charlie?" asked Rose, observing his silence and anxious for his approval.

"Very pretty for a little while, and very effective too; for I don't know any thing more captivating than a sweet girl in a meek little bonnet, going on charitable errands and glorifying poor people's houses with a delightful mixture of beauty and benevolence. Fortunately, the dear souls soon tire of it, but it's heavenly while it lasts."

Charlie spoke in a tone of mingled admiration and contempt, and smiled a superior sort of smile, as if he understood all the innocent delusions as well as the artful devices of the sex, and expected nothing more from them. It both surprised and grieved Rose, for it did not sound like the Charlie she had left two years ago. But she only said, with a reproachful look and a proud little gesture of head and hand, as if she put the subject aside since it was not treated with respect, —

"I am sorry you have so low an opinion of women: there *was* a time when you believed in them sincerely."

"I do still, upon my word I do! They haven't a more devoted admirer and slave in the world than I am. Just try me and see," cried Charlie, gallantly kissing his hand to the sex in general.

But Rose was not appeased, and gave a disdainful shrug, as she answered with a look in her eyes that his lordship did not like, —

"Thank you: I don't want admirers or slaves, but friends and helpers. I've lived so long with a wise, good man that I am rather hard to suit, perhaps; but I don't intend to lower my standard, and any one who cares for my regard must at least try to live up to it."

"Whew! here's a wrathful dove! Come and smooth her ruffled plumage, Mac. I'll dodge before I do further mischief," and Charlie strolled away into the other room, privately lamenting that Uncle Alec had spoiled a fine girl by making her strong-minded.

He wished himself back again in five minutes; for Mac said something that produced a gale of laughter, and when he took a look over his shoulder the "wrathful dove" was cooing so peacefully and pleasantly he was sorely tempted to return and share the fun. But Charlie had been spoiled by too much indulgence, and it was hard for him to own himself in the wrong even when he knew it. He always got what he wanted sooner or later; and, having long ago made up his mind that Rose and her fortune were to be his, he was secretly displeased at the new plans and beliefs of the young lady, but flattered himself that they would soon be changed when she saw how unfashionable and inconvenient they were.

Musing over the delightful future he had laid out, he made himself comfortable in the sofa corner near his mother, till the appearance of a slight refection caused both groups to melt into one. Aunt Plenty believed in eating and drinking; so the slightest excuse for festivity delighted her hospitable soul, and on this joyful occasion she surpassed herself.

It was during this informal banquet that Rose, roaming about from one admiring relative to another, came upon the three younger lads, who were having a quiet little scuffle in a secluded corner.

"Come out here and let me have a look at you," she said enticingly; for she predicted an explosion and public disgrace if peace was not speedily restored.

Hastily smoothing themselves down, the young gentlemen presented three flushed and merry countenances for inspection, feeling highly honored by the command.

"Dear me, how you two have grown! You big things! how dare you get ahead of me in this way?" she said, standing on tiptoe to pat the curly pates before her; for Will and Geordie had shot up like weeds, and now grinned cheerfully down upon her as she surveyed them in comic amazement.

"The Campbells are all fine, tall fellows; and we mean to be the best of the lot. Shouldn't wonder if we were six-footers, like Grandpa," observed Will proudly, looking so like a young Shanghae rooster, all legs and an insignificant head, that Rose kept her countenance with difficulty.

"We shall broaden out when we get our growth. We are taller than Steve now, a half a head, both of us," added Geordie, with his nose in the air.

Rose turned to look at Steve, and, with a sudden smile, beckoned to him. He dropped his napkin, and flew to obey the summons; for she was queen of the hour, and he had openly announced his deathless loyalty.

"Tell the other boys to come here. I've a fancy to stand you all in a row and look you over, as you did me that dreadful day when you nearly frightened me out of my wits," she said, laughing at the memory of it as she spoke.

They came in a body, and, standing shoulder to shoulder, made such an imposing array that the young commander was rather daunted for a moment. But she had seen too much of the world lately to be abashed by a trifle; and the desire to try a girlish test gave her courage to face the line of smiling cousins with dignity and spirit.

"Now I'm going to stare at you as you stared at me. It is my revenge on you seven bad boys for entrapping one poor little girl, and enjoying her alarm. I'm not a bit afraid of you now; so tremble and beware!"

As she spoke, Rose looked up into Archie's face and nodded approvingly; for the steady gray eyes met hers fairly, and softened as they did so, – a becoming change, for naturally they were rather keen than kind.

"A true Campbell, bless you!" she said, and shook his hand heartily as she passed on.

Charlie came next, and here she felt less satisfied, though scarcely conscious why; for, as she looked, there came a defiant sort of flash, changing suddenly to something warmer than anger, stronger than pride, making her shrink a little and say, hastily, —

"I don't find the Charlie I left; but the Prince is there still, I see."

Turning to Mac with a sense of relief, she gently took off his "winkers," as Jamie called them, and looked straight into the honest blue eyes that looked straight back at her, full of a frank and friendly affection that warmed her heart, and made her own eyes brighten as she gave back the glasses, saying, with a look and tone of cordial satisfaction, —

"*You* are not changed, my dear old Mac; and I'm so glad of that!"

"Now say something extra sweet to me, because I'm the flower of the family," said Steve, twirling the blonde moustache, which was evidently the pride of his life.

Rose saw at a glance that Dandy deserved his name more than ever, and promptly quenched his vanities by answering, with a provoking laugh, —

"Then the name of the flower of the family is Cock's-comb."

"Ah, ha! who's got it now?" jeered Will.

"Let us off easy, please," whispered Geordie, mindful that their turn came next.

"You blessed beanstalks! I'm proud of you: only don't grow quite out of sight, or ever be ashamed to look a woman in the face," answered Rose, with a gentle pat on the cheek of either bashful young giant; for both were as red as peonies, though their boyish eyes were as clear and calm as summer lakes.

"Now me!" And Jamie assumed his manliest air, feeling that he did not appear to advantage among his tall kinsmen. But he went to the head of the class in every one's opinion when Rose put her arms round him, saying, with a kiss, —

"You must be my boy now; for all the others are too old, and I want a faithful little page to do my errands for me."

"I will, I will! and I'll marry you too, if you'll just hold on till I grow up!" cried Jamie, rather losing his head at this sudden promotion.

"Bless the baby, what is he talking about?" laughed Rose, looking down at her little knight, as he clung about her with grateful ardor.

"Oh, I heard the aunts say that you'd better marry one of us, and keep the property in the family; so I speak first, because you are very fond of me, and I *do* love curls."

Alas for Jamie! this awful speech had hardly left his innocent lips when Will and Geordie swept him out of the room like a whirlwind; and the howls of that hapless boy were heard from the torture-hall, where being shut into the skeleton-case was one of the mildest punishments inflicted upon him.

Dismay fell upon the unfortunates who remained: but their confusion was soon ended; for Rose, with a look which they had never seen upon her face before, dismissed them with the brief command, "Break ranks, – the review is over," and walked away to Phebe.

"Confound that boy! You ought to shut him up, or gag him!" fumed Charlie, irritably.

"He shall be attended to," answered poor Archie, who was trying to bring up the little marplot with the success of most parents and guardians.

"The whole thing was deuced disagreeable," growled Steve, who felt that he had not distinguished himself in the late engagement.

"Truth generally is," observed Mac dryly, as he strolled away with his odd smile.

As if he suspected discord somewhere, Dr. Alec proposed music at this crisis; and the young people felt that it was a happy thought.

"I want you to hear both my birds; for they have improved immensely, and I am very proud of them," said the Doctor, twirling up the stool and pulling out the old music-books.

"I had better come first, for after you have heard the nightingale you won't care for the canary," added Rose, wishing to put Phebe at her ease; for she sat among them looking like a picture, but rather shy and silent, remembering the days when her place was in the kitchen.

"I'll give you some of the dear old songs you used to like so much. This was a favorite, I think;" and sitting down she sang the first familiar air that came, and sang it well in a pleasant, but by no means finished, manner.

It chanced to be "The Birks of Aberfeldie," and vividly recalled the time when Mac was ill, and she took care of him. The memory was sweet to her, and involuntarily her eye wandered in search of him. He was not far away, sitting just as he used to sit when she soothed his most despondent moods, – astride of a chair with his head down on his arms, as if the song suggested the attitude. Her heart quite softened to him as she looked, and she decided to forgive *him* if no one else; for she was sure that he had no mercenary plans about her tiresome money.

Charlie had assumed a pensive air, and fixed his fine eyes upon her with an expression of tender admiration, which made her laugh in spite of all her efforts to seem unconscious of it. She was both amused and annoyed at his very evident desire to remind her of certain sentimental passages in the last year of their girl and boyhood, and to change what she had considered a childish joke into romantic earnest. This did not suit her; for, young as she was, Rose had very serious ideas of love, and had no intention of being beguiled into even a flirtation with her handsome cousin.

So Charlie attitudinized unnoticed, and was getting rather out of temper when Phebe began to sing; and he forgot all about himself in admiration of her. It took every one by surprise: for two years of foreign training added to several at home had worked wonders; and the beautiful voice that used to warble cheerily over pots and kettles, now rang out melodiously or melted to a mellow music that woke a sympathetic thrill in those who listened. Rose glowed with pride as she accompanied her friend; for Phebe was in her own world now, – a lovely world where no depressing memory of poor-house or kitchen, ignorance or loneliness, came to trouble her; a happy world where she could be herself, and rule others by the magic of her sweet gift.

Yes, Phebe was herself now, and showed it in the change that came over her at the first note of music. No longer shy and silent, no longer the image of a handsome girl, but a blooming woman, alive and full of the eloquence her art gave her, as she laid her hands softly together, fixed her eye on the light, and just poured out her song as simply and joyfully as the lark does soaring toward the sun.

"My faith, Alec! that's the sort of voice that wins a man's heart out of his breast!" exclaimed Uncle Mac, wiping his eyes after one of the plaintive ballads that never grow old.

"So it would!" answered Dr. Alec, delightedly.

"So it has," added Archie to himself; and he was right: for, just at that moment, he fell in love with Phebe. He actually did, and could fix the time almost to a second: for, at a quarter past nine, he merely thought her a very charming young person; at twenty minutes past, he considered her the loveliest woman he ever beheld; at five and twenty minutes past, she was an angel singing his soul away; and at half after nine he was a lost man, floating over a delicious sea to that temporary heaven on earth where lovers usually land after the first rapturous plunge.

If any one had mentioned this astonishing fact, nobody would have believed it; nevertheless, it was quite true: and sober, business-like Archie suddenly discovered a fund of romance at the bottom of his hitherto well-conducted heart that amazed him. He was not quite clear what had happened to him at first, and sat about in a dazed sort of way; seeing, hearing, knowing nothing but Phebe: while the unconscious idol found something wanting in the cordial praise so modestly received, because Mr. Archie never said a word.

