

CHAPTER XIV

A REAL FAREWELL



JULY and August passed without a line or a word exchanged between the friends.

One day near the beginning of September Janet opened the door, in response to a light tap, and there stood Phebe upon the threshold.

Mrs. Loring, who had been sewing, rose and said:

“This is a very pleasant surprise. I hope you may come in.”

Phebe entered without replying.

Janet closed the door and the three

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stood staring at one another. At last Janet said:

“Phebe, my darling, why do you look so—so strange? You haven’t—you didn’t—run away?”

Phebe shook her head, then threw herself, shaking with a sudden burst of wild weeping, into Janet’s arms.

“Father—said—said I might—said I might come,” struggled out between sobs.

Mrs. Loring drew the two to a lounge and tried to make them comfortable, in body, at least.

“Don’t cry, dear Phebe, darling, why do you cry now when you have come, when we are together? Is it all over, now? May we be as we used?” Janet asked.

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“Janet—Janet!” was the only answer, a wild cry, like a child lost in the night.

They waited, held tight in each other's arms, waited until Phebe could explain.

“I've come to say good-by.” Phebe had stopped crying, though a piercing look of pain remained on her face. “Father said I might come and tell you. We are going away—going to move to the East—don't—don't, Janet—if you look so I cannot say it. My mother is tired of the wind; my father is tired of the prairie, of everything; we are going to Chicago.”

“There is wind in Chicago and prairie all round it,” Mrs. Loring said.

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“Yes? But they—we—are going there, anyway.”

“Perhaps they like the lake.”

“I don’t know what they like, but they’re going to Chicago, and—and I must go too, you know—I—must—go too.”

“When, when, Phebe, when?” Janet’s voice rose shrilly with her effort to neither weep nor faint.

“To-morrow.”

“Oh, Phebe! To-morrow—so—soon—to-morrow!”

“One day would be as hard as another.”

“May we write letters to each other?”

“I asked my father. He said,— ‘What’s the use? You will probably

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never see each other again, and you may as well resign yourself to the truth and get used to it.' That's what he said. Perhaps he's right, Janet. It's like dying, you know. We have to get used to doing without each other; we'd as well begin to-morrow."

"Never see each other again! No, Phebe, no, no, no! I don't believe it! Why do you believe it? Why do you let it—let it be so sure in your head? Don't believe it, Phebe, don't, don't!"

"Believing or not believing won't make any difference, but when I'm a woman I shall see you if you are alive and I am alive; I shall see you if I have to walk around the world. But—now—it seems like five hundred years till we shall be women. We are such little

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girls, and the whole world does just as it pleases with us and spoils everything for us, so how can we live the long, long, awful years, while we wait?"

"Oh, live, live, Phebe, and wait for me!"

"I'll try—yes, I'll try to believe this isn't quite like dying."

"Oh—you are going!"

"Yes. Good-by—good-by."

"My sweet, my dear, ^{*}dear Phebe, good-by."

The next morning Janet stood by her favorite window in her night-gown until her mother reminded her that it was time to dress. Then she brought her clothes and continued looking from the window while she put them on.

Some wagons were being loaded in

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front of the Sear house. Janet watched them all the morning, refusing her breakfast.

“If you wish, you may go to Phebe a while,” Mrs. Loring said.

Janet caught up her bonnet, ran from the house and down the path. At sight of the spring and the dear little post office, a lump rose in her throat.

Her steps wavered as she walked slowly and more slowly up the opposite hill, for she felt a shyness about meeting Mr. Sear.

She sat down, wondering whether she really wished to say again that painful good-by. Then she heard the rumbling of wheels, and started up to at least look again.

Phebe was standing at the gate sur-

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rounded by children of the village. Janet approached uncertainly, debating whether she should go.

Everything was ready; Mr. and Mrs. Sear were waiting. "Come, Phebe," they were saying.

Phebe broke from the group about her and dashed down the path to Janet. Their arms closed round each other in a long embrace. Neither spoke a word.

"Come, Phebe; we must reach Hawleyville to-day," Mrs. Sear called again.

Phebe turned, hurried to the wagon and climbed in. Janet ran home without pausing or looking backward.