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*Dramatic Publishing*

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S

# Little Women



Dramatized by Kristin Laurence

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT'S

# Little Women

***Adapted by Kristin Laurence. Based on the book by Louisa May Alcott. Cast: 9w.*** This full-length version of *Little Women* is loved by directors everywhere and has had hundreds of successful productions. The play begins that memorable Christmas when Marmee leaves to visit her sick husband and Jo sells her beautiful hair to help finance the trip. It ends just a year later when the happy family is again preparing to celebrate not only Christmas but also the return of Mr. March. In between these two events, we again live, laugh, love and cry with Meg, Jo, Amy and Beth as they go through the many trials and tribulations that have made this story a classic. *One int. set. Approximate running time: 2 hours, 5 minutes. Code: L27.*

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# Little Women

A dramatization in three acts of  
Louisa May Alcott's book, for an  
all-women cast,

By

KRISTIN LAURENCE



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(LITTLE WOMEN)

ISBN 0-87129-320-X

# Little Women

*A Play in Three Acts*

FOR NINE WOMEN

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## CHARACTERS

MEG	}	.....the "little women"
JO		
AMY		
BETH		
MRS. MARCH ("MARMEE")		.....their mother
AUNT MARCH		.....who is outspoken
HANNAH		.....the family servant
SALLIE MOFFATT		.....a friend
AUNT CAROLL		.....who is timid

PLACE: *All three acts take place in the living-room of the March home.*

TIME: *During the Civil War.*

## SYNOPSIS

ACT ONE, *Scene One: A December afternoon, a few days before Christmas.*

*Scene Two: Two weeks later.*

ACT TWO: *A month later. During Act Two, the lights are lowered to indicate the passing of a week.*

ACT THREE: *The afternoon of a day in December, a few days before Christmas, a year later.*

## NOTES ON CHARACTERS AND COSTUMES

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**MEG:** She is sixteen, with large eyes, and a very pretty, sweet face. Her dress and manner are dainty, and she has lovely white hands, of which she is very proud. Throughout the play, she and her sisters wear neat but plain-looking dresses suitable to that period.

**JO:** She is the tomboy of the family, and is a year younger than Meg. She is tall and thin, but very attractive. She seems all legs and arms, and is at that awkward age when she doesn't know what to do with them. She sprawls rather than sits. Her features are sharp and determined, and her beautiful hair is bundled up into a net. A few braids that match the hair of the person playing the part of Jo should be securely fastened to her own short hair inside this net. Then, in the second scene of Act One, when Jo comes back without her hair, she simply removes the net and these braids and puts on a bonnet, which she takes off to show the family her short hair. Jo does not pay as much attention to her dress as do the other girls; she enjoys a rather careless appearance.

**BETH:** Beth is almost fourteen, a rosy-cheeked, bright-eyed girl, with a shy, timid manner. She is loved by everyone, and Jo appropriately calls her "Mouse." In the last act, however, she has lost her plump, rosy look, and appears pale and wan, as a result of her sickness, but she never loses her sweet, peaceful disposition.

**AMY:** Amy is a very important person—if you should ask her. She is twelve. She is pale and slender, like a delicate flower, with long golden curls. She is determined to be grown up and a lady. She is always very particular about her dress, and manages to add a few frills to her otherwise plain clothes.

**MARMEE:** She is a very quiet, sweet-tempered woman of

about forty. Underneath, she is firm, but she rules her household with kindness rather than force. Her clothes are plain, and she wears them with an air of dignity.

**AUNT MARCH:** She is in her seventies, a large peppery, dictatorial lady, who tries to intimidate everyone. Underneath this gruff exterior she now and then shows her kindness and generosity. She is wealthy, and wears good clothes, although somewhat old-fashioned for the period. She may use a cane.

**HANNAH:** She is one of the family, having been with the March household since the girls were born. She may use a slight Irish accent, but it should not be overdone. Hannah is utterly devoted to the family, and is a capable, efficient housekeeper. She is firm with the girls, although she does delight in spoiling them now and then. She dresses very neatly at all times in house dresses and immaculate, stiffly-starched aprons.

**SALLIE:** She is about Jo's age, a dainty, pretty girl, who dresses elaborately in expensive clothes of the very latest style. Her appearance should contrast greatly with Jo's and Amy's plain clothes. She speaks with gushing sweetness, and pronounces the letter "r" as if it were "w."

