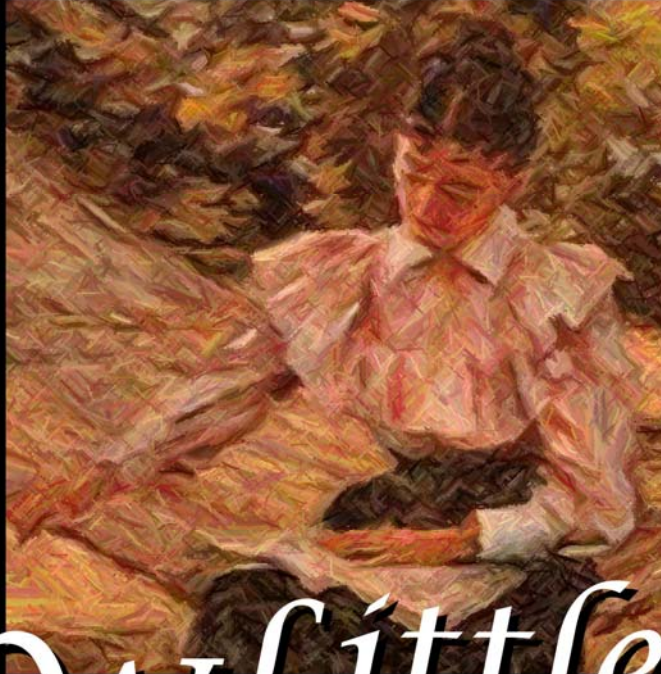


Louisa May Alcott's



Little Women

DOUG GOHEEN

Adapted from the novel by Louisa May Alcott

Morman Maine Publishing

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Little Women

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*For my parents,
Robert and Marie*

Little Women

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Louisa May Alcott's Little Women was first produced at Topeka West High School in the spring of 2001: Doug Goheen, director; Mike Callaway, technical design and direction; Linda Wardlow, costumes; Caroline Watkins, stage manager.

JO: Elizabeth Sullivan

MEG: Kendra Schmidt

AMY: Lindsey Hale

BETH: Emily Haury

MRS. MARCH: Brianna Auza

HANNAH: Hayley Kohake

LAURIE: John Bostwick

JOHN BROOKE: Andy Wise

MR. LAURENCE: Nick Scrapper

MR. MARCH: Joe Thomas

AUNT MARCH: Arianne Fisher

FRIEDRICH BHAER: Henner Brenken

Louisa May Alcott's Little Women

DRAMA. This adaptation remains true to the original novel and contains all the major events that made *Little Women* (1868) an American classic for both children and adults. The play opens on Christmas at the March home as the family tries to make the best of the holiday, though they have little money and Father is off ministering to Union soldiers. The play follows the March girls over 10 years as they grow into women. During this time, the family celebrates many joyous events including Jo's successful writing career, the birth of Meg's twins, Father's return home, and Amy's marriage. But these happy times are not without tragedy. Beth's untimely death leaves the family reeling as they try to cope with the loss. However, in the end, this cheerful, wholesome family prevails in this heartfelt story of courage and love.

Performance Time: Approximately 120 minutes.

About the Story

Little Women is Louisa May Alcott's most famous novel and is a fictionalized account of her family's life in Concord, Massachusetts. Like the character, Jo, Louisa hoped to become a successful writer to help earn money for her family. *Little Women* became an overnight success when it was published in 1868 and has gone on to become one of the best-loved novels of all time.

Characters

(5 m, 7 w)

JOSEPHINE MARCH (JO): 15, long, thick auburn hair and a boyish way about her.

MARGARET MARCH (MEG): 16, eldest daughter, domestic.

AMY MARCH: 12, blonde-hair, and is the most socially conscious of the March daughters.

ELIZABETH MARCH (BETH): 13, shy and introspective.

MRS. MARCH (MARMEE): 40s, a vision of maternal domesticity; wise and loving.

HANNAH: Slightly older than Mrs. March, she has been with the family since Meg's birth; more of a friend than a servant, she is of Irish descent and speaks with a slight accent.

THEODORE LAURENCE (LAURIE): 15, mild-mannered neighbor; has curly hair and dark eyes.

JOHN BROOKE: Late 20s, Laurie's tutor; a bespectacled scholar.

MR. LAURENCE: Laurie's grandfather; he is rather an austere-looking elderly gentleman who has a kind heart.

MR. MARCH: Mid-40s; father and minister; looks weak and gaunt.

AUNT MARCH: Mid-60s, matron not afraid to speak her mind. Although she carries a cane, one gets the distinct impression it is used more for effect than for practicality.

FRIEDRICH BHAER: Mid-30s, professor; a bit disheveled and speaks with a heavy German accent.

Setting

Concord, MA, 1861-1871. The March home dominates most of the stage, and two other smaller acting areas are evident including Mr. Laurence's library down left, and an area with a small bench is located down right.

March Home. The stage is dominated by the Marches' front parlor, the main entrance to which is a foyer at left. Further up left is a passageway to the offstage dining and kitchen area. The upstage left wall is lined with bookcases. A staircase is visible beginning at the upstage right wall, extending to an upper hall which leads to the girls' bedrooms. Only Jo and Beth's bedroom is visible, Meg and Amy's being merely suggested along the upstage wall. Along the upstage right wall, an entryway leads to Mr. and Mrs. March's room. Further downstage right stands a fireplace, which is lit as the play begins. The furniture in the parlor is plain, heavy, and well-worn. Its prominent pieces include a sofa and chair; a writing desk; an old, upright piano; and one or two occasional chairs. The effect is one of warmth and hominess.

Laurence Library. A portion of the Laurence library is visible down left. Besides the requisite volumes of books, a small writing desk and chair are also evident. An additional side-chair sits against the upstage wall. Hanging on this same wall is a portrait of old Mr. Laurence, Laurie's grandfather.

Bench Area. Down right this place is set with a small bench. This abstract area will be used for several locales during the course of the play.

Synopsis of Scenes

Act I

Scene 1: March home, Christmas Eve, 1861.

Scene 2: Laurence library, February 1862.

Scene 3: March home, several hours later.

Scene 4: Washington; March home, summer 1862.

Scene 5: March home, fall 1862.

Scene 6: March home, Christmas Eve, 1862.

Act II

Scene 1: March home, June 1867.

Scene 2: Boardinghouse in New York, winter 1867-1868.

Scene 3: March home; Laurence library, summer 1868.

Scene 4: Nice, France, 1869.

Scene 5: March home, winter 1870.

Scene 6: March home, January 1871.

Props

Cape	Slippers
Sewing basket	Tea tray
Books	Cups for hot chocolate
Knitting needles and yarn	Telegraph
Rug	Notepad
Sketch pad	Envelope
Pencils	Sack of hospital supplies
2 Wicker baskets	Large black trunk
Bouquet of roses	Sack of food
Food items	Women's glove
Vase	2 Baby dolls
Plums	Needlepoint

Sound Effects

Clock strikes six
Babies crying

Act I

Scene 1

(AT RISE: Meg is sewing a cape for use in her sister's Christmas play. Jo lies on the rug, reading. Beth is seated on the sofa, knitting. Amy is sketching her sister Beth. It is Christmas Eve, 1861, in Concord, Massachusetts. As the lights come up, a clock strikes six.)

JO: Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents.

MEG: It's so dreadful to be poor.

AMY: I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all.

MEG: Don't you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me! How happy and good we'd be if we had no worries!

BETH: We've got Father and Mother and each other.

JO: We haven't got Father and shall not have him for a long time.

MEG: You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it's going to be a hard winter for everyone, and she thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices and ought to do it gladly. But I'm afraid I don't.

JO: But I don't think the little we should spend would do any good. We've each got a dollar, and the army wouldn't be much helped by our giving that.

BETH: I've planned to spend mine for new music.

AMY: I shall get a nice box of Faber's drawing pencils. I really need them.

JO: Mother didn't say anything about our money, and she won't wish us to give up everything. Let's each buy what we want and have a little fun. I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it.

MEG: I know I do—teaching those tiresome children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home.

JO: You don't have such a hard time as I do. How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady who keeps you trotting, is never satisfied, and worries you till you're ready to fly out of the window or cry?

BETH: It's naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross, and my hands get so stiff, I can't practice well at all.

AMY: I don't believe any of you suffer as I do, for you don't have to go to school with impertinent girls who plague you if you don't know your lessons and laugh at your dresses.

JO: I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!

AMY: And I detest rude, unladylike girls!

MEG: Really, girls, you are both to be blamed. You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you are so tall, and turn up your hair, you should remember that you are a young lady.

JO: I'm not! And if turning up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm twenty. I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be Miss March, and wear long gowns, and look as prim as a China aster! It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners. I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy, and it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Papa, and I can only stay at home and knit, like a poky old woman!

BETH: Poor Jo. It's too bad, but it can't be helped, so you must try to be contented with making your name boyish, in spite of Aunt March's insistence on calling you Josephine.

MEG: As for you, Amy, you are altogether too particular and prim. Your airs are funny now, but you'll grow up an affected little goose if you don't take care.

BETH: If Jo is a tomboy and Amy a goose, what am I, please?

MEG: You're a dear, and nothing else. And now, finally, I think I've finished your cape, Jo. *(Holds it up.)*

JO: We ought to rehearse tonight. Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene. You're as stiff as a poker in that.

AMY: I can't help it. I never saw anyone faint, and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue, tumbling flat as you do. If I can go down easily, I'll drop. If I can't, I shall fall into a chair and be graceful.

BETH: I don't see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You're a regular Shakespeare!

JO: Not quite. Although it does help the piece if the actors can be convincing. *(Taking up the cape to demonstrate for Amy.)* Now do it this way, Amy. Clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, "Roderigo! Save me! Save me!"

