



# The Beth Book

*Sarah Grand*

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## **The Beth Book** Sarah Grand

Grand's compelling story recounts in vivid detail the childhood of her young heroine, Beth, a spirited and intelligent girl who challenges the limitations of provincial life in Ireland and Yorkshire. Without the benefit of an education, Beth must make her own way through adolescence, contending with a violent mother and an alcoholic father. With little money to go round, Beth often goes without so that her brothers might be raised as gentlemen, thus giving her an early introduction to sexual inequality. Even in girlhood Beth challenges gender expectations, dressing as a boy and poaching rabbits for the family dinner table. Like Grand herself, Beth makes an early marriage to escape her unhappy childhood, becoming the wife of philandering doctor, Daniel Maclure. Disillusion soon turns to defiance, as Beth recreates herself as a woman of genius, with her rousing refrain of "I shall succeed!" After escaping to a room of her own, Beth becomes a New Woman, setting a high standard both for herself and for other women. Grand's extraordinary recall of childhood emotions, avoiding Victorian sentimentality, makes *The Beth Book* a convincing and captivating chronicle of female adolescence. The coming of age and sexual awakening of Beth broadens into a consideration of wider social issues, such as marital violence, vivisection, and the sexual double standard. *The Beth Book* deserves to become a classic of the Victorian age.

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