

Graded Readers



8

Little Women



Louisa M. Alcott

Frank

Little Women 198

Louisa M. Alcott



PRITA LEE LESSON SCHOOL
Circular Road,
Kapurthala



SPECIMEN COPY
NOT FOR SALE

FRANK EDUCATIONAL AIDS

place in this novel in the character of Jo March, and she drew upon her sisters' characters to flesh out the other March sisters.

Little Women was published in 1868, and everyone—grown-ups and children, boys and girls—loved the story of the March family. Soon Louisa went on to write sequels to the book, *Good Wives*, *Little Men* and *Jo's Boys*. She wrote many other books but *Little Women* is her most popular work, retaining its place as a favourite literary classic ever since it had been first published.

Louisa May Alcott died in 1888 at the age of fifty-six.

CONTENTS

Chapters	Pages
1. Meet the March Family	1
2. A Merry Christmas	7
3. The Lawrence Boy	13
4. Burdens	21
5. The Neighbours	28
6. Jo and Amy Forget and Forgive	35
7. Meg Steps Out	41
8. A Day at Longmeadow	48
9. Jo and Secrets	53
10. A Telegram	58
11. Little Beth Falls Sick	62
12. Dark Days	68
13. Amy's Will	72
14. Mother is Back	75
15. Laurie Makes Mischief and Jo Makes Peace	79
16. A Merry Christmas Again	86
17. Meg Makes Up Her Mind	89
Comprehension Exercises	96



MEET THE MARCH FAMILY

CHAPTER

1

"Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents," grumbled Jo, lying on the rug.

"It's so dreadful¹ to be poor!" sighed Meg, looking down at her old dress.

"I don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things and other girls nothing at all," added little Amy.

"We've got father and mother and each other," said Beth from her corner.

It was Christmas Eve. The four March girls were waiting for their mother to come home. She was a social worker and spent her time helping the poor and the needy. Father was away at Washington, working as a Chaplain² in the army. A civil war was raging in America and it was hard for everyone.

The girls had one dollar each to spend but their mother had proposed³ not having any presents that Christmas as their men were suffering so much in the army.

Each girl had planned to buy something for Christmas. Jo, the bookworm, wanted to buy a book for herself as she loved reading, Beth some new music, Amy a box of Faber's drawing pencils and Meg a number of pretty things. All of them worked hard. Meg taught children, Jo was a companion to a fussy old lady, Aunt March.

1. dreadful—terrible, very bad; 2. chaplain—a member of the clergy, church priest; 3. proposed—suggested

Beth washed dishes and kept things tidy. Amy was the only one who went to school where girls laughed at her dresses, made fun of her nose and teased her for being poor.

Finally Jo said, "Our four dollars won't help the army much. Let's each of us buy what we want and have a little fun. I'm sure we have worked hard enough for it." She sat up, put her hands in her pockets and began to whistle.

"Don't, Jo, its so boyish!" protested Amy.

"That's why I do it."

"I detest⁴ rude, unladylike girls!"

"I hate affected, niminy piminy chits!"

Beth, the peacemaker tried to make them laugh. Meg began to lecture them in her elder sisterly fashion.

"Josephine, listen you are old enough to leave off your boyish tricks and behave better. As for you Amy, you are altogether very prim and proper⁵. If you don't take care now, you will grow up into an affected⁶ little goose."

"If Jo is a tomboy and Amy a goose, what am I, please?" asked Beth, ready to share the lecture.

"You are a dear and nothing else," answered Meg warmly; and no one contradicted⁷ her, for the "Mouse" was the pet of the family.

A sketch of the four girls is necessary at this point.

Margaret, the eldest, was sixteen and very pretty. She had large eyes, soft brown hair, a sweet mouth and white hands, of which she was rather vain. Fifteen

4. detest—hate; 5. prim and proper—formal and correct; 6. affected—artificial; 7. contradicted—opposed, denied

year old Jo was very tall, thin and reminded one of a colt⁸, for she never seemed to know what to do with her long limbs which were very much in her way. She had a comical⁹ nose, sharp grey eyes and long thick hair, her one claim to beauty. But her hair was usually bundled into a net to be kept out of her way. Elizabeth or Beth as everyone called her—was a rosy bright-eyed girl of thirteen, shy and timid with a peaceful expression. Amy, though the youngest, thought herself to be the most important person. She was a snow maiden with blue eyes, golden hair and manners of a lady. In short they all were different in their looks but it did not matter much as they bonded really well.

The clock struck six. It was time for mother to come home, everyone brightened up. Beth jumped up as she had an idea. "Let's each get mother something for Christmas and not buy anything for ourselves," she said.

"That's like you, dear! What will we get?" exclaimed Jo.

Everyone thought for a minute, then Meg announced. "I shall give her a pair of gloves."

"Army shoes are the best to be had," said Jo.

"Some handkerchiefs, all hemmed," said Beth.

"I'll get a bottle of cologne¹⁰. It won't cost much, so I'll have some left to buy my pencils," said Amy.

They decided to surprise their mother and do their shopping the next day. It had to be done very secretly so they would not go together. Jo then reminded them to rehearse for the play for Christmas night.

"I don't mean to act anymore. I'm getting too old

8. colt—a young horse; 9. comical—funny; 10. cologne—perfume

for such things," said Meg.

"You are the best actress we have and you can't leave," said Jo. She then asked Amy to rehearse the fainting scene.

Amy was not gifted with dramatic talent, she was chosen only because she was small enough to be carried out shrieking by the villain of the piece. Jo, of course, was the villain in the play.

She, in fact, had written the play and was the producer, director, hero and villain of the play. Her great ambition was to do MACBETH.

Beth was her greatest admirer and thought her to be a "regular Shakespeare".

The rehearsal ended with laughter when Jo pretended to be Macbeth. "Glad to find you so merry," said a cheerful voice at the door. The girls rushed to welcome their mother—a tall motherly lady, not very elegantly dressed. The girls thought she was the most splendid mother in the world and would go to any extent to bring a smile on her face.



Mother first apologized for not coming home for lunch and then made inquiries about each one of her daughters. The girls flew about, making their mother comfortable.

As they gathered round the table, Mrs. March said with a particularly happy face, "I've got a treat for you after supper."

"A letter! A letter! Three cheers for father!" said Jo.

The girls finished their tea quickly and gathered round their mother.

"I think it was so splendid of father to go as a Chaplain," said Meg.

"I wish I could have gone with him as a nurse, so I could be near him and help him," said Jo.

"It must be very disagreeable¹¹ to sleep in a tent and eat bad-tasting things," sighed Amy.

"When will he come home, Marmee¹²?" asked Beth.

"Not for many months, dear, unless he is sick. Now come and hear the letter."

Father had sent them all his love and a kiss. He thought of them all the time. He knew they would be loving children and look after their mother well. When he returned home he would be fonder and prouder of his "Little Women".

All four girls were moved to tears as mother came to the end of the letter. They all resolved to make their father proud of them. Meg decided not to think of her looks all the time. Jo thought of not being a tomboy anymore and try to be a "Little Woman". Amy resolved

11. disagreeable—unpleasant; 12. marmee—affectionate way of calling mother

not to be selfish and Beth promised herself that she would be what her father hoped to find her when he returned.

They then worked on the sheets they were making for Aunt March. They hated sewing but none grumbled.

At nine they stopped work, and sang as usual before they went to bed. Meg and Beth sang well, Amy chirped like a cricket and Jo always croaked. Mother was a born singer and the girls were never tired of hearing her sing.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS

CHAPTER 2

Jo was the first to wake up on Christmas morning. She remembered her mother's promise and immediately put her hand under her pillow. She found a little crimson-covered book—The Bible. She then woke up Meg with a "Merry Christmas" and asked her to check her pillow. A green-covered book appeared, with a few words written by their mother. Soon Beth and Amy woke up to find their little books also—one dove-coloured, the other blue.

In spite of her small vanities¹, Meg had a sweet and charming nature. Her sisters loved her, especially Jo, and obeyed her because her advice was always given very gently.

"Girls," said Meg seriously, "Mother wants us to read, love and mind these books. We must begin at once, and read a little every morning."

Then she opened her new book and began to read. Jo put her arm around her and read also.

"How good Meg is! Come, Amy let's do as they do, I'll help you with hard words," said Beth softly.

After half an hour Meg and Jo ran down looking for their mother.

Hannah was in the dining room. She told them that mother had gone away with a "poor creature", who came asking for help. "There never was a woman like your mother, for helping others," she said.

1. vanities—pride, self-admiration

Hannah had lived with the family since Meg was born, and was considered by them more as a friend than a servant.

Meg started arranging the presents in the basket which was kept under the sofa. "Why, where is Amy's bottle of cologne?" she asked.

Jo informed her that she had seen Amy take her present and go out. Why, she did not know.

Beth admired her present and said proudly, "How nice my handkerchiefs look."

A door banged and steps sounded in the hall. Before Meg could hide her basket, Amy came in hastily. She was a little taken aback² to see all her sisters waiting for her.

"Where have you been and what are you hiding behind you?" asked Meg, surprised to see lazy Amy had been out so early.

"Don't laugh at me, Jo! I only went out to change the little bottle for a big one, and I gave all my money to get it. I'm truly trying to be a good girl and not be selfish anymore," she showed the big bottle which replaced the cheap one.

Meg hugged her on the spot and Jo called her a "trump³".

Another bang on the door, the basket went under the sofa, and the girls gathered round the breakfast table.

"Merry Christmas, Marmee! Thank you for our books," they cried in chorus⁴.

"Merry Christmas, little daughters! I'm glad you

2. taken aback—surprised; 3. trump (in old English)—triumph, winner; 4. in chorus—together

began at once, and hope you'll keep on. But I have to say something before we sit down."

Then mother told them about a poor woman with a little newborn baby. Six older children were freezing in a room without fire. There was nothing to eat for them. Would they give their breakfast to them as a Christmas present?

No one spoke for a minute, then Jo said, "I'm so glad you came in before we began."

All four girls started packing—cream and, muffins, buckwheat's, bread—everything. Soon they were ready and set out. A poor, bare miserable room, torn bedclothes, a sick mother, wailing⁵ baby, six hungry children huddled under one old quilt—this is what they saw.

In a few minutes, Hannah, who had carried wood, made a fire; Mrs. March gave the mother tea and hot soup, and dressed the little baby. The girls, in the meantime, set the table, sat the children around it, and fed them. "Ach, mein Gott! (Oh, my God). It is good angels come to us!" said Mrs. Hummel, the poor woman.

The girls had never been called angels and they were happy little girls who ate only bread and butter for Christmas breakfast.

Then they gave their presents to their mother. Mrs. March was both surprised and touched⁶. She wore the slippers at once, slipped Beth's new handkerchief in her pocket, well-scented with Amy's cologne. Meg's gloves were a perfect fit.

The rest of the day was spent in practising for the

5. wailing—crying; 6. touched—moved

evening play; Jo and Meg had to perform several roles, with Jo performing all the male ones.

On Christmas night a dozen girls sat huddled on the bed, looking at the blue and yellow curtains with great expectancy. A bell sounded and "Operation Tragedy" began.



Many short dramatic scenes followed. But the masterpiece was when Meg appeared at a window on the top of a tower made up of a wooden ladder—Jo, the hero, threw a rope ladder to her and asked her to come down silently. Meg was about to leap down

gracefully, when the tower collapsed and fell down with a loud crash.

Everyone screamed; a golden head appeared from the heap and exclaimed, "I told you so!" Jo pulled out of the heap and whispered, "Act as if it was all right!" No mishap happened after this and the last Act was followed by a great applause⁷ which ended abruptly. The cot bed on which the audience was sitting, collapsed and all fell on the floor. Hannah came in at this moment to announce supper!

The supper was a surprise even for the actors. The table was laid up with ice cream—pink and white—and cake, fruit, French bonbons and in the middle of the table, four great bouquets of flowers!

The girls looked at their mother in amazement, who was looking very pleased.

"Is it fairies?" asked Amy.

"It's Santa Claus," said Beth.

"Mother did it," said Meg.

"All wrong. Old Mr. Laurence sent it," replied Mrs. March.

"The Laurence boy's grandfather? We don't know him!" exclaimed Meg.

Mrs. March told her daughters that Hannah told one of the servants about their breakfast party. That had pleased him. He sent her a polite note asking permission to send you a few trifles in honour of the day. She couldn't refuse it—hence the feast.

Jo was certain that it was Mr. Laurence's grandson who must have persuaded him to do this. The boy wanted to make friends with them.

⁷ applause—clapping

Mrs. March said she had seen the boy, he had good manners and the look of a gentleman. She had no objection to her daughters knowing him when the opportunity⁸ came.

The girls admired their bouquets. But Beth nestled⁹ up to her mother and said, "I wish I could send my flowers to father. I'm afraid he's not having such a merry Christmas as we are."

8. opportunity—chance, time; 9. nestled—snuggled, cuddled

THE LAWRENCE BOY

CHAPTER 3

Jo was sitting in her favourite refuge, the attic, eating an apple and crying over the HEIR TO REDCLYFFE, when Meg called out for her.

Meg came up, quite excited about the invitation she had received from Mrs. Gardiner to attend a party the next day. Mother says we can go, but what *shall* we wear?

