Excerpt terms and conditions

This excerpt is available to assist you in the play selection process.

Excerpts are not intended for performance, classroom or other academic use. In any of these cases you will need to purchase playbooks via our website or by phone, fax or mail.

A short excerpt is not always indicative of the entire work, and we strongly suggest you read the whole play before planning a production or ordering a cast quantity.



Little Women

Original Book by

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

Adapted by

THOMAS HISCHAK

Dramatic Publishing Company
Woodstock, Illinois • Australia • New Zealand • South Africa

© Dramatic Publishing

*** NOTICE ***

The amateur and stock acting rights to this work are controlled exclusively by THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., without whose permission in writing no performance of it may be given. Royalty must be paid every time a play is performed whether or not it is presented for profit and whether or not admission is charged. A play is performed any time it is acted before an audience. Current royalty rates, applications and restrictions may be found at our website: www.dramaticpublishing.com, or we may be contacted by mail at: THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., 311 Washington St., Woodstock, IL 60098.

COPYRIGHT LAW GIVES THE AUTHOR OR THE AUTHOR'S AGENT THE EXCLUSIVE RIGHT TO MAKE COPIES. This law provides authors with a fair return for their creative efforts. Authors earn their living from the royalties they receive from book sales and from the performance of their work. Conscientious observance of copyright law is not only ethical, it encourages authors to continue their creative work. This work is fully protected by copyright. No alterations, deletions or substitutions may be made in the work without the prior written consent of the publisher. No part of this work may be reproduced or transmitted in any form or by any means, electronic or mechanical, including photocopy, recording, videotape, film, or any information storage and retrieval system, without permission in writing from the publisher. It may not be performed either by professionals or amateurs without payment of royalty. All rights, including, but not limited to, the professional, motion picture, radio, television, videotape, foreign language, tabloid, recitation, lecturing, publication and reading, are reserved.

For performance of any songs, music and recordings mentioned in this play that are in copyright, the permission of the copyright owners must be obtained or other songs and recordings in the public domain substituted.

©MCMXCV by
THOMAS HISCHAK

Printed in the United States of America
All Rights Reserved
(LITTLE WOMEN)

ISBN: 978-0-88680-412-1

© Dramatic Publishing

IMPORTANT BILLING AND CREDIT REQUIREMENTS

All producers of the play *must* give credit to the author of the play in all programs distributed in connection with performances of the play and in all instances in which the title of the play appears for purposes of advertising, publicizing or otherwise exploiting the play and/or a production. The name of the author *must* also appear on a separate line, on which no other name appears, immediately following the title, and *must* appear in size of type not less than fifty percent (50%) the size of the title type. Biographical information on the author, if included in the playbook, may be used in all programs. *In all programs this notice must appear:*

"Produced by special arrangement with
THE DRAMATIC PUBLISHING COMPANY, INC., of Woodstock, Illinois."

© Dramatic Publishing

© Dramatic Publishing

ABOUT THE PLAY

Louisa May Alcott's *Little Women* is an epic tale that covers several years and many characters. A production of the play may be magnificent and huge, or relatively simple. It is most important that the action moves along swiftly with Josephine's narration covering any scene changes and costume changes that might be necessary. See Production Notes at the end of the playscript for suggestions. Josephine, of course, is Louisa May Alcott.

Most of the action takes place in the March house, and that is the only required scenery. A combination of living room, attic room and Beth's bedroom works best and this set should never move or be changed. All the other locations in the script can be played in front of the March set with little or no scenic pieces. A suggested floor plan can be found at the end of the play.

The cast size for this version of *Little Women* is flexible. Smaller roles that can be doubled are marked. Additional actors can be added to the Christmas party scene, the dance at the Laurences', and on the street in Act I Scene 9. The role of Amy may be played by two different actresses: a smaller, younger one for Act I and a slightly older, taller one for Act II. The role of Josephine has the greatest number of lines, but it must be remembered that her narration is a planned lecture, so she may use notes or even the script itself.

