

A row of traditional stone cottages with a dirt road in front. The cottages have multiple chimneys and dormer windows. The scene is set in a rural, historical-looking environment with lush greenery and flowers in the foreground.

# Rose in Bloom

Louisa May Alcott

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# **Rose in Bloom**

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# Chapter 1 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 eyeglasses 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 hogshead, the steamer hove in sight and everything else was forgotten. As it swung slowly around 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 onto 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 blond girl nearby 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 four 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 traveling 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 bodkinwise 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 anyone. I will now, if you don't mind." And, to the great amusement of the rest, Mac gravely adjusted his eyeglasses 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 anything 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 latest 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 laughter 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 laughingstock 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 to 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' means. I heard Uncle Mac say Charlie was sowing 'em too fast, and I asked Mama, 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 passersby 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 around 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 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 armchair, with Mac lounging over the back of it, while Archie leaned on one corner of the low chimneypiece, 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! Anyone 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 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 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 anything to do with love till I prove that I am something besides 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 anything 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 anything 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 anyone 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 head 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 Shanghai 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 see 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 blond 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 Cockscomb."

"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 even 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 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 everyone's opinion when Rose put her arms around 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 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 boy-hood, and to change what she had considered a childish joke into romantic earnest. 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 everyone 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 poorhouse 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 anyone had mentioned this astonishing fact, nobody would have believed it; nevertheless, it was quite true, and sober, businesslike 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 chimneypiece, 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 the 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 until 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 outer 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 around, 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, and 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 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 2 OLD FRIENDS WITH NEW FACES



"It is so good to be 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.

"Everything 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 bat and doffing the gay cap with one effective twitch.

"Good morning, dear. Yes, we really are 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 were one of national importance, Jamie flung open his jacket to display upon his proudly swelling chest an 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 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 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 are 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 schoolboy, 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 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 mountaintop, 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.