



Sample Pages from Finding Jo March

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FINDING JO MARCH

*Adapted from the novel "Little Women" by
Louisa May Alcott*

A DRAMEDY IN TWO ACTS BY
Laramie Dean



Finding Jo March
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Casting

5W+5M+1AG+3W/NB

- JO:** A writer trying to turn Louisa May Alcott's novel *Little Women* into a play. Casts themselves as "Jo March." Can be played by a female or non-binary actor.
- MEG:** The eldest of the March sisters from *Little Women*. Concerned with money and appearance, at least at first.
- BETH:** In *Little Women*, the middle sister, sweet and empathetic and incredibly musically inclined. The actor who plays Beth also plays the Writer's sister: determined, headstrong, and occasionally bratty.
- AMY:** The youngest March sister. An artist. Says whatever thought comes stomping through her brain.
- MARREE:** Margaret March, mother of the March sisters. The actor who plays Marree also plays the mother of "Jo" and "Beth."
- AUNT MARCH:** In Act One, Father's elderly and mean-spirited aunt, a wealthy woman who hires Jo to organize her library. In Act Two, not-quite-as-elderly and far more stylish (but still disgustingly wealthy) aunt who insists on controlling the lives of her nephew's daughters.
- LAURIE:** "Jo's" best friend who has agreed to play Laurie, otherwise known as Theodore Laurence, a wealthy boy and next-door neighbor to the March sisters.
- MR. LAURENCE:** Laurie's grandfather, a beneficent gentleman who appreciates the March family's kindness and consideration and decides to reward them when he can.
- FATHER:** Mr. March, father to the March sisters, husband to Marree, away fighting in the Civil War. The actor who plays Father also plays the father to "Jo" and "Beth," an alcoholic gambler who finally leaves his little family forever.
- JOHN BROOKE:** Laurie's tutor who falls in love with Meg March.
- RAE:** "Jo's" ex-girlfriend who has agreed to help them turn *Little Women* into a play. Plays other characters where noted, but particularly Annie Moffat, a wealthy brat of a young woman who, nevertheless, has an eye for Jo. Can be played by a female or non-binary actor.
- JET:** One of "Jo's" friends who has agreed to help them turn *Little Women* into a play. Impatient and possessing very little in the way of an attention span, nevertheless very much wants to help their friend. Plays other characters where noted. May be played by any gender.
- NORA:** One of "Jo's" friends who has agreed to help them turn *Little Women* into a play. Very motherly and empathetic. Plays other characters where noted. Can be played by a female or non-binary actor.
- JACKSON:** One of "Jo's" friends who has agreed to help them turn *Little Women* into a play. Very much a "dude bro" and super into the writer playing Jo. Plays other characters where noted, but particularly Christopher Straub, a wealthy 21st century socialite and Laurie's boyfriend, and Friedrich Bhaer, a 19th century German man with an oversized mustache who might or might not end up marrying Jo. Should be played by a male actor.

Casting

I'm fortunate to teach in a school with a fairly diverse population, including a great number of LGBTQ+ students. More and more students lately are coming out as genderqueer or non-binary, and they've found that they are not as represented in literature – including performing arts – as are their peers. I wrote this play for them.

The character of Jo was played in our first reading by a cisgendered actor; for the fully mounted production Jo was played by Elio House, who identifies as non-binary. I encourage you, as always, to cast the actor you think would make the production the most successful... but I will steer you toward queer-identified or non-binary performers if possible. Representation matters.

Jo's four friends – Rae, Jet, Nora, and Jackson – were, in the draft of the play we used for our original production, nameless, identified only as “Chorus 1,” etc. Upon further reflection, I am frustrated with myself for neglecting to name them, since each one emerged with a specific personality due, in part, to the performer who played them. So now I've given them the names of the actors who gave them life on stage; please feel free to keep the names as I used them, or apply the names of the actors you choose.

Production Notes

So: you should know right away that this isn't a traditional adaptation of *Little Women*.

The genesis of this play occurred when I had the germ of an idea about how my fond memories of Louisa May Alcott's popular novel might become an interesting play, an interpretation for the stage that hadn't been done before; upon revisiting the novel, I found that several lines – Jo's declaration that she is “the man of the family,” for instance – resonated today and in ways that felt even more relevant, prescient even, than they did in the 19th century, when Alcott first published the novel.

I thought, in my original conception, how it would be fun to separate the play into two acts, with the first taking place in the 1860s and the second today, in the 21st century; it would be interesting, I told myself, to juxtapose the Marches and their loves and losses at the time the book was written against the background of today. The story is timeless, after all (which writing the play taught me if nothing else) ... and oft-adapted. I read several different interpretations of the original Alcott while I prepared this play, watched the films, enjoyed graphic adaptations, and I was left with the same feelings I had as a child: there's a reason *Little Women* remains so accessible after a hundred and fifty years.

But I found myself immediately stumped. Why should each act take place in a different time and, essentially, a totally different world? What was the linking device?

I was lucky enough to enjoy a dramaturgical chat with Lindsay Price, who is an amazing and accomplished playwright and teacher, where I bounced around some of my ideas. “Wouldn't it be kinda cool,” she told me with a twinkle in her eye, “if you started in the past with all the costumes and props and familiar characters, but then, as the story goes along, little bits and pieces of the present start to appear? For instance, say that someone dressed up for the 1860s suddenly pulls out a cell phone! Stuff like that. How cool could that be?” I stared at her, astonished, then began to

grin, and then to nod, bobbing my head up and down like it was connected to a spring as I grew more and more excited.

I went home after that weekend and immediately started a new draft of the play. Two scenes from the original story stood out to me more than any others: Jo and Amy's fight after Amy viciously destroys Jo's writing and Amy's subsequent fall through the ice, and Beth's long illness and death. And there it was, I realized: the connection I needed, the scaffolding necessary to build a new adaptation of a familiar story. An essential theme among many in Alcott's novel is the importance of sisterhood, the value of family. The strength in love. In finding happiness. I started there.

What I ended up with is, as I said, a very different interpretation of the story. The central conceit is that a young writer, on top of dealing with trying to understand their gender and sexual orientation, must also cope with the loss of their sister, who died a year ago in a car accident after the siblings' father walked out on them and their mother for good. This lost sister's favorite novel...? *Little Women*, of course, which is why the Writer gets the idea to turn the book into a play, with a little help from their friends. The Writer tries to stay in their 19th century lane, but as the play progresses, more and more of their actual life and the modern era break through until finally the Writer is forced to confront and then deal with their own grief in the wake of their sister's death.

If you can get behind all of that, here are some suggestions that might help you with staging *Finding Jo March* yourself. Please don't feel beholden to them; do what you need to do to tell the story, which is, after all, the most important thing.

Music

The use of music was important to Louisa May Alcott when she created the character of Beth March, who is the most gentle of the sisters and inclined toward the piano. Besides my good fortune to teach at a school with a fairly open-mind as far as diverse populations go, we're also lucky to have an amazing music department. For most of my non-musical theatre performances I have recruited students from band and orchestra and/or my own theatre department to play live music. I find that live music engages audiences who are accustomed to scoring for the television and movies they enjoy (or are more familiar with musical theatre than, say, its equally legitimate though traditionally song-less sibling, the so-called "straight play"); it also offers a cross-curricular pathway for students who might not otherwise involve themselves in live theatre.

We were fortunate to have Grady Hood, a freshman, interested in theatre and piano performance, who auditioned for our production of *Little Women*. Grady was able to provide live transitional musical between scenes and important moments in the play as well as performing Beth's music; the actor cast as Beth mimed playing the piano while Grady provided the actual accompaniment.

Grady also played musical "stings" on the piano for these specific four moments in order to heighten the drama: 1) a little glissade of music when Jo and Annie Moffat brush hands in Act One; 2) the same little glissade of music when Meg meets John Brooke in Act One; 3) five slow, deliberate beats of the same note as Amy is trapped beneath the water when she falls through the ice in Act One; and 4) little notes to

punctuate Jo's repeated "Oh my gosh" in Act Two when they learn that their story is being published. If you are lucky enough to have an actual pianist (or if you choose to use recorded music) I encourage you to find other places in the script beyond just those four moments to highlight the drama or the comedy.

Locating a guitar player turned out to be slightly more challenging. I had planned to use another instrumentalist to play the guitar while Morgan Best, the actor playing Beth, mimed guitar as she had mimed playing the piano; fortunately, and without provocation, Morgan stepped up and volunteered to learn a few chords on the guitar herself.

I encourage you to use live musicians; require them to attend rehearsals and treat them as if they're part of the cast (because they are).

If this is not an option for you, you might use royalty-free music in the public domain and play it as a sound effect. Grady chose "Symphony No. 9 in E. Minor", popularly known as "The New World Symphony" by Antonín Dvořák for "Beth's Theme." They also used "Clair de Lune" by Claude Debussy for a few transitional moments and "Theme from Symphony No. 3, ('Eroica') by Ludwig van Beethoven for the ice skating scene in Act One (before Amy falls through the ice). Morgan played a few chords on the guitar when the script indicates; a more experienced musician could also be encouraged to play "The New World Symphony."

Costuming

Where noted in the script, most of the characters will inhabit the year 1863 and should dress accordingly. (You might think shawls and bonnets.) Exceptions are Jo's friends, who should don separate costume pieces while keeping visible their "friend" costume to suggest their character from *Little Women*. Here's what we did in our production:

RAE as ANNIE MOFFET: Wore a period dress (in pink) for Annie's party along with a long pink ribbon in her hair. During the skating scene Annie wore Rae's "friend" costume (jeans and a simple blouse) except for the ribbon; we did the same thing in Act Two when Annie and Jo meet up again in the modern day. The ribbon was particularly effective in the play's last moment, when Annie and Jo are discussing their future: Rae pulls off the ribbon when she abandons the Annie character and tells Jo, "I don't want to be Annie anymore; I just want to be me."

JACKSON as CHRISTOPHER STRAUB: Jackson donned a baseball cap worn backward.

JACKSON as FREDERICH BHAER: Jackson donned a ridiculously oversized shaggy mustache, which offered him some amusing stage business (he was fond of petting it) as well as allowing him to look suitably ridiculous.

THE MARCH SISTERS: Our costume team assigned a color to each of the March sisters: Meg wore blue, Beth green, and Amy pink. In Act One the sisters wore long dresses and shawls in their chosen color; in Act Two, they donned tee-shirts, sweaters, and blouses in their corresponding colors from Act One.

Set

We share our auditorium and stage, which usually requires that our set options must be fairly minimal. For this play, which travels swiftly through time and space, we used a three foot high platform with stairs attached for Jo's writing area and a series of flats that we decorated with vintage illustrations from multiple copies of *Little Women* blown up to poster size. We added a faux-fireplace, a chair, and a wee Christmas tree for the first scene, which Rae, Jet, Nora, and Jackson struck where the script indicates.

We are lucky enough to have a baby grand piano at our disposal, which we placed far stage right so that Grady was unobtrusive but always present.

Because there are a variety of small props that come and go quite quickly, we used Jo's writing platform to hide them before or after they were used.

I suggest utilizing as much or as little scenery as you feel you need to tell the story.

Amy and the Ice

My husband Ryan is the technical director for our productions, and he always comes up with nifty lighting designs that are cool to look at as well as being very theatrical. I knew that I wanted to show the audience Amy falling through the ice (as opposed to having the characters merely talk about it), since it was the most exciting moment (and my favorite) that I remembered from my childhood reading of Alcott's novel.

I blocked Sage Fife, the actor playing Amy, to mime ice skating to the edge of our apron... then she jumped off into the orchestra, waving her arms slowly as if she were trapped underwater. The lights turned to blue and purple, focused on Amy's friends and family as they rushed (in slow slow slow slow motion) to save her; meanwhile, Grady, our pianist, played five distinct, harsh, drawn out notes on the piano. After the fifth note, action resumed at its regular speed and the lights restored to the way they'd been before Amy crashed through the ice; Laurie and John Brooke then helped pull Amy out of the "water" and back onto the apron.

A very neat, satisfyingly theatrical moment.

Original Cast and Crew

Finding Jo March premiered (as *Little Women*) on November 13, 2021, at Hellgate High School in Missoula, Montana, with the following cast and crew:

JO: Elio House
MEG: Gretchen Morgan
BETH: Morgan Best
AMY: Sage Fife
MARMEE: Hazellan Seagrave
LAURIE: Alexander Blaide
AUNT MARCH: Caroline Wright
MR. LAURENCE: Lucca LePiane
FATHER: Miles Biddulph
JOHN BROOKE: Baker Morgan
RAE / ANNIE: Rae Scott
JET: Jet Burns
NORA: Nora Myers
JACKSON / CHRISTOPHER STRAUB /
FRIEDRICH BHAER: Jackson Richter
UNDERSTUDIES: Sean Jean and Lillian Young

DIRECTOR: Laramie Dean
TECHNICAL DIRECTOR: Ryan Young
SCRIPT CONSULTANT: Elio House
STAGE MANAGERS: Kiyaa Brown, Oliver Hughes, Maille Moynahan, Mila Yedinak
LIGHT DESIGN: Ryan Young
HANG AND FOCUS CREW: Rae Scott, Miles Biddulph, Vance Biddulph, Kiyaa Brown, Nora Myers
LIGHT BOARD OPERATOR: Vance Biddulph
COSTUME CREW: Hazellan Seagrave, Morgan Best, Rae Scott, Akela Armantrout, Liam Jones, Kiara Johnson, Natalie Floyd
MAKEUP AND HAIR: Caroline Wright and Morgan Best
PROP DESIGN: Maille Moynahan and Mila Yedinak
SET DESIGN: Laramie Dean and Ryan Young
CONSTRUCTION CREW: Cast
PHOTOGRAPHY: Rachel Morgan
POSTER: Oliver Hughes
PUBLIC RELATIONS: Alexander Blaide

ACT ONE

Scene I

Music plays, a piano or a guitar or both. Then, in the darkness:

JO: I'm going to find you. I'm going to. Yeah, yeah, yeah; I know it's gonna be hard. But I WILL.

