

JANET AND HER  
DEAR PHEBE

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# Janet and Her Dear Phebe

## CHAPTER I

### PHEBE AND JANET



**M**ORE than fifty years ago a few people moved to a place near the southwest corner of Iowa and built a little town which they named Amity.

Among the children of these settlers were two little girls who soon became very fond of each other. One had thin wrists and long brown hair. She was called Phebe Sear. The other had a tangle of sunbeams about her head; at least you felt sure that nothing else

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could be so yellow and so bright. Her eyes were round with wonder about the beautiful world. Her name was Janet Loring.

A pretty ravine with a spring in it zigzags across the town. Phebe lived up the slope from it on one side and Janet on the other.

Both families carried water from the spring.

When Janet went for water, her mother called her a good girl. Often she saw a tin pail and a pink sun-bonnet flashing down the opposite path. Then she ran to her mother and said:

“Let me be a good girl, real quick.”

If her mother put a little brass kettle into her hand, she ran toward the ravine, her yellow hair flying and a little song

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bubbling out of her mouth just as nature sent it, like the water of the spring rushing into the sunshine.

Sometimes, in long summer days, the two little friends had leave to stay together until one of them saw the come-home sign in her mother's window.

After they had made damp earth into rows and rows of plates and set them to dry in a level, sunny place, the little girls sometimes darted about the grassy slopes of the ravine, seeking flowers for their beauty as humming-birds seek them for their honey.

If there was still no red cloth hung in a window to call one of them home, they, perhaps, made a nest of grass and a bird of purslane and gave it pebble eggs to brood upon; or, they sat close

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together and Janet wondered at everything and Phebe explained everything. If you could have heard Phebe tell all about the sky and the earth and the water, you would have been surprised.

If Janet asked her how she knew, she said she was sure such things were very easy; she just felt for the answer—first all round under her arms, then in her head.

One day Janet wondered where people went when they fell into the sky over the edge of the hill.

Phebe said they dropped under The World and turned into flowers; then they grew up through the ground. "And we don't know," Phebe said, "but what we've picked somebody to-

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day. I just love Johnny-jump-ups, they have such dear faces."

"Like you," Janet said.

"Like *you*," Phebe said.

"What's the reason," Janet asked, "that little folks have bigger love-hearts than big folks?"

"They haven't, really, Janet. Love-hearts are born grown-up, so they can't grow any more, but the rest of us is born teenty-weenty, and the love part seems big 'cause the rest of us is so little."

"It's a lovely day," Janet said, stretching out her hands and turning the palms upward. "The sunshine seems to be having a dance. Is it glad to be here, do you think?"

"Yes, very glad. The world kind



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of b'longs to the sun, I guess, and when everything gets growing nicely, it's glad and the light dances for joy."

"But what makes the sun-man get mad every night and hide his face behind the hill?" Janet asked.

"That's 'cause we use up too much light. If we'd stay indoors and shut the curtains tight——"

"We did, you know, when we had the measles."

"But all of them; everybody'd have to stop using up so much light. I guess the sun can't spare it."

"What makes dog-fennel be a weed?" Janet asked presently, fondling in her hand a pretty blossom-head—yellow with white rays around, like a tiny Marguerite. "It has blooms that

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twinkle-twinkle in the dew like the first star after sun-down. Why isn't it a flower?"

"That's easy," Phebe replied. "I needn't feel for the answer; I know it in my head. Now you try to know it, yourself, and you tell me what you guess is the reason; it's so easy."

Janet shook her head and replied:

"I don't want to know it myself; I want you to tell me. Dog-fennel makes me sorry; it 'most makes me cry. I took home a whole bunch, once—that was when we first came here and we lived in the tent and there were just two houses in Amity, and we had only outdoors or else a tent for our house. I thought I'd found the prettiest flowers! I ran all around the hills for them, and

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I laughed and sang, and when my arms were full I carried them to my mother in the tent. I thought she would be so glad—I thought—I guessed—Phebe, white blossoms shine so! If there are fairies, they live in white flowers. But mother said,—‘Why, Janet! Throw away that dreadful dog-fennel! You’ll get the smell of it on your hands and clothes!’ That’s what she said, Phebe, but dog-fennel doesn’t smell any worse’n marigolds, and mother always has lots of them.”

“It isn’t the smell; it’s the *plenti-ness*,” Phebe said. “If there was only one dog-fennel and only one blossom on it, people’d call it a flower and walk a mile to look at it.”

“Oh,” Janet said, “is that the reason

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dog-fennel's a weed—'cause there's lots and lots of it?"

"Yes, that's the reason."

"Then, if there were lots of us, little girls'd be weeds, I s'pose?"

"Yes, of course they would."

Janet patted the little blossom in her hand and turned it this way and that to catch the light. At last she laid it gently on her knee and turned with a grave face to Phebe. "Here's another question," she said, "a real hard one, not about the sun nor dog-fennel. I've thought about it and I've wondered and wondered: What makes little girls so very, *very* much nicer and prettier than little boys? It isn't dresses, for Dolly Smith wears her brother's old things, and she's pretty. It isn't the hair,

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either, for Dicky Little has long curls, but they don't make him look nice, like a girl."

Phebe drew a long breath. "That's very hard," she said. "I'll feel for the answer after I'm in bed to-night, and to-morrow I'll tell you."

Thus Phebe and Janet played and talked and loved each other through the beautiful days.