**AUNT CAROLL:** She is a small, timid, meekly-agreeable person, a direct contrast to Aunt March. She seems to trail along in Aunt March's wake. Her clothes are very neat and plain.



## PROPERTIES

**GENERAL:** Fireplace and accessories; ottoman; large armchair, with end table right of it; smaller armchair; window seat, or large armchair in front of the window; several pots of flowers; small table, with doily and knickknacks; sofa and pillows; small work table; bowl of apples, on work table; easy chair; two bookcases; mirror; carpet, pictures, and other furnishings as space permits; small upright piano and bench (Act One, Scene Two).

**HANNAH:** Kitchen chair, Christmas wreath, hammer, and nail; rolling pin; telegram; handkerchief; old-fashioned carpet-bag; small travelling bag; note (invitation); dusting cloth; hot toddy; letter; apron and large wooden spoon.

**AMY:** Paper, pencil, and drawing board; letter; Marmee's shawl, bonnet, and gloves; handkerchief; pan of plaster (a dishpan, the top of which is covered with heavy white paper, and into which she inserts her foot); cookies; tall red candles in holders; clean collar and cuffs.

**BETH:** Knitting; toasting fork, by fireplace; stringy grey wig, on mantel; tray of tea things; blankets; Marmee's slippers; heavy bathrobe, blankets, and two bottles of wine; different knitting for Act Three; book.

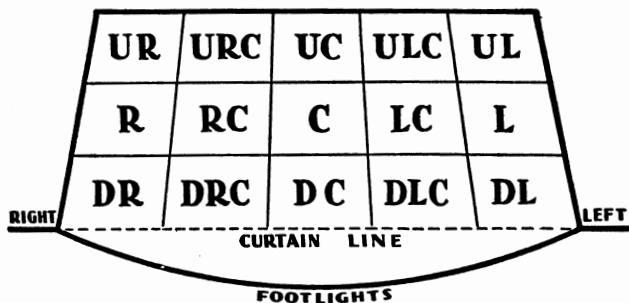
**JO:** Marmee's slippers; apple (from bowl); poker, by fireplace; manuscript; ice skates; mittens, on bookcase D L; pan of water; several bills; armload of books; newspaper; pen and paper; tray of tea things; tray, with small bowls of berries and cream, plate of sandwiches, teapot, sugar, and cream; "doctor's book," in bookcase U L; cape; nail, hammer, and wreath.

**MEG:** Embroidery, pair of candlesticks, rag curlers, curling iron, magazine (Godey's "Lady Book"), cup of tea, plate of cookies, sewing, cup of coffee.

**MARMEE:** Letter, knitting, paper and pen.

**AUNT MARCH:** Handbag and several bills.

## CHART OF STAGE POSITIONS



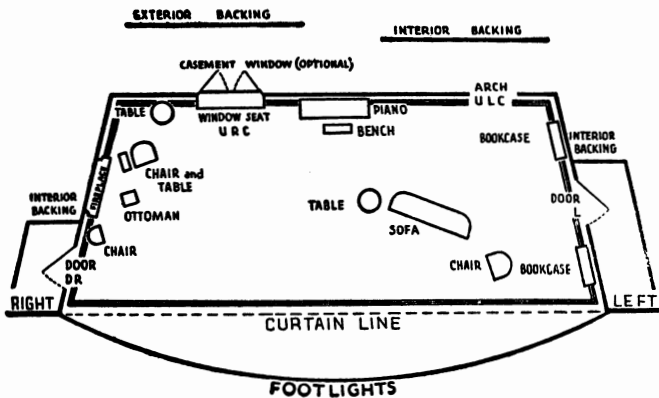
### STAGE POSITIONS

*Upstage* means away from the footlights, *downstage* means toward the footlights, and *right* and *left* are used with reference to the actor as he faces the audience. R means *right*, L means *left*, U means *up*, D means *down*, C means *center*, and these abbreviations are used in combination, as: U R for *up right*, R C for *right center*, D L C for *down left center*, etc. One will note that a position designated on the stage refers to a general territory, rather than to a given point.

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NOTE: Before starting rehearsals, chalk off your stage or rehearsal space as indicated above in the *Chart of Stage Positions*. Then teach your actors the meanings and positions of these fundamental terms of stage movement by having them walk from one position to another until they are familiar with them. The use of these abbreviated terms in directing the play saves time, speeds up rehearsals, and reduces the amount of explanation the director has to give to his actors.

