Little Women

Louisa Alcott

English - Arabic

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^RAYAHEEN^
لويسا ماي ألكوتوت
(1832 - 1888)

روائية أمريكية برعت في كتابة القصص للأطفال. كان عليها كسب معيشتها في سن مبكرة، فبدأت بأعمال الحياكة والتدريس، ثم اشغلت معرضا خلال الحرب الأهلية الأمريكية، وشرعت في كتابة الرسائل إلى عائلتها، وقد نشرت هذه الرسائل لاحقا تحت عنوان "صور من مستشفى". إن أشهر أعمالها "نساء صغيرات" (1868) يعتبر كتاباً نموذجياً للأطفال، وبخاصة للبنات.
أما أعمالها الأخرى فتضمن: "حكايات الزهور" (1854)، "أجواء" (1864)، و"فتحة محافظة" (1870).
Chapter One
A LONELY CHRISTMAS

The four sisters sat sadly by the warm fire, looking through the window at the snow falling heavily outside, and covering the ground with a pure white carpet.

Jo broke the silence saying: «Christmas won't be Christmas without presents.»

Her sister Meg said as she looked down at her old dress, «Being poor and without new clothes makes one so miserable.»

«I don't think it's fair that some people should have lovely new things and we should not,» said Amy.

Jo's answer was, «We haven't got father, and we won't have him for a long time.»

These four sisters who were complaining about being poor, lived in the town of Concord in the United States of America. At that time, war was raging between the North and the South, and their father was away with the army, helping to take care of the sick and wounded. They used to be quite rich, but their father lost his money in trying to help a friend. Now, Christmas was approaching.
their father is away, and they had no money to celebrate Christmas.

The eldest sister, Meg, could remember When money was plentiful and sufficient to buy all their needs. She was now sixteen years old, and she was very pretty. She had light brown hair, large brown eyes, small hands and feet.

Jo, who was fifteen was tall and thin, but not very graceful. She had grey eyes and lovely red-brown hair. She loved to run and climb trees, and do things which boys like doing.

Her thirteen year old sister, Beth, was bright eyed and with a sweet face like a rose. She was gentle and thoughtful, but she dared not talk to people whom she did not know.

She was greatly different from her youngest sister, Amy, who was only twelve years old. Amy thought she was an important person and was very proud of her golden hair, white skin, and blue eyes. Though she knew that her nose was somehow flat; she hoped to grow up to be a charming lady, and to marry a rich gentleman.

As for the girl's mother, Mrs. March, she dedicated all her time to working for the soldiers, making them warm clothing and cooking them hot meals. The girls also had given up their Christmas presents for the soldiers. For this reason they were complaining, and that was why Jo said,
«Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents.»

«Mother is about to come back home,» said Beth as she put her mother's shoes in front of the fire to warm them. Then Jo held them up close to it so as to warm them quickly.

«Mother needs a new pair of shoes. These shoes are quite worn out and should be thrown away,» she said.

Beth said, «I've got a dollar, I think I'll buy her a pair with it.»

«No! I will do that,» cried Amy.

Jo stood up firmly and said seriously, «Father called me the 'man of the family' and asked me to take special care of mother, so I will buy the shoes.»

«Why not each buy her something for Christmas and not get anything for ourselves?» asked Beth.

Jo began to march up and down with her hands behind her back, like a man. Then she suggested, «we will let her think that we are getting things for ourselves, and then surprise her.»

The door opened and Mrs. March came in saying, «I was so busy that I couldn't come home to dinner.»

She took off her wet clothes quickly and sat down by the fire.
Meg and Jo started setting the table for their supper. Beth was busy in the kitchen. Amy sat with her hands by her side and gave orders to every one, while she did nothing herself.

When they all sat round the fire, their mother said smilingly, «I have something nice for you girls - a letter.»

«A letter from Father!» cried Jo happily. «How I wish I could be a soldier so as to go and help in the war.»

But her sister Amy frowned and said, «I don't think this would be very unpleasant.»

«When is Dad coming home?» asked Beth.

«He won't be very late, unless he is ill.» replied their mother. «Now come and hear what your father writes to you.»

