

***ARLO
BATES***

A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing in a small, open diary. The person is holding a black pen and writing on the right page. The left page has some handwritten text, including the phrase "Do you believe in heaven?". The background is blurred, showing a person's head and shoulders. The overall tone is warm and intimate.

***THE DIARY
OF A SAINT***

**ARLO
BATES**

A close-up photograph of a person's hands writing in a small, open diary. The person is using a black pen. The diary pages are lined and contain handwritten text in cursive. The background is blurred, showing a reddish-brown surface. The overall tone is intimate and personal.

***THE DIARY
OF A SAINT***

Arlo Bates

The Diary of a Saint

EAN 8596547051077

DigiCat, 2022

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JANUARY

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January 1. How beautiful the world is! I might go on to say, and how commonplace this seems written down in a diary; but it is the thing I have been thinking. I have been standing ever so long at the window, and now that the curtains are shut I can see everything still. The moon is shining over the wide white sheets of snow, and the low meadows look far off and enchanted. The outline of the hills is clear against the sky, and the cedars on the lawn are almost green against the whiteness of the ground and the deep, blue-black sky. It is all so lovely that it somehow makes one feel happy and humble both at once.

It is a beautiful world, indeed, and yet last night—

But last night was another year, and the new begins in a better mood. I have shaken off the idiotic mawkishness of last night, and am more like what Father used to tell me to be when I was a mite of a girl: "A cheerful Ruth Privet, as right as a trivet." Though to be sure I do not know what being as right as a trivet is, any more than I did then. Last night, it is true, there were alleviating circumstances that might have been urged. For a week it had been drizzly, unseasonable weather that took all the snap out of a body's mental fibre; Mother had had one of her bad days, when the pain seemed too dreadful to bear, patient angel that she is; Kathie Thurston had been in one of her most despairing fits; and the Old Year looked so dreary behind, the New Year

loomed so hopeless before, that there was some excuse for a girl who was tired to the bone with watching and worry if she did not feel exactly cheerful. I cannot allow, though, that it justified her in crying like a watering-pot, and smudging the pages of her diary until the whole thing was blurred like a composition written with tears in a primary school. I certainly cannot let this sort of thing happen again, and I am thoroughly ashamed that it happened once. I will remember that the last day Father lived he said he could trust me to be brave both for Mother and myself; and that I promised,—I promised.

So last night may go, and be forgotten as soon as I can manage to forget it. To-night things are different. There has been a beautiful snow-fall, and the air is so crisp that when I went for a walk at sunset it seemed impossible ever to be sentimentally weak-kneed again; Mother is wonderfully comfortable; and the New Year began with a letter to say that George will be at home to-morrow. Mother is asleep like a child, the fire is in the best of spirits, and does the purring for itself and for Peter, who is napping with content expressed by every hair to the tip of his fluffy white tail. Even Hannah is singing in the kitchen a hymn that she thinks is cheerful, about

"Sa-a-a-acred, high, e-ter-er-er-nal noon."

It is evident that there is every opportunity to take a fresh start, and to conduct myself in the coming year with more self-respect.

So much for New Year resolutions. I do not remember that I ever made one before; and very likely I shall never

make one again. Now I must decide something about Kathie. I tried to talk with Mother about her, but Mother got so excited that I saw it would not do, and felt I must work the problem out with pen and paper as if it were a sum in arithmetic. It is not my business to attend to the theological education of the minister's daughter, especially as it is the Methodist minister's daughter, and he, with his whole congregation, thinks it rather doubtful whether it is not sinful for Kathie even to know so dangerous an unbeliever. I sometimes doubt whether my good neighbors in Tuskamuck would regard Tom Paine himself, who, Father used to say, lingers as the arch-heretic for all rural New England, with greater theological horror than they do me. It is fortunate that they do not dislike me personally, and they all loved Father in spite of his heresies. In this case I am not clear, on the other hand, that it is my duty to stand passive and see, without at least protesting, a sensitive, imaginative, delicate child driven to despair by the misery and terror of a creed. If Kathie had not come to me it would be different; but she has come. Time after time this poor little, precocious, morbid creature has run to me in such terror of hell-fire that I verily feared she would end by going frantic. Ten years old, and desperate with conviction of original sin; and this so near the end of the nineteenth century, so-called of grace! Thus far I have contented myself with taking her into my arms, and just loving her into calmness; but she is getting beyond that. She is finding being petted so delightful that she is sure it must be a sin. She is like what I can fancy the most imaginative of the Puritan grandmothers to have been in their passionate childhood, in the days when the only