# STAGE CHART



## ACT ONE—Scene One

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**SCENE:** *The living-room of the March home. It is a comfortable old room with plain, well-worn furniture. There are three entrances to the room. In the R wall, downstage, is the door to the kitchen. There is another door in the L wall at center, which leads to Marmee's bedroom, while U L C is an archway which leads to the front hall and the outside. There is a fire burning in the fireplace at L stage. In front of the fireplace is an ottoman, while a bit above it, facing downstage, is a large armchair with an end table right of it. There is a smaller armchair just below the fireplace, and facing slightly upstage. In the rear wall, U R C, are casement windows and a window seat, with several pots of flowers blooming along the sill. (An ordinary window will do in place of casement windows, in which case use an easy chair in front of the window to replace the window seat.) To the right of the window is a small table, with a doily and a few knickknacks. At L C, at an angle, is a sofa with several pillows. There is a small work table right of the sofa, and on it is a small bowl of apples. Below the sofa, D L C, is an easy chair. Above and below the door L, against the wall, are bookcases. On the wall D L is a mirror. When the piano and bench are brought in for the second scene in Act One, they are placed U C, against the back wall of the set, where they remain throughout the rest of the play.]*

**AT RISE OF CURTAIN:** HANNAH, the family servant, is standing on a kitchen chair, nailing a Christmas wreath above the archway U L C. JO is seated on the ottoman before the fire, and BETH is curled up in the big armchair upstage of the fireplace, humming softly as she knits. AMY, who is drawing a

*sketch of JO, sits on the sofa. MEG, slumped comfortably in the chair below the sofa, works carefully at her embroidery.]*

HANNAH [*with a last thump of the hammer*]. There! That ought to be holdin' it. [*She climbs down and stands back to look at it.*]

AMY. It looks very artistic, Hannah.

[HANNAH beams at the compliment. Gathering the chair and her things together, she goes out D R, leaving the girls looking critically at the wreath.]

JO [*grumbling*]. Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents.

MEG. It's so dreadful to be poor.

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

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

JO [*rebelliously*]. We haven't got Father and won't have for a long time. Maybe never.

BETH. Oh, Jo——

MEG [*quickly*]. You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas. The war is making it such a hard winter for everyone—and she thinks we shouldn't spend money on pleasure when our men in the army are suffering so.

AMY. Yes—it must be very disagreeable to be shot at, and have to sleep in a tent and drink out of a tin mug! [*She says this as if the tin mug were the worst of war's horrors.*]

MEG. We can't do much to help, but ought to do gladly what we can. [*She sighs.*] But I'm afraid sometimes I don't.

JO [*laughing a little*]. We've each got a dollar. I don't think the army would be much helped by that. [*Hugging her knees, she begins to rock back and forth on the footstool.*] I agree not to expect anything from you or Marmee, but I do want to buy "Undine and Sintram" for myself. I haven't bought a book for ever so long. [*She rocks too far, and the ottoman goes over, sending her sprawling.*]

AMY [*putting her drawing board down*]. Josephine, you are impossible!

BETH [*as she helps JO brush off her skirt*]. I planned to spend mine for new music. If only we had a nice piano. [*She resumes her seat, after helping JO.*]

AMY [*decidedly*]. I shall get a nice box of new drawing pencils. I really need them.

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

MEG. I know I do—teaching those tiresome children all day. At least you don't have to be a governess, Jo.

JO. You don't have half as hard a time as I do, being shut up all day with a fussy old lady like Aunt March. Every time I find an interesting book to read she starts calling—[*She imitates an old lady's voice.*]—"Josyphine! Josyphine!"—and I have to go help her wind yarn or wash the poodle!

AMY [*not wishing to be outdone*]. I don't believe any of you suffer as I do. You don't have to go to school with impertinent girls who laugh at your dresses and *label* your father if he isn't rich.

JO [*laughing*]. If you mean *libel*, I'd say so, and not talk about *labels*, as if Papa was a pickle bottle!

[*The other girls laugh at AMY.*]

AMY. I know what I mean, and you needn't be *statirical* about it. It's proper to use elegant words and improve your *vocabulary*. Jo uses such slang. [*She picks up her pencil and goes back to her sketching.*]

JO [*in great disgust*]. Elegant words! I like good strong words that mean something! [*She begins to whistle.*]

AMY. Don't whistle, Jo. It's boyish.

