

LITTLE WOMEN

Written by
Greta Gerwig

Based on the novel by Louisa May Alcott

I've had lots of troubles, so I write jolly tales.

- Louisa May Alcott

Note:

Where there is simultaneous or quick dialogue in the script, there is a SLASH in the middle of the speaker's dialogue, representing where the next actor should begin. The following actor's line will be started with a SLASH to indicate that it is interrupting another line.

When the text is in RED, it indicates that it is the **past timeline**, which begins in Winter of 1861.

When the text is in BLACK, it indicates that it is the **present timeline**, which begins in Fall of 1868.

Both timelines move forward from their origin point.

INT. NEW YORK. PUBLISHING OFFICE. 1868.

JO MARCH, our heroine, hesitates.

In the half-light of a dim hallway, she exhales and prepares, her head bowed like a boxer about to go into the ring. She puts her hand on the doorknob. A pause, and then, she opens it onto a disorderly room.

It is full of men. Some sit with their feet up on the desks, higher than their hats, which they do not remove for her. They smoke and read, hardly noticing that she has walked in.

Jo walks through the desks, looking for one in particular.

JO
(clearing her throat)
Excuse me.

MR. DASHWOOD (the oldest, smokiest gentleman) looks at her.

JO (CONT'D)
I was looking for the Weekly
Volcano office... I wished to see
Mr. Dashwood?

Mr. Dashwood stares silently.

JO (CONT'D)
(nervous, presenting
pages)
A friend of mine desired me to
offer a story, by her, she wrote it
- she'd be glad to write more if
this suits.

He stands and extends his rough, large hand. She gives him the manuscript.

MR. DASHWOOD
(turning the pages over)
Not a first attempt, I take it?

JO
No, sir; she has sold to "Olympic"
and "Scandal" and got a prize for a
tale in the "Blarney Stone Banner."

MR. DASHWOOD
A prize?

JO
(weakly)
Yes.

He now takes in Jo's appearance and her mended clothes.

MR. DASHWOOD

Sit.

Jo sits, hands folded, trying to cover the ink stains. Mr. Dashwood reads her story with a pen in hand, gleefully crossing out and making notes, changes. Every time his pen scratches, Jo feels her heart breaking. She's on the verge of tears when:

MR. DASHWOOD (CONT'D)

We'll take this.

JO

(looking up)

You will?

MR. DASHWOOD

With alterations. It's too long.

She nods and he hands it back to her, page after page with her work crossed out. She examines it.

JO

You've cut - I took care to have a few of my sinners repent.

MR. DASHWOOD

The country just went through a war. People want to be amused, not preached at. Morals don't sell nowadays.

(pointedly)

Perhaps mention that to your "friend."

Jo looks again at her completely altered story.

JO

What do you - that is, what compensation -

MR. DASHWOOD

We pay twenty-five to thirty for things of this sort. We'll pay twenty for that.

JO

(money over art)

You can have it. Make the edits.

Jo hands over the story, Mr. Dashwood hands over the money, business done.

JO (CONT'D)

(then)

Should I tell my, my friend that you'll take another if she had one better than this?

MR. DASHWOOD

We'll look at it. Tell her to make it short and spicy. And if the main character's a girl make sure she's married by the end.

(casually)

Or dead, either way.

JO

Excuse me?

But he's on to the next bit of business.

MR. DASHWOOD

What name would she like put to the story?

JO

Oh, yes - none at all if you please.

He considers her.

MR. DASHWOOD

Just as she likes, of course.

JO

Good morning, sir. Good day.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. DAY. CONTINUOUS. 1868.

The streets of New York. After the Civil War and at the brink of The Industrial Revolution. It is a city in the middle of *becoming*, the 20th century on the horizon. Horses, trolleys, young, old, black, white, immigrants, returning soldiers, factory workers, wealthy industrialists, fashionable women and poor mothers all crowd the streets.

We find Jo (also *becoming*) sprinting down the street with utter joy. She has pulled up her skirts and is *running* full steam. Not lady-running, flat-out RUNNING. For the joy of it.

LITTLE WOMEN

EXT./INT. BOARDING HOUSE. NYC. DAY. 1868.

Jo reading and walking at the same time, bounding two-at-a-time up the steps of a large brownstone boarding house. She stoops to pick up a cat who suns herself on the steps.

JO
(to the cat)
My Beth would like you very much.

As Jo walks through the house, into the drawing room, she lets the cat down, and goes straight to the fireplace. She stands with her back to it, to warm herself, and produces a small notebook and begins to write.

She is so engrossed with her writing that she doesn't hear the boisterous group of college students and professors, men and a few women, when they descend upon the room. She just keeps writing, until:

FRIEDRICH (O.S.)
Good afternoon, Miss March.

Jo looks up from her notebook to see **FRIEDRICH BHAER** looking down at her. He speaks with a French accent, and, like all Europeans, seems to know something that we Americans don't:

JO
(she straightens up)
Good afternoon, Professor.

FRIEDRICH
You're on fire.

JO
Thank you.

FRIEDRICH
(suddenly animated)
You're on fire!

Jo suddenly notices that the back of her dress has caught on fire. In a panic, another woman of the group helps her and the dress is put out.

Disaster is avoided, although not humiliation.

FRIEDRICH
(laughing)
I have the same habit, you see?

He shows her scorch marks on his jacket. Jo is about to laugh when, **MRS. KIRKE**, the landlady, bustles into the room:

MRS. KIRKE
Kitty and Minny are waiting!

Jo looks up the stairs to see the two little girls prancing.

JO
My students need me.

FRIEDRICH
Always working.

JO
(joke-dramatically)
Money is the end and aim of my mercenary existence.

FRIEDRICH
No one gets ink stains like yours just out of a desire for money.

Jo feels the intense pleasure and pain of being seen by someone, of knowing that they know you.

JO
(embarrassed, retreating)
Well my sister Amy is in Paris, and until she marries someone obscenely wealthy, it's up to me to keep the family afloat. Goodbye.

FRIEDRICH
(staring up after her)
Goodbye.

EXT. FRANCE. PARIS. DAY. 1868.

AMY MARCH, an angelic 20-year-old with golden curls, is painting a staged scene, along with a few other young artists. It is a classic scene of two young men and a young woman at a picnic, and Amy is rendering it realistically, imitating the 18th & 19th century painters she loved.

She looks at the painting of the young man next to her. He is doing something radically different - the paint is obvious, the colors are bright and un-life-like, space is flattened. It is not meant to be realistic: it is the beginning of modernism.

She looks back at her own piece and realizes that she might have missed the moment that she came here to master.

Perhaps she's already passed before her time. She continues working, troubled.

EXT. PARIS PROMENADE. DAY. 1868.

Amy rides in an open air carriage with **AUNT MARCH**, reading a letter from home. Everyone in Paris is out. Aunt March is only happy when she's complaining, and she's in excellent form this morning. It is the place to see and be seen and Amy March is doing both excellently.

AUNT MARCH

The decadents have ruined Paris, if you ask me. These French women couldn't lift a hairbrush.

No response from Amy.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)

AMY! I said, "These French women couldn't lift a hairbrush."

AMY

Oh yes! Very true, Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH

Don't humor me, girl. What do they write, your troublemaking family?

AMY

Mother doesn't say anything about Beth. I feel I should go back but they all say "stay."

AUNT MARCH

You can do nothing if you go back. The girl is sick, not lonely.

Amy gives her a hard look.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)

And you shouldn't go home until you and Fred Vaughn are properly engaged.

Amy blushes and puts the letter away.

AMY

Yes, and until I've completed all of my painting lessons, of course.

Aunt March looks at her, momentarily confused.

AUNT MARCH

What? Oh, yes, yes. Of course.

Amy looks at all the passers-by. She sees a somber young man, tall and dark and looking down as he walks. Suddenly!

AMY

STOP THE CARRIAGE! LAURIE! LAURIE!

Abandoning her primness, she launches out of the carriage and runs, nearly knocking people over. This is Theodore Laurence, **LAURIE**, a 26-year-old without a sense of direction, like most 26-year-olds. They hug joyously and un-self-consciously:

LAURIE

AMY! You're so /grown up!

AMY

/You wrote you'd come to the hotel!

LAURIE

I looked for you and couldn't find /you anywhere!

AMY

/You didn't look hard enough!

LAURIE

Maybe I just didn't recognize you, you've become so beaut/iful.

AMY

(making a face)
/Please don't.

LAURIE

I thought you liked that sort of thing!

AMY

NO. Where's your Grandfather?

LAURIE

Still in Germany. I'm on my own, traveling and /having fun.

AMY

(teasing him)
/and drinking and gambling and flirting...

LAURIE

Don't tell your mother!

AMY

Are you chasing some young girl across Europe?

LAURIE

(darkening)
No.

INT. TAILOR SHOP. AFTERNOON. 1868.

MEG MARCH, beautiful but with the melancholy of yearning emanating from her, is browsing the silks with Sallie Moffat, a rich young woman who possesses an air of casual boredom that comes from never having to work for what you have.

SALLIE

(to the clerk)

Twenty yards of the blue silk as well as the pink. Someone will be by for it later.

She looks over at Meg, who touches a beautiful grey silk:

SALLIE (CONT'D)

Oh Meg! That would look so lovely on you. I know just the dressmaker to send you to. You'll be the prettiest wife in Concord.

MEG

Oh no, John needs a new coat for winter and Daisy and Demi need new clothes and --

SALLIE

-- and his wife needs a new dress.

MEG

(trying to hide her embarrassment)

I can't... it's, I just can't.

SALLIE

He'll be so pleased with how you look that he'll forget all about the expense.

MEG

(equivocating)

I don't suppose it's *such* an extravagance.

SALES CLERK

Will twenty yards do?

MEG

(deciding)

Yes. Thank you.

And Meg watches, delighted but fighting guilt, as the beautiful fabric is cut.

EXT. MEG MARCH'S HOUSE. DAY. 1868.

From inside a modest rural cottage, Meg emerges, wiping her hands and muttering to herself.

MEG
(ashamed)
Fifty dollars, what was I thinking?

She sees her two 3-year-olds, a boy and a girl, **DAISY** and **DEMI**, playing in the yard. She sits down to watch them, feeling both grateful and trapped. They run up to her.

DAISY AND DEMI
Mommy -- mommy!

They fall into her arms, she accepts them and then sends them off to play again. We hear sounds a beautiful Bach piano sonata being played...

EXT. / INT. MARCH HOUSE. 1868.

... the music grows louder as we see empty rooms of the childhood home -- the attic, the dining room, the stairs. Finally we find **BETH MARCH**, alone at the piano. She stops playing suddenly, as if in pain. Then she takes a deep breath, feels the sunlight on her hand, and stretches it out.

MARMEE (O.S.)
Beth! Beth?

She doesn't respond.

INT. NEW YORK THEATRE. EVENING. 1868.

Shakespeare's Twelfth Night unfolds on stage. Jo is in the back, the cheap standing-room. She's so wrapped up that she moves in until she's practically leaning over the railing. It's the scene where Viola (dressed as a man) seduces Olivia.

OLIVIA
...That you do think you are not
what you are.

VIOLA
Then think you right, I am not what
I am!

Friedrich watches the play from his own, proper, seat. At a certain point, he sees Jo, and then watches her watching the play, her delight making him smile.

INT. NEW YORK THEATRE LOBBY. NIGHT. 1868.

The audience flows out of the theatre into the lobby. Jo, still in her theatrical reverie, spots Friedrich. She freezes, not moving, not wanting to be seen.

She then follows behind the band of friends, drawn to them in spite of herself.

INT. GERMAN BEER HALL. NIGHT. 1868.

It is a rowdy and raucous crowd, drinking and dancing. Jo walks through the crowd, taking it in, watching Friedrich. He knows everyone and can speak half a dozen languages. Another man young, speaking a language Jo doesn't know, offers his hand for the dance.

JO

I'm sorry, I only speak English...

YOUNG MAN

Come dance!

He pulls her into the dance, and she does her best to follow along. It's whirling and loud and wild. Before long, she finds herself paired with Friedrich and all self-consciousness leaves her. She is part of the night and the room and the music and she throws herself into movement, and we are taken back to....

THE PAST. INT. CONCORD. MARCH HOUSE. JO & MEG'S ROOM. 1861.

...the sisters, all together again in the past, in the snow-globe of girlhood and memory that is ever present but forever gone, are in a flurry of getting ready for a holiday party.

MEG

I know just who I'll dance with!

AMY

Who will you dance with, Jo?

JO

You know I never dance.

BETH

I *can't* dance.

AMY

Why can't we all go to the party?!
It's not fair!

Meg's hair is covered in papers, and Jo manipulates a pair of hot tongs. Meg struggles to get on a pair of slippers.

JO
Just wear your regular
/shoes.

MEG
(forcing it)
/These fit last winter!

Amy puts on jewels and rouge and tries to shape her nose.

AMY
My nose will simply not look
refined.

BETH
(to no-one)
I like your nose.

AMY
(reaching to Jo)
Now, Jo --

JO
-- don't touch me, thanks! I
already feel ridiculous I don't
want to look it!

AMY
You could be pretty if you tried.

JO
Don't want to, won't do it.

BETH
I don't want to go but I wish I
could hear all the music.

JO
I'll keep it all in my head and try
to sing it for you when I get home.

Jo goes back to working on Meg's hair. Beth watches Jo handle the tongs, amazed and slightly worried:

BETH
Ought they to smoke /like
that?

JO
(confident)
/It's the dampness drying.

AMY
What a queer smell - it's like...
burnt feathers.

JO
There, now you'll see a perfect
little ringlet.

Jo removes the tongs, and a burnt clump of hair follows. Jo screams and Meg screams because Jo screams.

AMY (gasps, half delighted) You're /ruined!
BETH /Why is her hair off?

JO
Meg, I'm so sorry!

MEG (looking in the mirror) What have you done?! /Marmee I'm spoilt! I can't go! My hair!
JO /I'm sorry! You shouldn't have asked me to do it! I ruin everything!

INT. GARDINER'S NEW YEAR'S PARTY. HALLWAY. NIGHT. 1861.

Meg and Jo walk down the hallway at the Gardiner's very fancy party, the party already in full swing. Meg is chastising Jo:

MEG
Don't stare, don't put your hands behind your back, don't say Christopher Columbus, don't say Capital, don't shake hands, don't whistle --

Meg is immediately pulled away.

SALLIE
Meg March! You look so pretty!

Sallie Moffat, at that moment Sallie Gardiner, pulls Meg away from Jo, who is left standing awkwardly.

JO
Meg...

Meg seems to put on another face and attitude, more grown up and elegant. Jo fades away into the back of the party.

INT. GARDINER'S NEW YEAR'S PARTY. CONCORD. NIGHT. 1861.

Jo, 16, miserable, glumly watches the dancers. She pulls at a string on her dress. She catches Meg's eyes, 17, laughing with her dance partner, and pleads with her to leave. Meg aggressively shakes her head, and Jo sighs, resigned.

A very large red-headed boy makes a beeline for Jo - in her terror, she looks for an escape.

She slips behind a curtain, and walking backwards, she nearly sits on Theodore Laurence (!), Laurie, a very serious looking 17-year-old boy.

JO
Dear me, I didn't know any
one /was here!

LAURIE
(rising)
/Don't mind me; stay, if you
like.

JO
I won't disturb you?

LAURIE
Not at all; I don't know many
people, and felt rather strange at
first, you know.

JO
So do I.

They stand there, unsure of what to do, both shy.

LAURIE
Miss March, isn't it?

JO
Yes, Mr. Laurence, but I'm not Miss
March, I'm only Jo.

LAURIE
And I'm not Mr. Laurence, I'm only
Laurie.

Their first burst of conversation has run its course, and they smile at each other, standing in the not-unpleasant awkwardness of meeting.

JO
Don't you dance?

LAURIE
I don't know how you do things here
yet - you see, I've spent most of
my life in Europe.

JO
EUROPE! That's CAPITAL!
(she catches herself)
I shouldn't use words like that.

LAURIE
Says who?

JO
Meg. She's my older sister.