Finally, this version of *Little Women* runs about two and a half hours with one intermission between acts. For groups who need to shorten this time, we refer you to the shorter version of *Little Women* with cuts by the author.

Thomas Hischak is a retired Professor of Theatre at the State University of New York College at Cortland. He is the author of many published plays and several books on the American Musical Theatre.

© Dramatic Publishing

The author and the publisher have worked to make this script playable by every theatre regardless of size and budget, and by actors of virtually any age, because we feel it is a story that every person ought to see.

It will touch every heart.

Originally produced by the SUNY Masquers at the State University of New York at Cortland.

© Dramatic Publishing

Little Women

CHARACTERS

In 1889:

MRS. TOMLINSON: A society lady.*
JOSEPHINE MARCH: A famous author.

The Years 1863 to 1868:

The March Family

MR. MARCH
MRS. MARCH: Called Marmee.
MEG: Their oldest and most practical daughter.
JO: A tomboy.
BETH: Shy and frail.
AMY: Their youngest daughter.
HANNAH: Their housekeeper.
AUNT MARCH: A rich relative.

Next Door

MR. LAURENCE: A wealthy man.
THEODORE (LAURIE) LAURENCE: His grandson—about Jo's age.
JOHN BROOKE: A tutor.

Also in Town

MRS. MOFFET*
CLARA: Her daughter
JENNY & MARY: Schoolgirls*
SARAH & KATY: Meg's pupils*

© Dramatic Publishing

In New York City

MRS. KIRKE.*
KITTY & MINNIE: Her daughters.*
PROFESSOR FRIEDRICH BHAER

* These roles can be doubled

© Dramatic Publishing

Little Women

ACT I

PROLOGUE

(A lecture hall in a small American city in 1889. There is a podium, a table with a glass of water and a chair. While the house lights are still up, MRS. TOMLINSON enters with JOSEPHINE MARCH. They are both late-middle-age ladies, dressed fashionably but not ostentatiously. Offstage a noise of people at a meeting is heard. JOSEPHINE sits and TOMLINSON goes to the podium, where she bangs her gavel. The recorded noise of the spectators dies down.)

TOMLINSON. Attention please, ladies. *(An afterthought.)* And gentlemen guests. We are about to begin. Thank you. As this year's president of the Springfield Ladies Literary Society, I am pleased and delighted to welcome you all tonight to our special program. Our speaker this evening is none other than that noted authoress, Josephine March, who, I am sure you will agree, needs no introduction. Except to say that she is also a celebrated champion of women's issues, a dedicated speaker on matters of importance to all of us, and a somewhat infamous … ah … suffragette. *(A buzz from the spectators is heard and she bangs her gavel again.)* But tonight, I hope, we will be hearing from Josephine March the literary writer. Her stories and characters have brought us so much fulfillment over the years. She is a national treasure and we are so honored to have her as our guest here in Springfield. Please welcome … Josephine March!

© Dramatic Publishing

(Recorded applause as TOMLINSON exits and JOSEPHINE goes to the podium.)

JOSEPHINE. Thank you for that spirited welcome. Since I don't have any plans for getting myself arrested while here in Springfield, I will limit my talk to a rather safe subject: literary fiction. I am often asked why I became a writer and I never have found a satisfactory answer except to say that I am who I am and Jo March always wanted to write. If I can somehow let you see the real Jo March, you will understand why I write. My whole life, I suppose, has been a series of adventures. Not the kind of adventures one thinks of as dazzling or grand; but the kind that we all experience. And I have learned that such a journey is no less remarkable than the adventures of Odysseus.

Scene 1

(Music is heard. The house lights dim out. Only JOSEPHINE is left in light.)

JOSEPHINE *(cont'd)*. If I had to pick a moment in time when I began this journey, it would be the Christmas of 1863. We lived in a town not unlike this one, in a New England that was far away from a raging war.

(The lights rise on the March house. BETH sits at the piano playing. Some of the keys don't work properly but she plays on valiantly. MEG and AMY are in the attic, huddled over a box.)

