

Literature.org:
[Authors](#)
[Contact](#)

[Eight Cousins](#)

[Louisa May Alcott](#)

This Book:
[Contents](#)
[Previous Chapter](#)
[Next Chapter](#)

Chapter 12 - "The Other Fellows"

Rose did tell "the people" what had passed, and no one "howled" over Mac, or said a word to trouble him. He had his talk with the doctor, and got very little comfort out of it, for he found that "just what he might do" was nothing at all; though the prospect of some study by and by, if all went well, gave him courage to bear the woes of the present. Having made up his mind to this, he behaved so well that everyone was astonished, never having suspected so much manliness in the quiet Worm.

The boys were much impressed, both by the greatness of the affliction which hung over him and by his way of bearing it. They were very good to him, but not always particularly wise in their attempts to cheer and amuse; and Rose often found him much downcast after a visit of condolence from the Clan. She still kept her place as head-nurse and chief-reader, though the boys did their best in an irregular sort of way. They were rather taken aback sometimes at finding Rose's services preferred to their's, and privately confided to one another that "Old Mac was getting fond of being molly-coddled." But they could not help seeing how useful she was, and owning that she alone had remained faithful a fact which caused some of them much secret compunction now and then.

Rose felt that she ruled in that room, if nowhere else, for Aunt Jane left a great deal to her, finding that her experience with her invalid father fitted her for a nurse, and in a case like this, her youth was an advantage rather than a drawback. Mac soon came to think that no one could take care of him so well as Rose, and Rose soon grew fond of her patient, though at first she had considered this cousin the least attractive of the seven. He was not polite and sensible like Archie, nor gay and handsome like Prince Charlie, nor neat and obliging like Steve, nor amusing like the "Brats," nor confiding and affectionate like little Jamie. He was rough, absent-minded, careless, and awkward, rather priggish, and not at all agreeable to a dainty, beauty-loving girl like Rose.

But when his trouble came upon him, she discovered many good things in this cousin of hers, and learned not only to pity but to respect and love the poor Worm, who tried to be patient, brave, and cheerful, and found it a harder task than anyone guessed, except the little nurse, who saw him in his gloomiest moods. She soon came to think that his friends did not appreciate him, and upon one occasion was moved to free her mind in a way that made a deep impression on the boys.

Vacation was almost over, and the time drawing near when Mac would be left outside the happy school-world which he so much enjoyed. This made him rather low in his mind, and his cousins exerted themselves to cheer him up, especially one afternoon when a spasm of devotion seemed to seize them all. Jamie trudged down the hill with a basket of blackberries which he had "picked all his ownself," as his scratched fingers and stained lips plainly testified. Will and Geordie brought their puppies to beguile the weary hours, and the three elder lads called to discuss baseball, cricket, and kindred subjects, eminently fitted to remind the invalid of his privations.

Rose had gone to drive with Uncle Alec, who declared she was getting as pale as a potato sprout, living so much in a dark room. But her thoughts were with her boy all the while, and she ran up to him the moment she returned, to find things in a fine state of confusion.

With the best intentions in life, the lads had done more harm than good, and the spectacle that met Nurse Rose's eye was a trying one. The puppies were yelping, the small boys romping, and the big boys all talking at once: the curtains were up, the room close, berries scattered freely about, Mac's shade half off, his cheeks flushed, his temper ruffled, and his voice loudest of all as he disputed hotly with Steve about lending certain treasured books which he could no longer use.

Now Rose considered this her special kingdom, and came down upon the invaders with an energy which amazed them and quelled the riot at once. They had never seen her roused before, and the effect was tremendous; also comical, for she drove the whole flock of boys out of the room like an indignant little hen defending her brood. They all went as meekly as sheep; the small lads fled from the house precipitately, but the three elder ones only retired to the next room, and remained there hoping for a chance to explain and apologise, and so appease the irate young lady, who had suddenly turned the tables and clattered them about their ears.

As they waited, they observed her proceedings through the half-open door, and commented upon them briefly but expressively, feeling quite bowed down with remorse at the harm they had innocently done.

"She's put the room to rights in a jiffy. What jacks we were to let those dogs in and kick up such a row," observed Steve, after a prolonged peep.