The letter was long, and the last part of it was addressed to the girls. Mr. March wrote to his wife, «Give them my love. Tell them how much I think of them and pray for them. It will be a whole year before I shall see them again. Tell them to make use of their time, and to work hard. I know that they are good and loving children, and that they will take great care of you and do their duty. I hope that each of my daughters will do her best to fight against her own weakness, so that when I come back, I may be proud of my little women.»
Chapter Two
A DELIGHTFUL SURPRISE

It was Christmas morning. The girls got dressed quickly and went down to the sitting-room. There they met Hannah, the old servant who had lived with the family since Meg was born. Hannah was loved by them all, more as a friend than a servant.

«Where is Mother?» asked Meg.

«Someone came to call her to help a poor family who have no food,» said Hannah.

«Oh well,» said Meg, «you bring our breakfast and she will soon be back.»

By the time Hannah had finished cooking, the girls were very hungry. Just at that minute their mother came in.

«Merry Christmas,» they said.

«Merry Christmas, my daughters,» said Mrs. March. «Before we sit down I want to tell you that I have just been to a house where there are six children. Their mother - Mrs. Hummel - has no fire to keep them warm and no food to feed them. Hannah and I will take them some wood. Will you come with us and take them your breakfast?»

They were all silent for a few minutes. Then Jo said, «What a good thing we hadn't begun to eat.»
«May I go and help carry the things to the poor little children?» asked Beth eagerly.

«I shall take the hot cakes,» said Amy, bravely giving up the food which she most liked.

Meg was already putting the bread and butter into a basket.

«I thought that you would do it,» said Mrs. March, smiling. «You shall all go and assist and when we come back we will have bread and milk for breakfast. We shall eat more at dinner-time so there will be no real loss.»

In the evening they acted a play which Jo had written and a few friends came in to watch it. The play went well: the actors made a great deal of noise, and their friends who were listening shouted and laughed. Just as it was about to end Hannah entered the room and said, «Mrs. March wants you all to come down and eat something.»

This was not expected, even by the actors: and when they saw the table, they looked at one another with delighted surprise. There were cakes of all sorts; there was fruit, and sweets. It was a wonderful supper. In the middle of the table there was a big vase of beautiful flowers.

«Where did it come from?» they all wanted to know.

«Did the fairies bring it?» asked Amy.

«Father Christmas brought it,» said Beth.

«Mother did it,» said Meg.
"Aunt March felt good for once, and sent us these things," said Jo.

"You are all mistaken. Old Mr. Laurence in the big house next door sent it," replied Mrs. March.

"The Laurence boy's grandfather!" said Meg. "Why did he do that? We don't know him."

"Hannah told one of his servants that you took your breakfast to the poor children. He is rather a strange old gentleman, but that pleased him. He knew my father many years ago; and this afternoon he sent me a friendly note: "I have heard what your children did this morning," he wrote, "and I am sending a little Christmas present to them." So you have this nice meal to make up for a breakfast of bread and milk."

"I suppose it was his grandson who told him to do it," said Jo. "I think his grandson would like to get to know us, and I am sure that I should like to know him."

"I like his manners," said Mrs. March, "and I do not mind your knowing him when a proper chance comes. He brought the flowers himself; he looked very sad when he went away - hearing your fun and not having any of his own."

"We will have another play some time," said Jo.

"Perhaps he will help act in it. How good that would be!"
Chapter Three
EVERYONE TRIES TO BE USEFUL

The week after Christmas was a free time for the four sisters, especially for Meg and Jo, who had each found some work to do when their father lost his money. Meg went every day to teach Mrs. King's four little girls. She did not like this work, but she did it as well as she could, because she wished to help her family. Jo spent each day with her father's rich aunt, a difficult old lady who lived in a large house nearby.

Jo made herself useful by doing any of the things her aunt wanted—looking after her dog and her bird, helping to clean things and reading to her aunt in the afternoon. She did not like the books she read to her aunt; but she was sometimes able to go and find other books which she liked.

Beth was at home all the time, helping Hannah. Before her father went away she did her lessons with him, but now she did them by herself. Mrs. March had tried to send her to school, but she was too frightened to learn among a lot of other children.

She loved music, and she prayed for a new piano instead of the old one in which many of the notes did not sound. Amy played a little, but she was proudest...
of her drawing, and she wanted to paint famous pictures when she grew up.

One day, Meg went over the house looking for Jo. She found her in the little room at the top of the house which was only used for storing things not wanted. Here Jo was lying on an old bed, reading and eating apples, while a friendly mouse came to sit beside her. The mouse ran into its hole when Meg came in with a letter.

