

## VII. Aunt Olivia's Beau

Aunt Olivia told Peggy and me about him on the afternoon we went over to help her gather her late roses for pot-pourri. We found her strangely quiet and preoccupied. As a rule she was fond of mild fun, alert to hear East Grafton gossip, and given to sudden little trills of almost girlish laughter, which for the time being dispelled the atmosphere of gentle old-maidishness which seemed to hang about her as a garment. At such moments we did not find it hard to believe--as we did at other times--that Aunt Olivia had once been a girl herself.

This day she picked the roses absently, and shook the fairy petals into her little sweet-grass basket with the air of a woman whose thoughts were far away. We said nothing, knowing that Aunt Olivia's secrets always came our way in time. When the rose-leaves were picked, we carried them in and upstairs in single file, Aunt Olivia bringing up the rear to pick up any stray rose-leaf we might drop. In the south-west room, where there was no carpet to fade, we spread them on newspapers on the floor. Then we put our sweet-grass baskets back in the proper place in the proper closet in the proper room. What would have happened to us, or to the sweet-grass baskets, if this had not been done I do not know. Nothing was ever permitted to remain an instant out of place in Aunt Olivia's house.

When we went downstairs, Aunt Olivia asked us to go into the parlour.

She had something to tell us, she said, and as she opened the door a delicate pink flush spread over her face. I noted it, with surprise, but no inkling of the truth came to me--for nobody ever connected the idea of possible lovers or marriage with this prim little old maid, Olivia Sterling.

Aunt Olivia's parlour was much like herself--painfully neat. Every article of furniture stood in exactly the same place it had always stood. Nothing was ever suffered to be disturbed. The tassels of the crazy cushion lay just so over the arm of the sofa, and the crochet antimacassar was always spread at precisely the same angle over the horsehair rocking chair. No speck of dust was ever visible; no fly ever invaded that sacred apartment.

Aunt Olivia pulled up a blind, to let in what light could sift finely through the vine leaves, and sat down in a high-backed old chair that had appertained to her great-grandmother. She folded her hands in her lap, and looked at us with shy appeal in her blue-gray eyes. Plainly she found it hard to tell us her secret, yet all the time there was an air of pride and exultation about her; somewhat, also, of a new dignity. Aunt Olivia could never be self-assertive, but if it had been possible that would have been her time for it.

"Have you ever heard me speak of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson?" asked Aunt Olivia.

We had never heard her, or anybody else, speak of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson; but volumes of explanation could not have told us more about him than did Aunt Olivia's voice when she pronounced his name. We knew, as if it had been proclaimed to us in trumpet tones, that Mr. Malcolm MacPherson must be Aunt Olivia's beau, and the knowledge took away our breath. We even forgot to be curious, so astonished were we.

And there sat Aunt Olivia, proud and shy and exulting and shamefaced, all at once!

"He is a brother of Mrs. John Seaman's across the bridge," explained Aunt Olivia with a little simper. "Of course you don't remember him. He went out to British Columbia twenty years ago. But he is coming home now--and--and--tell your father, won't you--I--I--don't like to tell him--Mr. Malcolm MacPherson and I are going to be married."

"Married!" gasped Peggy. And "married!" I echoed stupidly.

Aunt Olivia bridled a little.

"There is nothing unsuitable in that, is there?" she asked, rather crisply.

"Oh, no, no," I hastened to assure her, giving Peggy a surreptitious kick to divert her thoughts from laughter. "Only you must realize, Aunt Olivia, that this is a very great surprise to us." "I thought it would

be so," said Aunt Olivia complacently. "But your father will know--he will remember. I do hope he won't think me foolish. He did not think Mr. Malcolm MacPherson was a fit person for me to marry once. But that was long ago, when Mr. Malcolm MacPherson was very poor. He is in very comfortable circumstances now."

"Tell us about it, Aunt Olivia," said Peggy. She did not look at me, which was my salvation. Had I caught Peggy's eye when Aunt Olivia said "Mr. Malcolm MacPherson" in that tone I must have laughed, willy-nilly.

"When I was a girl the MacPhersons used to live across the road from here. Mr. Malcolm MacPherson was my beau then. But my family--and your father especially--dear me, I do hope he won't be very cross--were opposed to his attentions and were very cool to him. I think that was why he never said anything to me about getting married then. And after a time he went away, as I have said, and I never heard anything from him directly for many a year. Of course, his sister sometimes gave me news of him. But last June I had a letter from him. He said he was coming home to settle down for good on the old Island, and he asked me if I would marry him. I wrote back and said I would. Perhaps I ought to have consulted your father, but I was afraid he would think I ought to refuse Mr. Malcolm MacPherson."

