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*Dramatic Publishing*

# **LITTLE WOMEN: MEG, JO, BETH AND AMY**

**A two-act play based on the writings of  
LOUISA MAY ALCOTT**

**Adapted by  
SANDRA FENICHEL ASHER**

**Commissioned by DreamWrights Youth and Family Theatre**



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(LITTLE WOMEN: MEG, JO, BETH AND AMY)

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This play is dedicated to my friend,  
Honey Coane Zimmerman,  
in loving memory.

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SUGGESTED MUSIC: Appropriate Christmas carols of the time include "The First Noel," "It Came Upon a Midnight Clear," "We Wish You a Merry Christmas," "We Three Kings of Orient Are," "The Twelve Days of Christmas," "Up on the House Top," "Here We Come a-Was-sailing," "Angels We Have Heard on High" and "All Through the Night." All are available in Dan Fox's *Classic Christmas Carols and Songs: Arrangements for Piano, Guitar, and Electronic Keyboard*. Andrews and McNeel, Kansas City, Mo., 1994.

In addition to "What Can the Matter Be" (included at back of script), other folk songs of the era include "Down in the Valley," "Hush Little Baby," "Old Dan Tucker," "Nothing Else to Do" and "Froggie Went a-Courtin'." Mark McCutcheon's *Writers' Guide to Everyday Life in the 1800s* (Writers Digest Press, 1993) is a useful resource for determining what year well-known songs came into fashion, along with other period facts. *Folk Songs of Old New England*, collected and edited by Eloise Hubbard Linscott (The Macmillan Company, 1939; 2nd ed., Shoe String Press, 1962) is an interesting source of lesser-known songs and dance tunes.

# LITTLE WOMEN: MEG, JO, BETH AND AMY

A play in two acts  
for 12 women, 7 men (10 women, 6 men with doubling)\*

## CHARACTERS

### The March Family

JO . . . . . 15, an energetic and rebellious young author  
and playwright

MEG . . . . . 16, her older, far more ladylike sister

BETH . . . . . 13, their younger sister, shy, gentle,  
a talented pianist

AMY . . . . . 12, the baby, beautiful, artistic, self-centered

MARMEE . . . . . their ever-patient and wise mother

MR. MARCH . . their father, a chaplain in the Union Army

HANNAH MULLET . . . . . their housekeeper,  
an Irish immigrant

AUNT MARCH . . . . . Mr. March's elderly, peppery,  
well-to-do aunt

### The Laurence Household, next door

Laurie . . . . . 15, as energetic and rebellious as Jo

MR. LAURENCE . . . . . Laurie's grandfather,  
gruff but kindhearted

JOHN BROOKE . . . . . 25, Laurie's tutor, in love with Meg



### Other Friends and Neighbors

SALLIE GARDINER . . . . . a friend of Meg's, about 16  
ANNIE MOFFATT . . . . . another friend, about 16  
KITTY BRYANT . . . . . a classmate of Amy's, about 12  
PARTY, DANCE, PICNIC GUESTS, if desired  
(non-speaking)

### Laurie's Guests from England

FRED . . . . . a teenager  
NED . . . . . a teenager  
FRANK . . . . . about 10, uses a wheelchair  
KATE . . . . . about 20  
GRACE . . . . . about 12

\*MR. MARCH also plays MR. LAURENCE;  
ANNIE also plays KATE; KITTY also plays GRACE.  
In Act II "letter" scene, omit Mr. Laurence's letter, pp. 66-67.

TIME: Just before Christmas 1861 to Christmas Day, 1862.

PLACE: In and around the March house in Concord, Mass.

SETTING: Please see end of playbook for set description.

PLAYING TIME: About two hours, with intermission.

## ACT ONE

TIME: *Just before Christmas, 1861, to early spring, 1862.*

AT RISE: *The stage is dark. A PIANO is heard, as if in the distance, playing a Christmas carol. JO enters garret at L with a lighted candle or lantern, sets it down, drags on a small table and chair, sits (not very gracefully), pulls out a notebook, pen and inkwell and begins to read with ever-increasing expression and enthusiasm. PIANO fades.*

