

# *Stepping Heavenward*



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## Chapter 1

**January 15, 1831.**

*H*ow dreadfully old I am getting! Sixteen! Well, I don't see as I can help it. There it is in the big Bible in father's own hand: "Katherine, born Jan. 15, 1815."

I meant to get up early this morning, but it looked dismally cold out of doors, and felt delightfully warm in bed. So I covered myself up, and made ever so many good resolutions.

I determined, in the first place, to begin this Journal. To be sure, I have begun half a dozen, and got tired of them after a while. Not tired of writing them, but disgusted with what I had to say of myself. But this time I mean to go on, in spite of everything. It will do me good to read it over, and see what a creature I am.

Then I resolved to do more to please mother than I have done.

And I determined to make one more effort to conquer my hasty temper. I thought, too, I would be self-denying this winter, like the people one reads about in books. I fancied

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how surprised and pleased everybody would be to see me so much improved!

Time passed quickly amid these agreeable thoughts, and I was quite startled to hear the bell ring for prayers. I jumped up in a great flurry and dressed as quickly as I could. Everything conspired together to plague me. I could not find a clean collar, or a handkerchief. It is always just so. Susan is forever poking my things into out-of-the-way places! When at last I went down, they were all at breakfast.

“I hoped you would celebrate your birthday, dear, by coming down in good season,” said mother.

I do hate to be found fault with, so I fired up in an instant.

“If people hide my things so that I can’t find them, of course I have to be late,” I said. And I rather think I said it in a very cross way, for mother sighed a little. I wish mother wouldn’t sigh. I would rather be called names out and out.

The moment breakfast was over I had to hurry off to school. Just as I was going out mother said, “Have you your overshoes, dear?”

“Oh, mother, don’t hinder me! I shall be late,” I said. “I don’t need overshoes.”

“It snowed all night, and I think you do need them,” mother said.

“I don’t know where they are. I hate overshoes. Do let me go, mother,” I cried. “I do wish I could ever have my own way.”

“You shall have it now, my child,” mother said, and went away.

Now what was the use of her calling me “my child” in such a tone, I should like to know.

I hurried off, and just as I got to the door of the school-room it flashed into my mind that I had not said my prayers!

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A nice way to begin on one's birthday, to be sure! Well, I had not time. And perhaps my good resolutions pleased God almost as much as one of my rambling stupid prayers could. For I must own I can't make good prayers. I can't think of anything to say. I often wonder what mother finds to say when she is shut up by the hour together.

I had a pretty good time at school. My teachers praised me, and Amelia seemed so fond of me! She brought me a birthday present of a purse that she had knit for me herself, and a net for my hair. Nets are just coming into fashion. It will save a good deal of time my having this one. Instead of combing and combing and combing my old hair to get it glossy enough to suit mother, I can just give it one twist and one squeeze and the whole thing will be settled for the day.

Amelia wrote me a dear little note, with her presents. I do really believe she loves me dearly. It is so nice to have people love you!

When I got home mother called me into her room. She looked as if she had been crying. She said I gave her a great deal of pain by my self-will and ill temper and conceit.

"Conceit!" I screamed out. "Oh, mother, if you only knew how horrid I think I am!"

Mother smiled a little. Then she went on with her list till she made me out the worst creature in the world. I burst out crying, and was running off to my room, but she made me come back and hear the rest. She said my character would be essentially formed by the time I reached my twentieth year, and left it to me to say if I wished to be as a woman what I was now as a girl. I felt sulky, and would not answer. I was shocked to think I had got only four years in which to improve, but after all a good deal could be done in that time. Of course I don't want to be always exactly what I am now.



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Mother went on to say that I had in me the elements of a fine character if I would only conquer some of my faults. "You are frank and truthful," she said, "and in some things conscientious. I hope you are really a child of God, and are trying to please Him. And it is my daily prayer that you may become a lovely, loving, useful woman."

I made no answer. I wanted to say something, but my tongue wouldn't move. I was angry with mother, and angry with myself. At last everything came out all in a rush, mixed up with such floods of tears that I thought mother's heart would melt, and that she would take back what she had said.

"Amelia's mother never talks so to her!" I said. "She praises her, and tells her what a comfort she is to her. But just as I am trying as hard as I can to be good, and making resolutions, and all that, you scold me and discourage me!"

Mother's voice was very soft and gentle as she asked, "Do you call this 'scolding,' my child?"