(Jo's melodramatic manner causes the other girls to shriek with delight and laughter. Mrs. March [Marmee] enters.)

MARMEE: Glad to find you so merry, my girls. *(Her four daughters each greet her warmly.)* Well, dearies, how have you got on today? There was so much to do at the hospital, getting the boxes ready to go tomorrow, that I couldn't come home for dinner. But to make it up to you, I've brought you a special treat.

GIRLS: A letter! A letter from Father! Three cheers for Father!

MARMEE: Yes, a nice long letter. He is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and a special message to his girls.

MEG: I think it was so splendid of Father to go as a chaplain when he was too old to be drafted and not strong enough for a soldier.

JO: How I wish I could go as a drummer...or a nurse, so I could be near him and help him.

AMY: It must be very disagreeable to sleep in a tent, and eat all sorts of bad-tasting things, and drink out of a tin mug.

BETH: When will he come home, Marmee?

MARMEE: Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick. He will stay and do his work faithfully as long as he can, and we won't ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. Now come and hear the letter. (*Knock on the door. Hannah crosses from the kitchen through the foyer to answer the door. Marmee sits and reads from the letter.*) "Give them all my dear love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them by day, pray for them by night, and find my best comfort in their affection at all times. A year seems very long to wait before I see them, but remind them that while we wait we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their bosom enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully that when I come back to them, I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women."

(Hannah enters from SL.)

HANNAH: Excuse me, Mum. The young Laurence boy is here.

MARMEE: Of course. I'd forgotten. Please show him in, Hannah.

(Hannah exits.)

JO: The Laurence boy? From the big house next door?

MARMEE: Hannah told one of old Mr. Laurence's servants of our meager Christmas this year. He is an odd gentleman, but he knew my father years ago, and he sent me a polite note this morning. He said he hoped I would allow him to express his friendly feeling toward my children by sending them a few trifles in honor of the day. I could not refuse,

and so you shall apparently have a little treat for Christmas dinner.

(The girls react excitedly as Hannah re-enters with Theodore Laurence. Although not exactly shy, he is unaccustomed to the company of women. He carries various food items in two baskets as well as some roses.)

HANNAH: The Laurence boy, Mum.

(Marmee goes to him.)

MARMEE: Master Laurence, how gracious of you to come. You've not formally met the girls, I don't believe. *(Referring to each.)* This is Margaret, our eldest; Josephine; Elizabeth; and Amy, the baby.

AMY: Don't say "the baby," Mother. Say "the youngest."

JO: *(Chiding Amy.)* Niminy-piminy!

MARMEE: *(Cautioning Jo.)* Jo. *(She takes the food and roses from Laurie.)* Christmas roses! How lovely!

LAURIE: How do you do? *(Looks at Jo.)* How is your cat, Miss March?

JO: Nicely, thank you, Mr. Laurence. But I am not Miss March; I'm only Jo.

LAURIE: And I am not Mr. Laurence; I'm only Laurie.

AMY: Laurie Laurence. What an odd name.

MARMEE: *(Reprimanding.)* Amy!

LAURIE: My first name is Theodore, but I don't like it, for the fellows at school called me Dora, so I made them say Laurie instead.

JO: I hate my name too—so sentimental. I wish everyone would say Jo instead of Josephine. How did you make the boys stop calling you Dora?

LAURIE: I thrashed 'em.

JO: Well, I can't thrash Aunt March, so I shall have to bear it.

LAURIE: I suppose you shall. But I must return now. I promised Grandfather I wouldn't delay in resuming my French lesson.

JO: (*Impressed.*) You're learning French?

LAURIE: From Mr. Brooke, my tutor.

MARMEE: Master Laurence was born in Italy. He's spent a number of years abroad.

MEG: How romantic! And have you ever been to Paris?

LAURIE: We spent last winter there.

JO: Can you actually talk French?

LAURIE: We were not allowed to speak anything else.

JO: Do say some! I can read it, but can't pronounce.

LAURIE: *Je suis enchantée d'avoir fait votre connaissance, Mademoiselle.* (*Bows.*) *Au revoir.*

(*Marmee shows Laurie out.*)

MARMEE: Please extend our gratitude to your grandfather. And a Merry Christmas to you.

(*Marmee and Laurie exit SL.*)

JO: That boy is suffering for society and fun. His grandpa keeps him shut up when he isn't riding or walking with his tutor and makes him study very hard.

(*Beth arranges Laurie's flowers in a vase.*)

BETH: But how do you know about him, Jo?

JO: Do you remember when kitty ran away?

BETH: Of course.

(*Marmee re-enters.*)

JO: He brought her back, and we talked over the fence, and were getting on capitally—all about cricket and so on—when his grandfather came out and scolded him.

AMY: Cricket?

JO: I mean to know him someday, for he needs fun. I'm sure he does.

MARMEE: The poor child. His parents both died when he was only a little boy, and then his grandfather brought him here. He is not a strong lad, and the old man is afraid of losing him, which makes him so careful.

JO: But he needs amusement and exercise. And I mean to know him some day.

MARMEE: I do like his manners, and he looks like a little gentleman. So I've no objection to your knowing him if a proper opportunity should arise.

MEG: Italians always have pretty manners, as well as curly hair and handsome black eyes.

AMY: Enough of Laurie, or Theodore, or whatever his name is. *(To Meg.)* Come, Meg, and let's explore what he has brought us! *(Picks up one of the baskets.)* Look! Plums!

(Amy and Meg take the two baskets into the kitchen/dining area.)

MARMEE: A good idea, my little Raphael. But mind you, no indulging until tomorrow!

BETH: Imagine having lost both of his parents when he was only a child.

(Jo goes to Marmee.)

JO: And here we have been complaining of Father's ministry for the war.

BETH: *(To Marmee.)* I don't believe I could go on if ever I lost either one of you.

MARMEE: Speaking of him reminds me of how much I, too, miss him, how much I owe him, and how faithfully I should

watch and work to keep his little daughters safe and good for him.

JO: Yet you told him to go, Mother, and didn't cry when he went, and never complain now, or seem as if you needed any help.

MARMEE: I gave my best to the country I love, and kept my tears till he was gone. Why should I complain when we both have merely done our duty and will surely be the happier for it in the end?

(Lights fade to black.)

Scene 2

(AT RISE: *Laurence library, February 1862. John Brooke, Laurie's tutor, is seated at the desk, going over some papers for Laurie's lessons. After a few moments, Jo and Meg enter. Jo mistakenly presumes the seated figure is Laurie.*)

JO: *(To John Brooke.)* You don't look as though you're ready to take the ice!

(Brooke turns around.)

BROOKE: No, I don't suppose I do.

JO: *(Surprised and embarrassed.)* Oh! I thought you were Laurie!

BROOKE: Would that I were. I've been waiting nigh on thirty minutes for the boy. *(Rises.)* I'm John Brooke, Laurie's tutor.

JO: How do you do? I'm Jo March, and this is my sister, Meg.

MEG: Pleased to meet you, Mr. Brooke.

BROOKE: Ah, the March girls have come a-calling. There's to be ice-skating, then?

JO: Yes. Laurie thought it would be fun before the ice melted.

MEG: Actually, Jo proposed the idea to Mr. Laurence.

BROOKE: I see. Yes, I wouldn't imagine Laurie would be quite so bold. Well, he might as well go and enjoy himself. He certainly doesn't seem to have his mind on his studies this afternoon.

JO: Is Laurie an accomplished boy?

BROOKE: Generally, yes, he is. He has had an excellent education and has much talent. He will make a fine man, if not spoiled by petting.

MEG: And yet he doesn't seem conceited either.

BROOKE: No, not in the least. That is why he is so charming and we all like him so much.

JO: It's nice to have accomplishments and be elegant, but not to show off or get perked up.

BROOKE: These things are always seen and felt in a person's manners and conversation if modestly used, but it is not necessary to display them. Well, let me see if I can find the boy. *(Exits.)* Please wait here.

MEG: You see, Jo, I shouldn't have come. I rather think we've offended the man.

JO: Nonsense, although Mr. Brooke is certainly an interesting sort.

MEG: I'm beginning to think all the residents in this old house are fairly interesting.

JO: Just look at these books! It's like an enchanted palace! What richness!

MEG: I feel a little uncomfortable here, but I don't know why. Perhaps you should have brought Amy after all. She so wanted to go.

JO: How silly you are. Laurie didn't say Amy. He said Jo and Meg. It would be very rude, after he invited only us, to go and drag in Amy. I should think she'd hate to poke herself in where she isn't wanted.

MEG: But she was crying when we left, Jo. And she threatened to do something.

JO: Fiddlesticks! Just let her try, the niminy-piminy.

MEG: Really, Jo...

(Jo looks at the portrait of Mr. Laurence.)

JO: *(Indicating portrait.)* But look at this, Meg! The old man himself. I'm sure now that I shouldn't be afraid of him, for he has kind eyes, though his mouth is grim, and he looks as if he had a tremendous will of his own. He isn't as handsome as *my* grandfather, but I like him.

(Unseen by Jo, Mr. Laurence has quietly entered the library and stands listening to Jo.)

MR. LAURENCE: Thank you, miss.

(Startled, Jo jumps back.)

JO: Oh!

MR. LAURENCE: So you're not afraid of me, hey?

JO: Not much, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: And you don't think me as handsome as your grandfather?

JO: Not quite, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: And I've got a tremendous will, have I?

JO: I only said I thought so.

MR. LAURENCE: But you like me in spite of it?

JO: Yes, I do, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: You've got your grandfather's spirit, if you haven't his face. He was a fine man, my dear, but what is better, he was a brave and an honest one, and I was proud to be his friend.

JO: Thank you, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: What have you been doing to this boy of mine, hey?

JO: Only trying to be neighborly, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: You think he needs cheering up a bit, do you?