"The poor old Worm turns as if she was treading on him instead of cuddling him like a pussy cat. Isn't he cross, though?" added Charlie, as Mac was heard growling about his "confounded head."

"She will manage him; but it's mean in us to rumple him up and then leave her to smooth him down. I'd go and help, but I don't know how," said Archie, looking much depressed, for he was a conscientious fellow, and blamed himself for his want of thought.

"No, more do I. Odd, isn't it, what a knack women have for taking care of sick folks?" and Charlie fell a-musing over this undeniable fact.

"She has been ever so good to Mac," began Steve, in a self-reproachful tone.

"Better than his own brother, hey?" cut in Archie, finding relief for his own regret in the delinquencies of another.

"Well, you needn't preach; you didn't any of you do any more, and you might have, for Mac likes you better than he does me. I always fret him, he says, and it isn't my fault if I am a quiddle," protested Steve, in self-defence.

"We have all been selfish and neglected him, so we won't fight about it, but try and do better," said Archie, generously taking more than his share of blame, for he had been less inattentive than either of the others.

"Rose has stood by him like a good one, and it's no wonder he likes to have her round best. I should myself if I was down on my luck as he is," put in Charlie, feeling that he really had not done "the little thing" justice.

"I'll tell you what it is, boys we haven't been half good enough to Rose, and we've got to make it up to her somehow," said Archie, who had a very manly sense of honour about paying his debts, even to a girl.

"I'm awfully sorry I made fun of her doll when Jamie lugged it out; and I called her 'baby bunting' when she cried over the dead kitten. Girls are such geese sometimes, I can't help it," said Steve, confessing his transgressions handsomely, and feeling quite ready to atone for them if he only knew how.

"I'll go down on my knees and beg her pardon for treating her as if she was a child. Don't it make her mad, though? Come to think of it, she's only two years or so younger than I am. But she is so small and pretty, she always seems like a dolly to me," and the Prince looked down from his lofty height of five feet five as if Rose was indeed a pygmy beside him.

"That dolly has got a real good little heart, and a bright mind of her own, you'd better believe. Mac says she understands some things quicker than he can, and mother thinks she is an uncommonly nice girl, though she don't know all creation. You needn't put on airs, Charlie, though you are a tall one, for Rose likes Archie better than you; she said she did because he treated her respectfully."

"Steve looks as fierce as a game-cock; but don't you get excited, my son, for it won't do a bit of good. Of course, everybody likes the Chief best; they ought to, and I'll punch their heads if they don't. So calm yourself, Dandy, and mend your own manners before you come down on other people's."

Thus the Prince with great dignity and perfect good nature, while Archie looked modestly gratified with the flattering opinions of his kinsfolk, and Steve subsided, feeling he had done his duty as a cousin and a brother. A pause ensued, during which Aunt Jane appeared in the other room, accompanied by a tea-tray sumptuously spread, and prepared to feed her big nestling, as that was a task she allowed no one to share with her.

"If you have a minute to spare before you go, child, I wish you'd just make Mac a fresh shade; this has got a berry stain on it, and he must be tidy, for he is to go out to-morrow if it is a cloudy day," said Mrs. Jane, spreading toast in a stately manner, while Mac sipped his tea about without receiving a word of reproof.

"Yes, aunt," answered Rose, so meekly that the boys could hardly believe it could be the same voice which had issued the stern command, "Out of this room, every one of you!" not very long ago.

They had not time to retire, without unseemly haste, before she walked into the parlour and sat down at the work-table without a word. It was funny to see the look the three tall lads cast at the little person sedately threading a needle with green silk. They all wanted to say something expressive of repentance, but no one knew how to begin, and it was evident, from the prim expression of Rose's face, that she intended to stand upon her dignity till they had properly abased themselves. The pause was becoming very awkward, when Charlie, who possessed all the persuasive arts of a born scapegrace, went slowly down upon his knees before her, beat his breast, and said, in a heart-broken tone

"Please forgive me this time, and I'll never do so any more."

It was very hard to keep sober, but Rose managed it and answered gravely

"It is Mac's pardon you should ask, not mine, for you haven't hurt me, and I shouldn't wonder if you had him a great deal, with all that light and racket, and talk about things that only worry him."