This was one of the remarkable things which occurred that evening; another was that Mac paid Rose a compliment, which was such an unprecedented fact, it produced a great sensation, though only one person heard it.

Everybody had gone but Mac and his father, who was busy with the Doctor. Aunt Plenty was counting the teaspoons in the dining-room, and Phebe was helping her as of old. Mac and Rose were alone, – he apparently in a brown study, leaning his elbows on the chimney-piece; and she lying back in a low chair, looking thoughtfully at the fire. She was tired; and the quiet was grateful to her: so she kept silence and Mac respectfully held his tongue. Presently, however, she became conscious that he was looking at her as intently as eyes and glasses could do it; and, without stirring from her comfortable attitude, she said, smiling up at him, —

"He looks as wise as an owl: I wonder what he's thinking about?"

"You, cousin."

"Something good, I hope?"

"I was thinking Leigh Hunt was about right when he said, 'A girl is the sweetest thing God ever made.'"

"Why, Mac!" and Rose sat bolt upright with an astonished face: this was such an entirely unexpected sort of remark for the philosopher to make.

Evidently interested in the new discovery, Mac placidly continued, "Do you know, it seems as if I never really saw a girl before, or had any idea what agreeable creatures they could be. I fancy you are a remarkably good specimen, Rose."

"No, indeed! I'm only hearty and happy; and being safe at home again may make me look better than usual perhaps: but I'm no beauty except to uncle."

"'Hearty and happy,' – that must be it," echoed Mac, soberly investigating the problem. "Most girls are sickly or silly, I think I have observed; and that is probably why I am so struck with you."

"Of all queer boys you are the queerest! Do you really mean that you don't like or notice girls?" asked Rose, much amused at this new peculiarity of her studious cousin.

"Well, no: I am only conscious of two sorts, – noisy and quiet ones. I prefer the latter: but, as a general thing, I don't notice any of them much more than I do flies, unless they bother me; then I'd like to flap them away; but, as that won't do, I hide."

Rose leaned back and laughed till her eyes were full: it was so comical to hear Mac sink his voice to a confidential whisper at the last words, and see him smile with sinful satisfaction at the memory of the tormentors he had eluded.

"You needn't laugh: it's a fact, I assure you. Charlie likes the creatures, and they spoil him; Steve follows suit, of course. Archie is a respectful slave when he can't help himself. As for me, I don't often give them a chance; and, when I get caught, I talk science and dead languages till they run for their lives. Now and then I find a sensible one, and then we get on excellently."

"A sad prospect for Phebe and me," sighed Rose, trying to keep sober.

"Phebe is evidently a quiet one. I know she is sensible, or you wouldn't care for her. I can see that she is pleasant to look at, so I fancy I shall like her. As for you, I helped bring you up; therefore I am a little anxious to see how you turn out. I was afraid your foreign polish might spoil you, but I think it has not. In fact, I find you quite satisfactory so far, if you don't mind my saying it. I don't quite know what the charm is, though. Must be the power of inward graces, since you insist that you have no outward ones."

Mac was peering at her with a shrewd smile on his lips, but such a kindly look behind the glasses, that she found both words and glance very pleasant, and answered merrily, —

"I am glad you approve of me, and much obliged for your care of my early youth. I hope to be a credit to you, and depend on your keeping me straight; for I'm afraid I shall be spoilt among you all."

"I'll keep my eye on you upon one condition," replied the youthful Mentor.

"Name it."

"If you are going to have a lot of lovers round, I wash my hands of you. If not, I'm your man."

"You must be sheep-dog, and help keep them away; for I don't want any yet awhile; and, between ourselves, I don't believe I shall have any if it is known that I am strong-minded. That fact will scare most men away like a yellow flag," said Rose: for, thanks to Dr. Alec's guardianship, she had wasted neither heart nor time in the foolish flirtations so many girls fritter away their youth upon.

"Hum! I rather doubt that," muttered Mac, as he surveyed the damsel before him.

She certainly did not look unpleasantly strong-minded, for she *was* beautiful in spite of her modest denials. Beautiful with the truest sort of beauty; for nobility of character lent its subtle charm to the bloom of youth, the freshness of health, the innocence of a nature whose sweet maidenliness Mac felt but could not describe. Gentle yet full of spirit, and all aglow with the earnestness that suggests lovely possibilities, and makes one hope that such human flowers may have heaven's purest air and warmest sunshine to blossom in.

"Wait and see," answered Rose; then, as her uncle's voice was heard in the hall, she held out her hand, adding pleasantly, "The old times are to begin again, so come soon and tell me all your doings, and help me with mine just as you used to do."

"You really mean it?" and Mac looked much pleased.

"I really do. You are so little altered, except to grow big, that I don't feel at all strange with you, and want to begin where we left off."

"That will be capital. Good-night, cousin," and to her great amazement he gave her a hearty kiss.

"Oh, but that is not the old way at all!" cried Rose, stepping back in merry confusion; while the audacious youth assumed an air of mild surprise, as he innocently asked, —

"Didn't we always say good-night in that way? I had an impression that we did, and were to begin just as we left off."

"Of course not; no power on earth would have bribed you to do it, as you know well enough. I don't mind the first night, but we are too old for that sort of thing now."

"I'll remember. It was the force of habit, I suppose; for I'm sure I must have done it in former times, it seemed so natural. Coming, father!" and Mac retired, evidently convinced that he was right.

"Dear old thing! he is as much a boy as ever, and that is such a comfort; for some of the others have grown up very fast," said Rose to herself, recalling Charlie's sentimental airs, and Archie's beatified expression while Phebe sang.

CHAPTER II.

OLD FRIENDS WITH NEW FACES

"It is *so* good to be at home again! I wonder how we ever made up our minds to go away!" exclaimed Rose, as she went roaming about the old house next morning, full of the satisfaction one feels at revisiting familiar nooks and corners, and finding them unchanged.

"That we might have the pleasure of coming back again," answered Phebe, walking down the hall beside her little mistress, as happy as she.

"Every thing seems just as we left it, even to the rose-leaves we used to tuck in here," continued the younger girl, peeping into one of the tall India jars that stood about the hall.

"Don't you remember how Jamie and Pokey used to play Forty Thieves with them, and how you tried to get into that blue one and got stuck, and the other boys found us before I could pull you out?" asked Phebe, laughing.

"Yes, indeed; and speaking of angels one is apt to hear the rustling of their wings," added Rose, as a shrill whistle came up the avenue, accompanied by the clatter of hoofs.

"It is the circus!" cried Phebe, gaily, as they both recalled the red cart and the charge of the Clan.

There was only one boy now, alas! but he made noise enough for half a dozen; and, before Rose could run to the door, Jamie came bouncing in with a "shining morning face," a bat over his shoulder, a red and white jockey cap on his head, one pocket bulging with a big ball, the other overflowing with cookies, and his mouth full of the apple he was just finishing off in hot haste.

"Morning! I just looked in to make sure you'd really come, and see that you were all right," he observed, saluting with the bat and doffing the gay cap with one effective twitch.

"Good-morning, dear. Yes, we are really here, and getting to rights as fast as possible. But it seems to me you are rather gorgeous, Jamie. What do you belong to, – a fire company or a jockey club?" asked Rose, turning up the once chubby face, which now was getting brown, and square about the chin.

"No, *ma'am*! Why, don't you know? I'm captain of the Base Ball Star Club. Look at that, will you?" and, as if the fact was one of national importance, Jamie flung open his jacket to display upon his proudly swelling chest a heart-shaped red-flannel shield, decorated with a white cotton star the size of a tea-plate.

"Superb! I've been away so long I forgot there was such a game. And *you* are the captain?" cried Rose, deeply impressed by the high honor to which her kinsman had arrived.

"I just am, and it's no joke you'd better believe; for we knock our teeth out, black our eyes, and split our fingers almost as well as the big fellows. You come down to the Common between one and two and see us play a match; then you'll understand what hard work it is. I'll teach you to bat now if you'll come out on the lawn," added Jamie, fired with a wish to exhibit his prowess.

"No, thank you, captain. The grass is wet, and you'll be late at school if you stay for us."

"I'm not afraid. Girls are not good for much generally; but you never used to mind a little wet, and played cricket like a good one. Can't you ever do that sort of thing now?" asked the boy, with a pitying look at these hapless creatures, debarred from the joys and perils of manly sports.

"I can run still: and I'll get to the gate before you; see if I don't;" and, yielding to the impulse of the moment, Rose darted down the steps before astonished Jamie could mount and follow.

He was off in a moment: but Rose had the start; and, though old Sheltie did his best, she reached the goal just ahead, and stood there laughing and panting, all rosy with the fresh October air, a pretty picture for several gentlemen who were driving by.

"Good for you, Rose!" said Archie, jumping out to shake hands, while Will and Geordie saluted, and Uncle Mac laughed at Jamie, who looked as if girls had risen slightly in his opinion.

"I'm glad it is you, because you won't be shocked. But I'm so happy to be back I forgot I was not little Rose still," said Atalanta, smoothing down her flying hair.

"You look very like her, with the curls on your shoulders in the old way. I missed them last night, and wondered what it was. How is uncle and Phebe?" asked Archie, whose eyes had been looking over Rose's head while he spoke toward the piazza, where a female figure was visible among the reddening woodbines.

"All well, thanks. Won't you come up and see for yourselves?"

"Can't, my dear, can't possibly. Business, you know, business. This fellow is my right-hand man, and I can't spare him a minute. Come, Arch, we must be off, or these boys will miss their train," answered Uncle Mac, pulling out his watch.

With a last look from the light-haired figure at the gate to the dark-haired one among the vines, Archie drove away, and Jamie cantered after, consoling himself for his defeat with apple number two.

Rose lingered a moment, feeling much inclined to continue her run, and pop in upon all the aunts in succession; but, remembering her uncovered head, was about to turn back, when a cheerful "Ahoy! ahoy!" made her look up, to see Mac approaching at a great pace, waving his hat as he came.

"The Campbells are coming thick and fast this morning, and the more the merrier," she said, running to meet him. "You look like a good boy going to school, and virtuously conning your lesson by the way," she added, smiling to see him take his finger out of the book he had evidently been reading, and tuck it under his arm, just as he used to do years ago.

"I *am* a school-boy going to the school I like best," he answered, waving a plummy spray of asters, as if pointing out the lovely autumn world about them, full of gay hues, fresh airs, and mellow sunshine.

"That reminds me that I didn't get a chance to hear much about your plans last night: the other boys all talked at once, and you only got in a word now and then. What have you decided to be, Mac?" asked Rose, as they went up the avenue side by side.