Lights rise on JO, on a platform or a part of the stage separate from the rest of the action: JO's writing room. This should be decorated to demonstrate JO's personality: some books, pictures of their friends, lots of scattered papers, and one photo, larger than the rest, of BETH. JO fusses with a table or desk and a chair and a giant, ancient laptop, trying to find a place to plug it in. It should be unclear at first to whom JO is speaking. We don't know yet, but JO does, that they're talking to their sister, played by the actor who plays BETH in the story of "Little Women." Finally JO takes a biiiiiig breath, trying to control their frustration. Then they leap back into wrestling with the laptop, more specifically the cord.

The battery in this monster is so cheap! But it's all Mom could afford. She SAID. *(to themselves)* Come on, now, that isn't fair. You know that isn't fair. Being poor doesn't make you BAD. *(attacks the cord again)* It won't even turn on anymore unless I plug it into a – ah HA! *(JO has plugged it into the wall. The laptop starts up. They begin to type, talking to themselves/BETH as they go.)* Get me a new doc all clean and shiny and with no words written on it at all because who needs words, ha ha... *(stops)* Sigh. I do. *(calling)* You used to make fun of me all the time because I took myself soooooo seriously, said I was going to be a writer, a REAL writer, whateverthelldthat means, and then – *(finds a copy of "Little Women," the actual book, holds it up)* THEN I find out that the main character of this here book is a writer and you knew it all the time and so THAT doesn't seem very fair, does it? For you to make fun of me? *(Puts the book on the desk beside the laptop. Opens it. Thumbs through the pages.)* Jo March. Jo March, the writer. Who writes. Who imagines. Who BUILDS! *(calling)* I can imagine! I can build! Watch! Just you watch! *(furiously typing)* This is the story of sisters. FOUR sisters.

Suddenly three of the MARCH SISTERS appear in silhouette: AMY, MEG, and BETH.

AMY: (*speaking to an invisible JO*) You're always working! Always writing. Work work work, write write write. (*giggling*) Right?

JO looks up from the laptop, delighted.

JO: Yes! Yes, there they are! That is so... COOL!

MEG: (*to AMY*) And you're always whining.

AMY: (*whining*) I am not!

BETH: (*trying to be loyal*) There are many times when you don't whine... (*beat; sincere, a bit flustered*) I'm just having a hard time thinking of one.

JO: (*stepping away from the laptop to study the SISTERS more closely*) Wait. One, two, three... where's the fourth one?

THE SISTERS vanish, exiting abruptly.

JO: (*calling*) Okay, that wasn't super helpful!

RAE enters.

RAE: Where do you suppose the fourth sister is?

JO: Jeez, Rae! You scared the hell outta –

RAE: The fourth sister? Where is she? Hmmmmmm?

JO: (*startled*) She? Wait a minute. What are you doing –

RAE: You asked us for help awhile ago. You said you wanted to start this new project, and we, honestly, we all thought it sounded, you know, super looney tunes... but after everything that happened, I... felt bad. And I thought we could maybe try to –

JO: (*quickly*) Help me? Oh, yes! Yes, help me – with my play! I'm writing a play.

RAE: (*a little confused*) Oh? A... a play? See, I thought you were gonna write comic books. Hey, remember that time we stayed up until, like, three in the morning because you found all your Grandma's Wonder Woman comics in the attic? We read each and every single one of them and drank a billion gallons of coffee and then we had to pee all night? (*RAE laughs until she realizes that JO isn't paying her any attention; they are fussing with the laptop.*) So... a play, huh.

JO: Yeah, yeah, yeah. It's gonna be a new version of *Little Women*. Brand new. Like no one's ever done before.

RAE: *(a little startled)* Little Women? But wasn't that – *(JO pretends they didn't hear that last bit. It suddenly dawns on RAE exactly what's going on.)* Okay. Sure. Little Women. I can work with that.

JO: I appreciate the help. I really do. Are the others with you?

RAE: They'll be here in a bit. I thought I'd get here a little earlier than the rest of them. So it could be just us. Remember us?

JO: *(finally looking at RAE)* I do.

RAE: And I was thinking that we could try again, you and me. What do you think?

JO smiles at RAE. RAE returns the smile. They step toward each other. Then, abruptly, JO turns back to their laptop and types a few more words.

JO: "The four sisters sat knitting away in the twilight, while the December snow fell quietly without—"

RAE is hurt and a little confused.

RAE: Okay, so maybe not.

JO: "— and the fire crackled cheerfully within. It was a comfortable room, though the carpet was faded and the furniture very plain, for a good picture or two hung on the walls, books filled the recesses, chrysanthemums and Christmas roses bloomed in the windows, and a pleasant atmosphere of peace pervaded it." *(to RAE, pointedly)* CHRISTMAS roses...?

RAE: *(resigned to this new plan)* All righty... Christmas it is. *(calling)* Hey, Jet!

JET sticks their head out of the wings.

JET: Is she ready for us now or what? I've been waiting out there forEVER, and it's maybe two degrees above zero. MAYBE. I thought it was s'posed to be springtime.

RAE: *(annoyed, but charmed by JET despite herself)* We're summoning Christmas in here. Are you gonna help me or just stand there and whine?

RAE and JET quickly bring on a Christmas tree; JO stops typing to admire it. It is sprinkled with ornaments. JO crosses to it and examines it, squinting.

RAE: ("Ta da!") Like this?

JO: Not quite. It shouldn't... there should be less stuff on it, don't you think?

JET: Like this?

JET removes a few ornaments.

JO: Oh, hold on. (*Takes one. Looks at it closely.*) Not this one. This one was HERS. (*hesitates, then hangs it back on the tree*) Let's keep it. But definitely, a few less.

RAE removes another ornament.

JET: (*super duper critical*) Now it looks kinda bare. And by "kinda" I mean really really.

RAE: No, it's nice! It's... um... austere. (*to JO*) You told me last year that you liked a nice, simple tree. When I was a kid, we always –

JO: That's the point. We're... I mean, THEY'RE poor. And it's Christmas. (*inspired*) During the Civil War. That sounds like an exciting time, don't you think?

JET: (*examining their own fingernails*) I never had much interest in history.

RAE: (*chortling*) That's 'cause you failed it like a bazillion times!

JO: I haven't either. 'Til now. But it sounds exciting! And it's a good reason for Dad... for, for FATHER – for THEIR father, the sisters', I mean – it's a good reason for their father to be away. He's away because he has to be. He doesn't have a choice. He's away at war.

AMY enters, running. Now we see her clearly for the first time. Each girl, with the exception of JO, is dressed in period, 1860s American Civil War era clothing.

AMY: Look at the tree, look at the tree!

BETH enters, slower, a little out of breath.

BETH: It's really beautiful. Marmee outdid herself.

MEG enters.

MEG: It's small. It's too small. (*wrinkles her nose*) Oh, come now, Jo. You don't think that poor dear tree is too small?

RAE: (*elbowing JO*) And who do you think they're talking to?

JO: Wait... me? Is it... me? (*getting excited*) Am I... am I JO??! I think I could be Jo. Do... do you think I could be Jo?

RAE: (*deliberately*) That's how this is gonna go. You. Are. JO.

JO: (*a breath*) You're right. I am...

JET: Jo. Short for Josephine. Duh-doy. We all had to read that book because –

RAE elbows JET, shushing them. RAE arranges JET so they are bookending JO.

RAE & JET: You are Josephine March.

JO: (*trying it out*) Jo. Jo. I am JO. Yes. Yes, I like that. I REALLY like that.

RAE: She's a writer, you're a writer –

JO: Right! And so what if I put myself into the play. That's how I'll figure it out.

JET: (*with a look at RAE*) Suuuuuuure. (*RAE elbows JET*) Ouchies!

RAE: (*gently, to JO*) What do you think you have to figure out?

JO: (*quickly*) Um, oh, you know... plot! How to take it from the page to the stage, ha ha. (*weakly*) Ha.

RAE moves to come closer to JO, reaching a bit for them, when JET, paying not the slightest bit of attention to their dynamic, comes between them.

JET: (*to RAE*) When did she become a writer anyway? Hey, let's run to the Tastee Freeze and get a milkshake!

RAE: (*fiercely*) Work with me, please! She's always been a writer. You just don't know her as well as I do.

But JO hasn't heard any of this. They've moved away from RAE and have begun circling the other March sisters, who remain frozen by the tree. JO studies them in awe. RAE directs JET to look as well.

Watch.

MEG: (*as before*) Oh, come now, Jo. You don't think that poor dear tree is too small?

JET: (*off a nod from RAE, giving JO a little shove*) Time to go now!

JET turns to RAE for approval. RAE gives them a thumbs up; JET beams.

JO: (*stumbling a little*) Oh! (*with a glance at JET and RAE, who motion for them to go; JO takes a breath and then decisively strides into the scene, then turns to MEG*) No, it's not too small at all...

RAE: (*prompting*) Meg...

JO: Meg! And... Amy! And... and... (*with the barest hesitation*) Beth. Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. The March sisters.

RAE: (*to JO, worried*) Are you sure about this?

JET: (*sincere*) We'll understand if you aren't.

NORA and JACKSON enter as if they've been rushing to get there; NORA doesn't notice JO at first.

NORA: (*to RAE*) We got your messages. So many messages! Stupid group chat. (*off RAE's look, noticing JO, backtracking*) Oh! Hi there! Here we are!

JACKSON: We are so totally and a hundred percent here. (*wagging eyebrows at JO*) Hi.

NORA: We just want to help, Jackson and me, because Rae texted and –

JACKSON: (*gesturing at RAE*) Totes! Dude said –

RAE: (*big thundering eye roll*) Not a dude.

JACKSON: (*ignoring this*) – that you needed some help, and so we thought we'd, like, APPEAR –

NORA: But if you'd rather we didn't, we could always leave you alone again, like before, and –

JO: No, you are helping! You're a big help!

JACKSON: (*suavely, with a step toward JO*) If you're absolutely sure this is the way. I mean, otherwise, you and me, we could probably just ditch these djabronies and like, grab something of the eating or drinking variety and just forget all this old fashioned nonsensicalness – (*notices RAE, JET, and NORA are glaring at him*) Or – uh – never mind. Old fashioned nonsensicalness it is.

JET: (*furiously*) Djabronies? DJABRONIES? (*to RAE*) What's a djabronie?

JO: I'm absolutely sure. This is what I want. We are going to do this. (*NORA reveals that they've been holding a dress of the same period that the March girls are wearing.*) But how did you know –

NORA: Rae told us about your new, um, project at lunch yesterday.
(*quickly*) We weren't trying to exclude you. You know that, right?
You were gone again. I mean, I get why, I totally do –

JACKSON: (*leaning in to JO*) TOTALLY get it. I'm all about the understanding.

NORA: (*pushing him away*) We just figured that it would be *Little Women* –

JET: (*eyes rolling madly*) Cuz it's ONLY been *Little Women*. For months and months and months and –

NORA: (*handing JO the dress*) We had this, just lying around the house. It's from that time my Mom was Scarlett O'Hara for Halloween.

JO: (*holding it, unsure*) I remember!

JET: Scarlett O'What Now?

JACKSON: I saw that movie. Do I get to be, like, a solider dude or something? 'Cause that would be SICK.

JO: (*examining the dress*) I think it's too extravagant. And I don't know about dresses. I've never liked wearing dresses. I didn't think I'd ever wear one again.

RAE: (*gently*) You and Jo are a lot alike.

NORA: The other day you said, and I quote, (*looking at writing on their hand*) "Jo's long thick hair is her one beauty." (*If the actor playing JO has long thick hair, NORA will say:*) We can put it in ringlets or something later if you want. For now, (*wagging the dress a little at JO*) I think you could use a little extravagance. (*If the actor playing JO does not have long thick hair, NORA will waggle the dress and say:*) Maybe you could use a little extravagance right about now.

JO decides. NORA helps JO into the dress. RAE, JET, and JACKSON set up furniture around the tree while the following exchange takes place.

MEG: It's so dreadful to be poor.

AMY: I want presents. Why don't we have presents? (*she dances around the tree*) Presents, presents, presents! (*she throws herself onto a chair dramatically*) It isn't fair that the other girls have all kinds of pretty things, and we have to go without.

BETH: That isn't all the way true.

AMY: Says you.

BETH: I just mean that we have Mother and Father. And we have each other. Doesn't that count?

MEG: But we haven't got Father. And it's possible we won't. For a long time. (*critically, to BETH*) Shouldn't you be resting?

BETH: (*trying to rally*) I'm... fine.

MEG: You don't sound fine.

AMY: Beth NEVER sounds fine.

MEG: (*warningly*) Amy, what did we talk about?

BETH: I'm just a little out of breath, that's all.