"And I don't like to be called conceited," I went on. "I know I am perfectly horrid, and I am just as unhappy as I can be."

"I am very sorry for you, dear," mother replied. "But you must bear with me. Other people will see your faults, but only your mother will have the courage to speak of them. Now go to your own room, and wipe away the traces of your tears that the rest of the family may not know that you have been crying on your birthday." She kissed me but I did not kiss her. I really believe Satan himself hindered me. I ran across the hall to my room, slammed the door, and locked myself in. I was going to throw myself on the bed and cry till I was sick. Then I should look pale and tired, and they would all pity me. I do like so to be pitied! But on the table, by the window, I saw a beautiful new desk in place of the old clumsy

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thing I had been spattering and spoiling so many years. A little note, full of love, said it was from mother, and begged me to read and reflect upon a few verses of a tastefully bound copy of the Bible, which accompanied it every day of my life. "A few verses," she said, "carefully read and pondered, instead of a chapter or two read for mere form's sake." I looked at my desk, which contained exactly what I wanted, plenty of paper, seals, wax and pens. I always use wax. Wafers are vulgar. Then I opened the Bible at random, and lighted on these words:

"Watch, therefore, for ye know not what hour your Lord doth come." There was nothing very cheering in that. I felt a real repugnance to be always on the watch, thinking I might die at any moment. I am sure I am not fit to die. Besides I want to have a good time, with nothing to worry me. I hope I shall live ever so long. Perhaps in the course of forty or fifty years I may get tired of this world and want to leave it. And I hope by that time I shall be a great deal better than I am now, and fit to go to heaven.

I wrote a note to mother on my new desk, and thanked her for it I told her she was the best mother in the world, and that I was the worst daughter. When it was done I did not like it, and so I wrote another. Then I went down to dinner and felt better. We had such a nice dinner! Everything I liked best was on the table. Mother had not forgotten one of all the dainties I like. Amelia was there too. Mother had invited her to give me a little surprise. It is bedtime now, and I must say my prayers and go to bed. I have got all chilled through, writing here in the cold. I believe I will say my prayers in bed, just for this once. I do not feel sleepy, but I am sure I ought not to sit up another moment.

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### **JAN. 30**

Here I am at my desk once more. There is a fire in my room, and mother is sitting by it, reading. I can't see what book it is, but I have no doubt it is Thomas A' Kempis. How she can go on reading it so year after year, I cannot imagine. For my part I like something new. But I must go back to where I left off.

That night when I stopped writing, I hurried to bed as fast as I could, for I felt cold and tired. I remember saying, "Oh, God, I am ashamed to pray," and then I began to think of all the things that had happened that day, and never knew another thing till the rising bell rang and I found it was morning. I am sure I did not mean to go to sleep. I think now it was wrong for me to be such a coward as to try to say my prayers in bed because of the cold. While I was writing I did not once think how I felt. Well, I jumped up as soon as I heard the bell, but found I had a dreadful pain in my side, and a cough. Susan says I coughed all night. I remembered then that I had just such a cough and just such a pain the last time I walked in the snow without overshoes. I crept back to bed feeling about as mean as I could. Mother sent up to know why I did not come down, and I had to own that I was sick. She came up directly looking so anxious! And here I have been shut up ever since; only today I am sitting up a little. Poor mother has had trouble enough with me; I know I have been cross and unreasonable, and it was all my own fault that I was ill. Another time I will do as mother says.

### **JAN. 31**

How easy it is to make good resolutions, and how easy it is to break them! Just as I had got so far, yesterday, mother spoke for the third time about my exerting myself so much.

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And just at that moment I fainted away, and she had a great time all alone there with me. I did not realize how long I had been writing, nor how weak I was. I do wonder if I shall ever really learn that mother knows more than I do!

### **Feb. 17**

It is more than a month since I took that cold, and here I still am, shut up in the house. To be sure the doctor lets me go down stairs, but then he won't listen to a word about school. Oh, dear! All the girls will get ahead of me.

This is Sunday, and everybody has gone to church. I thought I ought to make a good use of the time while they were gone, so I took the Memoir of Henry Martyn, and read a little in that.