"A man first, and a good one if possible; after that, what God pleases."

Something in the tone, as well as the words, made Rose look up quickly into Mac's face, to see a new expression there. It was indescribable; but she felt as she had often done when watching the mists part suddenly, giving glimpses of some mountain-top, shining serene and high against the blue.

"I think you *will* be something splendid; for you really look quite glorified, walking under this arch of yellow leaves with the sunshine on your face," she exclaimed, conscious of a sudden admiration never felt before; for Mac was the plainest of all the cousins.

"I don't know about that; but I have my dreams and aspirations, and some of them are pretty high ones. Aim at the best, you know, and keep climbing if you want to get on," he said, looking at the asters with an inward sort of smile, as if he and they had some sweet secret between them.

"You are queerer than ever. But I like your ambition, and hope you will get on. Only mustn't you begin at something soon? I fancied you would study medicine with uncle: that used to be our plan, you know."

"I shall, for the present at least, because I quite agree with you that it is necessary to have an anchor somewhere, and not go floating off into the world of imagination without ballast of the right sort. Uncle and I had some talk about it last night, and I'm going up to begin as soon as possible; for I've mooned long enough," and giving himself a shake, Mac threw down the pretty spray, adding half aloud, —

"Chide me not, laborious band,
For the idle flowers I brought:
Every aster in my hand

Goes home laden with a thought."

Rose caught the words and smiled, thinking to herself, "Oh, that's it: he is getting into the sentimental age, and Aunt Jane has been lecturing him. Dear me, how we *are* growing up!"

"You look as if you didn't like the prospect very well," she said aloud; for Mac had rammed the volume of Shelley into his pocket, and the glorified expression was so entirely gone Rose fancied that she had been mistaken about the mountain-top behind the mists.

"Yes, well enough: I always thought the profession a grand one; and where could I find a better teacher than uncle? I've got into lazy ways lately, and it is high time I went at something useful; so here I go," and Mac abruptly vanished into the study, while Rose joined Phebe in Aunt Plenty's room.

The dear old lady had just decided, after long and earnest discussion, which of six favorite puddings should be served for dinner, and thus had a few moments to devote to sentiment; so, when Rose came in, she held out her arms, saying fondly, —

"I shall not feel as if I'd got my child back again, until I have her in my lap a minute. No, you're not a bit too heavy; my rheumatism doesn't begin much before November: so sit here, darling, and put your two arms round my neck."

Rose obeyed, and neither spoke for a moment, as the old woman held the young one close, and appeased the two years' longing of a motherly heart by the caresses women give the creatures dearest to them. Right in the middle of a kiss, however, she stopped suddenly; and, holding out one arm, caught Phebe, who was trying to steal away unobserved.

"Don't go: there's room for both in my love, though there isn't in my lap. I'm so grateful to get my dear girls safely home again, that I hardly know what I'm about," said Aunt Plenty, embracing Phebe so heartily that she could not feel left out in the cold, and stood there with her black eyes shining through the happiest tears.

"There, now I've had a good hug, and feel as if I was all right again. I wish you'd set that cap in order, Rose: I went to bed in such a hurry I pulled the strings off and left it all in a heap. Phebe, dear, you shall dust round a mite, just as you used to; for I haven't had any one to do it as I like since you've been gone, and it will do me good to see all my knickknacks straightened out in your tidy way," said the elder lady, getting up with a refreshed expression on her rosy old face.

"Shall I dust in here too?" asked Phebe, glancing toward an inner room which used to be her care.

"No, dear, I'd rather do that myself. Go in if you like: nothing is changed. I *must* go and see to my pudding;" and Aunt Plenty trotted abruptly away, with a quiver of emotion in her voice which made even her last words pathetic.

Pausing on the threshold as if it was a sacred place, the girls looked in with eyes soon dimmed by tender tears; for it seemed as if the gentle occupant was still there. Sunshine shone on the old geraniums by the window; the cushioned chair stood in its accustomed place, with the white wrapper hung across it, and the faded slippers lying ready. Books and basket, knitting and spectacles, were all just as she had left them; and the beautiful tranquillity that always filled the room seemed so natural both lookers turned involuntarily toward the bed where Aunt Peace used to greet them with a smile. There was no sweet old face upon the pillow now, yet the tears that wet the blooming cheeks were not for her who had gone, but for her who was left; because they saw something which spoke eloquently of the love which outlives death and makes the humblest thing beautiful and sacred.

A well-worn footstool stood beside the bed, and in the high-piled whiteness of the empty couch there was a little hollow where a gray head nightly rested, while Aunt Plenty said the prayers her mother taught her seventy years ago.

Without a word, the girls softly shut the door: and, while Phebe put the room in the most exquisite order, Rose retrimmed the plain white cap, where pink and yellow ribbons never rustled

now; both feeling honored by their tasks, and better for their knowledge of the faithful love and piety which sanctified a good old woman's life.

"You darling creature, I'm *so* glad to get you back! I know it's shamefully early; but I really couldn't keep away another minute. Let me help you: I'm dying to see all your splendid things; for I saw the trunks pass, and I know you've quantities of treasures," cried Annabel Bliss, all in one breath as she embraced Rose an hour later, and glanced about the room bestrewn with a variety of agreeable objects.

"How well you are looking! Sit down and I'll show you my lovely photographs. Uncle chose all the best for me, and it's a treat to see them," answered Rose, putting a roll on the table and looking about for more.

"Oh, thanks! I haven't time now: one needs hours to study such things. Show me your Paris dresses, there's a dear: I'm perfectly aching to see the last styles," and Annabel cast a hungry eye toward certain large boxes delightfully suggestive of French finery.

"I haven't got any," said Rose, fondly surveying the fine photographs as she laid them away.

"Rose Campbell! you don't mean to say that you didn't get one Paris dress at least?" cried Annabel, scandalized at the bare idea of such neglect.

"Not one for myself: Aunt Clara ordered several, and will be charmed to show them when her box comes."

"Such a chance! right there and plenty of money! How *could* you love your uncle after such cruelty?" sighed Annabel, with a face full of sympathy.

Rose looked puzzled for a minute, then seemed to understand, and assumed a superior air which became her very well, as she said, good-naturedly opening a box of laces, "Uncle did not forbid my doing it, and I had money enough; but I chose not to spend it on things of that sort."

"Could and didn't! I can't believe it!" And Annabel sunk into a chair, as if the thought was too much for her.

"I did rather want to at first, just for the fun of the thing; in fact, I went and looked at some amazing gowns. But they were very expensive, very much trimmed, and not my style at all; so I gave them up, and kept what I valued more than all the gowns Worth ever made."

"What in the world was it?" cried Annabel, hoping she would say diamonds.

"Uncle's good opinion," answered Rose, looking thoughtfully into the depths of a packing case, where lay the lovely picture that would always remind her of the little triumph over girlish vanity, which not only kept but increased "Uncle's good opinion."

"Oh, indeed!" said Annabel, blankly, and fell to examining Aunt Plenty's lace; while Rose went on with a happy smile in her eyes as she dived into another trunk.

"Uncle thinks one has no right to waste money on such things; but he is very generous, and loves to give useful, beautiful, or curious gifts. See, all these pretty ornaments are for presents; and you shall choose first whatever you like."

"He's a perfect dear!" cried Annabel, revelling in the crystal, filigree, coral, and mosaic trinkets spread before her; while Rose completed her rapture by adding sundry tasteful trifles fresh from Paris.

"Now tell me, when do you mean to have your coming-out party? I ask because I've nothing ready, and want plenty of time; for, I suppose, it will be *the* event of the season," asked Annabel, a few minutes later, as she wavered between a pink coral and a blue lava set.

"I came out when I went to Europe; but I suppose Aunty Plen will want to have some sort of merrymaking to celebrate our return. I shall begin as I mean to go on, and have a simple, sociable sort of party, and invite every one whom I like, no matter in what 'set' they happen to belong. No one shall ever say *I* am aristocratic and exclusive: so prepare yourself to be shocked; for old friends and young, rich and poor, will be asked to all my parties."

"Oh, my heart! you *are* going to be odd just as mamma predicted!" sighed Annabel, clasping her hands in despair, and studying the effect of three bracelets on her chubby arm in the midst of her woe.

"In my own house I'm going to do as I think best; and, if people call me odd, I can't help it. I shall endeavor not to do any thing very dreadful; but I seem to inherit uncle's love for experiments, and mean to try some. I dare say they will fail and I shall get laughed at; I intend to do it nevertheless, so you had better drop me now before I begin," said Rose, with an air of resolution that was rather alarming.

"What shall you wear at this new sort of party of yours?" asked Annabel, wisely turning a deaf ear to all delicate or dangerous topics and keeping to matters she understood.

"That white thing over there. It is fresh and pretty, and Phebe has one like it. I never want to dress more than she does; and gowns of that sort are always most appropriate and becoming to girls of our age."

"Phebe! you don't mean to say you are going to make a lady of *her*!" gasped Annabel, upsetting her treasures, as she fell back with a gesture that made the little chair creak again; for Miss Bliss was as plump as a partridge.

"She *is* one already, and anybody who slights her slights me; for she is the best girl I know and the dearest," cried Rose, warmly.

"Yes, of course, – I was only surprised, – you are quite right; for she *may* turn out to be somebody, and then how glad you'll feel that you were so good to her!" said Annabel, veering round at once, seeing which way the wind blew.

Before Rose could speak again, a cheery voice called from the hall, —

"Little mistress, where are you?"

"In my room, Phebe, dear," and up came the girl Rose was going to "make a lady of," looking so like one that Annabel opened her china-blue eyes, and smiled involuntarily as Phebe dropped a little courtesy in playful imitation of her old manner, and said quietly, —

"How do you do, Miss Bliss?"

"Glad to see you back, Miss Moore," answered Annabel, shaking hands in a way that settled the question of Phebe's place in *her* mind for ever; for the stout damsel had a kind heart in spite of a weak head, and was really fond of Rose. It was evidently, "Love me, love my Phebe;" so she made up her mind on the spot that Phebe *was* somebody, and that gave an air of romance even to the poor-house.

She could not help staring a little, as she watched the two friends work together, and listened to their happy talk over each new treasure as it came to light; for every look and word plainly showed that years of close companionship had made them very dear to one another. It was pretty to see Rose try to do the hardest part of any little job herself: still prettier to see Phebe circumvent her, and untie the hard knots, fold the stiff papers, or lift the heavy trays with her own strong hands; and prettiest of all to hear her say in a motherly tone, as she put Rose into an easy chair, —

"Now, my deary, sit and rest; for you will have to see company all day, and I can't let you get tired out so early."