MEG: Were you visiting the Hummels again? They're all very, very sick. Marmee told me. Oh, I do hope you haven't caught anything!

BETH: I was careful. Just like Marmee taught us to be.

AMY: (*whining, tugging at MEG's sleeve*) When will Marmee be home?

MEG: Patience, Amy!

AMY: (*sulking*) JO never has to be patient.

NORA, having fitted JO securely with the dress, steps back to reveal their work.

NORA: (*to JO*) Voila! You look wonderful.

JO: (*doubtfully*) I really don't know about this...

JET: You wanna channel that inner Jo, huh? Then you're gonna have to be (*sneering*) lady-like. Better start practicing now, sis.

RAE: (*to JET, shaking her head*) Why are you the worst?

JET: (*indicating JACKSON, who is staring, smitten, at JO*) Uh, I'm pretty sure Jackson is the worst.

JACKSON: (*sincerely, to JO*) I think you... look... AWESOME.

JO: (*tugging at the dress*) This is super uncomfortable – (*realizes MEG is evaluating her*) What's wrong now?

RAE, JET, JACKSON, and NORA retire away from the action to observe.

MEG: You are old enough to leave off boyish tricks, JOSEPHINE –

JO: Don't call me that! I hate that name.

MEG: –and to behave better. It didn’t matter when we were little girls, but we aren’t any more.

AMY: I am!

MEG: (*ignoring AMY*) But now you’re so tall...

RAE: (*slightly flirtatious to JO*) “Coltish,” is how you described yourself.

MEG: ...and turn up your hair. You should remember that you are a young lady.

JO: Ugh!

JET: (*slapping their knee, highly amused*) Ugh!

NORA shushes JET, who subsides.

JO: I hate to think that I’ve got to grow up and be “Miss March” and wear long gowns! It’s bad enough to be a girl anyway –

BETH: But what’s wrong with wearing long gowns?

JO: Because I like boys’ games and work and manners! I can’t get over my disappointment in not being a boy, for I’m dying to go and fight with Papa!

JET: (*to RAE, NORA, and JACKSON*) The whole Civil War thing is starting to make more sense now.

JO: And I can only stay home and knit, like a poky old woman!

JACKSON, puppy dog eyes all aglow, helpfully hands JO a ball of yarn. JO throws it. BETH retrieves it.

AMY: Marmee doesn’t want us to be friv-friv-

BETH: Frivolous. It means –

AMY: I know what it means!

JO: Don’t snap at Beth like that!

AMY: Don’t tell me what to do, JOSEPHINE!

JO advances on AMY. MEG comes between them.

MEG: It’s Christmas, you two! And Marmee is right. The soldiers certainly aren’t enjoying the season, and we should think of them... (*deep breath*) ...and not ourselves. (*she deflates a bit*) Though I’m having a hard time doing just that.

JO: I don’t think that the little we have –

AMY: (*helpfully*) A dollar! A dollar EACH!

JO: I don't think that a dollar would do much good either way. And I'd like to spend it on the new book Mrs. Hibbins showed me at her shop the other day.

AMY: (*taunting JO*) Bookworm, bookworm!

JO: (*dangerously*) I'd rather be a bookworm than like you.

AMY: What's that supposed to mean?

JO: I hate, hate, HATE affected, niminy-piminy little CHITS!

AMY: (*after a frustrated beat*) I don't even know what that means.

JO: Read a book sometime.

BETH laughs.

AMY: (*turning away from JO*) Oooh, and I could get some watercolors! I'm simply dying for some watercolors.

MEG: You aren't dying at all. Don't use slang, Amy March.

AMY: Jo uses slang all the time!

MEG: Jo isn't the role model she ought to be.

JO rolls their eyes.

BETH: I should like to purchase some sheet music.

JO: Marmee didn't say anything about our money, and she can't wish us to give up everything. We work hard, don't we, Meg?

AMY has gone to play with the ornaments on the tree. During the following exchange, JO follows her to rescue them: whichever ornament AMY moves, JO immediately moves it back until the business becomes a friendly little game between them.

MEG: No one works harder than me. Playing governess to a whole passel of spoiled brats. I believe firmly in my heart of hearts that my children, whenever I deign to have any children, will grow into perfect shimmering angels. The Sundersons have unleashed horrid little beasts upon the world, and that is a fact.

BETH: (*helpfully*) They should supply you with a whip and a chair!

JO: No one suffers as much as I suffer, is what you meant to say. Working night and day for that awful old woman. Aunt March is

never satisfied, not one single bit. She is nervous and fussy and critical. *(to themselves)* Boy, is she critical.

AMY: *(wrinkling her nose)* Also, she's very very old.

BETH: My hands hurt all the time from cooking and washing dishes for the poor. *(quickly)* I know, I know that I shouldn't let it bother me; those families are far less better off than we, and I should be thinking about that instead of –

JO takes BETH's hands and holds them gently. BETH relaxes. They smile at each other.

AMY: I attend school with impertinent girls who laugh at you if your dress isn't absolutely up to snuff –

MEG: *(warningly)* Amy –

AMY: All right! They laugh at my dresses and they laugh about Papa being NOT rich and they laugh at my nose!

BETH: There's nothing wrong with your nose.

AMY: *(wailing)* I KNOW THERE ISN'T!

BETH: *(comforting her)* Marmee will be home soon.

JET hands BETH a pair of slippers. She sets them before the fire to warm.

JO: At least we can all agree that Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents. *(notices the slippers)* Are those for Marmee?

BETH: I thought they'd be nice and toasty when she came through the door. She works harder than any of us do, even all put together, and –

JO: And these are quite worn out. Marmee must have a new pair.

JO holds the slippers up; JET unhappily returns, grabs the slippers, and takes them offstage.

MEG: A nice new splendid fashionable pair!

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

AMY: No, I shall, I shall!

MEG: I will. I'm the oldest, and –

JO: (*decisively*) I'm the man of the family now Papa is away, and I shall provide the slippers. He told me to take special care of Mother while he was gone.

JET: (*examining JO's laptop*) Man of the family?

RAE: No, no, that's what she meant to say.

JACKSON: Yeah she did! It's right out of the book, see? (*He indicates a page. RAE, JET, and NORA stare at him.*) What? I can read, you know.

JET: (*snorting laughter*) As long as there's mostly pictures, you mean!

RAE: Hush.

BETH: I'll tell you what we'll do then. Let's each get Marmee something for Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves.

AMY: But but but –

MEG: (*warningly*) Amy! (*deflating*) Yes. Yes, what a splendid idea. Really. Splendid.

JO: (*to BETH*) That's the spirit, dear! That'll be nice and fair, and then everyone can be happy! What shall we get her then?

MEG: (*taking charge*) A nice pair of gloves. The walk home is always too cold for her.

JO: Army shoes! Best to be had.

BETH: The slippers. They'll keep her feet warm all the time.

AMY: I'll get her some perfume. Some lovely, delicious-smelling perfume that she likes and that I like so of course she'll let me borrow it and it won't cost much so I can have something left over. Then I can get my watercolors.

*Mrs. March – MARMEE – enters, surprising them.
She holds a letter in an envelope.*

MARMEE: Watercolors? What a lovely idea, dear. Your talent grows and grows with every day that passes.

AMY: Marmee!

She flings herself into her mother's arms.

MARMEE: Hello darling! Goodness, but you're warm.

AMY: I'm hot-blooded. That's what Jo always says.

MARMEE: Jo is right. It's lovely on a chilly night like tonight.

AMY gives her another, bigger hug. MEG attempts to intervene.

MEG: Amy, be careful. Marmee is exhausted.

MARMEE: Not so exhausted that I can't give my youngest darling a hug and a kiss.

AMY: Your favorite darling.

MARMEE: My favorite YOUNGEST darling.

JO: (*noticing the letter*) Marmee, what is that?

MARMEE: It's a letter.

MEG: From father?

FATHER appears in a separate area of the stage. He is dressed in modern clothes. He types – with some difficulty due to lack of service – with his phone.

FATHER: My girls! Dearest daughters I love and miss more than the whole entire world. I have service now, but I don't know for how long. Long enough to email your Mom. I hope. I'd better type fast then, huh? I'd call if I could, I'd even text if I could. But everything is so limited here.

JO leaves their sisters and approaches FATHER, frowning.

JO: This is wrong.

FATHER: Maggie, I love you more every day. I wish I could tell you. I wish I could Skype or Zoom or anything else. I wish I could tell the girls so they could hear me. Or see me. Tell them for me, will you?

NORA: (*to JO*) Focus. You can do it!

JO: (*sharply*) I am. I mean, I'm trying.

JET: (*ra ra ra*) 1863! 1863! 1863!

NORA gently elbows JACKSON.

JACKSON: Oh! Oh, right! Just a sec.

JACKSON runs to FATHER and takes his phone while RAE helps FATHER into a military coat from the

19th century. Light on FATHER dims so he's only in silhouette. Now he exists in the 1860s. JO relaxes.

FATHER: I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully, that when I come back to them I may be...

FATHER & MARMEE: Fonder and prouder than ever...

FATHER: Of my little women.

He exits.

MARMEE: ...my little women.

MEG takes the letter.

MEG: Little women... that's lovely.

JACKSON: (*proudly*) Hey, that's the title of this book!

RAE pats him on the head while NORA and JET roll their eyes.

AMY: (*suddenly bursting into loud tears*) I am a selfish pig! I'm the most selfish of all the pigs in the whole... wide... world!

JO: Only sometimes, dear.

JO makes pig sounds.

MARMEE: Now, Jo...

MEG: When will he be home, Marmee?

MARMEE: Not for a long time. He must stay in that... that place and do his duty faithfully.

BETH covers her face and sobs. JO rushes to her.

JO: What is it?

BETH: (*sobbing and trying not to*) I, I, I, I have to help somehow, I have to help. Now. Right now. Right now I have to help. I have to. I have to do SOMETHING, I –

JO: But how? There isn't anything any of us can do –

BETH: But I have to try! Don't you feel that way too? Don't all of you?

MEG: (*small*) Yes.

AMY: Me too.

JO: I do, but –

BETH: I NEED to help! It's better when we help.

MARMEE puts her arm around BETH.

MARMEE: Play for us, Beth. Today was long and exhausting. I'd like to hear you play.

JO: Yes, Beth. Please play.

BETH: W-will it help?

MARMEE: It will help.

The MARCHES freeze; JO turns to their friends.

JO: She wants so badly to help...

RAE: The piano, then. Don't you think?

NORA: The piano is what Beth played in the –

JACKSON: The piano, totes def.

BETH begins to play the piano.

JO: (out) And Beth played the piano... (MARMEE, MEG, and AMY gather around the piano, arm in arm.) ...and they sang together. And it felt good. Together they felt good. Marmee and the four sisters...

MARMEE, MEG, AMY and BETH all vanish suddenly. JO's FRIENDS vanish, striking any furniture as they go. JO is alone and starting to freak out.

No, no, no, no – it was a nice moment, I made it a nice moment, tomorrow they're going to go and give their breakfast to a poor family called the Hummels for Christmas because Marmee thinks it would be a good idea... that's what happens next, but I can't... I can't do it...

JO collapses, trying not to sob. LAURIE – or, in reality, JO's best friend who will play the character of LAURIE – enters, sees JO, rushes to them. Takes JO's hand.

LAURIE: Shhh. It's all right.

JO: (pulling away) It's not! It's not, though! I can't do this. It's too hard. I can't. I can't!

LAURIE: I think you can.

JO: (*furiously*) Oh? Oh, do you? Well, then you know a lot more than me.

LAURIE: Be angry. It's okay.

JO: (*screaming*) Stop telling me what I can do! Stop telling me what's okay! Just... STOP!

JO takes a step back, breathing roughly. Shaking. LAURIE watches them with seeming impassivity. FRIENDS appear, peeking at JO and LAURIE nervously.

LAURIE: I'll be here, you know. Like I told you before. I'll always be here.

JO: (*bitterly*) Yeah, people like to say that. (*Laughs harshly. Breathes. Wipes their face. Turns to face LAURIE. Gestures. RAE hands LAURIE a stiff white button-up shirt.*) Here. This is for you.

LAURIE: Is it? Okay. Whatever you need.

He begins to don the shirt.

JO: It's not now. It's not us. Got it? It's THEM. It's... it's AGO. It's the story. You're part of the story. I am Jo... and you are Laurie. Understand?

LAURIE: I think so. (*The sound of BETH playing the piano begins again, softly.*) She's good.

JO: (*gruff*) I know.

LAURIE: But... didn't she play the guitar...?

JO: The piano seemed more...

LAURIE: Sure! Oh, sure. I get it. (*having donned the shirt*) There. How do I look?

JO: (*warming, pleased*) Right. You look right.

JO takes both of his hands and holds them. They smile at each other as the lights fade.

BETH's music continues to play as we transition into Scene 2.

Scene 2

Lights up. JO, alone, enjoys the music. JACKSON enters and finally gets their attention. He holds coffee in a paper cup.

JACKSON: Hey girl.

JO: *(not looking at him, irritated by his use of the word “girl”)* I’m trying to listen to this. And I wish you wouldn’t call me that.

JACKSON: You like mochas, right? Skim milk, half caf, light whip?

JO: *(surprised)* How’d you know that?

JACKSON: I pay attention. *(Hands JO the coffee. JO sips it.)* And...?

JO: It’s good!

JACKSON: I made it myself.

JO: *(awkward)* Um. Thanks.