"Oh, I don't think father will mind," said Peggy reassuringly.

"I hope not, because, of course, I would consider it my duty in any case

to fulfil the promise I have given to Mr. Malcolm MacPherson. He will be in Grafton next week, the guest of his sister, Mrs. John Seaman, across the bridge."

Aunt Olivia said that exactly as if she were reading it from the personal column of the Daily Enterprise.

"When is the wedding to be?" I asked.

"Oh!" Aunt Olivia blushed distressfully. "I do not know the exact date. Nothing can be definitely settled until Mr. Malcolm MacPherson comes. But it will not be before September, at the earliest. There will be so much to do. You will tell your father, won't you?"

We promised that we would, and Aunt Olivia arose with an air of relief. Peggy and I hurried over home, stopping, when we were safely out of earshot, to laugh. The romances of the middle-aged may be to them as tender and sweet as those of youth, but they are apt to possess a good deal of humour for onlookers. Only youth can be sentimental without being mirth-provoking. We loved Aunt Olivia and were glad for her late, new-blossoming happiness; but we felt amused over it also. The recollection of her "Mr. Malcolm MacPherson" was too much for us every time we thought of it.

Father pooh-poohed incredulously at first, and, when we had convinced him, guffawed with laughter. Aunt Olivia need not have dreaded any more

opposition from her cruel family.

"MacPherson was a good fellow enough, but horribly poor," said father.

"I hear he has done very well out west, and if he and Olivia have a notion of each other they are welcome to marry as far as I am concerned. Tell Olivia she mustn't take a spasm if he tracks some mud into her house once in a while."

Thus it was all arranged, and, before we realized it at all, Aunt Olivia was mid-deep in marriage preparations, in all of which Peggy and I were quite indispensable. She consulted us in regard to everything, and we almost lived at her place in those days preceding the arrival of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson.

Aunt Olivia plainly felt very happy and important. She had always wished to be married; she was not in the least strong-minded and her old-maidhood had always been a sore point with her. I think she looked upon it as somewhat of a disgrace. And yet she was a born old maid; looking at her, and taking all her primness and little set ways into consideration, it was quite impossible to picture her as the wife of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson, or anybody else.

We soon discovered that, to Aunt Olivia, Mr. Malcolm MacPherson represented a merely abstract proposition--the man who was to confer on her the long-withheld dignity of matronhood. Her romance began and ended there, although she was quite unconscious of this herself, and believed

that she was deeply in love with him.

"What will be the result, Mary, when he arrives in the flesh and she is compelled to deal with 'Mr. Malcolm MacPherson' as a real, live man, instead of a nebulous 'party of the second part' in the marriage ceremony?" queried Peggy, as she hemmed table-napkins for Aunt Olivia, sitting on her well-scoured sandstone steps, and carefully putting all thread-clippings and ravellings into the little basket which Aunt Olivia had placed there for that purpose.

"It may transform her from a self-centered old maid into a woman for whom marriage does not seem such an incongruous thing," I said.

The day on which Mr. Malcolm MacPherson was expected Peggy and I went over. We had planned to remain away, thinking that the lovers would prefer their first meeting to be unwitnessed, but Aunt Olivia insisted on our being present. She was plainly nervous; the abstract was becoming concrete. Her little house was in spotless, speckless order from top to bottom. Aunt Olivia had herself scrubbed the garret floor and swept the cellar steps that very morning with as much painstaking care as if she expected that Mr. Malcolm MacPherson would hasten to inspect each at once and she must stand or fall by his opinion of them.

Peggy and I helped her to dress. She insisted on wearing her best black silk, in which she looked unnaturally fine. Her soft muslin became her much better, but we could not induce her to wear it. Anything more prim

and bandboxy than Aunt Olivia when her toilet was finished it has never been my lot to see. Peggy and I watched her as she went downstairs, her skirt held stiffly up all around her that it might not brush the floor.

"Mr. Malcolm MacPherson' will be inspired with such awe that he will only be able to sit back and gaze at her," whispered Peggy. "I wish he would come and have it over. This is getting on my nerves."

Aunt Olivia went into the parlour, settled herself in the old carved chair, and folded her hands. Peggy and I sat down on the stairs to await his coming in a crisping suspense. Aunt Olivia's kitten, a fat, bewhiskered creature, looking as if it were cut out of black velvet, shared our vigil and purred in maddening peace of mind.

