

## CHAPTER IV

### TEN MINUTES



THE next morning Janet was eager to see Phebe. She felt that their visit of the night before had been broken off in the middle. She watched the path leading toward the spring from the Sear cottage.

By-and-by Mr. Sear appeared with two large pails, which he filled with water and carried up the hill toward home.

“That’s lots of water; it’ll last them a long time,” Janet said sorrowfully to her mother.

A few minutes later, however, Phebe ran down the path with her little tin pail.

Janet kissed her mother and hurried away, with spreading arms, to meet her friend.

There was something somber and mysterious in Phebe's eyes. "I can stay only ten minutes," she said, placing her pail under the spout and seating herself on a little projecting shelf of earth.

"Why? Is it washing-day? Is your mother in a hurry for the water?" Janet asked in a tone of disappointment.

Phebe shook her head. "It is *not* washing-day," she said emphatically. "My mother is *not* in a hurry, but my

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father says we 'loiter away our precious hours' down here, you and I, and if I'm not home in fifteen minutes from the time I started, I'll be shut in the attic bedroom all day. Janet, he looked at his watch! I s'pose it took two minutes to come and it'll take three to carry the water up the hill. Three and two make five. Five from fifteen leaves ten. Ten minutes to stay. Janet, we used to stay *hours*, HOURS!"

"To-morrow—perhaps——" Janet began hesitatingly.

"No," Phebe interrupted, "not to-morrow, not any day, ever. Father said,—'From this day forward you shall never spend so much time with Janet.' That's what he said."

"Oh, Phebe, my pretty, dear, loving-

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est Phebe, we can't, we can't get along that way."

"We'll have to," Phebe answered. She was trying to keep very calm and talk and act like a sensible girl—particularly because she had just been assured at home that she was romantic and sentimental and hadn't good common sense.

"In the winter," Janet sorrowfully reminded her friend, "when it was snowing and we couldn't see each other, how dreadful, how very dreadful it was; and now it'll be winter all the time."

Suddenly Phebe broke into wild sobbing and drew Janet into a crushing embrace.

"I love you—better than father—

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better than the sun—and the moon—better—better than anybody or anything. My father's a scallywag and a skeesicks and a 'postate and—and—every bad, nasty, mean thing there is. I'm sure he is; I'm just sure of it, and he doesn't know much of anything when he says you're not good, so he's an ignor'mus, too."

Janet was frightened by this new Phebe, the like of whom she had never seen before. Phebe with a red face and burning eyes, Phebe with a swift-moving tongue that heaped a torrent of strange-sounding abuses upon the head of her own father—what a changed being was this beloved Phebe, and oh! had they now come to dwell in some sorrowful and unknown world? She began to

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repeat in a low, solemn tone,—“Thou shalt honor thy father and thy mother——”

Phebe scrambled abruptly to her feet and seized the overflowing pail from under the spout. “We can’t be good always, Janet,” she said, turning and speaking slowly. “If I love you best of anything, I can’t help it.”

“Is it—Phebe, I don’t understand—is it because we’re getting so big and we ought to study more and work more and stop being quite so very happy?”

“No—no—no; not that, at all. I may go in the back yard at home and play all day with a foolish doll that hasn’t sense enough to look up when the wren comes with a new stick for its nest, but I mayn’t stay with you.”

“Why? Why not with me? We always did, you know. Why not any more?”

“It’s because your father is an ignor’mus and you are a fit *dee*-ciple, or something like that.”

“But we’re not! My father isn’t a—Oh, I don’t know—perhaps he is, but I love him very much, and if he’s an ignor’mus I’m going to be one, too. But what is a fit *dee*-ciple? Am I one? do you truly s’pose I’m one, Phebe?”

“May be you are,” Phebe said mournfully, “but I love you better’n anybody. I’d like you if you were a p’lant’rop’ist or anything dreadfuler, and if it’s like smallpox I’ll catch it and die and be all still like Rover when he

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wasn't alive any more. I don't want to be alive; I want to go away with you."

"But I'm not going anywhere," Janet said soothingly. It seemed to her as if they had changed places and she was Phebe and Phebe was the old Janet, else how could she comfort Phebe, who used always to comfort her? "Now," she added in a voice that seemed at every word to rise out of a cavern with a big stone in the path, "now you'll have to go, darlingest, or may be it's more than ten minutes."

The next day Janet watched the path in vain.

In the afternoon her father returned. He went out when evening came. As he prepared to go, Mrs. Loring's eyes



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followed him anxiously and Janet heard her say:

“Be careful, dear; be kind; be full of charity.”

Mr. Loring replied:

“I don’t choose words when I know I’m right.”

Early in the morning Janet stationed herself in a window that overlooked the path from the Sear place down toward the spring.

Mrs. Loring came and stood behind her.

“My dear little Janet,” she said; “my dear little girl.”

