

CHAPTER V.

THE LETTERS



MISS PHEBE SEAR,

My affectionate friend—I'm glad you thought about it. Letters will make us happy. I'll write one every day if I can.

My book says butterflies used to be worms. Why don't they hatch out of eggs like chickens, with wings already fixed on?

Expectfully yours,
Miss Florence Amanda Janet Loring.

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Miss Florence Amanda Janet Loring,

Dear Miss—The reason is about the colors. Eggs are just white and yellow. Butterflies have to be spotted like tiger-lilies and shiney like fire. I guess the sun has a way of putting the paint on right, but it couldent in the dark under an eggshell and a hen.

I shall be most happy to hear from you every day.

I will anser all questions right.

Your esteemed friend,

Miss Phebe Sear.

Miss Florence Amanda Janet Loring,

Dear Miss—I couldent mail my letter yesterday. The watchful eye of The Postait kept me away from The Spring but I can write in the attic and

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sometime you will get the letters, so I will write more.

I have been learning some things about butterflies. I asked my aunt Sarah Smith who teaches a school. She had tea with us. She says caterpillars are all rolled up in the dark before they get wings and turn into butterflies. So they dont get their paint in the sun. I guess the reason they don't hatch out of eggs is because they are not chickens. Trees have to hatch out of tree-seeds and chickens out of eggs and butterflies out of worms because you can't gather figs out of a thissel.

I am well. Hoping these few lines find you the same,

Your esteemed friend,

Miss Phebe Sear.

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Miss Florence Amanda Janet Loring,

My dear Miss—I hope you are well but I did not see you at the church nor at the Sunday school.

Weep not for me. If you get sick how can you go to our post office? Do not be sick.

Your esteemed friend,

Miss Phebe Sear.

Miss Phebe Sear,

My affectionate friend—I did not go to the Sunday school nor the church because my mother had a sick headache and I stayed with her to sop off her brow with a wet rag.

Why do people when they write letters be so polite and not the way we talk? If your father ever writes me a

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letter I shall be most happy to have it begin Miss Florence Amanda Janet Loring but when you write I wish it could be different. Please explane this to me.

Expectfully yours,

Miss Florence Amanda Janet Loring.

My darling Janet—

Your question is like something I have been thinking. Weve been putting on our Sunday clothes in the letters. Let's write as we would talk if we were sitting on the grass near the spring with our feet bare and our dresses patched. Nobody sees the letters but just you and me and we may as well please ourselves and write the way we want to. So now you are not

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Miss Janet any more. Youre the White Flower of Amity and Ime your Tall Red Poppy. Its not printed in a book nor a reading paper and wele say things the way the wind blows—without being afraid, for I wont laugh at you and you wont laugh at me.

Just

Phebe.

My pretty Phebe—

You know that flower they call The Wild Sweet William? Evry head of it is like a bunch of stars shining together. Your head is like a bunch of stars, your think is so bright. So you are Sweet-Phebe, but not Wild.

I guess its a mistaik about my father being an Ignomus. My father knows a very great deal but not so much as

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you. He knows why we ought to have a new teacher for the school and other Truss-Tees to see about The College. But he wont tell me. Fathers are so quere. If he knows, why not tell me when I ask him? Last night he told me about Berlin. That is away off but he wont tell about Mrs. Brown and Mr. Witt, who live so near. I like Mrs. Brown but I know we ought to have a different teacher next term, because My father says so.

Will you please tell me why Grandmothers have white hair? Also why they knit so many stockings?

Your wants-to-know-friend,

Janet.

Dear Lump of Sugar—

The reason grandmothers have white

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hair is because they are soon going to heaven where everything is white. They knit because it takes so many stitches to make a stocking and our mothers havent so much time.

I have been trying to knit some socks for my father, to show me that I am not as bad as I thought I was, but I can't do it. Every stitch seems to be calling him names about not letting me see you. That kind of socks would feel like needles sticking his feet. I will make him some slippers, instead. They can't hurt him clear through his socks, even if they do have sharp-pointed thoughts knit into them, so thatll be best. Even after they are all done Ime afraid I shall still be very bad around my heart. I dont know how Ime to get

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good and Honor my father, until I may see you. Then I could Honor most everybody.

From Still-naughty

Phebe.

My Sweet-Phebe (not wild)—

I dont spose we have to call ourselves bad and naughty when we do all we can to get right. We can make ourselves do things and not do things but we cant make ourselves feel different.

I wiped the dishes this morning. Then mother gave me some yellow calico to make a dress for Ragged Lady. I hate yellow dresses and dolls and dishes and needles.