"Such fun!" she said. "Sallie Gardiner's mother has asked us to a little dance tomorrow, and Mother says that we may go. Now, what shall we wear?"

"What's the use of asking that, when you know that we have only one dress each that we can wear." said Jo.
Chapter Four
A NEW FRIEND

On the next afternoon the sisters began to get ready for the dance, and at last, with the help of Beth and Amy, they were ready.

As soon as they arrived, Meg began to enjoy herself. Her friend Sallie looked after her, and several young men asked her to dance. Meg danced beautifully, even though her pretty shoes hurt her. She was proud of her small feet, and sometimes she bought shoes that were not big enough.

Jo sat quietly looking across at some boys who were laughing and talking about skating; she loved skating. Jo generally liked talking to boys better than to girls; but she knew that she must not go over to join them. When a young man came towards her to ask her to dance, Jo went behind the door to escape. To her surprise she found a boy in the passage.

"I didn't expect to find anyone here," she said, preparing to go out again as quickly as she came in.

But the boy laughed and said pleasantly, "Don't mind me; stay if you like."

"Shan't I trouble you?"

"Not a bit; I only came out here because I don't
know many people, and I felt rather strange at first, you know."

"So did I. Don't go away, please, unless you'd rather."

The boy sat down again. He sat silent, looking at his shoes. At last, trying to be pleasant and easy, Jo said, "I think I have seen you before; you live near us, don't you?"

"Next door," and he looked up and laughed.

Jo laughed too, and said, "We did have such a good time with your nice Christmas present."

"My grandfather sent it."

"But you told him to, didn't you, Mr. Laurence?"

"What makes you think that, Miss March?"

"I'm not Miss March; I'm only Jo."

"And I'm not Mr. Laurence; I'm only Laurie."

"Laurie Laurence - what a strange name!"

"My First name is Theodore, but I don't like it, so the fellows called me Dora, so I made them say Laurie instead."

"I hate my name too - Josephine, and I wish everyone would call me Jo. How did you make the boys stop calling you Dora?"

"I hit them."

"I can't hit Aunt March, so I suppose I shall have to bear it," said Jo.
They watched the dancing for a few minutes, and then Laurie said: «Don't you like dancing, Miss Jo?»

«I like it well enough, if there is plenty of room. In a place like this I'm sure to step on people's feet, or do something wrong, so I keep out of it. Don't you dance?»

«Sometimes; but I've been away so long - at school in Italy and Switzerland and in Paris - that I don't know how things are done here.»

Jo decided that she liked Laurie very much. She wondered how old he was, but did not like to ask.

«I suppose you will be going to college soon,» she said. «I often see you working at your books.»

«Not for a year or two,» he replied. «I shall not go before I'm seventeen.»

«Aren't you sixteen yet?» asked Jo, looking at the tall lad whom she thought must be seventeen already.

«Sixteen next month.» And then, as the music began again, he said suddenly, «This is a lovely dance; won't you dance; won't you have it with me?»

«I can't: I told Meg I wouldn't, because -» There Jo stopped for a minute; but she decided to go on. «You see, the back of my dress is burnt and, although I put a piece in, it doesn't look very well. Meg told...»
me to keep still, so that no one would see it. You may laugh if you want to; it is funny, I know."

But Laurie didn't laugh. He said very gently, «Never mind that; there is a long hall outside there, where we can dance with no one to see us. Please come.»

How they enjoyed that dance together! When the music stopped, they sat down to get cool. They were just beginning to have a pleasant talk when someone came to tell Jo that Meg wished to see her. She had hurt her foot and was resting in a side room. Jo was sorry to leave Laurie, but she went at once.

She found Meg resting, with her foot on a chair.

«I've hurt my foot,» she said. «It turned over - I suppose because these shoes are too small. It hurts so much that I won't be able to walk home.»

«I knew you'd hurt your feet with those silly little shoes,» said Jo. «We will have to get a carriage. You can't stay here all night.»

«A carriage would cost a lot of money; and I don't think we could get one. It is a long way from here to the town and we have no one to send.»

«I'll go,» said Jo.

«No! No! It's late and very dark,» said Meg. «You can't go.»

«I'll ask Laurie, and he will go,» cried Jo.

«I should think not.»
«No! Don’t ask anyone. I can’t dance any more, but Hannah will soon come. Tell me as soon as you see her. They are going in now. You go and have something to eat and bring me some coffee.»