JO: Yes, sir. He seems a little lonely, and young folks would do him good, perhaps.

MEG: We are only girls, but we should be glad to help if we could, for we don't forget the splendid Christmas present you sent us.

MR. LAURENCE: Tut, tut. That was the boy's affair. *(To Meg.)* You are the eldest daughter?

MEG: Yes, sir. Margaret...Meg.

MR. LAURENCE: And how is your poor mother doing?

MEG: Doing nicely, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: I shall come and see your mother some fine day. You tell her so.

MEG: Yes, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: *(To Jo.)* You, now. Come with me and we'll see if we can locate the boy.

(He starts off, followed by Jo, who shoots Meg a quizzical look as she leaves. Left alone, Meg crosses to the desk and tentatively begins to inspect the papers Mr. Brooke was studying at the beginning of the scene. After a few moments, John Brooke enters, startling Meg.)

BROOKE: Are you fond of books, Miss March?

MEG: *(Doing her best to recover.)* Yes, yes, I am. I'm quite fond of reading. And I am employed as a governess and tutor myself for a number of small children.

BROOKE: A tutor? At your young age?

MEG: I'm sixteen.

BROOKE: And seem as if you should be receiving lessons instead of giving them.

MEG: I don't attend school.

BROOKE: Oh?

MEG: A number of years ago, my father lost his property in trying to help an unfortunate friend. Jo and I finally persuaded Mother and Father to allow us to do something to help.

BROOKE: And so you became a governess and tutor?

MEG: I do get a good deal of satisfaction out of it, so I won't complain. I only wish I liked teaching, as you do.

BROOKE: I think you would if you had Laurie for a pupil. I shall be sorry to lose him next year.

MEG: Going to college, I suppose?

BROOKE: Yes, it's high time he went, for he is ready, and as soon as he is off, I shall turn soldier.

MEG: I am glad of that. I should think every young man would want to go, though it is hard for the mothers and sisters who stay at home.

BROOKE: I have neither, and very few friends to care whether I live or die.

MEG: Laurie and his grandfather would care a great deal, and we should all be very sorry to have any harm come to you.

BROOKE: Thank you. That sounds very pleasant. *(Pause.)*
Well, I thought perhaps Laurie had found his way back here. But I see he has not. Excuse me.

(John Brooke leaves, and Meg returns to her perusal of the papers on the desk. Momentarily, Jo and Laurie re-enter.)

JO: *(To Laurie.)* But what do you amuse yourself with?

LAURIE: Nothing. It's as dull as tombs up here.

JO: But all these books—they're glorious!

LAURIE: *(Smiling.)* A fellow can't live on books. How Mr. Brooke would love to have you as a pupil.

JO: I'm afraid I haven't the time for schooling.

LAURIE: And why is that?

JO: I'm a businessman—girl, I mean. I serve as a companion to an elderly woman—my great Aunt March at Plumfield, and a dear, cross old soul she is, too. This morning, I was reading away, droning on as I always do, when her cap began to bob, like a top-heavy dahlia. Well, I whipped "The Vicar of Wakefield" out of my pocket and read away with one eye on him and one on Aunt. I'd just gotten to where they all tumbled into the water when I forgot and laughed out loud. Aunt woke up, and being more good-natured after her nap, told me to read a bit and show what frivolous work amused me so. I did my very best, and she liked it, though she only said, "I don't understand what it's all about. Go back and begin it again, child." Back I went, making it as interesting as ever I could. Once, I was wicked enough to stop in a thrilling place and say meekly, "I'm afraid it tires you, ma'am. Shan't I stop now?" She caught up her knitting, which had dropped out of her hands, gave me a sharp look through her specs, and said, in her short way, "Finish the chapter, and don't be impertinent, miss." And when I ran back to Plumfield to retrieve my gloves to

go skating, there she was, so hard at the Vicar that she didn't hear me laugh as I danced a jig in the hall because of the good time coming.

MEG: Which might elude us all if you keep on so.

JO: (*Realizing she has been talking a great deal.*) I'm sorry. I'll talk all day if you'll only set me going. Beth says I never know when to stop.

LAURIE: Is Beth the rosy one who stays at home a good deal and sometimes goes out with a little basket?

JO: Yes, that's Beth. She's my girl, and a regular good one she is, too.

LAURIE: And the curly-haired one is Amy, I believe?

MEG: How did you find that out?

LAURIE: Why, you see, I often hear you calling to one another, and when I'm alone up here, I can't help looking over at your house. You always seem to be having such good times. I beg your pardon for being so rude, but sometimes you forget to put down the curtain at the window where the flowers are, and when the lamps are lighted, it's like looking at a picture to see the fire, and you all round the table with your mother. Her face is right opposite, and it looks so sweet behind the flowers, I can't help watching it. I haven't got any mother, you know.

(Jo exchanges a glance with Meg.)

JO: We'll never draw that curtain anymore, and I give you leave to look as much as you like. I just wish, though, instead of peeping, you'd come over and see us. Mother is so splendid, she'd do you heaps of good, and Beth would sing to you if I begged her to, and Amy would dance. Meg and I would make you laugh over our funny stage properties, wouldn't we, Meg? And we'd have jolly times. Wouldn't your grandpa let you?

LAURIE: I think he would if your mother asked him. He's very kind, though he does not look so, only he's afraid I might be a bother to strangers.

MEG: We are not strangers, we are neighbors, and you needn't think you'd be a bother. We *want* to know you.

JO: We haven't been here a great while, you know, but we have got acquainted with all our neighbors but you.

MEG: And we do want to get acquainted before you're off to college.

LAURIE: How did you know of that?

MEG: Mr. Brooke spoke of it.

LAURIE: Not for a year or two. I won't go before seventeen, anyway.

JO: Aren't you but fifteen?

LAURIE: Sixteen, next month.

JO: How I wish I were going to college. You don't seem as if you are looking forward to it.

LAURIE: Nothing but grinding or skylarking. And I don't like the way fellows do either in this country.

MEG: What do you like?

LAURIE: To live in Italy, and to enjoy myself in my own way.

(Brooke re-enters.)

BROOKE: There you are. Your grandfather and I have been searching everywhere.

LAURIE: I was only in the cellar, locating the skates, which haven't been used in a good while. *(An idea dawning.)* But I have a capital idea! There's an extra pair I came across. *(To Brooke.)* Why don't you come along with us?

MEG: Oh, yes, do. It will be ever so much fun!

JO: Please, Mr. Brooke. We can tandem skate.

BROOKE: Well, I don't suppose it could hurt, though I haven't been skating for years.

LAURIE: It will do you good to get out.

BROOKE: Nothing much for me to do here.

JO: Good. It's all settled, then.

(Mr. Laurence enters.)

MR. LAURENCE: And what, pray tell, might that be?

LAURIE: Grandfather! Mr. Brooke has consented to go ice-skating with us!

MR. LAURENCE: Skating, is it?

BROOKE: If that is satisfactory to you, sir?

MR. LAURENCE: Cold enough. Off you go. It will be nice to have a little peace then. *(The four say their goodbyes and exit, leaving Mr. Laurence alone in the library. He crosses to his portrait and reflects.)* Not as handsome as her own grandfather, hey? *(Turns to desk.)* So the young miss next door thinks he is studying too hard. Needs young society, amusement, exercise. I suppose she is right. I've been coddling the lad as if I'd been his grandmother. Well, let him take a holiday and do what he likes, as long as he's happy. *(Closing the book on the desk.)* A fellow can't live on books.

(He turns back to stare at the portrait as lights fade to black.)

Scene 3

(AT RISE: March home, several hours later. A fire blazes in the parlor, where a morose Amy lays stomach-down on the sofa. Beth is sewing a pair of slippers.)

BETH: They'll be back before long, Amy. Then maybe Hannah will fix us all some hot chocolate.

AMY: I don't want any hot chocolate.

(Pause.)

BETH: Perhaps Mother will allow the four of us girls to go skating tomorrow after the chores are done. *(Pause.)*

Wouldn't that be fun—just the four of us?

AMY: I don't know.

(Marmee enters from outside. Amy immediately sits up on the sofa.)

MARMEE: *(Takes off her wrap.)* Two more boys brought in this afternoon. I'm afraid it won't be long before the hospital is out of beds completely.

BETH: What a horrible thing war is.

(Notices the despondent Amy and goes to sit next to her.)

MARMEE: Still down in the dumps, Little Raphael?

BETH: I'm afraid Amy is saddened by having to stay home. I told her perhaps you'd allow us girls to go someday—just the four of us—after we'd finished our chores.

MARMEE: Perhaps so. We shall see. *(To Beth.)* And what are you working on now, Beth?

BETH: I've begun a pair of slippers for Mr. Laurence to thank him for the Christmas treat. I don't have any other way. Is it all right?

MARMEE: Yes, dear. They will please him very much and be a nice way of thanking him. The others will help you about them, and I will pay for the making up.

(Meg, Jo, Laurie, and John Brooke enter in high spirits, talking and laughing. Marmee rises to greet them, and Hannah appears from the kitchen. During the following, the four remove their coats, scarves, hats, and gloves. Hannah and Marmee help, taking some of the clothing to the fireplace hearth to dry out.)

JO: Mother, may we fix chocolate for Laurie and Mr. Brooke?

MARMEE: Of course, my dear. Let us first rid you of these damp garments. You'll all catch a death of a cold.

HANNAH: Damp, they are? More like soppin' wet! So did ya' actually fall through the ice and swim about?

MEG: Not ever through the ice, no, but we fell plenty of times.

HANNAH: *(To Brooke.)* Give me the muffler, lad.

LAURIE: All except Jo. She's a regular Hans Brinker, she is.

JO: Well, except for when I skated into the tree branch.

BETH: Here, Meg. Come and warm yourself by the fire.

MEG: In a minute. I seem to have lost one of my gloves.