Why do I not love Ragged Lady? She was a rag doll then and she is a rag doll now. I loved her when you

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helped me make her a cabbage-leaf hat with fire-flower trimming. That was a day I have over again in my head nights and nights before I go to sleep. Do you remember about it? You came in the morning with crullars in a clean cloth. Your mother went to see a sick woman and you could stay all day. We tried to be sorry the woman was sick but we were very very glad that you could stay with me while your mother was gone to see her. Mother made us thimble biscuits and pie in the lid of the coffee pot and teakettle tea with brown sugar to give it color and we had a tea party with our dollies in the back yard. Then we got smartweed and coltstail and made trains to our dresses and we were great ladies calling on my mother. We only

knew about one very very great lady, so we took turns being Queen Victory and we always got some water and put on our cheeks to cry tears for us whenever it came our turn because she weeped to wear a crown.

We laughed at the biscuits and the tea and the train and the calls and Oh everything was very funny that day. Mother said we laughed so much because our hearts were happy.

When shall we laugh like that again?

From Janet who does not feel at all like laughing.

White Flower of Amity—

The reason you do not love Ragged Lady is because I am not there to help you. When we have our arms round

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each other, love comes easy. We love dolls and fathers and everything, then.

Its the same with laughing.

Whenever laughing comes easy well laugh again, Honey-Bee. It doesnt snow the year round; it just snows in the winter. Our fathers have made us a winter in the summer but may be theyll let us have summer in the winter. But I dont know. My father says I must NEVER speak to you again. He says never hard, *hard*, like stamping your foot when you mean a thing very much. So I don't know when we'll have any more fun or feel like laughing.

Are your eyes red?

Mine are.

From Phebe who feels like crying.

Oh you darling—

Do you feel like crying?

I do, too.

Mother knows it and she is kind. She lets me have seeds to plant a little garden, though it is so late in the year for gardens. She does not care for Tuck-Me-Nots but she lets me plant a whole row of them. I wanted them very much before, but now I just drop the seeds topsy-turvy and cover them as may happen, like tumble-weeds rolling about in the wind not looking to see where they are going. I wonder why I do not shut my eyes sometimes and play I see the lovely pinkish-reddish blossoms that will by-and-by be cuddled close to their stems with leaves hanging over, just like birds in a tree at night. Last year

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I seemed to feel the queer little soft things in my hands weeks before there were any buds on them. Now everything is different. I can't care for them before they come, but maybe I will after. I shall have sunflowers too and Marygolds and maybe Hollyhocks. I am trying to be glad for that would please my mother. I also study Webster's Elementary Spelling-book a good deal, because it will please my mother and you and me when I can spell better.

Why don't clouds fall right down? What makes them stay up? I didn't think of this just to-day. I've been wondering about it a long time whenever there seemed to be rain coming. I don't know why the water doesn't all

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get to the ground at once instead of pitty-pattying along a drop at a time.

From your same little

Janet.

Morning-Glory Janet—

The clouds could stay up longer if they wanted to. They could hang on the upper edge of the world and wait but they are sorry when things are going to die of dryness. That makes them cry tears and the tears are rain.

I havent any garden, but mother is teaching me to sew. You know Ide rather read but when I can do it well I mean to make a pincushion for you, so, thinking of you keeps me trying to learn, but it will take a long time. I dont study Webster's Elementary

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Spelling-book, but reading helps with spelling.

How strange that I could not go to church last Sunday. I thought I should see you there, but I could not go. I had a cold and an earake.

I'm always glad when bedtime comes. I can cry all I feel like in the night and nobody will say, "What's the matter, Phebe? Does your ear ake again?"

Farewell until to-morrow.

Phebe.

My darling Sweet-Phebe—

I hope your ear does not ake any more. Earake is most as turrible as war and not seeing the One We Love Best. My dearest I hope you may never have any more such akes as that.

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I wish and hope it from the top of my fared to the ends of my toes.

What do you spose makes me keep on being me? I used to be a little baby. I know it because mother has the pick-cher. Its an ambertipe and if the light doesent fall just as it should the pick-cher isent there, then, when you turn it a little, theres a teenty queer baldheaded little thing with a long dress hanging over mothers arm. Yet its I, Janet, mother says. I grow older and taller and my hair gets longer and I learn things, yet I am always Janet, always myself. Mother says she has been herself ever since she can remember but she doesent know why. She said Ide better not ask father or hede want to call in Doctor Step. Isent that strange?

