

**MY
MORTAL
ENEMY**

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By
WILLA CATHER

ILLUSTRATED &
PUBLISHED BY
E-KİTAP PROJESİ & CHEAPEST BOOKS



www.cheapestboooks.com



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Istanbul

ISBN: 978-605-7566-65-2



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ABOUT AUTHOR:



Willa Sibert Cather (1873 – 1947) is an eminent author from the United States. She is perhaps best known for her depictions of U.S. life in novels such as *O Pioneers!*, *My Ántonia*, and *Death Comes for the Archbishop*.

Other Books of Willa Cather:

- *Death Comes for the Archbishop* (1927)
- *Pioneers!* (1913)
- *My Ántonia* (1918)
- *One of Ours* (1923)
- *Sapphira and the Slave Girl* (1940)
- *The Song of the Lark* (1915)
- *The Professor's House* (1925)
- *The Troll Garden and Selected Stories* (1905)
- *Youth and the Bright Medusa* (1920)
- *Not Under Forty* (1936)

PART 1

CHAPTER 1

I first met Myra Henshawe when I was fifteen, but I had known about her ever since I could remember anything at all. She and her runaway marriage were the theme of the most interesting, indeed the only interesting, stories that were told in our family, on holidays or at family dinners. My mother and aunts still heard from Myra Driscoll, as they called her, and Aunt Lydia occasionally went to New York to visit her. She had been the brilliant and attractive figure among the friends of their girlhood, and her life had been as exciting and varied as ours was monotonous.

Though she had grown up in our town, Parthia, in southern Illinois, Myra Henshawe never, after her elopement, came back but once. It was in the year when I was finishing High School, and she must then have been a woman of forty-five. She came in the early autumn, with brief notice by telegraph. Her husband, who had a position in the New York offices of an Eastern railroad, was coming West on business, and they were going to stop over for two days in

Parthia. He was to stay at the Parthian, as our new hotel was called, and Mrs. Henshawe would stay with Aunt Lydia.

I was a favourite with my Aunt Lydia. She had three big sons, but no daughter, and she thought my mother scarcely appreciated me. She was always, therefore, giving me what she called "advantages," on the side. My mother and sister were asked to dinner at Aunt Lydia's on the night of the Henshawes' arrival, but she had whispered to me: "I want you to come in early, an hour or so before the others, and get acquainted with Myra."

That evening I slipped quietly in at my aunt's front door, and while I was taking off my wraps in the hall I could see, at the far end of the parlour, a short, plump woman in a black velvet dress, seated upon the sofa and softly playing on Cousin Bert's guitar. She must have heard me, and, glancing up, she saw my reflection in a mirror; she put down the guitar, rose, and stood to await my approach. She stood markedly and pointedly still, with her shoulders back and her head lifted, as if to remind me that it was my business to get to her as quickly as possible and present myself as best I could. I was not accustomed to formality of any sort, but by her attitude she succeeded in conveying this idea to me.

I hastened across the room with so much bewilderment and concern in my face that she gave a