recognized office of the imagination was to picture the terrors of hell. I so long for Father. If he were alive to talk to her, he could say the right word, and settle things. The Bible is very touching in its phrase, "as one whom his mother comforteth," but to me "whom his father comforteth" would have seemed to go even deeper; but then, there is Kathie's father, whose tenderness is killing her. I don't in the least doubt that he suffers as much as she does; but he loves her too much to risk damage to what he calls "her immortal soul." There is always a ring of triumph in his voice when he pronounces the phrase, as if he already were a disembodied spirit dilating in eternal and infinite glory. There is something finely noble in such a superstition.

All this, however, does not bring me nearer to the end of my sum, for the answer of that ought to be what I shall do with Kathie. It would never do to push her into a struggle with the creeds, or to set her to arguing out the impossibility of her theology. She is too young and too morbid, and would end by supposing that in reasoning at all on the matter she had committed the unpardonable sin. Her father would not let her read stories unless they were Sunday-school books. Perhaps she might be allowed some of the more entertaining volumes of history; but she is too young for most of them. She should be reading about Red Riding-hood, and the White Cat, and the whole company of dear creatures immortal in fairy stories. I will look in the library, and see what there may be that would pass the conscientiously searching ordeal of her father's eye. If she can be given anything which will take her mind off of her spiritual condition for a while, that is all that may be done at

present. I'll hunt up my old skates for her, too. A little more exercise in the open air will do a good deal for her humanly, and perhaps blow away some of the theology.

Later. Hannah has been in to make her annual attack on my soul. I had almost forgotten her yearly missionary effort, so that when she appeared I said with the utmost cheerfulness and unconcern, "What is it, Hannah?" supposing that she wanted to know something about breakfast. I could see by the instant change in her expression that she regarded this as deliberate levity. She was so full of what she had come to say that it could not occur to her that I did not perceive it too.

Dear old Hannah! her face has always so droll an expression of mingled shyness and determination when, as she once said, she clears her skirts of blood-guiltiness concerning me. She stands in the doorway twisting her apron, and her formula is always the same:—

"Miss Ruth, I thought I'd take the liberty to say a word to you on this New Year's day."

"Yes, Hannah," I always respond, as if we had rehearsed the dialogue. "What is it?"

"It's another year, Miss Ruth, and your peace not made with God."

To me there is something touching in the fidelity with which she clings to the self-imposed performance of this evidently painful duty. She is distressfully shy about it,—she who is never shy about anything else in the world, so far as I can see. She feels that it is a "cross for her to bear," as she told me once, and I honor her for not shirking it. She thinks I

regard it far more than I do. She judges my discomfort by her own, whereas in truth I am only uncomfortable for her. I never could understand why people are generally so afraid to speak of religious things, or why they dislike so to be spoken to about them. I mind Hannah's talking about my soul no more than I should mind her talking about my nose or my fingers; indeed, the little flavor of personality which would make that unpleasant is lacking when it comes to discussion about intangible things like the spirit, and so on the whole I mind the soul-talk less. I suppose really the shyness is part of the general reticence all we New Englanders have that makes it so hard to speak of anything which is deeply felt. Father used to say, I remember, that it was because folk usually have a great deal of sentiment about religion and very few ideas, and thus the difficulty of bringing their expression up to their feelings necessarily embarrasses them.

I assured Hannah I appreciated all her interest in my welfare, and that I would try to live as good a life during the coming year as I could; and then she withdrew with the audible sigh of relief that the heavy duty was done with for another twelvemonth. She assured me she should still pray for me, and if I do not suppose that there is any great efficacy in her petition, I am at least glad that she should feel like doing her best in my behalf. Mother declares that she is always offended when a person offers to pray for her. She looks at it as dreadfully condescending and patronizing, as if the petitioner had an intimate personal hold upon the Almighty, and was willing to exert his influence in your behalf. But I hardly think she means it. She never fails to see

when a thing is kindly meant, even if she has a keen sense of the ludicrous. At any rate, it does us no harm that kindly petitions are offered for us, even if they may go out into an unregarding void; and I am not sure that they do.