JACKSON: No worries. It’s just my job. So... you’re a writer, huh.

JO: That’s me.

JACKSON: That’s cool. And you’re trying to write this play, yeah?

JO: *(now even more irritated)* I’m TRYING.

JACKSON: Cool, cool. So writers drink coffee and listen to music and then eventually they write something?

JO: *(irritation growing)* Sure.

JACKSON: *(supah dupah suave)* Sooooo... speaking of coffee and the drinking of coffee, which two people can totally do together... I was thinking that we could... I mean, you and me, WE could –

JO: No.

JACKSON: – go... no? I mean, I could call you and –

JO: No.

JACKSON: – then, um, TOGETHER, we could –

JO: No! *(JACKSON makes a frustrated sound and exits, coffee in hand, puppy-dog-defeated. JO scratches at the dress.)* This is itchy. Very itchy. Very very itchy. Ow!

They return to their laptop and examine it critically. LAURIE joins them, looking over their shoulder. They pretend to ignore him, but can't quite hide their smile when LAURIE reveals that he's now in a suit jacket as well as dress pants and shoes: a costume of the 19th century. All he's missing is a fancy tie of some kind.

JO: The girls surprised Marmee with a specially made Christmas breakfast, and she surprised them by suggesting that they donate the breakfast to the Hummel family, who were destitute and starving. Though the March sisters were hungry as well, they happily created a warm Christmas meal for the Hummels. Even Amy didn't complain. Much.

AMY, BETH, MEG, and MARMEE return. JO joins them as they walk home. LAURIE watches them from his place by JO's laptop.

AMY: But we'll eat EVENTUALLY... won't we?

MARMEE: *(smiling)* Eventually.

BETH: I think Father would be very proud of us.

MARMEE: I'M very proud of you.

MEG: *(to JO)* My feet hurt.

JO: *(to MEG)* My feet are killing me!

MEG: Jo, slang!

JO: It isn't at all. You must imagine little pistols attached to my boots, shooting up at me. Pew! Pew! Pew!

JO and MEG giggle.

AMY: *(rushing up to them)* What are you laughing about? Is it me?

JO: Absolutely not.

AMY: Marmee, they're always laughing at me!

MEG: Oh, we weren't at all. We were laughing about... *(stops, looking at a grand house before them)* ... this house! *(to JO)* It's the Laurence boy's house. Well, the Laurence boy's GRANDFATHER's house, I mean.

BETH: I've seen Mr. Laurence in the window and in the garden sometimes, or out walking. He's an old man and... *(drawing herself up)* ...he didn't scare me at all. Not one little bit.

AMY: You're scared of EVERYTHING.

JO: Amy, if you don't stop picking on Beth this moment –

MARMEE: Girls! I think we should go inside our OWN house. See how prettily it's lit up?

BETH: But how...?

MARMEE ushers the girls inside. JO and LAURIE pause, watching each other for a moment. He nods, and JO joins the others.

They enter the house to find a feast of treats spread before them: ice cream, cake, fruit, and fresh flowers. All the girls exclaim. MEG lifts a card.

MEG: It's from the Laurence boy's grandfather! But... but we don't even know him!

LAURIE: *(from his place by JO's laptop)* He heard about the Hummels and your good deed and he wanted to reward you.

BETH: But how did he know?

JO: I'll bet the Laurence boy told him! *(they all look at JO)* We've talked over the fence, that's all. He stays inside most of the time with his tutor. He's dreadfully bored. But he's a lovely fellow, really lovely. *(MEG gives JO an insinuating look: "Oh, REALLY?")* JO grows flustered.) When the cat ran away just before Halloween, remember, the Laurence boy brought her back!

AMY has crammed her mouth full of cake.

AMY: This is the best Christmas we've ever had!

BETH: It would be better if Father were here... but at least we have each other.

They all draw together. JO puts an arm around BETH's shoulder. BETH lays her head on JO's shoulder. They hold for a moment.

JO separates themselves again. All exit.

JO: Let's see, after Christmas comes... mmmm ... oh yes, the party!

RAE enters as ANNIE MOFFAT.

ANNIE: I shall invite Meg to a party. A highly fashionable party. The most highly fashionable party in all of the towns that ever were!

JO: Grumble grumble. It WOULD be Awful Annie Moffat's party, of course.

ANNIE: Hey, you're the writer of us, not me. I didn't think this all up on my own, you know. I'm just here to wear the best dress all my family's money can afford. Don't you think it's pretty? Come on, writer girl. Don't you think I'm pretty? Money, money, money. Pretty, pretty, pretty.

JO: You're a cliché. You realize that, right?

ANNIE: *(cheerful)* Nope!

She dances herself away.

JO: *(calling after her)* And don't call me "writer girl"! I hate when you – *(shaking their head, JO tries to return to their laptop)* Who's fault is that, JOSEPHINE? Maybe this dress wasn't such a good idea...

MEG enters, running.

MEG: Joooooooooooooooooooooooooooo! Jo, put down whatever ridiculous book you're reading –

JO: I'm WRITING. I'm working on my play. I mean novel. My very important novel. The very important novel I've been working on for years and years and years and –

MEG: Of course you are. Put it down regardless. We've been invited to a party at Annie Moffat's and we're going to go! Marmee said we might. Oooh, but what shall we wear?

JO: Our cotton dresses, of course.

MEG: Oh, I think NOT.

JO: Oh, I think SO. They're all we have, after all. *(teasing her)* Though mine is burned in the back...

MEG: BURNED?!? Jo! Jo! No no no!

JO: *(smiling)* Poetry. Sheer poetry.

MEG: *(examining JO critically)* They can't know how poor we are. I'm going to look as fabulous as I can; YOU'LL just have to stand with your back to the wall for the entire evening. So you won't be able to dance at all. Or socialize.

JO: Poor me.

MEG: And your hair...

JO: (*dangerously*) My hair is amazing.

MEG: That's the spirit! (*hugging JO*) Oh, we'll have a simply marvellous time if you stand absolutely still and don't say anything and don't look at anyone and don't make a single move or talk to even one single person. (*kisses JO on both cheeks*) This is why you're my favorite sister!

MEG, practically dancing, exits.

JO: How do you treat your LEAST-favorite sister?

FRIENDS enter as partygoers with ANNIE MOFFAT. They strut onto stage as a well-choreographed group of cool, mean kids, finally stopping, staring out at the audience. Off ANNIE, all jerk their heads simultaneously in JO's direction.

ANNIE: (*the snidest*) Is THAT what you're wearing?

JO: (*sweetly*) Oh, this ol' thing?

Laurie enters, watches the action. Now he has donned a fancy bow tie or some other neck accoutrement.

ANNIE: Where's the March sister I actually invited to my party?

JO: Annie Moffat, if I weren't such a lady, I'd –

ANNIE: You'd do what, dear? Exactly? (*JO looms over her... then backs down, defeated. Turns away.*) That's what I thought. And since WHEN are you a LADY? (*mean laugh; the OTHERS laugh as well*) Look, Jo! There's a lovely corner over there where no one's practicing being a wallflower yet. Just the spot for you. (*JO begins to move away, back to them.*) And that awful burn on the back of your dress!

ANNIE giggles meanly. The others giggle with her. Head down, JO stomps away from them. LAURIE watches curiously, then follows.

LAURIE: You can't even notice.

JO: (*thrilled*) Oh, it's you! Hello.

LAURIE: The burn, I mean. You wouldn't even notice it unless... well, you know.

JO: Unless some spiteful little chit called attention to it.

LAURIE: Yes, that.

ANNIE giggles wickedly and waves; the others with her follow suit. Awkward beat. JO and LAURIE look away from each other. Finally:

JO: Mr. Laurence.

LAURIE: That's me!

JO: You live near us, don't you, Mr. Laurence?

LAURIE: Theodore Laurence, at your service. (*He bows grandly; JO bows grandly back. This delights LAURIE.*) But you should call me Laurie. That's what I like to be called.

JO: (*trying it out*) Laurie.

LAURIE: And I do. Live near to you. With my grandfather, that is. My parents are both dead, so... so he took me in.

JO: Father's off in the war.

LAURIE: They... uh. They died in the war. My parents.

JO: I'm sorry.

LAURIE: (*snapping*) You didn't do it.

JO: (*snapping back*) No, I didn't.

Awkward beat. LAURIE and JO look away from each other again. ANNIE whispers something to her friends. They all turn and look at JO, smiling meanly. ANNIE begins to laugh, and they join her. LAURIE steers JO away from them.

LAURIE: I'm sorry. That was rude. I'm often accused of being rude. I... don't like it when people feel sorry for me, so I say whatever idiotic thought comes stomping through my brain.

JO: Me too! It's my temper. I'm very often chastised for my terrible temper. Do all the boys call you Laurie?

LAURIE: They called me "Dora" for awhile.

JO: Why'd they stop?

LAURIE: (*mimes punching*) I thrashed 'em. Thrashed 'em good.

JO: (*laughing*) Wonderful! I hate my name. I wish everyone would call me Jo instead of Josephine.

LAURIE: (*punch, punch*) Thrash 'em until they do!

JO: I would! But I couldn't thrash Aunt March. Well, maybe just once...

They laugh together. LAURIE extends a hand to JO.

LAURIE: Would you like to dance, Miss Jo?

JO: Miss...? Oh! No.

LAURIE: (*taken aback*) Oh no?

JO: That is, I wouldn't.

LAURIE: (*guessing*) The burn.

JO: The burn? Oh, yes! Yes, the burn! Because of the burn.

LAURIE: (*wisely*) Would you prefer that I don't call you "Miss"?

JO: (*now taken aback*) Uh... I...

MEG enters, looking fabulous in her fancy, period-appropriate gown and wearing pretty high-heeled shoes... which she struggles in. She totters as she walks. ANNIE rushes to her side. JO is relieved at the distraction.

There's Meg!

ANNIE: Oooooooh, Meg, darling, darling Meg, look at you and those darling shoes, oh Meg, poor Meg, can you walk in those darling shoes poor sweet Meg?

MEG: I can walk... (*she totters, nearly toppling, then righting herself*) ... perfectly well. (*ANNIE claps. ANNIE's FRIENDS clap as well. JO begins to clap ironically. MEG shoots JO a look. JO and LAURIE look exaggeratedly away.*) I'd like to dance! Doesn't anyone want to dance?

JACKSON: (*leaping toward her*) I'll dance with you!

They bow to each other. He gives JO an awkward look which JO pointedly ignores, then sweeps MEG off her feet. 21st century music plays; everyone dances. Except for JO and LAURIE.

JO: That is positively idiotic.

LAURIE: The dancing?

JO: All of it. All of... this.

LAURIE: I think you're jealous.

JO: I am not!

LAURIE: Oh you are too.

JO: You don't know me. You don't know anything about me.

LAURIE: *(eyes twinkling)* Oh, I think I know a bit. Tell me you're not jealous of your sister right at this moment. Tell me you don't want someone – the RIGHT someone – to ask you to dance.

A beat. JO hesitates. Looks with barely suppressed longing out where MEG is dancing. ANNIE is nearby. Then... MEG stumbles and screams and FALLS!

JO: Meg!

LAURIE and JO rush to MEG's side.

MEG: Ow ow ow ow ow!

JO: What happened?

ANNIE: She tripped!

MEG: It's these shoes! I thought they were so pretty, but now...

LAURIE: Now they have it out for you, I see.

MEG: I've sprained my ankle! Oh Jo, it hurts!

JO: *(sincerely)* I'm sorry, darling!

ANNIE and JO move to help MEG at the same moment. Their hands brush. If you have a piano player, they should play a sweet glissade of notes. A moment: JO and ANNIE lock eyes. Everyone freezes. A beat while they look at each other curiously. Then action resumes: ANNIE moves away, but takes another look back at JO, who sneaks another look at her. LAURIE notices.

MEG: How will we get home?

LAURIE: I can call a carriage.

MEG: Oh, I couldn't ask you to do that!

JO: I can. Laurie, will you call a carriage for us, please?

MEG: This is excruciating. Everyone is looking. *(She tries to walk and stumbles. JO catches her.)* Ow ow ow ow!

Laurie pulls out a cellphone, begins to search for a cab company or an Uber. Only JO notices.

JO: Put that away!

Laurie: This? Oh, this! Right. I was going to call an Uber. But I guess THAT wouldn't be terribly appropriate for NOW, would it. Sorry, sorry. *(He pockets the phone. Grins at JO.)* It's your story, isn't it. Or... is it? *(He begins to exit, then turns. Suddenly serious.)* You know, you could've just told me. When you finally figured it out? *(gestures in ANNIE's direction)* I could've been the first person you told.

He exits, taking MEG with him. JO watches after them, angry at his parting shot. Pulls off the cotton dress. [NORA and JET can help if need be, ad libbing if necessary.] Stomps back to the laptop. JO uses writing the following monologue to calm down.

JO: *(to themselves)* Stupid Laurie. So maybe figuring out how to be Jo won't be as easy as I thought. Take a breath, kid. Just keep breathing. Breath is life. Wanna stay alive. Yes, you do. Yes you DO. *(They pick up the copy of "Little Women," using it to calm down. Then, out:)* After their father lost his property in an attempt to help a friend who had fallen onto hard times, the older girls took jobs to help out around the house. Meg acted as governess to a wealthy family, but the Marches' own personal poverty was almost more than she could bear. And as for Jo...