Jo got the coffee but as she turned to carry it back she poured it down the front of her dress. «Oh! Oh! Oh!» she cried. «Now I’ve spoilt my dress!»

«Can I help you?» said a friendly voice. It was Laurie. He was carrying cakes in one hand and a cup of coffee in the other.

«I was trying to get something for Meg.»

«And I was looking for someone to give this to.»

Jo led him to Meg. Laurie brought more coffee and cakes for Jo and they sat down together. They were so happy that Meg forgot about her foot. When Hannah came she stood up quickly, but she soon sat down again in great pain. Laurie saw at once that she could not walk home.

«My grandfather’s carriage has just come,» he said. «Let me take you home in it.»

«But are you going so early?» said Jo. «You don’t want to go home yet!»

«Yes, I do. I always go early. Please let me take you all home.»

Soon they were all on their way home in Mr. Laurence’s large carriage. They said ‘good night’ to Laurie with many thanks, and went in quietly, hoping not to wake their young sisters. But soon two little voices cried out...
«Tell us about the dance! Tell us about the dance!»

When the story had been told and the little girls were asleep again, Jo bathed Meg's foot and brushed her hair.

«I really feel like a fine young lady,» said Meg: «I came home from the party in a carriage, and now I have a servant to brush my hair.»

«I don't believe that fine young ladies enjoy themselves a bit more than we do,» said Jo.
Perhaps Jo was right!
Chapter Five
JO VISITS LAURIE

One afternoon Jo came back early from Aunt March because it had been snowing heavily. She did not feel like sitting by the fire, so she took a brush and began to make a path through the snow so that Beth could walk through the garden. She watched old Mr. Laurence drive away from the house next door; and then, as she was brushing away the snow near the wall which separated the two houses, she saw an unhappy-looking Laurie through one of the windows.

«Poor Laurie,» thought Jo, «he's all alone; he needs a lot of friends to make him happy.»

She threw up a handful of snow against the window, and Laurie turned to see her. At once his face changed. He laughed, opened the window and called to her.

She shook her brush at him as she called out, «Are you ill?»

Laurie opened the window and said in a thick voice, «I’ve had a cold, and have been in my bedroom for a week, but I’m better now.»

«What do you find to do?»

«Nothing! Grandfather reads to me, but I don't like the books he reads.»

وعدد الأفكار لعندما نادتها: "هل أنت مريض؟"

ففتح لوري النافذة وقال بصوت مبوجح: "لقد أصبته بالزكام، وأنا في غرفة نومي منذ أسبوع، ولكني في حال أفضل الآن."

"هل تجد شيئاً تفعله؟"

"لا شيء! جدي يقرأ لي، ولكني لا أحد الكتب التي يقرأها."
«Why don't you get someone to come up?»
«I don't know anyone. Won't you come?»
«I will if Mother will let me. I'll go and ask her. Shut that window, and wait till I come.»
Jo came back in a few minutes, and was taken up to Laurie's room by a servant.
«Mother sent you her love,» she said when she entered Laurie's room; «and Meg sent you this cake for your tea.»
«How kind you all are,» said Laurie.
«Shall I read to you?» asked Jo.
«No, I would much rather you talked. Tell me about your sisters. Beth is the one who stays at home, isn't she, and Meg is the pretty one, and Amy is the little girl?»
«How did you know?» Jo asked.
«Well,» said Laurie, «I often hear you calling each other, and you always seem to be having such fun. I know it is not right to look through people's windows; but sometimes it is like looking at a picture. I see you all in the firelight, sitting round the table with your mother. I haven't any mother, you know.»
He looked so sad that Jo cried, «You may look as much as you like. But why don't you come and see us? Wouldn't your grandfather allow you?»
«He would if your mother asked me. He lives very much with his books. My teacher, Mr. Brooke, doesn't live here in the house, so I haven't anyone to go out with, and I stay at home most of the time.»
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Then they began talking of books.

"If you like them so much," said Laurie, "go down and see ours. Grandfather is out, so you needn't be afraid."

"I'm not afraid of anything."

"I don't believe you are," said Laurie. He was afraid sometimes; he was rather afraid of his solemn old grandfather. He took Jo down to a large room filled with books and pictures. Jo looked round the room: "What a lot of books!" she said. Just at that moment the bell rang and one of the servants came in and said, "The doctor has come to see Laurie."