"What's the use of asking that, when you know we haven't got another dress except our poplins," said Jo.

"If only I had a silk dress!" sighed Meg. "Mother says I will have one when I'm eighteen but that means I will have to wait for two long years more!"

"Yours is as good as new Meg! My dress has a tear¹ in the front and a burnt mark at the back. The burn shows badly."

Meg advised Jo to sit still at one place with her back to the wall so that no one could see the burn mark. She decided to have a new ribbon for her hair and borrow mother's little pearl pin and wear her new slippers. "Now, what should I do with my gloves, they are not as nice as they should be," added Meg.

"Mine are spoiled with lemonade. I shall go to the party without them," said Jo, who never cared much about dressing up.

"You *must* have gloves with you, or I won't go," said

1. tear—cut, rip

Meg decidedly.

"Then I won't go with you."

"Jo, you can't ask mother for her new gloves, you're so careless, you will definitely spoil them," said Meg anxiously.

"I'll tell you how we will manage. Each will wear one good glove and hold the bad one, what do you say?" said Jo.

Meg was doubtful. "Your hands are bigger than mine and you'll stretch them," began Meg; she was stopped by Jo's retort, "Then I'll go without them. I don't care what people say."

"You may have it, you may!" Meg said hastily, "Only don't stain it. Don't put your hands behind you, or stare or say, 'Christopher Columbus!' will you?"

Jo promised to be on her best behaviour and Meg went away "to accept with thanks". On New Year's Eve the two elder girls were absorbed in the important business of getting ready for the party. The younger two ran around helping them. Jo had undertaken the task of helping Meg to have a few curls about her face with a pair of hot tongs².

"Ought they to smoke like that?" asked Beth.

"What a queer smell!" said Amy, wrinkling her nose.

Jo assured them it was due to the dampness drying but when she removed the papers, Meg's hair came out with the papers.

"Oh, Oh, Oh! My hair, Oh my hair!" cried poor Meg with despair. "I can't go to the party like this!"

"I always spoil everything. I'm so sorry, but the tongs

2. tongs—a small metal instrument for curling hair



were too hot, and so the mess," groaned Jo.

"Serves me right for trying to be fine. I wish I had let my hair alone."

"So do I, it was so smooth and pretty. But it will soon grow," consoled³ Beth.

Amy suggested tying a ribbon so that the ends come over Meg's forehead and it would look very fashionable.

At last they were ready without any further mishaps⁴. Both girls looked pretty and smart in their simple suits, Meg in silver and Jo in a maroon dress. Each put on one nice glove and carried one soiled⁵ one. Meg's high-heeled slippers were very tight and hurt her though she would never admit it. Jo's head was thick with nineteen

3. consoled—comforted; 4. mishaps—accidents; 5. soiled—dirty, spoilt

pins and she was uncomfortable. Both of them did not dare to voice their discomfort.

Mrs. March gave some last minute instructions to the girls and told them that Hannah would come to fetch them at eleven. As they reached the gate, Mrs. March cried out, "Girls, girls! Have you both got your handkerchiefs?"

"Yes, yes," replied Jo, adding with a laugh as they walked on, "I do believe Marmee would ask that even if we were all running away from an earthquake."

Meg defended her mother by saying that a real lady was always known by her neat shoes, gloves and handkerchief. Mother was just trying to see if we went out properly as ladies.

As they reached Mrs. Gardiner's house, Jo asked Meg to wink at her if she saw her doing anything wrong.

Meg protested and said winking was not considered to be ladylike. She, however, promised to raise her eyebrows if Jo did anything wrong and nod if she was alright in her behaviour.

Mrs. Gardiner, a stately⁵ old lady greeted and handed them over to the eldest of her six daughters. Meg knew Annie and they both started chatting at once. But Jo stood about with her back carefully against the wall. She did not like the girls and their girlish gossip. She longed to join the few boys who were skating in another room nearby. She looked at Meg for permission, but the eyebrows went up so alarmingly⁶ that she did not dare to move an inch. No one came to talk to her and she stood alone. Soon dancing began and Meg was asked

5. stately—grand, dignified; 6. alarmingly—high



to dance. Her tight slippers hurt her very badly, but she suffered smilingly as that was expected of her.

Jo saw a red haired boy come towards her. Afraid that he might ask to dance, she slipped and hid herself behind some curtains. Unfortunately another shy person had chosen the same curtain to hide and Jo found herself face to face with the "Laurence boy".

"Dear me, I am sorry. I didn't know anyone was here!" stammered Jo ready to back out as fast as she had rushed in.

"Don't mind me," said the startled boy, "I don't know many people here and was feeling rather strange, you know. That is the reason why I am behind the curtains."

"So did I," confessed Jo.

The boy introduced himself as their neighbour.

Jo, rather primly, thanked him for his very nice Christmas present.

"Grandpa sent it. How is your cat, Miss March?" he asked after a pause. "Nicely, thank you, Mr. Laurence; I'm not Miss March, I'm Jo".

"I am not Mr. Laurence, I'm only Laurie."

And they both laughed outright! After that they both talked easily like two lost old friends. Jo was her merry self again. She totally forgot about her burnt dress. She liked the Laurence boy who had curly black hair, big black eyes, handsome nose and was very tall and very polite for a boy. She wanted to know how old he was, and with unusual tact she asked him whether he was going to college soon.

"Not before an year or two. I won't go before seventeen, anyway," he replied.

So he was the same age as Jo.

"How I wish I was going to college!" said Jo wistfully.

"I hate it!"

"What do you like?"

"To live in Italy and to enjoy myself in my own way."

The Dance Music changed to a Polka and Laurie invited Jo to dance with him.

"I can't because..." she stopped, looking undecided.

"Because what?" asked Laurie.

"You won't tell?"

"Never!"

Jo told him about her frock burnt at the back.

Laurie looked at her gently and did not laugh. He

told her there was a long hall next to the dance hall, where they could dance grandly and nobody would know.

And they did!

When the music stopped, Meg came looking for her sister. She had sprained her ankle and could hardly stand and was in pain!

"I knew you would hurt your feet with those silly shoes," cried Jo. "We will have to take a carriage to go home."

Jo said as she rubbed softly the twisted ankle.

"A carriage will cost too much. I'll rest till Hannah comes and then do the best I can," said Meg, "I'm so tired, I can't move myself, go bring me some coffee, Jo."

Jo went into the dining room, picked up a cup of coffee and promptly spilled it over her dress making her front as bad as the back.

"Can I help you," said Laurie. He had a cup in his one hand and a plate of ice in the other.

"I was trying to get something for Meg—and here I am in a nice state," answered Jo looking at her coffee-stained dress.

Laurie offered to take the coffee to Meg. He even fetched cakes and bonbons and was so attentive, that even Meg called him a "nice boy". When Hannah came to fetch them, Meg found she could not stand on her foot, such was the pain.

Laurie promptly offered his grandfather's carriage, which Jo accepted gratefully. They rolled away in a luxurious closed carriage, feeling very festive⁷. With many

⁷. festive—great, comfortable

thanks they said goodnight to Laurie and very quietly crept in the house. They did not want to disturb anyone. But the instant they entered they were surrounded by two eager girls crying—

"Tell us about the party!"

Jo gave them a detailed account of the party and some bonbons she had saved for them.

As Jo bound up Meg's foot with arnica she declared, "In spite of our burnt hair, old gowns, one glove each, tight slippers that sprain⁸ our ankles, I don't think fine young ladies had more fun than us."

And Meg agreed fully.

8. sprain—wrench, twist without breaking a bone

BURDENS

CHAPTER 4

The holidays were over. The week of merry-making had ended. Meg grumbled the morning after the party about going to work.

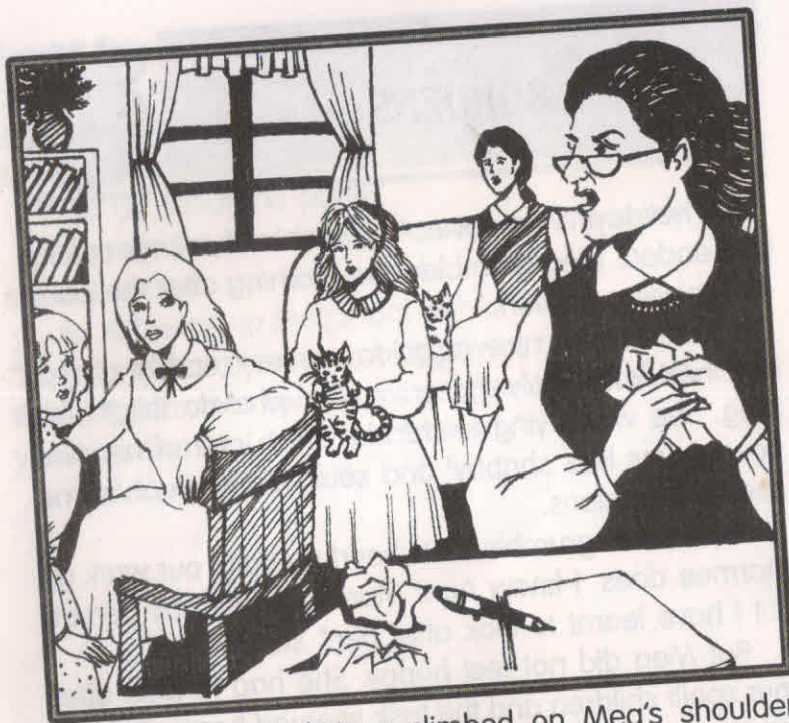
"It seems so nice to go to parties, read and rest, and not work. I always envy girls who do this," said Meg. She was trying to decide which one of her two gowns was less shabby¹ and could be worn on some special occasions.

"Let us not grumble, but cheerfully go to our work as Marmee does. I know Aunt March is a difficult person but I have learnt to look after her," said Jo.

But Meg did not feel happy. She had to look after four spoilt children and the task seemed heavy. "What's the use of looking nice, when no one sees me but those irritating kids," she was feeling so unhappy that she did not have the heart to make herself look pretty. "I will have to work till I'm old and ugly. It's a shame," she thought angrily that she would remain poor all her life.

She went down to breakfast in an irritable mood. Everyone seemed out of sorts. Beth had a headache and lay on the sofa, playing with her kittens. Amy was in tears because she had not learnt her lessons and done her homework. Jo was cross² with herself because she had upset an inkstand, broken her boot laces and squashed her hat by sitting on it.

1. shabby—old and worn out; 2. cross—upset, irritated



One of Beth's kittens climbed on Meg's shoulder and she threatened Beth that she would drown her kittens.

"Girls, girls, do be quiet one minute. I have to send this letter by early post," cried their mother. She crossed out a sentence for the third time.

Temper improved after this. Jo stopped scowling, Meg didn't scold, Beth did not sulk and Amy did not wail any more. Hannah's hot pies at breakfast made the girls happy.

Jo and Meg walked out in the snow feeling a little better. At the gate they turned to look back. Their mother was always there at the window to nod and smile and wave her hand to them. It always cheered them up to face the entire day.

Jo thought they had been a set of rascals in the morning but hoped to come back as angels.

Meg objected to her use of language. She did not like the word "rascal".

Jo told her not to be cross. "Just wait, Meg, till I make my fortune then you shall have carriages, ice cream, high-heeled slippers and all the boys to dance with."

"How ridiculous you are Jo!" said Meg laughing at the nonsense.

They then parted for the day, each going a different way, each trying to be cheerful in spite of the hard work they had to put up with.

The two girls had started working, with their parents' permission, when Mr. March lost his property. Margaret found a place as nursery governess and felt rich with her small salary. She tried very hard not to be envious or discontented³. But when she saw the King's daughters (whose children she taught) wearing dainty ball dresses and gossip about theatres, concerts, she could not help feeling depressed.

Jo helped Aunt March who was lame and needed an active person to look after her. The old lady had a short temper and once Jo had come back home, declaring she wouldn't work any more with her. But they soon made up, for in her heart of heart Jo rather seemed to liked the peppery⁴ old lady very much.

The real attraction for Jo was Aunt March's large library. The minute Aunt March took her nap or was busy with guests, Jo curled herself up in a chair in the library and read poetry, romance, history, travels like a

3. discontented—unhappy; 4. peppery—hot tempered

bookworm⁵. Of course she had to leave her paradise whenever a shrill voice called Josy-phine! Then she had to wind yarn, wash the poodle or read some "Essays" by the hour. Jo was able to do too many things at a time.

The training that Jo received at Aunt March's house was very good for her. She was always getting into scraps⁶, and Aunt March who was very strict, taught her discipline. She was also happy that she was saving some money.

Beth was extremely shy, so instead of going to school, she was taught at home by her father. Even when her father was away, she studied by herself. She helped Hannah in housework. She was very fond of



5. bookworm—very fond of reading books; 6. scraps—arguments, fights

music and she also had a desire to own a fine piano and take music lessons. But she never complained and nobody even saw her cry.

Amy, the youngest, was anything but shy. Her greatest worry was her rather flat nose. All the pinching in the world would not make it grow into a Grecian nose (long and aristocratic). Her second worry was that she had to wear her cousin's clothes. Amy suffered greatly at having to wear ugly clothes that did not really fit her. In fact, being the youngest, Amy was a little spoilt as everyone petted her. Nobody minded her selfishness and vanity. Amy confided in Meg, who was her model⁷ and monitor. Jo was gentle Beth's confidant⁸, to Jo alone did the shy Beth tell her innermost thoughts. And unconsciously she influenced her big sister Jo who learnt a lesson or two from Beth. The older sisters in this way kept an eye on the younger ones.