AUNT MARCH: *(hollering, shrill, from offstage)*
JOOOOOOOOSEPHIIIIIIIIINE MAAAAAAAARCH!

JO: Oh good god! *(Begins to cross, but stops, arranges hair, tries to quickly button a new blouse that is reminiscent of the past, slightly feminine, definitely uncomfortable, but not, at least, a dress.)* Coming, Aunt March!

AUNT MARCH enters, hobbling with a cane. She is a mean-spirited old woman dressed in a costume of the early 19th century.

AUNT MARCH: Don't bother. I'm here. Stand up straight! Don't slouch. *(squinting at JO)* And what have you done to your hair?

JO: Oh. I... um... didn't pin it today.

AUNT MARCH: “You... um... didn’t pin it today.” Young ladies don’t say “UM”. And they pin... their... hair!

Each ellipses is punctuated with a jab from AUNT MARCH’s cane.

JO: Ouch!

AUNT MARCH: Young ladies don’t say “ouch.”

JO: Perhaps I’m not meant to be a young lady.

AUNT MARCH: What was that?

JO: I said, I’ll try harder to be a young lady.

AUNT MARCH: That’s better. *(She stamps her cane down... on JO’s foot. JO won’t allow themselves to cry aloud.)* Now. You may pick up where you left off alphabetizing the library.

JO: *(muttering)* Oh thank god.

AUNT MARCH: What was that? *(JO smiles. AUNT MARCH glares.)* Well... you need to rearrange the Ds.

JO: But I just finished...

AUNT MARCH: I don’t like it! It looks shoddy.

JO: How on earth could it look –

AUNT MARCH: Do it again! It’s what I’m paying you for, isn’t it? *(JO begins to move away, stifling an aggravated sigh.)* You’re envious of my library, aren’t you, girl.

JO: *(reluctantly)* Yes, Aunt March.

AUNT MARCH: *(an evil little smile)* Although, when you’re married, I expect you won’t have time to read quite so much.

JO: I don’t know that I’ll ever get married.

AUNT MARCH: Oh, you will. All of you will. If you want to see even a shiny hint of my money, you will. As I’ve told you before, I plan to have a hand in all your marriages, and –

JO: *(defiantly)* I’m going to be a writer. I plan to be far too busy WRITING to find myself a man to marry.

AUNT MARCH: *(cackling)* We’ll just see about that! You should be more like Meg. She has good taste, that one. She can tell the

finest silks, and not by looking at the price either. I've seen her do it.

JO: (*temper flaring*) Perhaps I don't want to be rich, Aunt March!

AUNT MARCH: Look around, girl! (*JO glowers at this appellation.*) Look at this house. Isn't it grand? Isn't it enormous? Think about what you could do with a house this size!

JO: Fill it with books, I expect.

AUNT MARCH: (*slyly*) It's already filled with books, my dear. Half of them you've already read. Yes? (*JO glares, but forces themselves to nod. AUNT MARCH begins to exit, then pauses. Looks back.*) And... you may take another volume when you finish with the Ds. Any book you like. You may keep it, of course. What does an old woman need with a lot of books?

JO: (*startled, but pleased*) Oh, um... um, thank you, Aunt March!

AUNT MARCH: (*almost warmly*) Well. (*She begins to exit, with one last baleful glance backward.*) Young ladies don't say UM!

She is gone. JO giggles.

BETH appears, as if looking nervously, plaintively, out a window. JO watches her.

JO: (*out*) Beth was shy. Beth was timid. Beth struggled with the outside world. (*JO tries to approach BETH, but can't quite bring themselves to interact with her.*) She wanted to go out. I know she did. (*calling to BETH, who doesn't hear*) There's a whole world out there waiting for you! You can be happy! We can all be happy! I promise! If you'll just listen to me, wait for me I'll figure all this out and we can go together – (*BETH turns and runs away, offstage. JO moves as if to go after her.*) Beth, no, wait – (*JO stops.*) She's gone.

The sound of BETH's music. Sad. Haunting. JO closes their eyes and lifts their chin, luxuriating in the music for a moment as lights fade and we transition into Scene 3.

Scene 3

LAURIE appears, drags JO into his grandfather's house.

LAURIE: Oh my GOD I hate these clothes.

JO: I know, right? They're so...

LAURIE & JO: Itchy!

They laugh.

JO: Your grandfather's house is enormous! Vast acres.

LAURIE: We could Hansel and Gretel it for sure.

JO: I require breadcrumbs.

LAURIE: (*slightly uncomfortable*) Yeah, well, don't get super used to it: Grandfather has all the money.

JO: We had... some. When I was a child.

LAURIE: What happened to it?

JO: Father lost it. It wasn't his fault. I mean, not very much. He was trying to help a friend, and... well, it didn't work out. (*small and quick*) Helikedtogamblethink.

LAURIE: That sucks.

JO: Yeah. He makes a lot of bad choices. I mean, made. I mean, Father. The March sisters' father. (*An awkward moment. JO rallies.*) But this... this is an awesome library!

LAURIE: You like to read too?

JO: That's all I do. Ask Amy.

LAURIE: Brooke wants me to read more. But there are only so many hours in the day, you know?

JO: Brooke is...

LAURIE: My tutor. John Brooke.

JO: Oh!

LAURIE: You thought Brooke was a she?

JO: Names...

LAURIE: Were you jealous?

JO: (*big with the indignation*) What?

LAURIE: You heard me. When I said "Brooke" and you thought Brooke was a –

JO: Why would I be... I mean, how...

LAURIE whistles, hands behind his back, staring up at the ceiling, trying not to smile. JO glares.

That's idiotic. What an idiotic thing to say.

LAURIE: (*playfully*) Was it?

JO turns away.

JO: Yes! Look, people are complicated, okay? All sorts of complications. And, and not everything makes sense, or, hey, even has to make sense all the time, okay?

LAURIE: Okay.

An awkward beat while JO recovers their temper. Finally, JO looks up.

JO: Is that a painting of your grandfather?

LAURIE: He's super scary looking there.

JO: Oh, a little bit.

LAURIE: Only a little?

Unnoticed by JO and LAURIE, MR. LAURENCE has appeared behind them, looming closer and closer with each silent step.

JO: He has nice eyes.

LAURIE: So do I.

JO laughs as if this is a joke. A moment of hurt from LAURIE that he covers up.

JO: (*still at the portrait*) I mean that there's kindness in them. (*studying it closer*) His mouth seems a little too frown-y, though. As though he's seen trouble.

MR. LAURENCE: And who hasn't, my dear?

JO and LAURIE both gasp. MR. LAURENCE glares at them. He is terrifying.

LAURIE: Grandfather, this is –

MR. LAURENCE: I know who she is, Theodore. You're one of those March girls, aren't you?

JO: Y-yes, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: You threw a snowball at one of my windows just now.

JO: That was only to attract Laurie's – erm, I mean, Theodore's attention, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: And “sir,” yet. Well, you have manners, girl, I'll grant you that. *(he looms over JO, glaring down)* And you're not afraid of me?

JO: N-not much, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: But I have a grim mouth, is that right?

JO: Only a bit, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: And kind eyes?

JO: I thought you did. Sir.

His glowering grows more intense... JO finally forces themselves to meet his eye... and then MR. LAURENCE suddenly breaks into peals of laughter.

MR. LAURENCE: By gum, you're exactly what we need around here. What Laurie needs. Erm, I mean, “Theodore.”

JO: *(surprised but delighted at this sudden change)* Sir?

MR. LAURENCE: Some light... some backbone! We spend far too much time languishing in the doldrums, don't we, son?

LAURIE: I should say we do, sir!

MR. LAURENCE: We need some cheering up, Miss March.

LAURIE: This is Jo...sephine, Grandfather.

MR. LAURENCE: Too many shadows in this house. Too many by far. You've swept 'em away like cobwebs. For the moment, I mean.

JO: For the moment?

MR. LAURENCE: What I mean to say is that I hope we'll be seeing more of you, Miss Jo...sephine. You and your sisters and your mother.

JO: Thank you, Mr. Laurence!

MR. LAURENCE: Thank YOU. You're a writer, I hear.

JO: (with a dark look at LAURIE, who looks away, grinning) Yes, sir. I fancy myself a writer.

MR. LAURENCE: Either you are or you aren't. But I think you are. This library is at your disposal, Miss Jo. All I will ask is that you keep my Laurie cheerful, and then you may borrow any book you wish. Writers read, as I know you know. Do you keep a notebook?

JO: Of course!

MR. LAURENCE: Good. And are you at work at something right this very moment?

JO: I am. A play! (off LAURIE's look and perhaps a fake cough) I mean, a novel!

MR. LAURENCE: Play or novel, it matters not which. It is simply a cause for celebration!

A shift in lights to denote the passage of time. MARMEE, MEG, AMY, and finally, shyly, BETH enter. JO's FRIENDS, as waiters and butlers, pass out drinks and little cakes on plates. MR. LAURENCE lifts a flute of champagne RAE hands him.

A celebration for my talented neighbors!

MARMEE: Thank you, Mr. Laurence! This is too generous.

MR. LAURENCE: Those who can afford to be generous ought to be generous. My grandson reminds me of this daily.

AMY: Look at all these paintings! They're very nice, you know, but not as nice as mine. I'm an artist, see, and I'm going to –

JOHN BROOKE, LAURIE's tutor, enters, out of breath.

BROOKE: I'm sorry I'm late, sir.

LAURIE rushes to BROOKE, grinning, and raises his hand for a high five. BROOKE stares blankly.

LAURIE: Dude! You made it! (with a look at JO, who is hiding a smile behind their hand) Oh, right. I mean... (He shakes BROOKE's hand instead and thumps him companionably on the back.) John Brooke, you old scalawag!

MEG: (to JO) Is this where you learn all your slang, Josephine March?

JO, imitating LAURIE, whistles innocently.

LAURIE: Everyone, this is John Brooke, my tutor and a force in the world for justice and transformation and the powers of good. Also, he's fairly competent at keeping me in line.

MEG: Slang, slang, slang!

LAURIE: (*with an eye on MEG*) John, this is Miss Margaret March...

If you have a piano player, have them play the same little magical glissade of notes they played when JO and ANNIE brushed at Annie's party.

MEG: (*transfixed*) Meg, please.

BROOKE: (*equally transfixed*) Uh... John.

LAURIE: And Amy and Beth and Jo...sephine. (*JO laughs*) And Mrs. March.

MARMEE: Pleased to meet you, Mr. Brooke.

MEG: (*to JO*) Isn't he handsome!

JO: He can probably hear you.

BROOKE, stoic, definitely hearing them, stares into the distance. JO and MEG giggle. AMY rushes to them.

AMY: What? What? What?

JO: Nothing. Nothing. Nothing.

AMY: (*glaring*) Someday I'll pay you back for leaving me out, Jo March. You see if I don't.

JO: (*patting AMY on the head*) That's nice, dear.

AMY, glaring, stamps away. Takes one of the small cakes from JET (acting as a waiter). Crams the entire thing into her mouth and chews ferociously.

MEG: Mr. Brooke, perhaps you'd like to show me the library?

BROOKE: I'd be honored, Miss March.

They fade into the background. Lights dim on everyone except for BETH. She wanders about the house alone, until she finally comes upon the piano. She gasps. Looks around. No one is watching her. She approaches it cautiously. Sits. Begins to play. Her confidence grows. The music is beautiful. MR. LAURENCE appears behind her. JO watches them from a distance.

MR. LAURENCE: (*gently, trying not to spook her*) You play beautifully. (*BETH freezes. Is too afraid to turn to face him. He approaches her, but cautiously.*) Would you like to come over again and help us keep it in tune, Laurie and me?

BETH: (*in a whisper*) N-no, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: I'm sorry, my dear, but I didn't quite catch that. My ears have grown older than I expected them to, I fear, and at such a swift rate, and time has taken my hearing with my youth. It is dreadfully exhausting to grow old, I've found. Therefore, you must come again and play whenever you wish.

BETH: (*in a whisper*) I c-can't, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: Of course you can! Why can't you? (*He suddenly understands: she's afraid of him.*) Say, is the piano your favorite instrument? (*she doesn't respond*) Not... the flute? Trumpet? Trombone? Or maybe...

JO is watching from a distance.

JO: (*softly*) The guitar.

MR. LAURENCE: Oh, the guitar?

BETH nods, slowly.

JO: What she longs for most in the world.

MR. LAURENCE: A guitar. I see. Delightful! What if I –

Suddenly it's too much for poor BETH. She leaps up and runs away, past MARMEE and her sisters, and offstage.

Oh dear, oh dear. (*to JO*) What a fool I am.

JO: Not at all. She's... she's very shy. She always was.

Lights on just the two.

MR. LAURENCE: She means a lot to you.

JO: Yes.

MR. LAURENCE: She's afraid of me.

JO: We all were.

MR. LAURENCE: (*with a rough laugh*) My curse. She reminds me so much of my own daughter. Laurie's mother.

JO: I'm sorry about your loss, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: Grief is a wicked beast, isn't it. A monster. Something that must be wrestled with. Or... explored. Investigated.

JO: I... wouldn't know, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: (*legitimate surprise*) Oh? But I thought... (*JO turns away. He tries again.*) Wrestled with and beaten. Then embraced. Surely you must have SOME experience that you'd like to –

JO: (*temper beginning to flare*) I don't know anything about that kind of loss!...sir.