MARMEE: And how did you make out, Mr. Brooke?

MEG: He did wonderfully!

LAURIE: In spite of his abstention from the ice for so many years.

BROOKE: Well, I did all right, I suppose, challenging as it was to keep up with the others.

BETH: And was it very beautiful on the lake?

MEG: As beautiful as one of Little Raphael's paintings.

LAURIE: The countryside is so lovely and peaceful in the dead of winter—all sparkling and white with diamonds in the snow.

BETH: Jo talks about the country where we hope to live sometime—the real country, she means, with pigs and chickens and haymaking.

MARMEE: There is a lovelier country even than that where we shall all go, by and by, when we are good enough.

BETH: It seems so long to wait, so hard to do. I want to fly away at once, as those swallows fly, and go in at that splendid gate.

JO: You'll get there, Beth, sooner or later, no fear of that. I'm the one who shall have to fight and work, and climb and wait, and maybe never get in after all.

LAURIE: You'll have me for company, if that's any comfort. I shall have to do a deal of traveling before I come in sight of your celestial city. If I arrive later, you'll say a good word for me, won't you, Beth?

BETH: If people really want to go, and really try all their lives, I think they will get in, for I don't believe there are any locks on that door or any guards at the gate. I always imagine it is as it is in the picture, where the shining ones stretch out their hands to welcome poor Christian as he comes up from the river.

(Marmee kisses the top of Beth's head.)

MARMEE: How precious you are, my little Beth. But come, Hannah. Let us begin the chocolate to warm these frozen bodies.

(Hannah and Marmee now retire to the kitchen area. Pause.)

JO: Wouldn't it be fun if all the castles in the air which we make could come true and we could live in them?

LAURIE: I've made such quantities it would be hard to choose which I'd have.

MEG: You'd have to take your favorite one. What is it?

LAURIE: If I tell mine, will you tell yours?

MEG: Yes, if the others will, too.

(The three girls consent.)

LAURIE: All right. After I'd seen as much of the world as I want to, I'd like to settle in Germany and have just as much music as I choose. I'm to be a famous musician myself, and all creation is to rush to hear me, and I'm never to be bothered about money or business, but just enjoy myself and live for what I like.

BETH: Music? How wonderful!

LAURIE: That's my favorite castle. What's yours, Beth?

BETH: Mine is to stay at home safe with Father and Mother and help take care of the family.

LAURIE: Don't you wish for anything else?

BETH: Since I have my piano, I am perfectly satisfied. I only wish we may all keep well and be together...nothing else.

AMY: I have ever so many wishes, but the pet one is to be an artist, and go to Rome, and do fine pictures, and be the best artist in the whole world.

MEG: I should like a lovely house, full of all sorts of luxurious things—nice food, pretty clothes, handsome furniture, pleasant people, and heaps of money. I am to be mistress of it, and manage it as I like, with plenty of servants, so I never need work a bit. How I should enjoy it! For I wouldn't be idle, but do good, and make everyone love me dearly.

LAURIE: Wouldn't you have a master for your castle in the air?

MEG: (*Embarrassed.*) I said "pleasant people," you know.

JO: Why don't you say you'd have a splendid, wise, good husband and some angelic little children? You know your castle wouldn't be perfect without them.

MEG: You'd have nothing but horses, inkstands, and novels in yours.

JO: Wouldn't I though! I'd have a stable full of Arabian steeds, rooms piled with books, and I'd write out of a magic inkstand, so that my works should be as famous as Laurie's music. I want to do something splendid before I go into my castle—something heroic or wonderful that won't be forgotten after I'm dead. I don't know what, but I'm on the

watch for it and mean to astonish you all someday. I think I shall write books and get rich and famous. That would suit me, so that is my favorite dream. And if you all wait here a moment, I shall share a small part of it with you now.

(As Jo goes upstairs to her room, Amy looks after her nervously. During the following, Jo intends to retrieve her writing notebook. However, it is not in its customary place. With increasing anxiety, she searches her room until Amy finally appears in the doorway.)

LAURIE: We're an ambitious set, aren't we? Each one of us—but Beth—wants to be rich and gorgeous in every respect. I do wonder if any of us will ever get our wishes. I ought to be satisfied to please Grandfather, and I do try, but it's working against the grain, you see, and comes hard. He wants me to be an India merchant, as he was, and I'd rather be shot. I hate tea and silk and spices and every sort of rubbish his old ships bring, and I don't care how soon they go to the bottom when I own them. Going to college ought to satisfy him, for if I give him four years, he ought to let me off from the business, but he's set, and I've got to do just as he did, unless I break away and please myself, as my father did. If there was anyone left to stay with the old gentleman, I'd do it tomorrow.

(At this point, Amy removes herself from the conversation and goes upstairs to Jo's room.)

MEG: Laurie, my dear boy, you should do just what your grandfather wishes. Do your best at college, and when he sees that you try to please him, I'm sure he won't be hard or unjust to you. As you say, there is no one else to stay with and love him, and you'd never forgive yourself if you left him without his permission. Don't be dismal or fret, but do your duty and you'll get your reward, as good Mr. Brooke has by being respected and loved.

LAURIE: Speaking of whom, we have not yet heard from our Mr. Brooke.

BROOKE: I don't know if I have any castles in the air. I only wish for Laurie's success at college, for my own success in contributing to the war effort, and thereafter for a domestic sense of belonging...inclusion.

(At this point, Jo spies Amy standing in her doorway. The following two dialogues overlap – one upstairs, one downstairs.)

JO: *(To Amy.)* You've got my writing notebook, haven't you?

AMY: No, I haven't.

BETH: That is a splendid wish, Mr. Brooke.

JO: Do you know where it is, then?

AMY: No, I don't.

LAURIE: I do wonder if any of us will ever get our wishes.

(Jo advances on Amy.)

JO: You know something about it, and you'd better tell at once or I'll make you.

MEG: If we are all alive ten years hence, let's meet and see how many of us have gotten our wishes or how much nearer we are then than now.

AMY: Scold as much as you like, you'll never see your silly old book again.

JO: Why not?

AMY: I burned it up!

(At this point, Marmee and Hannah enter from the kitchen carrying a tray with cups of hot chocolate for everyone. The four young people downstairs have become uncomfortably aware of Jo and Amy's disruption upstairs.)

MARMEE: Here we are. But where have Jo and Amy gone?

(No one responds, and Marmee, too, now hears Amy and Jo and proceeds to set down the drinks, which Hannah begins to serve. Marmee moves hastily to Jo's bedroom.)

JO: What? My little book I was so fond of, and worked over, and meant to finish before Father got home? Have you really burned it?

AMY: Yes, I did! I told you I'd make you pay for not allowing me to go skating with you and Meg.

JO: You wicked, wicked girl! *(Shakes Amy.)* I can never write it again, and I'll never forgive you as long as I live!

(Jo slaps Amy just as Marmee makes her way into the room. Amy bursts into tears and tries to leave the room but runs directly into Marmee.)

MARMEE: Amy! *(Amy maneuvers her way around Marmee and escapes into her own room. Marmee turns back to Jo.)* Jo? *(Jo now also breaks down and collapses onto her bed, crying.)* Josephine, tell me what has happened at once.

JO: Amy...I...I...slapped her.

MARMEE: Why did you slap her?

JO: My book...she burned my writing notebook.

MARMEE: Oh, Jo.

JO: It's my dreadful temper! I try to cure it, I think I have, and then it breaks out worse than ever. Oh, Mother, what shall I do? What shall I do?

MARMEE: Watch and pray, dear. Never get tired of trying, and never think it is impossible to conquer your fault.

JO: You don't know. You can't guess how bad it is! It seems as if I could do anything when I'm in a passion. I get so savage, I could hurt anyone, and enjoy it. I'm afraid I shall do something dreadful someday, and spoil my life, and make everybody hate me. Oh, Mother, help me, do help me!

MARMEE: I will, my child. Don't cry so bitterly, but remember this day, and resolve with all your soul that you

will never know another like it. Jo, dear, we all have our temptations, some far greater than yours, and it often takes us all our lives to conquer them. You think your temper is the worst in the world, but mine used to be just like it.

JO: Yours, Mother? Why, you are never angry!

MARMEE: I've been trying to cure it for 40 years and have only recently succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it, and I still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me another 40 years to do so.

JO: How did you learn to keep still? That is what troubles me is how to control my passions before I know what I'm about. Tell me how you do it, Marmee dear.

MARMEE: My good mother used to help me...

JO: As you do us.

MARMEE: But I lost her when I was a little older than you are, and for years had to struggle on alone, for I was too proud to confess my weakness to anyone else. I had a hard time, Jo, and shed a good many bitter tears over my failures, for, in spite of my efforts, I never seemed to get on. (*Hannah now returns to the kitchen.*) Then your father came, and I was so happy that I found it easy to be good. But by and by, when I had four little daughters around me and we were poor, then the old trouble began again, for I am not patient by nature, and it tried me very much to see my children wanting anything.

JO: Poor Mother! What helped you then?

(*Meg now goes upstairs to check on Amy.*)

MARMEE: Your father, Jo. He never loses patience—never doubts or complains—but always hopes, and works, and waits so cheerfully that one is ashamed to do otherwise before him. He helped and comforted me and showed me that I must try to practice all the virtues I would have my little girls possess, for I was their example. It was easier to

try for your sakes than for my own. A startled or surprised look from one of you, when I spoke sharply, rebuked me more than any words could have done, and the love, respect, and confidence of my children was the sweetest reward I could receive for my efforts to be the woman I would have them copy.

(Knock on the front door. Hannah crosses from the kitchen to answer the door.)

JO: Oh, Mother, if I'm ever half as good as you, I shall be satisfied.

