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## **Cast of Characters**

*The March sisters:*

JO  
MEG  
AMY  
BETH

*The older members of the family:*

HANNAH  
MARMEE  
AUNT MARCH  
FATHER

*The neighbors:*

OLD MR. LAURENCE  
LAURIE  
BROOKE, Laurie's tutor

## **Setting**

The March family house and yard, 1863.

## **Acknowledgements**

All production groups performing this play are required to include the following credits on the title page of every program:

*Little Women* was originally commissioned and produced by The Children's Theatre Company of Minneapolis, under the direction of Jon Cranney, Artistic Director.

## **Scenes**

### **Prelude**

<b>Scene 1</b>	Making Christmas
<b>Scene 2</b>	Gifts and Quarrels
<b>Scene 3</b>	Valley of Shadow
<b>Scene 4</b>	Love and Heartache
<b>Scene 5</b>	Homecoming

# LITTLE WOMEN

## by Marisha Chamberlain

a short stage adaptation of the novel  
by Louisa May Alcott

### Prelude

*(Lights up on JO in her attic garret.)*

**JO.** *(Writes:)* In the beginning, you're just a young thing, just another young creature of the universe and you hardly know you're a girl, you're so busy learning to walk and run, and ride if there's a horse handy...or if not, the limb of an apple tree. You want what you have. You want more!

### Scene 1: Making Christmas

*(Snow begins to fall on the old house. JO descends from the garret, throws herself on the parlor rug.)*

**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—

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

**MEG.** We don't have Father and won't for a long, long time.

**JO.** Well, there's a war on, and I think it splendid of Father to go as chaplain as he's too old to be a soldier. *(Picks up her knitting and sets to it furiously.)* I wish I was a soldier!

**AMY.** I suppose we have to humor her.

**JO.** We don't have Father, but we have me and what we're going to do, girls, is to make our own kind of Christmas.

**AMY.** You aren't Father.

**JO.** No, but I'm to take his place. *He* said. A homemade Christmas, *I* say. A Christmas of our own invention.

**AMY.** You pretend you're Father because you wish you were a boy—

**JO.** So what if I do?

**AMY.** —and you want any excuse to boss us.

**JO.** Oh, fiddlesticks! The play we've been rehearsing, girls, why don't we present it to Mother for Christmas?

**BETH.** Yes!

**JO.** It's almost ready. If you know your lines, Amy.

**AMY.** Well, I do know my lines.

*(JO casts knitting aside, goes to fetch box, slippers, and wrappings.)*

**JO.** All right, we'll have the play...and that's not all.

**AMY.** Last Christmas we had plum pudding and cranberries and oysters and presents all around. This year we have corn pudding with raisins. Raisins, mind you. At least Jo and Meg are old enough to go out to parties, but Beth and I will have to stay here at home with our *raisins*.

**MEG.** Well, *I* won't be going to parties. My white muslin dress is worn out and Jo spilled tea on my tarlatan.

*(JO settles down to wrap box, with her back to the others.)*

**JO.** *(Mutters:)* Jo spilled tea. Jo spilled tea.

*(AMY tries to sneak a look at what JO is wrapping.)*

**JO.** Don't peek, Amy.

**MEG.** It's not just the tea stain, the dress is torn. Torn and mended in three places, with a seam giving out at the back—

**JO.** Well, pretend you're a poor foreigner just blown in from a storm or a spy under orders to attend parties!

**AMY.** And what is so wrong with parties?

**MEG.** Don't get her started, Amy.

**JO.** People ask you to dance, is what. And you're hurt if they don't, disgusted if they do and then you step on their feet.

**AMY.** Boys...

*(AMY sneaks a clothespin out and puts it on her nose.)*

**JO.** Yes, unless you're a boy yourself. Then you can stand with your back to the wall and frown down on everything.

**BETH.** Which is what you do, anyway, isn't it, Jo?

**MEG.** Well, if you won't dance, Jo, at least you could flirt.

**JO.** Flirt! If you're going to flirt, Meg, I'll have to stop you. Because, before you know it, some young man comes calling. What's that on your nose, Amy?

**BETH.** It's a clothespin.

**JO.** If you're going to put a clothespin up there in the breeze, Amy, you might as well wash a handkerchief and hang it.

**AMY.** Some young man comes calling? And then?

**JO.** Comes calling to try and marry you. The worst thing.

**MEG.** *(To herself:)* I don't see why it's the very worst thing.

**BETH.** *(To AMY, indicating clothespin:)* Doesn't that hurt?

**AMY.** I don't care if it hurts. I want my nose to be extinguished, not flat and stumpy.

**BETH.** Extinguished?

**AMY.** "In every feature, delicate and extinguished."

**MEG.** You mean *distinguished*, Amy.

**JO.** They marry you and then you cook and sew and take care to be sweet and pretty—in every feature *extinguished*—and your adventures are over and you may as well be dead.

**AMY.** *(Sighs, takes off the clothespin.)* Listen, Jo. Marmee married Papa.

**JO.** That's different. They are our Mother and Father.

**MEG.** Don't worry, Jo. If I have to look ragged at a party, I'd really rather stay at home.

*(BETH tries to peek at what JO is wrapping.)*

**JO.** Shoo, Beth. I'll let you see in a minute.

**AMY.** But I must go dressed raggedy every day to school.

**MEG.** School is not a party. And yes, you must.

**JO.** Well, we're meant to go out and see the world. I only mean it's good to be home at Christmas.

**BETH.** Nobody sits at home but me.

**MEG.** Do you think you'd like to try school again, dear?

**BETH.** No, I simply can't bear so many faces—

**JO.** Well, you're bashful, Beth. But you work very hard at home and your piano takes you to other places, doesn't it? To lands of enchantment. I'm writing you a storybook, by the way. *(Presents box.)* Now, how's this?

**BETH.** A Christmas present!

**AMY.** It's for me, isn't it?

**MEG.** Amy!

**BETH.** Where did you get it, Jo?

**JO.** I bought it with my Christmas dollar.

**AMY.** You were supposed to spend that on yourself.

**JO.** I did. I spent it to please myself.

**AMY.** It's not for that new boy, is it? Old Mr. Laurence's grandson? I know you like to watch him ride his horse.

**JO.** I would like to meet him, but I'd hardly give a present to a boy I haven't met.

**BETH.** I've guessed who it's for. You're too far afield.

**MEG.** It's for Mother!

**JO.** Yes! It's for Marmee! I thought that would make me happiest. Let's get cracking. There's the play and carols to sing, and there's one present for Marmee—

**MEG.** Two. I bought her a pair of gloves.

*(MEG fetches gloves.)*

**BETH.** And I bought her handkerchiefs!

*(BETH brings out handkerchiefs.)*

**JO.** Bravo, Meg! Bravo Beth!

**AMY.** And I—well, I—well—I kept my dollar.

**MEG.** It's all right, Amy. It's yours.

**AMY.** It's just I haven't decided how to spend it yet. If I'm to be an artist, I must have pencils. Faber's drawing pencils.