Janet caught her mother’s hand and held it against her young, pink cheek.

“Did they have another meeting at the schoolhouse last night, mother?”

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“Yes.”

“Did my father say things, and Mr. Sear—did he call my father anything?”

“Try not to think of it, my child.”

“But—Oh, mother, there’s Phebe on the path—may I? Mother, I must go.”

“Very well; this time,” Mrs. Loring said, but she looked very grave.

Janet ran down the hillside as fast as usual, but no song bubbled up from her lips.

When she had nearly reached the spring, Phebe motioned her back, saying no word.

Janet moved backward a few paces, facing Phebe with frightened eyes, wondering what new calamity had befallen them. At last she cried out:

“Phebe, mayn’t you speak to me? If

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you mustn't speak to me, wave your hand three times."

Phebe waved her hand three times.

Janet sat down beside the path and began pulling blades of grass without looking at them. Her fingers trembled. Her lips felt queer and dry. She watched while Phebe's pail filled with the slow-moving water of the spring. !

Phebe drew the pail from under the spout and started with it toward home. She walked a short distance up the hill, then suddenly flung her pail violently to the ground. It rolled back with a great clatter, spilling water about and finally striking a stone at the bottom of the descent with a noisy bang.

"I will speak to you—just this time! I will—I will—if I have to stay in the

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attic a week for it," she screamed, springing across the rill and up the bank to Janet.

"He will see—your father will see—he has come to the gate," Janet said in terror. "He may hear you—what if he heard?"

But Phebe continued, though in a lower tone,—“My father called your father a ‘Pharisee’ last night at the meeting, and your father called my father a ‘menace’ and something more I’ve forgot. It’s about The College. One wants things one way and one wants ’em another way, and my father says I must not speak to you because you’re the daughter of a—what is it?—Oh, a Pharisee. Don’t be in a chill, Janet, don’t, don’t. See, my fingers

don't shake—not very much. We'll write letters, Janet. Letters aren't speaking. We'll put them here, between these two stones. This'll be our post office. You ask me the questions, just like you used, only on paper, and I'll feel for the answers under my arms and think for them in my head and write them down for you. So, amen, good-by forever, Flower of Amity—Angel—good-by—good-by."

Phebe hastened to her pail and set it again under the end of the long wooden trough, or spout, that some one had made to carry water to a place convenient for those who used it. Already, her father was coming, his face cold and stern.

Janet saw with horror a switch in

his hand. She ran toward him, saying:

“Oh, Mr. Sear, don’t—don’t hurt Phebe! She couldn’t help it! I spoke to her first—it was my doing!”

“The fault was all yours that she disobeyed me? All yours? You admit it?”

“Father, I——”

“Keep still a moment, child; I’m talking to Janet.”

“Sir—Sir—Oh, Oh, Sir, Phebe didn’t ever do anything wrong; Phebe hasn’t any faults.”

“Tut, tut, she’s a plenty of them. See that you stay on your own side of the creek after this and don’t say a word to my Phebe, do you hear? Not a word. It isn’t the first time you have got her into trouble, but I wish it to be the last.”

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“Oh, Sir,—I—I don’t wish to—to get Phebe into trouble. Oh, Sir——”

“There, be done with your Oh’s and Ah’s. You’re a bold, insolent——”

Janet waited to hear no more. She was running home as fast as she could make her way, having assured herself that Mr. Sear’s wrath had been turned from Phebe to herself and that he had dropped the switch. “He doesn’t really want to hurt Phebe,” she was repeating to herself over and over. “He liked an excuse not to be cross with her. He isn’t really a ’Postate; he isn’t; may be he’s good down in his middle.”

In the afternoon Janet looked over her mother’s stock of waste papers and selected from among them everything that could be used in letter-writing.

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There were old envelopes, letters with blank pages, wrapping-papers—though the last were nearly all of them heavy, coarse and very dark brown, quite different from the wrappers now commonly used by merchants.

Janet did not wish to ask for writing materials lest some new difficulty should spring up before her. Perhaps if her father's attention were called to the matter, he might add some other commands to those already issued by Phebe's father, and, as for her mother, she never concealed anything from Mr. Loring. Janet even heard her tell him about the pyramid cake—with tears and explanations and promises that Janet did not try to understand.

Mrs. Loring usually worked in her



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garden a while in the afternoon when the shadow of the house lay over the scene of her labors. While her mother was thus engaged, Janet wrote, in pencil, her little letter and folded it in a kind of envelope made from the coarse brown wrapping-paper.

Early the next morning she went to the spring with a large tin cup in the bottom of which her letter was hidden.

Late in the afternoon she went again. Her own letter was still there, unanswered.

After four days of waiting, however, she was rewarded by finding three letters instead of one. They were written with ink on ruled paper of fair quality, for Phebe had plenty of stationery—gifts from her grandfather in Illinois.