MARMEE: I hope you will be a great deal better, but you must keep watch over your "bosom enemy," as Father calls it, or it may sadden, if not spoil, your life. You have had a warning. Remember it, and try with heart and soul to master this quick temper before it brings you greater sorrow and regret than you have known today.

(Hannah now comes from the door and starts upstairs, holding a telegraph in her hand.)

JO: I will try, Mother. I truly will. But you must help me, remind me, and keep me from flying out. It is so comfortable to say all I think to you and feel so safe and happy here.

MARMEE: My Jo, you may say anything to your mother, for it is my greatest happiness and pride to feel that my girls confide in me and know how very much I love them.

(Hannah is now in the doorway to Jo's room.)

HANNAH: Excuse me, Mum. It's one of them horrid telegraph things.

(Marmee snatches the telegraph, reads it quickly, and reacts sharply. Jo takes the telegraph.)

JO: What is it? *(Marmee quickly moves past Hannah and crosses downstairs. Reads aloud.)* "Mrs. March: Your husband is very ill. Come at once."

HANNAH: Oh, sweet Jesus in heaven! *(Hannah starts downstairs also, shouting to Meg and Amy as she goes.)*
Margaret! Amy! Come quickly!

(Hannah continues downstairs as Meg and Amy emerge from their room to meet Jo in the hallway.)

MEG: Jo! What is it?

JO: It's Father. A telegraph just arrived. He's very ill.

(The three girls urgently go downstairs into the parlor, where Marmee and Hannah have now arrived.)

MARMEE: Beth, we have just received word from Washington that Father is very ill. I shall be going at once. Let us hope and pray it may not be too late. Oh children, children, help me to bear it!

HANNAH: The Lord keep the dear man! I won't waste no time a-cryin', but get your things right away, Mum.

(Hannah exits into Marmee's room.)

MARMEE: She's right. There's no time for tears now. Be calm, girls, and let me think.

LAURIE: What can I do, Mrs. March? Let me do something, please.

MARMEE: The next train leaves later this evening. Send a telegram saying I will come at once.

LAURIE: What else? The horses are ready. I can go anywhere, do anything.

(Marmee writes a quick note at the desk.)

MARMEE: Go to Plumfield and tell Aunt March of what has happened. Don't kill yourself driving at a desperate pace. There is no need of that. *(She hands him the note and Laurie is off like a shot. Marmee writes another note.)* Jo, run to the hospital and tell them I shan't be coming for a while. Pick up these things there. They'll be needed, and I must go prepared for nursing. *(Marmee gives Jo the note and she dashes out.)* Beth, go and ask Mr. Laurence for a couple of bottles of old wine—I'm not too proud to beg for Father. He shall have the best of everything. *(Beth hastily exits.)* Amy, tell Hannah to pack the black trunk and put in plenty of warm clothes and blankets for Father.

(Amy exits to Marmee's room.)

MEG: Mother, please, come and sit down. We shall take care of everything.

(Marmee allows herself to be led to the sofa by Meg and Mr. Brooke, who sit on either side of her.)

BROOKE: Mrs. March, I'm very sorry to hear of this. I would like to offer myself as your escort.

MEG: Mr. Brooke!

BROOKE: Mr. Laurence has commissions for me in Washington, and it would give me great satisfaction to be of some service to you there.

MARMEE: How kind of you, Mr. Brooke. I accept your gracious offer.

MEG: It will be such a relief to know that Mother has someone to take care of her. Thank you very, very much!

BROOKE: Only allow me five minutes to gather my things. I shall return shortly.

(He rises to go. Meg escorts him to the door as Marmee goes again to the writing desk.)

MEG: Mr. Brooke? *(Brooke turns back and Meg embraces him warmly. He receives it somewhat awkwardly but is very pleased. He exits. Meg turns back to Marmee.)* Have you time for a cup of tea, Mother?

MARMEE: I'm afraid not, my dear. I have no choice but to make the evening train. I only hope everyone returns in time.

(Aunt March barges in.)

AUNT MARCH: I told that man it was absurd to go into the army. "No good will come of it," I said. Didn't I say that, Margaret?

MEG: *(Ever patient.)* Yes, Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH: But does anyone ever listen to what I have to say?

MARMEE: *(Pushed beyond her limit.)* No, Aunt March, and with good reason.

AUNT MARCH: Well! Perhaps next time someone should take heed of my advice!

MARMEE: Forgive me, Aunt March. It's a very difficult and busy time we have of it now.

AUNT MARCH: Yes, I can see that. I received the note from that curious young man. *(Holding out an envelope.)* Here. Far be it for me to refuse help for my only nephew.

(Meg takes the envelope and gives it to her mother.)

MEG: Oh, thank you, Aunt March.

(Mr. Laurence enters briskly and goes directly to Marmee.)

MR. LAURENCE: *(To Marmee.)* My dear woman, I'm so sorry to hear. Beth is at the house now loading up some supplies in the carriage with Laurie.

AUNT MARCH: What is this man doing here?

(Meg goes to Aunt March.)

MEG: Mr. Laurence, Aunt March, is our neighbor and friend.

MR. LAURENCE: *(To Meg.)* Thank you, my dear. *(Turning back to Marmee.)* Mrs. March, you're going to need an escort. Would you allow me to accompany you to Washington?

MARMEE: I wouldn't hear of it, dear Mr. Laurence. Besides which, Mr. Brooke has already made the same offer, which I immediately accepted.

MR. LAURENCE: Did he now? Splendid idea.

AUNT MARCH: Who's Mr. Brooke?

MEG: He's Laurie's tutor.

AUNT MARCH: Who's Laurie?

MARMEE: Really, Aunt March. He's the boy who delivered my message to you.

MEG: Mr. Laurence's grandson.

AUNT MARCH: Mr. Laurence? Now we're back to where we started!

(Jo now enters carrying a sack of various hospital supplies.)

JO: I've got them, Mother! *(Seeing the others.)* Oh!

(Hannah and Amy now emerge from Marmee's room, carrying a large black trunk.)

HANNAH: Ready, Mum. Plenty of good, thick blankets and warm clothes.

MARMEE: Thank you, Hannah.

(Hannah sees Aunt March, of whom she is not overly fond.)

HANNAH: Oh, hello, madam.

AUNT MARCH: Hannah.

HANNAH: *(To Marmee.)* Let me pack a quick bite for ya' t' eat on the train, Mum. It'll be a long night.

MARMEE: Thank you, Hannah.

(Beth, Laurie, and Mr. Brooke now enter.)

LAURIE: The carriage is ready, Mrs. March. The train leaves in 40 minutes.

BETH: Mr. Laurence has included a great many supplies, Mother.

BROOKE: All is ready, Mrs. March, except for your things.

MARMEE: How comforting you have all been. God's grace be with you.

MEG: Mr. Brooke, Laurie...Mother's trunk...

(The two young men cross to the trunk outside Marmee's room and carry it out to the carriage.)

MARMEE: My darlings... *(Summoning her daughters, who gather around.)* I leave you to Hannah's care and Mr. Laurence's protection. Hannah is faithfulness itself, and our good neighbor will guard you as if you were his own, I'm sure.

MR. LAURENCE: That I will, ma'am.

MARMEE: I have no fears for you, yet I am anxious that you should take this trouble rightly. Do not grieve and fret when I am gone, or think that you can comfort yourselves by being idle and trying to forget. Go on with your work as usual, for work is a blessed solace. Hope and keep busy, and whatever happens, remember that you never can be fatherless.

GIRLS: Yes, Mother.

MARMEE: *(Embracing each daughter as she speaks.)* Meg, dear, be prudent, watch over your sisters, consult Hannah, and, in

any perplexity, go to Mr. Laurence. Jo, be patient and remember our little talk. Write to me often, and be my brave girl, ready to help and cheer us all. Beth, comfort yourself with your music, and be faithful to the little home duties. And you, Amy, help all you can, be obedient, and keep happy and safe at home.

(Laurie and Mr. Brooke re-enter.)

LAURIE: Ready, Mrs. March.

(Hannah hurriedly re-enters from the kitchen with a sack of food, which she gives to Marmee.)

HANNAH: Here ya' go, Mum. *(Embracing her.)* Now don't ya' worry. We'll get along fine. Only take care of the mister, and bring him home safe and sound.

(Final goodbyes are exchanged and embraces shared, including one between Marmee and Aunt March and another between Meg and Mr. Brooke. As Marmee and Mr. Brooke leave, Jo and Amy also embrace. Lights fade to blackout.)

Scene 4

(AT RISE: Summer 1862. Marmee, now in Washington, sits on a small bench in the down right area. She is reading a letter – actually a compilation of seven different letters sent from home. As she silently reads, we hear the voices of the respective writers as well as actually see them writing their letters.)

MEG: *(From the parlor.)* It is impossible to tell you how happy your last letter made us, for the news that Father is better was so good we couldn't help but laugh and cry over it. How very kind Mr. Brooke is, and how fortunate that Mr. Laurence's business detains him near you so long, since he is so useful to you and Father. The girls are as good as gold. Beth is as regular about her tasks as a clock and never forgets what you told her. She grieves about Father and looks sober except when she is at her little piano. Amy minds me nicely, and I take great care of her. She does her own hair, and I am teaching her to make buttonholes and mend her stockings. She tries very hard, and I know you will be pleased with her improvement when you return. And Jo helps me with the sewing and insists on doing all sorts of hard jobs. I should be afraid she might overdo if I didn't know that her "moral fit" wouldn't last long.