MR. LAURENCE: You will, someday. Everyone does. You'll have to learn what to do with it, see. How to embrace your monsters. We all have our own little ways. We find them, develop them. We must. Or we go mad. (*a little break*) I miss her so much. Beth reminds me of her. The way she loves music. How she turns to it like a flower to the sun. That was my little girl as well. She was... very talented. My talent, it turns out, is pushing away the ones I love the best. Until it is too late.

JO: (*a harsh whisper*) Yes.

MR. LAURENCE: You're all very talented too, you know. You Marches.

JO: Thank you, sir.

MR. LAURENCE: Talent should be nurtured. (*suddenly*) You submit your stories, don't you?

JO: Submit...?

MR. LAURENCE: To places who could publish them.

JO: Oh, I never thought that they could be – I mean, that's just – that's – (*JO thinks. This has never truly occurred to them.*) Huh.

MR. LAURENCE: (*lightbulb moment*) Nurtured, like I said. Yes, yes...

He exits quickly, with purpose. JO returns to their laptop. As JO ponders, MEG appears, walking with BROOKE. JO watches fondly as they laugh together. BROOKE offers MEG his arm. She takes it. They continue walking. JO's warmth dissolves. They type a few sentences, then angrily delete them.

LAURIE appears, excited, and approaches JO.

LAURIE: Come on!

JO: I'm busy. I'm stuck. Writer's block; ever heard of it? *(to themselves)*
This isn't going to be as easy as I thought.

LAURIE: When are the really good things ever easy? So come on!
You're gonna wanna see this.

With a huge annoyed sigh, JO follows LAURIE. Lights on BETH, who holds a guitar as if it were about to fly away from her.

BETH: *(awed)* It... it just appeared. As if by magic!

LAURIE: *(to JO, proudly)* I'M "by magic."

JO: Oh my god.

LAURIE: Also, it was supposed to be a piano Mr. Laurence gives her...
wasn't it? In the book –

JO: *(still astounded)* Yeah, but she liked to play the guitar...

LAURIE: *(sharply)* She?

JO: *(coming back to themselves)* Beth. Beth, of course. And yeah, maybe it should have been a piano. But look! Jeez, I can remember this so well! *(BETH begins to play the guitar. Slowly at first, but then with growing confidence.)* One of the only really nice things Dad ever did. He saved up money and found it in a pawn shop and wrapped it up for Christmas morning. All by himself. Oh man, you should've seen her face when she first picked it up and started playing, she –

JO realizes they've said too much. LAURIE is gentle; he turns them so they can enjoy BETH playing.

LAURIE: You were right. She's got some talent.

MARMEE appears; AMY appears; MEG and BROOKE draw closer, attracted by the music.

JO: That's what Mr. Laurence... that is, that's what your grandfather said.

MR. LAURENCE appears. BETH runs to him. She stops awkwardly.

BETH: I came to thank you, sir, for –

She stops. Embraces him. Surprised, it takes him a moment until he returns the embrace.

MR. LAURENCE: Never stop playing. You have a light; you don't need to hide it under anything. Show it, you hear me, girl? Show us your light.

BETH: Yes, sir.

She picks the guitar up and begins to play it again. Lights fade as BETH plays, and we transition into Scene 4.

Scene 4

In the darkness, with only the little light of JO's laptop to dispel it at all.

AMY: I'm going to go with you.

JO: No. You're not.

AMY: Yes I am.

JO: No, you're NOT.

AMY: *(screaming at the top of her lungs)* YES I AM YES I AM YES I AM!

Lights up. JO and MEG are putting on bonnets and wraps, though JO is still wearing a simple blouse and 21st century pants or jeans.

JO: *(grumbling to themselves)* I cannot deal with these clothes, I cannot, I canNOT –

AMY: I know what you're doing. You're going to the theatre with Laurie!

MEG: And Mr. Brooke.

She and JO giggle to each other.

AMY: It's not fair.

JO: Life so seldom is.

AMY: You never have time for me, not ever! Either you're out with Laurie or you're working on your stupid novel.

JO: *(dangerously)* My novel isn't stupid. Anyway, Laurie only invited us.

MEG: And Mr. Brooke.

JO: *(gentle mocking)* And Mr. Brooke.

They giggle again.

AMY: (*darkly*) Stop. That. LAUGHING!

JO: Grow up, Amy.

AMY: THAT'S WHAT I'M TRYING TO DO!!!

MEG: She's impossible. Just ignore her, Jo, and let's hurry!

AMY: I told you before. If you leave me out one more time, I'll get back at you, Jo March. And you will be sorry.

JO: Suuuuuuure. 'Bye-eeee!

JO and MEG begin to exit. They meet LAURIE and BROOKE, then, chattering and laughing, they all exit. AMY remains, watching balefully.

RAE, JET, NORA, and JACKSON appear.

JET: (*whining*) Why do we have to do this part alone?

RAE: Because... it's hard for her to talk about.

NORA: She really does have a temper.

RAE: (*muttering*) Don't I know it.

JACKSON: Right? Dude, I thought she broke my leg that one time she –

JET: It was just your shin, "bro."

RAE: Also, I do believe you had it coming.

JACKSON: I thought she was lonely! Anyway, I was lonely! And I thought, you know what would make us both less lonely? If we went to a movie and then to dinner or to dinner and then a movie and I could buy popcorn and she could eat the popcorn and then maybe there could be some hanging out or some making out but it didn't matter anymore because she said no. And then she kicked me.

JET: She said no, like, five hundred times. Because you asked her five hundred times.

NORA: And THEN she kicked you.

JACKSON: (*glowering, rubbing his shin*) Still hurts on rainy nights.

RAE: Let's focus, shall we? We have to do this part ourselves because it's hard for her. She's finding that she and Jo have even more in common than she thought they did. This is part of it. And... it's still kinda fresh. Get it? (*soft*) You all know what happens.

JET: Yeah.

NORA: Yes.

JACKSON: Right.

RAE: Okay then. (*out*) Jo thought often about her temper.

JET: It was so quick, so volatile – it reminded her always of a great black horse, a powerful ebony stallion that she kept locked in a stable –

NORA: – where it would snort and paw at the walls and gate of its prison. On occasion, however,

ALL FOUR: it would escape.

JACKSON: That was her biggest fear.

RAE: For when it did escape it would begin to run, and once it began to run it was all but

ALL FOUR: unstoppable.

JET: She pictured it, that coal-black animal, that remarkable, terrible beast, running through a field, the grass dry, like tinder, and as it galloped sparks from its hooves caused the field to ignite

NORA: so that while the horse ran wild and unstoppable, the world behind it burned and burned. She lived in fear of the day when her temper would run away with her

JACKSON: and she would be unable to control it

RAE: or turn it back

ALL FOUR: at all.

They look at each other somberly, then move away from the action as AMY enters, skipping and singing to herself. JO enters and begins to look about. BETH enters, playing her guitar. MARMEE enters, sitting and knitting. MEG and BROOKE sit by themselves, chatting softly but animatedly.

AMY: (*sweetly*) Missing something?

JO freezes. Then:

JO: Where is it?

AMY: Why, whatever can you mean, sister dear?

JO: My manuscript. My manuscript that is my novel that I've been working on ALL YEAR. My manuscript that is my novel that I am about to send to a publisher for consideration!

AMY: Why, that old thing?

JO: (*with growing desperation*) Yes, that old thing!

AMY: It was in a sorry state. MUCH too sorry of a state for a GREAT LADY like YOU, Jo March, who goes on dates to the THEE-uh-tuh!

JO: What did you do with it?

AMY: What do you need a silly old thing like THAT for? I read it, you know –

JO: You did WHAT?

AMY: Well, I SKIMMED it. It wasn't THAT interesting. You give yourself too much credit, you know, you always have –

JO: (*in a whisper*) Amy –

AMY: But what I simply can't understand is how a GREAT LADY like YOU, Jo March, could ever think that those... those FAIRY TALES of yours have any import at all –

JO: I've been working on it. For YEARS.

AMY: You're SO lucky to have someone like me to watch out for you to see that you don't make horrifying mistakes like submitting it to –

JO seizes AMY by the shoulders.

JO: WHAT DID YOU DO TO MY BOOK?

AMY: (*screaming back at her*) You'll never see your stupid book again, never, not ever ever again, Jo March, BECAUSE I BURNED IT UP, I burned it up in the fire, so there! I told you I'd get even with you, and –

JO slaps her across the face. At the same moment, RAE, JET, NORA, and JACKSON strike the nearest surface as loudly as they can. MARMEE leaps to her feet. AMY stares at JO in shock. BETH, MEG, and

BROOKE watch silently, horrified. JO digs their hands into AMY's shoulders.

MARMEE: Josephine!

JO: (*slow, intense*) I. Will. (*giving AMY a vicious shake on "never"*) NEVER. Forgive you for this.

JO pushes her back and away. AMY gapes. JO turns slowly and deliberately and begins to move away.

MARMEE: Amy, apologize to your sister!

AMY: Jo... Jo, I'm –

JO: (*without turning*) Shut up. Shut your mouth.

MARMEE: (*softly*) Jo –

JO: (*slowly turns around*) I hate you, Amy March. And I will hate you for as long as we live. You are not my sister. Not anymore. Not ever again.

JO runs off.

AMY gapes for another moment. No one says a word. Then AMY bursts into tears and runs from the room. BETH rushes to MARMEE, who holds her. MEG lays her head on BROOKE's shoulder. He comforts her.

JO appears by their laptop. They regard it sadly.

JO: The horse had escaped. She... I... THEY... knew it would, eventually. Inevitably. Irrevocably.

JET, NORA, and JACKSON mime ice skating on a pond. RAE becomes ANNIE. BETH and MARMEE watch.

ANNIE: (*waving*) Jo! Jo March! It's me, Annie Moffat!

JO: (*taken aback*) Yes, I suppose you are.

ANNIE: Remember me?

JO: Of... of course I do.

JO looks to MEG, who looks back, equally confused, and shrugs. BROOKE and LAURIE help MEG onto the ice.

LAURIE: Come on in, Jo! The water's fine!

JO: For ice fishing, you mean!

LAURIE: Only closer to the center of the pond. It's gotten a little mushy there. Terribly unsafe for skating, but – and you're absolutely right – ideal for ice fishing!

ANNIE: Yes, please! You simply must join us, dear! Ice skating is ever so much fun!

JO: (*smiling*) I suppose I've sulked in my room enough today.

JO crosses down to join the others. AMY, seeing them, brightens, crossing toward JO.

AMY: Oh Jo, I'm so glad that you –

JO brushes by her, deliberately snubbing her. MARMEE and BETH observe this. MARMEE shakes her head sadly.

LAURIE: Nice of you to join us.

JO: Ice skating? It seems so...

LAURIE: (*smirking*) ...so 1863?

JO: I guess I'm doing my job then.

LAURIE: How long can you keep it up?

JO opens their mouth to respond, but then ANNIE is there. LAURIE skates away, grinning wickedly.

ANNIE: Let me help you, dear.

They skate together, smiling at each other. AMY, seeing this, frowns. Mimes lacing up her skates. Begins to skate away from the others... and suddenly crashes through the ice. Everything slows down. AMY tries to swim but can't reach the surface. JO screams without sound; they are utterly frozen, unable to do anything. LAURIE mouths, "Somebody get a rail!" AMY's hands break the surface. LAURIE seizes them, then, with great effort, pulls her out of the water. MARMEE clutches BETH, who is weeping. JO can only watch, frozen in place. AMY is shivering and dripping and crying. LAURIE throws his coat around her.

AMY: M-M-Marmee...

LAURIE: Here, keep this around you. We'll get you laid out before the fire and you'll be dried out in no time.

MARMEE rushes to her, followed by BETH and MEG. JO lags behind, shaking their head sadly. LAURIE joins them.

JO: It's all my fault.

LAURIE: You can't watch her every minute. Besides, she's almost thirteen, isn't she? Old enough to watch out for herself.

JO: That isn't what I mean.

LAURIE: Oh. I see. We're not playing anymore.

JO: (*regrouping*) Oh, yes! Yes, we are! This is the story. This is the play. This is whatever I want it to be. It's 1863 and Father is off to war and Amy broke through the ice and almost drowned because of my temper.

LAURIE: Your... temper.

JO: I almost lost her because of my temper. I said those things... those horrible things...

MARMEE appears. LAURIE retreats, but remains onstage, watching, unseen by MARMEE.

MARMEE: It wasn't your fault, darling.

JO: It was.

MARMEE: Amy is impulsive. She acts without thinking sometimes. Many times. Most times. (*She smiles. JO sobs and collapses into her arms. MARMEE holds them.*) There there, my darling, my beautiful child, it's all right, it's all right.

JO: It isn't! She died because of me!

MARMEE: Amy didn't die, dearest. She's in the bath now, a nice hot bath, and then she'll go off to bed and in the morning –

JO: But I froze!

MARMEE: Yes.

JO: I saw her go through the ice. I heard everyone calling for help. I heard Laurie cry out, "Somebody get a rail!" It was like I was outside of my body. Watching. Just watching. Marmee, I didn't want her to die!

MARMEE: I know, my darling.

JO: And if she had died... Marmee, I told her I hated her. HATED her!

MARMEE: You didn't mean it.

JO: *(with a harsh laugh)* Oh, didn't I?

MARMEE: Of course you didn't! Jo, I saw Amy go through the ice. And I couldn't move. Everything happened so fast.

JO: *(a whisper)* Yes...