We could see the garden path and gate through the hall window, and therefore supposed we should have full warning of the approach of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson. It was no wonder, therefore, that we positively jumped when a thunderous knock crashed against the front door and re-echoed through the house. Had Mr. Malcolm MacPherson dropped from the  
skies?

We afterwards discovered that he had come across lots and around the house from the back, but just then his sudden advent was almost uncanny. I ran downstairs and opened the door. On the step stood a man about six feet two in height, and proportionately broad and sinewy. He had



splendid shoulders, a great crop of curly black hair, big, twinkling blue eyes, and a tremendous crinkly black beard that fell over his breast in shining waves. In brief, Mr. Malcolm MacPherson was what one would call instinctively, if somewhat tritely, "a magnificent specimen of manhood."

In one hand he carried a bunch of early goldenrod and smoke-blue asters.

"Good afternoon," he said in a resonant voice which seemed to take possession of the drowsy summer afternoon. "Is Miss Olivia Sterling in? And will you please tell her that Malcolm MacPherson is here?"

I showed him into the parlour. Then Peggy and I peeped through the crack of the door. Anyone would have done it. We would have scorned to excuse ourselves. And, indeed, what we saw would have been worth several conscience spasms if we had felt any.

Aunt Olivia arose and advanced primly, with outstretched hand.

"Mr. MacPherson, I am very glad to see you," she said formally.

"It's yourself, Nillie!" Mr. Malcolm MacPherson gave two strides.

He dropped his flowers on the floor, knocked over a small table, and sent the ottoman spinning against the wall. Then he caught Aunt Olivia in his arms and--smack, smack, smack! Peggy sank back upon the

stair-step with her handkerchief stuffed in her mouth. Aunt Olivia was being kissed!

Presently, Mr. Malcolm MacPherson held her back at arm's length in his big paws and looked her over. I saw Aunt Olivia's eyes roam over his arm to the inverted table and the litter of asters and goldenrod. Her sleek crimps were all ruffled up, and her lace fichu twisted half around her neck. She looked distressed.

"It's not a bit changed you are, Nillie," said Mr. Malcolm MacPherson admiringly. "And it's good I'm feeling to see you again. Are you glad to see me, Nillie?"

"Oh, of course," said Aunt Olivia.

She twisted herself free and went to set up the table. Then she turned to the flowers, but Mr. Malcolm MacPherson had already gathered them up, leaving a goodly sprinkling of leaves and stalks on the carpet.

"I picked these for you in the river field, Nillie," he said. "Where will I be getting something to stick them in? Here, this will do."

He grasped a frail, painted vase on the mantel, stuffed the flowers in it, and set it on the table. The look on Aunt Olivia's face was too much for me at last. I turned, caught Peggy by the shoulder and dragged her out of the house.

"He will horrify the very soul out of Aunt Olivia's body if he goes on like this," I gasped. "But he's splendid--and he thinks the world of her--and, oh, Peggy, did you EVER hear such kisses? Fancy Aunt Olivia!"

It did not take us long to get well acquainted with Mr. Malcolm MacPherson. He almost haunted Aunt Olivia's house, and Aunt Olivia insisted on our staying with her most of the time. She seemed to be very shy of finding herself alone with him. He horrified her a dozen times in an hour; nevertheless, she was very proud of him, and liked to be teased about him, too. She was delighted that we admired him.

"Though, to be sure, he is very different in his looks from what he used to be," she said. "He is so dreadfully big! And I do not like a beard, but I have not the courage to ask him to shave it off. He might be offended. He has bought the old Lynde place in Avonlea and wants to be married in a month. But, dear me, that is too soon. It--it would be hardly proper."

Peggy and I liked Mr. Malcolm MacPherson very much. So did father. We were glad that he seemed to think Aunt Olivia perfection. He was as happy as the day was long; but poor Aunt Olivia, under all her surface pride and importance, was not. Amid all the humour of the circumstances Peggy and I snuffed tragedy compounded with the humour.