JO: *(From her room upstairs.)* You would laugh to see Meg head the table and try to be motherish. She gets prettier every day. The children are regular archangels, and I – well, I'm Jo, and never shall be anything else. I have included a little poem for Father – a trifle, really, but I do hope it helps to keep his spirits up. I have also sent 25 dollars, but you may not ask how I came by the money. Only know that I wanted to contribute something on my own for you and Father. Oh, and I must tell you that I came near having a quarrel with Teddy. I freed my mind about a silly little thing, and he was offended. I was right, but didn't speak as

I ought, and he marched home, saying he wouldn't come again till I begged pardon. I declared I wouldn't and got mad. It lasted all day. I felt bad and wanted you very much. Laurie and I are both so proud, it's hard to beg pardon, but I thought he'd come to it, for I *was* in the right. He didn't come, and just at night I remembered what you said about controlling my anger.

LAURIE: (*From the library down left.*) For Jo can have quite a stubborn streak, as you well know, Mrs. March. I resolved, however, not to let the sun set on *my* anger, and ran over to tell her I was sorry. I met her at the gate, coming for the same thing. We both laughed, begged each other's pardon, and felt all good and comfortable again.

AMY: I could not bear to remain at odds with her after the notebook burning—not with you and Father both gone. She has even been helping me with my school lessons, and Meg, as always, is a great comfort to me and lets me have jelly every night at tea. I have finally finished my little sketch of Beth and hope that it may bring some pleasure to you both.

BETH: (*From her room upstairs.*) And since Amy has made me pose for her every afternoon, I have read a great many books. I try to be good all day, and sing myself to sleep with Father's tune, though it sometimes makes me cry. Everyone is very kind, and we are as happy as we can be without you.

HANNAH: (*At the writing desk in the parlor.*) ...for Beth is the best of little creatures, and a sight of help t'me, bein' so dependable. She tries t' learn everything, and really goes t'market beyond her years, likewise, keeps accounts, with my help, quite wonderful. We have got on very economical so far. I don't let the girls have coffee only once a week, accordin' t'your wish, and keep 'em on plain, wholesome vittles. Mr. Laurie turns the house upside down frequent, but he heartens up the girls, and so I let 'em have full swing. The old gentleman sends heaps of things, and is rather wearin', but means well, and it ain't my place t'say nothin'.

My bread is rise, so no more at this time. I send my duty to Mr. March and hope he's seen the last of that pneumonia.

MR. LAURENCE: (*From the library desk down left.*) Hannah is a model servant and guards pretty Meg like a dragon. Glad the weather holds. Pray make Brooke useful, and draw on me for funds if expenses exceed your estimate. Don't let your husband want anything. Thank God he is mending.

MEG: (*Back in the parlor.*) Mister Laurence is very kind and neighborly and watches over us like a motherly old hen, as Jo says. And Jo...oh, Mother, she made me promise not to say, but I cannot help myself. She's cut her hair—her long, beautiful hair to earn some money to send to you and Father. How I love her so! She and Laurie keep us merry, for we get pretty blue sometimes and feel like orphans with you so far away. However, we are all well and busy, but we long, day and night, to have you back. Give my dearest love to Father, and believe me, ever your own...Meg.

(*Near tears, Marmee smiles and sighs contentedly as lights fade to blackout.*)

Scene 5

(AT RISE: A late morning in the fall of the same year. Amy and Laurie are seated in the parlor, engaged in a heated discussion.)

AMY: But I don't wish to be sent off as if I was in the way.

LAURIE: Bless your heart, child, it's to keep you well. You don't want to be sick, do you?

AMY: No, I'm sure I don't, but I daresay I shall be, for I've been with Beth all the time.

LAURIE: That's the very reason you ought to go away at once, so that you may escape it. Change of air and care will keep you well, I daresay, or, if it does not entirely, you will have the fever more lightly. And we have all had it, or at least been exposed to it previously. I advise you to be off as soon as you can, for scarlet fever is no joke, miss.

AMY: But it's dull at Aunt March's, and she is so cross.

LAURIE: It won't be dull with me popping in every day to tell you how Beth is and take you out gallivanting. The old lady likes me, and I'll be as sweet as possible to her, so she won't peck at us, whatever we do.

AMY: Will you take me out in the trotting wagon?

LAURIE: On my honor as a gentleman.

AMY: And come every single day?

LAURIE: See if I don't.

AMY: And bring me back the minute Beth is well?

LAURIE: The identical minute.

AMY: And go to the theater, truly?

LAURIE: A dozen theaters if we may.

AMY: Well...I guess...I will.

LAURIE: Good girl!

AMY: But Laurie, I'm not ready to die. I'm only 13 years old. I've never even been kissed. I've waited my whole life, and now I might miss it.

LAURIE: Well, Amy, I'll make you a promise. Before you die, I will kiss you. (*Amy smiles and embraces Laurie.*) Now go and tell Meg you'll give in and go to Aunt March's. (*As Amy exits into the kitchen, Jo enters from Marmee's room, where Beth has recently been moved due to her illness. Jo's hair is noticeably shorter. To Jo.*) How is the little dear?

JO: She's still asleep. She went to bed early last night and hasn't awakened since.

LAURIE: Best thing for her—rest.

JO: What a trying world it is! No sooner do we get out of one trouble than down comes another. There doesn't seem to be anything to hold on to when Mother's gone, so I'm all at sea.

LAURIE: Poor Josephine.

JO: I'm even worried about you, Teddy.

LAURIE: (*Surprised.*) Me? Whatever for?

JO: I've seen you at the billiard saloon, wasting time and money, and growing like all those dreadful boys.

LAURIE: Can't a fellow take a little innocent amusement now and then without losing his respectability?

JO: That depends on where and how he takes it. I wish you'd keep out of it. Just be a simple, honest, respectable boy, and we'll never desert you.

LAURIE: (*Sarcastically.*) Much obliged.

JO: I hear people talking about money being such a temptation, and I sometimes wish you were poor.

LAURIE: You needn't worry about me, Jo.

JO: Well, I do. I can't help it—a little. When you look moody or discontented, as you sometimes do, you've got such a strong will, if you once get started wrong, I'm afraid it would be hard to stop you.

LAURIE: Are you going to deliver lectures all morning?

JO: Of course not. Why?

LAURIE: Because if you are, I'll return to my lessons. If you are not, I'd like to tell you something very interesting.

JO: I won't preach anymore, and I'd like to hear the news immensely.

LAURIE: Very well, then. It's a secret; and if I tell you, you must tell me yours.

JO: I haven't got any.

LAURIE: You know you have—you can't hide anything, so up and 'fess, or I won't tell.

JO: Is your secret a nice one?

LAURIE: Oh, isn't it! All about people you know, and such fun! You ought to hear it, and I've been aching to tell it this long time. Come, you begin.

JO: You'll not say anything about it, will you?

LAURIE: Not a word.

JO: And you won't tease me in private?

LAURIE: I never tease.

JO: Yes, you do. You get everything you want out of people. I don't know how you do it, but you are a born wheedler.

LAURIE: Thank you. Fire away.

JO: Well, last week, when I saw you at the billiard saloon, I was dropping off two stories to the editor of the *Spread Eagle*. And yesterday, when I went to get my answer, the man said he liked them both but didn't pay beginners, only let them print in his paper.

LAURIE: So they're to be published?

JO: (*Nods.*) It would be good practice, he said, and once people read them, anyone would pay.

LAURIE: Hurrah for Miss March, the celebrated American authoress!

JO: Hush! It won't come to anything, I daresay, but I couldn't rest till I had tried, and I said nothing about it because I didn't want anyone else to be disappointed.

LAURIE: It won't fail. Why, Jo, your stories are works of Shakespeare compared to half the rubbish that is published every day. Won't it be fun to see them in print, and shan't we feel proud of our authoress?

JO: Now, what's *your* secret, Teddy? Play fair, or I'll never believe in you again.

LAURIE: I may get into a scrape for telling, but I didn't promise not to, so I will, for I never feel easy in my mind till I've told you any plummy bit of news I get. I know where Meg's glove is.

JO: Is that all?

LAURIE: It's quite enough for the present, as you'll agree when I tell you where it is.

JO: Tell, then.

LAURIE: Do you remember when we returned from skating with Meg and Mr. Brooke and we all gathered for hot chocolate?

JO: Of course. Marmee and Hannah prepared it for us.

LAURIE: And do you recall that Meg was unable to find one of her gloves?

JO: It's been lost ever since.

LAURIE: No, not lost.

JO: What do you mean?

LAURIE: When Mr. Brooke was preparing to escort your mother to Washington, a curious sight caught my eye.

JO: (*Gasping.*) Mr. Brooke? (*Laurie nods.*) Mr. Brooke has Meg's glove? (*He nods again.*) How do you know?

LAURIE: Saw it.

JO: Where?

LAURIE: Pocket.

JO: All this time?

LAURIE: Yes, isn't that romantic?

JO: No, it's horrid.

LAURIE: Don't you like it?

JO: Of course I don't. It's ridiculous; it won't be allowed. My patience, what would Meg say?

LAURIE: You are not to tell anyone, mind that.

JO: I didn't promise.

LAURIE: That was understood, and I trusted you.

JO: Well, I won't for the present, anyway, but I'm disgusted, and wish you hadn't told me.

LAURIE: I thought you'd be pleased.

JO: At the idea of anybody coming to take Meg away? No, thank you.

LAURIE: You'll feel better about it when somebody comes to take you away.

JO: I'd like to see anyone try.

LAURIE: So should I!

(Meg comes in from the kitchen carrying a small tea tray for Beth.)

JO: I don't think secrets agree with me. I feel ruffled up in my mind since you told me that.

MEG: What secret is that, Jo?

JO: Meg! You're always complaining about how dreadful it is to be poor, aren't you?

MEG: I've tried not to, especially with Father and Mother gone.

JO: But you'd like to have money, wouldn't you? To be wealthy?

MEG: Why are you asking me this?

(Jo takes Beth's tray from Meg.)

JO: Because if you care much about riches, you will never go and marry a poor man!

(Laurie stifles a chuckle, as Jo disappears into Marmee's room with Beth's tea.)