"Do you mind if I leave you for a few minutes?" he said.

"Of course not. I'm so happy with all these things to look at."

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not as good-looking as my grandfather, but I like him."

"Thank you, madam," said a deep voice, and Jo turned to find — not Laurie — but old Mr. Laurence himself.

For a minute she thought she must run away; but, as she looked at the old man, she saw that he was smiling.

"So you're not afraid of me," he said.

"No much, sir."

"And I am not so good-looking as your mother's father?"

"Not quite, sir."

"But you like me?"

"Yes, I do, sir," said Jo.

That answer pleased the old gentleman. He laughed, shook hands with her and said:

"You are brave, like your grandfather, my dear. What have you been doing to my grandson?"

"Only trying to be good neighbours. He is all alone, and we girls would like to help him if we can, because we haven't forgotten your Christmas present."

"How are the poor little children to whom you gave your breakfast?"

"The Hummels? They are doing well, sir."

"Tell your mother I shall come over to see her soon; and now let us go in to tea."

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At this minute Laurie came running in. He was very surprised to see Jo and his grandfather talking together; and the old man was equally surprised, during tea, to hear Laurie and Jo talking like two old friends.

«How happy he is!» he thought. «She has done him good already.»

After tea, Laurie took Jo over the large house, showing her all the lovely things in it. When they went back to old Mr. Laurence, Jo looked at the big piano. How she wished that Beth could see it!

«Do you play, Laurie?» said Jo.

«Sometimes,» he replied.

«His music is not bad,» said his grandfather, «but I hope he will do well in more important things.» Jo stood up to go. «Must you go?» he asked.

«Yes, sir; it's late.»

«Come again,» said Laurie.

«Yes,» said Jo, «if you promise to come and see us when your cold is better.»

«Indeed, I will,» said Laurie.
Chapter Six

BETH GETS HER WISH

After Jo's visit, a new life began for Laurie. Mrs. March was glad to see him whenever he wished to come to the house, and soon he and the four girls were the greatest friends. Laurie spent less time on his lessons, but old Mr. Laurence was pleased to see him happy in the company of people of his own age. There were evening parties in the big house, and Laurie and the girls arranged plays and out-of-door parties together.

Meg liked wandering over the large house. Jo liked to sit for hours in the big room reading, and Amy looked at the pictures. Only Beth was too afraid to enter the house. She wanted to play the big piano, but she feared old Mr. Laurence too much to go near him.

When Mr. Laurence discovered this, he tried to make it easy for Beth to come. One day, when he was visiting Mrs. March and the four girls, he began to talk about music and musicians, until the music-loving Beth came nearer and nearer to his chair to listen. Then he went on to talk of Laurie's music lessons.

«Laurie hasn't much time for his music now,» he

الفصل السادس

بيت تنال أمنيتها

بعد زيارة جو، بدأت حياة جديدة للنورى. كانت السيدة مارش مسرورة لرؤيته كلما دخل البيت، وسرعان ما أصبحت الأخوات الأربع من أعز الأصدقاء. وأصبح النوري يمضي وقت أقل في درساته، ولكن السيد لورانس العجوز كان مسروراً لرؤيته سعيداً برفقة أشخاص من سنه. كانت تجري حفلات مسائية في البيت الكبير، وكان لوري والفنانين ينظمون المسرحيات والحفلات معاً.

كانت مين تلعب التماثيل في المنزل الكبير، وأحيت جو الجلوس ساعات في الغرفة الكبيرة لقراءة، وكانت آمي تنتظر إلى اللوحات. فقط بيت كانت خائفة جداً من دخول المنزل. كانت تريد أن تعرف على البيانو الضخم، ولكنها كانت تخفف السيد لورانس العجوز كثيراً حتى أنها لم تكن تقرب منه.

وبعدما اكتشف السيد لورانس ذلك، حاول تبسيط الأمور ليجعل بيت نوري. وفي أحد الأيام، عندما كان يزور السيدة مارش وبناتها الأربع، أخذ يتحدث عن الموسيقى والموسيقين، حتى بدأت بيت المجاب للموسيقى بالاختاب من كرسية أكثر فأكثر. ثم تحدث عن دروس لوري الموسيقية.