**JO.** Mmm, what a glorious smell from the kitchen! Must be pudding! *(Calls:)* Hannah, how's the pudding!?!

**AMY.** Don't shout, Jo.

**JO.** Rehearsal! Rehearsal, everybody! *(Sings trumpet fanfare.)* "The Witches' Curse, a Christmas Opera"!

**MEG.** What has Christmas to do with it?

**JO.** I'm working that in. *(Calls:)* Hannah, would you come watch our rehearsal? The fainting scene isn't right.

*(HANNAH enters, wiping her hands on her apron.)*

**AMY.** Hannah, what *are* you cooking?

**HANNAH.** You saw everything that went into it, dear.

**AMY.** Just corn pudding with raisins? Smells too delicious.

*(AMY takes a few steps toward the kitchen.)*

**JO.** Watch this, Hannah. When Amy faints, it's supposed to be shocking. A great lady has fainted and all that. So. A bell sounds.

The curtains fly apart. The forbidding tower—there. The beautiful Zara stands in the tower. Zara? Amy?

**AMY.** How soon may we eat, Hannah?

**HANNAH.** Not 'til evening. I must watch the pudding.

*(HANNAH exits.)*

**JO.** You stand here, Amy. Put your mind to fainting.

*(Crosses to the piano, bangs on the lowest keys. As "Hugo," turns to AMY.)*

**JO.** Oh, Zara! Beautiful Zara! *(Pulls imaginary pistol.)* I give you one final chance, or you die!

**AMY.** Let me get set. *(Sets a chair out to faint on.)* Here I go. *(Delivers her line.)* "I'm fainting!" *(Faints into the chair.)*

**JO.** You can't faint into a chair—you have to just drop. Look here—clasp your hands so—*(Staggers across the room.)* This is your line, Amy—Roderigo! Save me! Save me!

*(JO sings out a shriek and falls to the floor.)*

**AMY.** *(Squeaks:)* Roderigo! Roderigo! *(Faints.)*

**MEG.** She sounds like someone is sticking her with pins.

**JO.** Amy, are you even trying?

**AMY.** Yes, I'm trying—and you're not so brilliant. You don't look like any Hugo the villain.

**JO.** Well, wait 'til I put on my big, red boots. *(Puts on boots. As Hugo:)* Observe the glint—*(Draws imaginary sword.)*—of my sword!

**AMY.** And you sound like you've got a frog in your neck, and I don't want to rehearse this stupid old play.

**MEG.** A frog in her *throat*, Amy.

**AMY.** I'm bored to tears with it, even if you did write it!

**JO.** Is that so?

**MEG.** Amy, a play can't be any good without rehearsal.

**JO.** It's too late. When the audience laughs, don't blame me.

**AMY.** They won't laugh. They'll say I'm pretty!

**JO.** Marmee and Hannah will say you're pretty. And that's all you want out of life. Christopher Columbus!

**AMY.** Is not. And don't swear.

**JO.** I'll swear if I like, and what's more—*(Sits up, puts her hands in her pockets, whistles.)*

**AMY.** Don't, Jo—it's boyish! I detest rude, unladylike girls!

**JO.** And I hate niminy-piminy chits!

*(AMY puts her cloak on.)*

**JO.** Where are you going?

**AMY.** I have an errand.

**JO.** You can't go now. The pudding's almost done.

**MEG.** Really, girls, you're both to blame. Amy, sometimes you are *entirely* too prissy.

**AMY.** And how is Jo to blame?

**MEG.** You have an errand? Then you'd best be on your way.

**JO.** Come back directly. It won't be a long lecture—I know exactly what Meg will say.

*(AMY exits.)*

**BETH.** You don't have to tell her, Meg. She knows.

**MEG.** It's time you left off boyish tricks, Josephine.

**JO.** Josephine!

**BETH.** You'd best not call her Josephine. Aunt March calls her Josephine. I don't think she'll ever answer to Josephine.

**MEG.** Now that you're tall, *Jo*, now that you're tall and turn up your hair, you must remember that you are a lady.

**JO.** I'm not! And if turning up my hair makes me one—there! (*Pulls off her hairnet, shakes out hair.*) In the beginning, you're just a young creature and you hardly know you're a girl you're so busy learning to walk and run—

**BETH.** And ride if there's a horse handy—

**MEG.** Beth, you're not helping.

**JO.** And suddenly they tell you, not that you're grown, but that you're a lady and you'd best be still so someone will pick you out and claim you, like a doll from a toy shop shelf.

**MEG.** Well, perhaps. But what else can you do?

**JO.** Make my own living.

**MEG.** You'll work dreadfully hard.

**JO.** Well, I look forward to it! I'll do just as much as I'm allowed... I wonder what that Laurence boy is doing now?

*(JO goes to the window.)*

**BETH.** Preparing for Christmas alone with his grandfather.

**JO.** That does sound lonely. I guess I wouldn't change places with him tonight. Wish we could meet him, though.

**MEG.** Well, you can't. He's rich and we're poor.

**JO.** Here's Marmee! Strike up! Stoke the fire. She's home! Three cheers and halleluiah!

*(BETH plays. MARMEE enters.)*

**BETH.** Hurrah! She's home!

**MEG.** Merry Christmas, Marmee! Let me take your cloak.

**MARMEE.** Glad to find you so merry, my girls!

**JO.** (*Indicates birthday chair.*) Sit here.

**MARMEE.** It's not my birthday...

**BETH.** You'll see!

**MARMEE.** (*Takes her shoes off.*) Where are my slippers?

**JO.** Just you wait.

**MARMEE.** Where's Amy?

**MEG.** She's on some mysterious errand.

**AMY.** *(Enters.)* Here I am. Merry Christmas, Marmee.

*(MARMEE opens her arms. AMY runs to her.)*

**MARMEE.** Merry Christmas!

**JO.** *(Presents box.)* Now! Open this first. You need them.

**MARMEE.** Slippers! New slippers?!?

**JO.** First rate army issue!

**MARMEE.** Jo, dear, thank you! And from Meg.

**MEG.** *(Presents box.)* Gloves!

**MARMEE.** Lovely! Children. How did you manage this?

**BETH.** *(Presents package.)* You know what we did!

*(MARMEE opens handkerchiefs.)*

**MARMEE.** You spent your Christmas dollars on me?

**BETH.** I hemmed them myself, but the stitching's crooked.

**MARMEE.** Handkerchiefs, hemmed with your own hands. *(Dries her eyes.)* Thank you, Beth. And from Amy.

**AMY.** *(Presents bottle.)* It's the large bottle of cologne, not the small one, though I was terribly tempted by drawing pencils, but instead—see? It's the prettiest present of all—

**JO.** Oh, really?

**MARMEE.** Now, Amy—

**AMY.** —and I'm truly trying not to be selfish any more!

**HANNAH.** *(Offstage.)* Pudding! Pudding!

**MARMEE.** You've all been so very generous. Supper?

**HANNAH.** *(Enters with the pudding.)* And here we are!

**JO.** Hurrah for Hannah!

**AMY.** Hurrah for the pudding!

**HANNAH.** And applesauce, and hot tea, and cream.

**MARMEE.** Girls, there's something weighing on my mind. Mrs. Hummel and her five children, just 'round the corner? Well, I stopped in to see them just now, only to find all six of them and the newborn baby huddled in one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. No food there, either—