MEG: *(Surprised and calling after Jo.)* I shall never "go and marry" anyone! *(Noticing Laurie.)* And why are you so amused?

LAURIE: Nothing, Meg, only your dear sister.

(Meg sits.)

MEG: What shall we do with that girl? She never will behave like a young lady.

LAURIE: I hope not. She is so funny and charming as she is.

MEG: Laurie, thank you for persuading Amy to go and stay at Aunt March's.

LAURIE: Of course.

MEG: I begged her to go—I pleaded and commanded. But she flat out refused, declaring that she would rather have the fever than go to Aunt March. However did you do it?

LAURIE: Only promised to take her out in the carriage and go to the theater. That and visit every day.

MEG: What a dear lad you are.

LAURIE: Only trouble is, now I suppose I've got to do it.

(Jo re-enters from Marmee's room.)

JO: She won't drink it. She says she doesn't want it, but wishes only to sleep. *(Meg now rises and goes into Marmee's room.)* She doesn't know us, she doesn't even talk about the flocks of green doves, as she calls the vine leaves on the wall. She doesn't look like my Beth, and there's nobody to help us bear it. Mother and Father both gone, and God seems so far away I can't find him.

(Laurie extends his hand.)

LAURIE: I'm here. Hold on to me, Jo.

(Jo takes his hand.)

JO: I'm so glad Father is better. Oh, me! It does seem as if all the troubles came in a heap, and I got the heaviest part on my shoulders.

LAURIE: Doesn't Meg pull fair?

JO: Oh, yes, she tries to, but she can't love Bethy as I do, and she won't miss her as I shall. Beth is my conscience, and I *can't* give her up. I can't! I can't!

(She breaks down and collapses in Laurie's arms. Meg re-enters from Marmee's room.)

LAURIE: Keep hoping for the best, Jo. I don't think she will die. She's so good, and we all love her so much, I don't believe God will take her away yet.

JO: The good and dear people always do die.

MEG: If God spares Beth, I never will complain again.

JO: If God spares Beth, I'll try to love and serve him all my life.

MEG: I wish I had no heart, it aches so.

JO: If life is often as hard as this, I don't see how we shall ever get through it.

(The front door opens quietly. Mr. and Mrs. March enter. Mr. March looks gaunt and weak. He is supported by his wife as they enter the parlor. They are followed by Mr. Brooke, who carries the black trunk Marmee took to Washington. A very emotional but subdued reunion ensues. Amy enters from the kitchen, followed shortly by Hannah, who continues to chant, "Oh, sweet Jesus in heaven!" After a few moments, Marmee raises her hand in warning.)

MARMEE: Hush! Remember Beth!

(At which time, Marmee's bedroom door opens and Beth, clad in her nightgown, steps weakly out.)

BETH: *(Barely a whisper.)* Father.

(Soundlessly, Beth and Mr. March move toward each other and quietly embrace as lights fade to black.)

Scene 6

(AT RISE: *It is Christmas Eve, 1862. Mr. and Mrs. March, Meg, Jo, Beth, Laurie, Mr. Brooke, and Mr. Laurence have gathered in the parlor after dinner.*)

MR. LAURENCE: A finer plum pudding I've never eaten!

MR. MARCH: I'd forgotten how our Hannah can cook.

BETH: I'm so full of happiness that if only Amy and Aunt March were here, I couldn't hold one drop more.

JO: Well, Amy anyway.

MARMEE: (*Amused but reproaching Jo.*) Jo!

MR. MARCH: When I went to visit Amy this afternoon to deliver her Faber's drawing pencils, I was once again struck with what a little lady our baby has become. She is very gracious to Aunt March and has learned to think of other people more and of herself less. She has molded her character as carefully as she molds her little clay figures. I am glad of this, for though I should be very proud of a graceful statue made by her, I shall be infinitely prouder of a lovable daughter with a talent for making life beautiful to herself and others.

MEG: How happy I am that you've come home, Father. I don't believe I have ever eaten so much at a single sitting.

BROOKE: Even Beth took care of herself this evening.

MR. MARCH: For which we thank the good Lord.

JO: Just a year ago, we were groaning over the dismal Christmas we expected to have. Do you remember?

MEG: Rather a pleasant year on the whole.

BETH: (*To Mr. March.*) I'm glad it's over because we've got you back.

MR. MARCH: Rather a rough road for you to travel, my little pilgrims, especially the latter part of it. But you have got on bravely, and I think the burdens are in a fair way to tumble very soon.

JO: How do you know? Did Mother tell you?

MR. MARCH: Not much. Straws show which way the wind blows, and I've made several discoveries besides my one about Amy.

MEG: Oh, tell us what they are, Father!

MR. MARCH: Here is one. (*Takes Meg's hand.*) I remember a time when this hand was white and smooth, and your first care was to keep it so. It was very pretty then, but to me it is much prettier now—for in these seeming blemishes, I read a little history. A burnt offering has been made of vanity, this hardened palm has earned something better than blisters, and I'm sure the sewing done by these pricked fingers will last a long time, so much goodwill went into the stitches. Meg, my dear, I value the womanly skill which keeps home happy more than white hands or fashionable accomplishments. I'm proud to shake this good, industrious little hand, and hope I shall not soon be asked to give it away.

BETH: What about Jo? Please say something nice, for she has tried so hard and been so very, very good to me.

MR. MARCH: In spite of the curly crop, I don't see the "son Jo" whom I left a year ago. I see a young lady who pins her collar straight, laces her boots neatly, and neither whistles, talks slang, nor lies on the rug as she used to do. Her face is rather thin and pale just now with watching and anxiety, but I like to look at it, for it has grown gentler, and her voice is lower. She doesn't bounce, but moves quietly, and takes care of a certain little person in a motherly way which delights me. I rather miss my wild girl, but if I get a strong, helpful, tender-hearted woman in her place, I shall feel quite satisfied. I don't know whether the shearing sobered our black sheep, but I do know that in all Washington I couldn't find anything beautiful enough to be bought with the five and twenty dollars which my good girl sent me.

JO: And Beth?

MR. MARCH: There's so little of her, I'm afraid to say much, for fear she will slip away altogether, though she is not so shy as she used to be. I've got you safe, my Beth, and I'll keep you so, please God.

(Very moved, Beth hugs her father.)

BETH: I love you, Father. Would you take me to my room now?

MR. MARCH: Of course.

(Mr. March escorts Beth up to her room, to which she has now moved back. He remains there until the end of the scene, watching over Beth as she goes asleep for the night.)

MR. LAURENCE: I'm afraid it's high time I retire as well. Laurie? Mr. Brooke? *(As the three prepare to leave, exchanging goodbyes and thank yous, Mrs. March escorts them to the door.)* A splendid evening, Mrs. March.

(Marmee shakes Mr. Laurence's hand.)

MARMEE: Our family is forever indebted to you, Mr. Laurence. And to you as well, Laurie. *(To Mr. Brooke.)* And to you, my dear man, I have no doubt that we could not have shared this Christmas Eve without your kind and gracious assistance.

BROOKE: It has been a privilege, Mrs. March.

(She embraces him warmly, and the three men leave.)

MEG: Well, I'd best see if Hannah is through with her package for Amy and Aunt March. *(Goes into kitchen.)* Heaven knows there was enough to feed the forces all!

(Marmee now comes back in and sits next to Jo. She simply stares at her daughter, smiling, and fingering her daughter's cropped hair.)

MARMEE: My precious, precious Jo.

JO: It doesn't affect the fate of the nation. It will be good for my vanity. I was getting too proud of my wig. It will do my brains good to have that mop taken off. My head feels deliciously light and cool, and the barber said I would soon have a curly crop, which will be boyish, becoming, and easy to keep in order.

MARMEE: Tell me all about it, Jo. I am not quite satisfied, but I can't blame you, for I know how willingly you sacrificed your vanity, as you call it, to your love. But, my dear, it was not necessary, and I'm afraid you will regret it one of these days.

JO: No, I won't.

MARMEE: What made you do it?

JO: Well, I was wild to do something for Father. I hadn't the least idea of selling my hair at first, but as I went along, I kept thinking of what I could do and feeling as if I'd like to dive into some of the rich stores and help myself. In a barber's window, I saw tails of hair with the prices marked, and one black tail, not so thick as mine, was forty dollars. It came over me all of a sudden that I had one thing to make money out of, and without stopping to think, I walked in, asked if they bought hair and what they would give for mine.

MARMEE: Oh, Jo.

JO: I took a last look at it while the man got his things, and that was the end of it. I never snivel over trifles like that. I will confess, though, I felt queer when I saw the dear old hair laid out on the table, and felt only the short, rough ends on my head. It almost seemed as if I'd an arm or a leg off. The man saw me look at it and picked out a long lock for me to keep. I'll give it to you, Marmee, just to remember past

glories by, for a crop is so comfortable, I don't think I shall ever have a mane again.

MARMEE: Thank you, deary. Now we must go to bed, for we must be up early and shall need all the sleep we can get.
(*Marmee rises and starts to her room.*)

JO: (*Calls.*) Mother!

MARMEE: What is it, Jo?

JO: I want to tell you something, Mother.

MARMEE: About Meg?

JO: How quickly you guessed. Yes, it's about her, and though it's a little thing, it fidgets me. (*Marmee returns to the room and sits.*) Last winter when the four of us went ice-skating, you remember, we came back for some chocolate and Meg couldn't find one of her gloves. We forgot all about it until Laurie told me that Mr. Brooke had it. Teddy spied it when Mr. Brooke was preparing to escort you to Washington. Teddy joked with him about it, and Mr. Brooke owned that he liked Meg but didn't dare say so, she was so young and he so poor. Now, isn't that a dreadful state of things?

MARMEE: Do you think your sister cares for him?

JO: Mercy me! I don't know anything about love and such nonsense!

MARMEE: Then you fancy that Meg is *not* interested in John?