JO. That's why I do it. [*She continues to whistle.*]

AMY. I detest rude, unladylike girls. [*She swishes her skirt as she hitches about on the sofa.*]

JO [*imitating AMY'S gesture*]. And I hate affected, niminy-piminy little school children.

MEG [*in her "eldest sister" manner*]. Now, don't peck at one another.

JO. Oh, Amy is always trying to be so elegant! She has even started wearing a clothespin on her nose when she goes to bed.

AMY [*with a little toss of her head*]. My nose wouldn't be so flat and un-aristocratic if you hadn't dropped me in the coal hod when I was little.

BETH [*laughing*]. Remember, Jo and Amy—"birds in their little nests agree."

[*They all laugh, and peace is restored.*]

MEG. Really, though, Josephine, you are old enough to leave off boyish tricks and behave better. When you were younger it didn't matter so much, but now that you are so tall and turn up your hair, you should remember you are a young lady.

JO [*boily, rising, and crossing to C stage*]. I'm not a young lady! And if turning up my hair makes me one, I'll wear it in two tails till I'm twenty! [*She pulls off her net and shakes her head, letting her hair fall about her shoulders.*] I hate to think I've got to grow up and wear long gowns and be prim. [*She flops down on the hearth at BETH'S feet.*] It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway. I wish I were a boy and could go away to war with Papa and fight, instead of staying at home like a poky old woman.

MEG. But, Jo, Father is the chaplain of his regiment, and chaplains don't fight.

JO. They don't knit socks, either!

BETH [*stroking JO'S head*]. Poor Jo! It's too bad, but it can't be helped; so you must try to be content with having a boyish name and playing brother to us girls.

MEG [*continuing her sisterly lecture*]. As for you, Amy, you are getting altogether too particular and prim. I like your nice

manners, but your absurd words are as bad as Jo's slang. If you don't take care, you'll grow into an affected little goose.

[JO grins up at AMY, who pretends not to notice.]

BETH [*suddenly jumping up*]. Oh, I forgot to bring in Marmee's slippers!

JO [*getting up quickly*]. Never mind. I'll get 'em!

[JO dashes out L, into MARMEE'S bedroom.]

BETH [*moving up to the window*]. Oh, look! There's Laurie, out riding his new pony!

AMY [*running to look over BETH'S shoulder*]. That boy it a perfect Cyclops, isn't he?

[On AMY'S line, JO enters L with MARMEE'S slippers.]

JO [*moving U C*]. How dare you say that when he's got both his eyes?

AMY [*turning*]. I didn't say anything about his eyes. I don't see why you fire up so just because I admire his riding.

JO [*laughing*]. You mean a Centaur—not a Cyclops! [*She crosses to the fireplace and puts the slippers down on the hearth.*]

AMY. Anyway, he's outside with his new pony. [*She turns away, crosses down to the sofa, and sits again.*]

JO [*rushing to the window*]. He is! Where? [*She throws open the window and leans out, shouting.*] Laurie! Laurie! May I have that ride now?

MEG. Jo, you mustn't shout so.

JO [*over her shoulder, to MEG*]. How else can I make him hear me? [*She yells out the window again to Laurie.*] All right. I'll be right there. Wait a minute! [*She gathers her skirts up and climbs quickly out the window, shouting as she disappears.*] Be right back, Meg!

AMY [*moving U R C and closing the window firmly*]. Well! Jo is certainly precipitous!



BETH [*anxiously, peering through the window*]. I hope she doesn't catch cold, going out without her shawl and bonnet.

MEG. What would Marmee say?

BETH. Don't scold her, Meg. You know how Jo has been looking forward to riding the pony. [*She sits in the chair by the fireplace again.*]

AMY [*sitting down on the sofa and smoothing her skirt*]. Even people who ride horses usually leave the house by the door. I declare, it was a sad day for Josephine's manners when Laurie and his grandfather came to live next door.

[*BETH giggles, and MEG laughs outright.*]

MEG. You know you were as glad as any of us to see the Laurences move into that huge old house. Marmee thinks it's good for us to share our fun with a boy our own age, since we have no brothers. And old Mr. Laurence is such a good friend of Father's.

AMY. Well, I just meant——

BETH. It must be very lonely to live in such a big house with no father or mother—just a grandfather and a tutor.

AMY. I think it would be wonderful.

BETH. Why, Amy!

AMY. To have a tutor like Mr. Brooke, I mean, and not have to go to school any more.