**JO.** Oh. Well, it's good you told us before we began eating!

**MEG.** Yes, we'll give them our supper.

**AMY.** Our *whole* supper?

**HANNAH.** Oh, Mother March—on *Christmas Eve*—

**MARMEE.** I know, Hannah—but they have *nothing*.

**MEG.** Yes, we *will* go.

**AMY.** (*Sighs.*) All right. I'll carry...I'll carry the pudding!

**JO.** Good! And firewood—I chopped a stack of firewood—

**BETH.** Let me push the wheelbarrow.

**JO.** Capital, Marmee! If you and the little girls take supper to the Hummels, Meg and I will set up for the play.

**MARMEE.** The play? What play? Might there be a hero in the play? Might there be a villain in red boots?

**JO.** It's a new play, Marmee.

**MEG.** Don't tell her the plot, Beth. Promise, Amy?

**AMY.** I'll not reveal a word.

(LAURIE appears upstage of the house. MARMEE, BETH and AMY exit.)

(Music. JO and MEG begin to assemble the set for the play: a rickety tower made of piled-up furniture.)

*(LAURIE waves to the supper party, who are out of sight for the moment. JO goes to the window.)*

**JO.** Oh, look! It's the Laurence boy.

**MEG.** Jo! Come help me here.

*(Music. MARMEE, AMY and BETH appear beside LAURIE up-stage. The four shake hands, carry on animated conversation, wave good-bye, exit.)*

**JO.** Let's see how the tower looks in the dark. *(Lights out. JO strikes a match.)* Good.

*(JO blows out her match. In the dark, BETH takes her place at the piano and begins playing. HANNAH and MARMEE sit down to be the audience, as the lights come up.)*

**MARMEE.** It's about to begin. Beth is playing the overture.

**BETH.** *(Stops playing.)* Yes, I am!

*(JO peeks out from behind the curtain to see what's holding the music up. Gestures to BETH to continue playing.)*

**BETH.** Oops. *(Resumes playing.)*

*(Curtains open on Hugo [JO] in a black beard and boots.)*

**HUGO (JO).** The time of year was Christmas!

*(Sings in mock-operatic style:)*

There is a lady named Beautiful Zara,  
I love her so much I would kill or I'd die.  
She loves a fellow who's called Roderigo.  
The witches' curse on Roderigo I cry:

Curse Roderigo! Curse Roderigo!

*(Hagar, the Witch [MEG] appears.)*

**HAGAR (MEG).** Who is invoking the witches' curse?

**HUGO (JO).** I, Hugo. The villain. Give me a poison to kill Roderigo.  
And a potion, a love potion to make Zara love me.

*(HAGAR gives two little bottles to HUGO, who puts the bottles in his boots and exits.)*

**HAGAR (MEG).**

I hate wicked Hugo, I spit in his eye.  
Huge shall take his own poison and die.

*(Enter Roderigo [JO] in red beard, escorting the beautiful Zara [AMY].)*

**RODERIGO (JO).** *(Sings:)* They call me Roderigo!

*(“Audience” applauds.)*

And may I present the beautiful Zara?

*(Applause.)*

**ZARA (AMY).** *(Sings:)* Roderigo! Roderigo!

**JO.** *(Aside:)* Don't sing, Amy. You know you can't sing!

**HANNAH.** Isn't Amy pretty?

*(JO groans.)*

**MARMEE.** *(Loud enough for JO to overhear.)* And Jo is so good in both parts, you hardly know she's the same person.

**HANNAH.** It's just a masterpiece. A masterpiece!

**JO.** Carry on, Amy. All the way to the top.

**AMY.** This doesn't feel very steady, Jo.

**MARMEE.** Someone's coming to the door.

**JO.** What's the matter out there in the audience?

**HANNAH.** *(To MARMEE:)* Sssh, Mother. I'll see who it is.

**MARMEE.** Thank you, Hannah. Sorry, Jo. Please proceed.

**JO.** All the way to the top, Zara!

*(HANNAH enters, leading LAURIE, BROOKE, and OLD MR. LAURENCE as the tower comes crashing down. JO and MEG endeavor to free AMY from the wreckage.)*

**AMY.** I told you so! I told you so!

**JO.** (*Growls:*) A sorry, sorry performance! (*Turns, notices the newcomers.*) My word! Look who's here. (*Bows.*) The end!

**MARMEE.** Mr. Laurence, our old friend!

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Please forgive the intrusion, Mrs. March. I heard you gave your supper to the poor.

(*OLD MR. LAURENCE, LAURIE, and BROOKE produce Christmas supper in baskets.*)

**MARMEE.** Oh, how splendid of you! Children, this is Mr. Laurence, who lives just across the way and—

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** My grandson. And his tutor.

**LAURIE.** I do admire your boots, Miss March.

**JO.** Call me Jo. You climb trees, don't you, Mr. Laurence?

**LAURIE.** I do. And I'm not Mr. Laurence. Call me Laurie.

**BROOKE.** (*To MEG:*) I'm Brooke, the boy's tutor.

**MEG.** Margaret.

**BROOKE.** Margaret. So pleased to meet you, Margaret!

**JO.** Just plain Meg. Call her Meg—and let's be ourselves! (*To LAURIE:*) I did so hope we'd have an excuse to meet you.

**MEG.** (*Takes Brooke's basket.*) Thank you. And this is Amy—

**AMY.** (*Takes Laurie's basket from JO and unpacks.*) Look, Jo. Smoked chicken! Look! Real, actual mincemeat!

**MARMEE.** Dear Mr. Laurence! How can I thank you?

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** As it happens, I like music...

**MARMEE.** Beth? Listen to this.

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** I love music, and sometimes I hear someone in this house play when I sit at my window...

**MARMEE.** She's a bit bashful.

(*In answer, BETH plays: "Pat a Pan."*)

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** You play beautifully.

**BETH.** But I'm afraid the old piano won't stay in tune.

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Won't it, now?

*(AUNT MARCH enters.)*

**MEG.** Merry Christmas, Aunt March!

**AUNT MARCH.** I hear you have no presents and no dinner and so I—*(Views supper.)* I see. It seems you need nothing.

**MARMEE.** Aunt March, our kind neighbor, Mr. Laurence—

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Of course! We are acquainted. Charmed, as always, Georgetta. Beth is playing piano for us.

**AUNT MARCH.** Yes, I know all that.

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** No, but she plays with real feeling.

**LAURIE.** *(Aside to JO:)* You climb trees, too, don't you?

**AMY.** Don't answer that!

**JO.** Hush, Amy. If you want a real lady, there she is.

**AUNT MARCH.** Josephine, come here to me. Whatever are you wearing? Is this what you call your Christmas best?

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** *(Offers his arm.)* Georgetta, you must sing for your supper! Beth?

*(BETH plays. All sing "Pat a Pan.")*

Willie, bring your pipe and come,  
Robin, bring your fife and drum.  
We'll have music as we play,  
Tu-ra-lu-ra-lu. Pat-a-pat-a-pan.  
We'll have music as we play  
For a Christmas should be gay!