MARMEE: I will relive that moment over and over. I'll dream about it tonight. How I failed my little girl. A mother... *(she draws a deep trembling breath)* A mother is supposed to help her children. And what did I do? I merely watched. Jo, we never know how we're going to react in a situation of sudden stress, duress, fear, pain, or panic. And we don't always do the thing we wish we would have. Or should have. Darling, you must always remember that "should" indicates a world that doesn't exist.

JO: But I should have –

MARMEE: Amy is safe. Amy is alive. That moment has passed; it's gone forever. The question now is: what will you do next time?

AMY appears, wrapped in a robe and quilt.

AMY: *(shyly)* Jo?

JO looks at her. Says nothing; races to her. Embraces her. Squeezes her tightly.

BETH and MEG enter, watching. MARMEE smiles. BETH begins to play her guitar. JO watches. Moves to BETH. Reaches for her. Lights fade quickly while the music continues for a few more beats. Then it stops.

END OF ACT ONE

ACT TWO

Scene I

Lights up on JO writing in a notebook. Fiercely revising, scribbling out old words, adding new ones. Much thinking and considering and polishing. They are still wearing 21st century clothes with the old-timey looking blouse that is clearly uncomfortable; every once in awhile they scratch absently at the collar. LAURIE is nearby, unobserved. He wears clothing solely of a 21st century vintage. After a beat we hear JO's FRIENDS offstage.

RAE: (off) Come on! We shouldn't leave her alone for too long.

JET: (off) "Her?"

RAE enters. Sees JO writing. JET strides onstage.

I've been thinking. Are we sure that "she" and "her" are the right –

RAE: No. I guess you're right. But it isn't up to us. And I don't think she's decided yet. We have to wait, to follow her lead.

JET: Or THEIR lead. (*examining JO super critically; JO remains unaware of their presence*) I don't get it.

RAE: (*startled*) Don't get what?

JET: This isn't HER story. Or "their" story. It's freakin' *Little Women*. So why are they trying so hard to make it about them?

NORA: (*entering, patiently*) You read it. We all read it. So you know.

JET: (*cautiously*) I... I guess...?

JACKSON: (*Leaping onto stage. To all.*) It makes total sense to me, bro!

RAE & JET & NORA: Not a bro.

JACKSON: She's playing Jo, right? Trying to, you know, figure her out, maybe? And she took all these people from the book, and, like, brought 'em to life, and so WE'RE –

JET: We're everybody else. THAT I get. Duh. I'm still DYING for a milkshake, by the way.

NORA: (*teasing, an imitation of MEG*) Slang slang slang! (*patiently*) Milkshakes will come. We just have to get her through this. (*to RAE, fondly*) We've been friends since kindergarten. You should've been there on her seventh birthday, when her mom wouldn't let her cut her hair short and she'd been BEGGING to cut off all her hair, just BEGGING, but her mom said no... so she took a pair of scissors and, whoosh, just did it herself. Snip, snip, SNAP! All gone! I helped her sweep it up and hide it at the bottom of the garbage. Told her how awesome she looked. Then her mom saw and had a FIT and she wasn't allowed to come over to my house for a month. She tried so hard to never let it grow out. Kept cutting it off, no matter what her mom said. Over and over until her mom finally gave in... or up. She's strong. She's always been strong.

RAE: (*close to JO, who remains unaware of her*) But she thinks she has to be strong all the time, and that's just not possible. She's trying to make everyone else happy, and that's not always possible either. I'm worried about her. It's been over a year and she still isn't dealing.

JACKSON: (*gesturing around the stage*) THIS is how she's dealing, don'tcha think? Hey, I think it's kinda rad, you guys. She's writing about all these people and places and things and they're coming to life, WE'RE a part of it, US, WE'RE bringing them to life, and –

NORA: But it isn't working. Can't you see? The phones, the clothes, the names... it's starting to fall apart. (*to RAE*) Isn't it.

RAE nods miserably. Notices LAURIE. Crosses toward him angrily.

RAE: (*furious*) Some help you are!

LAURIE: (*calm*) She wants me to be Laurie, so Laurie I shall be. At least until –

RAE: Until when?

LAURIE: Until she figures it out.

RAE: And what if that never happens? (*indicating JO*) She's still referring to her sister as "Beth"! (*thinking*) Nora is right. She still needs our help. So we'll help! We'll keep trying.

LAURIE: (*intrigued; so are the others*) How?

RAE: We'll keep helping her find Jo. We'll – (*lightbulb moment*) Oh!

RAE brings AMY onstage. AMY is dressed in her 19th century costume, but she's messing around on her phone, typing, swiping, taking selfies. JET sees this.

JET: Can I use my phone yet?

NORA: (*fierce*) No phones! It's 1863!

JET: Amy's using her phone!

JACKSON: But Amy's not, you know, REAL. Not like us. We're totally and a thousand percent real. (*suddenly doubtful, to NORA*) Right?

NORA nods, pats him comfortingly on the shoulder. He beams.

As the above exchange is happening between JET, JACKSON, and NORA, RAE takes AMY's phone. Whispers something in her ear. Draws a heart over her chest. Waggles her eyebrows. AMY brightens. RAE pushes her gently in JO's direction.

AMY: Guess what guess what guess what!

JO: (*not looking up*) No.

AMY: I'm in loooooooooove!

JO: (*not looking up*) No you're not.

AMY: (*cartoon hearts in her eyes*) With LAURIE!

RAE laughs; LAURIE gapes at her in shock, then shakes his head, torn between irritation and amusement.

JO: (*finally looking up*) No you're NOT.

AMY: Am so am so am SO! And I'm changing out of this dress.

JO: (*back to their writing*) Nope.

AMY: (*super whiney*) I don't like it.

JO: Tough. You don't get a say.

AMY: Remember that time I destroyed all your writing? (*JO gives her a ferocious look*) Yipe! I'm gone!

AMY scurries away. JO returns to their writing. MEG enters, running, and in complete 21st century clothing.

MEG: Guess what, guess what, guess what?

JO: *(looking up)* Oh, not you too!

MEG: I'm in loooooooooove!

JO: *(to themselves)* This is going about as well as I expected. *(to MEG)*
Why aren't you in your dress?

MEG: *(looking down)* Oh. Oh! You're right; I'm not! I guess it just didn't seem... appropriate suddenly.

JO: Of course it is! *(MEG begins to exit)* Why is everyone in love all of a sudden?

MEG: You're the writer. Isn't the essence of drama conflict?

JO: Yes, of course but –

MEG: And there's nothing more full of good old fashioned conflict than... *(heavy sigh)* ... young love!

JO: Gross.

MEG whirls herself offstage. JO returns to their notebook. BETH appears, but she isn't Beth from "Little Women" any longer: now she is a 21st century girl. When she speaks, her character is quite different than the shy Beth we've seen so far. This new girl is bold, defiant, a little spiteful, a little confused. Definitely frustrated with JO.

BETH: You should have told me. Before. You were in love. You could have told me that part. Your name, the words, what you ARE –

JO freezes. Doesn't look at her.

JO: I didn't have the words for it.

BETH: But you always have the words. That's what you DO. You use words.

JO: *(angry)* So I didn't then! Just that one time.

BETH: You just wanted everyone to be happy so you didn't say anything and you didn't say anything until you finally did and then it was too late and everything was bad.

JO: *(anger fading)* ...yes.

BETH kneels beside JO.

BETH: (*gentler*) You know that isn't possible. For everyone to be happy. It isn't. You know?

JO: (*ferocious*) No. I don't know that.

BETH: (*now angry*) What are you, huh? A girl? A boy?

JO: (*dangerously*) I told you before. Leave it alone.

BETH: Him? Her? Do you know? Do you know? Do you even know?

JO: (*it's too much*) Go back to being Beth! Right now! Right this minute! Beth, Beth, BETH!

BETH stares, suddenly wilting a little. Shaky. Gasps for breath.

RAE: (*out*) Beth was not well. She had contracted scarlet fever from the Hummel family and never really recovered. A doctor visited, but the prognosis was not... good.

JO: (*to RAE*) No, wait. Can't I change that part? Does she still die? Does Beth die? DOES SHE REALLY HAVE TO DIE? (*RAE stares at JO silently. JO turns to BETH, puts an arm around her, helps her stand.*) There. There. There. You're okay, you're okay. I promise. I'm changing it. It's changed. Consider it changed. You're going to be fine, just fine.

BETH: (*19th century version now*) I am?

JO: Yes. I promise. I won't let anything happen to you. I'll change it, what it said in the book. I'll keep you safe. I'll ALWAYS keep you safe. I... love you.

BETH: (*gentle, sweet*) I love you too. (*BETH leads JO to their laptop*) Here, dear. Some good news for you too. About love.

BETH exits slowly, with some difficulty. She keeps wanting to look back at JO, but she knows she has to go.

JO looks at the laptop. Stands up as if zapped by lightning.

JO: (*quiet*) Ohmygosh. (*louder*) Ohmygosh! (*loudest*) OHMYGOSH OHMYGOSH OHMYGOSH!

MARMEE enters, 21st century-style.

MARMEE: What's happened?

JO is dancing around, still holding the laptop. AMY enters, still in her 19th century dress.

AMY: What is it?

JO: WA-HOO! WA-HOO!

AMY and MARMEE clutch each other.

AMY: (to MARMEE) “Wa-hoo?”

JO is now jumping up and down.

JO: I’m a published writer! I’m a published writer! I’m a published writer!

MARMEE: Oh my goodness! Oh, I’m so proud of you!

MARMEE hugs JO.

AMY: (at the laptop, reading) A short story. Huh. A hundred dollars! Whoot! See, if I hadn’t burned all your older, less good stories and made you actually write new and better ones, this wouldn’t have happened. So, really, if you think about it, I did YOU a favor.

JO stares at her.

MARMEE: Oh, Amy. Maybe not.

AMY: What? What?

JO glares at her... then bursts into laughter. AMY watches JO suspiciously.

JO: I can’t stay mad at you. I mean, sometimes I can. But not now. This is too important... this is the greatest thing that’s ever happened to me!

MARMEE takes the laptop while AMY and JO grasp hands and jump around, whooping together.

MARMEE: (smiling) Crazy. But about what I expected.

MEG runs back onstage. She’s still in her 21st century costume. AMY and JO stop jumping. MEG is clearly excited. She holds out her hand, showing them the ring on her finger.

MEG: Guess what? I’m getting married!

Everyone freezes. A beat. Then:

AMY: Hey, if Meg gets to do whatever SHE wants... (*tears her hated old fashioned dress off, revealing the 21st century clothing beneath*) ...then I'm not wearing this stupid dress anymore!

All stare at AMY, then back at MEG, who is still beaming, exuberantly happy.

Scene 2

BETH's music. JO is alone onstage again, enjoying the music. LAURIE joins them.

LAURIE: So. When exactly did you lose control of your characters?

A beat.

JO: When I started writing about the characters.

They laugh together.

LAURIE: I think we're more alike than you know.

JO: Oh?

LAURIE: And... I know what you're doing.

JO: (*now irritated*) Sure you do.

LAURIE: Do you?

JO: Do I WHAT?

LAURIE: Know.

JO: I'm writing a play. I'm telling a story.

LAURIE: Whose?

JO: (*dangerously*) Don't be an idiot.

LAURIE: (*patient*) You don't need to throw that horse at me.

JO: Throw WHAT?

LAURIE: Hey, it's your metaphor, not mine. Your temper.

JO: Yeah, so YOU don't get to tell ME about my TEMPER.

LAURIE: (*his own temper now rising*) I'm just saying, I'm on your side. I always have been.

JO: You have a funny way of showing it.

LAURIE: Because of that night, when –

JO: Yes.

They glare at each other.

LAURIE: *(temper still growing)* Look. Look, I like you.

JO: *(matching his)* I know.

LAURIE: And I don't have the words to say it, like you do –

JO: *(bitter laugh)* Because I'm SO amazing with WORDS.

LAURIE: But you are!

JO: Pronouns! Freaking pronouns! All right? I don't know what to do with them!

LAURIE: You will! Give yourself some time!

JO: *(temper beginning to gallop)* Could you stop for, like, two seconds? Stop being support-o guy? Or at least, stop PRESCRIBING things! You don't have all the answers!

LAURIE: *(nearly nose to nose with JO)* I thought that's what you wanted!

JO: *(screaming)* I DON'T KNOW WHAT I WANT! I DON'T KNOW WHAT I AM! OKAY?

LAURIE: *(screaming back)* OKAY!

They glare at each other. Suddenly LAURIE snickers. JO stares at him.

JO: *(still pissed)* What's so funny?

LAURIE: *(his laughter growing wilder)* Us!

JO: *(now confused)* Us?

LAURIE: We! We are! We are so... so... STUPID!

He collapses, laughing. JO tries to stay angry, but they can't. Starts smiling, then laughing. Soon they're roaring with laughter. They both collapse against each other as both their laughter starts to wind down.

JO: *(at last)* I do appreciate you.

LAURIE: I know you do. You're my best friend.

JO: I just have a hard time with the words.

LAURIE: THAT's irony, Alanis.

JO: SAYING them, I mean. Out loud. I can write 'em just fine, but having to actually say them is... it's hard. (beat) Are we the same?

LAURIE: I think... I think we're close.

JO: How?

LAURIE: How we are. Who we love.

JO: (lightbulb) Hey, I got it.

LAURIE: "It?"