January 2. Kathie is delighted with the skates, and she does not think that her father will object to her having them; so there is at least one point gained.

We have had such a lovely sunset! I do not see how there can be a doubter in a world where there are so many beautiful things. The whole west, through the leafless branches of the elms on the south lawn, was one gorgeous mass of splendid color. I hope George saw it. It is almost time for him to be here, and I have caught myself humming over and over his favorite tunes as I waited. Mother has had a day of uneasiness, so that I could not leave her much, but rubbing her side for an hour or two relieved her. It has cramped my fingers a little, so that I write a funny, stiff hand. Poor Mother! It made me ashamed to be so glad in my heart as I saw how brave and quiet she was, with the lines of pain round her dear mouth.

Later. "How long is it that we have been engaged?"

That is what George asked me, and out of all the long talk we had this evening this is the one thing which I keep hearing over and over. Why should it tease me so? It is certainly a simple question, and when two persons have been engaged six years there need no longer be any false sensitiveness about things of this sort. About what sort? Do I mean that the time has come when George would not mind hurting my feelings? It may as well come out. As Father

used to say: "You cannot balance the books until the account is set down in full." Well, then, I mean that there is a frankness about a long engagement which may not be in a short one, so that when George and I meet after a separation it is natural that almost the first question should be,—

"How long is it that we have been engaged?"

The question is certainly an innocent one,—although one would think George might have answered it himself. How much did the fact that he talked afterward so eagerly about the Miss West he met while at his aunt's, and of how pretty she is, have to do with the pain which the question gave me? At my age one might think that I was beyond the jealousies of a school-girl.

We have been engaged six years and four months and five days. It is not half the time that Jacob served for Rachel, although it is almost the time he bowed his neck to the yoke for Leah, and I am afraid lest I am nearer to being like the latter than the former. I always pitied Leah, for she must have understood she had not her husband's love; any woman would perceive that. Six years—and life is so short! Poor George, it has not been easy for him! He has not even been able to wish that the obstacle between us was removed, since that obstacle is Mother. Surely she is my first duty; and since she needs me day and night, I cannot divide my life; but I do pity George. He is wearing out his youth with that old frump of a housekeeper, who makes him uncomfortable with an ingenuity that seems to show intellectual force not to be suspected from anything else. But she is a faithful old soul, and it is not kind to abuse her.

"How long is it that we have been engaged?"

I have a tendency to keep on writing that over and over all down the page as if this were the copy-book of a child at school. How Tom used to admire my writing-books in our school-days! His were always smudged and blotted. He is too big-souled and manly to niggle over little things; and he laughed at the pains I took, turning every corner with absurd care. He was so strong and splendid on the ice when we went skating over on Getchell's Pond; and how often and often he has drawn me all the way home on my sled!

But all that was ages and ages ago, and long before I even knew George. It never occurred to me until to-night, but I am really growing old. The birthdays that Tom remembered, and on which he sent me little bunches of Mayflowers, have not in the least troubled me or seemed too many. I have not thought much of birthdays of late years, but to-night I realize that I am twenty-nine, and that George has asked me,—

"How long is it that we have been engaged?"

January 7. Sackcloth and ashes have been my portion for days, and if I could by tearing from my diary the last leaves blot out of remembrance the foolish things I have written, it would be quickly done. My New Year's resolutions were even less lasting than are those in the jokes of the comic papers; and I am ashamed all through and through. I have tried to reason myself into something resembling common sense, but I am much afraid I have not yet entirely accomplished it. I have said to myself over and over that it would be the best thing for George if he did fall in love with that girl he saw at Franklin, and go his way without wasting more time waiting

for me. He has wasted years enough, and it is time for him to be happy. But then—has he not been happy? Or is it that I have been so happy myself I have not realized how the long engagement was wearying him? He must have wearied, or he could never have asked me—

No, I will not write it!

January 8. George came over last night, and was so loving and tender that I was thoroughly ashamed of all the wicked suspicions I have had. After all, what was there to suspect? I almost confessed to him what a miserable little doubter I had been; but I knew that confession would only be relieving my soul at the expense of making him uncomfortable. I hated to have him think me better than I am; but this, I suppose, is part of the penalty I ought to pay for having been so weak.