*(Lights down.)*

**Scene 2: Gifts and Quarrels**

*(Lights up on JO in the garret, writing in her storybook.)*

*(Out the window, AMY and BETH can be seen throwing snowballs—BETH is animated but AMY shows boredom.)*

**JO.** And the genie said, I grant you no money, nor pretty dresses, but instead, the spirit to trust your own efforts. There! That'll show Meg! Oh, drat—can't show her 'til tomorrow. She's off overnight to one of her parties! The End. Signed, Josephine March. *(Blows on page to dry the ink.)* All done! A whole book of stories! Bethy's going to love it.

*(Lights up downstairs. OLD MR. LAURENCE, BROOKE and HANNAH quietly set in place a new piano for Beth, then all three quietly exit.)*

*(JO comes downstairs and spots the new piano.)*

**JO.** Well, my word. Laurie said his grandfather might...and they've gone and done it! Bethy, this is your day! *(Places the storybook atop the piano. Calls offstage:)* Marmee! Bethy!

*(MARMEE, BETH and AMY enter. BETH sees the new piano. Gasps.)*

**BETH.** Marmee! The piano!

**MARMEE.** Oh, my heavens.

**BETH.** Do you think it's real?

**MARMEE.** Why don't you go and find out?

**JO.** There's a note here, Bethy. It's to you.

**BETH.** Here. *(Hands note to MARMEE, approaches piano slowly.)*

**MARMEE.** *(Opens note and reads.)* Well, glory be! It's yours.

**JO.** Go, ahead, Bethy. Go ahead!

**BETH.** *(Depresses keys. Plays arpeggio.)* Oh! *(Turns to MARMEE, takes the note.)* "For the little musician, from Old Mr. Laurence." What's this? *(Picks up storybook.)* From Jo?

**AMY.** *(Disgruntled.)* It's not even her birthday.

**JO.** Oh, open that later!

**BETH** (*Breathless.*) My book of stories from Jo. Thank you, Jo, oh thank you! (*Places book atop piano.*) But how can ever I thank *him*?

**MARMEE.** Unless I'm very much mistaken, *he* is hovering near a window, waiting to hear you play.

**BETH.** What shall I play? Oh! Oh! (*Plays.*)

**AMY.** (*Bored at the window, suddenly straightens up.*) Look! Here's Meg! But she's supposed to be at her party.

(*MEG and LAURIE enter.*)

**LAURIE.** Her ladyship! Home from the wicked world—

**MARMEE.** Home early, Meg?

**MEG.** Yes. I've had a beastly time.

**LAURIE.** Oh, now, Meg. I can't believe that. Do you realize that Meg knows *all the dances*? She kicks her heels, she bats her eyes, she fans her low-cut gown.

**JO.** Wait a minute. Meg doesn't own a low-cut gown.

**LAURIE.** And what was that sparkly stuff in the glass, Meg?

**MEG.** Be quiet, Laurie. What would you have me do? Stand with my back to the wall in my dowdy frock—Meg the Freak from the poor, eccentric, bookish family?!?

**JO.** Oh! Are you ashamed of us, Meg?

**MEG.** I'm sorry. I didn't mean it. I'm so glad to be home.

**LAURIE.** No, Meg, I'm the one who's sorry. Ah, Bethy—you have your piano! I'll go congratulate Grandfather.

**MEG.** It's all right, Laurie. Thank you for fetching me home.

**LAURIE.** Good-bye, then. (*Hands JO envelope.*) Here, Jo. This should fix things. Open it now—it's for today. (*Exits.*)

**MEG.** I didn't mean any of that, Jo. Marmee, I want to 'fess up. It's true. I romped, I flirted, I drank champagne—

**JO.** You flirted? But we discussed that. We said no flirting!

**MEG.** I let them dress me up in borrowed frippery—

**AMY.** You wore a low-cut gown?

**MEG.** But then, standing at the punch bowl, I started to feel peculiar. The gossip! They all think that you have “plans” for us, Marmee, that you want us to know Laurie because he has money so he’ll marry us—I mean, one of us—

**BETH.** How peculiar.

**JO.** It’s not peculiar, it’s ridiculous. You don’t have any “plans” for us, Marmee. I’ll tell Laurie. Won’t he shout?

**MEG.** You mustn’t tell! Have you no pride?

**MARMEE.** Of course she won’t tell.

**JO.** All right, I won’t. (*Opens the envelope Laurie gave her.*)

**MARMEE.** Listen, Meg, shall I tell you who you are? You are a fine young girl, the daughter of a family not rich nor inclined to follow fashion. And, as it happens, Jo, I do have plans for my girls. (*Gathers her girls in her arms.*) I want my daughters to be accomplished and good...to have a happy youth, to be well and wisely married—

**JO.** Or to be splendid old maids!

**MARMEE.** That’s right, Jo. And either way, to be ready for duty and capable of joy. Beth and Amy, shall we fetch tea?

**AMY.** (*To herself, practicing.*) “I had a beastly time.” (*Shrugs.*)

**JO.** Meg? Did you really flirt?

**MEG.** I tried. I don’t know if I succeeded.

**JO.** You won’t get silly on me, will you Meg? You won’t turn all stupid and blank, and pine after young men?

**MEG.** Hmmm.

**JO.** Because Laurie’s invited us to the theater this very afternoon! Here’s my kind of social occasion!

(*BETH and AMY enter with tea things.*)

**AMY.** Don't shout. We're standing right under your mouth.

**MEG.** Nose, Amy. For heaven's sake, what, Jo?

**JO.** It's for me and Meg. Laurie's invited us to the theater this very afternoon. To see *The Hall of the Mountain King*.

**MEG.** What do we have to wear?

**JO.** Wear whatever. We aren't the show, we're the audience.

**AMY.** You'd just go off and leave Beth and me at home?

**BETH.** I want to be at home. My piano!

**AMY.** You must let me come, too, Meg. I've got nothing to do and am so bored. I'll ask Laurie. He'll say yes.

**JO.** You can't go, Amy, so don't be a baby about it.

**MEG.** Suppose we take her. Mother won't mind.

**JO.** It's rude, after he invited only us, to go and drag Amy in.

**AMY.** I shall go, Meg says I may.

**MEG.** You can't, dear. You aren't invited. (*Producing two pairs of gloves.*) Gloves, Jo.

**JO.** (*Examines gloves.*) I can't wear these. Poured lemonade on 'em and both are spoiled.

**MEG.** Here, quick! Take my good glove and wear it, and hold the spoiled glove crumpled in your other hand—

**LAURIE.** (*Offstage:*) What ho, girls?!

**JO.** Here's Laurie!

**AMY.** (*Bursts into tears.*) I shall go!

**JO.** We don't have time for this. We're coming, Laurie!

**AMY.** You'll be sorry, Jo March, see if you aren't.

**JO.** Fiddlesticks, Amy! Just drink your tea.

(BROOKE and LAURIE enter. BROOKE offers MEG his arm. LAURIE offers his arm to JO, who bats it away and steps between BROOKE and MEG. Theater party exits.)

(MARMEE enters.)