They peek through the curtain and watch Meg dance.

JO LAURIE
That's her, see? The girl (looking)
in the violet /dress? /Very pretty.

JO
She reminds me to be good so Father
will be proud of me when he
returns.

LAURIE
Where is he?

JO
Volunteered for the Union Army. I
wanted to go fight with him. I
can't get over my disappointment in
being a girl.

Laurie doesn't look disappointed that she's a girl at all:

LAURIE
Jo ... would you like to dance?
With me?

JO
I can't, because...

LAURIE
Because what?

JO
You won't tell?

LAURIE
Never!

JO
I scorched my dress, see? Meg told
me to keep still, so no one would
see it. You can laugh if you want
to. It's funny, I know.

Laurie does not laugh, but looks quite tender.

LAURIE
Never mind that; I'll tell you how
we can manage.

EXT. GARDINER'S NEW YEAR'S PARTY. PORCH. NIGHT. 1861.

Laurie bows, Jo awkwardly curtsies and then they go dancing wildly up and down a wrap-around porch. It's actually very romantic in its exuberance. Sometimes Jo is the woman and sometimes the man - same with Laurie. They are mid-spin when they see Meg wildly gesture at them from inside: She's hurt.

MEG

My foot- I've hurt my ankle.

INT. GARDINER'S NEW YEAR'S PARTY. HALLWAY. NIGHT. 1861.

Meg limps, Jo supports her and Laurie trails behind.

MEG

How will I get home?!

JO

I don't see what you can do
except get a carriage or stay
/here all night.

MEG

/Carriages are too expensive.

LAURIE

Well, let me take you. It's right
next door.

MEG

No, thank you, we cannot accept.

LAURIE

You must take mine. Please!

MEG

No, it's so early -- you can't mean
to leave yet.

LAURIE

I always leave early - I do, truly.

JO

What choice do you have?

INT./EXT. MARCH HOUSE. NIGHT. 1861.

A laughing Marmee, holding a book and covered in flour, opens the door on Laurie and Jo, supporting Meg.

MARMEE

(laughing)

Goodness gracious, what have you
done!

Marmee has none of the pretensions of the other mothers, no artifice. She's a hippie before they existed.

The little girls, Amy and Beth come rushing down the stairs and attack the older girls.

JO
Here, make room, /Meg is a wounded soldier!

MEG
/I sprained my ankle dancing!

MARMEE
Oh Meg - You'll kill yourself for fashion one of these days. Hannah! We need ice!

AMY
Tell us about it!/
(re: Laurie)
What's *he* like?

BETH
(to Jo)
/Was the music wonderful?

Laurie stands apart, not wanting to be a disruption, but loving the March household, this slightly medieval utopia of artists and thinkers.

MARMEE
Come in come in! Apologies for the chaos: I enjoy baking in the middle of the night! Don't mind the clutter, Mr. Laurence, we don't.

LAURIE
Laurie, please.

JO
(calling over)
Can I call you Teddy?!

LAURIE
Yes!

MARMEE
You must be part of the girls' theatricals!

AMY
(pointedly)
I'm *Amy*.

LAURIE
Hello.

MARMEE

They could use an extra player,
although you'll have to fight Jo
for the male roles or play a girl.
Here, have a scone.

Marmee hands him the scone, as Hannah enters with ice for Meg's ankle. Amy keeps sneaking looks at Laurie.

MARMEE

(cracking herself up)
Laurie, how are your ankles? Do you
need ice?

LAURIE

(laughing)
No, thank you, ma'am.

Instantly, she sees his loneliness, his lack of a mother.

MARMEE

Oh, just call me Mother, or Marmee.
Everyone does.

He doesn't say anything, but looks as if he's about to cry.
He doesn't have a mother, and hasn't had one for a long time.

MEG

It really seems like being a
fine young lady to come home
from my party in a carriage
and have maids to /wait on
me!

JO

/I don't believe fine young
ladies enjoy themselves a bit
more than we do.

The girls laugh and prance and gossip around the warm fire.
He stands apart, loving them all, the whole family...

EXT. MARCH HOUSE. NIGHT. CONTINUOUS.

...but most especially Jo. As Laurie retreats back to his
big, lonely house, he looks across the field to Jo, writing
alone in the attic, absorbed with her work.

THE PRESENT. EXT./INT. NEW YORK BOARDING HOUSE. NIGHT. 1868.

Jo works with her writing costume on: an antique military
jacket. Her writing is like an attack, moving into enemy
territory and occupying space. Her hand starts to cramp, she
shakes it, stretches it, and then switches hands.

Suddenly she stops - she's heard something. She opens the
door, but the hallway is empty. She looks down and sees a
book, a very beautiful copy of The Complete Works of William
Shakespeare. She opens the cover - inside there is a note:

FRIEDRICH

(read to camera)

For the writer in the attic:
 Because you enjoyed the play so
 much tonight, I wanted you to have
 this. It will help you study
 character and paint it with your
 pen. I would love to read what
 you're writing, if you'll trust me.
 I promise honesty and whatever
 intelligence I can muster.
 Yours, Friedrich

Jo opens the book and almost greedily she begins to read,
 reciting the words to herself.

INT. PARIS. BALLROOM. 1868.

A gorgeous Paris ball, and Amy is lively and everyone's
 favorite at the party. She dances with Fred Vaughn most
 often, gossips with his sister and her friends, and is
 charming to everyone.

Suddenly, Amy sees something that makes her look sour, and we
 follow her gaze to see Laurie entering: He is loud, drunk,
 has two girls with him. They all fall into a sofa, laughing
 and loud.

Amy frowns and approaches. She stands before him, annoyed:

AMY

Laurie.

LAURIE

(bleary, looking up)

Amy.

AMY

I waited an hour for you.

LAURIE

I feel caught.

Laurie clumsily makes a space for her while the other ladies
 depart. Amy does not, and walks away, forcing him to follow:

LAURIE

Amy, please!

AMY

Do you want to know what I honestly
 think of you?

LAURIE
What do you honestly think of me?

AMY
I despise you.

LAURIE
(almost laughing)
Why do you despise me?

AMY LAURIE
Because with every chance for /Oh this is interesting.
being good, useful and happy,
you are faulty, lazy and
/miserable.

AMY
Selfish people do like to talk
about themselves.

LAURIE
Am I selfish?

AMY LAURIE
Yes, very selfish. With your /Beauty?
money, talent, beauty and
/health --

AMY
- ah you like that, you old vanity -
with all these good things to
enjoy, you can find nothing to do
but dawdle.

He drunkenly puts his hand over hers. He wears a ring on his
pinky finger, which he never takes off:

LAURIE
(making fun of her)
I'll be good for you, Saint Amy,
I'll be good!

AMY
Aren't you ashamed of a hand like
that?

LAURIE
No, I'm not.

AMY

It looks like it's never done a day of work in its life. And that ring is ridiculous.

LAURIE

Jo gave me this ring.

Amy considers him seriously.

AMY

I feel sorry for you, I really do. I just wish you'd bear it better.

LAURIE

You don't have to feel sorry for me, Amy. You'll feel the same way one day.

AMY

(with significance)

No, I'd be respected if I couldn't be loved.

LAURIE

(drunken meanness)

And what work have you done lately, oh great "artiste" - or have you been too busy imagining how you'll spend Fred Vaughn's fortune? FRED VAUGHN, ladies and gentlemen!

Amy smarts, his comment cut her to the core. Laurie takes his very messy leave and she looks to Fred --

AMY

Fred, I'm, I'm so sorry.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE DRAWING ROOM. NYC. DAY. 1868.

Friedrich holds a few newspaper clippings and handwritten pages. Jo paces and watches him read, nervous. He laughs, she smiles at his laughter.

He finishes reading, puts down the work, and looks at her. Jo instantly feels that she needs to explain.

JO

Those are just stories, of course, but I'm working on a novel.

FRIEDRICH

And your novel, it will be like this?

JO
Yes... so far /anyway.

FRIEDRICH
/With plots like this, duels
and killing?

JO
It sells.

FRIEDRICH
Why don't you sign your real name?

JO
My mother wouldn't like it, it's
too, gory for her.

FRIEDRICH
Yes?

JO
(explaining)
I want to help with the money I
make and not worry her.

He considers, then speaks:

FRIEDRICH
I don't like them.

JO
...

FRIEDRICH
Honestly, I think that they're not
good.

JO
(fumbling)
But, I, they're published in the
papers, and, people have always
said - I'm considered talented -

FRIEDRICH
Oh I think you're talented, which
is why I'm being so blunt.

Jo, deeply offended, starts to gather up her work.

JO
I can't afford to starve on praise.

FRIEDRICH
Are you upset?

JO
Of course I'm upset! You just told
me you didn't like my work!

FRIEDRICH
I thought you wanted honesty.

JO
(stuck)
I... do.

FRIEDRICH
Has no one ever talked to you like
this before?

JO
I've been rejected plenty of
times.

<p>FRIEDRICH But do you have anyone to take you seriously, to talk about your/work?</p>	<p>JO /And who made you High Priest of what's good and what's bad?</p>
---	--

FRIEDRICH
No one, and I'm not.

JO
Then why are you acting like it?

<p>FRIEDRICH Your reaction indicates that you must think there is some truth /in it.</p>	<p>JO /My <i>reaction</i> indicates that you are a pompous blowhard. Shakespeare wrote for the masses.</p>
--	--

FRIEDRICH
He was the greatest poet who ever
lived. He smuggled his poetry in
popular works.

JO
I'm no Shakespeare.

FRIEDRICH
Thank goodness, we already have
him.

JO
If you know so much about it, why
don't you do it yourself?

FRIEDRICH

I'm not a writer. I don't have the gifts you have.

She does what she does when she's hurt, which is that she gets incredibly mean instantaneously, without meaning to, and without being able to take it back.

JO

No, you don't, and you'll always be a critic, never an author, and the world will forget that you ever even lived /but no one..

FRIEDRICH

(amused)
/I'm sure they will.

JO

But, I'll be, but...

FRIEDRICH

Yes?

JO

(not sure of herself)
No one will forget Jo March.

FRIEDRICH

I can believe it.

An energy between them and then she kills it definitively.

JO

We are not friends, you are not my friend. And I don't want your opinion because I don't like you very much so just don't talk to me anymore, thank you.

She turns to leave, hiding all the emotions.

EXT. NEW YORK CITY. TWILIGHT INTO NIGHT. 1868.

Jo, in fury and confusion, walks the streets, letting her feelings burn out. She strides through the entire night that way, like Charles Dickens' Night Walks.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

After her walk -- Mrs. Kirke hands Jo a telegram:

MRS. KIRKE

Josephine, this came for you.

Jo tears it open and quickly reads.

MARMEE

Dear Jo, Our Beth has taken a turn
for the worse. Please, come home as
soon as you can.

JO

(breathes, crumpling the
note)

Beth.

INT. TRAIN. DAY. 1869.

Jo drifts off to sleep, lulled by the movement. The country speeds past her. As she goes forward towards her childhood home that is now no longer her home, and to the past that she can no longer find...

THE PAST. INT. ATTIC OF THE MARCH HOUSE. MORNING. 1861.

Jo March is sleeping in her large, cozy writing chair, a blanket wrapped around her. Her fingers are stained with ink and pages are strewn about her. Sounds of the day start to drift upstairs to her perch. Her eyes flutter open at the distant sound of...

MEG (O.S.)

Jo! Jo! Where /are you?

AMY (O.S.)

/Do you like these garlands?

BETH (O.S.)

They're beautiful!

Jo yawns and stretches and looks through the attic window out onto the snow-covered New England world:

JO

(whispered to herself)

Merry Christmas, world.

She wraps the blanket around her and quietly opens the attic door and sneaks down, watching her sisters, her heart's joy, fussing over the decorations Amy has made.

JO

(calling out)

Merry Christmas!

They all look up, delighted:

MEG

Jo! We've been up /for hours!

BETH

/What have you been writing?

Jo clomps down the stairs, pages of the play in her hand.

JO
I got carried away with our
delicious revenge play last night.
POISON!

AMY
No, no poison it's
/Christmas.

JO
(flopping down)
/Christmas won't be Christmas
without any presents.

MEG
It's so dreadful to be /poor.

AMY
(injured)
/I don't think it's fair for
some girls to have lots of
pretty things and other girls
nothing at all.

BETH
At least we have father and
mother and /each other.

JO
(glum)
/We haven't got father. And
we won't have him for as long
as this war drags on.

MEG
(putting down her sewing)
I wish I had heaps of money and
plenty of servants, so I'd never
need to work again.

JO
You could be a proper actress on
the boards!

MEG
(privately delighted)
I can't be an /actress.

JO
/They aren't all fallen
women.

AMY
(prancing)
I have lots of wishes, but my
favorite one is to be an artist and
go to Paris and do fine pictures
and be the best painter in the
world.

BETH
(cuddling up to Jo)
That's what you want too, isn't it
Jo? To be a famous writer?

JO
Yes, but it sounds so crass when
she says it.

AMY JO
Why be ashamed of what you /I'm not!
/want?

BETH
My wish is to have us all to be
together with Father and Mother in
this house - that's what I want.

AMY MEG
(under her breath) /SHHHHHH.
Beth is /perfect.

JO
What about your music, Queen Bess?

BETH
(blushing)
I only do that for us, I don't need
anyone else to hear it.

AMY
(trying to shape her nose)
You must not limit yourself.

MEG
(standing, ending it)
Mother proposed not having any
presents this Christmas because our
men are suffering in the army. We
can't do much, but we should make
our little sacrifices and do it
gladly.

JO
Don't play mother just because
she's not home.

Jo throws a pillow at Meg, it hits her squarely in the face.

AMY
Don't Jo; it's so boyish.

JO AMY
That's why I /do it. (disdainfully)
/I detest rude, unlady-like
girls.

JO
I hate affected little chits!

Jo tackles Amy and Beth and pulls in Meg. They commence play-fighting. In the tussle, Amy shouts out:

AMY
Watch my nose! My nose! It's
already no good!

HANNAH
(entering)
I know you don't care what *I* think,
but you don't want your mother to
find you like this, do you?

The girls untangle and run to Hannah. She's a good-natured woman old enough to be their grandmother.

MEG (kissing her)	JO
Of <u>course</u> we care what /you	/You're more family than
think.	wicked old Aunt March.

BETH	AMY
Don't, /Jo.	/Where <u>is</u> Marmee?

HANNAH
Goodness only knows. Some poor
creature came a-beggin', and your
ma went straight off to see what
was needed.

JO
I wish she could help other people
at a time convenient to us.

BETH
(holding her doll)
Joanna and I are *very* hungry.

AMY
Dolls don't get hungry, Beth.

JO
(holing up the pages)
I've re-written the climax and we
need to set it to memory. Amy, get
the costumes.

AMY	BETH
I've made a DIVINE hat, and	/I think the melancholy piece
painted those old shoes blue	I've figured out is pretty
/so she truly looks like a	good.
princess.	

Beth goes to the piano and Jo hands out the new pages:

JO
 Meg, wait until you see this
 /new speech!

BETH
 (marveling at the pages)
 /I don't see how you can
 write such splendid things,
 Jo! You're a regular
 Shakespeare.

JO
 Not quite.
 (to Amy)
 Miss Michelangelo, can you please
 rehearse the fainting scene?

JO
 You're as stiff as a poker
 /in that.

AMY
 (almost yelling)
 /I can't help it! I never saw
 anyone faint and I don't
 choose to make myself all
 black and blue. If I can go
 down easily, I'll drop. If I
 can't, I shall fall into a
 chair and be graceful; I
 don't care if Hugo does come
 at me with a pistol.

Amy falls into a chair, and Jo turns to Hannah:

JO
 Hannah...

HANNAH
 I'm not acting.

JO
 I didn't even say anything!

HANNAH
 I knew what you were going to say
 and I'm not acting.

EXT./INT. CONCORD. MARCH HOUSE. CONTINUOUS. 1861.

Marmee approaches her modest home, and sees her girls laughing and rehearsing, joyfully playing make-believe. She fights tears and sadness, about what, we don't entirely know. We just know that what she does as a mother isn't free. Of course it's not, nothing is ever free, even a joy a mother can make.