"Has anybody got anything to tell?" said Meg as the four of them sat sewing together in the evening. Jo loved to tell stories. She told her sisters about how Aunt March forced her to read a dull book and soon dozed off herself. Jo promptly took out her favourite book and started reading it furiously. She forgot her Aunt and laughed loudly at some point. This woke up her Aunt who asked Jo to read from her book. When Jo did, she rather enjoyed it.

"Did she own she liked it?" asked Meg.

"Oh, bless you, no! I wish she would let me choose the books. What a pleasant life it would be then!" sighed Jo.

7. model—ideal, a person to follow; 8. confidant—a very close friend to whom one tells one's secrets

Amy had a story to tell too. "Susie Perkins came to school today with a lovely red carnelian ring. I wanted the ring with all my heart. Later Mr. Davis (the teacher) caught her drawing a picture of him with a huge nose and a hump. He pulled her ear and made her stand for half an hour. Poor Susie cried and cried. I did not envy her then, for millions of rings would not have made me happy after that humiliation⁹."

It was now Beth's turn. "I saw something very nice this morning. When I went with Hannah to buy some fish, Mr. Laurence was there too. He didn't see me as I was behind a barrel. A poor woman came and begged the shopkeeper to let her do some cleaning in exchange for a small fish. Her children hadn't eaten anything. The shopkeeper said 'no'. As she was going away, Mr. Laurence picked up the biggest fish and gave it to her. The grateful woman thanked Mr. Laurence again and again, and went away very happy. Wasn't it good of him?"

The girls then asked their mother to tell a story. Mother thought for a moment and then started—"As I sat sewing uniforms for the soldiers at war, an old man came in to order some clothes. He looked poor and tired."

"Have you sons in the army?" I asked.

"Yes ma'am I had four. Two were killed, one is a prisoner, and I'm going to the other, who is very sick in a Washington hospital," he answered quietly.

"You have done a great deal for your country, Sir," I said, feeling respect for him.

"Not a mite than I ought, ma'am. I sent my

9. humiliation—shame

boys, because I am too old to go myself," he said cheerfully.

"I felt ashamed of myself. I'd given one man, and worried about it all the time; while he gave four without complaining about it."

The girls were silent for some time. "We do have a great deal to be grateful for," said Mrs. March. "Whenever you feel discontented, think over and count your blessings and be grateful to God for whatever he has given. You will never feel disappointed or sorry in your life," she ended.

"We needed this lesson to be grateful to God and we won't forget it," promised Jo sincerely.

THE NEIGHBOURS

CHAPTER

5

Since the day of the party Jo had wanted to know the "Laurence boy" and visit his stately¹ home. She had often seen him look at their garden from his window. Only a low hedge stood between the old brown house from Laurence's mansion.

Her chance came. It had snowed the whole afternoon and Jo decided to take some exercise. She came out with rubber boots, a broom in one hand, a shovel in the other and began shovelling the snow. She saw a black head leaning out of a window and promptly hurled a handful of snow at it. A head came out with a big smile on the face.

"How do you do?" Jo asked, "Are you sick?"

"I was. I had a bad cold and been shut up for a week."

"What do you amuse yourself with?"

"Nothing."

"Don't you have company?"

"Don't know anyone."

"You know us," said Jo, then stopped.

"So I do! Will you come please?" cried Laurie.

"I will come, if mother will let me."

Mrs. March had no objection and soon Jo appeared in the Laurie parlour with a dish in one hand and Beth's three kittens in the other.

"Here I am bag and baggage," she said, "Mother

1. stately—majestic



sends her love. Meg wanted me to give you her custard. She makes it very nicely. Beth has sent you her kittens to play with."

The kittens were the right gift. Laurie forgot to be shy and began playing with them.

Jo admired² his room and called it "cosy". Laurie thought it was untidy. Jo immediately began to set it right, and as she laughed and talked, she whisked things into place and soon the room was neat as a pin.

"Shall I read to you?" Jo offered.

"No, I'd rather talk," said Laurie.

"If I start talking, Beth says I don't know when to stop."

"Is Beth the rosy one who stays at home a great

2. admired—praised

deal?" asked Laurie.

"Yes, that's my Beth?"

"The pretty one is Meg and the curly haired one is Amy?"

"How did you find that out?"

"I hear you calling to one another when I'm alone up here. Sometimes when you forget to pull the curtains, I watch you sitting round the table with your mother. I can't help watching, I haven't got any mother you know," said Laurie turning his head away to hide his tears.

The look went straight to Jo's heart. Laurie was sick and lonely and her face became gentle.

"We'll never draw the curtains again. You must come over to see us. Won't your grandpa let you?"

"Grandpa does not want me to bother strangers. He lives in his books and doesn't bother about the world outside. Do you like your school?" asked Laurie to change the subject.

"I don't go to school. I'm a businesswoman—girl; I mean I go to wait on my great aunt, and dear cross old soul she is. After that Jo gave him a lively description of the old lady, her fat poodle, and the parrot that talked Spanish, and the library she loved. Laurie enjoyed the description and laughed merrily.

Laurie then asked Jo to see their library. "Grandpa is out, so you needn't be afraid," he added.

"I'm not afraid of anything," replied Jo with a toss of her head.

"I don't believe you are not!" exclaimed Laurie, looking at her with admiration.

Jo clapped her hands with glee³ when she saw the

3. glee—happiness, great joy

library. It was lined with books, and there were pictures and statues.

They heard the bell ring and Jo exclaimed with alarm. "It's your grandpa!"

"Well, what if it is? You are not afraid of anything," answered Laurie, looking wicked.

Jo tried to compose herself. A maid came in, "The doctor to see you, Sir."

Laurie excused himself and went out.

Jo stood before a fine portrait painting of the old gentleman. She heard the door open, and without turning, she said, "I'm sure I won't be afraid of him. He has got kind eyes though his mouth is grim. He isn't as handsome as my grandfather, but I like him."

"Thank you, ma'am," said a gruff⁴ voice behind her. Jo blushed to her hair roots, because behind her stood Mr. Laurence. For a moment she had a wild desire to run. But a second look showed her that the kind eyes twinkled and she became less afraid. After a pause, the old gentleman said, "So you are not afraid of me?"

"Not much, Sir."

"And you don't think I'm as handsome as your grandfather?"

"Not quite Sir."

"But you like me in spite of it?"

"Yes, I do, Sir." That answer pleased the old gentleman and he laughed and shook hands with her. "You have got your grandfather's spirit, though you don't have his looks. He was a brave and honest man. I was proud to be his friend." Jo felt at ease now.

"So, you think the boy needs a bit of cheering up?"

4. gruff—low and harsh

"Yes, Sir, he seems to be a little lonely. We are only girls, but we would be glad to help. And thank you for your splendid Christmas present."

"That was the boy's idea. Come down and have tea with us," Mr. Laurence offered his arm to her with old-fashioned courtesy.

As Laurie came running downstairs, he was surprised to see Jo arm-in-arm with his grandfather. Jo gave him a victorious⁵ look.

The old gentleman watched the young people who chatted away like old friends. There was colour and life in the boy's face.

"She's right, the lad is lonely." He thought as he drank his tea.

After tea Laurie gave Jo some flowers from his garden. In the drawing room Jo saw a huge piano.

"Do you play?" she asked Laurie.

"Sometimes," he answered.

Jo asked him to play and her respect for the boy increased. She praised him a lot, but grandfather cut her short.

"That will do, young lady. His music isn't bad, but I hope he will do better in more important things."

Jo said goodbye to him. She felt something did not please him.

Laurie told her he didn't like him to play the piano. He promised to tell her the reason some other day, and Jo left with a promise to come again.

At home all the afternoon's adventures had to be told to her sisters and mother. Mother then told them Laurie's father had married an Italian lady, a musician,

5. victorious—triumphant

which displeased the old man. He never saw his son after he married. The boy's parents died when he was very young and then his grandfather brought him home. He was very protective about him and did not want him to be a musician like this mother.

Meg thought it was a romantic story but Jo thought it was silly, "Let him be a musician, if he wants to," she said.

After this the girls visited the old palace regularly. Even little Beth forgot to be shy and afraid of Mr. Laurence. When he found out that Beth was fond of music, he very artfully tried to make her use the piano in his house. He told Mrs. March, "The boy is neglecting his music and the piano is not being used. Won't one of your girls like to run over and practice? They needn't see or talk to anyone but run in anytime." This clever speech gave enough courage to Beth to ask his permission to play the piano.

From the next day, whenever she saw Laurie and Mr. Laurence go out, Beth made her way to the drawing room and played the piano till Hannah came to fetch



her home for dinner. Her happiness was great and she did not know that old Mr. Laurence often opened the door of his study to hear her play. She never suspected⁶ that the new music books were specially kept in the room for her.

Beth was so grateful that she made a pair of slippers for Mr. Laurence, and put them quietly in his study. The next day a letter arrived for her from the old gentleman. Beth was so overwhelmed⁷, that she hid her head in Jo's lap and asked her to read it.

Dear Madam,

I have had many pairs of slippers in my life, but none suited me so well as yours. I like to pay my debts, so I know you will allow the old gentleman to send you something that belonged once to the little granddaughter he lost.

With hearty thanks and best wishes.

I remain your humble servant.

James Laurence

And the present was—a piano!

What happiness! Beth was so grateful that she surprised her family by going to Mr. Laurence's house and thanked him with a kiss.

6. suspected—sensed, imagined; 7. overwhelmed—moved, touched

JO AND AMY FORGET AND FORGIVE



One morning, as Amy watched Laurie galloping¹ on his horse, she surprised Meg by saying, "I wish I had a little of the money Laurie spends on that horse."

"Why?" asked Meg.

"I'm in debt²."

"In debt? What do you mean?"

"I owe at least a dozen pickled limes. You see they are in fashion now. Girls are buying them, and you must do so too. If one girl likes another she gives her a lime; if she is mad with her, she eats one before her face. You treat by turns and I have been treated to so many of them," sighed Amy.

Meg gave her a quarter and Amy reached school the next day with a bag full of limes. Unfortunately for Amy, Jenny Snow, her enemy, reported to Mr. Davis, the teacher, that she had pickled limes in her desk.

Now Mr. Davis had forbidden³ bringing of limes to school. He was in a particularly bad mood and was "cross as a bear". He rapped on his desk and said sternly—

"Miss March come to the desk."

As Amy got up, she got another order.

"Bring with you, the limes you have in your desk."

A frightened Amy took her bag to the teacher's desk.

1. galloping—riding very fast; 2. in debt—owing money to someone; 3. forbidden—disallowed



"Now take these disgusting things two by two and throw them out of the window."

Red with shame and anger, Amy obeyed. As she returned from the window for the last time, Mr. Davis spoke again—

"Young ladies, I never allow my rules to be broken. Miss March hold out your hand." Amy's mute⁴ appeal drew only an "your hand, Miss March".

Too proud to cry or beseech⁵, Amy set her teeth and bore without flinching several blows on her little palm. For the first time in her life she was struck and she felt totally disgraced⁶.

"You will now stand on the platform till recess," said

4. mute—silent; 5. beseech—beg for pardon; 6. disgraced—humiliated

Mr. Davis.

This was dreadful. During the fifteen minutes that followed the little girl suffered from shame and pain. In recess, Amy snatched her bag and left school.

When Mrs. March arrived home she was disturbed and told Amy she needn't go to school and study with Beth. She didn't approve of corporal⁷ punishment. But she warned Amy against becoming conceited⁸. She had broken a school rule and she deserved some punishment. Mrs. March told her to be more like Laurie who had talent and lots of accomplishments⁹ but was not conceited.

Amy promised to behave better but soon forgot her promise.

She found her two elder sisters getting ready to go out and insisted that she wanted to go with them too.

Meg told her she was not invited and Jo told her abruptly not to be a baby.

Amy guessed they were going out with Laurie to see a play and thought she should have been invited too. Jo's abrupt manner angered her and she wailed loudly when they left her and went away.

"You will be sorry for this, Jo March," she cried out.

The next day Jo made a discovery. She burst into the room where Meg, Beth and Amy were sitting. "Has anyone taken my book?" Meg and Beth said no at once, only Amy didn't say anything.

"You know something about it, and you better tell

7. corporal—physical; 8. conceited—vain, arrogant, proud; 9. accomplishments—achievements

at once, or I'll make you."

And Jo gave her a shake.

"I burnt it up."

"What! My little book I was so fond of. I worked so hard to finish it before father came home." Jo's hot temper made her give a box on her sister's ear before she rushed out.

Amy had realized the grave¹⁰ wrong she had done to Jo even before their mother came home. The little book contained half a dozen little fairy tales Jo had been writing for several years.

When the tea bell rang, Jo appeared looking very grim. It took all of Amy's courage to say, "Please forgive me Jo."



10. grave—serious, grim

"I never shall forgive you," Jo replied sternly and then she ignored Amy completely.

Though grieved, Mrs. March did not say anything. At night she asked Jo to forgive Amy as she was very young, but Jo flatly refused.

