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## Priestess of the Year

Bertie M. Layne

**I**t is not necessary for me to take pensive journeys along country lanes or on the banks of streams to be aware of the solemnity that marks the decline of all things in the autumn of the year. For even though I might not have the good fortune to see the passionate beauty in the colors of

the leaves or to feel the chill that permeates the air at the hour of dawn and at the time of twilight, I would be in possession still of that mystical sensitivity which the clairvoyant mind experiences when in the vicinity of the dying. For the spirit of nature, through some incomprehensible medium, calls to me at this time more forcefully than at any other. This spirit of nature, which in the spring became a laughing, dancing girl with flowers in her hair, laughing and dancing so that at times tears fell from her eyes in the midst of her merriment; this spirit, which in the full force of the summer became a virile young matron married to the arduous tasks of man, assumes now the role and vestments of a priestess to administer at the vesper time of the year the extreme unction to all dying things.

When she calls me, I release my soul from the limitations which the romance of the spring and the toiling of the summer had imposed upon it and urge it to be off to join itself with nature while she is yet in contemplation of the year's completed work. In her musings she has much to confide to her intimates before she withdraws herself. What does my soul gather in this autumnal association? What new secrets does this priestess of the year reveal upon which the soul might nourish itself to expand and grow and live eternally? This harvest is richer and more lasting than the garnerings of a diligent and tireless farmer in Ohio. I learn in this communion such themes as the utter futility of all that is only material, since there is constant change and ultimate decay governing all things. I see more clearly, because of this change and destiny of decay, that I am brother to the corn shock and the honeybee, for I too must become immersed in the universal solvent of death. But this priestess also extends the cup of her Eucharist and a surge of fresh faith in Nature's wisdom and in the justice of her system. I feel also a growing breadth of love for all my brother-things, the sensible and insensible with which I share a common destiny. Hope fills me too. I have hope with the swiftly dismantling trees that the sap of new life will rise again, and also with the decaying seed of corn that it will grow once more. Thus the dying of all things in the autumn of the year gives new life to my thoughts. The decline of nature inspires the resurgence of my soul.