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Why should he want me to have a doctor when Ime perfectly well, all but the part of me that wants Phebe? A doctor couldnt cure that. Perhaps wanting to call a doctor would be part of my fathers staying himself; so he cant help it. But whats the reason father must be himself and mother must be herself and I must be myself? Ime most very glad you cant be anybody but Phebe. There isnt any one nicer you could turn into if you were a fairy and could be whoever you liked.

Your full of love

Janet.

White Flower of Amity—

Theres a little baby looking out of the eyes of every big man or woman I ever saw. Everybody used to be little,

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and the big is just grown on outside of the little, like bark round a tree. That's the reason we always stay us. We *are* us inside, with more bark growing on all the time.

That's the reason its silly to get mad with big folks for doing things to us. We don't get mad with babies, and the big ones are babies, too, only they have thicker bark and more branches.

That was the right kind of a question. I liked it. But I could turn into A Good Lady, like Mrs. Marshall, who raised two orphans, or A Poet-Lady, like my Aunt Fanny. I think I should rather be the Poet-Lady but my head wasent born the right shape for it and Ime not a fairy, so I can't.

Mother says the girls who write

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rhymes when they are little usually wash dishes when they grow big. She says its well, too, because working is better than dreaming, but I don't think so. I hate dishes. I wish we could eat off clean stones by the side of a river and afterwards throw them into the water. I wish we could dream and dream forever and forget that there are dishes and dirt and thimbles and stitches.

Your own

Phebe.

My Tall Red Poppy—

I am not sure after all that we are always ourselves. Who are we at night when we are dreaming? Was it really I, Janet, who stole a blue ribbon last night and flew up in the air with it,

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flew without wings? Ime not that kind of a Janet when Ime awake.

Why do we need to sleep, anyway? I fight against going to sleep. I always did since I can remember about it. I seem to be getting lost from myself when Ime going to sleep and I try to keep awake thinking of you. I look at you with my other eyes the ones that see at night or when theyre shut. I see the red of your lips just as plain and the white of your teeth and the brown of your hair and the shine of your eyes that isent a color but a kind of glori-ness.

In the morning I remember that I saw you and then lost you but I cant be sure whether you faded or melted or went away slowly or stopped being

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there all at once or whether it was myself that got dim and went out like a wick without oil.

I do not like going to sleep.

Why must we sleep?

Yours all day every day.

Janet.

My little white-and-pink darling—

We go to sleep to give our baby-part a chance to play.

Babies don't know any better than to take ribbons.

I s'pose you just played you were flying. We can play anything we want to, and the dream-baby doesn't know the difference between playing things and doing them.

Dont try to stay awake, dont, *dont*, little white flower. If you do, a little

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rinkel will come before long in your snowy brow. Go to sleep and then dont think you have to be sorry the next day for what your baby-part did in the night while your bark and branches were resting.

My ears do not ake for anything now only the sound of your voice. I think I would walk all day just to hear you snore at night, I am so sure you are you, awake or asleep.

Your lonely

Phebe.

My Sweet-Phebe—

What do you think we shall be when we are wimmin? Perhaps I shall be a merchant and have a great many blue dresses and a banquit with you for my Honored Gest.

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Are you learning to sew? Can you wear a thimble? Mine wont stay on but without it I prick my fingers.

I made a doll to-day of a big reddish. I snipped the leaves into strings for hair. I play she is a red lady but her eyes are white so are her teeth where I scraped the red off with a knife. She is dressed in sunflower leaves. She is a red lady in a green dress. I send her pickcher, for if I send her your folks might ask where she came from and learn our secret.

From your dear

Janet.

My pretty little flower-blossom—

I am not learning to sew nor to knit nor to make a garden. I am not a useful girl. I read and read and read. I

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try to do other things. I try a little every day but it all looks so hard and reading is so easy.

I got a book out of Amity Public Library yesterday. It is about the Spanish people coming to America a long time ago.

The book is so big I could hardly carry it home. Father says there are no books in Amity Public Library only some that nobody wanted for themselves so they gave them to The Public. But I like to read this one. I liked the Temperance Tales and a book of stories that had Nanibojou in it. Any book is better than none. I am very glad there is a library in our town. I only like books and answering questions and you. You best. I suppose

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when I am a woman I shall be the keeper of Amity Public Library. By that time there'll be more books and I'll read them all. I'd like to help make books but I'm sure I couldn't. I'd never be able to get the covers on straight.

I surely will learn to sew enough to make you a pincushion, but no more.

I think when you grow big and your hair gets all white enough you will be a dear lovely grandmother. I guess that's what you will be—a grandmother. I don't think you'll be a merchant, for you don't like black and there's always so much black cloth in a store.