"That is no reason why I should let you either. Call Jane to help or I'll bob up again directly," answered Rose, with a very bad assumption of authority.

"Jane may take my place downstairs; but no one shall wait on you here except me, as long as I'm with you," said stately Phebe, stooping to put a hassock under the feet of her little mistress.

"It is very nice and pretty to see; but I don't know what people *will* say when she goes into society with the rest of us. I do hope Rose won't be *very* odd," said Annabel to herself as she went away to circulate the depressing news that there was to be no grand ball; and, saddest disappointment of all, that Rose had not a single Paris costume with which to refresh the eyes and rouse the envy of her amiable friends.

"Now I've seen or heard from all the boys but Charlie, and I suppose he is too busy. I wonder what he is about," thought Rose, turning from the hall door, whither she had courteously accompanied her guest.

The wish was granted a moment after; for, going into the parlor to decide where some of her pictures should hang, she saw a pair of boots at one end of the sofa, a tawny-brown head at the other, and discovered that Charlie was busily occupied in doing nothing.

"The voice of the Bliss was heard in the land, so I dodged till she went upstairs, and then took a brief *siesta* while waiting to pay my respects to the distinguished traveller, Lady Hester Stanhope," he said, leaping up to make his best bow.

"The voice of the sluggard would be a more appropriate quotation, I think. Does Annabel still pine for you?" asked Rose, recalling certain youthful jokes upon the subject of unrequited affections.

"Not a bit of it. Fun has cut me out, and the fair Annabella will be Mrs. Tokio before the winter is over, if I'm not much mistaken."

"What, little Fun See? How droll it seems to think of him grown up and married to Annabel of all people! She never said a word about him; but this accounts for her admiring my pretty Chinese things, and being so interested in Canton."

"Little Fun is a great swell now, and much enamoured of our fat friend, who will take to chopsticks whenever he says the word. I needn't ask how you do, cousin; for you beat that Aurora all hollow in the way of color. I should have been up before, but I thought you'd like a good rest after your voyage."

"I was running a race with Jamie before nine o'clock. What were you doing, young man?"

"Sleeping I dreamed, love, dreamed, love, of thee,"

began Charlie; but Rose cut him short by saying as reproachfully as she could, while the culprit stood regarding her with placid satisfaction, —

"You ought to have been up and at work like the rest of the boys. I felt like a drone in a hive of very busy bees, when I saw them all hurrying off to their business."

"But, my dear girl, I've got no business. I'm making up my mind, you see, and do the ornamental while I'm deciding. There always ought to be one gentleman in a family, and that seems to be rather my line," answered Charlie, posing for the character, with an assumption of languid elegance which would have been very effective if his twinkling eyes had not spoiled it.

"There are none *but* gentlemen in our family, I hope," answered Rose, with the proud air she always wore when any thing was said derogatory to the name of Campbell.

"Of course, of course. I should have said gentleman of leisure. You see it is against my principles to slave as Archie does. What's the use? Don't need the money, got plenty; so why not enjoy it, and keep jolly as long as possible? I'm sure cheerful people are public benefactors in this world of woe."

It was not easy to object to this proposition, especially when made by a comely young man, who looked the picture of health and happiness as he sat on the arm of the sofa, smiling at his cousin in the most engaging manner. Rose knew very well that the Epicurean philosophy was not the true one to begin life upon; but it was difficult to reason with Charlie, because he always dodged sober subjects, and was so full of cheery spirits, one hated to lessen the sort of sunshine which certainly is a public benefactor.

"You have such a clever way of putting things that I don't know how to contradict you, though I still think I'm right," she said gravely. "Mac likes to idle as well as you; but he is not going to do it, because he knows it's bad for him to fritter away his time. He is going to study a profession like a wise boy; though he would much prefer to live among his beloved books, or ride his hobbies in peace."

"That's all very well for *him*, because *he* doesn't care for society, and may as well be studying medicine as philandering about the woods with his pockets full of musty philosophers and old-fashioned poets," answered Charlie, with a shrug which plainly expressed his opinion of Mac.

"I wonder if musty philosophers, like Socrates and Aristotle, and old-fashioned poets, like Shakspeare and Milton, are not safer company for him to keep than some of the more modern friends

you have?" said Rose, remembering Jamie's hints about wild oats; for she could be a little sharp sometimes, and had not lectured "the boys" for so long it seemed unusually pleasant.

But Charlie changed the subject skilfully by exclaiming with an anxious expression, —

"I do believe you are going to be like Aunt Jane; for that's just the way she comes down on me whenever she gets a chance! Don't take her for a model, I beg: she is a good woman, but a mighty disagreeable one, in my humble opinion."

The fear of being disagreeable is a great bugbear to a girl, as this artful young man well knew, and Rose fell into the trap at once; for Aunt Jane was far from being her model, though she could not help respecting her worth.

"Have you given up your painting?" she asked rather abruptly, turning to a gilded Fra Angelico angel which leaned in the sofa corner.

"Sweetest face I ever saw, and very like you about the eyes, isn't it?" said Charlie, who seemed to have a Yankee trick of replying to one question with another.

"I want an answer, not a compliment," and Rose tried to look severe, as she put away the picture more quickly than she took it up.

"Have I given up painting? Oh, no! I daub a little in oils, slop a little in water-colors, sketch now and then, and poke about the studios when the artistic fit comes on."

"How is the music?"

"More flourishing. I don't practise much, but sing a good deal in company. Set up a guitar last summer, and went troubadouring round in great style. The girls like it, and it's jolly among the fellows."

"Are you studying any thing?"

"Well, I have some law books on my table, — good, big, wise-looking chaps, — and I take a turn at them semi-occasionally, when pleasure palls or parents chide. But I doubt if I do more than learn what 'a allybi' is this year," and a sly laugh in Charlie's eye suggested that he sometimes availed himself of this bit of legal knowledge.

"What *do* you do then?"

"Fair catechist, I enjoy myself. Private theatricals have been the rage of late, and I have won such laurels that I seriously think of adopting the stage as my profession."

"Really!" cried Rose, alarmed.

"Why not? if I *must* go to work, isn't that as good as any thing?"

"Not without more talent than I think you possess. With genius one can do any thing: without it one had better let the stage alone."

"There's a quencher for the 'star of the goodlie companie' to which I belong. Mac hasn't a ray of genius for any thing, yet you admire him for trying to be an M.D.," cried Charlie, rather nettled by her words.

"It is respectable, at all events; and I'd rather be a second-rate doctor than a second-rate actor. But I know you don't mean it, and only say so to frighten me."

"Exactly. I always bring it up when any one begins to lecture, and it works wonders. Uncle Mac turns pale, the aunts hold up their hands in holy horror, and a general panic ensues. Then I magnanimously promise not to disgrace the family; and in the first burst of gratitude the dear souls agree to every thing I ask; so peace is restored, and I go on my way rejoicing."

"Just the way you used to threaten to run off to sea, if your mother objected to any of your whims. You are not changed in that respect, though you are in others. You had great plans and projects once, Charlie; and now you seem to be contented with being a 'jack of all trades and master of none.'"

"Boyish nonsense! Time has brought wisdom; and I don't see the sense of tying myself down to one particular thing, and grinding away at it year after year. People of one idea get so deucedly narrow and tame, I've no patience with them. Culture is the thing; and the sort one gets by ranging

over a wide field is the easiest to acquire, the handiest to have, and the most successful in the end. At any rate, it is the kind I like, and the only kind I intend to bother myself about."

With this declaration, Charlie smoothed his brow, clasped his hands over his head, and, leaning back, gently warbled the chorus of a college song, as if it expressed his views of life better than he could: —

"While our rosy fillets shed
Blushes o'er each fervid head,
With many a cup and many a smile
The festal moments we beguile."

"Some of my saints here were people of one idea; and, though they were not very successful in a worldly point of view while alive, they were loved and canonized when dead," said Rose, who had been turning over a pile of photographs upon the table, and, just then, found her favorite, St. Francis, among them.

"This is more to my taste. Those worn-out, cadaverous fellows give me the blues; but here's a gentlemanly saint, who takes things easy, and does good as he goes along, without howling over his own sins, or making other people miserable by telling them of theirs." And Charlie laid a handsome St. Martin beside the brown-frocked monk.

Rose looked at both, and understood why her cousin preferred the soldierly figure with the sword to the ascetic with his crucifix. One was riding bravely through the world in purple and fine linen, with horse and hound, and squires at his back; the other was in a lazar-house, praying over the dead and dying. The contrast was a strong one; and the girl's eyes lingered longest on the knight, though she said thoughtfully, —

"Yours is certainly the pleasantest: and yet I never heard of any good deed he did, except divide his cloak with a beggar; while my St. Francis gave himself to charity just when life was most tempting, and spent years working for God without reward. He's old and poor, and in a dreadful place, but I won't give him up; and you may have your gay St. Martin, if you want him."

"No, thank you; saints are not in my line: but I'd like the golden-haired angel in the blue gown, if you'll let me have her. She shall be my little Madonna, and I'll pray to her like a good Catholic," answered Charlie, turning to the delicate, deep-eyed figure, with the lilies in its hand.

"With all my heart, and any others that you like. Choose some for your mother, and give them to her with my love."

So Charlie sat down beside Rose to turn and talk over the pictures for a long and pleasant hour. But when they went away to lunch, if there had been any one to observe so small but significant a trifle, good St. Francis lay face downward behind the sofa, while gallant St. Martin stood erect upon the chimney-piece.

CHAPTER III.

MISS CAMPBELL

While the travellers unpack their trunks, we will pick up, as briefly as possible, the dropped stitches in the little romance we are weaving.

Rose's life had been a very busy and quiet one for the four years following the May-day when she made her choice. Study, exercise, house-work, and many wholesome pleasures, kept her a happy, hearty creature, yearly growing in womanly graces, yet always preserving the innocent freshness girls lose so soon when too early sent upon the world's stage, and given a part to play.

Not a remarkably gifted girl in any way, and far from perfect; full of all manner of youthful whims and fancies; a little spoiled by much love; rather apt to think all lives as safe and sweet as her own; and, when want or pain appealed to her, the tender heart overflowed with a remorseful charity, which gave of its abundance recklessly. Yet, with all her human imperfections, the upright nature of the child kept her desires climbing toward the just and pure and true, as flowers struggle to the light; and the woman's soul was budding beautifully under the green leaves behind the little thorns.

At seventeen, Dr. Alec pronounced her ready for the voyage round the world, which he considered a better finishing off than any school could give her. But just then Aunt Peace began to fail, and soon slipped quietly away to rejoin the lover she had waited for so long. Youth seemed to come back in a mysterious way to touch the dead face with lost loveliness, and all the romance of her past to gather round her memory. Unlike most aged women, her friends were among the young; and, at her funeral, the gray heads gave place to the band of loving girls who made the sweet old maiden ready for her rest, bore her pall, and covered her grave with the white flowers she had never worn.

