

CHAPTER VIII

THE RHYMES



MR. LORING knew very well why Janet's favorite window was the one from which she could see the front of the Sear house.

Near it, for days, Janet sat, with a bit of slate-pencil and a slate, occasionally writing a line, but more occupied with the outlook than anything else. She was watching for Phebe and practicing verse-making.

Whenever she had succeeded in writing a few lines, she carefully re-wrote them twice on paper—one copy for

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Phebe and one for herself, in case she might, when a woman, desire some reminder of the efforts that had filled so many hours and days of her childhood. Frequently she laid down her slate and hunted laboriously in Webster's Elementary Spelling-book for the spelling of a word. She had no dictionary.

Janet saw Mr. and Mrs. Sear return on the 6th of July, but there was no sign of Phebe until more than a week later, when, very pale and wretched-looking, she appeared at the church with her parents.

Several times during the services Janet glanced across the aisle where Phebe was seated, but always it was Mr. Sear instead of Phebe whose eyes she encountered.

Although Janet knew, now, that Phebe had returned from Clarinda, she was careful not to place her own little writing in their "post office" until she had received something from Phebe. The verses were now their only means of communicating, and she could not be certain that even this pleasure was still open to them until she held Phebe's first piece of rhyme safely in her hands.

Although Janet visited the sheltered hiding-place between stones, visited it every day, she found nothing until nearly two more weeks had passed. Afterward there was almost daily mail, and song and laughter again bubbled up from the heart of Janet.

Not always, however.

Sometimes she wept over the verses,

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no matter how cheery they were. It was, after all, so little like receiving a letter, and Phebe now seemed so far away, so utterly removed out of her life.

The verses were not always cheerful, either; how could they be under these circumstances?

Sometimes one or the other found a whole budget of verses waiting in their post office; sometimes only one was there, occasionally, none at all. They were much easier for Phebe to write than for Janet—who often wrote something else instead and left out rhymes and rhythms altogether. Phebe, also, wrote little stories or fables, sometimes, but not frequently.

Because of quarrels and dissatisfac-

tion among their elders on the subject of school and teachers, neither Janet nor Phebe was sent to school that year. They studied at home under the supervision of their parents.

Their strange correspondence went on, with some interruptions, for about a year. During that time, although they lived not far apart and attended the same church, they were never near enough together to speak to each other. Mr. Sear had been more than ever determined to keep them apart after the Fourth of July occurrence, as he supposed that Janet had encouraged Phebe in rebellion against his wishes and that she had an objectionable influence upon his daughter's character.