Just before she flings open the door, she puts a smile on her face. Like so many mothers, she creates magic where there is none, and enables her girls to be brave.

MARMEE

Merry Christmas, girls!

All the girls shriek and crowd around her.

MARMEE (CONT'D)

I'm so glad to see you so happy.

JO

Mother! Are you freezing,
/come have some tea.

BETH

/Hannah and I made these
cakes.

MEG

We finished the /sewing!

AMY

/Wait until you see my
portrait.

They clearly worship their mother. As she's talking, they follow her into the kitchen.

MARMEE

Jo, you look tired - were you up
again all night writing? Amy, come
kiss me! How are my girls?

BETH

I'm so /hungry!

JO

/I could eat a horse.

AMY

Stop it, /Jo!

MEG

/Look at this breakfast!

Marmee sees the expectant faces and wrestles with herself:

JO

What?

MEG

What is it?

MARMEE

Not far from here lives a poor
young woman, Mrs. Hummel. Her five
children are in one bed to keep
from freezing, and there is nothing
to eat. My girls, will you give
them your breakfast as a Christmas
present?

They are very quiet, because they really don't want to do it.

BETH

Is this where you say that Father
would want us to?

MARMEE

Yes.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSE. FORMAL DINING ROOM. DAY. 1861.

Mr. Laurence sits with his grandson, Laurie, his grandson's
tutor, Mr. Brooke. It is quiet and proper, the opposite of
the merry mayhem of the March household.

MR. BROOKE

(while being served)

Thank you.

(then to his host)

And thank you, Mr. Laurence, for
including me.

MR. LAURENCE

You're welcome. Perhaps you could
tutor my grandson in manners as
well as mathematics.

They both look at Laurie, who watches the March women walk
across the snow-covered field with their breakfast. Jo hits
Amy with a snowball, and there is a general tussle.

LAURIE

(quietly to himself)

What are they doing?

EXT. CONCORD. CHURCH. CHRISTMAS DAY. 1861.

All of the "proper" people of Concord are entering the local
church, serving God in the traditional manner.

The March family walks by, actually doing the Christ-like
thing, instead of performing their faith.

EXT. WOODS AROUND THE HUMMELL HOUSE. DAY. 1861.

The girls make their way through the woods and finally find
themselves outside of a shack that is so dilapidated that it
is hardly standing. This is the Hummel house.

INT. HUMMEL HOUSE. DAY. 1861.

The girls enter, tentative at first around such wretched
poverty. Mrs. Hummel is barely older than they are, and
frighteningly thin. Marmee shows no hesitation, immediately
taking the infant into her arms.

MRS. HUMMEL

Ach, mein Gott! It is good angels
come to us!

MARMEE

I'm back! We brought food and
blankets and sweaters. And we
brought some medicine. These are my
girls!

They all set about making the room less wretched, more home-
like. Marmee comforts the baby, Meg takes two children into
her lap, Amy cleans and straightens, Beth covers the other
children with blankets, Jo sets up the food.

INT. MARCH DINING ROOM. LATE AFTERNOON. 1861.

Freezing but happy, the women return, and immediately see
Hannah has arranged an unimaginable feast, with candy and ice
cream and cakes. Hannah pulls Mrs. March aside while the
girls marvel:

AMY

Is it /fairies?

BETH

/Santa Claus.

JO

No, it's old Aunt March!

HANNAH

Mr. Laurence sent it.

MEG

(surprised)

The Laurence boy's grandfather?
Why?

HANNAH

He saw you giving your Christmas
breakfast away and wanted you to
enjoy the day.

They all run to the window to look.

AMY

But I thought he was a mean old
man!

MARMEE

That's so generous of him.

JO

His grandson Laurie put the idea into his head! I know he did. We should make friends with him.

BETH

Boys scare me. And that big old house scares me.

AMY

(gorging on sweets)

Jenny Snow says that Mr. Laurence disowned his son after he went off with an Italian woman, and now his grandson is an orphan and he spends all of his time in that house locked up with his tutor.

MARMEE

(sharply)

He is a very kind man who lost his little girl when she was only a child, and now his son as well.

BETH

His daughter died? That's so sad.

AMY

But doesn't Laurie just seem so romantic? He's half *Italian*.

JO

What do you know? You've never spoken /to him!

MEG

(touching their petals)
/Flowers in winter.

MARMEE

I am not responsible for this feast, but I have got a surprise.

MEG/JO/BETH/AMY

A letter! / from Father! / Is he coming home? / Three cheers!

They gather around Marmee, sitting her into her easy chair, and making her comfortable. This is clearly their tradition:

JO

Don't I wish I could go...

BETH

Poor Jo - we can't give up our only /brother.

AMY

/It must be very disagreeable to sleep in a tent.

Jo takes her position behind the chair.

AMY	JO
Jo stands in the back so we	(smacks her head)
can't see her /cry.	/So what if I do?

BETH
(on her mother's lap)
When will he come home?

MARMEE
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.
(reading)
"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.

As the letter is being read, we see the sisters put on the play they had been rehearsing. With Marmee and Hannah cheering them on, they perform for the neighborhood children. The children are entranced as Jo, dressed as Hugo, with a black beard, a mysterious cloak, boots and a sword, calls out:

JO
What ho! Minion! I need thee!

MARMEE (V.O.)
...A year seems a very long time 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....

Meg enters as Hagar, the horrible old witch. A smoke effect and a well done homemade costume make the audience gasp:

MEG
Born of roses, fed on dew,
What charms and potions canst thou
brew?

Jo mouths the words along with her - she's written every one.

MARMEE (V.O.)
...I know they will be loving
children to you, do their duty
faithfully, fight their enemies
bravely...

Amy, as the Sprite, appears on top of a poorly constructed "tree," to give the illusion of "flying":

AMY

Hither I come, from my airy home,
afar in the silver moo -- AHHHHH!

In mid-speech and gesture, Amy falls with a loud crash:

JO

(breaking character)
Don't laugh! Act like it's all
right! Just keep going! Beth play!

Beth is revealed playing and trying to keep a straight face, while the sisters scramble to keep the performance going.

MARMEE (V.O.)

...and conquer themselves so
beautifully...

Princess Zara (Amy) and Roderigo (Meg) kneel before Don Pedro (Jo), as he pronounces them man and wife. Beth plays the final triumphant chords.

MARMEE

Brava! Brava!

The audience claps as the sisters bow - Jo gentlemanly, Meg demurely, Amy the diva, and Beth's small quiet curtsy. One woman rises to her feet with her applause and shouts:

MARMEE (V.O.)

....that when I come back to them I
may be fonder and prouder than ever
of my little women."

THE PRESENT. INT. TRAIN. DAY. 1869.

The whistle blows, Jo is being gently shaken awake.

RAILROAD PORTER

Your stop, ma'am.

JO

Thank you.

INT. BOARDING HOUSE. KITCHEN/LAUNDRY. NEW YORK. DAY. 1869.

Mrs. Kirke hangs laundry as Friedrich questions her:

FRIEDRICH

She's gone? Why?

MRS. KIRKE

I don't know. She just left.

FRIEDRICH

But she didn't say if she was coming back?

MRS. KIRKE

We didn't have a heart to heart, Professor.

(to a maid)

What are you doing? Why are you just sitting there? Go dust something.

And what about the girls? She was the best teacher they ever had.

FRIEDRICH

I know...

Friedrich looks troubled and serious.

EXT. CONCORD TOWN ROAD. DAY. 1869.

Jo, with her luggage, walks home on the familiar roads she knows so well. She breathes in the air and trudges onward.

THE PAST. EXT. CONCORD TOWN ROAD. MORNING. JANUARY, 1862.

The four girls are walking, bundled against the cold. The streets are more bustling, the atmosphere cozier. It is how childhood always is in memory -- brighter and better. They are back to the daily task of making a living.

MEG

It's so hard to go back to work after such /good times.

BETH

/I wish it was Christmas every day.

AMY

Or New Year's, wouldn't that be exciting?

JO

We're a bunch of ungrateful minxes!

MEG

Don't use such dreadful /expressions!

JO

/I like good strong words that mean something.

AMY

Well I have to go to school and I don't have any limes.

Limes? JO AMY
 The other girls are all trading pickled limes. I'm in debt. I owe ever so many limes.

MEG (giving her a quarter) JO (to Meg)
 Will that /do? /What did you do that for?

MEG
 I know what it is to want little things and feel less than other girls.

AMY
 Between that and the drawings I should wipe out my debt.

JO AMY
 What /drawings? (defensive)
 /Nothing!

Beth shudders.

BETH
 I'm just glad that mother doesn't make me go to that school with all those girls...

JO (reminded)
 Beth, after your shopping, I need you to work your way through the new sums and spelling and I'll check it all when I get home.

Meg looks at the sun, and speeds up.

MEG
 Hurry! I'll be late!

They break apart from each other at the fork in the road, Beth and Meg going one direction and Amy and Jo in another.

EXT. AUNT MARCH'S HOUSE. THE SAME DAY. 1862.

Jo hops over a fence and runs toward Aunt March's house.

INT. AUNT MARCH'S HOUSE. CONTINUOUS. 1862.

Aunt March dozes, poodle in her lap, while Jo stands by the bookcase and surreptitiously reads her own book.

She turns the page, trying to be as quiet as possible, but Aunt March wakes up.

AUNT MARCH (O.S.)
JOSY-/PHINE!

JO
(hiding her book)
/Yes!

AUNT MARCH
Is there a reason you stopped
reading Belsham?

JO
I'm sorry, I'll continue.

AUNT MARCH
(examining her)
You mind yourself, dearie, one day
you'll need me and you'll wish you
had behaved better.

JO
(carefully)
Thank you, Aunt March, for your
employment and many kindnesses, but
I intend to make my own way in the
world.

AUNT MARCH
No one makes their own way, not
really, least of all a woman.
You'll need to marry well.

JO
You are not married, Aunt
/March.

AUNT MARCH
/Because I was rich and made
sure to keep my money.

JO
So the only way to be an unmarried
woman is to be rich.

AUNT MARCH
Yes.

JO
But there are precious few ways for
women to make money.

AUNT MARCH
That's not true. You could run a
cat house, or go on the stage.
Practically the same thing.

JO
(says nothing)

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)
 Other than that, you're right,
 precious few ways for women. That's
 why you should heed me.

JO
 So I can get married.

AUNT MARCH
 No, so you can live a better life
 than your poor mother has.

JO
 Marmee loves her /life.

AUNT MARCH
 /You don't know what she
 loves. Your father cared more
 about educating freedmen's
 children than taking care of
 his family.

JO
 Yes, but he was right.

AUNT MARCH
 It is possible to be right and
 foolish.

JO
 I don't think so.

AUNT MARCH
 Well, you're not paid to think.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)
 (softening slightly)
 I know you don't care much about
 marriage now. I can't say I blame
 you, but I intend to go to Europe
 one more time, and I need a
 companion. How would you like to be
 the person I take?

JO
 I'd like that more than anything!

AUNT MARCH
 Then read and don't sneak around. I
 don't like sneaks.

INT. SCHOOL. THE SAME DAY. 1862.

During a break, one of the school girls whispers to Amy:

SCHOOL GIRL #1
 President Lincoln.

AMY

No! Father is fighting for him.

SCHOOL GIRL #2

My father says the war is a waste, we should just let them keep /their labor. (shocked) /It is immoral!

AMY

SCHOOL GIRL #2

Everyone benefited from the system, including you Marches - why should only the south be punished?

AMY

Perhaps we should *all* be punished.

SCHOOL GIRL #1

The Marches love a cause.

SCHOOL GIRL #3

Fine, just do Mr. Davis.

AMY

I don't know if I should.

SCHOOL GIRL #1

I'll wipe out your debt and give you five more limes besides.

Amy is seduced, and instantly starts drawing the (very good and accurate) caricature. The girls giggle. Amy gets carried away, drawing a conversation bubble with words "My eye is upon you, young ladies." More laughter. Suddenly, a shadow falls over them, and all the girls look up, scared, and move away. Amy, however, is too wrapped up in her drawing to notice. When she does, Mr. Davis looks down sternly at her.

INT./EXT. MR. LAURENCE'S HOUSE. DAY. 1862.

Laurie tries very hard to study with his tutor, Mr. Brooke, but it is hopeless, Laurie keeps jumping up and distracting himself with something in the room. His most recent position is standing like a statue, perched on a chair.

MR. BROOKE

Sit down. Sit down, Laurie. Latin is a privilege. Please, you have to learn this. I can't afford to lose this position. Just return to Cicero.

But Laurie is staring out the window.

LAURIE
There's a girl out there.

MR. BROOKE
No, there is not.

LAURIE
YES! Mr. Brooke, there is a girl!

He throws open the window and yells out:

LAURIE
Hello there! Are you hurt?

AMY
(sniffing but yelling)
I'm Amy.

LAURIE
Hello Amy, I'm Laurie!

AMY
I know. You brought my sister back
from the dance - I would have
never sprained MY ankle, I have
lovely small feet. Best in my
family. But I can never go home
again, I'm in such trouble. Look.

She holds up her hand, which is red and bleeding a little.

AMY (CONT'D)
Mr. Davis hit me.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSE. LIBRARY. DAY. 1862.

Amy, her hand now bandaged, sits looking at an art book,
pretending to be a very fine lady.

AMY
(doing a voice)
Tell the servants that I want this
painting purchased for me!
IMMEDIATELY!

Laurie laughs at this confident girl. Amy likes making him
laugh. Mr. Brooke shakes his head, frustrated. A servant
enters, followed by Jo and Meg.

SERVANT
(indicating Amy)
She's in here...

Meg goes instantly to Amy, while Jo gets distracted by all the books. Laurie stands when Jo enters:

	LAURIE	JO
Jo!		(bursting out)
		What richness! Theodore Lawrence you ought to be the happiest boy in the world!

LAURIE
A fellow can't live on books alone.

JO
I could.

Meg is tending to Amy, and Mr. Brooke can't help but stare at Meg, completely flummoxed by her beauty and goodness:

	MEG	JO
	What happened /little lamb?	(suspicious, to Amy)
		/What did you do?

AMY
(playing innocent)
Just a drawing and then... Mr. Davis hit me.

Amy starts crying again, holds up her hand. Meg has **taken off her gloves** and put them on a side table while she examines her sister's outstretched hand. Mr. Brooke eyes the gloves, he's drawn to the items so recently worn by Meg.

Jo, who has been roaming the room, stops in front of a portrait of Mr. Laurence. Laurie follows her gaze.

JO
Christopher Columbus, look at that.

LAURIE
That's my grandfather. Are you scared of him?

JO
I'm not scared of anyone! He looks stern, but my grandfather was much more handsome.

Unfortunately, during this speech, Mr. Laurence has entered with Mrs. March, unseen by Jo.

MARMEE
Jo! We do not compare grandfathers!

Jo spins around and sees Mr. Laurence and her mother.

MR. LAURENCE

You think he's more handsome, hey?

JO

Oh, no. You are very handsome. I didn't mean...

MR. LAURENCE

(cracking half a smile)

I knew your mother's father. You've got his spirit.

JO

Thank you, sir.

Marmee tends to Amy.

MARMEE

You are not to attend that school any more.

JO

Good, that man has always been an idiot.

MARMEE

Jo will teach you.

JO

ME?! I already teach Beth!

MEG

You're a good teacher.

MR. BROOKE

(trying with Meg)

Yes, women being taught at home is much more proper, I believe.

MEG

(turning to him)

Only because the schools for women are so poor.

MR. BROOKE

Indeed, quite right.

AMY

I wish all the girls would leave his horrible school and that he would die.

MARMEE

You did wrong, Amy, and there will be consequences.

(to Laurie)

Thank you so much for taking care of Amy. My girls do have a way of getting into mischief.

LAURIE

So do I!

MARMEE

(smiling)

Then you should run over and we'll take care of you.

LAURIE

And please come here,
whenever you'd like. And tell
Beth to come /too.

JO

/YES! Beth would adore the
piano!