When this was over, poor Aunt Plenty seemed so lost without her life-long charge that Dr. Alec would not leave her; and Rose gladly paid the debt she owed by the tender service which comforts without words. But Aunt Plenty, having lived for others all her days, soon rebelled against this willing sacrifice, soon found strength in her own sincere piety, solace in cheerful occupation, and amusement in nursing Aunt Myra, who was a capital patient, as she never died and never got well.

So, at last, the moment came when, with free minds, the travellers could set out; and on Rose's eighteenth birthday, with Uncle Alec and the faithful Phebe, she sailed away to see and study the big, beautiful world, which lies ready for us all, if we only know how to use and to enjoy it.

Phebe was set to studying music in the best schools; and, while she trained her lovely voice with happy industry, Rose and her uncle roamed about in the most delightful way, till two years were gone like a dream, and those at home clamored for their return.

Back they came, and now the heiress must make ready to take her place; for at twenty-one she came into possession of the fortune she had been trying to learn how to use well. Great plans fermented in her brain; for, though the heart was as generous as ever, time had taught her prudence, and observation shown her that the wisest charity is that which helps the poor to help themselves.

Dr. Alec found it a little difficult to restrain the ardor of this young philanthropist, who wanted to begin at once to endow hospitals, build homes, adopt children, and befriend all mankind.

"Take a little time to look about you and get your bearings, child; for the world you have been living in is a much simpler, honester one than that you are now to enter. Test yourself a bit, and see if the old ways seem best after all; for you are old enough to decide, and wise enough to discover, what is for your truest good, I hope," he said, trying to feel ready to let the bird escape from under his wing, and make little flights alone.

"Now, uncle, I'm very much afraid you are going to be disappointed in me," answered Rose, with unusual hesitation, yet a very strong desire visible in her eyes. "You like to have me quite honest, and I've learned to tell you all my foolish thoughts: so I'll speak out, and if you find my wish very

wrong and silly, please say so; for I don't want you to cast me off entirely, though I am grown up. You say, wait a little, test myself, and try if the old ways are best. I should like to do that; and can I in a better way than by leading the life other girls lead, just for a little while," she added, as her uncle's face grew grave.

He *was* disappointed; yet acknowledged that the desire was natural, and in a moment saw that a trial of this sort might have its advantages. Nevertheless, he dreaded it; for he had intended to choose her society carefully, and try to keep her unspoiled by the world as long as possible, like many another fond parent and guardian. But the spirit of Eve is strong in all her daughters: forbidden fruit will look rosier to them than any in their own orchards, and the temptation to take just one little bite proves irresistible to the wisest. So Rose, looking out from the safe seclusion of her girlhood into the woman's kingdom which she was about to take possession of, felt a sudden wish to try its pleasures before assuming its responsibilities, and was too sincere to hide the longing.

"Very well, my dear, try it if you like, only take care of your health: be temperate in your gayety, and don't lose more than you gain; if that is possible," he added under his breath, endeavoring to speak cheerfully and not look anxious.

"I know it is foolish; but I do want to be a regular butterfly for a little while and see what it is like. You know I couldn't help seeing a good deal of fashionable life abroad, though we were not in it; and here at home the girls tell me about all sorts of pleasant things that are to happen this winter; so, if you won't despise me *very* much, I should like to try it."

"For how long?"

"Would three months be too long? New Year is a good time to take a fresh start. Every one is going to welcome me; so I must be gay in spite of myself, unless I'm willing to seem very ungrateful and morose," said Rose, glad to have so good a reason to offer for her new experiment.

"You may like it so well that the three months may become years. Pleasure is very sweet when we are young."

"Do you think it will intoxicate me?"

"We shall see, my dear."

"We shall!" and Rose marched away; looking as if she had taken a pledge of some sort, and meant to keep it.

It was a great relief to the public mind when it became known that Miss Campbell was really coming out at last; and invitations to Aunt Plenty's party were promptly accepted. Aunt Clara was much disappointed about the grand ball she had planned; but Rose stood firm, and the dear old lady had her way about every thing.

The consequence was a delightfully informal gathering of friends to welcome the travellers home. Just a good, old-fashioned, hospitable house-warming; so simple, cordial, and genuine that those who came to criticise remained to enjoy, and many owned the charm they could neither describe nor imitate.

Much curiosity was felt about Phebe, and much gossip went on behind fans that evening; for those who had known her years ago found it hard to recognize the little house-maid in the handsome young woman who bore herself with such quiet dignity, and charmed them all with her fine voice. "Cinderella has turned out a princess," was the general verdict: and Rose enjoyed the little sensation immensely; for she had had many battles to fight for her Phebe since she came among them, and now her faith was vindicated.

Miss Campbell herself was in great demand, and did the honors so prettily that even Miss Bliss forgave her for her sad neglect of Worth; though she shook her head over the white gowns, just alike except that Phebe wore crimson and Rose blue trimmings.

The girls swarmed eagerly round their recovered friend; for Rose had been a favorite before she went away, and found her throne waiting for her now. The young men privately pronounced Phebe the

handsomest, – "But then you know there's neither family nor money; so it's no use." Phebe, therefore, was admired as one of the ornamental properties belonging to the house, and let respectfully alone.

But bonny Rose was "all right," as these amiable youths expressed it; and many a wistful eye followed the bright head as it flitted about the rooms, as if it were a second Golden Fleece to be won with difficulty; for stalwart kinsmen hedged it round, and watchful aunts kept guard.

Little wonder that the girl found her new world an enchanting one, and that her first sip of pleasure rather went to her head; for everybody welcomed and smiled on her, flattered and praised, whispered agreeable prophecies in her ear, and looked the compliments and congratulations they dared not utter, till she felt as if she must have left her old self somewhere abroad, and suddenly become a new and wonderfully gifted being.

"It is very nice, uncle; and I'm not sure that I mayn't want another three months of it when the first are gone," she whispered to Dr. Alec, as he stood watching the dance she was leading with Charlie in the long hall after supper.

"Steady, my lass, steady; and remember that you are not really a butterfly, but a mortal girl with a head that will ache to-morrow," he answered, watching the flushed and smiling face before him.

"I almost wish there wasn't any to-morrow, but that to-night would last for ever: it is so pleasant, and every one so kind," she said with a little sigh of happiness, as she gathered up her fleecy skirts like a white bird pluming itself for flight.

"I'll ask your opinion about that at two A.M.," began her uncle, with a warning nod.

"I'll give it honestly," was all Rose had time to say before Charlie swept her away into the parti-colored cloud before them.

"It's no use, Alec: train a girl as wisely as you choose, she will break loose when the time comes, and go in for pleasure as eagerly as the most frivolous; for 'tis their nature to," said Uncle Mac, keeping time to the music as if he would not mind "going in" for a bit of pleasure himself.

"My girl shall taste and try; but, unless I'm much mistaken, a little of it will satisfy her. I want to see if she will stand the test; for, if not, all my work is a failure, and I'd like to know it," answered the doctor, with a hopeful smile on his lips, but an anxious look in his eyes.

"She will come out all right, – bless her heart! so let her sow her innocent wild oats and enjoy herself till she is ready to settle down. I wish all our young folks were likely to have as small a crop, and get through as safely as she will," added Uncle Mac, with a shake of the head, as he glanced at some of the young men revolving before him.

"Nothing amiss with your lads, I hope?"

"No, thank heaven! So far I've had little trouble with either; though Mac is an odd stick, and Steve a puppy. I don't complain; for both will outgrow that sort of thing, and are good fellows at heart, thanks to their mother. But Clara's boy is in a bad way; and she will spoil him as a man as she has as a boy, if his father doesn't interfere."

"I told brother Stephen all about him when I was in Calcutta last year, and he wrote to the boy; but Clara has got no end of plans in her head, and so she insisted on keeping Charlie a year longer when his father ordered him off to India," replied the doctor, as they walked away.

"It is too late to 'order:' Charlie is a man now, and Stephen will find that he has been too easy with him all these years. Poor fellow, it has been hard lines for him, and is likely to be harder, I fancy, unless he comes home and straightens things out."

"He won't do that if he can help it; for he has lost all his energy living in that climate, and hates worry more than ever: so you can imagine what an effort it would be to manage a foolish woman and a headstrong boy. We must lend a hand, Mac, and do our best for poor old Steve."

"The best we can do for the lad is to marry and settle him as soon as possible."

"My dear fellow, he is only three and twenty," began the doctor, as if the idea was preposterous: then a sudden change came over him, as he added with a melancholy smile, "I forget how much one can hope and suffer, even at twenty-three."

"And be all the better for, if bravely outlived," said Uncle Mac, with his hand on his brother's shoulder, and the sincerest approval in his voice. Then, kindly returning to the younger people, he went on inquiringly, "You don't incline to Clara's view of a certain matter, I fancy?"

"Decidedly not. My girl must have the best, and Clara's training would spoil an angel," answered Dr. Alec, quickly.

"But we shall find it hard to let our little Rose go out of the family. How would Archie do? He has been well brought up, and is a thoroughly excellent lad."

The brothers had retired to the study by this time, and were alone; yet Dr. Alec lowered his voice as he said with a tender sort of anxiety pleasant to see, —

"You know I do not approve of cousins marrying, so I'm in a quandary, Mac; for I love the child as if she were my own, and feel as if I could not give her up to any man whom I did not know and trust entirely. It is of no use for us to plan; for she must choose for herself: yet I do wish we could keep her among us, and give one of our boys a wife worth having."

"We must; so never mind your theories, but devote yourself to testing our elder lads, and making one of them a happy fellow. All are heart-whole, I believe, and, though young still for this sort of thing, we can be gently shaping matters for them, since no one knows how soon the moment may come. My faith! it is like living in a powder-mill to be among a lot of young folks now-a-days. All looks as calm as possible, till a sudden spark produces an explosion, and heaven only knows where we find ourselves after it is over."

And Uncle Mac sat himself comfortably down to settle Rose's fate; while the doctor paced the room, plucking at his beard and knitting his brows, as if he found it hard to see his way.

"Yes, Archie is a good fellow," he said, answering the question he had ignored before. "An upright, steady, intelligent lad, who will make an excellent husband, if he ever finds out that he has a heart. I suppose I'm an old fool, but I do like a little more romance in a young man than he seems to have; more warmth and enthusiasm, you know. Bless the boy! he might be forty instead of three or four and twenty: he's so sober, calm, and cool. I'm younger now than he is, and could go a-wooing like a Romeo if I had any heart to offer a woman."