**BETH.** I'm sorry, Amy. Would you like to play checkers?

**MARMEE.** Here's my Beth. Here's my Amy... I'm going into the village on errands. Would you two like to come?

**BETH.** (*Glances nervously at AMY.*) I think I would.

**AMY.** No, thank you.

**MARMEE.** Well. Goodbye, Amy.

**AMY.** Goodbye.

(BETH and MARMEE exit. AMY takes JO's storybook, and throws it into the fire. Lights down.)

(Lights up. AMY on the sofa. BETH at the piano. Theater party enters.)

**JO.** That was glorious! The swordplay and the fire effect!

**MEG.** Such fun! Thanks ever so much, Laurie! Mr. Brooke!

**BROOKE.** John. Please call me John.

**JO.** Good-bye, Laurie. Goodbye, *Mr. Brooke*.

**LAURIE.** See you in a bit, Jo? Skating?

**JO.** Right!

**MEG and JO.** Good-bye!

(LAURIE and BROOKE exit.)

**AMY.** Hello, Amy. Hello, Amy. Someone say "hello, Amy."

**MEG.** Of course, dear. Hello.

**JO.** Amy, you've done something. I can see it in your face.

**BETH.** Tell us about the play. We're dying to know.

**MEG.** Well, it was called *The Hall of the Mountain King*.

**AMY.** We know what it was called. *(To JO:)* You think you can see right through me, don't you? You think you know everything. You think you run the world.

**JO.** You've dumped my drawers out, haven't you? You've messed with my pen and papers?

**AMY.** No, I haven't. *(To MEG.)* The play had a story?

*(JO rushes up to her garret.)*

**MEG.** Well, first the prince comes on in satin robes. And then some little elves, all in green...

*(AMY yawns. JO comes down from garret.)*

**JO.** Drawers are fine. Nothing wrong with my writing stuff...

**BETH.** *(To MEG:)* A prince and elves, and what else?

**JO.** Beth, where's your book? The storybook that I just finished writing for you?

*(BETH searches the piano top. Shakes her head.)*

**JO.** *(To AMY:)* You've got it, haven't you? *(AMY shakes her head.)* You know where it is, then?

**AMY.** No, I don't.

**JO.** *(Takes her by the shoulders.)* That's a lie! Where is it?

**AMY.** I don't know where it is because it isn't anywhere. *(Gestures to the fireplace.)*

**JO.** What? You've burnt it? You've burnt it up?

*(AMY nods.)*

**JO.** *(Shakes AMY, boxes her ears.)* You wicked, wicked girl! I finished that book. I can't write it again and I'll never forgive you as long as I live!

*(MEG and BETH rush to them and separate them.)*

**MEG.** Amy, how could you!

**AMY.** *(Uncertain:)* You know how mean she was!

**MEG.** That's no excuse! She can be sorry for being mean, but you can't bring her book back.

**BETH.** Oh, Jo. Your lovely storybook. I'm sure she's sorry.

**AMY.** Well, all right, I *am* sorry.

(**MARMEE** *enters.*)

**JO.** It doesn't matter if she's sorry!

**AMY.** Don't talk about me like I'm not in the room. Meg—

**MEG.** I won't comfort you, Amy.

**MARMEE.** What's all this?

**BETH.** Oh, Marmee! Amy has gone and—

**MEG.** Jo and I went off to the theater and Amy wanted to go, too, but wasn't invited. Jo was sharp about it—and so—

**AMY.** And so I threw Jo's book into the fire, and I feel like I murdered something and all I can say is I'm sorry.

**MARMEE.** I see. Well, Amy?

**AMY.** I am sorry. I'm truly, terribly sorry. (*Crosses to JO, stands in front of her.*) Please forgive me, Jo. I'm very sorry.

**JO.** I'll never forgive you. She doesn't deserve it.

**MEG.** Laurie's at the door. Come to take you skating, Jo.

**JO.** I can't. Tell him what happened. I can't see anyone.

**MARMEE.** Go with Laurie, dear. Don't think—just go.

(**JO** *grabs her cloak, exits.*)

**AMY.** I shall go, too.

**MARMEE.** Amy, do you really wish to make things worse?

**AMY.** I'm not invisible. I want to show her I'm sorry.

(**AMY** *grabs her cloak, exits.*)

**MARMEE.** Jo will want to forgive her. They'll find a way.

(MARMEE and MEG settled down to sewing; BETH to piano. HANNAH enters with OLD MR. LAURENCE.)

**HANNAH.** Come in, sir. Look who I found at our door.

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Uninvited! A rogue and a beggar!

(BETH rises.)

**HANNAH.** More a king, at least to this household. (*Exits.*)

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** (*To BETH.*) Sit down, dear girl. I didn't come to frighten you, I came to hear you play—

**BETH.** (*Clears her throat.*) Mr. Laurence—

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** No, no, please don't say a word!

**BETH.** *Dear* Mr. Laurence—

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Sshh. Play.

**BETH.** (*Sits.*) What would you like to hear, sir?

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Oh, anything.

(BETH plays.)

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Very nice.

(BETH gets up, runs to him and kisses him.)

**BETH.** How kind you are!

**MEG.** Is that our Beth?

**MARMEE.** Knock me over with a feather!

**JO.** (*Offstage.*) Mother! Meg!

(LAURIE enters with AMY, wrapped in blankets, shivering in his arms. JO follows.)

**MEG.** Amy? What is it, Laurie?

**LAURIE.** She'll be fine, I think. Let's get her straight to bed.

**JO.** She fell through the ice.

**MARMEE.** Oh, my word!

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Shall I fetch a doctor?

**AMY.** I'm fine! I'm fine!

**JO.** She was following us and Laurie pulled her out and—

*(MARMEE exits with AMY. JO sits alone on the sofa. LAURIE enters.)*

**LAURIE.** She's all right. She'll want out of bed in a minute.

**JO.** You did it all, Laurie. I skated far ahead though I knew she was behind us and if she did die, it would be my fault!

**LAURIE.** I think she's all right, Jo.

*(Attempts to put his arm around her. JO shakes him off.)*

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Come, my boy.

*(The LAURENCES exit. MARMEE enters.)*

**MARMEE.** She's fine, really. All rosy again.

**JO.** It's my dreadful temper! You can't guess how bad it is. I'll do something horrible someday and spoil my life.

**MARMEE.** *(Takes JO in her arms.)* Jo, dear, I have a temper.

**JO.** You, Mother? Why, you are never angry.

**MARMEE.** I've been trying to cure it for forty years. I am angry nearly every day of my life.

**JO.** You are, aren't you? When you fold your lips together—

**MARMEE.** Oh, do I?

**JO.** Yes, you do. But you don't storm and shout. You have some secret.

**MARMEE.** No, not really. It's a mystery. Myself, sometimes so bitter, and at other times, able to control myself.

**JO.** You mean grace.

**MARMEE.** Yes! And I mean life itself—it's mysterious what makes people do things that annoy, petty things, terrible things that shouldn't be allowed. Often I don't understand.