MR. LAURENCE

Is she the quiet one?

MEG

That's our Beth.

MR. LAURENCE

(pretend business-like)

Tell the little girl to use our
piano.

LAURIE

And Jo, borrow any book you'd like!

AMY

And may I come look /at the
paintings?

MR. BROOKE

(to Meg)
/There is also a lovely
greenhouse..

MARMEE

We must be going. Girls?

JO/AMY/MEG

Thank you/ Please come over/Many
thanks/Our apologies.

The women leave and Mr. Brooke notices Meg has left her glove behind.

MR. BROOKE

Oh, Miss Meg! You forgot your
glove!

The men are left standing in the silence of their absence.
Mr. Laurence breaks the spell:

MR. LAURENCE
Well, back to work, back to work.

THE PRESENT. EXT. MARCH HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

Jo looks towards the Laurence's house, which is dark,
shutters closed. It doesn't seem right without Laurie in it.

She looks in the forest by the pond to find an old mailbox.

She produces a key with a red ribbon and holds it in her
hand, and we and she are transported back to....

THE PAST. INT. MARCH ATTIC. DAY. 1862.

Meg, Beth, Jo and Amy are all dressed as men, with hats and
spectacles and pipes - Meg reading from the homemade
newspaper in her lovely sonorous voice.

MEG
(finishing)
A NEW PLAY, written by Miss Jo
March, will appear at the Barnville
Theatre, in the course of the next
few weeks, which will surpass
anything ever seen before on the
American stage.

JO
Starring the greatest actress from
here to the Mississippi River, Miss
Meg March.

MEG
WEEKLY REPORT Meg- Good. Jo- Bad.
Beth- Very Good. Amy- Middling.

BETH AMY
Excellent. Well done, sirs.

JO
Mr. President and gentlemen, I wish
to propose the admission of a new
member. One who highly deserves the
honor, would be deeply grateful,
and would add immensely to the
spirit of the club. I propose Mr.
Theodore Laurence!

MEG AMY
No! Absolutely not!

JO
 (breaking formality)
 Come now, let's have him.

AMY
 He's a real boy!

MEG
 We don't want any boys. This is a club for ladies.

BETH
 I think we should to do it, even if we are afraid. I say yes. It's Laurie!

JO
 Now then, everybody vote, and remember that it's our Laurie and say "AYE!"

MEG (reluctantly) Aye. AMY

JO
 And, as there is no time like the present!

Jo throws open the doors of the closet, and Laurie is there, already dressed for the occasion of the meeting.

AMY You /traitor! MEG /You rogue!

LAURIE
 Ladies, please - this is my stratagem, I deserve the blame: Jo only gave into it after lots of teasing.

Laurie bows deeply.

JO
 Hear hear!

LAURIE
 I merely wish to say, that as a slight token of my gratitude and as a means of promoting friendly relations between adjoining nations, I propose this set of keys for a little post office I've made in the forest by the pond.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

Allow me to present four copies of the key, and with many thanks for your favor, take my seat as part of the club.

He lays the four keys (with different colored ribbons) before them and bows again and they all cheer.

THE PRESENT. EXT. MARCH HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

Jo holds the very same key and opens the post office box - nothing, of course. She shuts it back up and trudges across the field to her childhood home.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. KITCHEN. DAY. 1869.

Jo walks in the kitchen, and is immediately surrounded by Hannah, Meg, Marmee, and Demi and Daisy. They unload her bags and sit her in a chair and pepper her with questions.

JO
Hello!

HANNAH
Thank God you're home!

MEG
Oh Jo I've missed you!

MARMEE
We could have come to get you!

JO
(leaning down to the children)
Daisy and Demi! You've gotten so big!

MEG
I wish you were here to teach them...

JO
(hugging Meg)
I'm here now...

HANNAH
It's so good to have you home! I think the loneliness got to Beth, though she ain't said anything.

JO
Beth, where is Beth?

Jo turns to Marmee, who shows the truth in her eyes.

MARMEE

She's upstairs. Oh, my Jo. We all thought she was better but the fever had weakened her heart.

Jo produces an envelope full of money.

JO

Take this and find her the best doctor you can.

MARMEE

No, you need this money to live in New York.

JO

(shaking her head)

I'm not going back. I'm using the rest to take her to the sea and get her strong.

She hugs all the women again.

JO

When is Amy coming home?

Marmee and Meg exchange glances.

MARMEE

We didn't want to worry her.

JO

(sharply)

Does she not know?

MEG

Beth insisted we not tell her because she didn't want to ruin Amy's trip.

JO

(rueful)

Amy has always had a talent for getting out of the hard parts of life.

MARMEE

Jo, don't be angry with your sister...

THE PAST. INT. MARCH HOUSE. EVENING. 1862.

Jo, in her and Meg's room, places a pretty cover page on top of the novel she has written. She lovingly writes "For Father," and hears:

MEG (O.S.)

Jo! Jo, where are you? I can't find my other glove!

JO

(hollering)

TAKE MINE!

Jo puts her novel carefully in a drawer that is filled with her finished writing, and closes it.

MEG (O.S.)

Jo we're going to be late!

AMY

Where are you going?

JO

(entering)

You're not invited.

AMY

You are going somewhere with Laurie, I know it!

JO

Yes, we are, now stop bothering.

MEG

Do you have the tickets?

JO

Yes! Hurry up!

AMY

You're going to the theatre with Laurie. Meg, please, can I come?

MEG

I'm sorry, dear, but you weren't invited.

JO

You can't go Amy, so don't be a baby and whine about it.

AMY
I've been shut up in here and I
never get to go anywhere. Beth has
her piano but I'm so lonely!

BETH
(from the piano)
I can teach you chords.

AMY
I don't want chords, I want
to go to the /theatre!

JO
NO. I think you'd hate to
poke yourself in where you're
not wanted. We already have
to deal with dull Mr. Brooke.

MEG
I like him, he's kind.

AMY
I'll pay for myself!

JO
You will not come.

MEG
I'm sorry, my sweet, but Jo is
right. Next time.

JO
(leaving)
Come, Meg, stop petting her!

AMY
You'll be sorry for this Jo March!
You will! You'll regret this!

INT. THEATRE. NIGHT. 1862.

Jo and Meg watch the play, which is a campy vaudeville kind of thing. They are completely engaged in the proceedings. The men are watching them: Laurie looks at Jo while Mr. Brooke looks at Meg.

INT. JO AND MEG'S ROOM. EVENING. 1862.

Amy sneaks into Jo and Meg's room, searching every drawer and hiding place for the novel that she knows is there. She finally finds it in the bureau. She pulls out the novel that Jo has just lovingly placed there.

EXT. THEATRE. NIGHT. 1862.

As they leave the theatre, Mr. Brooke offers Meg his arm, and she takes it. Jo notices and doesn't like it at all.

Laurie sees Jo's expression and offers his own arm in mock chivalry. She punches him in the shoulder, and then races up, taking her sister's other arm, pulling her away from Mr. Brooke.

INT. KITCHEN. EVENING. 1862.

Amy places page after page into the fire, watching it burn, and feeling nothing but terrific about it.

INT. MARCH LIVING ROOM. NIGHT. 1862. CONTINUOUS

Meg and Jo waltz in. Beth is playing with her dolls and Amy is sitting and reading, suspiciously quiet. Jo sprints upstairs.

JO

(yelling down as she runs
up the stairs)

Meg you're a million times better
than she was - although she was a
terrific fainter!

MEG

(musing to herself)
I wonder how she managed to
turn white /as she did?

JO (O.S.)

/Ugh, that Mr. Brooke, could
he be any more... *obsequious?*

MEG

(hollering back)
I thought he was very well-
mannered.

JO

(from upstairs)
Hold on, let me just get this idea
down.

MEG

Beth what's your favorite eye
color?

BETH

(quickly)
Purple.

MEG

(wrapped up in her own
story)
Mr. Brooke has blue eyes and an old
soul which is much more important
than money.

Jo re-appears, walking slowly.

Nothing from Jo.

MARMEE

Amy...

AMY

(a rush of words)

It's just that the only thing you care about is your writing so it's not as if I could hurt you by ruining one of your dresses. And I really did want to hurt you.

AMY (CONT'D)

I am the most sorry for it now. I'm so sorry.

Marmee approaches the bed.

MARMEE

Don't let the sun go down on your anger. Forgive her. Help each other, and you begin again tomorrow.

JO

(running from the room)

She doesn't deserve my forgiveness. I will hate her! I will hate her forever!

INT. MARCH HOUSE. KITCHEN. MORNING. 1862.

A very tense breakfast: Jo's eyes are red and puffy and a remorseful Amy tries to sit beside her and make peace, but Jo changes seats away from her. Amy looks pleadingly at Meg.

Laurie bursts open the back door, unaware of all the trouble.

LAURIE

Good morning ladies! It's brisk and brilliant and I think the last day for the river - get your ice skates!

Jo springs up, thrilled to have something to do.

JO

One second! Go down, and I'll /be right there!

AMY

/I want to come too! Last time you promised I could go!

Jo, not acknowledging her, grabs her skates and races out.

Farther along the river, Laurie and Jo are trying tricks and spins, when Jo suddenly feels a pang of guilt, but shoves her feelings down and races to catch Laurie.

She plows into Laurie, toppling him. They are both laughing when just at that moment - CRRAACCCKKK. The sound of ice splitting. And a high pitched scream:

AMY (O.S.)
HELP! HELP!

Laurie and Jo freeze and look at each other, and in the same instant they scramble up, Jo screaming.

JO
Amy! It's AMY!

They race back, Jo sending up a breathless prayer, an incantation, a pleading with the universe:

JO
Oh god, oh god, dear god please...

They find Amy surfacing and screaming and then going back under. Jo is almost paralyzed with terror...

JO
No... no...

... but Laurie has leapt to action.

LAURIE
Jo! Get a branch!

Jo obeys quickly, blindly, using the incredible strength that is available to people in times of crises - Jo drags a large branch over to Laurie, who stretches it over to Amy:

LAURIE
Grab on!

She does, and Laurie and Jo both lie flat on their stomachs so as not to disturb the ice, as they pull together. Jo is terrified but keeping herself together to get Amy to safety. The effort makes her own hands bleed. She and Laurie give one last pull and Amy is back on firm ground.

Tears are streaming down Jo's face as she strips off all her warm clothes and bundles them around Amy.

JO
My sister, my sister, dear God
thank you for my sweet sister.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. AMY AND BETH'S ROOM. EVENING. 1862.

Amy is asleep, covered in blankets. Jo is slumped down on the floor beside her, not even feeling herself worthy of a chair. Marmee adjusts Amy's blanket, and then looking at Jo, decides to take a seat beside her, on the floor:

MARMEE

She's asleep.

JO

If she had died it would've been my fault.

MARMEE

(cheerfully)

She will be fine, the doctor said he didn't even think she'd catch cold.

JO

What is *wrong* with me? I've made so many resolutions and written sad notes and cried over my sins but it doesn't seem to help. When I get in a passion I get so savage, I could hurt anyone and *enjoy* it.

MARMEE

You remind me of myself.

JO

But you're never angry.

MARMEE

(honestly)

I'm angry nearly every day of my life.

JO

You are?

MARMEE

I'm not patient by nature, but with nearly forty years of effort I have learned to not let it get the better of me.

JO

(resolutely)

I'll do the same, then.

Marmee touches her daughters face.

MARMEE

I hope you'll do a great deal
better than me. There are some
natures too noble to curb, too
lofty to bend.

The two women sit beside each other as Amy sleeps. Jo puts her head on Marmee's shoulder.

THE PRESENT. INT. BETH'S ROOM. DAY. 1869.

Jo, sitting by the bed, watches over Beth as she did for Amy. She attempts to write while Beth sleeps. She keeps starting, crossing things out. She is divinely dissatisfied.

She gives up and picks up one of Amy's letters. As she's reading, Beth opens her eyes and sees Jo sitting there.

BETH

Jo.

JO

Oh, Beth! My /love!

BETH

/You didn't need to come...

JO

I never should've left. Do you need anything? Here take some water.

BETH

It's so good to see your face.

JO

We're going to the sea to get you strong and /well.

BETH

/The sea!

JO

I want you dancing by the time Amy gets back.

BETH

(worried)
She's not cutting her trip short, /is she?

JO

No, no...

BETH

Good. Is there any news? What does she say?

JO

She writes that Laurie is there... I'm glad he's with her, he won't respond to any of my letters.

BETH
Do you miss him?

JO
(tearing up)
I miss everything.

BETH
I know.

Jo bows her head on Beth's bed.

THE PAST. EXT. LAURENCE HOUSE. SPRING DAY. 1862.

Meg is saying goodbye to everyone as she sets off for her adventure to visit Annie Moffat. Mr. Brooke is carrying her baggage, Hannah and the sisters and Marmee are helping with odds and ends, Laurie is "boxing" with Jo, and Mr. Laurence is there in his proper, "over-seeing-things" kind of way.

AMY
HURRY UP YOU TWO! MEG IS GOING TO
BE GONE FOR A WEEK!

LAURIE
Coming!

JO
(to Laurie)
You take the other carriage and
surprise her - make sure she
doesn't fall in love!

LAURIE
Yes, Captain /Jo!

MEG
(to her Mother)
/It was so kind of Annie to
invite me. Thank you for
letting me go, Marmee.

MARMEE
Just be who you are, my sweet Meg.
(handing her a necklace)
It was mine when I was your age.

MEG
Oh mother! Thank you!

MARMEE
I've never understood saving
jewelry until marriage - pretty
things should be enjoyed.

JO
 (to Laurie, while kneeling
 and removing a ring from
 her finger)
 Yes, pretty things should be
 enjoyed.

Jo places the ring in Laurie's hand.

AMY
 (pouting)
 I wish I could go to the debutante
 ball.

MR. BROOKE
 (aside to Marmee)
 Do you think this is a good idea,
 her going away like this?

MARMEE
 Girls have to go into the world and
 make up their own minds about
 things.

JO
 (to Meg)
 Don't forget about us.

MEG
 I won't Jo, it's only a week!

HANNAH
 (handing a pair of shoes
 to Marmee)
 She needs to have some decent
 shoes.

MEG
 Thank you again for the carriage,
 Mr. Laurence. I don't know how to
 repay you.

MR. LAURENCE
 Nonsense!
 Although, there is one thing -

MEG
 Anything!

For a second, Mr. Laurence's eyes flick to Beth - but then he
 directs his comments to Marmee.

MR. LAURENCE

It occurred to me today that my daughter's piano suffers from want of use.

MEG

Does /it?

JO

/Shhhhh!

MR. LAURENCE

Wouldn't one of your girls like to run over, and practice on it now and then, just to keep it in tune? If they don't care to come, why, never mind.

BETH

(bursting out)

Oh sir, they do care, very very much!

MR. LAURENCE

(gently)

Are you the musical girl?

BETH

I love it dearly, and I'll come, if you are quite sure nobody will hear me, and be disturbed.

MR. LAURENCE

Not a soul, my dear.

(to the driver)

Drive on, and keep her safe!

Meg is pulled away by a carriage, and waves goodbye to everyone, they run down the road after her.

EXT. ANNIE MOFFAT'S HOUSE. BOSTON. DAY. 1862.

Meg arrives at a very grand, beautiful house, and suddenly feels quite self-conscious in her clothes.

INT/EXT. LAURENCE HOUSE. DAY. 1862.

Mr. Laurence watches from an upper window as a very timid Beth tries to walk bravely across the lawn. She stops, and turns back and walks towards her house, and then turns around again, finally making it all the way into the Laurence house.

INT. ANNIE MOFFAT'S HOUSE. DAY. 1862.

All the other girls are in their fabulous dresses, parading up the grand staircase. Meg trails in her plain dress.

ANNIE

Now what dress will you wear tonight, Meg?

MEG

(ashamed, but hiding it)
I will wear this one.

SALLIE

That one? Can't you send home for another?

MEG

I haven't got another.

SALLIE

Only the one? Oh, that's so /funny.