JO: Who?

MARMEE: Mr. Brooke. I call him John now. We fell into the way of doing so at the hospital, and he likes it.

JO: Oh, dear! I knew you'd take his part. He's been good to Father, and you won't send him away, but don't let Meg marry him if she wants to. Mean thing...to go petting Father and helping you just to wheedle you into liking him.

MARMEE: My dear, don't get angry about it. Only know that John was so devoted to poor Father that we couldn't help getting fond of him. He was perfectly open and honorable about Meg, for he told us he loved her but would earn a comfortable home before he asked her to marry him. He only wanted our leave to love her and work for her, and the

right to make her love him if she could. He is a truly excellent young man, and we could not refuse to listen to him, but I will not consent to Meg's engaging herself so young.

JO: I knew there was mischief brewing! I felt it, and now it's worse than I imagined. I just wish I could marry Meg myself and keep her safe in the family.

MARMEE: It is natural and right you should all go to homes of your own, in time, but I do want to keep my girls as long as I can. I'm sorry that this happened so soon, for Meg is only 17, and it will be some years before John can make a home for her. Your father and I have agreed that she shall not bind herself in any way, not be married, before 20. If she and John love one another, they can wait, and test the love by doing so. She is conscientious, and I have no fear of her treating him unkindly. My pretty, tenderhearted girl! I hope things will go happily with her.

JO: Hadn't you rather have her marry a rich man?

MARMEE: Money is a good and useful thing, Jo, and I hope my girls will never feel the need of it too bitterly, nor be tempted by too much. However, I know from experience how much genuine happiness can be had in a plain little house, where the daily bread is earned and some privations give sweetness to the few pleasures. I am content to see Meg begin humbly; for, if I am not mistaken, she will be rich in the possession of a good man's heart, and that is better than any fortune.

JO: I hate to see things going all criss-cross and getting snarled up when a pull here and a snip there would straighten it out. (*Meg enters, having returned from visiting Amy at Aunt March's.*) I wish wearing flatirons on our heads would keep us from growing up. But buds will be roses, and kittens, cats—more's the pity!

MEG: What's that about flatirons and cats?

MARMEE: Meg! How did you find Amy?

MEG: As Father mentioned, she's getting to be quite the little lady. And do you know, I think she's actually grown fond of old Aunt March.

MARMEE: I half suspected she would. They share many of the same interests. But tell me more tomorrow, for I have grown so weary, I'm afraid your words would fall on deaf ears. (*Kisses Meg and Jo.*) Goodnight, girls.

(Marmee exits into her room, leaving Jo and Meg alone.)

JO: So what did you think of your John at dinner?

MEG: Don't say *my* John. It isn't proper or true. Please don't plague me, Jo. I've told you I don't care much about him, and there isn't to be anything said, but we are all to be friendly and go on as before.

JO: We can't, for something *has* been said. I see it, and so does Mother. You are not like your old self a bit and seem ever so far away from me. I don't mean to plague you and will bear it like a man, but I do wish it was all settled. I hate to wait, so if you mean ever to do it, make haste and have it over quickly.

MEG: I can't say or do anything till he speaks, and he won't because Father said I was too young.

JO: If he did speak, you wouldn't know what to say, but would cry or blush or let him have his own way instead of giving a good, decided "no."

MEG: I'm not so silly and weak as you think. I know just what I should say, for I've planned it all, so I needn't be taken unawares. There's no knowing what may happen, and I wish to be prepared.

JO: Would you mind telling me what you'd say?

MEG: Not at all. You are 16 now, quite old enough to be my confidante. I should merely say, quite calmly and decidedly, "Thank you, Mr. Brooke, you are very kind, but I agree with Father that I am too young to enter into any

engagement at present. So please say no more, but let us be friends as we were."

JO: Hum! That's stiff and cool enough. I don't believe you'll ever say it, and I know he won't be satisfied if you do. If he goes on like the rejected lovers in books, you'll give in rather than hurt his feelings.

(Knock at the front door. Meg goes to answer it.)

MEG: No, I won't. I shall tell him I've made up my mind and shall walk out of the room with dignity.

(Mr. Brooke is at the door, catching Meg off guard.)

BROOKE: Good evening, Meg. I'm sorry to call so late. I...I... *(Pause.)* May I come in?

MEG: Of course. *(Brooke enters the parlor and is surprised to see Jo standing there. She gives him an icy glare before "walking out of the room with dignity" into Marmee's room.)* Father is upstairs with Beth. Pray sit down. I'll call him.

BROOKE: It is not he to whom I've come to speak.

MEG: Oh. Mother has just retired for the evening.

BROOKE: Nor she. *(Pause.)* Are you afraid of me, Margaret?

MEG: How can I be afraid when you have been so kind to Father? I only wish I could thank you for it.

BROOKE: Shall I tell you how?

MEG: Oh, no, please don't. I'd rather not.

BROOKE: I won't trouble you. I only want to know if you care for me a little, Meg. I love you very much.

MEG: *(Very softly, hanging her head.)* I don't know.

BROOKE: Will you not try and find out? I want to know so much, for I can't go to work with any heart until I learn whether I am to have my reward in the end or not.

MEG: I'm too young.

BROOKE: I know. You're 17, and you cannot marry until you're 20. I'll wait, and in the meantime, you could be learning to like me. Would it be a very hard lesson?

MEG: Not if I choose to learn it, but—

BROOKE: Please choose to learn, Meg. I love to teach.

(Pause.)

MEG: I *don't* choose. Please go away and let me be.

BROOKE: Do you really mean that?

MEG: Yes, I do. I don't want to be worried about such things.

Father says I needn't. It's too soon, and I'd rather not.

BROOKE: Mayn't I hope you'll change your mind by and by?

I'll wait and say nothing till you have had more time. Don't play with me, Meg. I don't think that of you.

MEG: Don't think of me at all. I'd rather you wouldn't.

(Brooke, crushed, extends Meg's lost glove.)

BROOKE: I believe this belongs to you.

(Suddenly, Aunt March barges in from the front door without knocking.)

AUNT MARCH: Margaret! I want to visit with your father immediately. *(Sees Brooke.)* Bless me, what's all this?

(An emotional Mr. Brooke retreats into the shadows.)

MEG: It's Father's friend. I'm surprised to see you here.

AUNT MARCH: That's evident. But what is Father's friend saying to make you look like a peony? *(Raps her cane.)*

There's mischief going on, and I insist upon knowing what it is!

MEG: Mr. Brooke and I were merely talking, Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH: Brooke? That boy's tutor? Ah! I understand now. I know all about it. Jo blundered into a wrong message in one of your father's letters, and I made her tell me. You haven't gone and accepted him, child?

MEG: Hush! He'll hear. Shan't I call Father?

AUNT MARCH: Not yet. I've something to say to you, and I must free my mind at once. Tell me, do you mean to marry this pauper? If you do, not one penny of my money ever goes to you. Remember that, and be a sensible girl.

MEG: (*Insulted.*) I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March, and you can leave your money to anyone you like.

AUNT MARCH: Highty tighty! Is that the way you take my advice, miss? You'll be sorry for it by and by – when you've tried love in a cottage and found it a failure.

MEG: It can't be a worse one than some people find in big houses.

AUNT MARCH: (*Calms down a bit.*) Now, Meg, my dear, be reasonable and take my advice. I mean it kindly and don't want you to spoil your whole life by making a mistake at the beginning. You ought to marry well and help your family. It's your duty to make a rich match, and it ought to be impressed upon you.

MEG: Father and Mother don't think so. They like John even though he is poor.

AUNT MARCH: Your parents, my dear, have no more worldly wisdom than two babies.

MEG: I'm glad of it.

AUNT MARCH: This fellow is poor and hasn't got any rich relations, has he?

MEG: No, but he has many warm friends.

AUNT MARCH: You can't live on friends. Try it and see how cool they'll grow. He hasn't any business, has he?

MEG: Not yet. Mr. Laurence is going to help him.

AUNT MARCH: That won't last long. James Laurence is a crotchety old fellow and not to be depended on. So you intend to marry a man without money, position, or business,

and go on working harder than you do now, when you might be comfortable all your days by minding me and doing better? I thought you had more sense, Meg.

MEG: I couldn't do better if I waited my entire life! John is good and wise, he's got heaps of talent, he's willing to work and sure to get on, he's energetic, and he's brave. Everyone likes and respects him, and I'm proud to think he cares for me, though I'm so poor and young and silly.

AUNT MARCH: He knows *you* have got rich relations, child. That's the secret of his liking, I suspect.

MEG: Aunt March, how dare you say such a thing? John is above such meanness, and I won't listen to you a minute if you talk so. My John wouldn't marry for money, anymore than I would. We are willing to work, and we mean to wait. I'm not afraid of being poor, for I've been happy so far, and I know I shall be with him because he loves me, and I...I...

AUNT MARCH: Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair. You are a willful child, and you've lost more than you know by this piece of folly. No, I won't stop. I'm disappointed in you and haven't spirits to see your father now. Don't expect anything from me when you are married. Your Mr. Brooke's friends must take care of you now. I'm done with you forever.

(Aunt March storms out, leaving a shaken Meg. Jo now comes out of Marmee's room, but stops in the doorway when she sees what's going on. Meg is unaware of her presence. After a moment, Brooke steps forward.)

BROOKE: I couldn't help hearing. Thank you, Meg, for defending me, and Aunt March for proving that you *do* like me a little.

MEG: Not *like* you, John...*love* you. I didn't know how much till she abused you.

BROOKE: *(Thunderstruck.)* Then...then...

MEG: Yes, John. If you're willing to wait three years, yes.

BROOKE: For you, Meggie, I would wait forever.

(As Meg and Brooke kiss, Jo looks on with a blank expression as the lights fade to blackout. Intermission.)

[End of Freeview]