**JO.** You understand it's best not to explode.

**MARMEE.** (*Laughs.*) Yes, my darling. Here's Amy, now.

(*MEG and BETH enter, carrying AMY.*)

**AMY.** Don't carry me, I'll stand. I'm so, so sorry Jo.

**JO.** Shh, Amy. I'm sorry, too.

(*MEG and BETH settle AMY on the couch with JO.*)

(*AUNT MARCH enters.*)

**AUNT MARCH.** I heard the littlest girl fell through the ice?

**AMY.** I'm all right now.

**AUNT MARCH.** But to fall through the ice!

**AMY.** Well it was dreadfully frightening. The edges of the ice were sharp and jagged. The water was cold as Antarctica.

**AUNT MARCH.** Really. Cold as Antarctica!

**JO.** (*To MARMEE:*) I believe she's recovered.

(*BROOKE enters.*)

**BROOKE.** Excuse the intrusion—

**MEG.** Mr. Brooke!

**BROOKE.** Good evening, all. Good evening, Margaret!

**AUNT MARCH.** *Margaret?*

**BROOKE.** I hate to interrupt. I'm to deliver this telegram.

**JO.** Father!?!

**MARMEE.** Dear God! (*Opens the telegram, reads.*) Father is very sick at the front. I must go to him. My traveling bag!

**JO.** (*Takes telegram, reads.*) I'll fetch it! Let me go with you!

**MARMEE.** Shh, Jo. I'll need you here.

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** Mrs. March, I'll accompany you. You cannot travel alone.

**BROOKE.** Sir, let me go instead.

**MARMEE.** Yes, send Mr. Brooke, dear Mr. Laurence. I'll feel much safer knowing you're here keeping an eye on my girls.

**OLD MR. LAURENCE.** So be it.

**MEG.** Thank you, Mr. Brooke.

*(JO beckons to MEG. Both exit. MR. LAURENCE and BROOKE exit. MARMEE exits.)*

**AUNT MARCH.** I suppose I should take the girls home with me. It's a large home, but it contains many valuable and fragile items...

**AMY.** Aunt March, you are so very kind.

*(BETH slides her hand down to cover AMY's mouth.)*

**AUNT MARCH.** Maybe I'll take just one girl, a small, pretty one with lovely manners.

**AMY.** *(Pulls BETH's hand away.)* Aunt March, you are most kind. But it might cause jealousy and resentment if you took just one, and you can't take all. I fear it's not practical.

**AUNT MARCH.** ...No, I fear not.

*(AMY curtseys. AUNT MARCH bows and exits.)*

**BETH.** Amy, you've outdone yourself.

*(MARMEE enters.)*

**MARMEE.** Girls? Where's Jo?

*(JO and MEG enter with traveling bag.)*

**MEG.** Handkerchiefs. An extra shawl and soap.

**BETH.** But Marmee, you won't be here. You are *always* here and we—I will miss you.

**JO.** You mustn't give us a thought, Marmee. We'll carry on.

**HANNAH.** Go on to your dear husband. I'll be mother.

**JO.** And I shall be—

**AMY.** (*Deadpan.*) Father, uncle and grandfather, all in one.

**JO.** Pfft, Amy! (*Grabs a broom and sweeps vigorously.*)

**MARMEE.** Girls?

*(They gather to her.)*

You'll be well? You'll be good to each other?

**JO.** We'll be gilded angels.

*(MARMEE laughs.)*

**AMY.** We will, we will!

*(BROOKE arrives. MARMEE exits with him.)*

*(Lights down.)*

### **Scene 3: Valley of Shadow**

*(A spring afternoon. JO sweeps the dining room floor while MEG reads a letter aloud to her.)*

**MEG.** “And this afternoon, he sat up in bed.” Marmee says Father is sitting up in bed, Jo. The danger's almost past, she says. Stop sweeping, Jo. You've swept twice today already.

**JO.** You're right. We've been gilded angels for more than a month! Scrubbed, dusted, swept, darned a million socks—

**MEG.** “—and I miss you all, but thank God, and John Brooke for his constant assistance.” John Brooke...

**JO.** The chores really are all done, aren't they? I'm going to the garret to work on my war story.

*(BETH enters from outdoors.)*

**JO.** Hello, Beth!

**MEG.** You look tired, Bethy. Where've you been?

**JO.** I'm off to war!

*(BETH sneezes.)*

**MEG.** Bless you! (*Pours BETH a cup of tea.*)

**BETH.** I—Jo—the Hummels' baby is sick and I don't feel—

**JO.** (*Feels BETH's forehead.*) Come up to my garret, Bethy. I'd love to have you. I can scribble and you can drink tea.

*(JO and BETH ascend stairs.)*

**MEG.** I'm going to write Mother. Any messages?

**BETH.** Don't tell her I'm sick.

**JO.** We won't. You're just tired.

*(JO and BETH exit. LAURIE enters, unnoticed by MEG.)*

**MEG.** (*To herself:*) Then, afterwards, I may write Mr. Brooke.

**LAURIE.** D'you mean Brooke, my tutor?

**MEG.** Laurie! Don't eavesdrop! You'll find Jo in the garret.

**LAURIE.** What? Is she back at her scribbling? Good!

*(LAURIE ascends to the garret.)*

**JO.** Sshh! Beth's not feeling well.

**LAURIE.** Are you sick, Beth?

**BETH.** (*Gets up. Sits down again.*) No.

**JO.** (*Feels BETH's forehead.*) You might have a fever.

*(HANNAH enters.)*

**HANNAH.** Have you put Beth to bed? Here's her medicine.

**MEG.** Medicine, Hannah?

**HANNAH.** Beth's been exposed to scarlet fever. You've had it, haven't you, Meg?

**MEG.** Yes, a mild case, and so has Jo But not Amy. Oh, my heavens! We have to keep Amy out of the house—

*(AMY enters from school.)*

*(JO and LAURIE descend from the garret with BETH.)*

**MEG.** Keep Beth there. We must get Amy out of the house.

**AMY.** Why?

**JO.** What is it, everyone?

**HANNAH.** *(To BETH:)* Medicine, dear. Haven't you told?

**BETH.** No! I'm sorry! I didn't even think of exposing others! Jo, you've had it—Laurie, have you had scarlet fever?

**LAURIE.** Yes, I have.

**JO.** Oh, no—is that it, Bethy? Scarlet fever?

**MEG.** Aunt March will take Amy.

**BETH.** Oh, Amy, I'm sorry. She is pernicky. But you manage her very well.

**AMY.** ...Yes. I understand her.

**MEG.** You must go right now, Amy.

**LAURIE.** I'll take Amy over in grandfather's carriage. *(Exits with MEG and AMY.)*

**AMY.** Good-bye, Beth!

**BETH.** Good-bye, Amy.

**JO.** Scarlet fever, Beth?

**BETH.** The Hummel baby is so sick, but I won't get the fever, I can't get the fever, not with Mother away.

**JO.** Let's get you to bed. You'll have whatever you have.

*(JO wraps BETH in the quilt.)*

**HANNAH.** We won't worry your mother. I've nursed others through the fever, Bethy, and we'll nurse you.

*(Lights down.)*

*(Lights up on BETH, bedded down in the parlor, HANNAH attending. JO and MEG enter.)*

**JO.** *(To HANNAH:)* Any better?

(HANNAH *shrugs, uncertain.*)

**BETH.** Hello, Jo.

**JO.** Didn't mean to wake you. She's awake, Meg. (*To BETH:*) Would you like me to read to you?

**BETH.** I wish I could see Amy.

**MEG.** So do I, but if she comes to the house, it'll be too tempting and she'll have to come in.

(LAURIE *enters with mail.*)

**LAURIE.** Letters! One for Jo, one for Beth—*three* for Meg.

**MEG.** (*Takes letters quickly.*) Thank you.

(MEG *goes to the dining room with her letters.*)

**LAURIE.** (*To JO and BETH:*) And I've got a funny secret.

**JO.** Tell us the secret. We could use a laugh.

**LAURIE.** Oh, I don't know, Beth, you've impressed everyone else with your fever, but not me.

**JO.** Laurie!

**LAURIE.** I mean it, Beth. I'm not impressed. I want you to give me a different show. Show me Grendel with his arm torn off, dragging Beowulf down to the watery depths.

