"O, my luve is like a red, red rose/That's newly sprung in June." Clover and Rose Red are living a dream.

"I do declare, Miss Carr, that I shall miss you extraordinarily," Rose Red told her on the last day of school. Clover blushed, her white cheek coloring prettily, and Rose kissed it. When she pulled away, Katy was smiling at her with that half-maternal, half-sisterly affection which inevitably made Rose throw her arms around her in a bear hug.

"Oh! - Rosy," Katy cried, returning the embrace with equal warmth. "We'll miss you, too."

"You're such a dear," Rose said with her usual vim. "Like fruit cake, you know - it fills you up and makes you feel so satisfied somehow."

Katy chuckled in her ear and released her to go say goodbye to Esther Dearborn. Rose released her and went to kiss Clover again.

"If Katy's fruit cake, what am I?" Clover asked, putting her arm round Rose's waist as sentimentally as any schoolgirl.

"She's a dear but you're the dearest, darling," Rose whispered. She pressed her lips to Clover's cheek again and then, trying to be sneaky, breathed a kiss over her lips. Clover pulled away, scowling so adorably that Rose laughed. "There isn't a soul around who would tell."

"Lilly might," Clover said reprovingly. Rose, breaking at least one bye-law of the S.S.U.C., stuck her tongue out.

"Like I said," she retorted, "not a soul."
"Rose!"

But Clover was giggling, that mischievous sparkle in her eyes. The Carr girls, for all their calm simplicity and sweet natures, had a deep streak of fun. It made them both endlessly fascinating; more so than running round with Lilly Page or her cronies. One got bored with lengthy frivolity as much as one did with lengthy goodness (though, Rose admitted privately, being an angel became tedious faster) and it was delightful to kiss Clover and then sit down solemnly with the S.S.U.C. for hours, knowing that at the end, Clover would still be there, smiling.

They'd discussed that in one of the earliest meetings.

"When is it right to flirt?" inquired Ellen Gray, with the air of one pronouncing the Topic of the Day.

"Never," Rose returned promptly, and received an approving smile from Katy for her trouble.

"If one is in love," said Sally Alsop, "would it be right then? For at least one would be serious in purpose, if not in tone."

"I - I - don't think - " Everyone paused obligingly for Silvery Mary. She reddened horribly as they all looked at her and subsided miserably. Rose patted her shoulder.

"It's not decent to make light of something so important," Clover said. Her tone was so fierce that everyone quite forgot poor Mary in their astonishment. "I mean - if you are in earnest, then you should act like it, or else how will the - the other person know?"

"If I married," Rose informed the company, "then I should lead 'my luve' a merry dance." At their irritated glares, she sighed dramatically. "Only after I married them; otherwise they'd undoubtedly go out West to the Indian Territories."

"They might do that anyway," Ellen Gray said in her mildest tones. Rose tickled her with the end of one of her plaits.

"True," she said carelessly. "I might have to contract a Boston marriage instead, my dears, and live with the sister of my heart."

"What about the sister of your body?" Amy Erskine asked, and was immediately told off by Katy for her indiscretion. It shouldn't have been so terrible - Katy's reproofs never were, they were delivered in such a kind voice - but they all hated to disappoint her so much that Amy colored and it was a minute or two before she spoke again.

Meanwhile, I am afraid to say Rose was cheerfully dismissing her sister's claim on her presence. "Sylvia wouldn't miss me one bit. She's dreadfully self-sufficient."

"I can't imagine it," Clover said, her lovely eyes wide. "I wouldn't know what to do without Katy."

"Don't be silly," Katy said, sounding pleased. "You'd get along fine."

"You can marry me," Rose suggested, dimpling and batting her eyelashes until even Katy succumbed to laughter at her antics. But when the meeting finished up, Clover caught Rose's hand and tugged her away from the others.

"Come to our room again after tea," she whispered. "Katy is going to visit Louisa."