Next morning, Amy heard Jo go out skating with Laurie. She stubbornly followed them. Jo saw her coming but ignored her. Laurie was skating ahead and he did not see Amy! He shouted to Jo in warning, "Keep near the shore, it isn't safe in the middle."

Jo heard it but Amy didn't. Something made Jo turn back and look, just in time to see Amy throw up her hands and go down, with the sudden crash of ice. The splash of water and Amy's cry made Jo's heart still. She tried to rush forward but couldn't. She felt Laurie rush past her and pull Amy by her arm.

Laurie wrapped his coat around Amy, pulled her skates off and between them they carried a shivering, dripping, crying girl home. Rolled in blankets, she fell asleep. Jo, who had been quiet, till she slept, whispered to her mother, "Are you sure she is safe?"

"Quite safe dear. She is not hurt."

"Laurie did it all. I only let her go." Then Jo sobbed and told her mother what had happened. "It's my dreadful temper! I try to cure it. What shall I do?"

"Never get tired of trying, dear. It is never impossible to cure your faults. You think you have a bad temper? Mine used to be worse than yours," said Mrs. March.

And Jo forgot her tears, in surprise. "I have been controlling it for forty years and I have learnt not to show it."

Moved, Jo hugged her mother tightly and said, "Oh,

mother, if I am half as good as you, I'll be satisfied." Jo then went upstairs and stood beside the sleeping Amy. "How I could I be so wicked!"? If it hadn't been for Laurie she would have died."

She bent and softly stroked Amy's hair. Amy opened her eyes and held out her arms with a smile that went straight to Jo's heart. Without a word they hugged each other and everything was forgiven and forgotten.

11. wicked—bad

MEG STEPS OUT

CHAPTER 7

The King's children had measles and Meg was invited by her friend Annie Moffat to spend a whole fortnight with her. The sisters helped Meg to pack her trunk. Amy wished she could go too and wear all the fine things Meg would. She asked Meg, "What did mother give you out of her treasure box?"

"A pair of silk stockings, a pretty carved fan and a lovely blue sash. There was a pearl set also, but mother said that real flowers were the prettiest ornament¹ for a young girl. Laurie has promised to send me all I want."

Meg's clothes were not new. She did not have a silk dress but Beth reminded her, "You said you're perfectly happy if you could only go to Annie Moffat's."

"So I did. I *am* happy," said Meg, immediately cheering up. She thanked her sisters for lending her their things and helping her to get ready. "I will tell you about my adventures when I come back." Meg left the next day. Her mother was not very keen to let her go. Her rich friend might make Meg dissatisfied with her own life, but Meg had begged very hard and Sallie Moffat had promised to take good care of her and have a real good time.

The Moffats *were* rich and very fashionable but they were kind people. Mr. and Mrs. Moffat—both fat and jolly, liked Meg and called her "Daisy", Mr. Moffat

1. ornament—jewelry

knew Meg's father. Meg spent her time with her friends shopping, walking, riding, going to theatres. Meg began to imitate² Sallie's elder sisters in airs and graces and her own home now seemed to her all the more dismal³.

The Moffats had given a small party and all the girls dressed up for it. Meg thought her poplin dress looked shabby and old before Sallie's crisp new one.

Sallie and her sisters helped her to dress but her heart was heavy. Proud Meg thought that they pitied her. Just then a maid came in with a box of flowers and a note.

"They are for Miss March," she said.

The flowers were from Laurie and the note from mother. Meg cheered up and put a few roses in her hair and the rest she pinned on her friends' dresses and hair.

She enjoyed herself very much, danced a lot and received three compliments. Mr. Moffat danced with her, Annie made her sing and praised her voice, and Major Lincoln asked, "Who the fresh little girl with the beautiful eyes was." It was fun till she heard a voice ask—

"How old is she?"

"Sixteen or seventeen," said Mrs. Moffat.

"Her mother is playing her cards well⁴. She would like Meg to marry Laurie. Sallie says he visits them quite often."

"She told a lie about the note being from her mamma. Obviously it was from Laurie. Do you think she'll mind if we offered her a dress for Thursday. Her poplin is awful," said one of Sallie's sisters.

2. imitate—copy; 3. dismal—gloomy, poor; 4. playing her cards well—acting in a clever manner

"She's proud," said Mrs. Moffat "But I'll try. I will also invite Laurie for the party and we'll have fun about it later."

Meg was proud and it was her pride, which helped her to go back to the party, and hide her anger, disgust and shame at what she had heard. So that is what their friends thought of her! Her mother, a scheming⁵ woman; she a liar and her clothes shabby. She wanted to go home to rush to her mother. But she hid it and seemed to enjoy everything.

Annie told her, the next morning that they had invited her young man, Mr. Laurence for the party on Thursday. "He's not my young man. He is only fifteen and I am going to be seventeen," said Meg.

"But he sent you flowers?" said Belle, Annie's sister.

"Yes, he sends it to all of us, my mother, my sisters. My mother and old Mr. Laurence are friends you know, so it is quite natural that we children should play together," replied Meg.

Just then Mrs. Moffat came in, "I'm going out shopping. Can I do anything for you, young ladies?" she asked. "No, thank you, mother," replied Annie, "I've got my new pink silk for Thursday." She then turned to Meg and asked her what she would wear.

"My old white again."

"Why don't you send home for another?" asked Annie.

"I haven't got another," she replied. Before Annie could say anything, Belle Moffat spoke, "I have got a sweet little blue dress which I've outgrown. You shall

5. scheming—cunning



wear it for the party." She said it so kindly that Meg could not refuse.

On Thursday Meg was dressed to look like a fine lady. Belle and her maid curled her hair; bracelets, necklaces, earrings adorned her; a pair of high-heeled silk boots and a fan and lace handkerchief completed her resemblance to a newly dressed doll.

She found that her fine clothes attracted a lot of nice comments and aroused interest in people who had ignored her at the earlier party. But she was shocked to hear Mrs. Moffat tell an old lady, "You don't know her? She's Daisy March; her father is a Colonel in the army—one of our first families." Meg's father was only a Chaplain!

Meg played the part of a fine lady and was enjoying herself, when she saw Laurie just opposite her, staring at her with surprise and disapproval⁶. She blushed because there was something in his honest eyes, which made her wish she was wearing her old dress and not the tight-fitting blue silk.

"I'm glad you came. I was afraid you wouldn't," she said.

"Jo wanted me to come and tell her how you did, so I came," replied Laurie.

"What shall you tell her?" asked Meg, full of curiosity.

"I shall say I didn't know you, for you look so grown up and unlike yourself."

"Don't you like me so?" asked Meg.

"No I don't. I don't like fuss and feathers⁷," replied Laurie looking at her hair, her dress and finery.

This was too much. Meg walked away, saying, "You are the rudest boy I ever saw."

But she was brought to her senses by Major Lincoln's remark as he passed her by and told his mother, "They are making a fool of that little girl. She's nothing but a doll today."

Laurie came and apologized and asked her to dance with him. They were well-matched and a pleasant sight to see. When they rested, Meg told Laurie she wanted a favour from him.

"Don't tell them at home about my dress. I shall tell them about it myself. Just tell Jo I looked pretty and was having a good time."

On Saturday Meg went home and told her sisters

6. disapproval—dislike; 7. fuss and feathers—too much finery

she had a wonderful time. When the younger girls had gone to bed, Meg knelt beside her mother and said bravely, "Mother, I want to confess."

She told mother and Jo everything, all about the Moffat girls turning her into a fashion plate, Laurie's disapproval and her feeling flattered at being called a beauty. The most difficult part was to tell about the gossip about them and Laurie.

Jo was angry, "That's the greatest rubbish I ever heard."

Mrs. March said gravely that it was unwise on her part to let Meg go and stay with people, who though kind, were vulgar and ill-bred⁸.

Meg said she will forget all the bad things and remember only the fun and good things. "But Marmee, is it wrong to be praised and admired by others?" she asked.

"That is perfectly natural and harmless," said mother. "Learn to be modest as well as pretty, Meg," she added.

Jo felt her sister had grown amazingly in the fortnight she was away. She did not understand or like it.

"Mother," said Meg bashfully⁹, "Do you have plans as Mrs. Moffat said?"

"Yes my dear, I have great many; all mothers do, but mine are different from Mrs. Moffat."

In a grave and serious voice she told her daughters that she was ambitious about them. She wanted them to marry rich men, not because they were rich, but because they were good men. She wanted her daughters to be accomplished, admired, loved and respected. She

8. ill-bred—badly brought-up; 9. bashfully—shyly

wouldn't mind their marrying poor men as long as they were happy, contented and loved.

She ended her advice by telling Meg and Jo that both she and their father hoped that their daughters, whether single or married, would be the pride and comfort of their lives.

"We will, Marmee, we will," promised both of them with all their hearts.

A DAY AT LONGMEADOW

CHAPTER

8

Soon it was spring; days became longer and the girls amused themselves with different activities. Each girl had her own patch in the garden and each did what she liked. Besides gardening, they went for walks, rowed and when it rained, they were busy with their secret club named "The Pickwick Club". The club published a weekly newspaper, "The Pickwick Portfolio", of which Jo was the editor.

At one of their secret meetings, after much debate, Laurie was made a member. No one regretted this decision, for there was never a more devoted, well behaved, and jovial member of the club. His contributions to the paper were excellent, and his speeches were so hilarious¹ that his audiences were convulsed with laughter². The new member also installed a post office in the hedge in the lower corner of a garden. It had an open roof and all sorts of things could be passed through it, e.g. letters, manuscripts, books and bundles.

Beth usually acted as postmistress. One day she brought a letter and a glove for Meg and two letters for Doctor Jo and a funny old hat. Meg wondered where her other glove was. The hat for Jo was sent by Laurie to save her from sunburn. One of Jo's letter was from mother who praised her for keeping control on her temper successfully. Jo was happy that her

1. hilarious—humorous; 2. convulsed with laughter—laugh uncontrollably

mother had noticed her self-control. The second letter was from Laurie.

*Dear Jo,
What ho!*

Some English girls and boys are coming to see me tomorrow. They are nice people. I'm going to take them to Longmeadow and have fun. Brooke will keep an eye on us boys and Kate Vaughn will play propriety³ for girls. Do come.

*In a tearing⁴ hurry
Yours ever, Laurie.*

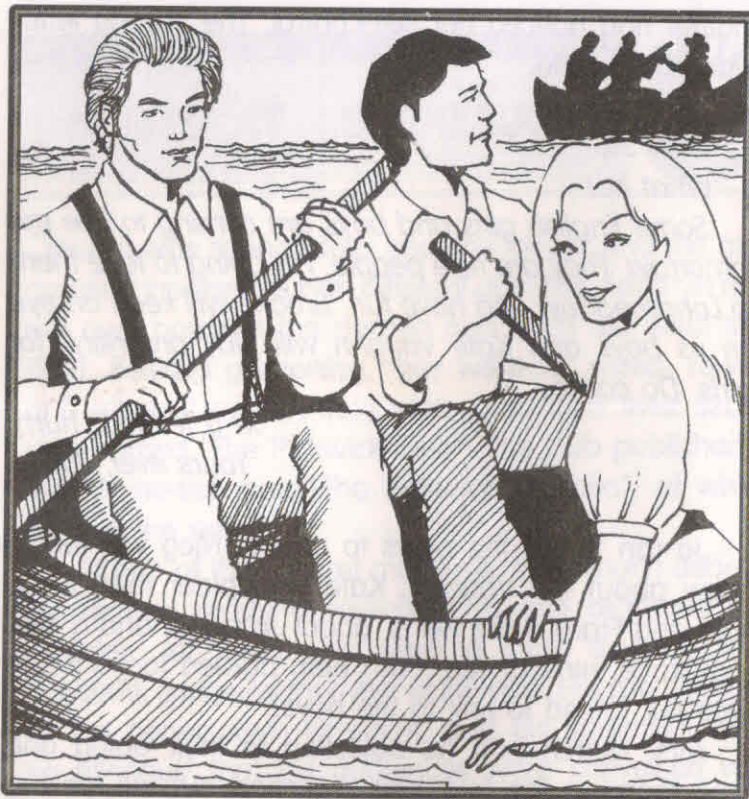
Jo ran to tell the news to others. Meg wanted to know about the Vaughn. Kate was older than Meg; Fred and Frank were twins, about Jo's age, and a little girl Grace, nine or ten. Even Beth agreed to go if she was not forced to talk to the boys!

Mrs. March had no objection to their going and next morning the four girls marched out, all looking their best in summer suits. Jo led them in the hat sent by Laurie.

Laurie ran to meet them and introduced them to his friends. Meg was happy to see that Miss Kate was dressed simply. Beth noticed that one of the boys was lame and Amy and Grace liked each other and became good friends immediately.

Ned and Sallie were there too. It was decided that Laurie and Jo would row one boat and Mr. Brooke and Ned the other. Though Miss Kate found Jo a bit "strange"

3. propriety—correctness of behaviour and conduct; 4. tearing—great, extreme



but "clever" and liked her in the end.

Meg sat face to face with the two rowers. Mr. Brooke was a quiet, serious young man with handsome brown eyes and a pleasant voice. Meg liked his quiet manners and admired him for his knowledge. Ned, in college, liked to show off but was good-natured.