JOSEPHINE *(cont'd)*. Father had lost a great deal of money in a bad business venture some years before, so the March family was not so grand as it had once been. But we were

© Dramatic Publishing

able to keep our house and we made ends meet as best we could. When the war came, Father was too old to go as a soldier so he joined Mr. Lincoln's army as a chaplain. He had left for Virginia the spring before and money matters were difficult than ever. But still it was Christmas Eve and the March family was nothing if not spirited.

(MEG and AMY come down the steps with the box and go into the sitting room.)

MEG. Beth, look what we found in the attic!

AMY. They're not really tree decorations but they'll do well enough.

BETH. Let me see … !

MEG. This old banner from Jo's play last summer might make a suitable garland.

BETH. Oh, look at this!

AMY. Our star for the top of the tree!

BETH. This is pretty …

AMY. Oh, Beth, let me have it! I can make a new hair ribbon out of that, don't you think?

MEG. We'll get this sad old tree looking magical before Marmee gets home. If only there were dozens of presents to put under it.

AMY. Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents.

MEG. Oh, 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 …

AMY. But we haven't got Father, not at home we don't. And who's to say how long it will be before we see him again.

© Dramatic Publishing

MEG. You know the reason Mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas was because it's going to be a hard winter for everyone. And money ought not be spent for pleasure when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices and ought to do it gladly. *(A beat.)* I just wish I felt more … glad about it.

(The three girls work on the tree silently as JOSEPHINE continues.)

JOSEPHINE. That's Meg, the oldest and the most practical of the March girls. We all looked up to Meg because she always seemed so responsible.

AMY. I wouldn't mind being so poor and not having nice things if I didn't have to go to that horrible school with those impudent girls who laugh at your dresses and label your father if he isn't rich. I wish we were as wealthy as the Laurences; I'd thumb my nose at those girls and teach them a thing or two about manners.

(AMY and MEG continue with the tree as BETH returns to the piano.)

JOSEPHINE. That is Amy, the youngest and, as she likes to remind us, the prettiest.

BETH *(stops playing)*. Oh, dear. That key is sticking again.

MEG. Oh, don't stop, Beth.

AMY. We love it when you play!

BETH. I only wish I played better. Then this old piano wouldn't sound so bad. *(Resumes playing.)* I know it sounds so funny to say, but in some ways I'm glad we're not rich.

AMY. Whatever fort

© Dramatic Publishing

MEG. What do you mean, Beth?

BETH. Well … didn't you say just the other day, Meg, that the Watson children you have to tend to are always fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money?

MEG. Well, yes—

BETH. And that we were a great deal happier than they were? Well, I think we are. For, though we do have to work and do without things, we make fun for ourselves and I wouldn't want it any other way.

(AMY and MEG look at her affectionately.)

JOSEPHINE. And that's our Beth … so sweet, so kind and gentle. But also so shy that she was content never to leave her house and her piano if she didn't need to. We all adored Beth but her frail health and timid manner were a concern to all the family.

(A loud and boisterous voice is heard offstage. It is JO.)

JO *(offstage)*. Hellooooo! "Don Pedro, where are ye, thou snivelling swine of a villainous wretch!"

JOSEPHINE. But most troubling of the March sisters was undoubtedly … myself.

JO *(enters from the hall, throwing her coat down and rushing to the warm fire)*. Hello, dears!

BETH. Jo!

MEG. You're home early.

JO. Yes, I escaped! Aunt March dozed off in the middle of chapter seven of St. Augustine's *Confessions* so I tiptoed out with her being none the wiser. Christopher Columbus! Look at that tree!

© Dramatic Publishing

AMY. Do you like it?

MEG. Jo, don't use such slang, please.

JO. Like it? It's miraculous! Maybe we'll have a bit of Christmas around here after all! *(She whistles and struts about the room with her hands in her pockets.)*

MEG. Don't, Jo. It's so … boyish.

JO. That's why I do it. How's my Beth today?

BETH. Fine, Jo.

AMY. Jo, look at your dress!

JO. What's the matter with it?

MEG *(lifting the hem of JO's dress)*. Jo, have you been sitting too near the fireplace again?