Besides,—probably it was only my weakness in another form, the petty jealousy of a small soul and a morbid fancy,—he seemed somehow more remote than I have ever known him, and I could not have told him if I would. We did not seem to be entirely frank with each other, but as if each were trying to make the other feel at ease when it was not really possible. Of course I was only attributing my own feelings to him, for he was dearly good.

He told me more about his visit to Franklin, and he seems to have seen Miss West a good deal. She is a sort of cousin of the Watsons, he says, and so they had a common ground. When she found that he lived so near to the Watsons she asked him all kinds of questions. She has never seen them, having lived in the West most of her life, and was naturally much interested in hearing about her relatives. I found

myself leading him on to talk of her. I cannot see why I should care about this stranger. Generally I deal very little in gossip. Father trained me to be interested in real things, and meaningless details about people never attracted me. Yet this girl sticks in my mind, and I am tormented to know all about her. It cannot be anything he said; though he did say that she is very pretty. Perhaps it was the way in which he said it. He seemed to my sick fancy to like to talk of her. She must be a charming creature.

January 9. Why should he not like to talk of a pretty girl? I hope I am not of the women who cannot bear to have a man use his eyes except to see their graces. It is pitiful to be so small and mean. I certainly want George to admire goodness and beauty, and to be by his very affection for me the more sensitive to whatever is admirable in others. If I am to be worthy of being his wife, I must be noble enough to be glad at whatever there is for him to rejoice in because of its loveliness: and yet as I write down all these fine sentiments I feel my heart like lead! Oh, I am so ashamed of myself!

January 10. Miss Charlotte came in this afternoon, looking so thin, and cold, and tall, that I have been rather sober ever since.

"I wish I had on shoes with higher heels," I said to her as we shook hands; "then perhaps I shouldn't feel so insignificant down here."

She looked down at me, laughing that rich, throaty laugh of hers.

"Mother always used to say she knew the Kendalls couldn't have been drowned in the Flood," she answered,

"for they must all have been tall enough to wade to Mt. Ararat."

"You know the genealogy so far back that you must be able to tell whether she was right."

"I don't go quite so far as that," she said, sitting down by the fire, "but I know that my great-great-grandfather married a Privet, so that I always considered Judge Privet a cousin."

"If Father was a cousin, I must be one too," said I.

"You are the same relation to me on one side," Miss Charlotte went on, "that Deacon Webbe is on the other. It's about fortieth cousin, you see, so that I can count it or not, as I please."

"I am flattered that you choose to count us in," I told her, smiling; "and I am sure also you must be willing to count in anybody so good as Deacon Webbe."

"Yes, Deacon Webbe is worth holding on to, though he's so weak that he'd let the shadow of a mosquito bully him. The answer to the question in the New England Primer, 'Who is the meekest man?' ought to be 'Deacon Webbe.' He used up all the meekness there was in the whole family, though."

"I confess that I never heard Mrs. Webbe called meek," I assented.

"Meek!" sniffed Miss Charlotte; "I should think not. A wasp is a Sunday-school picnic beside her. While as for Tom"—

She pursed up her lips with an expression of disapproval so very marked I was afraid at once that Tom Webbe must have been doing something dreadful again, and my heart sank for his father.

"But Tom has been doing better," I said. "This winter he"—

"This winter!" she exclaimed. "Why, just now he is worse than ever."

"Oh, dear," I asked, "what is it now? His father has been so unhappy about him."

"If he'd made Tom unhappy it would have been more to the purpose. Tom's making himself the town talk with that Brownrig girl."

"What Brownrig girl?"

"Don't you know about the Brownrigs that live in that little red house on the Rim Road?"

"I know the red house, and now that you say the name, I remember I have heard that such a family have moved in there. Where did they come from?"

"Oh, where do such trash come from ever?" demanded Miss Charlotte. "I'm afraid nobody but the Old Nick could tell you. They're a set of drunken, disreputable vagabonds, that turned up here last year. They were probably driven out of some town or other. Tom's been"—

But I did not wish to hear of Tom's misdeeds, and I said so. Miss Charlotte laughed, as usual.

"You never take any interest in wickedness, Ruth," she said good-naturedly. "That's about the only fault I have to find with you."