"Do you really think we've hurt him, cousin?" asked Archie, with a troubled look, while Charlie settled down in a remorseful heap among the table legs.

"Yes, I do, for he has got a raging headache, and his eyes are as red as as this emery bag," answered Rose, solemnly plunging her needle into a fat flannel strawberry.

Steve tore his hair, metaphorically speaking, for he clutched his cherished top-knot, and wildly dishevelled it, as if that was the heaviest penance he could inflict upon himself at such short notice. Charlie laid himself out flat, melodramatically begging someone to take him away and hang him; but Archie, who felt worst of all, said nothing except to vow within himself that he would read to Mac till his own eyes were as red as a dozen emery bags combined.

Seeing the wholesome effects of her treatment upon these culprits, Rose felt that she might relent and allow them a gleam of hope. She found it impossible to help trampling upon the prostrate Prince a little, in words at least, for he had hurt her feelings oftener than he knew; so she gave him a thimble-pie on the top of his head, and said, with an air of an infinitely superior being

"Don't be silly, but get up, and I'll tell you something much better to do than sprawling on the floor and getting all over lint."

Charlie obediently sat himself upon a hassock at her feet; the other sinners drew near to catch the words of wisdom about to fall from her lips, and Rose, softened by this gratifying humility, addressed them in her most maternal tone.

"Now, boys, if you really want to be good to Mac, you can do it in this way. Don't keep talking about things he can't do, or go and tell what fun you have had batting your ridiculous balls about. Get some nice book and read quietly; cheer him up about school, and offer to help him study by and by; you can do that better than I, because I'm only a girl, and don't learn Greek and Latin and all sorts of headachy stuff."

"Yes, but you can do heaps of things better than we can; you've proved that," said Archie, with an approving look that delighted Rose, though she could not resist giving Charlie one more rebuke, by saying, with a little bridling of the head, and a curl of the lip that wanted to smile instead

"I'm glad you think so, though I am a 'queer chicken.'"

This scathing remark caused the Prince to hide his face for shame, and Steve to erect his head in the proud consciousness that this shot was not meant for him. Archie laughed, and Rose, seeing a merry blue eye winking at her from behind two brown hands, gave Charlie's ear a friendly tweak, and extended the olive-branch of peace.

"Now we'll all be good, and plan nice things for poor Mac," she said, smiling so graciously that the boys felt as if the sun had suddenly burst out from behind a heavy cloud and was shining with great brilliancy.

The storm had cleared the air, and quite a heavenly calm succeeded, during which plans of a most varied and surprising sort were laid, for everyone burned to make noble sacrifices upon the shrine of "poor Mac," and Rose was the guiding star to whom the others looked with most gratifying submission. Of course, this elevated state of things could not endure long, but it was very nice while it lasted, and left an excellent effect upon the minds of all when the first ardour had subsided.

"There, that's ready for to-morrow, and I do hope it will be cloudy," said Rose, as she finished off the new shade, the progress of which the boys had watched with interest.

"I'd bespoken an extra sunny day, but I'll tell the clerk of the weather to change it. He's an obliging fellow, and he'll attend to it, so make yourself easy," said Charlie, who

had become quite perky again.

"It is very easy for you to joke, but how would you like to wear a blinder like that for weeks and weeks, sir?" and Rose quenched his rising spirits by slipping the shade over his eyes, as he still sat on the cushion at her feet.

"It's horrid! Take it off, take it off! I don't wonder the poor old boy has the blues with a thing like that on"; and Charlie sat looking at what seemed to him an instrument of torture, with such a sober face that Rose took it gently away, and went in to bid Mac good-night.

"I shall go home with her, for it is getting darkish, and she is rather timid," said Archie, forgetting that he had often laughed at this very timidity.

"I think I might, for she's taking care of my brother," put in Steve, asserting his rights.

"Let's all go, that will please her"; proposed Charlie, with a burst of gallantry which electrified his mates.

"We will!" they said with one voice, and they did, to Rose's great surprise and secret contentment; though Archie had all the care of her, for the other two were leaping fences, running races, and having wrestling matches all the way down.

They composed themselves on reaching the door, however; shook hands cordially all round, made their best bows, and retired with great elegance and dignity, leaving Rose to say to herself, with girlish satisfaction, as she went in

"Now, that is the way I like to be treated."