ANNIE

(jumping in)
/Not at all. There's no need of sending home, Daisy - I'm going to call you Daisy now - I've got a sweet pink dress laid away, and you will wear it to please me, won't you, Daisy?

MEG

If it's alright.

ANNIE

Of course!

INT. LAURENCE HOUSE. DAY. 1862.

Beth enters the big house and makes her way to the conservatory, looking at the piano with love.

INT. ANNIE MOFFAT'S HOUSE. STAIRS. DAY. 1862.

All the young men in their tuxedos wait for the young women to descend down the grand staircase - their parents watch proudly. The young ladies walk down the stairs like fancy Easter Eggs, Meg the most beautiful of all. She's a triumph.

INT. ANNIE MOFFAT'S HOUSE. DAY. 1862.

Meg is done up nearly beyond recognition. She's powdered and corseted and drinking and flirting. In fact, she's kind of great at it.

ANNIE

Everyone is in love with you,
Daisy! You have to keep my dress.

MEG

I can't keep your dress!

Suddenly, Laurie is standing in front of her. Meg starts.

ANNIE

Have fun, little Daisy.

And Annie retreats with her friends, giggling again.

MEG

(trying to be normal)
Laurie! I didn't know you were
going to come!

LAURIE

It was supposed to be a surprise.

MEG

And what a lovely surprise it is.

LAURIE

Why are they calling you "Daisy"?

MEG

It's their pet name /for me.

LAURIE

/Meg is a perfectly good
name.

MEG

It's just like playing a part, to
be Daisy for a little while.

LAURIE

What would Jo say?

Meg says nothing but looks concerned.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

You wouldn't actually marry one of
these men, would you?

MEG

I might.

LAURIE

(re: her champagne)
You'll have a terrible headache
tomorrow.

MEG

It's a good thing that it's still
tonight, then.

(then)

Do you like the way I look?

LAURIE

No I don't.

MEG

Why /not?

LAURIE

/I don't like fuss and
feathers.

MEG

You...you are the rudest boy I ever
saw!

Meg, in her anger and hurt, inelegantly hands him her
champagne and accepts a dance with the boy standing nearest.

INT. LAURENCE HOUSE. DAY. 1862.

A very nervous Beth sits down and sees the sheet music in
front of her. At first she is tentative, trying to play
quietly, but soon she plays with abandon. She is on fire. Mr.
Laurence, sitting on the stairs, is deeply moved by Beth's
music. Tears stream down his face.

INT. MOFFAT BALLROOM. NIGHT. 1862.

Meg feels faint from the corset and the champagne, and leans
her head against a cool windowpane, hot and ashamed. Laurie
comes and sits beside her.

LAURIE

Please forgive me and come dance.

MEG

(still hurt)

I'm afraid it would be too
disagreeable for you.

LAURIE

I don't like your dress, but I
think you are just... splendid.

Meg smiles, and Laurie smiles at her.

MEG

I know it's silly, but please don't
tell Jo. Let me have my fun
tonight. I'll be desperately good
for the rest of my life.

INT. MOFFATT BALLROOM. NIGHT. 1862

The two of them are now dancing, looking young and sincere and terrific. They whirl and spin and laugh and the music plays on as the picture changes to...

THE PRESENT. INT. MEG'S HOUSE. KITCHEN. NIGHT. 1869.

Meg sits scared and ashamed, and John - Mr. Brooke, intelligent and kind and handsome - examines the two ledger books. He struggles to understand.

MEG

I'm sorry, John. The silk was the first real expense.

JOHN

(making the best of it)
Fifty dollars, while a lot, is not, I suppose, too much for a dress, with all the notions that are needed to finish it these days.

MEG

Well, it's not exactly even a dress yet... It's just the fabric.

John takes off his glasses, overwhelmed.

JOHN

Oh, I see.

MEG

(working herself up)
I know you are angry, John. I don't mean to waste your money, but I can't resist when I see Sallie buying all she wants, and pitying me because I don't. I try to be contented, but it is hard, and, and...

(honestly and quietly)

I'm tired of being poor.

John bows his head, wounded.

JOHN

I was afraid of this.
I do my best, Meg.

Instantly regretful, Meg begs forgiveness:

MEG

Oh, John, my dear, kind, hard-working boy. I didn't mean it! It was so wicked, so untrue and ungrateful, how could I say it!

JOHN

(sadly)
Perhaps you meant it.

MEG

No! Not a bit! We'll figure out a way to get you your coat as well, and then won't we be grand, the two of us?

JOHN

(pats her hand, rises)
I can't afford it, my dear.

MEG

John, but --

JOHN

I need to go to bed.

John gets up from the table.

JOHN (CONT'D)

(pausing, but not turning around)

And I really am very sorry that you have had to do without so many beautiful things. And that you're married to someone who can't give them to you.

He leaves, and she is terrified that she's broken the man she loves so much.

INT. PARIS. ARTIST'S STUDIO. DAY. 1869.

Amy is looking through her own paintings and sketches and has a disturbed expression on her face. Laurie enters. His lot in life is always to be apologizing to one March sister or another, and he looks truly contrite.

LAURIE

Hello Amy!

AMY

(not turning around)
I don't want to see you.

LAURIE

Oh, Amy I'm so sorry for how I
behaved. Please? Forgive me?

AMY

(still not turning)
Have you been drinking
/again?

LAURIE

/Only a little, and it's 4pm,
you can't be too hard on me.

AMY

Someone has to do it.

LAURIE

So when do you begin your great
work of art, Raphaella?

AMY

(finally turning)
Never.

He sees her face, the ashen worry traced on it.

LAURIE

What - why?

AMY

(grim)
I'm a failure. Jo is in New York,
being a writer, and I am a failure.

LAURIE

That's quite a statement to make at
twenty.

AMY

Rome took all the vanity out of me.
And Paris made me realize I'd never
be a genius. I'm giving up all my
foolish artistic hopes.

LAURIE

Why should you? You have so much
talent and energy.

AMY

Talent isn't genius, and no amount
of energy can make it so. I want to
be great, or nothing. I won't be a
common-place dauber, so I don't
intend to try anymore.

Laurie watches her and then says conspiratorially:

LAURIE

What women are allowed into the club of geniuses anyway?

AMY

The Brontes?

LAURIE

That's it?

AMY

I think so.

LAURIE

And who always declares genius?

AMY

Well, men, I suppose.

LAURIE

They're cutting down the competition.

AMY

That's a very complicated argument to make me feel better.

LAURIE

Do you though? Feel better?

AMY

I do think that male or female, I'm a middling talent.

LAURIE

Middling talent? Then may I ask your last portrait be of me?

Amy laughs.

AMY

All right.

LAURIE

Now that you've given up all your foolish artistic hopes, what are you going to do with your life?

AMY

Polish up my other talents and be an ornament to society.

LAURIE
Here is where Fred Vaughn comes in,
I suppose.

AMY
Don't make /fun!

LAURIE
(laughing)
/I'm not!

LAURIE
You are not engaged, I hope?

AMY
No...

LAURIE
But you will be, if he goes down
properly on one knee?

AMY
Most likely, yes.

AMY
He's rich, richer than you, even.

LAURIE
I understand queens of society
can't get on without money. But it
does sound odd coming from one of
your mother's girls.

AMY
I've always known that I would
marry rich. Why should I be ashamed
of that?

LAURIE
There is nothing to be ashamed of,
as long as you love him.

AMY
Well, I believe we have some power
over who we love, it isn't
something that just happens to a
person.

LAURIE
I think the poets might disagree.

AMY
Well. I'm not a poet, I'm just a
woman. And as a woman I have no way
to make money, not enough to earn a
living and support my family.

AMY (CONT'D)

Even if I had my own money, which I don't, it would belong to my husband the minute we were married. If we had children they would belong to him not me. They would be his property. So don't sit there and tell me that marriage isn't an economic proposition, because it is. It may not be for you but it most certainly is for me.

The sound of a carriage approaching, and Amy gives a little start:

AMY

That will be Fred now.
(to Laurie)
How do I look? Do I look all right?

Laurie looks at her, really looks at her for the first time.

LAURIE

You look beautiful. You are...
beautiful.

She suddenly blushes, but smiles in thanks. And then runs off to greet Fred. From the top of the staircase, Laurie looks at her and Fred embrace, not sure of what he's feeling.

THE PAST. EXT. BEACH. DAY. 1862.

On a perfect spring day, Laurie, playing the host, makes the introductions of the British family to the March women. And he introduces **Fred Vaughn**, who, of course, we already know as Amy's potential husband.

LAURIE

This is Fred Vaughn,
(a handsome young man)
and his sister Kate,
(a prim looking girl)
and of course you know Mr. Brooke -
and this is Meg, Amy, Beth and Jo.

Jo tips her oversized hat.

FRED

(British accent)
So pleased to meet you.

AMY

Oh, how *elegant*.

AMY (CONT'D)
 (suddenly intense)
 Remember the name "Amy March." I'm
 going to come find you one day in
 London.

FRED
 Oh, I certainly will!

EXT. BEACH. DAY. 1862.

KITES! BADMINTON! OCEAN!

- A badminton game between Fred and Amy on one team and Jo and Laurie on the other while Beth cheers on both sides.

- Sallie tries to impress Kate and flirt with Fred.

- Fred tries to flirt with Jo, who kicks him.

- Everyone flies kites.

- Jo and Laurie run into the ocean.

- Amy settles with a sketchpad, drawing Laurie - this is the picture we will see later (earlier).

- Mr. Brooke and Meg are talking and flirting and skipping stones and generally being adorable and have that look of intimacy.

- Jo, trying to practice her badminton skills, keeps looking over at Meg, who gazes at Mr. Brooke adoringly. This annoys Jo. Laurie sees her and comes and whispers in her ear.

LAURIE
 (whispering to Jo)
 I know something you don't know.

JO
 (whispering back)
 Tell me this second!

LAURIE
 (devilish)
 Has Meg perhaps mislaid a glove?

Jo whips around to look at Laurie.

JO
 (sharp)
Mr. Brooke has it?
 (Laurie nods)
 How do you know?

LAURIE
Saw it.

JO
Where?

LAURIE
Pocket.

JO
All this time?

LAURIE
Yes, isn't it romantic?

JO
No, it's horrid.

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 it!

LAURIE
So would I!

More scenes of childhood on the beach play out over the sound
of Jo's voice reading The Mill on the Floss by George Eliot:

JO (V.O.)
"We could never have loved the
earth so well if we had had no
childhood in it, if it were not the
earth where the same flowers come
up again every spring that we used
to gather with our tiny fingers."

THE PRESENT. EXT. SEASHORE. DAY. 1869.

Beth is wrapped up and looking at the sea and Jo reads George
Eliot's "The Mill On the Floss." The beach is emptier,
darker, colder -- the beach of their adulthood, without the
gloss of memory.

JO (CONT'D)

"What novelty is worth that sweet monotony where everything is known and loved because it is known?"

(to Beth)

How great is that?!

BETH

(nods, then)

I love to listen to you read, Jo, but I love it even better when you read the stories you've written.

JO

(self-conscious)

I don't have any new stories.

BETH

Why not?

JO

Haven't written any.

BETH

You have pencil and paper. Sit here and write me something.

JO

Uhh. I can't, I don't think I can anymore.

BETH

Why?

JO

It's just, no one even cares to hear my stories anyway.

BETH

Write something for me. You're a writer. Even before anyone knew or paid you. I'm very sick and you must do what I say.

Jo smiles and then lays back.

BETH (CONT'D)

Do what Marmee taught us to do. Do it for someone else.

Jo is quiet. Sometimes it's hard when someone knows you.

THE PAST. EXT./INT. UNION ARMY SOLDIER'S FUND. DAY. 1862.

Men, and a handful of women, are busily working in a converted warehouse with soldiers, veterans and volunteers.

MARMEE

If you're walking to Vermont, there is Mrs. Sewell in Keene New Hampshire who will give you room and board.

SUSAN ROBBINS

You should go home to the girls, I can take care of this.

MARMEE

I need to be here. I've spent my whole life ashamed of my country.

SUSAN ROBBINS

No offense meant but you should still be ashamed.

MARMEE

I know, I am.

And older man, worn with age and grief, approaches her table. He is almost too shy to talk to her. She sees him, and puts him at ease.

MARMEE

Can I help you sir?

ASA MELVIN

Hello Ma'am.

MARMEE

Have you sons in the Army?

ASA MELVIN

Yes, ma'am; I had four, but two were killed; one is a prisoner, and I'm going to the other, who is very sick in a Washington hospital.

MARMEE

You have done a great deal for your country sir.

ASA MELVIN

Not a mite more than I ought, ma'am. I'd go myself, if I was any use; as I ain't, I give my boys.

Marmee fights her tears, busying herself with arranging a charity bundle for him. She notices that he doesn't have a good scarf, so gives him her own, careful that he doesn't see this kindness. As she's doing this, a soldier walks up:

SOLDIER
Mrs. March?

MARMEE
Yes?

SOLDIER
Telegram from Washington Ma'am.

He holds a telegram, the thing Marmee dreads.

INT. MARCH FAMILY HOME. EVENING. 1862.

Everything is topsy-turvy in the March house, anxious and worried. Hannah and Meg run about getting everything ready, Beth cries but tries not to, Amy packs her mother's trunk.

MARMEE
Is Jo back yet from Aunt March?

AMY
No, I haven't seen her.

MARMEE
(worried)
I can't miss the last train...

Mr. Laurence and Laurie enter.

LAURIE
(hugging Beth)
What can I do?

MR. LAURENCE
(to Marmee)
If I may be of any more assistance,
please tell me. I will look in on
the girls every day, without fail.

MARMEE
Thank you, for everything.

MR. LAURENCE
I have always admired your husband,
and I pray for a quick recovery.

Meg is nearly running in the hallway when she bumps straight into Mr. Brooke.

MEG
 (looking up)
 Oh - I'm, I'm sorry.

MR. BROOKE
 I came to offer myself as escort to your mother. Mr. Laurence has commissions for me in Washington, and it will give me real satisfaction to be of service to her there.

Meg spontaneously kisses him on the cheek. Instead of being embarrassed, Meg looks at him with pure gratitude and says:

MEG
 Thank you.

Meg runs back into the living room, followed by a stunned Mr. Brooke.

MARMEE
 While I'm gone, Hannah is in charge - and please remember to check on the Hummel's, it will be a difficult winter for everyone...

At just that moment, the door swings open, and Jo rushes in and places money in her mother's hand.

JO
 Will this be enough for the train?

MARMEE
 Twenty five dollars! That isn't like Aunt March to be so generous.

JO
 I didn't go to Aunt March, couldn't bear to.

MARMEE
 Where did you get the money?

JO
 I only sold what was my own.

Jo removes her hat, and beneath, all of her beautiful long hair is gone - now it's just a short, blunt crop. Gasps from everyone and exclamations of "What?/How?/Why did you do it?/Jo!"

BETH
 Your hair!

MEG
Oh Jo, how could /you?

AMY
/Your one beauty!

BETH
Now your hair is /off.

HANNAH
/You look like a boy.

JO
It doesn't affect the fate of the
nation, so don't wail.

MARMEE
(leaning close to Jo)
I am so proud that you are my
daughter.

JO
(just to her mother)
I was crazy to do something for
Father. It'll be good for my
vanity, anyway.

Jo runs to Laurie, hugging him. They now look like twin boys,
and they both ruffle each other's hair.

MARMEE
My girls: I love you more than
words can say. Be good to each
other. Pray for Father's recovery.
I will come back as soon as I can.

The men watch solemnly, more determined than ever to help
these women that they care for so deeply.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. UPSTAIRS HALLWAY. NIGHT. 1862.

Jo sits alone in the hallway, quietly weeping to herself. She
tries to make as little noise as possible, but a door opens
and Amy walks out - she stoops down to comfort her sister.

AMY
Oh, Jo. Is it Father?

JO
No... It's my hair.

And she sobs and sobs into Amy's arms.

AMY
(getting emotional too)
I would feel the same way.

JO
I know you would.

The two sisters, so different, sit and comfort each other.

THE PRESENT. EXT. PARIS. GARDEN. DAY. 1869.