Poor Deacon Webbe! Tom has made him miserable indeed in these years since he came from college. The bitterness of seeing one we love go wrong must be unbearable, and when we believe that the consequences of wrong are to be eternal—I should go mad if I believed in

such a creed. I would try to train myself to hate instead of to love; or, if I could not do this—But I could not believe anything so horrible, so that I need not speculate. Deacon Daniel is a saint, though of course he does not dream of such a thing. A saint would not be a saint, I suppose, who was aware of his beatitude, and the deacon's meekness is one of his most marked attributes of sanctity. I wonder whether, in the development of the race, saintliness will ever come to be compatible with a sense of humor. A saint with that persuasively human quality would be a wonderfully compelling power for good. Deacon Daniel is a fine influence by his goodness, but he somehow enhances the desirability of virtue in the abstract rather than brings home personally the idea that his example is to be followed; and all because he is so hopelessly without a perception of the humorous side of existence. But why do I go on writing this, when the thought uppermost in my mind is the grief he will have if Tom has started again on one of his wild times. I do hope that Miss Charlotte is mistaken! So small a thing will sometimes set folk to talking, especially about Tom, who is at heart so good, though he has been wild enough to get a bad name.

January 11. Things work out strangely in this world; so that it is no wonder all sorts of fanciful beliefs are made out of them. There could hardly be a web more closely woven than human life. To-day, when I had not seen Tom for months, and when the gossip of last night made me want to talk with him, chance brought us face to face.

Mother was so comfortable that I went out for an hour. The day was delightful, cold enough so that the walking was

dry and the snow firm, but the air not sharp to the cheek. The sun was warm and cheery, and the shadows on the white fields had a lovely softness. I went on in a sort of dream, it was so good to be alive and out of doors in such wonderful weather. I turned to go down the Rim Road, and it was not until I came in sight of the red house that I remembered what Miss Charlotte said last night. Then I began to think about Tom. Tom and I have always been such good friends. I used to understand Tom better in the old school-days than the others did, and he was always ready to tell me what he thought and felt. Nowadays I hardly ever see him. Since I became engaged he has almost never come to the house, though he used to be here so much. I meet him only once or twice a year, and then I think he tries to avoid me. I am so sorry to have an old friendship broken off like that. The red house made me think of Tom with a sore heart, of all the talk his wild ways have caused, the sorrow of his father, and the good that is being lost when a fellow with a heart so big as Tom's goes wrong.

Suddenly Tom himself appeared before my very eyes, as if my thought had conjured him up. He came so unexpectedly that at first I could hardly realize how he came. Then it flashed across me that he must have walked round the red house. I suppose he must have come out of a back door somewhere, like one of the family; such folk never use their front doors. He walked along the road toward me, at first so preoccupied that he did not recognize me. When he saw my face, he half hesitated, as if he had almost a mind to turn back, and his whole face turned red. He came on, however, and was going past me with a scant

salutation, when I stopped him. I stood still and put out my hand, so that he could not go by without speaking.

"Good-afternoon, Tom," I said. "Isn't it a glorious day?"

He looked about him with a strange air as if he had not noticed, and I saw how heavy and weary his eyes were.

"Yes," he answered, "it is a fine day."

"Where do you keep yourself, Tom?" I went on, hardly knowing what I said, but trying to think what it was best to say. "I never see you, and we used to be such good friends."

He looked away, and moved his lips as if he muttered something; but when I asked what he said, he turned to me defiantly.

"Look here, Ruth, what's the good of pretending? You know I don't go to see you because you're engaged to George Weston. You chose between us, and there's the end of that. What's more, you know that nowadays I'm not fit to go to see anybody that's decent."

"Then it is time that you were," was my answer. "Let me walk along with you. I want to say something."

I turned, and we walked together toward the village. I could see that his face hardened.

"It's no sort of use to preach to me, Ruth," he said, "though your preaching powers are pretty good. I've had so much preaching in my life that I'm not to be rounded up by piety."

I smiled as well as I could, though it made me want to cry to hear the hard bravado of his tone.

"I'm not generally credited with overmuch piety, Tom. The whole town thinks all the Privets heathen, you know."

"Humph! It's a pity there weren't a few more of 'em."