قال: "ليس لدى لوري الوقت الكافي للموسيقى الآن،" ثم ركأن
said; and then, as though the thought had just come to him, he went on, «I am glad of this, for I did not want him to spend so much time on it; but the piano should be used, and I do wish that some of your girls would come and play on it sometimes. They needn't see anyone, and they won't trouble me, for I shall be in my room at the other end of the house.»

As he got up to go, he said, «Of course, if they don't care to come.»

Here Beth put her hand into his and said, «Oh, sir; I do care - I care very much.»

«Are you the musical girl?»

«I'm Beth, and I do love music. I'll come, if you're sure no one will hear me.»

«No one, my dear - come as often as you like.»

He held out his hand; and Beth, no longer afraid, put her small hand trustingly in his, for she had no words to thank him for his kindness.

Early next morning, Beth watched old Mr. Laurence go out and then she set off for the big house. After twice turning back in fear, she at last went in by a side-door and made her way as quietly as she could to the room where the piano was. Laurie had left some easy but very pretty music for her, and she spent a delightful morning playing it on the great piano. She forgot her fears, herself, and everything else except the pleasure which the music gave her. At last Hannah came to tell her the time, and take her home to dinner.
After that, Beth went to play on the piano every morning. She never met anyone, and she never knew that old Mr. Laurence often sat in his study listening to her, and thinking of his dearly-loved little granddaughter who died long ago. Beth was so happy and so thankful that she decided to make some shoes for old Mr. Laurence. With the help of her mother and sisters over the difficult parts, she soon finished them and sent them to him. For two days there was no reply. Beth was afraid that the old gentleman was not pleased with them. Then, one morning, when she returned from a walk, several joyful voices called out to her:

«Here's a letter for you, Beth. Come quick, and read it!»

As Beth hurried in, Jo cried out, «Oh, Beth, look at what he has sent you!» They were all pointing and saying, «Look there! Look there!»

Beth did look, and turned white with delight, for there stood a small piano, with a letter lying upon it for «Miss Elizabeth March.» Beth opened and read it. It was a rather solemn letter, as if written to someone grown-up:

Miss March.
Dear Madam,

I have never had any shoes which pleased me so well as yours. I should like to return your kindness, and so I am sending you the small piano

وبعد ذلك، أصبحت يتذهب للعب على البيانو صباح كل يوم ولم تلق أحداً مرتة، ولم يخبر أن السيد لورانس العجوز كان يجلس دائماً في مكتبه يسمع إليها، ويفكر بمفهومه الصغير التي ماتت منذ زمن بعيد. كانت بيت نرحة وممتنة لدرجة أنها قررت صنع حذاء للسيد لورانس العجوز، ومساعدة أمه وأخواتها في الأجزاء الصعبة. أنهن قاربت بسرعة وأرسلته إليه. ولدتها يومين لم يتلقين جواباً. وخشيت بيت أن لا يكون الحذاء قد أعجب السيد العجوز. ثم، ذات صباح، عندما عادت من نزهة، نادتها عدة أصوات مرحة:

"هذه رسالة لك، يا بيت. تعالني بسرعة واقفتها،" وعندما أسرت بيت داخلاً، صرخت جور: "أوه، بيت، أنظري ما قد أرسل إليك!" ركن جميعاً يشرح ويرسخ: "نظري هنا! النظري هنا!" نظرت نفلاً، وقد شجعت من المرح، وكان هناك بانو كبير رسالة عليه مرسالة إلى "الآنسة إليزابيث مارش." فتحتها بيت وقرأها. كانت رسالة رزية وقالها مرسالة إلى شخص يائع:

الآنسة مارش
سيدتي العزيزة،
لم أحظ ببداً بهذا أفرحني كحذائك. وأود أن أرد لك طبقتك.
which was once used by my granddaughter.

With many thanks and best wishes.

I am, Your friend, James Laurence.

All the girls gathered round to see the beautiful piano, while Beth sat down to try it. She found it perfect.

"Now you'll have to go and thank him," said Jo—half in fun, for she did not think that Beth would be brave enough.

"I am going now," said Beth, "before I get afraid." Then, to the surprise of everyone, she walked out of the house, down the garden path, and in at the Laurence's door, before they could believe what had happened.

Old Mr. Laurence looked very surprised to see her.

"I came to thank you, sir," she began but she did not finish what she was saying, for he looked so friendly, and smiled so kindly at her, that she put both her arms round his neck and kissed him.