BETH. But Mr. Brooke is *old*—he must be twenty-five, at least.

MEG. He's very dignified. And twenty-five isn't so awfully old.

BETH. But Laurie is only Jo's age——

AMY. I don't care! You needn't have jumped on me so—I didn't mean it was a *really* sad day when the Laurences and Mr. Brooke moved here, but—[*She pouts a little.*]*—even neighbors needn't go flying out windows at each other!*

[*There is the sound of much stomping about offstage U L, and JO calling "Good-bye, Laurie. Thanks very much." In a moment, she enters U L C, wearing a huge pair of russet-colored boots.*]

JO [*clumping about the room at C stage*]. Look! Aren't they wonderful? Real actor's boots! Laurie gave them to me to wear in our Christmas play.

AMY. Where did Laurie get actor's boots?

JO. He has a friend who has a friend who once knew an actor. It was certainly a lucky day for this family when Laurie and his grandfather moved in next door!

[AMY, MEG, and BETH all look at each other for a moment, and then burst into laughter. JO looks at them, puzzled.]

BETH [*quickly*]. I think the boots are—simply plummy!

[JO sits down on the ottoman and starts to tug at the boots to get them off.]

AMY [*rising, moving to her, to help take off the boots*]. You should exert a more Herculeaneum effort, Jo. [*She starts to help, but stops when JO laughs.*] Well, you needn't be rude about it. If I did make a mistake, it's only a lapse of lingly as Mr. Davis says at school. [*She sighs deeply, and goes to the window.*] I only wish I had some of the money Laurie spent buying that horse.

MEG. Why, what would you do with it?

AMY. I really need it. I'm dreadfully in debt, and——

MEG [*sharply*]. In debt! What do you mean?

AMY [*turning from the window and coming to C stage*]. I owe at least a dozen pickled limes——

MEG [*relieved*]. Is that all?

AMY. It's a debt of honor. I should pay them back next month when the new term begins, but I can't until I have some money, for Marmee forbade my charging anything at the store. It's quite dreadful.

MEG. Are pickled limes the fashion now?

AMY. Oh, yes! Everybody buys them. The girls eat them during school time and trade them off for pencils and bead rings at recess. If one girl likes another she gives her a lime; if she's mad at her she eats one right before her, and doesn't even

offer her a bite. They treat by turns. I've had ever so many, and I haven't returned them.

MEG [*smiling*]. How much will pay them off and restore your credit? Would a quarter do?

AMY [*delighted, racing down to her*]. And leave some over for a treat for you! Do you really think you can spare it?

MEG [*teasingly*]. Yes—since it is a debt of honor.

AMY [*bugging MEG*]. Oh, thank you! Ever so much!

[*JO, meanwhile, has not succeeded in removing the boots, and resigns herself to wearing them for the moment.*]

JO [*shaking her head*]. I wish it were as easy to get Marmee new slippers. These are quite worn out! [*She pokes her finger through the hole in the toe of one, and holds it up for the others to see.*]

BETH. I think I'll buy her some with my dollar.

AMY [*still glowing with new-found wealth*]. No! I shall. [*She perches on the upstage arm of MEG's chair.*]

MEG. I'm the oldest, so I ought—

JO [*cutting in decidedly*]. I'm the man of the family, now that Father is away, and I shall get the slippers, for he told me to take special care of Marmee while he was away.

BETH. I'll tell you what! Let's each get Marmee something for Christmas and not get anything for ourselves.

JO. Good for you, Bethy! [*She continues thoughtfully.*] What will we get?

MEG [*after a moment of sober consideration*]. I shall give her a nice pair of gloves.

JO. Army shoes, best to be had.

BETH. Some handkerchiefs, all hemmed.

AMY. I'll get a small bottle of cologne. It won't cost very much, so I'll have enough left to buy my drawing pencils.

MEG [*severely*]. Amy!

AMY [*defensively*]. She likes cologne!

JO. Let's let Marmee think we are getting things for ourselves, and then surprise her.

[*The doorbell rings offstage* U L. HANNAH enters D R to answer it.]

AMY [*as HANNAH enters*]. Now, who can that be?

HANNAH. I'll soon find out.

[HANNAH goes out U L C.]

HANNAH [*offstage* U L]. I'll be takin' it, thank you.

JO [*to MEG*]. We must go shopping tomorrow, anyway, Meg.

There's still so much to do about the play for Christmas night.

[HANNAH enters U L C, carrying a note.]