I laughed, and thanked him for the compliment, and then we went on in silence for a little way. I had to ignore what he said about George, but it did not make it easier to begin. I was puzzled what to say, but the time was short that we should be walking together, and I had to do something.

"Tom," I began, "you may not be very sensitive about old friendships, but I am loyal; and it hurts me that those I care for should be talked against."

"Oh, in a place like Tuskamuck," he returned, at once, I could see, on the defensive, "they'll talk about anybody."

"Will they? Then I suppose they talk about me. I'm sorry, Tom, for it must make you uncomfortable to hear it; unless, that is, you don't count me for a friend any longer."

He threw back his head in the way he has always had. I used to tell him it was like a colt's shaking back its mane.

"What nonsense! Of course they don't talk about you. You don't give folks any chance."

"And you do," I added as quietly as I could.

He looked angry for just the briefest instant, and then he burst into a hard laugh.

"Caught, by Jupiter! Ruth, you were always too clever for me to deal with. Well, then, I do give the gossips plenty to talk about. They would talk just the same if I didn't, so I may as well have the game as the name."

"Does that mean that your life is regulated by the gossips? I supposed that you had more independence, Tom."

He flushed, and stooped down to pick up a stick. With this he began viciously to strike the bushes by the roadside and the dry stalks of yarrow sticking up through the snow. He set his lips together with a grim determination which

brought out in his face the look I like least, the resemblance to his mother when she means to carry a point.

"Look here, Ruth," he said after a moment; "I'm not going to talk to you about myself or my doings. I'm a blackguard fast enough; but there's no good talking about it. If you'd cared enough about me to keep me straight, you could have done it; but now I'm on my way to the Devil, and no great way to travel before I get there either."

We had come to the turn of the Rim Road where the trees shut off the view of the houses of the village. I stopped and put my hand on his arm.

"Tom," I begged him, "don't talk like that. You don't know how it hurts. You don't mean it; you can't mean it. Nobody but yourself can send you on the wrong road; and I know you're too plucky to hide behind any such excuse. For the sake of your father, Tom, do stop and think what you are doing."

"Oh, father'll console himself very well with prayers; and anyway he'll thank God for sending me to perdition, because if God does it, it must be all right."

"Don't, Tom! You know how he suffers at the way you go on. It must be terrible to have an only son, and to see him flinging his life away."

"It isn't my fault that I'm his son, is it?" he demanded. "I've been dragged into this infernal life without being asked whether I wanted to come or not; and now I'm here, I can't have what I want, and I'm promised eternal damnation hereafter. Well, then, I'll show God or the Devil, or whoever bosses things, that I can't be bullied into a molly-coddle!"

The sound of wheels interrupted us, and we instinctively began to walk onward in the most commonplace fashion. A farmer's wagon came along, and by the time it had passed we had come to the head of the Rim Road, in full sight of the houses. Tom waited until I turned to the right, toward home, and then he said,—

"I'm going the other way. It's no use, Ruth, to talk to me; but I'm obliged to you for caring."

I cannot see that I did any good, and very likely I have simply made him more on his guard to avoid giving me a chance; but then, even if I had all the chance in the world, what could I say to him? And yet, Tom is so noble a fellow underneath it all. He is honest and kind, and strong in his way; only between his father's meekness and his mother's sharpness—for she is sharp—he has somehow come to grief. They have tried to make him religious so that he would be good; and he is of the sort that must be good or he will not be religious. He cannot be pressed into a mould of orthodoxy, and so in the end—But it cannot be the end. Tom must somehow come out of it.

January 13. When George came in to-night I was struck at once with the look of pleasant excitement in his face.

"What pleases you?" I asked him.

"Pleases me?" he echoed, evidently surprised. "Isn't it a pleasure to see you?"

"But that's not the whole of it," I said. "You've something pleasant to tell me. Oh, I can read you like a book, my dear; so it is quite idle trying to keep a secret from me."

He seemed confused, and I was puzzled to know what was the matter.

"You are too wise entirely," was his reply. "I really hadn't anything to tell."

"Then something good has happened," I persisted; "or you have heard good news."

"What a fanciful girl you are, Ruth," George returned. "Nothing has happened."

He walked away from me, and went to the fire. He was strangely embarrassed, and I could only wonder what I had said to confuse him. I reflected that perhaps he was planning some sort of a surprise, and felt I ought not to pry into his thoughts in this fashion whatever the matter was that interested him. I sat down on the other side of the hearth, and took up some sewing.