(BETH *laughs.*)

**LAURIE.** That's better. Now Cleopatra, driving a herd of elephants.

**JO.** Actually, I've got a secret, myself.

**LAURIE.** Do you, now? You tell first!

**JO.** Well...you won't repeat it to anyone?

(BETH *shakes her head.*)

**LAURIE.** Not a word.

**JO.** All right. You know the war story I just finished? I left it with the editor of the paper.

**BETH.** Oh, Jo, how wonderful!

**JO.** Hush! It won't come to anything.

**LAURIE.** It *will* come to something, I know it will! We'll see it in print and won't we be proud of our author! I have to hurrah! (*Throws cap in air.*) Hurrah for Jo!

**JO.** Ssshhh! Now, your secret. Play fair.

**LAURIE.** I know where Meg's glove is.

**JO.** In her drawer.

**LAURIE.** No, it's not. Brooke has it. She dropped it in the carriage the day we went to the theater. Brooke said he'd return it to Meg, but he didn't. He put it in his pocket.

**JO.** Is the glove plain or lace?

**LAURIE.** Lace.

**BETH.** It's not Meg's glove, it's Jo's—and I'm afraid it's spoiled—it's got a big splotch of lemonade—

**LAURIE.** Doesn't matter. He thinks it's Meg's and he carries it everywhere in his pocket. Isn't that romantic?

**JO.** No! I think it's horrid! Bethy, you look a bit...

**BETH.** Tired. I think I'll close my eyes. Do you hear music?

*(Solo piano, from far off.)*

**LAURIE.** Yes! Grandfather's playing by the open window for you, Beth. Shall I tell him you like it?

**BETH.** Oh, yes.

**LAURIE.** And when are you going to play for him again?

**JO.** (*Worried.*) Not today... Off with you, Laurie.

**LAURIE.** I thought you'd be amused.

**JO.** At the thought of someone coming to take Meg away?

*(MEG comes up to check BETH.)*

**JO.** I'm warning you, Laurie—not another word.

**LAURIE.** You'll feel better when someone comes for you.

**JO.** I'd like to see anyone try!

**LAURIE.** Well. I believe I'll just slink home.

*(LAURIE exits. JO and MEG go in to BETH.)*

**MEG.** *(Feels BETH's forehead.)* Shall we call the doctor again?

**JO.** He's been already. He'll come again tomorrow.

*(Music: Piano duet.)*

**MEG.** Listen, Jo. Laurie's joined his grandfather playing. However he offended you, he's trying to beg your pardon.

**JO.** Of course I forgive him. I always do.

**MEG.** Do you think Beth can hear it while she sleeps? I wish Marmee were with us.

**JO.** Yes.

*(Lights down.)*

*(Late night. Lights up on MARMEE and MEG in their nightgowns at BETH's bedside. MEG tends BETH.)*

*(Music: Piano duet from far off.)*

**MEG.** Marmee, I'm so glad you're home.

**MARMEE.** I came the instant I got Jo's telegram.

**MEG.** Listen. They've been playing all night. Oh, Marmee—when I knew you were coming, I felt sure she'd improve.

**MARMEE.** I'd like to think my love was that powerful.

**MEG.** When will father be well enough to travel?

**MARMEE.** Not for some time yet.

*(JO enters with fresh bowl of water and towel.)*

**JO.** Let me, Meg. I'd do anything, *anything* to make her well.

**MARMEE.** So would we all, Jo. But it's out of our hands.

*(Music.)*

**MEG.** Marmee's asleep. May I close my eyes a minute, Jo?

**JO.** Please do. I'm quite awake.

*(Music.)*

**BETH.** Jo?

**JO.** Yes, Beth! It's me!

**BETH.** Hello, Jo.

**JO.** Oh, Beth, do you recognize me? Are you with us again?

**BETH.** Jo, I—I—

**JO.** Beth, please stay with us. I'll love you ever so much more than before. Don't go! I'd miss you too terribly.

**BETH.** Oh, Jo. And I'll miss...

**JO.** Yes? What will you miss?

**BETH.** I'm going to miss, oh, the piano, and sun on the trees.

**JO.** You must think of what you will miss. You must fight.

**BETH.** I'm going to miss you, Jo.

**JO.** Don't. Listen, Beth. I'll stay right with you. Yes, we'll be the stay-at-home daughters and keep house for Father and Mother in their old age—think how nice that will be—*please*.

**BETH.** Sshh, Jo. Don't wake the others.

**JO.** Or a journey? I'll take you to lands far away. I mean it.

**BETH.** I know you do. It's just that I'm so very tired.

**JO.** A sunny place where you can get better—

**BETH.** There is a place, Jo. But I think I have to go alone.

**JO.** No, Beth. Don't say that.

**BETH.** I can't.

**JO.** I'll even put aside my wildness and my silly writing. I promise, Beth. Only don't go tonight. Oh, Beth, stay.

**BETH.** I can't—someone is calling me—

**JO.** Oh, Beth. Listen to the music. Laurie and his grandfather are playing for you. Do you hear?

*(No answer. BETH dies.)*

**JO.** Good-bye, Beth, Good-bye.

*(Kisses BETH. Goes to wake MARMEE and MEG.)*

Mother? Meg? She's gone.