Mr. Malcolm MacPherson could never be trained to old-maidishness, and

even Aunt Olivia seemed to realize this. He never stopped to clear his boots when he came in, although she had an ostentatiously new scraper put at each door for his benefit. He seldom moved in the house without knocking some of Aunt Olivia's treasures over. He smoked cigars in her parlour and scattered the ashes over the floor. He brought her flowers every day and stuck them into whatever receptacle came handiest. He sat on her cushions and rolled her antimacassars up into balls. He put his feet on her chair rungs--and all with the most distracting unconsciousness of doing anything out of the way. He never noticed Aunt Olivia's fluttering nervousness at all. Peggy and I laughed more than was good for us those days. It was so funny to see Aunt Olivia hovering anxiously around, picking up flower stems, and smoothing out tidies, and generally following him about to straighten out things. Once she even got a wing and dustpan and swept the cigar ashes under his very eyes.

"Now don't be worrying yourself over that, Nillie," he protested. "Why, I don't mind a litter, bless you!"

How good and jolly he was, that Mr. Malcolm MacPherson! Such songs as he sang, such stories as he told, such a breezy, unconventional atmosphere as he brought into that prim little house, where stagnant dullness had reigned for years! He worshipped Aunt Olivia, and his worship took the concrete form of presents galore. He brought her a present almost every visit--generally some article of jewelry. Bracelets, rings, chains, ear-drops, lockets, bangles, were showered upon our precise little aunt; she accepted them deprecatingly, but never wore them. This hurt him a

little, but she assured him she would wear them all sometimes.

"I am not used to jewelry, Mr. MacPherson," she would tell him.

Her engagement ring she did wear--it was a rather "loud" combination of engraved gold and opals. Sometimes we caught her turning it on her finger with a very troubled face.

"I would be sorry for Mr. Malcolm MacPherson if he were not so much in love with her," said Peggy. "But as he thinks that she is perfection he doesn't need sympathy."

"I am sorry for Aunt Olivia," I said. "Yes, Peggy, I am. Mr. MacPherson is a splendid man, but Aunt Olivia is a born old maid, and it is outraging her very nature to be anything else. Don't you see how it's hurting her? His big, splendid man-ways are harrowing her very soul up--she can't get out of her little, narrow groove, and it is killing her to be pulled out."

"Nonsense!" said Peggy. Then she added with a laugh,

"Mary, did you ever see anything so funny as Aunt Olivia sitting on 'Mr. Malcolm MacPherson's' knee?"

It WAS funny. Aunt Olivia thought it very unbecoming to sit there before us, but he made her do it. He would say, with his big, jolly laugh,

"Don't be minding the little girls," and pull her down on his knee and hold her there. To my dying day I shall never forget the expression on the poor little woman's face.

But, as the days went by and Mr. Malcolm MacPherson began to insist on a date being set for the wedding, Aunt Olivia grew to have a strangely disturbed look. She became very quiet, and never laughed except under protest. Also, she showed signs of petulance when any of us, but especially father, teased her about her beau. I pitied her, for I think I understood better than the others what her feelings really were. But even I was not prepared for what did happen. I would not have believed that Aunt Olivia could do it. I thought that her desire for marriage in the abstract would outweigh the disadvantages of the concrete. But one can never reckon with real, bred-in-the-bone old-maidism.

One morning Mr. Malcolm MacPherson told us all that he was coming up that evening to make Aunt Olivia set the day. Peggy and I laughingly approved, telling him that it was high time for him to assert his authority, and he went off in great good humour across the river field, whistling a Highland strathspey. But Aunt Olivia looked like a martyr. She had a fierce attack of housecleaning that day, and put everything in flawless order, even to the corners.

"As if there was going to be a funeral in the house," sniffed Peggy.

Peggy and I were up in the south-west room at dusk that evening, piecing

a quilt, when we heard Mr. Malcolm MacPherson shouting out in the hall below to know if anyone was home. I ran out to the landing, but as I did so Aunt Olivia came out of her room, brushed past me, and flitted downstairs.

"Mr. MacPherson," I heard her say with double-distilled primness, "will you please come into the parlour? I have something to say to you."

They went in, and I returned to the south-west room.

"Peg, there's trouble brewing," I said. "I'm sure of it by Aunt Olivia's face, it was GRAY. And she has gone down ALONE--and shut the door."

"I am going to hear what she says to him," said Peggy resolutely. "It is her own fault--she has spoiled us by always insisting that we should be present at their interviews. That poor man has had to do his courting under our very eyes. Come on, Mary."

The south-west room was directly over the parlour and there was an open stovepipe-hole leading up therefrom. Peggy removed the hat box that was on it, and we both deliberately and shamelessly crouched down and listened with all our might.

It was easy enough to hear what Mr. Malcolm MacPherson was saying.