"George," I asked, entirely at random, "didn't you say that the Miss West you met at Franklin is a cousin of the Watsons?"

I flushed as soon as I had spoken, for I thought how it betrayed me that in my desire to hit on a new subject I had found the thought of her so near the surface of my mind. I had not consciously been thinking of her at all, and certainly I did not connect her with George's strangeness of manner. There was something almost weird, it seems to me now, in my putting such a question just then. Perhaps it was telepathy, for she must have been vividly in his thoughts at that moment. He started, flushed as I have never seen him, and turned quickly toward me.

"What makes you think that it was Miss West?"

"Think what was Miss West?" I cried.

I was completely astonished; then I saw how it was.

"Never mind, George," I went on, laughing and putting out my hand to him. "I didn't mean to read your thoughts, and I didn't realize that I was doing it."

"But what made you"—

"I'm sure I don't know," I broke in; and I managed to laugh again. "Only I see now that you know something pleasant about Miss West, and you may as well tell it."

He looked doubtful a minute, studying my face. The hesitation he had in speaking hurt me.

"It's only that she's coming to visit the Watsons," he said, rather unwillingly. "Olivia Watson told me just now."

"Why, that will be pleasant," I answered, as brightly as if I were really delighted. "Now I shall see if she is really as pretty as you say."

I felt so humiliated to be playing a part,—so insincere. Somebody has said the real test of love is to be unwilling to deceive the loved one, even in the smallest thing. That may be the test of a man's love, but a woman will bear the pain of that very deception to save the man she cares for from disquiet. I am sure it has hurt me as much not to be entirely frank with George as it could have hurt a man; but I could not make him uncomfortable by letting him see that I was disturbed. Yet that he should have been afraid or unwilling to tell me did trouble me. He knows that I am not jealous or apt to take offense. He is always saying that I am too cold to be really in love. It made me feel that the coming of this girl must mean much to him when he feared to speak of it. If he had not thought it a matter of consequence, he would have realized that I should take it lightly.

I am not taking it lightly; but what troubles me is not that she is coming, but that he hesitated to tell me. Something is wrong when George fears to trust me.

January 17. I have seen her. I went to church this morning for that especial reason. Mother was a little astonished at me when I said that I was going.

"Well, Ruth," she said, "you don't have much dissipation, but I didn't suppose that you were so dull you would take to church-going."

"You can never tell," I answered, making a jest of a thing which to me was far from funny. "Mr. Saychase will be sure to conclude I'm under conviction of sin, and come in to finish the conversion."

She looked at me keenly.

"What is the matter, Ruth?" she asked in that soft voice of hers which goes straight to my heart.

"It isn't anything very serious, Mother," I said. "Since you will have the truth, I am going to church to see that Miss West who's visiting the Watsons. George thinks her so pretty that my curiosity is roused to a perfect bonfire."

She did not say more, but I saw the sudden light in her eye. Mother has never felt about George as I have wished. She has never done him justice, and she thinks I idealize him. That is her favorite way of putting it; but this is because she is my mother, and doesn't see how much idealizing there must have been on his side before he could fall in love with me.

Miss West is very pretty. All the time I watched in church I tried to persuade myself that she was not. I meanly and contemptibly sat there finding fault with her face, saying to

myself that her nose was too long, her eyes too small, her mouth too big; inventing flaws as if my invention would change the fact. It was humiliating business; and utterly and odiously idiotic. Miss West is pretty; she is more than this, she is wonderfully pretty. There is an appealing, baby look about her big blue eyes which goes straight to one's heart. She looks like a darling child one would want to kiss and shelter from all the hard things of life. I own it all; I realize all that it means; and if in my inmost soul I am afraid, I will not deny what is a fact or try to shut my eyes to the littleness of my feeling about her. Of course George found her adorable. She is. The young men in the congregation all watched her, and even grim Deacon Richards could not keep his eyes off of her.

She does not have the look of a girl of any especial mind. Her prettiness is after all that of a doll. Her large eyes are of the sort to please a man because of their appealing helplessness; not because they inspire him with new meanings. Her little rosebud lips will never speak wisdom, I am afraid; but in my jealousy I wonder whether most men do not care more for lips which invite kisses than for lips which speak wisdom. I am frankly and weakly miserable. George walked home with me, but he had not two words to say.