Soon they were in Longmeadow. The tents were already pitched. They played a game of croquet⁵. Laurie, Sallie, Jo and Ned were on one side; Mr. Brooke, Meg, Kate and Fred on the other. Frank, Beth, Amy and Grace

5. croquet—a game played on a lawn with wooden balls which are driven through a series of loops with mallets

were the spectators⁶. Jo, kept control over her temper because Fred cheated in the game. Finally Laurie's team won, and they all sat together for lunch.

After lunch they played a game called "Truth". They had to draw lots and the one who was left last had to answer questions put by the rest. Only Fred, Sallie, Jo and Laurie agreed to play. Laurie was the first to answer questions.

"Who are your heroes?" asked Jo.

"Napoleon and grandfather."

"Which lady here do you think is the prettiest?" said Sallie.

"Margaret."

"Which do you like best," said Fred.

"Jo, of course."

Everyone laughed at his matter of fact tone.

It was Jo's turn next.

"What is your greatest fault?" asked Fred.

"A quick temper," answered Jo.

"What do you most wish for?" asked Laurie.

"To be a genius and write well."

"What virtues⁷ do you admire most in a man?" asked Sallie.

"Courage and honesty."

When Fred's turn came, Jo asked at once, "Didn't you cheat at croquet?"

"Well, yes, a little."

"Good," said Jo, forgiving him at once.

After Sallie's turn they got tired of the game and they indulged in reading poetry. Miss Kate read some German poetry in an expressionless voice. Meg's accent wasn't

6. spectators—outlookers; 7. virtues—good habits or deeds

so perfect but she read a poem with great expression and won Mr. Brooke's approval. Miss Kate was rather shocked when she learnt that Meg did not go to school but worked, and she made some unkind remark.

Mr. Brooke promptly assured Meg that there is no country like America for workers. He told Meg that he loved teaching and Laurie was an excellent student. But next year Laurie would go to college and not need him.

"What will you do, then?" asked Meg.

"Become a soldier." He touched Meg's heart by revealing⁸ he had neither parents nor any friends.

"We're all your friends. You can count on us whenever you have any problems." Mr. Brooke was touched by her warmth and sincerity.

Meanwhile, Beth felt sorry for Frank sitting in one corner by himself. She forgot her shyness and began to talk to him. The only topic she could think of were animals, and soon the two of them started having a long discussion on different animals of their country.

Jo was quite shocked to see Beth talking to Frank. "She pities him, that is why she is trying to be good to him."

"I always knew she was a saint," said Meg.

At sunset, they packed up everything and rowed back home singing songs along the way. They bid goodbye to each other and the four sisters returned home.

Kate could not help telling Mr. Brooke, "American girls can be very nice when one comes to know them."

Mr. Brooke agreed heartily.

8. revealing—disclosing

JO AND SECRETS

CHAPTER 9

Soon it was October; afternoons were short and days were chilly. Jo would sit in the afternoon in the attic and write furiously, her papers spread about her. Finally, one day, she finished her manuscript¹ and signed her name, exclaiming, "There I've done my best!"

She tied her manuscript with a red ribbon, produced another manuscript from a tin box and put both of them in her pocket.

She crept downstairs, put on her hat and jacket as noiselessly as possible, and went out of that house from the back entrance. She caught a bus and got down looking very mysterious. On reaching a building she pulled her hat over her eyes and hesitated before going in. A dentist sign hung at the entrance of the building.

She did not know that Laurie was watching her from the window of the opposite building. He smiled and thought she had come to see the dentist.

In ten minutes Jo came out with a very red face. She did not look pleased to see Laurie, who asked her—

"Did you have a bad time?"

"Not very."

"You came out very quickly. Why did you go alone?"

"I didn't want anyone to know."

"How many did you have out?"

1. manuscript—hand-written text of a book

Jo was very puzzled, and then she began to laugh loudly.

"There are two which I want to come out, but I must wait a week." Laurie was suspicious and thought Jo was up to some mischief.

Jo retorted by asking what Laurie was doing in a billiard saloon².

Laurie clarified that it was a gym and he was taking lessons in fencing.

Jo was glad that Laurie did not visit saloons, because if he went to the wrong places, her mother would not allow him to come home.

"I want you to be a simple, honest, respectable boy," she finished. Laurie then told her that he would tell her a secret, if she told him hers.

Jo was going to protest, but she suddenly remembered what she had, "You will not say anything about it at home will you?" she asked anxiously.

"Not a word," promised Laurie.

"And you won't tease me in private?"

"No, I won't. Fire away."

"Well, I've left two of my stories with a newspaperman and he is to give his answer next week," said Jo, shyly.

Laurie was delighted. He threw his hat in the air and caught it shouting, "Hurrah, for Miss March, you are going to be famous like Shakespeare."

"What's your secret?" asked Jo, to stop Laurie teasing her.

Laurie whispered something in her ear and Jo looked both surprised and unhappy.

2. billiard saloon—a large room or gallery for playing billiards



"How do you know?" she asked sharply.

"I saw it in his pocket. Isn't it romantic?"

"No, it's horrid," she did not like the idea that Mr. Brooke, the tutor, was keeping Meg's lost glove hidden in his pocket all the time. Poor Laurie. He thought she would be pleased, but Jo hated the idea of someone taking Meg away from her.

To get over her disturbed feelings she challenged Laurie to a race. She reached the maple tree with her hair flying, hat lost and pins scattered all over the place. Out of breath, she flopped under the maple tree and asked Laurie to pick up her things.

Meg saw her and was surprised at her sister's dishevelled³ state.

"What in the world are you doing here?" she

3. dishevelled—untidy

asked angrily.

"Getting leaves," answered Jo meekly.

"You have been running, Jo. How could you? When will you stop?"

"Never—till I'm very old and have to use a stick. You have changed all of a sudden, let me be a little girl as long as I can," said Jo. Lately Jo had felt that Meg was changing very fast and Laurie's secret made her more afraid.

Meg, in a mood to preach, lectured Laurie also about listening to his grandfather. "Laurie do your duty, like your tutor Brooke."

Laurie was surprised, "What do you know about my tutor?" he asked.

"I know what your grandpa told mother. How he looked after his mother when she was ill."

Laurie agreed that Brooke was a splendid fellow and he would certainly do something for him when he inherited money.

Meg advised Laurie to start being good to him immediately. She had seen Mr. Brooke look gloomy as he left, on the days Laurie irritated him.

Laurie was both surprised and offended⁴ and accused Meg of spying on him.

"Don't be angry with me Laurie, I've never spied on you. I look upon you as my brother and want you to change for the better."

Laurie was immediately contrite⁵ and squeezed Meg's hand. All three went inside in a happy mood.

For a week or two after this Jo behaved very strangely. She rushed to the door every time the postman rang,

4. offended—insulted; 5. contrite—sorry

and she was rude to Mr. Brooke whenever they met. The next Saturday, the sisters were surprised to see Laurie chasing Jo, waving a newspaper. In a few minutes Jo came in and pretended to read the newspaper with great interest.

"Have you anything interesting there?" asked Meg, full of curiosity.

"Nothing but a story," said Jo.

"Read it aloud," begged Amy, while Beth wondered why Jo hid her face behind the paper.

Jo read very fast. The tale was romantic and full of tragedy as most of the characters died in the end.

Meg and Amy expressed approval. Only Beth asked, "Who wrote it?"

Jo sat up, her face red and a mixture of excitement and gravity. "Your sister," she said.

How delighted they all were! Meg believed it only when she saw the words, "Miss Josephine March", actually printed in the paper. Beth cried, "Oh, my Jo, I'm so proud!" And so was Mrs. March when she knew it. Jo laughed and cried both and tried to answer everyone.

"Stop jabbering, girls and I'll tell you everything", said Jo. She told them all how she was not paid anything for the stories as they were her first; she would be paid for the next one. "I'm so happy," she ended breathlessly. To be independent and earn praise⁶ of those she loved, were her deepest wishes and this seemed to be the first step towards it.

6. earn praise—win approval

A TELEGRAM

CHAPTER 10

It was November and the girls were feeling a bit depressed, especially Meg. She was tired of working hard and wanted a little fun. Amy who was making little clay models of birds and faces, told Meg to cheer up. Jo and she were going to make fortunes for everyone. Jo wished she could make things better just as she did for heroines in her stories. Beth suddenly smiled and said, "Two pleasant things are going to happen right now. Marmee is coming down the street, and Laurie is rushing through the garden, as if he had something nice to tell."

Mrs. March asked her usual question about any letter from father. Laurie wanted the girls to go for a drive with him. Meg refused, but Amy, Jo and Beth agreed at once. Mrs. March asked Laurie to check at the post office whether any letter had come.

There was a sharp ring at the door and after a minute, Hannah rushed in with a telegram. Mrs. March read the telegram, and fell back into a chair white as a sheet. Jo read aloud in a frightened voice.

Mrs. March:

Your husband is very ill. Come at once.

S. Hale,

Blank Hospital, Washington.

The room went absolutely still. The girls collected



round their mother, who got up after a while and said, "I shall go at once, but it may be too late." For several minutes there was nothing but the sound of sobbing in the room.

Mrs. March controlled herself and began to plan. She asked Laurie to send a telegram about her leaving at once. She then wrote a note for Aunt March and told Laurie to deliver it to her. Laurie left immediately on his horse, eager to help. She asked Jo to inform her friends that she would not be able to work for a few weeks. She also asked her to collect a few things for nursing from the chemist. Beth was told to go to Mr. Laurence and ask for bottles of some good wine; Mr. March would need them in the winter months. Amy was sent to tell Hannah to get her trunk down and Meg was to

help her in packing.

Mr. Laurence came himself with the wine bottles and offered to go with Mrs. March to Washington, but she refused the kind offer. He was too old to take the journey. Mr. Laurence promised to look after the girls.

As soon as he left, Mr. Brooke rang the bell. He told Meg, "I have come to offer myself as escort to your mother."

Mr. Laurence had given him some work in Washington and he could look after Mrs. March also. Meg was touched and very grateful. Mrs. March was relieved, as she did not know anyone in Washington.

Everything was packed and ready. Only Jo was missing. Laurie went out to look for her. He missed her, and Jo came walking in with a strange expression on her face. She gave twenty-five dollars to her mother,



saying, "That's my contribution towards making father comfortable and bringing him home!"

"My dear where did you get it? Hope you haven't done anything rash?" For answer, Jo took off her bonnet¹ and everyone cried out in surprise. Her hair was cut short! "Your hair, your beautiful hair!" Jo pretended² she didn't mind the sacrifice! Mrs. March hugged her, "There was no need for this sacrifice, but I love you dearly for it," she said.

"What made you do it?" asked Amy who would never have sacrificed her pretty hair.

Beth said in a voice full of awe³, "I don't see how you dared to do it."

"I wanted to help father, and I saw this shop which had hair for sale," said Jo.

The shopkeeper was not ready to cut her hair, and did it only when Jo told him about her sick father and the need for money. At first Jo felt strange to see her hair on the table but then the thought of her father made her cheer up.

Nobody wanted to go to bed. Beth played her father's favourite hymn, which consoled the girls. They then kissed their mother and went to bed as silently as possible. Amy and Beth went to sleep at once but Meg's head was full of thoughts. She heard Jo give a sob and went to her.

"Jo dear what is it? Are you angry about father?"

"My—my hair," burst out poor Jo. Meg put her arms about her sister and comforted her, till they both fell asleep.

1. bonnet—hat; 2. pretended—falsely claimed; 3. awe—respect and wonder

LITTLE BETH FALLS SICK

CHAPTER 11

The sisters got up very early next morning and read a chapter from their Bibles with utmost seriousness. They had decided not to break down¹ and ate their breakfast quietly. Hannah ran about serving them. Mother tried to eat but could not. As the time for her to go to the station came near, Mrs. March turned to her daughters and said, "I leave you in Hannah's care and Mr. Laurence's protection. They will both take care of you all, of that I am sure. Go on with your work as usual, keep busy. Do not grieve."

"Yes, mother."

"Meg dear, be careful and look after your sisters. If you have any problem, consult Hannah or go to Mr. Laurence."

"We will mother! We will."

Just then Laurie and his grandfather came over to see her off. Mr. Brooke looked so strong and sensible and kind that the girls named him "Mr. Greatheart" immediately. The carriage arrived, the girls kissed their mother and she got into the carriage, waving goodbye to her daughters. Slowly the carriage moved on and was out of sight.

As soon as they came in, the girls broke down and cried bitterly. Hannah wisely allowed them to relieve their feelings. After some time she brought coffee for them and reminded them about working hard as they

¹break down—lose control and cry



had said.

Meg decided to go to the Kings and Jo said she would go to Aunt March as usual and try to bear her lectures.

Amy declared that she and Beth would mind the house.

As Jo and Meg left the house, Beth remembered to wave to them, from mother's window, just as she used to do.

"That's so like my Beth!" said Jo, waving her hat with a grateful face.

The girls were relieved to hear that their father, though dangerously ill, was improving. Their mother's presence had done him a world of good. Mr. Brooke sent a daily bulletin and Meg insisted on reading aloud the "Washington Despatches", as they called his letters.