"I've come up to get the date settled, Nillie, as I told you. Come now,

little woman, name the day."

SMACK!

"Don't, Mr. MacPherson," said Aunt Olivia. She spoke as a woman who has keyed herself up to the doing of some very distasteful task and is anxious to have it over and done with as soon as possible. "There is something I must say to you. I cannot marry you, Mr. MacPherson."

There was a pause. I would have given much to have seen the pair of them. When Mr. Malcolm MacPherson spoke his voice was that of blank, uncomprehending amazement.

"Nillie, what is it you are meaning?" he said.

"I cannot marry you, Mr. MacPherson," repeated Aunt Olivia.

"Why not?" Surprise was giving way to dismay.

"I don't think you will understand, Mr. MacPherson," said Aunt Olivia, faintly. "You don't realize what it means for a woman to give up everything--her own home and friends and all her past life, so to speak, and go far away with a stranger."

"Why, I suppose it will be rather hard. But, Nillie, Avonlea isn't very far away--not more than twelve miles, if it will be that."



"Twelve miles! It might as well be at the other side of the world to all intents and purposes," said Aunt Olivia obstinately. "I don't know a living soul there, except Rachel Lynde."

"Why didn't you say so before I bought the place, then? But it's not too late. I can be selling it and buying right here in East Grafton if that will please you--though there isn't half as nice a place to be had. But I'll fix it up somehow!"

"No, Mr. MacPherson," said Aunt Olivia firmly, "that doesn't cover the difficulty. I knew you would not understand. My ways are not your ways and I cannot make them over. For--you track mud in--and--and--you don't care whether things are tidy or not."

Poor Aunt Olivia had to be Aunt Olivia; if she were being burned at the stake I verily believe she would have dragged some grotesqueness into the tragedy of the moment.

"The devil!" said Mr. Malcolm MacPherson--not profanely or angrily, but as in sheer bewilderment. Then he added, "Nillie, you must be joking. It's careless enough I am--the west isn't a good place to learn finicky ways--but you can teach me. You're not going to throw me over because I track mud in!"

"I cannot marry you, Mr. MacPherson," said Aunt Olivia again.

"You can't be meaning it!" he exclaimed, because he was beginning to understand that she did mean it, although it was impossible for his man mind to understand anything else about the puzzle. "Nillie, it's breaking my heart you are! I'll do anything--go anywhere--be anything you want--only don't be going back on me like this."

"I cannot marry you, Mr. MacPherson," said Aunt Olivia for the fourth time.

"Nillie!" exclaimed Mr. Malcolm MacPherson. There was such real agony in his tone that Peggy and I were suddenly stricken with contrition. What were we doing? We had no right to be listening to this pitiful interview. The pain and protest in his voice had suddenly banished all the humour from it, and left naught but the bare, stark tragedy. We rose and tiptoed out of the room, wholesomely ashamed of ourselves.

When Mr. Malcolm MacPherson had gone, after an hour of useless pleading, Aunt Olivia came up to us, pale and prim and determined, and told us that there was to be no wedding. We could not pretend surprise, but Peggy ventured a faint protest.

"Oh, Aunt Olivia, do you think you have done right?"

"It was the only thing I could do," said Aunt Olivia stonily. "I could not marry Mr. Malcolm MacPherson and I told him so. Please tell your

father--and kindly say nothing more to me about the matter."

Then Aunt Olivia went downstairs, got a broom, and swept up the mud Mr. Malcolm MacPherson had tracked over the steps.

Peggy and I went home and told father. We felt very flat, but there was nothing to be done or said. Father laughed at the whole thing, but I could not laugh. I was sorry for Mr. Malcolm MacPherson and, though I was angry with her, I was sorry for Aunt Olivia, too. Plainly she felt badly enough over her vanished hopes and plans, but she had developed a strange and baffling reserve which nothing could pierce.

"It's nothing but a chronic case of old-maidism," said father impatiently.

Things were very dull for a week. We saw no more of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson and we missed him dreadfully. Aunt Olivia was inscrutable, and worked with fierceness at superfluous tasks.

One evening father came home with some news. "Malcolm MacPherson is leaving on the 7:30 train for the west," he said. "He has rented the Avonlea place and he's off. They say he is mad as a hatter at the trick Olivia played on him."

After tea Peggy and I went over to see Aunt Olivia, who had asked our advice about a wrapper. She was sewing as for dear life, and her face

was primmer and colder than ever. I wondered if she knew of Mr. Malcolm MacPherson's departure. Delicacy forbade me to mention it but Peggy had no such scruples.