I must try to meet this. If George should come to care for her more than for me! If he should,—if by a pretty face he forgets all the years that we have belonged to each other, what is there to do? I cannot yet believe that it is best for him; but if it will make him happy, even if he thinks that it will, what is there for me but to make it as easy for him as I

may? He certainly would not be happy to marry me and love somebody else. He cannot leave me without pain; that I am sure. I shall show my love for him more truly if I spare him the knowledge of what it must cost me.

But what mawkish nonsense all this is! A man may admire a pretty face, and yet not be ready for it to leave behind all that has been dear to him. Oh, if he had not asked me that question when he came back from Franklin! I cannot get it out of my mind that even if he was not conscious of it, it meant he still was secretly tired of his long engagement; that he was at least dreaming of what he would do if he were free. He shall not be bound by any will of mine; and if his heart has gone out to this beautiful creature, I must bear it as nobly as I can. Father used to say,—and every day I go back more and more to what he said to me,—"What you cannot at need sacrifice nobly you are not worthy to possess."

January 18. I have had a note which puzzles me completely. Tom Webbe writes to say that he is going away; that I am to forgive him for the shame of having known him, and that his address is inclosed in a sealed envelope. I am not to open it unless there is real need. Why should he give his address to me?

January 19. The disconcerting way Aunt Naomi has of coming in without knocking, stealing in on feet made noiseless by rubbers, brought her into the sitting-room last night while I was mooning in the twilight, and meditating on nothing in particular. I knew her slow fashion of opening the door, "like a burglar at a cupboard," as Hannah says,—so

that I was able to compose my face into an appropriate smile of welcome before she was fairly in.

"Sitting here alone?" was her greeting.

"Mother is asleep," I answered, "and I was waiting for her to wake."

Aunt Naomi seated herself in the stiffest chair in the room, and began to swing her foot as usual.

"Deacon Daniel's at it again," she observed dispassionately.

I smiled a little. It always amuses me that the troubles of the church should be so often brought to me who am an outsider. Aunt Naomi arrives about once a month on the average, with complaints about something. They are seldom of any especial weight, but it seems to relieve her to tell her grievances.

"Which Deacon Daniel?" I asked, to tease her a little.

"Deacon Richards, of course. You know that well enough."

"What is it now?"

"He won't have any fire in the vestry," she answered.

"Why not let somebody else take care of the vestry then, if you want a fire?"

"You don't suppose," was her response, with a chuckle, "that he'd give up the key to anybody else, do you?"

"I should think he'd be glad to."

"He'll hold on to that key till he dies," retorted Aunt Naomi with a sniff; "and I shouldn't be surprised if he had it buried with him. He wouldn't lose the chance of making folks uncomfortable."

"Oh, come, Aunt Naomi, you are always so hard on Deacon Richards," I protested. "He is always good-natured

with me."

"I wish you'd join the church, then, and see if you can't keep him in order. Last night it was so cold at prayer-meeting that we were all half frozen, and Mr. Saychase had to dismiss the meeting. Old lady Andrews spoke up in the coldest part of it, when we were all so chilled that we couldn't speak, and she said in that little, high voice of hers: 'The vestry is very cold to-night, but I trust that our hearts are warm with the love of Christ.'"

I laughed at the picture of the half-frozen prayer-meeting, and dear old lady Andrews coming to the rescue with a pious jest; it was so characteristic.

"But has anybody spoken to Deacon Richards?" I asked.

"You can't speak to him," she responded, wagging her foot with a violence that seemed to speak celestial anger within. "I try to after every prayer-meeting; but he has the lights out before I can say two words. I can't stay there in the dark with him; and the minute he gets me outside he locks the door, and posts off like a streak."

"Why not go down to his mill in broad daylight?" I suggested.

"Oh, he'd stick close to the grinding-thing just so he couldn't hear, and I'm afraid of being pitched into the hopper," she said, laughing. "You must speak to him. He pays some attention to what you say."

"But it's none of my business. I don't go to prayer-meeting."

"But it's your duty to go," she answered, with a shrewd smile that showed that she appreciated her response; "and if you neglect one duty it's no excuse for neglecting another."