*(Lights down.)*

#### **Scene 4: Love and Heartache**

*(Winter. The house is in mourning. JO sits at the piano, trying to summon her patience to play, gives up and goes.)*

*(AMY enters, sets a vase of flowers on the piano, sits down, plays with ease. HANNAH rushes in with pipe and pipestand sets them on the mantle.)*

**AMY.** I've been practicing Beth's carol. Laurie's helping me.

*(AMY picks out melody: "Pat a Pan.")*

**HANNAH.** I've cleaned Father's study, dusted all his books.

**AMY.** He won't arrive home today, Hannah. His letter said he'd arrive at Christmas.

**HANNAH.** A mere two weeks! *(Exits.)*

**AMY.** *(Takes pipe and sniffs it.)* Father's tobacco!

*(AMY returns to the piano. BROOKE enters.)*

**AMY.** Mr. Brooke!

**BROOKE.** Forgive me for barging in—

**AMY.** You're home, Mr. Brooke! Is Father with you?

**BROOKE.** No, he sent me on ahead. I bring his love and my love, and our extreme sorrow over Beth.

**AMY.** Yes. Thank you. (*Offers her hand.*)

**BROOKE.** (*Shakes her hand absently.*) Is—perhaps—anyone else at home?

**AMY.** Yes. Jo's home. Shall I call her?

**BROOKE.** Ah, no, no—just tell them all I'm home.

(*BROOKE exits.*)

**AMY.** Your umbrella—(*Sets the umbrella aside.*)

**JO.** (*Enters with MEG.*) Who was that?

**AMY.** Mr. John Brooke.

**JO.** And Father?

**AMY.** Not yet. Father sent Mr. Brooke home ahead of him.

**MEG.** Did John say anything else?

**JO.** Since when do we call him John?

**AMY.** He said he brings his love. He forgot his umbrella.

**JO.** Drat. Where is it? I'll take it to him.

(*AMY hands JO the umbrella, MEG takes it from her.*)

**MEG.** Mother calls him John. And after all he's done to help us, I'd think you'd like him better.

**JO.** Well, if you call him John, he'll go romantical.

**MEG.** Oh, nonsense.

**JO.** Well, if he did, what would you say?

**MEG.** I would simply say that I'm too young, that he is very kind but we must simply be friends, as before.

**JO.** Good! That's stiff and cool enough—

**MEG.** And then I'd walk with great dignity from the room.

(BROOKE enters.)

**MEG.** Mr. Brooke. Hello, Mr. Brooke!

**BROOKE.** Forgive me—I seem to have left my umbrella—

(JO tosses him his umbrella.)

**JO.** Come, Amy—something's burning on the stove. (*Aside to MEG:*) Remember what you plan to say.

(JO exits with AMY.)

**BROOKE.** Hello, Margaret. What do you plan to say?

**MEG.** (*Backing away.*) Mother will like to see you. I'll call her.

**BROOKE.** Your mother's not home. I saw her in the village. Are you afraid of me, Margaret?

**MEG.** (*Stops herself.*) No, of course not. Welcome home, Mr. Brooke. You've been so kind to Marmee and Father.

**BROOKE.** Margaret, while I was away, your letters meant so much to me.

**MEG.** Yes. We're all so grateful to you, Mr. Brooke.

**BROOKE.** Lovely letters—so full of home! (*Takes her hand.*)

**MEG.** (*Drops his hand.*) Oh, no—please don't!

**BROOKE.** I only want to know if you care for me a little.

**MEG.** I don't know... I'm all flustered. Please go away!

(AUNT MARCH enters.)

**AUNT MARCH.** What's all this?

**MEG.** Hello, Aunt March!

(BROOKE flees to the dining room.)

**AUNT MARCH.** I came to call on your father.

**MEG.** Father's not yet home. I'm *so* surprised to see you.

**AUNT MARCH.** That's evident. And who was that?

**MEG.** It's Father's friend.

**AUNT MARCH.** And what is "Father's friend" saying to make you blush like a peony?

**MEG.** Mr. Brooke came to get his umbrella.

**AUNT MARCH.** That boy's tutor? Making a proposal?

**MEG.** Hush! He'll hear you.

**AUNT MARCH.** You don't mean to marry this tutor? If you do, not one penny of my money goes to you.

**MEG.** I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March.

**AUNT MARCH.** Highty tighty! He's poor, I'll wager, and has no rich relations.

**MEG.** No, but he has many warm friends—

**AUNT MARCH.** He knows *you* have got rich relations.

**MEG.** Aunt March, how dare you? John is above such meanness. My John wouldn't marry for money any more than I would. We're used to being poor and we are willing to work. I shall be with him and he loves me—

**AUNT MARCH.** Well, I wash my hands of the whole affair! I'm done with you—with all of you forever!

(AUNT MARCH *exits*. BROOKE *enters*.)

**MEG.** Oh!

**BROOKE.** Thank you for defending me. You *do* care for me?

**MEG.** I didn't know how much, 'til she insulted you.

**BROOKE.** (*Embraces her.*) So you won't send me away, but let me stay and be happy? May I?

**MEG.** Yes, John.

**BROOKE.** And shall we tell them all at Christmas?

(JO *enters*.)

**BROOKE.** I don't think the secret will keep! Congratulate us, Sister Jo.

**JO.** Oh, no! Amy! Somebody do something! *(Falls on the floor.)* John Brooke is acting dreadfully and Meg likes it!

*(Blackout.)*

*(Lights up in the garret, where JO reads on the couch and eats apples. LAURIE ascends the stairs, throws himself down beside her and bites into an apple.)*

**LAURIE.** It's going to be a romantic Christmas.

**JO.** Harumph.

**LAURIE.** Seriously, Jo, you're just grumbling out of habit. Put your book down. We aren't little children any more.

**JO.** I don't like the look on your face. We're only sixteen.

**LAURIE.** And Meg is seventeen.

**JO.** Which is very much too young for—for anything.

**LAURIE.** There's something I must say. Must ask you.

**JO.** I have a suspicion what it is. Laurie, don't!

**LAURIE.** I must. We've got to have it out.

**JO.** Well, I don't plan to listen.

**LAURIE.** You must. Think of all we are to each other. We do everything together. Jo, I've loved you ever since I met you.

**JO.** Well, I love you, too, of course, Laurie, but not love with a capital L. That's not—

**LAURIE.** Oh, but I mean love with a capital L.

**JO.** I never meant to entangle you—

**LAURIE.** I want to be entangled.

**JO.** But you know my views on—on—

**LAURIE.** Marriage. You say you're against it. But girls are so strange you never really know. So I must ask, will you, Jo?

**JO.** Don't say it—

**LAURIE.** Marry me, Jo.

**JO.** I can't say "Yes" truly, so I won't say it at all. I'm happy as I am and love my liberty too well and not only that—

**LAURIE.** What? Say it all!

**JO.** I have to stay home with Father and Mother. I can't go off on my own and leave them. I promised Beth.

**LAURIE.** Why, Jo, why? You aren't made for that!

**JO.** I promised. Not only that—I don't think I'll ever marry.

**LAURIE.** Oh, there'll come a time when you'll care for somebody and love him tremendously and live and die for him. You will, it's your way, and I shall have to stand by—

**JO.** Oh, I doubt that very much. I've done my best. I'll never marry you and the sooner you believe it, the better for both of us—so now we've had it out!

*(LAURIE storms down the stairs. JO repairs to the garret.)*

### **Scene 5: Homecoming**

*(FATHER and MOTHER enter; LAURIE exits the house and meets them outside.)*

**FATHER.** Just a moment! Where are you going, young man?

**LAURIE.** To the devil!

**MARMEE.** What's the matter, Laurie?

**LAURIE.** Jo! *(Turns to FATHER:)* Sir?

*(MARMEE goes in.)*

**FATHER.** I've been wanting to meet you, Laurie.

**LAURIE.** Mr. March! *(They shake hands.)* I'll leave you to your family, sir.

## **THIS PLAY IS NOT OVER!**

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