JO: Let's try an experiment.

LAURIE: (suspicious) What kind of experiment?

JO: We'll both say it at the same time.

LAURIE: Again with the "it."

JO: What we are. No... WHO we are. Who we... love.

LAURIE: (amused) This is so fifth grade.

JO: (irritated) Look, do you wanna try it or not?

LAURIE: What about the play?

JO: (uncomfortable) This can... um... maybe be a part of it.

LAURIE: Okay, I'm in. You want to count us off?

JO: One... two... three. (ANNIE MOFFAT enters, 21st century version. She is window-shopping at some very exclusive, very ritzy stores. LAURIE notices; JO does not.) I... am... (suddenly realizing that LAURIE isn't speaking too) Hey! I thought we were in this together! (LAURIE, amused, turns JO very gently in ANNIE's direction) Oh!

LAURIE: (teasing) Mmm-HMMMMM?

ANNIE: (seeing JO, brightening) Jo! Hi! It's me! Meg's friend, Annie? Remember me?

LAURIE: (giving JO a little shove in ANNIE's direction) Remember her?

JO: Um. Hi. Yes. Hi, Miss... er... Annie.

ANNIE: Oh, you don't have to be so formal. Just Annie. It's been such a long time! (She hugs JO impulsively. JO doesn't know how to react.) Sorry. Well, not really. I'm a hugger.

JO: I... am not.

ANNIE: Everyone needs a little hug sometimes. How are your sisters? How's Meg? I never hear from her anymore. We had that little squabble, it was so stupid, it was just a DRESS, I mean, I have THOUSANDS, and Meg is so SENSITIVE –

JO: (*muttering*) Someone has to be.

ANNIE: I mean, okay, full transparency, it was totally my fault. My friends were being mean to Sasha Barker, she's, like, an heiress to the Barker Baby Food empire, but she has ZERO style, I mean seriously, you have to see it to believe it, and I had to tell her how awful her dress was, I was doing her a favor, or I thought I was, and... Meg TOTALLY stood up for her.

JO: She did?

ANNIE: I know, right? I was SO shocked. And then I... I felt kinda... bad.

JO: About making fun of people.

ANNIE: SO not me. And then Meg quit returning my texts, she blocked me on every social media platform known to God and man, it was insane. And the worst part was... I kept feeling BAD.

JO: I hear that can happen.

ANNIE: I just have a temper sometimes.

JO: You do?

ANNIE: (*grinning slyly*) Meg said you do too.

JO: Meg should learn to shut her big fat mouth.

ANNIE: I realized something else that weekend too.

JO: Listen, Annie, I should really –

ANNIE: I missed you.

JO: (*absolutely thrown*) Me? Me... Jo? Why?

Laurie, brightening, races offstage.

ANNIE: Well, I liked having you around, I guess. Like when we were all ice skating together? (*quickly*) Um, before your sister's accident, I mean. (*brightly*) I always thought you were pretty cool.

JO removes the 19th century blouse, revealing a tee-shirt beneath it. Throws the blouse. ANNIE is amused.

JO: Oh, I'm not. Meg's the cool one.

ANNIE: There's something about you...

JO: I'm trying a new shampoo.

ANNIE: That's not it...

JO: I remembered to put on deodorant...?

ANNIE: (*grinning*) That would be an improvement...

ANNIE moves closer to JO. JO swallows, nervous, but moves closer too. LAURIE returns with JACKSON as CHRISTOPHER STRAUB, very deliberately holding hands with him. JO reacts.

JO: (*to LAURIE*) What are you doing?

LAURIE: Holding hands with my boyfriend.

JO: Your WHAT NOW?

LAURIE: Oh, hey, Annie. You remember Christopher Straub, yeah?

CHRISTOPHER: 'sup.

ANNIE: Of the Westport Straubs? Your dad designed the entire fall collection of this month's Vogue. It's on the COVER, I almost DIED.

CHRISTOPHER: He's the one.

ANNIE: I have, like, a thousand of his dresses! Okay, well, two. But it feels like a thousand. (*grumbling to herself*) Mostly because each one cost a thousand. Or ten...

JO: As fascinating as this conversation is – (*to LAURIE*) YOUR BOYFRIEND? You didn't tell me you had a –

LAURIE: I was about to. I was trying to. Bi. I am. Bisexual.

JO: (*thrown*) Oh.

CHRISTOPHER: Hey, Laurie, we gotta book if we're gonna make it to the –

LAURIE: Yeah, yeah. Nice to see you again, Annie. (*pointedly*) JO.

They exit, holding hands. An awkward beat of silence.

ANNIE: Soooooooo... ComicCon is happening this weekend. Well, our little local version. Not like the really big one. I was going to head over in a little bit, if you want to –

JO: YOU like comic books?

ANNIE: I mean, it's not something I used to announce to the world, but... yeah. I'm a *Wonder Woman* kinda girl.

JO: Me too!

Reacting suddenly, painfully to ANNIE's use of the word "girl." ANNIE doesn't notice.

ANNIE: Yeah? Cool. So... if you want to go –

JO: I do! I mean... wait. I can't. My Aunt March is in town, and we're all having dinner.

ANNIE: Tell them I kidnapped you.

JO: You don't understand. Aunt March... she's... she's like Cheetah and the Joker and Lex Luthor combined. She'll eat my face if I skip.

ANNIE: Gross. Also, that would be a tragedy. I like your face.

She suddenly reaches into JO's pocket...

JO: Hey!

...revealing JO's phone.

ANNIE: No passcode? Careless. *(adds her number to JO's contacts)*
There. Now you've got me under your skin.

Laurie returns, grinning. ANNIE is frozen.

Laurie: She didn't REALLY say that, did she?

JO glares at him. ANNIE punches her numbers in again.

ANNIE: There. Now you've got my digits. Text me. Or call me. I know that no one does that anymore, so it could kinda be... our thing. Actually talking to one another.

JO: I... can do that.

ANNIE: You better.

She exits. JO watches her go. Laurie begins to laugh. JO smacks him tenderly. Transitional music plays.

Scene 3

AUNT MARCH strides determinedly onto stage. 21st century edition. A classy older lady, late 60s, in a pantsuit. Some slight jewelry, nothing gaudy or extravagant. Her hair is pulled back fairly severely.

AUNT MARCH: No. No, I absolutely forbid it.

MEG appears with BROOKE. From this point on, unless otherwise noted, all characters will appear in contemporary dress. MEG and BROOKE hold hands fiercely.

MEG: But Aunt March –

AUNT MARCH: (*suddenly sweet*) You can call me Aunt Daphne!

MEG: But Aunt Daphne –

AUNT MARCH: (*iron steel once again*) I categorically forbid it.

MEG: (*icy cold*) Then it's a good thing that you don't have a say.

MARMEE appears with AMY in tow.

MARMEE: Now, Meg, Aunt Daphne just wants to help.

AUNT MARCH: No. That isn't it at all. I want to see my nephew's children prosper. Old-fashioned as my attitude may appear to you, I intend to have a hand in all your marriages.

MARMEE: Oh, Aunt Daphne –

AUNT MARCH: Be quiet, Maggie. This doesn't concern you.

MARMEE: But I think that –

AUNT MARCH: The fact is, Meg, I built my fortune from the ground up. The American way. The old-fashioned way. Through sometimes back-breaking labor, through wise investments, through using my BRAIN. A skill you have obviously abandoned.

MEG: How DARE you –

AUNT MARCH: Be quiet! As I was saying, I have built my fortune, and it has grown to be considerable, and my intention is, once I have shuffled off this mortal coil, to provide for you and your sisters for the rest of your lives. But you must play by my rules.

MEG: (*spiteful*) YOUR rules indeed.

AUNT MARCH: (*chilly*) Yes, indeed. I didn't build an empire, clawing my way up from seamstress to designer to CEO of my own company to see the four of you FRITTER it away. You will do as you are told. By ME.

MEG: I will marry whoever I want to.

AUNT MARCH: "Whomever."

JO: Not the time for the policing of grammar, Auntie D.

MEG: I don't want to marry for money. I don't care about it.

JO: (*genuinely shocked*) Um, really?

MEG: So I will marry John Brooke, and you can leave your money to anyone you want to.

AMY: I like money!

AUNT MARCH: (*ignoring this*) Think carefully, girl. And not just about yourself for once. Marrying well brings more for your family. For your FAMILY, Meg. Isn't that the most important thing?

MEG: I –

AUNT MARCH: If you marry THIS man, this man with no position, no prestige, no money nor sense, you will be condemning your own sisters, your MOTHER, to a life of poverty. Is that what you want?

MEG turns to BROOKE. He looks at her expressionlessly.

BROOKE: I can't tell you what to do, Meg. I never have and I never will.

MEG: John, I –

MARMEE: Meg, you're going to marry your John.

MEG: Oh, Marmee!

MARMEE: Tonight if you want to. This afternoon if you want. Right this MOMENT if you want to.

AUNT MARCH: Step carefully, Margaret.

MARMEE: Be quiet, Aunt Daphne! For once in your life, YOU be quiet.

AUNT MARCH: How DARE –

MARMEE: How dare YOU! Coming into my house, talking to MY girls like that! You... you ought to be ashamed! Throwing your money around –

AUNT MARCH: Money that has helped you in the past –

MARMEE: I've never asked for your money, Daphne March, not a single penny!

MEG: Marmee, please. (*she steps between AUNT MARCH and MARMEE*) I love him. And I'm going to have him. And that is final.

A long beat while AUNT MARCH stares at her coldly.

AUNT MARCH: I wash my hands of the whole affair. I wash my hands of YOU. Don't expect anything from me, not ever again. I am done with the lot of you. Forever.

She turns, and with great dignity, she begins to exit. She stops for a moment to stare at JO, coldly, appraisingly. Then she exits. They all watch her go silently. A beat.

JO: Oh Meg. Oh, you great IDIOT.

BROOKE takes MEG's hands.

BROOKE: Marry me, Meg. Right now. Today.

BETH enters. She is pale.

BETH: Didn't any of you see this? (*she holds out her phone*) It's Dad. He's... he's been hurt.

JO rushes to her. Looks at the phone. Lights fade so they're just on JO and BETH. Then they go out. Music.

Scene 4

In the darkness.

JO: He isn't dead.

Lights up. JO is at the laptop. LAURIE is looking over JO's shoulder.

LAURIE: Yeah, that would be too much.

JO: Do you think so?

LAURIE: Definitely. Also it didn't happen that way.

JO: Okay. So how about...

They both look. FATHER appears silhouetted.

FATHER: I'll come home. I'll come home to you soon. I promise. I promise.

FATHER disappears.

LAURIE: *(scratching his head)* So what war is it now?

JO: There's always a war, isn't there? I don't think anyone can keep track anymore. It's been there since I can remember. And I don't know why he had to go off to fight it.

LAURIE: *(air quotes)* The "war."

JO: *(angrily)* It's a kind of a war, isn't it? *(small)* And once he left, I... I knew that he would never come back. That it was just the end. And Mom is so strong, she always has been. But I think... I KNOW... that she believed he wouldn't come back too.

LAURIE: But he did.

JO: *(reluctantly)* Yes...

LAURIE: In the story...

JO: *(forlorn)* In the story... so in my play, he'll come back...

Lights up on MARMEE, packing a small suitcase. BETH, AMY, and MEG are nearby.

MARMEE: Shrapnel. From a jeep that exploded. One of his own men... idiot, IDIOT.

BETH: It's going to be okay, Mom.

AMY: *(quickly)* Yeah. Yeah. Yeah. He's, like, a super trooper, Mom. He's got this.

MARMEE: I wish... oh Lord, I wish I didn't have to leave you girls.

She embraces BETH and AMY. MEG approaches and joins the hug. AUNT MARCH appears, but at a distance, watching.

I don't know how I'm going to afford it... the plane ticket... the hospital bills...

LAURIE stands with MR. LAURENCE. They also watch from a distance, not quite part of the scene.

MEG: We'll figure it out, Mom. I'm sure the Sundersons would have me back to watch their vile brats... *(off MARMEE's look)* I mean, precious darlings.

AMY: I can do caricatures of people at the farmers' market and charge them lots and lots of money! *(they all stare at her)* You know... once I learn how to do caricatures...

JO approaches. Hands MARMEE money.

JO: Here. Take it.

MARMEE: Jo, it's –

JO: Not a lot, I know. But maybe enough to make him comfortable... or you... or both of you? I don't know. *(pushing the money forward)* It's MONEY. I EARNED it. TAKE it.

MARMEE: From your story...?

JO hesitates, then nods.

JO: From my story.

MARMEE: Oh, Jo...

She moves to embrace JO. JO steps back.

JO: No. Not now. We'll wait 'til he's home. 'Til you're BOTH home.

AUNT MARCH steps forward.

AUNT MARCH: Yes, Maggie. You will both come home. I will pay for the plane tickets.

MR. LAURENCE steps forward.

MR. LAURENCE: And I'll take care of the hospital. Whatever your insurance will not cover.

MARMEE: Oh no, no, that's too much –

MEG faces AUNT MARCH.

MEG: *(hard)* No. No, it's not. Let them, Mother.

AUNT MARCH: *(cold, eyes on MEG)* It's the least I can do.

MR. LAURENCE: *(swiftly, trying to diffuse the tension)* The least I can do. You've all been there for me and for Theodore so often this year...

MARMEE: Thank you. Thank you, both. I have to pack.



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