As the news became more and more cheerful, the girls became relaxed and lazy. Jo developed a cold and stayed away from Aunt March, as she couldn't bear anyone with a cold near her. Amy gave up housework and started to make her mud pies. Meg started spending more time on writing letters or reading the "Washington Despatches" over and over again. Only Beth kept on with her work.

"Meg, I wish you'd go and see the Hummels. Mother told us not to forget them," said Beth ten days after their mother had gone.

Meg was too tired; Jo had a bad cold and refused to go. They promised they would go the next day. When they were all resting, Beth quietly put on her hood, filled her baskets with odds and ends for the poor children and walked out into the cold air. She came back as

quietly in the evening and shut herself up in her mother's room. Jo found her there crying.

"Christopher Columbus! What's the matter?" cried Jo, as Beth told her not to come near. She asked Jo whether she had scarlet fever² earlier.

Jo said yes, both Meg and she had it.

"Oh Jo, Mrs. Hummel's baby is dead," Beth cried out. "It died in my lap, while the mother had gone for a doctor. I held it till she came back. The doctor took one look and said 'scarlet fever', and he turned to me and told me to go home and take belladonna at once or I'll have the fever." Jo put her arms around her sister and made her sit lovingly in her lap. "Oh, Beth if you should be sick, I'll never forgive myself! What shall we do?"

Hannah was called, she assured the girls not to worry and advised them to call Dr. Bangs. She also told them that Amy would have to go to Aunt March's house for a few weeks, since she was the only one who hadn't had the fever. Jo or Meg would have to stay at home to look after Beth as she needed a lot of care.

Jo said at once, "I'll stay. She is sick because it's my fault."

Amy was rebellious³; she would rather have the fever than go to Aunt March, and beside, it was so dull at her place. She would not listen to Meg's pleadings or commands.

Laurie walked in at this moment. He sat down near Amy and in his best wheedling voice he told her to go to Aunt March's. He would visit her everyday and take

2. scarlet fever—an infectious fever which causes a rash all over the body; 3. rebellious—stubborn, difficult

her out walking and driving.

"Will you take me out driving and come everyday?" asked Amy.

"On my honour as a gentleman."

"And bring me back the minute Beth is well?"

"The same minute."

"Well—I guess—I will," said Amy slowly. "Good girl!" said Laurie giving her a pat. Meg and Jo were absolutely surprised and thrilled at the miracle, which Laurie had performed.

Laurie then went away to fetch Dr. Bangs. Hannah told the girls not to inform their mother, as she could not leave their sick father and come. Hannah told them she knew what to do.

Dr. Bangs came and looked quite serious when he heard the Hummel story. He ordered Amy to go off at once and gave her some medicine to ward off the fever.

Aunt March received them (Laurie, Jo and Amy) in her usual sharp manner. "What do you want now?"

Jo told her story. "No more than I expected if you are allowed to go poking about among poor people," she said Amy could stay as long as she made herself useful. Then she asked about the news of their father.

"Father is much better," replied Jo.

"Oh, is he? Well that won't last long. March never had the stamina⁴," was the cheerful answer.

Laurie at this moment pinched Aunt March's parrot, Polly.

"Ha, ha! Never say die, take a pinch of snuff, goodbye, goodbye," screamed Polly.

4. stamina—strength

"Hold your tongue, you disrespectful old bird!" said Aunt March angrily. "And Jo, you go home at once. It isn't proper to be roaming about so late with a rattleplated boy like—"

"Hold your tongue, you disrespectful old bird!" cried Polly, making Laurie shake with laughter.

Poor Amy, she wondered how she could bear living with Aunt March, after Jo and Laurie left her alone.

DARK DAYS

CHAPTER 12

Beth was very seriously ill, only Hannah and the Doctor knew how serious she was. Jo looked after her with devotion¹ and Meg felt very guilty about not letting their mother know. Then came a day when Beth was almost unconscious and did not recognize anyone. She kept calling for her mother. Hannah, though shaken, yet did not want them to write to mother. To make matters worse, a letter from Washington told them that Mr. March had a relapse² and that mother would not be able to come home for a long while.

The house was now full of sadness, with the shadows of death hovering over it. Meg and Jo thought how loving little Beth was. They learnt how popular Beth was because the milkman, the baker, grocer and butcher inquired how she did on a regular basis. The neighbours sent all sorts of comforts and good wishes. Laurie haunted the house morning and evening and old Mr. Laurence locked up the piano; he could not bear to look at it as it reminded him of loving Beth.

On first of December, Dr. Bangs came in the morning. He examined Beth and then told Hannah; "If Mrs. March can leave her husband she'd better be sent for." Jo rushed out to send the telegram, as Meg dropped into a chair and Hannah went very pale.

Jo was soon back and met Laurie at the gate. One look at her face made Laurie cry out, "What is it? Is

1. devotion—great love; 2. relapse—set-back

Beth worse?"

"I've sent for mother," said Jo and burst into tears. She had tried to keep a brave front³ so far and not cried. "I can't give up Beth, I can't, I can't," she cried. "Why do good and dear people always die?" she asked Laurie.

When she stopped crying, Laurie then told her, "I telegraphed your mother yesterday and Brooke answered she'd come at once, and she'll be here tonight and everything will be all right. Aren't you glad I did it?"

The effect was electrifying⁴. Jo stopped crying and throwing her arms around his neck, cried out in joy, "Oh Laurie! Oh mother! I *am* so glad."



3. brave front—full of courage, have a strong nerve; 4. electrifying—dramatic

Though surprised, Laurie patted her back gently and gave her a kiss that made Jo recover immediately. She blushed and apologized for her behaviour.

"I don't mind," laughed Laurie. "Grandpa and I thought that your mother had to be informed. Hannah was overdoing the authority business. Your mother will arrive at 2 a.m. and I shall go and fetch her. Go and take care of Beth."

"Mr. Laurie, you're an angel!" said a grateful Jo. Meg was equally happy. Both the girls hugged each other and whispered "mother is coming" again and again.

Beth lay quietly, she only muttered "water", now and then. Jo and Meg hovered over her, watching, waiting, hoping. Dr. Bangs had told them that some change for better or worse, would take place at midnight; so they prayed and did not sleep at all. Twelve o'clock came and went and everyone seemed quite tensed. Laurie left quietly for the station. At 2 o'clock Jo saw Meg bend over Beth and thought, "Beth is dead, and Meg is afraid to tell me."

A change had come over Beth's face. The flush and look of pain had gone. She looked so pale and peaceful. Hearing the stir⁵, Hannah woke up and rushed to Beth, felt her hands. Then she cried out, "The fever's gone. She is sleeping and breathing easily." Before the girls could believe the happy news, the doctor came to confirm it. "Yes my dears, I think the little girl will pull through. Let her sleep and when she wakes give her..."

Nobody heard what was to be given to her, because the girls hugged each other and rejoiced⁶ quietly. When they went back, they found Beth breathing quietly as if

5. stir—movement; 6. rejoiced—felt happy

just fallen asleep.

The next morning, when the sun rose, the world looked so beautiful and lovely to the two girls.

Then they heard a sound of bells at the door below, a cry from Hannah, and Laurie's voice saying joyfully—

"Girls, she's come! she's come!"

AMY'S WILL

CHAPTER 13

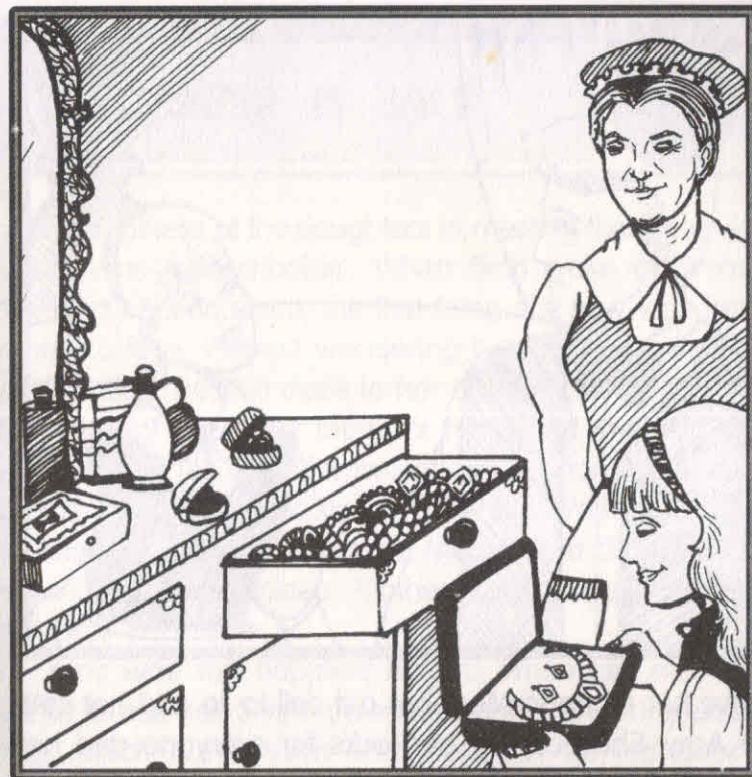
Amy was having a very hard time¹ at Aunt March. For the first time in her life, she realized how much she was loved and petted at home. Aunt March never petted anyone. She did not know how to do it. She liked Amy, because of her courteous² behaviour but was strict with her rules and orders.

Amy had to wash the cups every morning, polish up the spoons, the fat silver teapot and glasses till they shone. Then she had to dust the room, feed Polly, and comb the dog. After this she had to do her lessons. The only free time allowed was one hour when she went out with Laurie walking or driving after dinner. She had to read aloud and sit while the old lady slept. Then patchwork or towels appeared and Amy had to sew till teatime. The evenings were the worst of all, for Aunt March told long dull stories about her youth. Poor Amy always went to bed with tears in her eyes.

Her two friends were Laurie and old Esther, the maid, who stopped her from running away. The maid allowed her to roam about the big house and examine the pretty things stored away in big wardrobes. Amy loved to arrange Aunt March's jewel cases. There were so many beautiful jewels.

"I wish I knew where all these pretty things would go when Aunt March dies," Amy said as she put the jewels back in their cases.

1. hard time—difficult time; 2. courteous—polite



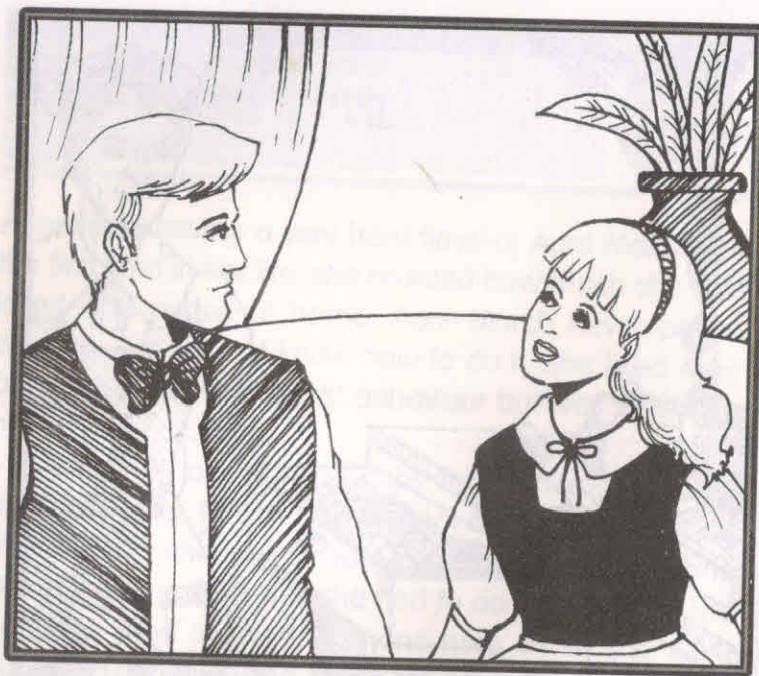
"To you and your sisters. I know it. I witnessed her will³. I think madam will give you the little turquoise⁴ ring when you go."

Amy was delighted to hear it and tried to be a model of obedience, which pleased Aunt March a lot.

On one of his visits, she surprised Laurie by showing him her will, duly attested by Esther. She told Laurie that she got the idea from Aunt March's will.

Laurie then told her about Beth's will in which she

3. will—a legal document which states how one's property should be disposed after death; 4. turquoise—a precious stone of greenish blue colour



gave her piano to Meg, her old doll to Jo and her cats to Amy. She also left her locks for everyone and her best love to grandpa. Amy whispered, "Is she really in danger?" Laurie comforted her in a brotherly fashion. "I'm afraid she is," he said. "But we must hope for the best, so don't cry dear."

When he left, Amy prayed for little Beth, with a sad heart. She knew that a million turquoise rings would not console her for the loss of her gentle little sister.

MOTHER IS BACK

CHAPTER 14

The happiness of the daughters at meeting their mother again was indescribable¹. When Beth woke up from the long healing sleep, the first thing she saw was her mother's face. Without wondering how she was there, Beth smiled, nestled close to her and fell asleep again. She did not leave her mother's hand and she had to whisper and tell the elder two about their father's state. Brooke has stayed back to look after him. With a blissful feeling of burdens² lifted away, Meg and Jo closed their eyes and went to sleep. Mother went to sleep in the big chair near Beth.

Amy was the happiest of girls when her mother came to visit her. She showed her mother the turquoise ring, which Aunt March had given her for her good behaviour.