The doctor looked rather shamefaced as he spoke, and his brother burst out laughing, —

"See here, Alec, it's a pity so much romance and excellence as yours should be lost; so why don't you set these young fellows an example, and go a-wooing yourself? Jessie has been wondering how you have managed to keep from falling in love with Phebe all this time; and Clara is quite sure that you only waited till she was safe under Aunt Plenty's wing to offer yourself in the good old-fashioned style."

"I!" and the doctor stood aghast at the mere idea; then he gave a resigned sort of sigh and added like a martyr, "If those dear women would let me alone, I'd thank them for ever. Put the idea out of their minds for heaven's sake, Mac, or I shall be having that poor girl flung at my head, and her comfort destroyed. She is a fine creature, and I'm proud of her; but she deserves a better lot than to be tied to an old fellow like me, whose only merit is his fidelity."

"As you please, I was only joking," and Uncle Mac dropped the subject with secret relief; for the excellent man thought a good deal of family, and had been rather worried at the hints of the ladies. After a moment's silence, he returned to a former topic, which was rather a pet plan of his. "I don't think you do Archie justice, Alec. You don't know him as well as I do; but you'll find that he has heart enough under his cool, quiet manner. I've grown very fond of him, think highly of him, and don't see how you could do better for Rose than to give her to him."

"If she will go," said the doctor, smiling at his brother's business-like way of disposing of the young people.

"She'll do any thing to please you," began Uncle Mac, in perfect good faith; for twenty-five years in the society of a very prosaic wife had taken nearly all the romance out of him.

"It is of no use for us to plan, and I shall never interfere except to advise; but, if I *were* to choose one of the boys, I should incline to my godson," answered the doctor, gravely.

"What, my Ugly Duckling!" exclaimed Uncle Mac, in great surprise.

"The Ugly Duckling turned out a swan, you remember. I've always been fond of the boy, because he's so genuine and original. Crude as a green apple now, but sound at the core, and only needs time to ripen. I'm sure he'll turn out a capital specimen of the Campbell variety."

"Much obliged, Alec; but it will never do at all. He's a good fellow, and may do something to be proud of by and by; but he's not the mate for our Rose. She needs some one who can manage her property when we are gone; and Archie is the man for that, depend upon it."

"Confound the property!" cried Dr. Alec, impetuously. "I want her to be *happy*; and I don't care how soon she gets rid of her money if it is going to be a millstone round her neck. I declare to you, I dreaded the thought of this time so much that I've kept her away as long as I could, and trembled whenever a young fellow joined us while we were abroad. Had one or two narrow escapes, and now I'm in for it, as you can see by to-night's 'success,' as Clara calls it. Thank heaven, I haven't *many* daughters to look after!"

"Come, come, don't be anxious: take Archie, and settle it right up safely and happily. That's my advice, and you'll find it sound," replied the elder conspirator, like one having experience.

"I'll think of it; but mind you, Mac, not a word of this to the sisters. We are a couple of old fools to be match-making so soon; but I see what is before me, and it's a comfort to free my mind to some one."

"So it is. Depend on me; not a breath even to Jane," answered Uncle Mac, with a hearty shake and a sympathetic slap on the shoulder.

"Why, what dark and awful secrets are going on here? Is it a Freemasons' Lodge, and those the mystic signs?" asked a gay voice at the door; and there stood Rose, full of smiling wonder at the sight of her two uncles hand in hand, whispering and nodding to one another mysteriously.

They started, like school-boys caught plotting mischief, and looked so guilty that she took pity on them, innocently imagining that the brothers were indulging in a little sentiment on this joyful occasion; so she added quickly, as she beckoned, without crossing the threshold, —

"Women not allowed, of course: but both of you dear Odd Fellows are wanted; for Aunt Plenty begs we will have an old-fashioned contra dance, and I'm to lead off with Uncle Mac. I chose you, sir, because you do it in style, pigeon-wings and all. So, please come; and Phebe is waiting for you, Uncle Alec. She is rather shy you know, but will enjoy it with you to take care of her."

"Thank you, thank you!" cried both gentlemen, following with great alacrity.

Unconscious Rose enjoyed that Virginia reel immensely; for the pigeon-wings were superb, and her partner conducted her through the convolutions of the dance without a fault, going down the middle in his most gallant style. Landing safely at the bottom, she stood aside to let him get his breath; for stout Uncle Mac was bound to do or die on that occasion, and would have danced his pumps through without a murmur if she had desired it.

Leaning against the wall with his hair in his eyes, and a decidedly bored expression of countenance, was Mac, Jr., who had been surveying the gymnastics of his parent with respectful astonishment.

"Come and take a turn, my lad. Rose is as fresh as a daisy; but we old fellows soon get enough of it, so you shall have my place," said his father, wiping his face, which glowed like a cheerful peony.

"No, thank you, sir: I can't stand that sort of thing. I'll race you round the piazza with pleasure, cousin; but this oven is too much for me," was Mac's uncivil reply, as he backed toward the open window, as if glad of an excuse to escape.

"Fragile creature, don't stay on my account, I beg. *I* can't leave my guests for a moonlight run, even if I dared to take it on a frosty night in a thin dress," said Rose, fanning herself, and not a bit ruffled by Mac's refusal; for she knew his ways, and they amused her.

"Not half so bad as all this dust, gas, heat, and noise. What do you suppose lungs are made of?" demanded Mac, ready for a discussion then and there.

"I used to know, but I've forgotten now. Been so busy with other things that I've neglected the hobbies I used to ride five or six years ago," she said, laughing.

"Ah, those were times worth having! Are you going in for much of this sort of thing, Rose?" he asked, with a disapproving glance at the dancers.

"About three months of it, I think."

"Then good-by till New Year," and Mac vanished behind the curtains.

"Rose, my dear, you really must take that fellow in hand before he gets to be quite a bear. Since you have been gone, he has lived in his books, and got on so finely that we have let him alone, though his mother groans over his manners. Polish him up a bit, I beg of you; for it is high time he mended his odd ways, and did justice to the fine gifts he hides behind them," said Uncle Mac, scandalized at the bluntness of his son.

"I know my chestnut-burr too well to mind his prickles. But others do not; so I *will* take him in hand and make him a credit to the family," answered Rose, readily.

"Take Archie for your model: he's one of a thousand; and the girl who gets him gets a prize I do assure you," added Uncle Mac, who found match-making to his taste, and thought that closing remark a deep one.

"Oh me, how tired I am!" cried Rose, dropping into a chair as the last carriage rolled away, somewhere between one and two.

"What is your opinion now, Miss Campbell?" asked the doctor, addressing her for the first time by the name which had been uttered so often that night.

"My opinion is that Miss Campbell is likely to have a gay life if she goes on as she has begun; and that she finds it very delightful so far," answered the girl, with lips still smiling from their first taste of what the world calls pleasure.

CHAPTER IV.

THORNS AMONG THE ROSES

For a time every thing went smoothly, and Rose was a happy girl; for the world seemed a beautiful and friendly place, and the fulfilment of her brightest dreams appeared to be a possibility. Of course, this could not last, and disappointment was inevitable; because young eyes look for a Paradise, and weep when they find a work-a-day world, which seems full of care and trouble, till one learns to gladden and glorify it with high thoughts and holy living.

Those who loved her waited anxiously for the dis-illusion which must come in spite of all their cherishing; for, till now, Rose had been so busy with her studies, travels, and home duties, that she knew very little of the triumphs, trials, and temptations of fashionable life. Birth and fortune placed her where she could not well escape some of them; and Doctor Alec, knowing that experience is the best teacher, wisely left her to learn this lesson as she must many another, devoutly hoping that it would not be a hard one.

October and November passed rapidly; and Christmas was at hand, with all its merry mysteries, home-gatherings, and good wishes.

Rose sat in her own little sanctum, opening from the parlor, busily preparing gifts for the dear five hundred friends who seemed to grow fonder and fonder as the holidays drew near. The drawers of her commode stood open, giving glimpses of dainty trifles, which she was tying up with bright ribbons.

A young girl's face at such moments is apt to be a happy one; but Rose's was very grave as she worked, and now and then she threw a parcel into the drawer with a careless toss, as if no love made the gift precious. So unusual was this expression that it struck Dr. Alec as he came in, and brought an anxious look to his eyes; for any cloud on that other countenance dropped its shadow over his.

"Can you spare a minute from your pretty work to take a stitch in my old glove?" he asked, coming up to the table strewn with ribbon, lace, and colored papers.

"Yes, uncle, as many as you please."

The face brightened with sudden sunshine; both hands were put out to receive the shabby driving-glove; and the voice was full of that affectionate alacrity which makes the smallest service sweet.

"My Lady Bountiful is hard at work, I see. Can I help in any way?" he asked, glancing at the display before him.

"No, thank you; unless you can make me as full of interest and pleasure in these things as I used to be. Don't you think preparing presents a great bore, except for those you love, and who love you?" she added, in a tone which had a slight tremor in it as she uttered the last words.

"I don't give to people whom I care nothing for. Can't do it; especially at Christmas, when good-will should go into every thing one does. If all these 'pretties' are for dear friends, you must have a great many."

"I thought they were friends; but I find many of them are not, and that's the trouble, sir."

"Tell me all about it, dear, and let the old glove go," he said, sitting down beside her with his most sympathetic air.

But she held the glove fast, saying eagerly, "No, no, I love to do this! I don't feel as if I could look at you while I tell what a bad, suspicious girl I am," she added, keeping her eyes upon her work.

"Very well, I'm ready for confessions of any iniquity, and glad to get them; for sometimes lately I've seen a cloud in my girl's eyes, and caught a worried tone in her voice. Is there a bitter drop in the cup that promised to be so sweet, Rose?"

"Yes, uncle. I've tried to think there was not; but it *is* there, and I don't like it. I'm ashamed to tell; and yet I want to, because you will show me how to make it sweet, or assure me that I shall be the better for it, as you used to do when I took medicine."

She paused a minute, sewing swiftly; then out came the trouble all in one burst of girlish grief and chagrin.

"Uncle, half the people who are so kind to me don't care a bit for me, but for what I can give them; and that makes me unhappy, because I was so glad and proud to be liked. I do wish I hadn't a penny in the world, then I should know who my true friends were."

"Poor little lass! she has found out that all that glitters is not gold, and the dis-illusion has begun," said the doctor to himself, adding aloud, smiling yet pitiful, "And so all the pleasure is gone out of the pretty gifts, and Christmas is a failure?"

"Oh, no! not for those whom nothing can make me doubt. It is sweeter than ever to make *these* things, because my heart is in every stitch; and I know that, poor as they are, they will be dear to you, Aunt Plen, Aunt Jessie, Phebe, and the boys."