JO. "The Banner of Beaumanoir" by Josephine March. (*Looks at her writing a moment, crosses something out, reads again.*) "The Banner of Beaumanoir" by Jo March. (*Considers this, finds it more suitable, continues reading.*) "Larks were singing in the clear sky over Dinan. (*Pictures this, smiles with approval, reads on.*) Up at the chateau, a great banner streamed in the wind, showing the motto of the Beaumanoirs—'En tout chemin loyauté.' " (*She stops, relishing the meaning of these words.*) Always loyal. (*She sighs with satisfaction, and continues reading. The excitement soon brings her to her feet.*) "In the courtyard below, hounds brayed, horses pranced, and servants hurried about, for the count was going to hunt wild boar. Away they went, with the merry music of horns, clatter of hooves, and ring of voices, till the pleasant clamor died away in the distant

woods. (*She observes the departure, totally believing and entranced, then turns back toward the chateau tower—and her reading.*) From one of the windows of the chateau tower, a boy's face looked out, full of eager longing. (*In a boyish voice.*) 'If I may not hunt, I'll away to Yvonne,' he declared. 'She can tell better tales than any in this weary book.' (*Still in boy's voice, but considering her writing.*) ... this ... weary ... book ... (*Suddenly inspired, she writes as she speaks.*) ... 'the bane of my life!' (*Laughs, pleased with herself. Thinks, gets a sudden inspiration, then, in her own voice, still writing.*) Swinging himself out as if it were no new feat, he climbed boldly down. The moment he touched ground ... he raced away to the meadow ... where he was welcomed by a rosy, brown-eyed lass. (*In boy's voice, completely caught up in acting both roles.*) 'I will not waste such days poring over dull pages when I should be hunting like a knight and a gentleman.' (*In girl's voice, firm but good-humored.*) 'Nay, dear Gaston, but you ought, for obedience is the first duty of the knight, and honor of the gentleman.' "

MEG (*offstage*). Jo! Jo, where are you?

JO (*shuts notebook with a sigh of satisfaction*). Up here, in the garret.

(*JO waves notebook at MEG as she enters.*)

JO (*cont'd*). There'll be a fine new role for you, Meg, when I've finished my latest story. Yvonne. (*In her boyish voice.*) I'll play Gaston, of course.

MEG. I don't mean to act anymore after the play for Christmas night. I'm getting too old for such things.

JO (*alarmed*). You're the best actress we've got, and there'll be an end of everything if you quit the boards.

MEG. Never mind that now. Come down. It's nearly time for tea.

JO. Is Marmee home?

MEG. Not yet. I'm sure she's on her way.

*(They exit together. LIGHTS down on garret. BETH is playing PIANO as LIGHTS come up to reveal the living room. AMY is hanging greenery. JO and MEG enter through archway. JO, seeing the decorations for the first time, is deflated by their meagerness. BETH stops playing as JO speaks.)*

JO (*flopping on the floor near the fireplace*). Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents.

MEG (*primping up a bit of greenery*). It's so dreadful to be poor.

AMY (*taking a critical look at her decorating efforts*). 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. We haven't got Father, and shall not have him for a long time. Perhaps— (*She's about to say "never," and ALL know it.*)

MEG. Please don't say what you're thinking, Jo.

JO (*shrugs*). It's only because he's far away, where the fighting is.

MEG (*taking on a grown-up tone*). It's going to be a hard winter for everyone, and Marmee thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army.

JO. Aunt March gave us each a dollar, and the army wouldn't be much helped by our giving that. I agree not to expect anything from Marmee or you, but I do want to buy the book *Undine and Sintram* for myself. I've wanted it so long.

BETH (*quietly*). I planned to spend mine on music.

AMY (*taking up her sketchpad and pencils: decisively*). I shall get a nice box of Faber's drawing pencils.

JO. Marmee won't wish us to give up everything. Let's each buy what we want, and have a little fun. I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it.

MEG (*in her complaining tone again*). I know I do—teaching those tiresome King children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home.

JO. You don't have half the hard time I do. How would you like to be shut up for hours with Aunt March, who is never satisfied, and worries you till you're ready to fly out of the window?

BETH. It's naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world.

AMY. I don't believe any of you suffer as I do, for you don't have to go to school with impertinent girls, who laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn't rich.

JO (*laughing*). If you mean "libel," you'd better say so, Amy, and not talk about "labels," as if Papa was a pickle-bottle!

AMY. I know what I mean, and you needn't be statirical about it.

JO. Statirical?

MEG (*as JO laughs even louder*). Don't peck at one another, children. (*AMY and JO desist, grumpily.*) Don't

you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me, how happy and good we'd be if we had no worries!

BETH. You said, the other day, you thought we were a great deal happier than the King children, for they fight and fret all the time, in spite of their money.

MEG (*softening*). So I did, Beth, dear. Well, we are a pretty jolly set, as Jo would say.

AMY. Jo uses such slang words! (*JO responds by jamming her hands in her pockets and whistling.*) Don't, Jo, it's so boyish.

JO. That's why I do it.

AMY. I detest rude, unlady-like girls.

JO. And I hate affected, niminy-piminy chits!