"Well, Aunt Olivia, your beau is off," she announced cheerfully. "You won't be bothered with him again. He is leaving on the mail train for the west."

Aunt Olivia dropped her sewing and stood up. I have never seen anything like the transformation that came over her. It was so thorough and sudden as to be almost uncanny. The old maid vanished completely, and in her place was a woman, full to the lips with primitive emotion and pain.

"What shall I do?" she cried in a terrible voice. "Mary--Peggy--what shall I do?"

It was almost a shriek. Peggy turned pale.

"Do you care?" she said stupidly.

"Care! Girls, I shall DIE if Malcolm MacPherson goes away! I have been mad--I must have been mad. I have almost died of loneliness since I sent him away. But I thought he would come back! I must see him--there is time to reach the station before the train goes if I go by the fields."

She took a wild step towards the door, but I caught her back with a

sudden mind-vision of Aunt Olivia flying bareheaded and distraught across the fields.

"Wait a moment, Aunt Olivia. Peggy, run home and get father to harness Dick in the buggy as quickly as he can. We'll drive Aunt Olivia to the station. We'll get you there in time, Aunty."

Peggy flew, and Aunt Olivia dashed upstairs. I lingered behind to pick up her sewing, and when I got to her room she had her hat and cape on. Spread out on the bed were all the boxes of gifts which Mr. Malcolm MacPherson had brought her, and Aunt Olivia was stringing their contents feverishly about her person. Rings, three brooches, a locket, three chains and a watch all went on--anyway and anyhow. A wonderful sight it was to see Aunt Olivia bedizened like that!

"I would never wear them before--but I'll put them all on now to show him I'm sorry," she gasped, with trembling lips.

When the three of us crowded into the buggy, Aunt Olivia grasped the whip before we could prevent her and, leaning out, gave poor Dick such a lash as he had never felt in his life before. He went tearing down the steep, stony, fast-darkening road in a fashion which made Peggy and me cry out in alarm. Aunt Olivia was usually the most timid of women, but now she didn't seem to know what fear was. She kept whipping and urging poor Dick the whole way to the station, quite oblivious to our assurances that there was plenty of time. The people who met us that

night must have thought we were quite mad. I held on the reins, Peggy gripped the swaying side of the buggy, and Aunt Olivia bent forward, hat and hair blowing back from her set face with its strangely crimson cheeks, and plied the whip. In such a guise did we whirl through the village and over the two-mile station road.

When we drove up to the station, where the train was shunting amid the shadows, Aunt Olivia made a flying leap from the buggy and ran along the platform, with her cape streaming behind her and all her brooches and chains glittering in the lights. I tossed the reins to a boy standing near and we followed. Just under the glare of the station lamp we saw Mr. Malcolm MacPherson, grip in hand. Fortunately no one else was very near, but it would have been all the same had they been the centre of a crowd. Aunt Olivia fairly flung herself against him.

"Malcolm," she cried, "don't go--don't go--I'll marry you--I'll go anywhere--and I don't care how much mud you bring in!"

That truly Aunt Olivia touch relieved the tension of the situation a little. Mr. MacPherson put his arm about her and drew her back into the shadows.

"There, there," he soothed. "Of course I won't be going. Don't cry, Nillie-girl."

"And you'll come right back with me now?" implored Aunt Olivia, clinging

to him as if she feared he would be whisked away from her yet if she let go for a moment.

"Of course, of course," he said.

Peggy got a chance home with a friend, and Aunt Olivia and Mr. Malcolm MacPherson and I drove back in the buggy. Mr. MacPherson held Aunt Olivia on his knee because there was no room, but she would have sat there, I think, had there been a dozen vacant seats. She clung to him in the most barefaced fashion, and all her former primness and reserve were swept away completely. She kissed him a dozen times or more and told him she loved him--and I did not even smile, nor did I want to. Somehow, it did not seem in the least funny to me then, nor does it now, although it doubtless will to others. There was too much real intensity of feeling in it all to leave any room for the ridiculous. So wrapped up in each other were they that I did not even feel superfluous.

I set them safely down in Aunt Olivia's yard and turned homeward, completely forgotten by the pair. But in the moonlight, which flooded the front of the house, I saw something that testified eloquently to the transformation in Aunt Olivia. It had rained that afternoon and the yard was muddy. Nevertheless, she went in at her front door and took Mr. Malcolm MacPherson in with her without even a glance at the scraper!