JO. Oh, just singed it a little. It gave Aunt March quite a start, I must admit! *(Laughs.)*

AMY. Oh, how I detest rude, unlady-like girls!

JO. And I hate affected little niminy-piminies!

MEG. Stop it, both of you. Really, you both are to blame. You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks and to behave better, Josephine. It didn't matter so much when you were a little girl. But you are a lady now.

JO. Oh, I hate to think I've got to grow up and be Miss March and wear long gowns and look as prim as a China doll. It's bad enough to be a girl, anyway, when I like boys' games and work and manners. I can't get over my disappointment in not being a boy. And it's worse than ever now, for I'm dying to go and fight with Father. But I can only stay at home and knit, like a pokey old woman!

BETH. Poor Jo. It's too bad but it can't be helped. You must try to be contented with making your name boyish and playing brother to us girls.

© Dramatic Publishing

AMY. Or playing those silly men in those silly plays of yours.

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

JO. Honk! Honk!

(AMY shrieks.)

BETH. That's enough, Jo.

JO. Of course, my dearest. Peace on Christmas Eve, I say. Speaking of those silly old plays of mine, Amy, we better rehearse. We've got to be ready for tomorrow night. Come here and let's do the fainting scene, for you are as stiff as a poker in that.

AMY. I can't help it. I never saw anyone faint and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue tumbling flat as you do.

JO. Come and give it a try. You're the only one who can play Zaza; you're the only one small enough to be carried off shrieking by Don Pedro. Beth, will you give us some music?

BETH. Yes, Jo.

(AMY and JO station themselves in the archway, their stage. BETH plays some dramatic music.)

JO. Meg, have you got your cue?

MEG. I think so.

JO. Good. We'll start with Don Pedro's entrance. I'll use this comb for a pistol. *(Goes outside the arch then re-enters in character.)* "There you are! So the hour of my revenge approaches. Listen carefully, my sweet, and you will hear my hounds as they track down your beloved Roderigo!"

© Dramatic Publishing

MEG *(as the hounds)*. Arroooo! Arrooo!

AMY. "It cannot be so! Roderigo! Save me! Save me!"

JO *(drops character)*. No, no, no. Do it this way. *(Demonstrates.)* Clasp your hands so and stagger across the room, crying frantically, "Roderigo! Save me! Save me!" *(She staggers and then does a sensational faint onto the floor; then she sits up again.)* You see? *(BETH and MEG applaud.)* Try it again.

AMY. Oh, dear …

MEG. Arrooo! Arrooo!

AMY. "It cannot be so. Roderigo! Save me! Save me!" *(She cautiously moves across the room and faints delicately onto a settee.)*

JO. It's no use! Do the best you can when the time comes and if the audience laughs don't blame me.

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

JO. Not quite. But I do think *The Witch's Curse, an Operatic Tragedy* is rather a nice thing. I'd rather like to try *Macbeth* if only we had a trapdoor for Banquo. *(In character.)* "Is this a dagger I see before me?"

MEG. No, it's that horrid hurricane lamp Aunt March gave us two Christmases ago!

(All four laugh and MARMEE appears in the archway in her coat and hat.)

MARMEE. Glad to find my girls so merry.

GIRLS. Marmee!

(They rush to her and silently greet her, help her off with her coat, and seat her as JOSEPHINE continues.)

© Dramatic Publishing

JOSEPHINE. We had always called our mother Marmee as far back as I could remember. She was the most unselfish woman I have ever known. Everyone in town admired her and we thought she was the most splendid mother in the world.

MARMEE. Well, dears, how have you got on today? How is your cold, Beth? Meg, you look so tired. Were those Watson children in bad sorts today? Was school all right, Amy? Jo, how did you find Aunt March today?

MEG. She found her well enough but left her sleeping! *(They all laugh.)*

MARMEE. I've got a treat for you. *(Holds up a letter.)*

GIRLS. A letter!

JO. Three cheers for Father!

MARMEE. A nice long one. He is well and thinks they shall get through the winter better than he feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas and a special message to you girls. I'll read that part to you. Here it is … "Give them all my dear love … "

(MR. MARCH, in uniform, is seen at the side and takes over from MARMEE, who continues to mime reading.)