I am afraid I am not much like him. Then I knelt down and tried to pray. But my mind was full of all sorts of things, so I thought I would wait till I was in a better frame. At noon I disputed with James about the name of an apple. He was very provoking, and said he was thankful he had not got such a temper as I had. I cried, and mother reproved him for teasing me, saying my illness had left me nervous and irritable. James replied that it had left me where it found me, then. I cried a good while, lying on the sofa, and then I fell asleep. I don't see as I am any the better for this Sunday, it has only made me feel unhappy and out of sorts. I am sure I pray to God to make me better, and why doesn't He?

### **Feb. 20**

It has been quite a mild day for the season, and the doctor said I might drive out. I enjoyed getting the air very much. I feel just well as ever, and long to get back to school. I think God has been very good to me in making me well again,

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and wish I loved Him better. But, oh, I am not sure I do love Him! I hate to own it to myself, and to write it down here, but I will. I do not love to pray. I am always eager to get it over with and out of the way so as to have leisure to enjoy myself. I mean that this is usually so. This morning I cried a good deal while I was on my knees, and felt sorry for my quick temper and all my bad ways. If I always felt so, perhaps praying would not be such a task. I wish I knew whether anybody exactly as bad as I am ever got to heaven at last. I have read ever so many memoirs, and they were all about people who were too good to live, and so died; or else went on a mission. I am not at all like any of them.

### **March 26**

I have been so busy that I have not said much to you, you poor old journal, you, have I? Somehow I have been behaving quite nicely lately. Everything has gone on exactly to my mind. Mother has not found fault with me once, and father has praised my drawings and seemed proud of me. He says he shall not tell me what my teachers say of me lest it should make me vain. And once or twice when he has met me singing and frisking about the house he has kissed me and called me his dear little Flibbertigibbet, if that's the way to spell it. When he says that I know he is very fond of me. We are all very happy together when nothing goes wrong. In the long evenings we all sit around the table with our books and our work, and one of us reads aloud. Mother chooses the book and takes her turn in reading. She reads beautifully. Of course the readings do not begin till the lessons are all learned. As to me, my lessons just take no time at all. I have only to read them over once, and there they are. So I have a good deal of time to read, and I devour all the poetry I can

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get hold of. I would rather read "Pollok's Course of Time" than read nothing at all.

### **April 2**

There are three of mother's friends living near us, each having lots of little children. It is perfectly ridiculous how much those creatures are sick. They send for mother if so much as a pimple comes out on one of their faces. When I have children I don't mean to have such goings on. I shall be careful about what they eat, and keep them from getting cold, and they will keep well of their own accord. Mrs. Jones has just sent for mother to see her Tommy. It was so provoking. I had coaxed her into letting me have a black silk apron; they are all the fashion now, embroidered in floss silk. I had drawn a lovely vine for mine entirely out of my own head, and mother was going to arrange the pattern for me when that message came, and she had to go. I don't believe anything ails the child! a great chubby thing!

### **April 3**

Poor Mrs. Jones! Her dear little Tommy is dead! I stayed at home from school to-day and had all the other children here to get them out of their mother's way. How dreadfully she must feel! Mother cried when she told me how the dear little fellow suffered in his last moments. It reminded her of my little brothers who died in the same way, just before I was born. Dear mother! I wonder I ever forget what troubles she has had, and am not always sweet and loving. She has gone now, where she always goes when she feels sad, straight to God. Of course she did not say so, but I know mother.

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### April 25

I have not been down in season once this week. I have persuaded mother to let me read some of Scott's novels, and have sat up late and been sleepy in the morning. I wish I could get along with mother as nicely as James does. He is late far oftener than I am, but he never gets into such scrapes about it as I do. This is what happens. He comes down when it suits him.

Mother begins.—“James, I am very much displeased with you.”

James.—“I should think you would be, mother.”

Mother, mollified.—“I don't think you deserve any breakfast.”

James, hypocritically.—“No, I don't think I do, mother.”

Then mother hurries off and gets something extra for his breakfast.

Now let us see how things go on when I am late.

Mother.—“Katherine” (she always calls me Katherine when she is displeased, and spells it with a K), “Katherine, you are late again; how can you annoy your father so?”

Katherine.—“Of course I don't do it to annoy father or anybody else. But if I oversleep myself, it is not my fault.”

Mother.—“I would go to bed at eight o'clock rather than be late as often as you. How should you like it if I were not down to prayers?”

Katherine, muttering.—“Of course that is very different. I don't see why I should be blamed for oversleeping any more than James. I get all the scoldings.”

Mother sighs and goes off.

I prowl round and get what scraps of breakfast I can.