The old gentleman was pleased by the trusting little girl. He took her on his knee, and Beth was soon talking to him as if she had known him all her life. When she went home he walked with her to her own gate, shook hands, and lifted his hat.

When the girls saw this happen, Jo began to dance with joy, Amy nearly fell out of the window in her surprise, and Meg said, "Well, I do believe the world is coming to an end."
Chapter Seven
AMY BURNS THE BOOK

It was Saturday afternoon. Amy was just getting better from a cold. She found her sisters dressing to go out, and asked them to tell her where they were going.

"Little girls shouldn't ask questions," said Jo. This made Amy very angry.

"Do tell me, Meg," she said. "I think you might take me too. I am always left alone, because Beth spends so much time with her piano."

"I can't take you. You haven't been asked."

"Now, Meg," said Jo, "don't tell her. Amy can't go. She mustn't be a baby and be angry about it."

"I know you are going with Laurie to see the Fairy Play," said Amy, "and I shall go too. I've got a little money and I shall pay for myself."

"Just listen, Amy," said Meg. "Mother doesn't want you to go out so soon after your cold. You can go next week with Beth and Hannah."

"I shan't like that nearly as well as going with you and Laurie. Do take me, Meg! I'll be so good."

"Shall we take her, Jo?" asked Meg. "She could put on her warm clothes, and I don't believe that Mother would mind."
"No," replied Jo. If she goes, I won't; and Laurie won't like that.

"I will go!" cried Amy.

"You couldn't sit with us," said Jo, "because we could not get another seat just next to ours. The seat would be somewhere else; but we couldn't let you sit alone, so you would have to have Laurie's seat, and then he would have to sit alone. So you must not come."

Amy began to cry, and Meg tried to make her understand. Then Laurie came. As the elder girls went away with him she called out, "You'll be sorry for this, Jo March."

This rather spoiled Jo's enjoyment of the play. She and Amy often had quarrels. Jo was always sorry that she had been angry after them. She knew that she had a very quick temper and she tried not to give way to it.

When they returned, Jo expected to find that Amy had done something to hurt her, but she did not find out what it was until the next afternoon. A few days before this, Jo had finished writing some little stories in a book; and she meant to give the book to her father.

"Have you seen my little book?" she asked the others.

"No," said Meg and Beth. Jo looked at Amy.

"You've got it, Amy?"
"No, I haven't," said Amy. "I don't know where it is, and I don't care."

"You know something about it. Tell me at once, or I'll make you," said Jo, shaking her.

"You'll never see your silly book again," said Amy. "I burnt it."

"What? My little book that I worked so hard over, to give to father when he comes back! You couldn't burn my little book?"

"Yes, I did -- I told you I'd make you pay for not taking me yesterday."

Jo shook Amy, shouting as she did so, "You bad bad girl! I can never write it again, and I'll never forgive you."

Meg and Beth ran to save Amy; and Jo ran up to her little room at the top of the house and shut herself in to fight against her temper.

In the sitting-room Amy too was unhappy. "How could you do such a thing?" said Meg. Beth and her mother were too hurt to say much, and Amy felt that no one loved her.

Jo came down at tea-time, still looking so angry that Amy was hardly brave enough to say: "Please forgive me, Jo. I'm very sorry."

"I shall never forgive you," replied Jo, and took no further notice of her for the rest of the evening.

When bed-time came, Mrs. March said to Jo, "My dear, don't let the sun go down on your anger.
Forgive each other, help each other, and begin again tomorrow."

Jo felt like putting her head down and crying, but she knew that Amy was listening, so she said, in a hard voice, «It was a very bad thing to do, and I can never forgive her.»

On the next afternoon, when Jo came back from a rather difficult morning with Aunt March, she still felt angry and unhappy.

«I'll ask Laurie to go skating on the ice with me,» she said to herself. «He is so kind and friendly. He'll soon make me feel better.»

Amy watched her go and said to Meg: «She promised to take me skating next time she went, and this is the last ice we shall have; but it's no good asking her when she is so angry.»

«Well, Amy, you were very unkind to burn her book, and it is hard for her to forgive you. But if you go after her now, you may find that Laurie had made her feel better. Tell her again that you are sorry, and perhaps she will be friends.»

«I'll try,» said Amy.

