

## CHAPTER XV

### THE PASSING YEARS



FEW days later Janet, now a little past thirteen years of age, started to the public school. There were many things to fill her mind. Lessons were not easy, play was exciting, and bed-time usually found her tired enough to fall quickly asleep.

There was now a foot-bridge over the gully at some distance from the spring. Janet crossed it on her way to school and avoided looking at the Sear house—now occupied by other people—or at the “post office,” or even the

## THE PASSING YEARS

---

---

spring—her father carried all the water. Janet had formed a strange, paradoxical determination: she would love Phebe all her life, of course; she could not help it and did not wish to help it; but she would cease to think very much about her for four years. Phebe was not dead, but she was in prison; her term of incarceration would last about four years; during that time Janet vowed not to spoil the lives of her father and her mother by perpetual grieving; her love should “lie quiet” for a time, should be a beautiful dream, a joyous memory, but never a shadow or a sorrow. She could not keep to this course if she looked at the spring and the post office and the house which, however filled with a fresh stir of other life, al-

## JANET AND HER DEAR PHEBE

---

ways seemed vacant to her; so she put these tokens from her as a bereaved mother hides the playthings of her dead babe, and resolutely waited. She had no prohibitive force in her own home; she need not await the day of her own majority, which would arrive a year later than that of her friend. When Phebe was eighteen, they would surely find each other. In that thought she rested the deferred activities of her faithful heart.

The following spring Mr. and Mrs. Loring agreed to seek a home in another Iowa county, farther East. Before going, Mr. Loring, divining Janet's wish, made an unavailing effort to learn the street and number of Mr. Sear's residence. The Clarinda branch of the

## THE PASSING YEARS

---

Sear family had returned to England and no one seemed to be in communication with them.

This did not destroy hope. The future looks easy of conquest to thirteen. Janet preserved all a child's unreasoned faith in the powers to be hers when she grew older. Seventeen seemed a long way off; she should know how to find Phebe when the time came for determined action.

Mr. Loring's business misfortunes impelled him to frequent changes of location and of occupation. In three years there were five removals from one mid-Western State to another, the last being to Omaha, Nebraska.

In the meantime a new struggle arose in Amity, a new power presided over

## JANET AND HER DEAR PHEBE

the destinies of its postal affairs and the name of the post office was changed to College Springs.

After Janet's sixteenth birthday her clothes became noticeably shabby. If her father gave her money for a new hat, she smiled upon him with beaming gratitude, but she did not buy the hat. She sewed early and late out of school hours and during vacations. Every penny of her earnings was carefully hoarded. One day Mrs. Loring jested with her about becoming a miser.

"Dearest mother," she said, her blue eyes turned purple with resolve, "I thought you understood. It is my Phebe-fund. I am going to Amity and perhaps to Chicago before a year. I know you will not stand in my way. I

## THE PASSING YEARS

---

wish we were richer so that you might go with me.”

“You are too young to go alone, dear child. Would you be satisfied if your father made the search for you? I know he would willingly do so.”

The purple faded to wonted blue; Janet's hands trembled; but she knew her mother was right. It was Mr. Loring who went. It seemed to him mere waste of effort to visit College Springs. Without apprising Janet of his intention he went straight to Chicago, examined directories; advertised; and returned from his fruitless search knowing that the old shadow was unremoved from the heart of Janet and that a new one was about to fall; for he was ill with an illness that proved fatal.

His death was a double blow. To the sad break in the family circle Janet found added a stern necessity to forget herself, her needs, her dreams, even her sorrows, and devote every energy to earning a livelihood for the dear mother.

She entered the office of their family physician as Information Girl and undertook to fit herself for a nurse.