**May 12**

The weather is getting perfectly delicious. I am sitting with my window open, and my bird is singing with all his heart. I wish I was as gay as he is.

I have been thinking lately that it was about time to begin on some of those pieces of self-denial I resolved on upon my birthday. I could not think of anything great enough for a long time. At last an idea popped into my head. Half the girls at school envy me because Amelia is so fond of me, and Jane Underhill, in particular, is just crazy to get intimate with her. But I have kept Amelia all to myself. To-day I said to her, Amelia, Jane Underhill admires you above all things. I have a good mind to let you be as intimate with her as you are with me. It will be a great piece of self-denial, but I think it is my duty. She is a stranger, and nobody seems to like her much.

"You dear thing, you!" cried Amelia, kissing me. "I liked Jane Underhill the moment I saw her. She has such a sweet face and such pleasant manners. But you are so jealous that I never dared to show how I liked her. Don't be vexed, dearie; if you are jealous it is your only fault!"

She then rushed off, and I saw her kiss that girl exactly as she kisses me!

This was in recess. I went to my desk and made believe I was studying. Pretty soon Amelia came back.

"She is a sweet girl," she said, "and only to think! She writes poetry! Just hear this! It is a little poem addressed to me. Isn't it nice of her?"

I pretended not to hear her. I was as full of all sorts of horrid feelings as I could hold. It enraged me to think that Amelia, after all her professions of love to me, should snatch at the first chance of getting a new friend. Then I was mortified because I was enraged, and I could have torn myself to



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pieces for being such a fool as to let Amelia see how silly I was.

“I don’t know what to make of you, Katy,” she said, putting her arms round me. “Have I done anything to vex you? Come, let us make up and be friends, whatever it is. I will read you these sweet verses; I am sure you will like them.”

She read them in her clear, pleasant voice.

“How can you have the vanity to read such stuff?” I cried.

Amelia colored a little.

“You have said and written much more flattering things to me,” she replied. “Perhaps it has turned my head, and made me too ready to believe what other people say.” She folded the paper, and put it into her pocket. We walked home together, after school, as usual, but neither of us spoke a word. And now here I sit, unhappy enough. All my resolutions fail. But I did not think Amelia would take me at my word, and rush after that stuck-up, smirking piece.

### **May 20.**

I seem to have got back into all my bad ways again. Mother is quite out of patience with me. I have not prayed for a long time. It does not do any good.

### **May 21.**

It seems this Underhill thing is here for health, though she looks as well as any of us. She is an orphan, and has been adopted by a rich old uncle, who makes a perfect fool of her. Such dresses and such finery as she wears! Last night she had Amelia there to tea, without inviting me, though she knows I am her best friend. She gave her a bracelet made of her own hair. I wonder Amelia’s mother lets her accept presents from strangers. My mother would not let me. On the whole, there

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is nobody like one's own mother. Amelia has been cold and distant to me of late, but no matter what I do or say to my darling, precious mother, she is always kind and loving. She noticed how I moped about to-day, and begged me to tell her what was the matter. I was ashamed to do that. I told her that it was a little quarrel I had had with Amelia.

"Dear child," she said, "how I pity you that you have inherited my quick, irritable temper."

"Yours, mother!" I cried out; "what can you mean?"

Mother smiled a little at my surprise.

"It is even so," she said.

"Then how did you cure yourself of it? Tell me quick, mother, and let me cure myself of mine."

"My dear Katy," she said, "I wish I could make you see that God is just as willing, and just as able to sanctify, as He is to redeem us. It would save you so much weary, disappointing work. But God has opened my eyes at last."

"I wish He would open mine, then," I said, "for all I see now is that I am just as horrid as I can be, and that the more I pray the worse I grow."

"That is not true, dear," she replied; "go on praying—pray without ceasing."

I sat pulling my handkerchief this way and that, and at last rolled it up into a ball and threw it across the room. I wished I could toss my bad feelings into a corner with it.

"I do wish I could make you love to pray, my darling child," mother went on. "If you only knew the strength, and the light, and the joy you might have for the simple asking. God attaches no conditions to His gifts. He only says, 'Ask!'"

"This may be true, but it is hard work to pray. It tires me. And I do wish there was some easy way of growing good. In fact I should like to have God send a sweet temper to me just

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as He sent bread and meat to Elijah. I don't believe Elijah had to kneel down and pray for them.”