HANNAH [*handing the note to MEG*]. 'Tis for you.

[HANNAH goes out D R again.]

MEG [*opening the envelope*]. Jo! It's an invitation! [*She rises.*]

A regular note of invitation!

JO [*eagerly*]. Go on, read it.

MEG [*reading*]. "Mrs. Gardiner would be happy to see Miss Meg and Miss Josephine at a little dance on New Year's Eve." [*She looks up.*] Marmee will surely be willing to have us go. [*She stops suddenly.*] Whatever shall we wear?

JO [*rising, taking an apple from the bowl on the table right of the sofa*]. What's the use of asking that when you know we shall wear our poplins because we haven't got anything else? [*She calmly takes a bite of apple.*]

MEG [*sitting on the sofa*]. If only I had a silk! Mother says I may have one, perhaps, when I'm eighteen—but that seems an everlasting time to wait.

JO [*reassuringly*]. I'm sure our pops look like silk, and they are nice enough for us. Yours is as good as new. [*She stops in horror.*] Oh! I forgot the burn in mine! Whatever shall I do?

MEG. The burn? Where? Can't it be covered?

BETH. I could sew a patch over it.

JO. No—it's—well, you see, I was standing with my back to the fire, and the—back is burned out of it.

MEG. Well, you will just have to sit still all you can and keep your back out of sight.

BETH. That's a shame!

JO [*with assumed indifference*]. Oh, well, I don't care much for company dancing. I like to fly about and cut capers. [*She illustrates by whirling about at c stage.*]

MEG. I can wear my new slippers and get a new ribbon for my hair. Maybe Marmee will let me wear her little pearl pin. My gloves will do, though they aren't as nice as I'd like.

JO [*casually*]. Mine are spoilt with lemonade, so I shall have to go without. [*She crosses down to the chair below the fireplace and sits.*]

MEG [*horrified*]. You must have gloves or I won't go! Gloves are more important than anything. A lady simply doesn't go without them.

JO. I can't ask Marmee for new ones. She said when I tore the last pair that I couldn't have any more this winter.

MEG. Can't you make yours do?

JO. I can hold them crumpled up in my hand, so no one will see them. [*She jumps up.*] Christopher Columbus! I have it! We can each wear a good one and carry one of my bad ones. Don't you see?

MEG. Your hands are bigger than mine. You'll stretch my gloves dreadfully.

JO. Then I'll go without. I don't care what people say.

MEG. You may have it, you may. Only don't spill anything on it, and do behave nicely. Don't put your hands behind your back, or say "Christopher Columbus," will you?

JO [*dropping a deep curtsey*]. I shall be a pattern of prudence! [*She sits again.*]

MEG [*smiling, in spite of herself*]. I daresay it will be very pleasant after all our grubbing along. Laurie will be sure to have an invitation, too.

AMY [*who is still perched on the arm of the chair, eagerly absorbing the conversation*]. Oh—maybe his grandfather will let him drive you to the party in their carriage. Wouldn't that be elegant?

MEG [*sighing*]. Don't you wish *we* could have money and a carriage as we used to, Jo?

JO [*sprawling out comfortably in the chair*]. Mmmm—I guess so. Never mind. Maybe some rich relative will leave you a fortune, and you can go dashing about in a blaze of splendor.

MEG [*feeling a little sorry for herself*]. People don't have fortunes left them nowadays. Men have to work, and women to marry for money. It's a dreadfully unjust world.

[JO and BETH burst into laughter.]

JO. Fiddlesticks! You're just trying to put on grown-up airs by repeating what you've heard Sallie Moffatt prattling about. You said yourself we had more fun than the Moffatts for all their money.

MEG [*abashed*]. Yes, so I did.

AMY [*crossing to stand before the fire*]. I shall become a painter when I grow up, and be very famous and make fortunes for all of you.

JO. I think I shall write books. I'm not just sure—but I mean to do something wonderful and astonish you all some day.

MEG. Aren't we ambitious!

[*They all laugh.*]

JO [*jumping up and crossing to c stage*]. In the meantime, we'd better be rehearsing our play.

MEG. I don't mean to act any more after this time. I'm getting too old for such things.

JO. You won't stop as long as you can trail around in a long gown and wear gold paper jewelry. You're the best actress we've got, and there'd be an end to everything if you quit the boards. [*She calls to AMY.*] Come, Amy, and do the fainting scene. You're stiff as a poker in that.