Laurie lazily lolls on the grass of the beautiful estate, while Amy sketches him. A peace has settled over them, they're friends again. Amy gives him a hard time, playfully:

AMY

Laurie, when are you going back to your grandfather?

LAURIE

Very soon.

AMY

You've said that a dozen times in the past month.

LAURIE

Short answers save trouble.

AMY

He expects you, so why don't you do it?

LAURIE

Natural depravity, I suppose.

AMY

Natural indolence, you mean.

LAURIE

I'll only plague him if I go, so I might as well stay and plague you a little longer.

He jumps up and play fights with her, making her laugh. He captures her, and holds her.

LAURIE (CONT'D)

You can bear it. In fact, I think it agrees with you.

Amy disentangles herself. She goes back to drawing:

AMY

What are you doing?

LAURIE

(cheeky)

Looking at you.

AMY

(stern)

No, I mean what do you intend. To do.

LAURIE

Oh you mean with life?

AMY

Yes.

LAURIE

I've been writing an opera, I'd be the central /figure...

AMY

/That's a waste of time.

LAURIE

What would you have me do?

AMY

Go back and work for your grandfather and make something of yourself.

She watches him and he watches her.

AMY

Here.

Laurie comes around to look at the sketch - and sees another sketch beside it from years ago, young and full of happiness.

LAURIE

(he picks it up, touched)

When did you do this one?

AMY

It was the day at the beach, when I met Fred for the first time.

The mention of Fred changes the air.

LAURIE

When is he coming back?

AMY

(inexplicably embarrassed)

A week or two... he has business in London.

Laurie gets very intense all of the sudden, words rush out:

LAURIE

Don't marry him.

AMY

What?

LAURIE

Don't marry him.

AMY

Why?

LAURIE

You know why....

He takes her hand, and she pulls it away.

AMY

No, Laurie, that's mean, it's just mean of you...

LAURIE

Why?

AMY

I have been second to Jo my whole life in everything and I will not be the person you settle for just because you cannot have her. I won't do it, not when, not when I've spent my entire life loving you.

THE PAST. INT. MARCH HOUSE. EARLY MORNING. 1862.

Amy has her foot in a bucket of plaster, working on making a mold. Meg is reading a letter, smiling to herself. Jo writes a story. Beth finishes a pair of slippers for Mr. Laurence. The room is messy - they've let things slide since their mother has been gone. It was never a neat house, but now it definitely isn't. The inmates are running the asylum.

AMY

I'm making a mold of my foot for Laurie to remind him I have nice feet.

MEG

Mr. Brooke writes that Father is still very weak, but improving. Mr. Brooke also says Mother is the best nurse a man could have...

JO

(annoyed)

I wish all the letters were from Mother, and not *Mr. Brooke*.

MEG

I'm grateful for any letters.

Meg, with careful attention, places the letter away and starts working on an errands list.

BETH

I think the deep purple is very fitting for Mr. Laurence, do you agree Amy?

AMY

(glancing over)

Quite. And the design is very cunning.

Amy returns to her task.

BETH

I had to thank him *somehow* for allowing me to play the piano at his house all the time.

MEG

I'll go into town for groceries - Jo, can you go look into getting more firewood?

BETH

You all haven't been to see the Hummel's. We should go.

JO

Oh Bethy we barely have enough to feed ourselves. Besides, I have to finish this story.

BETH

Marmee said /that we

AMY

/Marmee said so many things we can't possibly do them all.

BETH

But I always go by myself and you haven't been keeping up with your tasks...

JO

We work!

MEG

Don't worry sweet girl, we'll find a time.

BETH
But it's been weeks.

JO
We'll go soon.

AMY
MY FOOT IS STUCK! I CAN'T GET IT
OUT!

Jo laughs and tries to help her pull her foot out, while Beth's little face turns stubborn. She doesn't like this...

BETH
Fine, I'll go myself.

EXT. LAURENCE HOUSE. MORNING. 1862.

Beth gives her slippers, wrapped up, to a servant.

EXT. WOODS./HUMMEL HOUSE. AFTERNOON. 1862.

Beth, all alone, with a basket of supplies, makes her way towards the Hummel's. A baby is crying, a panicked, sick cry.

EXT/INT. MARCH HOUSE. LATE AFTERNOON. 1862.

Beth returns to her home, walking slowly, and feeling strange. Her sisters' heads bob up and down in the window:

JO (O.S.)
Here she comes!

Beth walks in, and a letter is placed in her hand:

JO
Here's a letter from the old
gentleman.

AMY
Beth look what they got you --

But Jo clamps a hand over Amy's mouth - Meg takes Beth's arm and leads her to where the old piano used to stand, and in its place, a beautiful little piano forte.

MEG
Look!

AMY
Open the note!

BETH
(overwhelmed)
Jo... read it, I cannot.

JO

"Miss Beth March, I have had many pairs of slippers in my life, but I never had any that suited me so well as yours. And they will always remind me of the gentle giver. I like to pay my debts, and hope you will accept this gift. Your grateful friend and humble servant, James Laurence."

(whoops with joy!)

OH BETH!

MEG

"Humble servant" /how lovely!

AMY

(examining)

/See the cunning brackets to hold candles, and the nice green silk...

They are so absorbed in the piano, that they almost don't notice that Beth has gotten up and walked straight over to the Laurence's house.

EXT./INT. LAURENCE HOUSE. MR. LAURENCE'S OFFICE. DAY. 1862.

Timid Beth walks straight up to the house and then to Mr. Laurence's office and tries to speak:

BETH

Sir, I wanted to thank you...

But words are lost, and she throws her arms around him. He accepts the hug like he's been waiting for it his whole life.

MR. LAURENCE

You remind me so much of my little girl. The piano is yours, I should have given it to you long ago.

While he's hugging her, he notices that she's hot and flushed.

MR. LAURENCE (CONT'D)

My child, you're burning.

BETH

The Hummel's are very sick.

INT. OUTSIDE BETH'S ROOM. DAY. 1862.

Beth, in her bed, is delirious with fever. A doctor looks her over, then consults with the girls and Hannah.

DOCTOR
She's resting.

MR. LAURENCE
How is she? Is there anything I can do?

HANNAH
What is it?

DOCTOR
It's scarlet fever.

AMY
What's "scarlet fever?"

DOCTOR
(lowering his voice, to
Mr. Laurence)
I visited the Hummel's, the baby
has died.

DOCTOR (CONT'D)
Have you all had it before?

JO
Meg and I have, but Amy hasn't!

DOCTOR
She'll have to be sent away.

AMY
I don't want to be sent away!

MEG
I'll see if Aunt March can
/take her.

AMY
/I don't like Aunt March.

HANNAH
It's for your own good, child.

JO
Should we send for Mother?

MEG
No, we shouldn't worry her. I've
never wished for money more than
now.

JO
We'll nurse her and she'll get
better. You'll see. She will. She
must.

THE PRESENT. EXT. SEASHORE. DAY. 1869.

Jo reads a story for Beth that she's written herself, for Beth, finishing the last lines.

JO

"The post office in the forest was a capital little institution, and flourished wonderfully, for many things passed through it: poetry and pickles, tragedies, garden seeds and long letters, music and gingerbread, invitations, scoldings, and even puppies."

She puts down the story, looking shyly at Beth, who beams:

BETH

It's all about us!

JO

It is.

BETH

I love it.

JO

It's just a little story.

BETH

It's nothing like what you usually write.

JO

You don't think it's too... boring?

BETH

No, it is my favorite one yet.

JO

Really?

BETH

Write me another.

JO

Yes ma'am!

BETH

And keep writing them.

JO

I will.

BETH
Even when I'm not here.

It is said quickly, almost casually, but it lands like it was meant to.

JO
No, don't say that, don't say it.

BETH
I have to tell /you. JO
/No you don't.

BETH
I've had a very long time to think about this, and I'm not afraid.

JO
No...

BETH
It's like the tide going out. It goes out slowly, but it can't be stopped.

JO
I'll stop it. I've stopped it before.

THE PAST. INT. BETH'S ROOM. LATE AT NIGHT. 1862.

Jo, sitting vigil, puts cold towels on Beth's hot forehead.

JO
You will get better. Father will get better. And we'll all be together soon.

BETH
We can't stop God's will.

JO
God hasn't met *my* will yet. What Jo wills shall be done.

INT. AUNT MARCH'S HOUSE. DAY.

Amy is working very diligently on her French and her painting - Aunt March notices the quiet little girl, and admires her:

AUNT MARCH
Amy? Come here.

AMY

Yes?

AUNT MARCH

Come, sit!

Amy sits down next to Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)

(pointing to her finger)

If you are very good, one day this ring will belong to you.

AMY

(marveling)

Really?

AUNT MARCH

You just keep being a proper young lady and see if it doesn't. You are your family's hope now. Beth is sick, Jo is a lost cause, and I hear Meg has had her head turned by a penniless tutor. It'll be up to you to support them all, and your indigent parents in their old age. So you must marry well and save your family.

Amy looks serious -- Aunt March releases her.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)

(breezy)

That's all I wanted to say to you. You can go finish your...little painting.

Amy stands up and walks out of the one room in the past, to another room in the present...

THE PRESENT. INT. FRANCE. RENTED APARTMENTS. DAY. 1869.

...Amy rushes in, excited, to Aunt March taking her tea:

AMY

Hello Aunt March!

AUNT MARCH

That Laurence boy was just here.

AMY

He was?

AUNT MARCH

What a disappointment he's turned out to be. It must be the Italian in him.

Amy sits down without intending to.

AMY

(thrilled)

When will he be back?

AUNT MARCH

He's gone, to London. Why? What do you need to discuss with him?

We briefly flash to...

A country scene in the Paris exurbs. From a distance, we see Fred and Amy walking. Suddenly, Fred drops to one knee, offers Amy his hand, and she drops it....

...Back to Aunt March.

AMY

I've just told Fred Vaughn that I wouldn't marry him.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. BETH'S ROOM. DAY. 1869.

Meg is watching over Beth, who is getting weaker by the day. Jo comes up with a bowl of soup, and touches Meg on the shoulder, relieving her.

JO

Meg.

Jo cocks her head towards the window, John is standing outside.

EXT. MARCH HOUSE. GARDEN. DAY. 1869.

Meg and John are talking, tentative after their quarrel.

MEG

I'll come home to help with the children, I'm sorry, I'm just so worried /for Beth.

JOHN

/Stay. I asked for leave. I'll take care of the children.

MEG

(embracing him)

John.

JOHN

And there's another thing - you should send your fabric to the dressmaker as soon as possible.

MEG

But I /can't --

JOHN

/No, don't say another word, I won't hear it. I want you to have that dress. My old coat will be fine for the winter.

MEG

But /John, it's --

JOHN

It's all settled.

MEG

No, John, I really can't. I sold the fabric to Sallie.

JOHN

You did?

MEG

Yes.

JOHN

I don't want you to be unhappy.

MEG

I couldn't be, John Brooke is my husband and I am his wife.

Meg kisses him, spontaneously, just like years earlier.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. BETH'S ROOM. DAY. 1869.

From the window, Jo watches the loving scene - feeling happy for her sister and also a pang of loneliness.

Suddenly, a crash - the soup bowl clatters to the floor. Beth's fever is high and she knocked everything off the bed - Jo flies to her side, feeling her forehead, calling.

JO

Hannah!

THE PAST. INT. BETH'S ROOM. DAY. 1862.

Just as in the present, Beth has gotten worse.

JO

What do we do?

HANNAH
We should send for your mother.

THE PRESENT. INT. BETH'S ROOM. EVENING. 1869.

Jo lays in bed with Beth.

THE PAST. INT. BETH'S ROOM. EVENING. 1862.

Marmee enters with Laurie and goes straight to Beth. She's gone from a sick husband to a sick daughter, but she brings cheerful efficiency to a terrifying situation.

MARMEE
You were right to send for me, my girls - but you've been very good nurses indeed.

MEG
It's mostly been Jo, she's hardly slept.

JO
I didn't know what else to do.

MARMEE
Hannah, go make a clear broth and Jo get ice - we need to cool her.

MEG
Who is with Father?

MARMEE
John is staying with him.

Meg smiles to herself, which her Mother notices.

MARMEE
(looking at the bed)
We need to change the linens.

Marmee attends to Beth while the girls help her.

THE PRESENT. INT. BETH'S ROOM. NIGHT. 1869.

Meg and Jo and Marmee take turns in shifts, making sure that Beth is as comfortable as she can be. When it is Jo's turn, Beth is very weak, barely able to hold her head up.

JO
(whispering to Beth)
Don't go quietly, fight!

JO (CONT'D)

Please fight to the end, be LOUD!
Don't just quietly go away!

Jo is sitting watch, and drops off to sleep, her head on the bed, her hand grasping Beth's. Beth opens her eyes and looks down at Jo and smiles. She closes her eyes again and drifts away.

THE PAST. INT. BETH'S ROOM. EVENING. 1862.

Jo jerks suddenly awake - she doesn't see Beth in the bed. She rises, and with growing panic - screams.

JO

Marmee! Marmee!

She rushes downstairs to find Beth sitting up with her Mother and Hannah eating. She cries with joy, and kisses Beth's head.

JO (CONT'D)

Merry Christmas, Beth.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. AFTEROON. 1862.

It is Christmas time again. Amy, standing on a chair, supervises all the decorations. Mr. Laurence and Marmee sit by the fire, and Beth on the couch with her doll. Jo runs around with Hannah setting the table for their feast.

At just that moment, Laurie pops his head in and with wild excitement in his eyes, announces:

LAURIE

And here's another Christmas gift
for the March family!

The door swings open, and it's **Father**, supported by Mr. Brooke. Mayhem breaks out - Beth starts crying, Amy falls off a chair, Marmee gasps, Jo drops a dish, and Meg (again) spontaneously kisses Mr. Brooke. All the girls run to him, surrounding him in a hug.

FATHER

(joyfully overwhelmed)
My little women. How you've grown,
and how proud I am of you. Each of
you. Merry Christmas, my dears.

He looks over them to Marmee - who is gazing back at him with love. She wasn't sure that this moment would come for her, and she can hardly believe she has her family together. He steps out of his daughters' hug to embrace his wife.

MARMEE

(crying out of happiness)
Thank god, thank god you're home.
Now I can be angry with you in
person.

He laughs, and brushes her tears away. It is romance, but the real kind.

LATER: It is Christmas dinner, with everyone, including the Laurences and Mr. Brooke, gathered around the table - it is the finest day any one of them has ever had, and the joy radiates across the chilly Christmas night.

THE PRESENT. INT. BETH'S ROOM. MORNING. 1869.

Jo jerks awake to find Beth gone - she goes downstairs and sees Marmee there. Jo looks at Marmee, and her mother, for the first time in Jo's life, breaks. Jo becomes the parent at that moment, comforting her mother, who is trapped in the unimaginable pain of losing a child.

EXT. GRAVEYARD. DAY. 1869.

The March family: Mother and Father and Jo, Meg and John with their arms around each other, and Hannah. They have all gathered to lay their Beth to rest on an impossibly beautiful day. *

The party walks away, each with their own pain. Jo stays, unable to leave Beth's side, even in death.

Meg makes to go approach her - but John pulls Meg closer.

Meg nods - and she is grateful to him, grateful that she married this man who can be there for her.

Jo cries, alone. She cannot comprehend how the world keeps spinning when her Beth is gone. We go from the emptiness of the grief to...

THE PAST. EXT./INT. MARCH HOUSE. MEG & JO'S ROOM. SPRING. DAY. 1865.

...a beautiful day, full of flowers and sunlight. Outside, Beth and Amy are arranging decorations and laughing.

Inside, Meg prepares for her wedding with Jo helping her, placing flowers in her sister's hair.

MEG

I can't believe today is my wedding
day!

JO
 (sadly)
 Me neither.

MEG
 What's wrong?

JO
 Nothing.

MEG
 Jo...

Jo suddenly kneels before her, wild and desperate:

JO
 We can leave. We can leave right
 now.

MEG
 What?