Rose went, and found Clover curled up on her bed reading. "When will the admirable Miss Carr
"Ages yet," Clover said and Rose sat down next to her.

"What are you reading?"

"'O my luve's like a red, red rose, that's newly sprung in June,'" Clover said shyly. Sweet little Clover! This sort of thing was very new for her, as well it might be, and she was determined to do it properly. Poetry was appropriate for - not lovers, of course not, but certainly for very beloved friends, as one might read in a novel of Dickens such as *Bleak House*. She was quite taken aback when Rose giggled and leant forward to brush her nose against Clover's in a butterfly kiss.

"'As fair art thou, my bonnie lass,'" replied she good-naturedly. Clover was still more amazed when Rose pressed her lips to hers, but being a clever girl, she soon realized the point.

How to describe the happiness of those hours spent in the room at the end of Quaker Row? It is impossible to convey the harmony and delight of finding a true companion in all things. Kisses were exchanged in the guise of telling secrets; they engaged each other to walk for three weeks in a row before Katy reclaimed her sister and Rose Red felt kindly disposed enough to the world to placate Mary Silver. One Sunday, on their way to the bath house, Rose dodged off the path to snatch up a posy:

"'How do I love thee?'" she demanded of the air. "'I love thee freely, as men strive for Right; I love thee purely, as they turn from Praise.' Clovy, be my Valentine, do."

Mrs Nipson, who had been looking vaguely approving at Rose's rhetoric, frowned deeply at her request. But Clover answered first.

"Silly! It's April."

"This is why we must be friends forever," Rose pronounced soberly. "Clover is so sensible I barely know what to do with myself."

It was the meeting after that when things came to a head at the S.S.U.C., but it was all done in such a ladylike way that half the members of that august body did not understand a word.

"I propose," said Alice Gibbons, "that all proceedings of the S.S.U.C. be secret."

"Of course," said Katy, looking surprised. "It's in the bye-laws."

"No, what I mean is - we shall tell each other secrets, of course, but I think they should only be discussed here, else it isn't fair." She stopped, flushing, and bit her lip. "I mean - there are things I should think that no one would want generally known and it *would* be unladylike to talk about them in public."

"We have the signals," Katy began, but she stopped, too. "No, I see. Well, I second the motion. If a girl here would like to speak of something, then she should know we won't tell at all."

They put it to the vote and the motion was carried unanimously. ("Though I do think," Sally Alsop confided in Rose later, "that whatever it is *must* be covered by the bye-laws, and Alice simply wants us all to know that she has a secret she isn't telling. But that is petty of me." Rose, who knew what the secret was, kept her own counsel.)

Clover would not have hurt Katy for worlds, but in the end it was a good thing that she did not know of the sore spot in Katy's heart for those weeks afterwards. Katy never spoke of it, nor even truly acknowledged it to herself, for to do so would have meant reproaching Clover. They two
who had always been such good friends - the Inseparables, as Lilly called them - should not, she felt, have been divided by even the most charming acquaintance. It was like losing Clover to marriage, as she knew she was losing Cecy, but a little worse. There was an unspoken, barely thought-of fear in her mind, though she had no real idea of what; only that no one outside of perhaps the S.S.U.C. should know how close Clover and Rose Red were. It was her pride, she decided in her more self-flagellating moments; it was not to be borne that Lilly or any of the others should think that they had deserted her. But she knew that this kind of fear was birthed out of love, not anger.

If only I could write to Cousin Helen! she thought. Cousin Helen would undoubtedly know what to do, but then Cousin Helen would know and she might write and tell Papa. And they would both understand that there was nothing wrong in it, it was just a loving friendship, but they might worry that others wouldn't realize; and if Cousin Helen worried, then she would be ill, and Papa might come and take them away. That would be the most unbearable thing of all, Katy thought. Because people would talk (and talk to Aunt Olivia, the idea of which made poor Katy flinch) and one day they might talk to people from Burnet and then Clover would never be safe from Rumor.