Mrs. March liked the ring but told Amy she was too young to wear such ornaments.

Amy said, "I want to wear this ring to remind me not to be selfish. I'm going to try and be like Beth. Beth isn't selfish, that is why everyone loves her. I usually forget my resolutions³ but this ring would remind me. May I try this way?"

Mrs. March promptly⁴ told her to wear her ring and do her best. She promised to have her back again at home soon.

1. indescribable—that cannot be described; 2. burdens—problems; 3. resolutions—something resolved on; 4. promptly—immediately



That evening, while Meg was writing to her father, Jo slipped upstairs into Beth's room.

"I want to tell you something, mother."

"About Meg?"

"Yes, it's about her, it's a little thing, but it worries me."

Then Jo told her mother how last summer Meg had left a pair of gloves at the Laurences'. Only one was returned to her. They all forgot about it till Laurie told Jo that Mr. Brooke had it. He saw it in Mr. Brooke's pocket, who confessed⁵ that he liked Meg. He didn't say anything because he was poor and Meg was very young. Jo ended by asking her mother whether this wasn't a dreadful state of affairs.

"Do you think Meg cares for him?" asked Mrs. March.

"I don't know. She looks straight at me when she talks about Mr. Brooke, and only blushes a little when Laurie jokes about lovers."

"Then she is not interested in John," said mother.

"John who?" cried Jo, staring.

"Mr. Brooke. I call him John now."

"Oh dear, I knew you'll take his part. He's been good to father; you'll let Meg marry him," said Jo angrily.

"My dear don't be angry about it. John was perfectly open and honourable about Meg. He told us he loved her, but would ask her to marry him only when he had a better job. He is an excellent young man. But Meg is very young and I will not agree to an engagement."

"Of course not," said Jo firmly.

Mrs. March told her not to say anything to Meg.

5. confessed—admitted

When John comes back she would watch them together and decide.

"She'll see his handsome brown eyes and it will be all up with her," cried Jo. "Oh, dear me, why weren't we all boys, then there wouldn't be any bother!"

Mrs. March smiled at this remark and consoled Jo by saying that Meg was too young at seventeen to get married. They will not allow it till she was twenty and John was firmly established in some good business.

"Hadn't you rather have her marry a rich man?" asked Jo.

"Money is a good and useful thing, Jo but I'm not ambitious for a splendid fortune. If rank and money come with love and goodness, I'll be happy for my daughter. Meg will be rich in having the love of a good man and that is better than a fortune."

At this moment Meg came in to show mother her letter.

Mother approved of it. She wanted Meg to add that she sent her love to John.

"Do you call him 'John'?" asked Meg smiling.

"Yes, he has been like a son to us, and we are very fond of him," replied Mrs. March, looking at her daughter keenly⁶.

"I'm glad of that, he is so lonely." After that she wished goodnight to her mother affectionately.

Mrs. March kissed her daughter tenderly and said to herself,

"She does not love John yet, but she will soon learn to."

6. keenly—sharply

LAURIE MAKES MISCHIEF AND JO MAKES PEACE

CHAPTER 15

The next day, Jo went about the house looking important and mysterious. Meg saw the look, but did not say anything. She knew Jo could not keep a secret and will tell all, if nobody asked her anything but she was surprised at Jo's silence for so long a period.

Jo did not have to nurse Beth now, mother had taken over the task. Since Meg kept a dignified reserve, Jo had only Laurie to talk to but she was afraid he would ferret¹ out her secret quickly.

She was right. One look at her face, and Laurie knew there was some mystery. He tried every trick—wheedled², bribed, ridiculed³, threatened to find out the truth. Finally his patience led him to discover that the secret was about Meg and Mr. Brooke. Feeling bad that his tutor did not take him into confidence, he decided on revenge. He sat down and wrote a letter for Meg.

Soon after this Meg started behaving in a strange way. She looked surprised when spoken to, blushed without reason and was very quiet. When asked, she told her mother she was all right. Jo kept a watch on her and said aloud, "Whatever shall we do?"

The next day Jo handed a letter to Meg saying, "How odd! Laurie never seals mine." This letter was sealed.

Suddenly Meg gave a cry and turned to Jo, "Oh Jo, how could you do it!" She hid her face in her hands

1. ferret—find out, discover; 2. wheedled—coaxed by flattering;
3. ridiculed—made fun of

and cried as if her heart would break.

"Me! I have done nothing," said Jo, totally bewildered⁴.

"You wrote it and that bad boy helped you. How could you be so rude, so mean and cruel to us both?" Jo read the letter along with mother. It was written in a peculiar⁵ writing.

*My dear Margaret,
I can no longer stop myself from writing. We both love each other and your parents would not object. I cannot tell them yet. I have to wait till Mr. Laurence gets me a good job. I beg you not to say anything to your family yet, but to send a word to me through Laurie.*

Your devoted John.

Jo was furious. She knew at once that was Laurie's way of retaliating⁶ because Jo had not told him the secret.

"Mr. Brooke would not write such stuff as that," Jo said scornfully.

"It's like his writing," said Meg.

"Meg, did you answer it?" asked Mrs. March quickly.

"Yes I did," and Meg hid her face again.

Jo was ready to run and bring Laurie over to be lectured but Mrs. March stopped her.

"What did you write?" Mrs. March asked Meg.

"I only said I was too young to do anything about

4. bewildered—puzzled; 5. peculiar—strange; 6. retaliating—taking revenge



it yet, that I didn't wish to have secrets from you, and he must speak to father. I was very grateful for his kindness, and would be his friend, but nothing more, for a long while." Mrs. March smiled, well pleased with the answer and Jo clapped her hands.

"Tell me Meg, what did he say to that?"

Meg told them that this time the answer was totally different. John wrote that he never sent any love letter at all and he was sorry that Jo had played this trick. It was a very kind letter but very dreadful for Meg to receive it.

Jo, who was walking furiously in the room, stopped and picked up both the notes. Then she said that both the notes were written by Laurie and she was sure Mr. Brooke never saw or wrote any of them.

Mrs. March told Jo to bring Laurie at once so she could put an end to the whole thing.

She then turned to Meg and asked,

"Do you love John?"

"I do not know," said Meg. "If John doesn't know anything, don't tell him. Tell Jo and Laurie to hold their tongues," said Meg, angrily.

The minute Laurie stepped in the hall, Meg ran away to her room. Jo had not told him anything, but one look at Mrs. March's face told Laurie why he was called. The interview between Mrs. March and Laurie went on for half an hour, but what happened during that period, nobody knew.

When Jo and Meg were called in, Laurie looked so ashamed that Jo forgave him on the spot. Laurie begged Meg to forgive him and assured her that Brooke knew nothing about the joke.

"Meg, I'll do anything to show how sorry I am," he said.

"I'll try. But I never expected such ungentlemanly⁷ behaviour from you," replied Meg.

Laurie looked at Jo, but she looked so disapprovingly that he felt hurt and walked off without a word.

Jo felt sorry she was so hard and after some time, ran to the Laurence house.

"Is Mr. Laurie in?" she asked the maid who opened the door.

"Yes, but he will not see anyone. He has had a big quarrel with Mr. Laurence."

"Where is Laurie?" asked Jo.

"Shut up in his room, and will not answer," said the maid.

"I'll go up and see what the matter is. I am not

7. ungentlemanly—discourteous, rude

afraid of both of them."

She went up and knocked very hard at Laurie's door. She rushed in as soon as Laurie opened it, and went on her knees before him, "Please forgive me for being so angry. I came to make up," she said in a very meek⁸ voice.

"It's all right, get up and don't be a fool," said Laurie.

"What is the matter?" she asked Laurie, because he looked hurt and pale.

"I've been shaken by grandpa and I will not stand it," said Laurie angrily.

"Why?" asked Jo.

"Just because I didn't tell him why your mother had called me. Nothing would make me break my promise to your mother."

"I'm sure he is sorry now," said Jo. "Why don't you go down and apologize⁹."

"I will not," said Laurie emphatically. "It is he who ought to beg my pardon. I will run away to Washington and join Brooke," he added.

"I wish I could run off too," said Jo.

"Come on, then! Why not?" said Laurie promptly. For a minute Jo was tempted but she came back to her senses.

"Stop Laurie," she said. "If I get grandpa to apologize to you, will you give up the idea of running away?" she asked seriously.

"You can try, but he won't do it," said Laurie, who in his hearts of heart wanted to make up, without any

8. meek—feeble; 9. apologize—beg pardon

cost to his dignity¹⁰.

Jo tapped at Mr. Laurence's door. The old man looked grim and angry. Jo pretended she had come to return a book and to please him asked for the second volume of Boswell's Johnson.

The old gentleman looked hard at Jo and wanted to know what was the mischief Laurie had done. He threatened to punish him if he had done anything rude and ungrateful.

Jo assured him that Laurie had confessed, asked for pardon and had been punished enough. She was not protecting him but someone else and Mr. Laurence should not interfere.

The old man was ready to forgive Laurie because he didn't speak to keep his promise. "Do you think I'm unkind to him? But he tries my patience," said Mr. Laurence.

"If you are harsh with him, he'll run away," said Jo.

Mr. Laurence turned pale and sat down. His son, Laurie's father had run away.

Jo quickly assured him he won't do that and tried to turn it into a joke. Much relieved, Mr. Laurence asked her to bring the boy down for dinner. "He won't come, Sir. He's hurt that you didn't believe him. I think the shaking hurt him," said Jo.

The old gentleman looked a little ashamed of his short temper. Jo quickly said, "Why don't you write an apology, Sir. It will make him see how foolish he is and bring him down. I'll take your letter up and teach him his duty."

10. cost to his dignity—without losing face

Mr. Laurence gave Jo a sharp look. "You're a sharp girl, but I don't mind being managed by you and Beth." And he sat down to write a note.

Jo found the door locked, so she slid the note under Laurie's door. She turned and went down but Laurie was waiting for her at the bottom. He had slid down the banisters. "What a good fellow you are," he told Jo. "Did he blow you up?"

"No, now go and eat your dinner," said Jo and walked out of the house very pleased with her work. She had made peace between Laurie and his grandfather.

A MERRY CHRISTMAS AGAIN

CHAPTER 16

Christmas was approaching. The two invalids in the family were improving fast. Mr. March had written about returning home before New Year and Beth was now able to lie down on the sofa in the study and play with her cats.

Christmas Day was splendid, unusually mild. Beth was carried to the window to look at the snow-maiden Jo and Laurie had created, with holly on her head and a basket of fruits in her hands. Beth laughed gaily when she saw it. The girls loved their presents. Jo had received her favourite storybook. Amy an engraved copy of Madonna and Child, Meg her first silk dress from Mr. Laurence and Beth ate some delicious grapes sent to her.

"I'm so full of happiness. If only father was here," sighed Beth. Laurie opened the door and looked at the girls, his face full of excitement. "Here's another present for the March family," he announced. A tall man wrapped up to the eyes appeared at the door, leaning on the arm of another tall man. There was a general stampede, and four pairs of arms hugged Mr. March. Jo nearly fainted; Mr. Brooke kissed Meg, and Amy fell down from the stool. She didn't get up but hugged and cried over her father's boots. Beth who had not walked yet, came running in and ran straight into her father's arms.

They had a grand Christmas dinner. The fat turkey



and the plum pudding made by Hannah was a grand sight to see. Mr. Laurence, Laurie and also Mr. Brooke dined with them. Mr. March and Beth sat in two easy chairs and everyone told stories, sang songs. The guests went away early and the happy family sat together round the fire.

"Just a year ago we were grumbling about a dismal Christmas," said Jo "It was a pleasant year on the whole!" said Meg.

"I think it was a pretty hard one," said Amy.

"I'm glad it's over, because we've got you back," whispered Beth, hugging her father.

"You had a rough time, but you all have been brave," said Mr. March, looking at his daughters with pride.

MEG MAKES UP HER MIND

CHAPTER

17

The girls and their mother waited upon Mr. March and neglected everything else. He sat in a big chair by Beth's sofa enjoying the attention of the family. Hannah also looked in every now and then to see how "the dear man" was; the family's happiness was complete.

Laurie passed the house in the afternoon. The minute he saw Meg at the window he fell down upon one knee in the snow, beat his breast, clapped his hands and seemed to be begging for something. Meg ordered him to behave himself, which seemed to reduce Laurie to tears.

"What does the silly boy mean?" said Meg, laughing.

"He's showing you how your John will behave, soon," said Jo scornfully.

"Don't say my John," said Meg. "I've told you, there isn't any such thing. We are all friends."

But Jo was not convinced¹. She told Meg that she did not behave like her old self and was always lost in her thoughts. She advised Meg to make up her mind soon and not let things drift.

Meg told Jo that her mind was made up and she knew just what she should say.

"Would you mind telling me what you'd say?" asked Jo.

"No, I don't. My experience will help you when you

¹ convinced—satisfied, assured

fall in love."

Jo was indignant. "I have no intention of falling in love," she declared. "Anyway, what will you say?"

"I would say very calmly, thank you, Mr. Brooke. But I agree with father that I am too young to get engaged, so please say no more. Then I would walk out of the room with dignity."

As Meg rose to show Jo how she would walk out, the door opened and Mr. Brooke walked in. Jo immediately left the room.