MR. MARCH. My dear love and a kiss. Tell them I think of them, pray for them and find my best comfort in their affection at all times. A year seems very long to wait before I see them but remind them that while we wait we may all work so that these hard days need not be wasted. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully and conquer themselves so beautifully that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder …

© Dramatic Publishing

MARMEE. "I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women."

(MR. MARCH exits. Silence. MARMEE quietly refolds the letter.)

AMY *(crying)*. Meg is right. I am a selfish little goose!

JO. I'll try not to be so rough and wild, but do my duty here instead of wanting to be someplace else!

(MARMEE hugs her girls as HANNAH enters.)

JOSEPHINE. That's Hannah. Our housekeeper, our cook, our Rock of Gibraltar. She had been with us since Meg was a baby.

HANNAH. Good evening, Mrs. March.

MARMEE. Hannah … Merry Christmas.

HANNAH. I'd best be telling you that a carriage has just pulled up to the walk and I don't have to make you guess who it might be. *(She gathers MARMEE and JO's coats and exits.)*

MARMEE. Aunt March.

JO. Oh, oh …

MARMEE. Whatever can she want?

AMY. Aunt March never goes out!

MEG. Especially in winter.

MARMEE. Jo, do you know anything about this?

JO. Well …

(AUNT MARCH enters boldly. She is of undetermined old age and never smiles but always barks.)

© Dramatic Publishing

AUNT. Josy-phine!

JO. Yes, Aunt March … ?

AUNT. It seems you neglected to relay your Christmas wishes to your aunt before leaving today.

JO. I am sorry, Aunt March. *(Goes to her.)* Merry Christmas, Auntie. *(Kisses her on the cheek.)*

MARMEE. Girls, please offer your best wishes as well.

(Each girl goes up to AUNT MARCH and kisses her as JOSEPHINE continues.)

JOSEPHINE. Aunt March was my father's aunt and was extremely rich and extremely unpleasant. She was widowed and childless and rarely left her big house on the hill because of her many ailments. Aunt March did hire me as a companion when Father left for the war and it was my job to read to her and be at her beck and call.

AUNT. Josy-phine left today before I had a chance to give her these. *(Hands four envelopes to MARMEE.)* One for each of the girls. One dollar each.

GIRLS. Thank you, Aunt March.

AUNT. You can thank me by spending it wisely and not in the foolish manner that young girls are accustomed to these days.

GIRLS. Yes, Aunt March.

MARMEE. Thank you, Aunt March. Won't you stay for some tea?

AUNT. Nothing of the kind I must get back home before I catch my death from the cold. *(Looks at JO.)* It was not a trip I anticipated taking.

MARMEE. I understand. You will be glad to hear, Aunt March, that I received a letter today from Mr. March. He

© Dramatic Publishing

is quite well, thank God, and speaks optimistically of the winter ahead.

AUNT. Foolish nephew. To run off and join the army at his age! Where does he get off doing such a thing? And to leave a family behind for others to take care of, no less.

JO. We take care of ourselves—!

MARMEE. Jo … thank you for coming, Aunt March. And please accept my warmest Christmas wishes.

AUNT. Yes … good day to you all. *(She exits.)*

JO. Christopher Columbus!

AMY. A whole dollar!

MEG. We shall have Christmas after all!

MARMEE *(giving each an envelope)*. Here you are, girls.

JO. Do you believe what she said about Father!

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

MEG. I'm going to buy that blue and yellow bonnet. You know, Jo, the one we saw at Mason's.

JO. Nothing like that for me. I've had my eye on those volumes of Undine and Sintram for the longest time and now I can get them.

MARMEE. What about you, Beth? What will you do with your dollar?

BETH. Do you think it would be all right if I bought some new sheet music? They have so many wonderful songs at Mason's.

AMY. Maybe I should get some new hair ribbons instead. What do you think, Meg?

MEG. Why not buy only a few pencils, then you might have enough for some ribbon as well?

© Dramatic Publishing