BETH (*sweetly, anxious to end their squabbling*). Birds in their little nests agree!

MEG (*motherly again*). Really, girls, you are both to be blamed. You're old enough to leave off boyish tricks, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl, but now you should remember that you're a young lady.

JO. I'm not! I hate to think I've got to grow up, and be "Miss March." I'm dying to go and fight with Papa! (*She collapses on the floor again, at BETH's feet.*)

BETH (*stroking her hair gently, calming her*). Poor Jo! You must try to be contented with making your name boyish, and playing brother to us girls.

MEG. And Papa isn't fighting, Jo! He's a chaplain, giving comfort to the soldiers. (*JO is chagrined by this.*) As for you, Amy, your airs are funny now, but you'll grow up an affected little goose, if you don't take care.

BETH. If Jo is a tomboy and Amy's a goose, what am I, please?

MEG. You're a dear, and nothing else, Beth.

JO (*her spirits instantly lifted*). Our own "little Mouse."

(*Clock begins to chime.*)

BETH. It's six o'clock. Why isn't Marmee home?

MEG (*as HANNAH enters to light the lamps*). Hannah, where can Mother be so late?

HANNAH. Goodness only knows. The Hummel boy come a-beggin' for help, and your ma went straight off to see what was needed. There never was such a woman for givin' away vittles and drink, clothes and firewood.

MEG. She'll be back soon, I'm sure, so fry your cakes for tea, Hannah, and have everything ready.

(*HANNAH nods and exits.*)

BETH. I'll warm Marmee's slippers by the fire.

JO (*stoking the fire, as BETH holds out the slippers*).

They're quite worn out. Marmee must have a new pair.

BETH. I thought I'd get her some with my dollar.

AMY. No, I shall!

MEG. I'm the oldest—

JO. I'm the man of the family, now Papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers.

BETH. Let's each get Marmee something for Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves.

JO. That's like you, dear! We'll let her think we're getting things for ourselves, and then surprise her.

MEG (*delighted at the thought of shopping*). We must go shopping—

JO. Tomorrow, Meg. There's so much to do about the play yet. We ought to rehearse right now. (*Drags AMY from her chair.*) Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene. You're stiff as a poker in that.

AMY. I can't help it. I never saw anyone faint, and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue.

JO. Do it this way. (*Demonstrating, with vigor.*) "Alas! Roderigo! Save me!" (*She emits a bloodcurdling scream and falls to the floor. BETH and MEG applaud. To AMY.*) Now, you try.

AMY (*mincing along daintily*). "Alas! Roderigo! Save me!" (*A ladylike "ooooo," a glance at the hard floor, and then, still "ooooo"ing, she repositions herself to faint into a comfortable chair. JO groans in exasperation, MEG and BETH laugh.*)

JO. It's no use!

(*MARMEE enters at archway.*)

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

JO. Marmee's home!

MARMEE (*as GIRLS rush to help her remove and hang up her coat, escort her to her chair by the fire, remove her boots, and put on her slippers*). How have you gotten on today, my dears? Has any one called, Beth?

BETH. No, Marmee.

MARMEE. How is your cold, Meg?

MEG. Much better, Marmee.



MARMEE (*gathering both JO and AMY close to her*). Jo, you look tired to death. (*To AMY.*) Come and kiss me, baby.

(*HANNAH enters with teapot and cups, sets them on table.*)

HANNAH. Here's tea, ma'am.

MARMEE. Thank you, Hannah.

(*HANNAH smiles and exits, returning several times through the following with food for their tea.*)

MARMEE (*cont'd. To GIRLS*). And now, girls, I've got a treat for you all. (*ALL gather close to the chair as MARMEE brings a letter out of her pocket.*)

JO. A letter!

MARMEE. Yes, a nice long letter. Your papa is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared.

(*LIGHT comes up at L, where MR. MARCH is seen writing the letter MARMEE holds in her hand.*)

JO. Don't I wish I could go as a drummer, or a nurse, so I could help him!

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

BETH. When will he come home, Marmee?

MARMEE. Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick, and we won't ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and a special message to you girls: (*Read-*

*ing.*) "Tell them I think of them by day, pray for them by night—

MARMEE & MR. MARCH. —and find my best comfort in their affection at all times."

MR. MARCH (*reading his letter aloud as MARMEE mouths reading it to GIRLS*). "A year seems very long to wait before I see them, but I know that they will be loving children to you and will do their duty faithfully, so that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women." (*LIGHT fades on MR. MARCH, who exits.*)

MEG (*tearfully*). Oh, Papa!

AMY (*sobbing*). I am a selfish girl! But I'll truly try to be better, so he won't be disappointed in me.