And she would be unhappy, Katy realized as she knocked on her own room's door and opened it to find Rose sitting Turkish fashion on Clover's bed, laughing at a story Clover had told her. It was one of Johnnie's, from that week's letter. Clover was blushing, happy to have gotten such a gratifying reaction, and Rose leaned over to kiss her cheek.

"'And fare the weel, my only luve, and fare the weel a while! And I will come again, my luve, tho' it were ten thousand mile.'"

With that, she darted off the bed and out of the door, pausing only to hug Katy briefly. Katy watched her go and then closed the door. "Do you only talk Scotch to each other?"

"Oh, someone gave Rosy a book of Burns's poems for Christmas, you know how she is," Clover declared with airy composure. Katy nodded, conscious of the fact that Rose had always loved to speak in Scotch and of the fact that Clover, for once, was not telling the whole truth. But because she would not have hurt Clover for worlds, she said:

"I only hope no one gives her a book of French poetry; then she will be incomprehensible."

"Oh! Rose speaks French admirably, I am sure," said Clover with prompt loyalty.

So that was that for Katy; she kept her own counsel and she made sure that the rest of the S.S.U.C. kept theirs. If she was a little cross with Rose for the next few weeks, it is understandable; but Rose accepted it with aplomb and lavished such affection on Katy and Clover alike that Katy was moved to forgive her before very long. In truth, she was almost as sad as Clover was to bid goodbye to Rose at the end of the year.

"Well! My dears," Rose said, embracing them both one last time. "I tell you I would look affectionately at that stage over there - " gesturing at the vehicle hired for the transport of the departing girls - "for it takes Lilly Page ever further away from me. I just wish you two weren't going with her. Stay, do, and make my life bearable. Will you leave me to the tender mercies of Miss Jane?"

"I will," Katy said, laughing, "she is much tenderer than you think."

"Never say that again," Rose told her, "for tough meat is only tenderized when one beats it greatly, you know. I have done it once; I don't have the patience for more."

"When was that?" Katy asked, but Rose affected not to hear her. She turned once more to Clover.
"Write me, Clovy," she ordered; the kindest taskmistress in the world. "Tell me all about Burnet and oh! don't you see, I'll get you to Washington yet."

"We'll see," said Clover, smiling through her teary eyes. "I shall never love anyone half so well as you, you know."

"And I you," Rose swore. She stepped back and with a sudden devil of an idea, whirled on her heel and dashed back into the building. Clover looked after her in undisguised bewilderment. Then she began to laugh as Rose's voice was heard inside, calling the other girls to duty; the windows opened and the cotton curtains began to flap from the sashes. It was with much amusement, tempered with sorrow, that the Carr girls left Hillsover and we may be glad that their last memory of it was contented.

Rose, alone in her room, had reason to be glad the fluttering cotton hid her face. She was a little older and wiser than innocent Clover and she could not help but see an end to something that had brightened her life for almost a year. Poor Rose! No "Boston marriage" for her, though she would contract a marriage in Boston. No more endless hours spent with Clover stroking her hair and kissing her lips. She was not the sort, as I have said, to marry anyone she did not adore; but at seventeen it is difficult to see past one's first love.

It was a very somber meeting of the S.S.U.C. that met that night and it was never again quite the cheerful company it had been. Rose kept her own counsel on the subject of the Misses Carr and kept her popularity amongst her fellows intact. If she seemed slightly more cynical than she had been, she was at least still as mischievous as ever; if she seemed a touch faded, the rose still had her thorns. Normally I would finish this tale by telling you about the katydid, and how it begs for more of the story, but a rose is silent except in the breeze, when it whispers secrets to its bed-mate. Let us leave it there, then, with the roses leaning towards each other, a soft susurrus tickling at the air.

Please drop by the archive and comment to let the author know if you enjoyed their work!