She opened a drawer where lay a pile of pretty gifts, wrought with loving care by her own hands; touching them tenderly as she spoke, and patting the sailor's knot of blue ribbon on one fat parcel with a smile that told how unshakable her faith in some one was. "But *these*," she said, pulling open another drawer, and tossing over its gay contents with an air half sad, half scornful, "these I *bought* and give because they are expected. *These* people only care for a rich gift, not one bit for the giver, whom they will secretly abuse if she is not as generous as they expect. How *can* I enjoy that sort of thing, uncle?"

"You cannot; but perhaps you do some of them injustice, my dear. Don't let the envy or selfishness of a few poison your faith in all. Are you sure that none of these girls care for you?" he asked, reading a name here and there on the parcels scattered about.

"I'm afraid I am. You see I heard several talking together the other evening at Annabel's, only a few words, but it hurt me very much; for nearly every one was speculating on what I would give them, and hoping it would be something fine. 'She's so rich she ought to be generous,' said one. 'I've been perfectly devoted to her for weeks, and hope she won't forget it,' said another. 'If she doesn't give me some of her gloves, I shall think she's very mean; for she has heaps, and I tried on a pair in fun so she could see they fitted and take a hint,' added a third. I did take the hint, you see;" and Rose opened a handsome box in which lay several pairs of her best gloves, with buttons enough to satisfy the heart of the most covetous.

"Plenty of silver paper and perfume, but not much love went into *that* bundle, I fancy?" and Dr. Alec could not help smiling at the disdainful little gesture with which Rose pushed away the box.

"Not a particle, nor in most of these. I have given them what they wanted, and taken back the confidence and respect they didn't care for. It is wrong, I know; but I can't bear to think all the seeming good-will and friendliness I've been enjoying was insincere and for a purpose. That's not the way *I* treat people."

"I am sure of it. Take things for what they are worth, dear, and try to find the wheat among the tares; for there is plenty if one knows how to look. Is that all the trouble?"

"No, sir, that is the lightest part of it. I shall soon get over my disappointment in those girls, and take them for what they are worth as you advise; but being deceived in them makes me suspicious of others, and that is hateful. If I cannot trust people, I'd rather keep by myself and be happy. I do detest manœuvring and underhand plots and plans!"

Rose spoke petulantly, and twitched her silk till it broke; while regret seemed to give place to anger as she spoke.

"There is evidently another thorn pricking. Let us have it out, and then 'I'll kiss the place to make it well,' as I used to do when I took the splinters from the fingers you are pricking so unmercifully," said the doctor, anxious to relieve his pet patient as soon as possible.

Rose laughed, but the color deepened in her cheeks, as she answered with a pretty mixture of maidenly shyness and natural candor.

"Aunt Clara worries me by warning me against half the young men I meet, and insisting that they only want my money. Now that is dreadful, and I won't listen: but I can't help thinking of it sometimes; for they *are* very kind to me, and I'm not vain enough to think it is my beauty. I suppose I am foolish, but I do like to feel that I am something beside an heiress."

The little quiver was in Rose's voice again as she ended; and Dr. Alec gave a quick sigh as he looked at the downcast face so full of the perplexity ingenuous spirits feel when doubt first mars their faith, and dims the innocent beliefs still left from childhood. He had been expecting this, and knew that what the girl just began to perceive and try modestly to tell, had long ago been plain to worldlier eyes. The heiress *was* the attraction to most of the young men whom she met. Good fellows enough, but educated, as nearly all are now-a-days, to believe that girls with beauty or money are brought to market to sell or buy as the case may be.

Rose could purchase any thing she liked, as she combined both advantages; and was soon surrounded by many admirers, each striving to secure the prize. Not being trained to believe that the only end and aim of a woman's life was a good match, she was a little disturbed, when the first pleasing excitement was over, to discover that her fortune was her chief attraction.

It was impossible for her to help seeing, hearing, guessing this from a significant glance, a stray word, a slight hint here and there; and the quick instinct of a woman felt even before it understood the self-interest which chilled for her so many opening friendships. In her eyes love was a very sacred thing, hardly to be thought of till it came, reverently received, and cherished faithfully to the end. Therefore, it is not strange that she shrunk from hearing it flippantly discussed, and marriage treated as a bargain to be haggled over, with little thought of its high duties, great responsibilities, and tender joys. Many things perplexed her, and sometimes a doubt of all that till now she had believed and trusted made her feel as if at sea without a compass; for the new world was so unlike the one she had been living in that it bewildered while it charmed the novice.

Dr. Alec understood the mood in which he found her, and did his best to warn without saddening by too much worldly wisdom.

"You are something besides an heiress to those who know and love you; so take heart, my girl, and hold fast to the faith that is in you. There is a touchstone for all these things, and whatever does not ring true doubt and avoid. Test and try men and women as they come along; and I am sure conscience, instinct, and experience will keep you from any dire mistake," he said, with a protecting arm about her, and a trustful look that was very comforting.

After a moment's pause she answered, while a sudden smile dimpled round her mouth, and the big glove went up to half hide her tell-tale cheeks, —

"Uncle, if I must have lovers, I do wish they'd be more interesting. How can I like or respect men who go on as some of them do, and then imagine women *can* feel honored by the offer of their hands? hearts are out of fashion, so they don't say much about them."

"Ah, ha! that is the trouble is it? and we begin to have delicate distresses do we?" said Dr. Alec, glad to see her brightening, and full of interest in the new topic; for he *was* a romantic old fellow, as he confessed to his brother.

Rose put down the glove, and looked up with a droll mixture of amusement and disgust in her face. "Uncle, it is perfectly disgraceful! I've wanted to tell you, but I was ashamed, because I never could boast of such things as some girls do; and they were so absurd I couldn't feel as if they were worth repeating even to you. Perhaps I ought, though; for you may think proper to command me to make a good match, and of course I should have to obey," she added, trying to look meek.

"Tell, by all means. Don't I always keep your secrets, and give you the best advice, like a model guardian? You must have a confidant, and where find a better one than here?" he asked, tapping his waistcoat with an inviting gesture.

"Nowhere: so I'll tell all but the names. I'd best be prudent; for I'm afraid you may get a little fierce: you do sometimes when people vex me," began Rose, rather liking the prospect of a confidential chat with uncle; for he had kept himself a good deal in the background lately.

"You know our ideas are old-fashioned; so I was not prepared to have men propose at all times and places, with no warning but a few smiles and soft speeches. I expected things of that sort would be very interesting and proper, not to say thrilling, on my part: but they are not; and I find myself laughing instead of crying, feeling angry instead of glad, and forgetting all about it very soon. Why, uncle, one absurd boy proposed when we'd only met half a dozen times. But he was dreadfully in debt, so that accounted for it perhaps," and Rose dusted her fingers, as if she had soiled them.

"I know him, and I thought he'd do it," observed the doctor with a shrug.

"You see and know every thing; so there's no need of going on, is there?"

"Do, do! who else? I won't even guess."

"Well, another went down upon his knees in Mrs. Van's greenhouse and poured forth his passion manfully, with a great cactus pricking his poor legs all the while. Kitty found him there, and it was impossible to keep sober; so he has hated me ever since."

The doctor's "Ha! ha!" was good to hear, and Rose joined him; for it was impossible to regard these episodes seriously, since no true sentiment redeemed them from absurdity.

"Another one sent me reams of poetry, and went on so Byronically, that I began to wish I had red hair and my name was Betsey Ann. I burnt all the verses: so don't expect to see them; and he, poor fellow, is consoling himself with Emma. But the worst of all was the one who would make love in public, and insisted on proposing in the middle of a dance. I seldom dance round dances except with our boys; but that night I did, because the girls laughed at me for being so 'prudish,' as they called it. I don't mind them now; for I found I *was* right, and felt that I deserved my fate."

"Is that all?" asked her uncle, looking "fierce," as she predicted, at the idea of his beloved girl obliged to listen to a declaration, twirling about on the arm of a lover.

"One more: but him I shall not tell about; for I know *he* was in earnest and really suffered, though I was as kind as I knew how to be. I'm young in these things yet, so I grieved for him, and treat his love with the tenderest respect."

Rose's voice sunk almost to a whisper as she ended; and Dr. Alec bent his head, as if involuntarily saluting a comrade in misfortune. Then he got up, saying with a keen look into the face he lifted by a finger under the chin, —

"Do you want another three months of this?"

"I'll tell you on New Year's day, uncle."

"Very well: try to keep a straight course, my little captain; and, if you see dirty weather ahead, call on your first mate."

"Ay, ay, sir; I'll remember."

CHAPTER V. *PRINCE CHARMING*

The old glove lay upon the floor forgotten, while Rose sat musing, till a quick step sounded in the hall, and a voice drew near tunefully humming.

"As he was walkin' doun the street
The city for to view,
Oh, there he spied a bonny lass,
The window lookin' through."

"Sae licht he jumpèd up the stair,
And tirded at the pin;
Oh, wha sae ready as hersel'
To let the laddie in?"

sung Rose, as the voice paused and a tap came at the door.

"Good morning, Rosamunda; here are your letters, and your most devoted ready to execute any commissions you may have for him," was Charlie's greeting, as he came in looking comely, gay, and debonair as usual.

"Thanks: I've no errands unless you mail my replies, if these need answering; so by your leave, Prince," and Rose began to open the handful of notes he threw into her lap.

"Ha! what sight is this to blast mine eyes?" ejaculated Charlie, as he pointed to the glove with a melodramatic start; for, like most accomplished amateur actors, he was fond of introducing private theatricals into his "daily walk and conversation."

"Uncle left it."

"'Tis well; methought perchance a rival had been here," and, picking it up, Charlie amused himself with putting it on the head of a little Psyche, which ornamented the mantle-piece, humming, as he did so, another verse of the old song, —

"He set his Jenny on his knee,
All in his Highland dress;
For brawly well he kened the way
To please a bonny lass."

Rose went on reading her letters, but all the while was thinking of her conversation with her uncle, and something else, suggested by the newcomer and his ditty.

During the three months since her return, she had seen more of this cousin than any of the others; for he seemed to be the only one who had leisure to "play with Rose," as they used to say years ago. The other boys were all at work, even little Jamie, many of whose play hours were devoted to manful struggles with Latin grammar, the evil genius of his boyish life. Dr. Alec had many affairs to arrange after his long absence; Phebe was busy with her music; and Aunt Plenty still actively superintended her housekeeping. Thus it fell out, quite naturally, that Charlie should form the habit of lounging in at all hours with letters, messages, bits of news, and agreeable plans for Rose. He helped her with her sketching, rode with her, sung with her, and took her to parties, as a matter of course; for Aunt Clara, being the gayest of the sisters, played chaperon on all occasions.

