

# Uncles

by Louisa May Alcott from *Eight Cousins*

*This passage is from Eight Cousins by Louisa May Alcott. It's the story of Rose Campbell whose parents have both died. She is living with her wealthy aunts in Boston. The aunts have seven sons, so Rose is the eighth cousin and only girl. She has been sick a great deal, and her only friend is the housemaid named Phebe. In this passage Rose's Uncle Alec has just returned from a trip and is talking with Rose for the first time.*

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"But what are these troubles of yours, child?" he asked, after a minute of silence.

"Please don't ask me, uncle."

"Can't you tell them to me as well as to Phebe?"

Something in his tone made Rose feel that it would be better to speak out and be done with it, so she answered, with sudden color and averted eyes,

"The greatest one was losing dear papa."

As she said that, Uncle Alec's arm came gently round her, and he drew her to him, saying, in the voice so like papa's,

"That is a trouble which I cannot cure, my child; but I shall try to make you feel it less. What else, dear?"

"I am so tired and poorly all the time, I can't do anything I want to, and it makes me cross," sighed Rose, rubbing the aching head like a fretful child.

"That we can cure and we will," said her uncle, with a decided nod that made the curls bob on his head, to that Rose saw the gray ones underneath the brown.

"Aunt Myra says I have no constitution, and never shall be strong," observed Rose, in a pensive tone, as if it was rather a nice thing to be an invalid.

"Aunt Myra is a *ahem!* an excellent woman, but it is her hobby to believe that everyone is tottering on the brink of the grave; and, upon my life, I believe she is offended if people don't fall into it! We will show her how to make constitutions and turn pale-faced little ghosts into rosy, hearty girls. That's my business, you know," he added, more quietly, for his sudden outburst had rather startled Rose.

“I had forgotten you were a doctor. I’m glad of it, for I do want to be well, only I hope you won’t give me much medicine, for I’ve taken quarts already, and it does me no good.”

As she spoke, Rose pointed to a little table just inside the window, on which appeared a regiment of bottles.

“Ah, ha! Now we’ll see what mischief these blessed women have been at.” And, making a long arm, Dr. Alec set the bottles on the wide railing before him, examined each carefully, smiled over some, frowned over others, and said, as he put down the last: “Now I’ll show you the best way to take these messes.” And, as quick as a flash, he sent one after another smashing down into the posy-beds below.

**Questions**

1. What does “constitution” mean in the passage?
2. What is the Uncle Alec’s job?
3. What is Rose’s biggest trouble?
4. What did Uncle Alec do with the medicine bottles?