"Good afternoon I came to get my umbrella—that is to see how your father finds himself today," said Mr. Brooke.

"It's very well, he's in the rack, I'll get him and tell it you are here."

Meg jumbled² her father and the umbrella well together in her reply. She started going towards the door, saying she'll call her mother.

"Are you afraid of me Margaret?" asked Mr. Brooke, sounding and looking very hurt. Meg denied it at once and said he had been so kind to her father, she wished to thank him for it.

Mr. Brooke held her hand and said, "Meg, I love you so much dear, do you care for me a little?"

"I don't know, I'm too young," whispered Meg, softly.

Mr. Brooke smiled confidently and Meg saw that look. Some mischief took hold of her and she wanted to test her womanly powers. She snatched her hands away and said, "I don't choose, please go away and let me be."

2. jumbled—mixed up



Poor Mr. Brooke was totally bewildered by this sudden change in her.

"Do you really mean that?" he asked her anxiously.

"Yes I do. Please don't think of me at all."

John grew serious and just stood there looking at her tenderly and wistfully³. Just at this moment Aunt March walked in on the two of them. Meg started and Mr. Brooke vanished into the study.

"Bless me, what's all this?" cried the old lady, looking at Meg's red face and Mr. Brooke's disappearing back.

"He's father's friend. I'm so surprised to see you!" stammered Meg. Aunt March sat down, "And pray what is father's friend saying to make you look so red? Tell me!"

"Mr. Brooke came for his umbrella," Meg said.

"Brooke? The boy's tutor? Now I understand. You haven't accepted him child?" asked Aunt March, looking shocked.

"Shall I call mother?" said Meg, much agitated⁴.

"Not yet. I've something to say to you. If you intend to marry this man, you will not get a penny of my money."

Her words had the opposite effect on Meg. She did not like being ordered and immediately made up her mind that she would marry John!

"I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March and you can leave your money to anyone you like," she said with a determined look.

"Oh, is that the way you take my advice, miss? You'll

3. wistfully—yearningly, lovingly; 4. agitated—upset, disturbed

be sorry when you live in a poor cottage and feel miserable."

"It can't be worse than the life some people find in big houses."

Aunt March did not know Meg in this mood. She changed her tactics⁵ and said mildly, "Meg be reasonable. It's your duty to marry a rich man and help your family."

"Father and mother don't think so and they like John even though he is poor."

"Your parents have no worldly wisdom."

"I'm glad of it," said Meg proudly.

Aunt March went on with her lecture.

"Does Brooke have any rich relations?"

"No, but he has many warm friends."

"Oh, he knows you have rich relations, child, that's the secret of his liking you."

Meg was now really angrily. "Aunt March, how dare you say such a thing? John is above such meanness. We both wouldn't marry for money. We are willing to work. I'm not afraid of being poor."

Before she could finish Aunt March declared, "Well, I wash my hands off the whole affair," and slamming the door in Meg's face, she left. Meg did not know whether to laugh or cry. Mr. Brooke appeared again and caught hold of her hands, "I couldn't help overhearing. Thank you for defending me and proving that you do care for me a bit."

"I didn't know how much till she abused you," Meg started saying.

"May I stay with you and be happy, may I dear?"

5. tactics—plans or way of speaking

asked John.

"Yes John," said Meg meekly.

Fifteen minutes later Jo came down softly and hearing no sound thought John had departed⁶. Imagine her shock when she found Meg and John sitting on the sofa, holding hands. She gave a loud gasp and the two turned and saw her. Meg jumped up, looking both proud and shy. Mr. Brooke had the audacity⁷ to laugh and kiss Jo's cheek, "Sister Jo, congratulate us!"

This was too much; Jo vanished and rushed upstairs to her parent's room. "Oh do something, go down quick. John Brooke is behaving dreadfully and Meg likes it!"

Mr. and Mrs. March left the room immediately. Jo told the awful news to Beth and Amy. The little girls were delighted and poor Jo had to retire to her attic for a good cry.

At tea, Meg and John looked so happy that Jo did not have the heart to be gloomy. No one ate much but everyone looked happy and the room looked bright.

"You can't say nothing pleasant ever happens now, can you, Meg?" said Amy.

"The joys follow the sorrows," said Mrs. March. "This year has been full of events, but it ends well, after all."

"Hope the next year will end better," muttered Jo. She still could not stand Meg so absorbed in a stranger before her face. "Anyway we are not getting married for three years," said Meg, "I've so much to learn."

Laurie came dancing in, with a big bouquet for "Mrs. John Brooke".

"I knew Brooke would persuade Meg to marry him."

6. departed—gone; 7. audacity—guts

When John makes up his mind to do something, he always succeeds." Happy Mr. Brooke invited him to his wedding on the spot!

"I will attend your wedding, just for a look at Jo's face on that occasion," laughed Laurie. He turned to Jo and asked her why she didn't look happy like the others.

"I don't approve of the match, but I have made up my mind to bear it and not say a word against it," said Jo seriously. "You do not know how hard it is for me to give up Meg. I've lost my dearest friend."

Laurie promptly told her that she had him as her friend. He would always stand by her till the end of his days.

Jo, gratefully shook hands with him and said she was obliged to him for his friendship.

"So now cheer up. Meg is happy with Brooke. We will have a grand time after she marries Brooke. I would finish college and then we would go on some nice trip round the world," said Laurie.

"There is no knowing what may happen in three years," said Jo.

"Would you wish to look forward and see where we would be in three years?" asked Laurie.

"No," said Jo definitely. "Everybody is so happy now, I do not want to see something sad."

Father and mother sat together, watching the happy scene. Jo looked around and decided to be as happy as the rest of the family and relaxed on her favourite low seat.

COMPREHENSION EXERCISES



CHAPTER 1

Comprehension Questions

1. Who was the prettiest of the March girls?
2. Why was their father away at Washington?
3. Which action of Jo irritated Amy and why?
4. Who was the peacemaker of the family?
5. Mention the surprise, mother brought for the girls.

Think and Answer

1. Write one characteristic of each of the March girls, which you have found out from this chapter.
2. Put a tick against the adjectives which you think suit the March family:
quarrelsome, caring, hardworking, lazy, greedy, god-fearing

CHAPTER 2

Comprehension Questions

1. What did the girls receive as Christmas present? In what way was each present different?
2. Why did the girls not eat the Christmas breakfast made by Hannah?
3. Describe the presents, mother received from each of her daughters.
4. Twice, once during the play and once at the end of the play, the audience ended up in laughter. Why?
5. Who sent them a sumptuous supper and why?

Think and Answer

1. How do we know that Amy tried to improve herself?
2. Describe in your own words the scene of Mrs. Hummel's house?

CHAPTER 3

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Meg advise Jo to sit still at the party, with her back to the wall?
2. What made Jo say that she always spoiled things?
3. Whom did Jo meet at the party and how?
4. Why did Meg say that Laurie was a "nice boy"?

Think and Answer

1. Which characteristic was common between Jo and the Laurence boy?
2. Give two examples from the chapter to show that Meg and Jo were not upset by their lack of riches and enjoyed simple things.

CHAPTER 4

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Meg grumble, the next day after the party?
2. Give one reason each for Beth, Amy and Jo being in an irritable mood.
3. Describe the work Jo had to do at Aunt March's place.
4. Why was Susie Perkins punished by her teacher, Mr. Davis?

5. What do you learn about Mr. Laurence in this chapter?

Think and Answer

1. What made Jo work for Aunt March, in spite of the old lady being ill-tempered?
2. Why did Mrs. March feel ashamed of herself when she heard the old man's story?
3. Explain the lesson you learn from this chapter.

CHAPTER 5

Comprehension Questions

1. How was Jo able to make a visit to young Laurence's home?
2. Describe the gifts she took for Laurie. Which pleased him the most?
3. Why did Jo not feel afraid of Mr. Laurence? Why was he pleased with her in spite of her remarks?
4. How did Mr. Laurence persuade Beth to play the piano in his house?

Think and Answer

1. Why didn't old Mr. Laurence like Laurie to play the piano?
2. Which qualities did Mr. Laurence possess? Choose from the list given below:
 - (a) strict and harsh
 - (b) had a sense of humour
 - (c) loved his grandson
 - (d) was a very observant man
 - (e) frightened everyone with his gruff voice
 - (f) was really a kind gentleman

CHAPTER 6

Comprehension Questions

1. How did Mr. Davis punish Amy?
2. What did Mrs. March do when she heard Amy's story?
3. Why did Jo shake Amy and box her ears?
4. What made Jo regret her behaviour later on?

Think and Answer

1. Do you think Mr. Davis was a very harsh teacher? Give a reason for your answer.
2. Explain how mother tried to encourage Jo to control her temper.

CHAPTER 7

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Mrs. March regret allowing Meg to go to Moffat's house?
2. How was Meg dressed for the big Party? Why didn't Laurie approve of it?
3. Describe the plans Mrs. March had for her daughters.

Think and Answer

1. Point out two differences in the values which Mrs. March taught her daughters and, Mrs. Moffat her daughters.

CHAPTER 8

Comprehension Questions

1. Describe the "Pickwick Club".
2. What were the things which Beth found in their post

- office one day?
- Why did Meg call Beth "a saint"?
 - Show that both Meg and Mr. Brooke liked each other in their first meeting.

Think and Answer

- Why was Miss Kate shocked that Meg did not go to school?
- Explain the game "Truth".
- Show by an example that Jo was learning to conquer her temper.

CHAPTER 9

Comprehension Questions

- Why was Jo glad that Laurie did not visit saloons?
- What was Jo's secret which she told Laurie?
- How did Jo react when Laurie told her his secret?

Think and Answer

- What does Meg's lecture to Laurie tell you about her?
- Describe Jo's two greatest ambitions.

CHAPTER 10

Comprehension Questions

- Who sent a telegram to Mrs. March and why?
- Describe Jo's sacrifice. What were Amy's and Beth's reactions?

Think and Answer

- Show that Mr. Laurence and Laurie were the best kind of neighbours one can have.

- Jo made a sacrifice for her father, but she was human too. How does the writer let us know this?

CHAPTER 11

Comprehension Questions

- How did Beth catch the scarlet fever?
- Why didn't Amy want to go to Aunt March's place?
- What was Aunt March's reaction when she heard about Beth's illness?

Think and Answer

- What is your opinion about Hannah?
- Laurie knew the sisters so well that she could manage them. How does he persuade Amy to go to Aunt March's place?

CHAPTER 12

Comprehension Questions

- How did the girls learn that Beth was very popular?
- Why did Jo call Laurie an angel?
- Which signs told Hannah that Beth's fever was gone?

Think and Answer

- Which was the worst part of Beth's illness?
- Why did the world look so beautiful and lovely to the sisters at the end of this chapter? Give two reasons.

CHAPTER 13

Comprehension Questions

1. Why was Amy having a hard time at Aunt March's place?
2. Who were her only two friends in Aunt March's house?
3. What did Esther tell Amy that made her become a model of obedience?

Think and answer

1. Describe Beth's will.
2. Why did Amy lose interest in the turquoise ring?

CHAPTER 14

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Amy want to wear her turquoise ring?
2. What did mother tell Jo about John Brooke?

Think and answer

1. Why didn't Jo like the idea of Meg marrying John Brooke?
2. Do you think Mrs. March wanted a rich son-in-law for her daughter Meg? Give a reason for your answer.
3. Which adjective will you use for Mrs. March:
 - (a) scheming
 - (b) worldly wise
 - (c) ambitious
 - (d) simple and straightforward
4. What, according to Jo, was a dreadful state of affairs?

5. Give two reasons why mother approved of John Brooke.
6. Why was mother sure that Meg would learn to love John Brooke?

CHAPTER 15

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Meg call Jo mean and cruel?
2. Who had written the two letters? Why?
3. How did Meg answer the first letter?
4. Give two reasons why old Mr. Laurence lost his temper at Laurie.
5. Briefly describe how Jo made peace between Laurie and his grandfather.

Think and answer

1. Why was Mrs. March pleased with Meg's reply to Mr. Brooke's letter?
2. Old Mr. Laurence looked pale and frightened when Jo told him that Laurie might run away from home. Give reasons for his behaviour.
3. Who did Mr. Laurence like best among the four March girls? Give proof for your choice.

CHAPTER 16

Comprehension Questions

1. Why did Beth laugh merrily when she looked out of her window on Christmas morning?
2. Describe the Christmas presents the girls received.
3. Who brought the best gift?

Think and answer

1. The story begins with Christmas and ends with one too. Compare and contrast them.
2. Do you think the girls have changed in anyway during the year? Give a reason for your answer.

CHAPTER 17**Comprehension Question**

1. Did Meg behave with Mr. Brooke as she had promised Jo she would? Describe her behaviour.
2. How did Aunt March help Meg in making up her mind? Did she expect Meg to say or do what she did?
3. How did her parents and sisters react to Jo's "awful news"?

Think and answer

1. Now that you have finished reading the book attempt a brief character sketch of each girl. Your sketch should be based on these points:
 - (a) Appearance
 - (b) What were their basic qualities—who was the tomboy, who was the most loving, etc?
 - (c) Choose one incident, which shows them at their best.
 - (d) One incident, which shows them at their worst.
 - (e) Have they improved or become worse at the end of the story?
 - (f) Who is your favourite among Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy? Why?