For a time it was very pleasant; but, by and by, Rose began to wish Charlie would find something to do like the rest, and not make dawdling after her the business of his life. The family were used to his self-indulgent ways: and there was an amiable delusion in the minds of the boys that he had a right to the best of every thing; for to them he was still the Prince, the flower of the flock, and in time to be an honor to the name. No one exactly knew how: for, though full of talent, he seemed to have no especial gift or bias; and the elders began to shake their heads, because, in spite of many grand promises and projects, the moment for decisive action never came.

Rose saw all this, and longed to inspire her brilliant cousin with some manful purpose, which should win for him respect as well as admiration. But she found it very hard: for, though he listened with imperturbable good humor, and owned his shortcomings with delightful frankness, he always had some argument, reason, or excuse to offer, and out-talked her in five minutes; leaving her silenced, but unconvinced.

Of late she had observed that he seemed to feel as if her time and thoughts belonged exclusively to him, and rather resented the approach of any other claimant. This annoyed her, and suggested the idea that her affectionate interest and efforts were misunderstood by him, misrepresented and taken advantage of by Aunt Clara, who had been most urgent that she should "use her influence with the dear boy," though the fond mother resented all other interference. This troubled Rose, and made her feel as if caught in a snare; for, while she owned to herself that Charlie was the most attractive of her cousins, she was not ready to be taken possession of in this masterful way, especially since other and sometimes better men sought her favor more humbly.

These thoughts were floating vaguely in her mind as she read her letters, and unconsciously influenced her in the chat that followed.

"Only invitations, and I can't stop to answer them now, or I shall never get through this job," she said, returning to her work.

"Let me help. You do up, and I'll direct. Have a secretary; do now, and see what a comfort it will be," proposed Charlie, who could turn his hand to any thing, and had made himself quite at home in the sanctum.

"I'd rather finish this myself, but you may answer the notes if you will. Just regrets to all but two or three. Read the names as you go along, and I'll tell you which."

"To hear is to obey. Who says I'm a 'frivolous idler' now?" and Charlie sat down at the writing table with alacrity; for these hours in the little room were his best and happiest.

"Order is heaven's first law, and the view a lovely one, but I *don't* see any note-paper," he added, opening the desk and surveying its contents with interest.

"Right-hand drawer: violet monogram for the notes; plain paper for the business letter. I'll see to that, though," answered Rose, trying to decide whether Annabel or Emma should have the laced handkerchief.

"Confiding creature! Suppose I open the wrong drawer, and come upon the tender secrets of your soul?" continued the new secretary, rummaging out the delicate note-paper with masculine disregard of order.

"I haven't got any," answered Rose, demurely.

"What, not one despairing scrawl, one cherished miniature, one faded floweret, etc., etc.? I can't believe it, cousin," and he shook his head incredulously.

"If I had, I certainly should not show them to you, impertinent person! There *are* a few little souvenirs in that desk, but nothing very sentimental or interesting."

"How I'd like to see 'em! But I should never dare to ask," observed Charlie, peering over the top of the half-open lid with a most persuasive pair of eyes.

"You may if you want to, but you'll be disappointed, Paul Pry. Lower left-hand drawer with the key in it."

"Angel of goodness, how shall I requite thee? Interesting moment, with what palpitating emotions art thou fraught!" and, quoting from the "Mysteries of Udolpho," he unlocked and opened the drawer with a tragic gesture.

"Seven locks of hair in a box, all light; for 'here's your straw color, your orange tawny, your French crown color, and your perfect yellow' Shakspeare. They look very familiar, and I fancy I know the heads they thatched."

"Yes, you all gave me one when I went away, you know; and I carried them round the world with me in that very box."

"I wish the heads had gone too. Here's a jolly little amber god, with a gold ring in his back and a most balmy breath," continued Charlie, taking a long sniff at the scent-bottle.

"Uncle brought me that long ago, and I'm very fond of it."

"This now looks suspicious, – a man's ring with a lotus cut on the stone and a note attached. I tremble as I ask, Who, when, and where?"

"A gentleman, on my birthday, in Calcutta."

"I breathe again: it was my sire?"

"Don't be absurd. Of course it was, and he did every thing to make my visit pleasant. I wish you'd go and see him like a dutiful son, instead of idling here."

"That's what Uncle Mac is eternally telling me; but I don't intend to be lectured into the treadmill till I've had my fling first," muttered Charlie, rebelliously.

"If you fling yourself in the wrong direction, you may find it hard to get back again," began Rose, gravely.

"No fear, if you look after me as you seem to have promised to do, judging by the thanks you get in this note. Poor old governor! I *should* like to see him; for it's almost four years since he came home last, and he must be getting on."

Charlie was the only one of the boys who ever called his father "governor: " perhaps because the others knew and loved their fathers, while he had seen so little of his that the less respectful name came more readily to his lips; since the elder man seemed in truth a governor issuing requests or commands, which the younger too often neglected or resented.

Long ago Rose had discovered that Uncle Stephen found home made so distasteful by his wife's devotion to society, that he preferred to exile himself, taking business as an excuse for his protracted absences.

The girl was thinking of this, as she watched her cousin turn the ring about with a sudden sobriety which became him well; and, believing that the moment was propitious, she said earnestly, —

"He *is* getting on. Dear Charlie, do think of duty more than pleasure in this case, and I'm sure you never will regret it."

"Do *you* want me to go?" he asked quickly.

"I think you ought."

"And I think you'd be much more charming if you wouldn't always be worrying about right and wrong! Uncle Alec taught you that along with the rest of his queer notions."

"I'm glad he did!" cried Rose, warmly; then checked herself, and said with a patient sort of sigh, "You know women always want the men they care for to be good, and can't help trying to make them so."

"So they do; and we ought to be a set of angels: but I've a strong conviction that, if we were, the dear souls wouldn't like us half as well. Would they now?" asked Charlie, with an insinuating smile.

"Perhaps not; but that is dodging the point. Will you go?" persisted Rose, unwisely.

"No, I will not."

That was sufficiently decided; and an uncomfortable pause followed, during which Rose tied a knot unnecessarily tight, and Charlie went on exploring the drawer with more energy than interest.

"Why, here's an old thing I gave you ages ago!" he suddenly exclaimed in a pleased tone, holding up a little agate heart on a faded blue ribbon. "Will you let me take away the heart of stone and give you a heart of flesh?" he asked, half in earnest, half in jest, touched by the little trinket and the recollections it awakened.

"No, I will not," answered Rose, bluntly, much displeased by the irreverent and audacious question.

Charlie looked rather abashed for a moment; but his natural light-heartedness made it easy for him to get the better of his own brief fits of waywardness, and put others in good humor with him and themselves.

"Now we are even: let's drop the subject and start afresh," he said with irresistible affability, as he coolly put the little heart in his pocket, and prepared to shut the drawer. But something caught his eye, and exclaiming, "What's this? what's this?" he snatched up a photograph which lay half under a pile of letters with foreign post-marks.

"Oh! I forgot that was there," said Rose, hastily.

"Who is the man?" demanded Charlie, eyeing the good-looking countenance before him with a frown.

"That is the Honorable Gilbert Murry, who went up the Nile with us, and shot crocodiles and other small deer, being a mighty hunter, as I told you in my letters," answered Rose gayly, though ill-pleased at the little discovery just then; for this had been one of the narrow escapes her uncle spoke of.

"And they haven't eaten him yet, I infer from that pile of letters?" said Charlie, jealously.

"I hope not. His sister did not mention it when she wrote last."

"Ah! then she is your correspondent? Sisters are dangerous things sometimes." And Charlie eyed the packet suspiciously.

"In this case, a very convenient thing; for she tells me all about her brother's wedding as no one else would take the trouble to do."

"Oh! well, if he's married, I don't care a straw about him. I fancied I'd found out why you are such a hard-hearted charmer. But, if there is no secret idol, I'm all at sea again." And Charlie tossed the photograph into the drawer, as if it no longer interested him.

"I'm hard-hearted because I'm particular, and, as yet, do not find any one at all to my taste."

"No one?" with a tender glance.

"No one," with a rebellious blush, and the truthful addition, "I see much to admire and like in many persons, but none quite strong and good enough to suit me. My heroes are old-fashioned, you know."

"Prigs, like Guy Carleton, Count Altenberg, and John Halifax: I know the pattern you goody girls like," sneered Charlie, who preferred the Guy Livingston, Beauclerc, and Rochester style.

"Then I'm not a 'goody girl,' for I don't like prigs. I want a gentleman in the best sense of the word, and I can wait; for I've seen one, and know there are more in the world."

"The deuce you have! Do I know him?" asked Charlie, much alarmed.

"You think you do," answered Rose, with a mischievous sparkle in her eye.

"If it isn't Pem, I give it up. He is the best-bred fellow I know."

"Oh, dear, no! far superior to Mr. Pemberton, and many years older," said Rose, with so much respect that Charlie looked perplexed as well as anxious.

"Some apostolic minister, I fancy. You pious creatures always like to adore a parson. But all we know are married."

"He isn't."

"Give a name, for pity's sake: I'm suffering tortures of suspense," begged Charlie.

"Alexander Campbell."

"Uncle? Well, upon my word, that's a relief, but mighty absurd all the same. So, when you find a young saint of that sort, you intend to marry him, do you?" demanded Charlie, much amused and rather disappointed.

"When I find any man half as honest, good, and noble as uncle, I shall be proud to marry him, if he asks me," answered Rose, decidedly.

"What odd tastes women have!" And Charlie leaned his chin on his hand, to muse pensively for a moment over the blindness of one woman who could admire an excellent old uncle more than a dashing young cousin.

Rose, meanwhile, tied up her parcels industriously, hoping she had not been too severe; for it was very hard to lecture Charlie, though he seemed to like it sometimes, and came to confession voluntarily, knowing that women love to forgive when the sinners are of his sort.

"It will be mail-time before you are done," she said presently; for silence was less pleasant than his rattle.

Charlie took the hint, and dashed off several notes in his best manner. Coming to the business-letter, he glanced at it, and asked, with a puzzled expression, —

"What is all this? Cost of repairs, &c., from a man named Buffum?"

"Never mind that: I'll see to it by and by."

"But I do mind, for I'm interested in all your affairs; and, though you think I've no head for business, you'll find I have, if you'll try me."

"This is only about my two old houses in the city, which are being repaired and altered so that the rooms can be let singly."

"Going to make tenement-houses of them? Well, that's not a bad idea: such places pay well, I've heard."

"That is just what I'm *not* going to do. I wouldn't have a tenement-house on my conscience for a million of dollars, — not as they are now," said Rose, decidedly.

"Why, what do *you* know about it, except that poor people live in them, and the owners turn a penny on the rents?"

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