JO
 I can make money: I'll sell
 stories, I'll do anything - cook,
 clean, work in a factory. I can
 make a life for us.

But, Jo..

MEG

JO

And you, you should be an
 actress and have a life on
 the stage. Let's run away
 together.

MEG
 I want to get married.

JO
 WHY?

MEG
 I love him.

JO
 (angry)
 You will be bored of him in two
 years and we will be interesting
 forever.

MEG
 Just because my dreams are not the
 same as yours doesn't mean they're
 unimportant.

Jo sits back, heartbroken.

MEG (CONT'D)

I want a family and a home and I'm not scared of working and struggling, but I want to do it with John.

JO

I just hate that you're leaving me.

MEG

Oh, Jo, I'm not leaving you. Besides, one day it will be your turn.

JO

I'd rather be a free spinster and paddle my own canoe.

(hugging her, crying)

I can't believe childhood is over.

MEG

It was going to end one way or another. And what a happy end.

EXT. MARCH HOUSE. GARDEN. DAY. 1865.

Meg and Mr. Brooke are married, with Mr. March officiating.

MR. MARCH

What excessive promises, giving yourself away to get the other. What a thing, what a gift, always given before it is known the cost or the reward.

During the simple and emotional ceremony, Amy and Jo catch each others eye - they simultaneously realize that they are the only two left standing.

Later, during the picnic reception:

- Marmee and Hannah deliver cakes and pastries and food galore.
- Laurie dances with Beth, whirling her around, and making her laugh. Jo watches adoringly: the two halves of her heart.
- Meg, both bride and host, makes sure everyone is cared for.
- Laurie and Jo taste the alcohol and decide it's *terrible*.

- Meg dances with John, Marmee dances with Mr. Laurence, Jo tries to play the fiddle - then Marmee dances with Father, Jo and Meg dance, John and Amy dance, Hannah dances with Father. The point is, everyone dances with everyone and...

- Mr. Laurence offers to dance with Aunt March, but she turns him down. Then Laurie also approaches her. Aunt March feigns even MORE hatred, to cover her epic delight.

- There is more eating and dancing until the sun starts to set. As Aunt March moves to make her departure, she speaks to Meg, who stands with John, Marmee and Father March.

AUNT MARCH

Well, I hope you're happy. Now that you've ruined your life, just like your Mother did by marrying your father.

Despite her meanness, the March family is so happy, that they burst out laughing at Aunt March's rudeness.

FATHER

Dear Sister, you are too kind. And thank you for today's festivities.

AUNT MARCH

You are most welcome.

MEG

(leaning in to kiss her)
Thank you Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH

Oh, oh, I don't like to be...
KISSED!

MEG

Oh, I'm sorry.

AUNT MARCH

(back at Meg)
You'll be sorry when you've tried love in a cottage and found it a failure!

MEG

(smiling sweetly)
It can't be worse than some people find in big houses.

AUNT MARCH

I understood your meaning, my dear.

Meg and John retreat and laugh and kiss. Nothing can pierce their happiness.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)
 (to Marmee)
 I don't miss a THING.

MARMEE
 (taking Aunt March's arm
 and leading her away)
 You are not entirely wrong.

AUNT MARCH
 I may not always be right, but I am
 NEVER wrong.

Amy takes over from Marmee, Aunt March gratefully accepting her hand.

AUNT MARCH (CONT'D)
 Thank goodness, here's the only
 sane member of the family. I really
 can't take any more of this.

Amy leads her away, and Marmee lets them go. Amy gets Aunt March into a carriage and then lets out a cry of joy. She runs to Marmee, who is now standing with Jo:

AMY	JO
Marmee! Marmee! Aunt March is going to Europe /and	/wants me to go with her! How wonderful! Now I know why I spent all those BORING hours reading to her!

Jo throws her arms around Amy, delighted.

AMY
 No, she... she wanted me to come.
 As her companion.

JO
 (stunned)
 Europe? With you?

AMY
 She wants me to work on my art, and
 my French, of course.

JO
 Oh... I, that's wonderful Amy.

Marmee takes Jo's hand, knowing how this hurt her. Jo smiles through her pain for Meg's day, but it is a true blow.

INT. MEG'S HOUSE. DAY. 1865.

John and Meg enter their small but lovely newlywed home. He embraces her and kisses her - she's never been happier.

EXT. WOODS. DAY. CONTINUOUS. 1866.

Laurie and Jo walk through the woods together, as they've done for years.

JO

Meg married, Amy off to Europe, now that you're a graduate, you'll be off on a long holiday - I'm not good like Beth so I'm angry and restless.

LAURIE

You don't have to stay here.

JO

Why? Should we run off and join a pirate ship?

He looks at her, and inhales, about to talk. Jo sees his face and immediately knows what is about to happen.

JO

(panicking)

No, Teddy -- please don't.

LAURIE

It's no use Jo; we've got to have it out..

JO

No, no, /we don't...

LAURIE

I've loved you ever since I've known you Jo -- I couldn't help it, and you've been so good to me -- I've tried to show it but you wouldn't let me; now I'm going to make you hear and give me an answer because I can't go on like this any longer.

JO
I wanted to save you from
this, I thought /you'd
understand.

LAURIE
(not listening to her)
/I've worked hard to please
you, and I gave up billiards
and everything you didn't
like, and waited and never
complained for I hoped you'd
love me, though I'm not half
good enough --

JO
Yes, you are, you're a great deal
too good for me, and I'm so
grateful to you and so proud of
you, I don't see why I... I can't
love you as you want me to.

LAURIE
You can't?

JO
(helplessly)
I can't change the feeling and it
would be a lie to say I do when I
don't. I'm so sorry, Teddy, so
desperately sorry, but I can't help
it...

Laurie backs away from her like she hit him.

LAURIE
I *can't* love any one else.

JO
It would be a disaster if we
married, we'd be miserable! We both
have such quick tempers --

LAURIE
-- If you loved me Jo, I would be a
perfect saint!

JO
I can't - I've tried it and failed.

LAURIE
Everyone expects it -- Grandpa and
your family, Jo say you will and
let's be happy!

JO
I can't say "Yes" truly so I won't
say it at all.

JO (CONT'D)

You'll see that I'm right,
eventually, and you'll thank me for
it.

LAURIE

I'll be hanged if I do!

JO

You'll find some lovely
accomplished girl, who will adore
you, and make a fine mistress for
your fine house. I wouldn't. I'm
homely and awkward and odd and
you'd be ashamed of me and we would
quarrel - we can't help it even
now! - I'd hate elegant society and
you'd hate my scribbling and we
would be unhappy and wish we hadn't
done it and everything will be
horrid.

LAURIE

Anything more?

JO

Nothing more -- except that...

(honest)

I don't believe I will ever marry.
I'm happy as I am, and love my
liberty too well to be in any hurry
to give it up.

LAURIE

(shaking his head)

You *will* care for somebody, and
you'll love him tremendously, and
live and die for him. I know you
will, it's your way, and you will
and I'll watch.

JO

Teddy..

He straightens up and walks away. Jo cries and cries. Her
heart is breaking, even though she is the one who broke it.

THE PRESENT. INT. MARCH HOUSE. ATTIC. DAY. 1869.

Jo is putting away Beth's things, and arranging her little
dolls and toys. Everyone is gone. Meg left by marriage, Amy
left by a voyage to Europe, Laurie left because she rejected
him and Beth was taken from this life. She places sheet music
of Beth's into a trunk, the hurt in her heart almost
unbearable.

MARMEE

I hope I'm not disturbing your writing...

JO

I don't do that anymore.

(then)

It didn't save her.

They sit beside each other, both missing Beth.

MARMEE

You are much too lonely here, Jo. Wouldn't you like to go back to New York? What about your friend - Friedrich, was that his name?

JO

(resigned)

I ruined our friendship with my temper, just as I ruin everything.

MARMEE

I doubt a sincere friend would be deterred.

JO

I wish that were true. If I were a girl in a book, this would all be so easy, I'd give up the world happily.

MARMEE

Laurie is returning, you know.

JO

(looking up)

He is?

MARMEE

There was a letter from Amy, she's coming home: She was devastated about Beth and Aunt March is very ill - but Laurie will be accompanying them on the journey home.

JO

(nodding)

That's good of him.

Jo stands and paces, anxiously.

MARMEE

What is it?

JO

Perhaps... perhaps I was too quick
in turning him down.

MARMEE

Do you love him?

JO

If he asked me again, I think I
would say yes... Do you think he'll
ask me again?

MARMEE

But do you love him?

JO

(tearing up)

I know that I care more to be
loved. I want to be loved.

MARMEE

That is not the same as loving.

JO

(crying, trying to explain
herself to herself)

Women have minds and souls as well
as hearts, ambition and talent as
well as beauty and I'm sick of
being told that love is all a woman
is fit for. But... I am so lonely.

EXT. PARIS. FRANCE. DAY. 1869.

Amy, dressed in black, is waiting with all her luggage - she
is in mourning. A carriage approaches and Laurie gets out. He
tentatively walks to Amy.

LAURIE

I couldn't let you travel alone
with Aunt March being so sick -
even if you despise me.

AMY

Oh, Laurie, I don't despise you.

She embraces him, weeping.

AMY (CONT'D)

Beth was the best of us.

Laurie is quiet, letting her cry. She pulls back.

AMY

I'm not marrying Fred Vaughn.

LAURIE

(carefully)

I heard... Amy...

AMY

(rush of words)

It was not for you it was for myself. You are under no obligation to say anything or do anything, it was because I didn't love him as I should.

Laurie studies her face, and we know that he sees her and loves her.

AMY

(still rambling)

You don't have to say anything, we never need to talk about it, we don't have to talk about --

Laurie catches her face with his hands, and kisses her. She looks at him and kisses him back. They embrace with both their joy and their grief. This is the way it was meant. It is done.

INT. MARCH HOUSE ATTIC. DAY. 1869.

Jo infused with a new kind of energy, writes to Laurie. We hear snippets of the letter.

JO (V.O.)

My dear Teddy, I miss you more than I can express.

EXT. MARCH HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

In the forest, Jo finds the mailbox.

JO (V.O.)

...I used to think the worst fate was to be a wife, I was young and stupid. Now I have changed. The worst fate is to live my life without you in it. I was wrong to turn you down and to run away to New York.

She opens it and places the letter inside, she looks at it, satisfied. She closes the mailbox back up again.

THE PAST. EXT. STREETS OF NEW YORK CITY. DAY. 1867.

Jo tries to find her way through the unfamiliar city - she isn't an expert at it quite yet. She walks too slowly, stares too long, and gets hopelessly lost - but a spark of happiness is growing, she's figuring out how to be what Aunt March said was impossible - a woman making her own way in the world.

She walks up the stairs to the boarding house and as she ascends the stairs and the doors open, we hear:

LAURIE (O.S.)
JO... JO... JO...

THE PRESENT. INT./EXT. MARCH HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. DAY. 1869.

Jo, asleep on the couch, is gently shaken awake. She sees:

LAURIE
Jo? Wake up!

JO
Oh Teddy! My Teddy!

LAURIE
Dear Jo, are you glad to see me then?

Jo embraces him and looks at him and holds him for too long.

JO
Glad, my blessed boy, is too small!
Words can't express it.

Laurie breaks their embrace.

LAURIE
Oh thank heaven, I was worried, well, anyway, I wanted a moment with you alone.

JO
Yes, of course. Here, come sit.

They take a moment, not sure what to do. They aren't in their youth any longer, they aren't sure how to relate to each other.

JO
(making a joke)
How's Amy?

JO (CONT'D)

Did she bother you all the way from Europe with her preening?

LAURIE

(laughs)

Yes, but I love it.

JO

Where is she now? Did she not come straight home?

LAURIE

Your mother's got her down at Meg's, we stopped there by the way, and there was no getting my wife out of their clutches.

?!?!?!

JO

Your... your what?

LAURIE

Now I've done it! It was meant to be a surprise.

JO

What surprise?

LAURIE

Well, we were engaged, and we were going to wait... that is to say, now we are man and wife.

Jo sits. She's hit hard.

JO

You and... Amy.

LAURIE

It all happened very fast.

JO

Are you - in love?

LAURIE

Yes.

(launching in)

Jo, I want to say one thing, and then we'll put it away forever. I have always loved you; but the love I feel for Amy is different - you were right - we would have killed each other.

JO
 (still in shock)
 Yes.

LAURIE
 I think it was meant this way.

JO
 Oh, Teddy.

LAURIE
 No one ever calls me that but you.

JO
 What does Amy call you?

LAURIE
 My Lord.

JO
 That's like her...
 Well, you look deserving of it.

LAURIE
 Can we - can we still be friends?

Though it takes a supreme effort, she says:

JO
 Of course, my boy, always.

At that moment, everyone comes bursting through the door. Mother and Father and Amy and John and Meg and Daisy and Demi - Amy goes straight to Jo. Jo fixes her face and decides she will be the person she wishes she was:

AMY
 Laurie told you?

JO
 Yes.

Amy looks at her expectantly. Jo has a moment of wanting to strike her, the way she did when they were children, but checks herself, and tries to be what Beth would want:

JO
 Amy, I'm so happy for you. It was meant to be.

Amy sighs, her anxiety lifts:

AMY

Oh, I'm so relieved - I couldn't write because it all happened so quickly and then, really, I was worried you'd be angry.

JO

(shaking her head)
No, no.

AMY

So you aren't? Angry?

JO

Life is too short to be angry at one's sisters.

AMY

(tearing up)
I really miss her...

JO

I know.

They embrace. Over her shoulder she catches her mother's eye, who gives her a look of infinite empathy.

Then Laurie calls for his wife. Jo straightens up and sees these couples - Mother & Father, John & Meg, Laurie & Amy.

It all hits her with a heat and a mass that she was unprepared for. She hastily excuses herself and goes outside.

EXT. MARCH HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

Weeping, but also in a panic, Jo removes the letter from the mailbox and walks into the woods.

EXT. WOODS. DAY. 1869.

She tears through the woods and finally stands by the river, breathing heavily. For one moment, we believe that she might end her suffering in the most tragic way - she leans towards the river...

...and throws the letter into it, letting it drift away, along with her childhood love. It is over.

EXT. MARCH HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

Jo trudges back, and is surprised to find Mr. Laurence standing alone, looking at the March's house.

JO
Mr. Laurence?

MR. LAURENCE
Jo!

They embrace - and then Mr. Laurence tries to explain:

MR. LAURENCE
I couldn't bring myself to... The house doesn't seem right without her and I couldn't go in knowing she wouldn't be there.

He begins crying. Jo takes his arm tenderly.

JO
I know I am not half so good as my sister, but I'll be a friend to lean on, if you'll let me.

He gratefully accepts her help and they approach the house together, an odd, sweet pair of friends.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. JO & MEG'S ROOM/ATTIC. NIGHT/DAY. 1869.

Jo starts awake - she looks around the room: she's all alone, everyone is truly gone. She lights a candle. She goes to the drawer where she keeps her writing, and pulls out the stack.

She feeds a published story into the fire. Then she burns more stories, printed, unpublished, half-finished, she burns them all. It is a potlatch, a total burning down of everything she has made up until this point.

She finds one last piece, and is about to give it over to the fire, when she reads on top: "For Beth." She stops.

Jo makes her way up to the attic, and sits in her old writing chair, looking at the story. She takes a fresh sheet of paper and starts writing.

She writes all night, and into the next day, piling up page after page. She spreads them out in the attic, like a quilt, building outwards. Candles are lit and re-lit, the sun rises and sets.

Marmee brings her some food and then leaves her alone.

Jo nods off for a second then keeps writing. She revises, she scratches out, she changes orders. She falls asleep on her blanket of papers.

She's re-connected with her childhood, and out of the depths of despair has found hope and inspiration.

Jo finishes and carefully ties up the first few chapters of this experiment and writes a letter to Mr. Dashwood:

JO

(read to camera)

Dear Mr. Dashwood: Enclosed are the first few chapters of a piece I've only begun working on. It could suit as a story for young people, but I think it is probably quite boring. However, I'm sending it to you just in case it has something of value, though I doubt it.