MEG. We all will! I think too much of my looks, and hate to work, but won't anymore—if I can help it.

JO. And I'll try not to be rough and wild.

MARMEE (*smiling gently*). Each of you told what your burden was just now, except Beth. I rather think she hasn't got any.

BETH. Yes, I have! Mine is envying girls with nice pianos, and being afraid of people.

JO (*hugging BETH sympathetically*). Oh, Mouse!

MARMEE (*suddenly serious*). Our burdens are here, our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes. (*A thoughtful pause, then:*) Girls, not far away lies a poor woman, Mrs. Hummel, with a newborn baby. Her children are huddled in one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there, and they are suffering hunger and cold. Will you give them your tea as a Christmas present?

JO (*as ALL ad lib agreement and jump up to ready their tea things for carrying out*). I'm so glad you told us before we began to eat!

BETH. May I help carry things to the poor little children?

MEG. May we all go?

AMY. I shall take the cream and the muffins—for they're what I most like myself.

MARMEE. I thought you'd do it. You shall all go and help me, and when we come back we'll have bread and milk—and make it up at our Christmas party tomorrow.

*(They gather up food, tea, firewood. JO begins singing a carol and ALL join in heartily. LIGHTS fade on living room, PIANO picks up carol and continues to play as ALL exit. BETH is next discovered as LIGHTS come up in the garret. She reads aloud by candle or lantern light from JO's notebook, engrossed in the tale.)*

BETH. "Yvonne's father was the count's forester, and when the countess died, good Dame Gillian had taken in the motherless Gaston and reared him with her little girl. But time brought changes, and both felt that the hour of separation was near, for while Yvonne went on leading the peasant life to which she was born, Gaston was receiving the education befitting a young count." *(She takes a moment to consider this, sighs, reads on.)* "Now, seeing that Gaston was already growing more tranquil, Yvonne told him stirring tales of warriors, saints, and fairies."

*(JO enters the garret, in "Hugo" hat and cape, nearly ready for her play. She carries her russet-leather boots.)*

BETH (*cont'd*). "Best of all was the tale of Gaston's own ancestor, Jean de Beaumanoir, the hero of Ploermel, where, sorely wounded and parched with thirst, he cried for water and Geoffrey du Bois answered—"

(*Surprising BETH, JO recites the next part of this new story by heart, brandishing a knife to be used in "Witch's Curse."*)

JO. "'Drink thy blood, Beaumanoir, and thy thirst will pass!' And he drank and the battle madness seized him and he slew ten men, winning the fight against great odds, to his everlasting glory." (*As herself.*) Ah, those were the times to live in! If they could only come again, I would be a second Jean de Beaumanoir! (*She sighs, sits, and pulls on her boots.*) Ah, well. Our guests are all here, Beth. Curtain's about to go up on "The Witch's Curse." You will play for us, won't you?

BETH. Yes—but *no lines*.

JO. No lines, Mouse.

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

JO (*as they put away the notebook and pillow*). Not quite. "The Witch's Curse" is a rather nice thing, and this new story will be even better, but I'd like to try Macbeth. (*In a deep voice, as they exit together, with candle.*) "Is this a dagger which I see before me, the handle toward my hand?"

(*MUSIC bridges transition as LIGHTS fade on garret and come up on living room, where a blanket has been hung across the archway, furniture has been pushed*

*back and chairs set up facing the arch for an audience of friends—SALLIE, KITTY and ANNIE—and MARMEE and AUNT MARCH. There is much rustling and giggling behind the blanket as MUSIC fades.)*

AUNT MARCH. Are we ever to see this foolishness—or shall we be kept waiting straight into the new year?

MARMEE. I'm sure the performance will begin very soon, Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH. Good! Sooner begun, sooner done.

*(Ever-patient MARMEE leads AUNT MARCH to a chair. ANNIE, SALLIE and KITTY quickly move to another part of the room.)*

KITTY (*whispering*). Who is that cross old woman talking to Mrs. March?

ANNIE. Be quiet, Kitty. She'll hear you.

KITTY. Is she the witch in Jo's play?

ANNIE. No! Hush!

SALLIE (*confidentially*). That's Aunt March. She's very wealthy.

ANNIE (*also confidentially*). Meg said that when the troubles came—

KITTY (*a bit too loudly*). When Mr. March lost all his money?

ANNIE. Hush! Yes, trying to help an old friend. Aunt March offered to adopt one of the girls and was offended when her offer was declined.

SALLIE. "Rich or poor," Mr. March told her, "we will keep together and be happy in one another."

KITTY. Imagine if Amy had to live with her!