Goodday, My pretty love,
From Phebe.

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Dear beautiful Moon-star—

Ime so glad about the books. Then you wont be crying for me too much.

When we cry and cry and cry, why do we have eyes left? Are not the tears made of our eyes?

Ime sure you are right. You will be The Book-Keeper and Ile be a grandmother. You will know a great deal and you will teach some of it to my dear little girls and boys. And Ile always have plenty of donuts and gingerbread for you when you come. Your father will not say you must not speak to me then, Ile be such a very nice kind grandmother and he'll want some of the donuts.

I wish we could hurry and get big. It is so long to wait till we are too old

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to be forbidden before we may sit bare-foot together by the spring.

There is going to be a Fourth of July before long. Mother is making a flag. It makes something inside of me go thump-thump like a big hammer when I think about the Fourth of July, for may be you will be taken somewhere and may be I will be taken somewhere and may be it will be the same place and may be there will be so many people that no one will mind if I just squeeze your hand a little. And I *might* whisper Beautiful Tall Poppy close to your ear but you couldent anser me for you are not allowed to speak to me, but it was your father, not mine, said I musent speak to you. If our own fathers say things we do what they say,

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but other peoples fathers dont count, not very much. Ile surely speak to you if I get a chance. I just must. I hope its right but Ile do it anyway. We are too little to be good *all* the time when being good is such hard work.

Your naughty

Janet.

Little white kitten—

Has it dot its ittle claws out? You think you can be naughty, Janet, but you can't. You're just like my little white kitten. She sticks out her claws and pretends she's going to hurt some one, but she never does.

Tears are not made of eyes. If they were I should not have any eyes left, Ive cried so much, though, for a few

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days, now, I have kept from crying so I could see to read.

No, tears are sorriness turned to water and dropped out so we won't hurt quite so bad.

Oh, Janet, they used to do dreadful, dreadful things to people in the days I'm reading about. There were some folks living in The Western Hemisphere, up and down, Central and South America and islands, and the ones that came sailing ore the sea pretended that they owned all the land they could find. Then they just took everything they wanted and spoiled lots of things they didnt want, and killed people and hurt people—Oh Janet, I'm glad we live now. Other people are most all happy. It's just you and I

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who are unhappy, and we'll be brave and stand it, wont we?

Fifty kisses for you, my Bessedy. I love you when I am awake. I go to sleep hoping I shall dream of you, but then I hardly ever do.

Your own

Phebe.

Phebe, my best hero—

You make me feel ashamed to be bad and a coward. But I cant help it, not yet. When I think of days and days, snow coming then warm rain and flowers and grass, once, twice, Oh I dont know how many times, how long, and no Phebe, I am afraid, afraid. I could bear it a little while but not so long.

I saw you go down the hill yesterday.

I was glad there would be a letter but my neck had a lump in it because

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I couldent go, too. Then, after you had filled the pail, I saw you go and go and go, up the hill and into the gate.

Then I went down the path.

I didnt run.

I saw the mark of your foot in the mud, your dear little bare foot. It made me cry. I took the dirt with the mark in it and made a little mud foot and brought it home. Its dry now, in my patch-box, covered with quilt-pieces and the yellow doll-dress, part made. No one will see it. I dont want any one to see it but I shall kiss it sometimes. I guess its my little heathen idle.

There isnt any question to-day. I dont care about things. I dont want to know anything. I just want you. Oh Phebe, I cant forget you a bit. I wish

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I could. When I think about something else you're under it all, ready to pop up in a minute. I can shut my eyes any time and there you stand. Oh Phebe, I want you, I want you, I want you.

Your own lonely

Janet.

There was no answer to this letter for several days. Then Mr. Loring brought from the post office an envelope addressed:

MISS JANET LORING,

Care of Mr. J. J. Loring,

Amity,

Iowa.

Mr. Loring opened the letter and read it aloud—

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Miss Janet Loring—

I have discovered a letter written by you to my daughter Phebe. I have directed her not to reply. She shall write no letters to you and I desire you to discontinue writing to her.

H. Y. SEAR.

“I never saw such nosing about in a pigeon’s nest for a buzzard’s egg,” Mr. Loring said with a curl of his lip and a flash of his eye.

“What do you mean about eggs?” Janet asked. Her voice was trembling. Mr. Loring lifted her upon his knee and began to tell her that there would be a grand Fourth of July celebration in a few days. She could not get an answer to any question she asked about Phebe or Mr. Sear.