INT. AUNT MARCH'S HOUSE. DAY. 1869.

The empty rooms of Aunt March's house -- nothing is left of the deliciously cranky old lady. Furniture is covered over, and the loss is felt in the grand rooms. Amy, Jo and Meg walk around the big empty mansion.

JO

I thought she hated me.

AMY

She could still hate you and leave you the house!

Jo laughs.

JO

What about you and John?

MEG

No, I don't need a grand estate.

Meg looks satisfied, and we know that she is, deeply. Suddenly, Jo lets out a WHOOP and runs through the house.

MEG

For heaven's /sake!

AMY

/What are you doing?

JO

(looking around)

I should sell it, but I'd love to do something that would really make Aunt March turn in her grave.

MEG

I wouldn't mind that.

AMY
/Girls!

JO
/A nice turning, just a rotation, nothing terrible.

MEG
What will you do?

Jo thinks for half a second, but she already knows:

JO
I'd like to open a school. We never had a proper school, and now there are women's colleges opening - there should be a school. For Daisy.

AMY
And what will Demi do?

JO
I'll open a school for boys and girls, both.

Amy takes her sister's arm on one side, while Meg is on the other side. They walk and talk confidentially.

AMY
What about writing?

JO
(Jo turns bright red)
What /about it?

MEG
What are you working on?

JO
I started something... but I don't think it's very good.

AMY
Everyone likes what you write.

JO
(pointedly)
No, they don't.

MEG
I do.

JO
It's just about our little life.

So? AMY JO
 Who will be interested in a story of domestic struggles and joys? It doesn't have any real importance.

AMY
 Maybe we don't see those things as important because people don't write about them.

JO
 No, writing doesn't confer importance, it reflects it.

AMY
 I'm not sure. Perhaps writing will make them more important.

JO
 (looking at her, amused)
 When did you become so wise?

AMY
 I always have been, you were just too busy noticing my faults.

MEG
 Which weren't there, of course.

They lean their heads together and stroll through the house.

INT. NEW YORK PUBLISHING OFFICE. DAY. 1869.

Mr. Dashwood sits, reading the pages that Jo gave him. He finishes and then writes to her.

MR. DASHWOOD
 (read to camera)
 Dear Miss March: I have read the chapters you sent, and I have to agree that they aren't very promising. But, please send us more stories of the scandalous variety, if you have any.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. ATTIC./DINING ROOM. EARLY EVENING. 1869.

Jo reads the note Mr. Dashwood sent:

MR. DASHWOOD (V.O.)
 Or, shall I say, your friend can. My apologies for the joke, I couldn't help it.

And she crumples it up. Just then, Marmee breaks her reverie.

MARMEE (O.S.)

Jo! Come down!

JO

Coming! I'm starving!

Jo stashes her writing and clomps down the stairs and heads straight for the table, not even looking around her. She sits down and grabs a piece of bread and takes a big bite.

MARMEE

Jo, you might want to wait..

JO

But I'm famished.

MARMEE

Jo, dear, you have a guest.

JO

I don't know anyone.

FRIEDRICH (O.S.)

I am so sorry to intrude.

Jo hears his voice and bolts up.

JO

(she bursts out laughing)

It's you!

THE PAST. EXT. BOARDING HOUSE. NEW YORK. DAY. 1867.

Jo, with all of her luggage, finds the address and rings the doorbell. Friedrich opens it, he smiles down at this young woman, with his handsome face and merry eyes -- she comes undone before even knowing it.

FRIEDRICH

Hello.

JO

Hello. I'm Josephine March. Jo.

Just then, Mrs. Kirke pushes past him, with her two children.

MRS. KIRKE

(to be delivered without
stopping for breath, with
infinite cheer and
anxiety)

Jo! Is that you?! Come in, come in!

MRS. KIRKE (CONT'D)

Your mother says that you're a writer – how wonderful! I keep a diary, you know. This is Kitty and Minny. SMILE GIRLS. I see you've met our professor, he's a very accomplished man, actually, it's an interesting group here, lots of intellectuals and Europeans. You know I never thought I'd run a boarding house but here I am! How is that sweet mother of yours? She always had such great height, I never had that, she could reach anything...

She leads Jo up through the stairs and Jo takes a quick glance backwards at Friedrich, as if to confirm that the man she saw was real and not an apparition. She finds Friedrich looking back up at her. She turns away again.

BACK TO THE PRESENT. 1869.

FRIEDRICH

Jo, I hope it is all right, I got your address from Mrs. Kirke –

LAURIE

Who are you?
(to Amy)
Who is he?

FRIEDRICH

(backing away)
I'm so sorry to intrude, I was close by and thought I'd, but I'll be going...

AMY

– Please stay! We have more than enough room.

LAURIE

Can someone tell me who he is!?

FRIEDRICH

I don't want to be a burden.

MEG

It's no burden at all.

JO

(still stunned)
Yes, of course. Please.

LAURIE
 (proprietary)
 I'm Laurie. And who are you?

FRIEDRICH
 I am Friedrich Bhaer.

JO
 (explaining)
 We were at the same boarding house
 together in New York.

HANNAH
 Oh JO, he's VERY handsome.

Later:

Everyone is talking. Father and Friedrich especially talk philosophy and religion and politics. Father obviously very much likes him. Jo is glowing with happiness.

Amy looks from Friedrich to Jo and from Jo to Friedrich. She can see that there is love between them.

FATHER
 (to Friedrich)
 And you intend to stay in New York?

FRIEDRICH
 No, I've been offered a
 professorship in California - and
 as I have nothing keeping me here,
 I thought I might go West. It is
 new there, and they are less
 particular about immigrants.

Jo has an unconscious sharp intake of breath. No one notices but Amy. Father continues oblivious:

FATHER
 Perhaps I should go West...

MARMEE
You aren't an immigrant, so perhaps
 you should stay home.

Everyone bursts out laughing. Father laughs at himself good-naturedly.

FATHER
 Oh, I'm going.

INT. MARCH HOUSE. LIVING ROOM. DAY. 1869.

Everyone relaxes after dinner, and Friedrich eyes the piano:

FRIEDRICH
This is a beautiful instrument.
Which one of you plays?

They all fall quiet.

JO
It was my sister, Beth.

AMY
We all play a little.

MEG
But none so well as her...

FRIEDRICH
It is very hard to lose a sister.
I'm sorry.

FATHER
Do you play?

FRIEDRICH
I do, yes.

MARMEE
It would make us so happy if you
played now, she wouldn't want the
piano to sit silent.

FRIEDRICH
I don't wish to offend.

FATHER
Not in the least.

He sits down and plays Bach - it is beautiful and elegant. Jo watches him, moved and deeply happy.

The sound of his music plays over Friedrich saying his goodbyes and telling Jo, as he stands at the door:

FRIEDRICH
Jo, if you ever come to California,
I would love to see you.

JO
I don't know that I will, but thank
you.

FRIEDRICH
 (hurting, but accepting)
 Well, yes... goodbye.

JO
 Goodbye.

It has started to rain, and he puts up his umbrella and trudges into the evening.

The door closes. Jo turns back around to find everyone staring at her.

JO
 What?! Why are you all looking at me like that?

FATHER
 What a wonderful man. I hope he comes again, he would be a terrific friend for me.

AMY
 (crying out)
 Oh Father, he wasn't here for you!

FATHER
 No?

AMY
 Jo! You love him!

JO
 I do not!

AMY
 You do too! I may be half as smart as you are but I can see it so plainly, you love him. I have never seen you happier. What else is love? Doesn't she love him Mr. Laurence?

MR. DASHWOOD
 That's a good instinct, you love him.

AMY
 Go get him. Laurie prepare the horses. We can catch him before he gets to the train.

MEG
 (standing)
 I'm coming too.

JO
 I'm not going!

MEG
 You are. Amy is right.

LAURIE
 I never thought I'd prepare a carriage to help Jo March go after a man, but I like it.

JO
 He's moving to California!

AMY
 That's a fiction. He was practically *begging* for a reason to stay.

JO
 But it's raining outside.

AMY
 It doesn't matter! Put on a better dress. Follow me.

Amy has started ascending the stairs.

AMY
 LAURIE. STOP STANDING THERE AND GO GET THE HORSES READY.

LAURIE
 (jumping to action)
 Yes, my love.

INT. NEW YORK APARTMENT. NIGHT. 1869.

It is also raining in New York. Mr. Dashwood is in his cozy apartment, eating dinner with his wife. She tries to start a fight.

MRS. DASHWOOD
 You never ask about my mother even when you know I've seen her.

MR. DASHWOOD
 I assume she's still alive.

MRS. DASHWOOD
But I ask after your mother.

MR. DASHWOOD
And I have no idea why.

MRS. DASHWOOD
You're willfully missing the point.

MR. DASHWOOD
That's true.

He hears his daughter's laughter and talking in the next room.

MR. DASHWOOD
What have they gotten into now?

MRS. DASHWOOD
I have no idea.

The girls tumble into the room, speaking over each other.

DASHWOOD GIRL #1 Father are you publishing/ this?	DASHWOOD GIRL #2 /What happens to the Little Women?
---	---

DASHWOOD GIRL #3
Tell me you have the rest of the
book!

Close on Mr. Dashwood as he realizes what he has, what this story could be, this story that he, and the author, both thought was boring...

INT/EXT. CARRIAGE./TRAIN STATION. NIGHT. 1869.

Meg, Amy, and Jo are all in the carriage, making top speed through the rain. They arrive at the train station.

AMY
GO! Find him!

Jo runs in the rain towards the beautifully lit station and the music swells and the thunder claps and we **CUT TO:**

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. NEW YORK CITY. DAY. 1870.

Jo sits where she originally sat across from Dashwood, but now she is more grown up, more together, more herself -

DASHWOOD
Frankly, I don't see why she didn't
marry the neighbor.

JO

Because the neighbor married her sister!

DASHWOOD

Right, of course.
So, who does she marry?

JO

No one. She doesn't marry either of them.

DASHWOOD

No. No, no, no, that won't work at all.

JO

She says the whole book that she doesn't want to marry.

DASHWOOD

WHO CARES! Girls want to see women MARRIED. Not CONSISTENT.

JO

It isn't the right ending.

DASHWOOD

The right ending is the one that sells.

Jo thinks. Dashwood pounces.

DASHWOOD (CONT'D)

If you end your delightful book with your heroine a spinster, no one will buy it. It won't be worth printing.

Jo shifts. She considers.

JO

I suppose marriage has always been an economic proposition. Even in fiction.

DASHWOOD

It's romance!

JO

It's mercenary.

DASHWOOD

Just end it that way, will you?

JO

Fine.

THE PRESENT IS NOW THE PAST. OR MAYBE FICTION. EXT. TRAIN. EVENING. 1869.

Jo runs from the carriage, out into the rain and into the crowd in front of the train station, looking for Friedrich. He's not there, every face isn't his. Couple after couple stands under umbrellas. She runs into the station, and then turns around to go back out -- has she missed him?

Just then:

FRIEDRICH

Jo!

Jo sees Friedrich, also standing under an umbrella, but alone. She runs towards him. She feels her emotions rising, she starts to cry, despite herself.

FRIEDRICH (CONT'D)

Jo, why are you crying?

JO

Because -- because you are going away.

FRIEDRICH

I would never leave if you wished me to stay.

JO

I wish you would stay.

FRIEDRICH

But, but I have nothing to give you but my full heart and these empty hands.

JO

(she puts her hands in his, and steps under the umbrella)

They aren't empty now.

They kiss one of those epic perfect kisses. The train arrives, and he doesn't get on it. BAM.

THE PRESENT. INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. NEW YORK CITY. DAY. 1870.

Back to negotiations.

DASHWOOD (O.S.)

I love it. It's so romantic. "Your hands aren't empty now." It makes me emotional.

He gets a little teary.

JO

Thanks.

DASHWOOD

We can call the chapter "Under the Umbrella."

JO

(has to admit)

It's good.

DASHWOOD

Perfect! Now there is the question of the contract... I'm prepared to give you 5% of the royalties.

JON

So I get 5% of the profit?

DASHWOOD

5% of the net profits. After I recoup.

JO

What about a payment, upfront?

DASHWOOD

(shaking his head)

I'm taking the risk in printing this book.

JO

Yes, but, but it's my book.

DASHWOOD

If it works, then we'll both make money. If not, then I won't go under.

JO

So I get nothing? If it fails?

DASHWOOD

No, I'll give you \$500 dollars right now to buy out the copyright.

JO
The copyright?

DASHWOOD
It's the right for re-printing,
that sort of thing, sequels, the
characters for other stories.

JO
Might that be worth something?

DASHWOOD
Well, again, only if it's a
success.

JO
I see. It seems like something I
would want to own.

DASHWOOD
Doesn't your family need the money
more immediately?

JO
They do, which is why I wanted
upfront payment.

DASHWOOD
I'll only pay for the copyright.

An intense moment between them. Her book hangs in the
balance. She leans forward, resolute.

JO
You keep your \$500, and I'll keep
the copyright, thank you. Also, I
want ten percent of royalties.

DASHWOOD
Five point five percent and that is
very generous.

JO
Nine percent.

DASHWOOD
Six percent -- and that's it.

JO
If I'm going to sell my heroine
into marriage for money, I might as
well get some of it.

DASHWOOD
Six point six percent.

JO
Done.

DASHWOOD
And you don't need to decide about
the copyright now.

JO
I've decided. I want to own my own
book.

We fade down on this scene, and fade up on:

FICTION(?) INT./EXT. PLUMFIELD ACADEMY. DAY. 1871.

Jo is supervising a great number of rambunctious girls and boys of all races and ages. They are finishing lessons for the day, and everyone runs outside at full speed.

Jo makes her way down the stairs and is handed a homemade cake by one of the children. She kisses him on the head and continues through what she's built. Every inch of the school is covered with the students' work, all of the former stuffiness is gone. She's in her heaven.

INT. PRINTING HOUSE. DAY. 1871.

Jo, captivated, watches type being set, each letter put into place, and one page after another pressed with her novel.

FICTION(?) INT./EXT. PLUMFIELD ACADEMY. DAY. 1871.

Jo walks past Friedrich's classroom, all the students with their violins learning from him how to play. They smile at each other and she continues out.

INT. PRINTING HOUSE. DAY. 1871.

Each page is stacked one on top of the other and the massive industrial sewing machine stitches the pages together as Jo observes.

FICTION(?) EXT. PLUMFIELD ACADEMY. DAY. 1871.

Jo walks past Laurie giving a fencing lesson (while also holding his baby), Amy conducting a painting lesson, Meg supervising children in a play rehearsal, John Brooke (his own children next to him) leading a botany lesson... they all join Jo as she troupes down the lawn.

INT. PRINTING HOUSE. DAY. 1871.

The excesses of each page are sliced off, making a satisfying sound, and making Jo jump and laugh at her jumpiness.

FICTION(?) EXT. PLUMFIELD ACADEMY. DAY. 1871.

Leading a procession of children and family behind her, and holding the cake, Jo and the group arrive upon Father, teaching the very young children the alphabet by having their bodies form the letters, and also Marmee, who is having each child read aloud in their best dramatic reading voice.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. DAY. 1871.

The hard cover of the book is placed over the pages, the glue to hold it in place is so strong-smelling as to make Jo dizzy.

FICTION(?) EXT. PLUMFIELD ACADEMY. DAY. 1871.

Jo presents her mother with the cake, and all of them, Amy, Meg, Jo, Laurie, John, Friedrich, Father, and the children, wish her a happy birthday. Jo looks around at the group, so happy she was able to be alive with them, so amazed.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. DAY. 1871.

A man finishes the book, and unceremoniously hands it to Jo and gets to work on the next one.

THE PAST, OR MAYBE FICTION, OR MAYBE BOTH. 1850S.

Beth, Meg, Amy and Jo are very young girls, playing in their attic, together again, if only in memory, or in the book.

INT. PUBLISHING HOUSE. DAY. 1871.

Jo turns it over in her hands, touching it like the holy object it is, her inchoate desire made manifest.

Jo looks up ...

and sees the future -

CUT TO BLACK.

Credits.