She put on her warm coat and ran off as quickly as she could. It was not far to the river, and both Jo and Laurie were ready before Amy reached them. Jo saw her coming and turned her back. Laurie did not see her. He was trying the ice a little further on. He called back to Jo: «Keep near the side; the ice isn't safe in the middle.»
Jo said to herself as she followed Laurie, "Did Amy hear that it isn't safe in the middle? I Ought to tell her? - No, let her take care of herself."

She decided to go on, but something held her. She turned round just in time to see Amy throw up her hands with a cry that made Jo's heart stand still with fear as Amy fell through the thin ice into the water.

Laurie lay in the ice, and held out his stick to Amy. Together they got her out, unhurt, but very cold and wet.

They took off their coats and put them round Amy to keep her warm.

"We must make her run as fast as she can, before she takes cold," said Laurie.

They all ran home, and very soon Amy was in a warm bed, with a fire in her room. Before long she was fast asleep.

Mrs. March and Jo went up to see her.

"Are you sure she is safe?" asked Jo.

"Quite safe. You and Laurie did the right thing, putting your coats on her and hurrying her back home."

"Oh, Mother," said Jo, weeping, "if she had died it would have been because of my wicked temper. I was angry with her and did not tell her to keep near the side. I know that I shall do something in a temper one day which will spoil my life. Oh, Mother, what shall I do? What shall I do?"
"You must try not to be angry with other people. We all do things which make other people angry. Sometimes you do things which make me angry, but I hold myself back; I keep back the angry words and learn to understand and forgive. I have been learning that lesson for forty years."

"Oh, Mother, if only I could be half as good as you!" said Jo.

"I hope you will be a great deal better, my dear," replied her mother.

Jo held her mother close, and together they watched Amy. She moved in her sleep, woke with a smile, and held out her arms to Jo. In the kiss that followed, the sisters were friends again and their quarrel forgotten.

"يجب أن تحاول أن لا تتغضب من الآخرين. جميعنا نفعل أشياء قد تتغضب الآخرين. وأحياناً تفعلين أشياء تعنيني غاضبة، ولكنني أتذكّر نصيبي: إنّي أعلم الكلمات الغاضبة وأتعلم التفهم والمساعدة. وما زلت أتعلم ذلك الدروس منذ أربعين سنة."

قالت جر: "أوه، أمي، لو أستطيع أن أكون طيبة ينصف القدر الذي أنت عليه!"

أجابت أمها: "أمل أن أصبحي أفضل حالاً، يا عزيزي.

ضمت جو أمها إليها، رابطاً أمي معها. تحركت وهي نائمة، ثم استيقظت مبتسمة ومدّت يديها نحوها. وعندما قبالتها، أصبحت الأختان صديقتين ثانية ونسنّى خلافهما.
Chapter Eight
MEG VISITS THE MUFFATS

Annie Moffat met Meg at Mrs. Gardiner’s party and liked her: they became great friends.

In the spring Annie asked Meg and her friend, Sallie Gardiner, to stay at her home for two weeks. Meg was teaching four little girls but they were ill, so Meg was able to go. Jo and Amy helped her to get her clothes ready for the visit.

“I think your old blue house-dress looks pretty now it has been made longer,” said Beth.

“Your grey dress will do very well for the small parties, and you will have your white dress for the large ones,” said Jo.

“I think you look lovely in white,” said Amy, touching the white dress with loving fingers.

Meg was not entirely happy: her white dress had been washed many times, and she knew that the Moffats were rich and had many clothes.

“I wonder if I shall ever be able to buy the new dresses I really want,” she said.

“You once said that you would be happy if only you could go and stay with the Moffats,” said Beth.
«So I did. I am happy, and I will try not to think how much I want just one new dress.»

At last all the preparations were finished; the simple clothes were put in a travelling-case, and Meg set out on her journey.

She found that the Moffats were indeed rich, and that their house was large and full of costly things. Both Mr. and Mrs. Moffat were fat and happy-looking. They were pleasure-loving people; they loved money and what it could buy; but they were kind, and they wished to make Meg's visit happy. Meg enjoyed the lazy, care-free life, with plenty of time to arrange her hair, dress herself, and go out with others. In the daytime she was taken out in the carriage and in the evening they often went to see plays. Everyone seemed to love pretty Meg, and she was very happy. When she saw all the nice things that the Moffats had, she wanted to be rich, and as she looked back at her own home, she thought how small and poor it was.

During the second week a small party had been arranged, at which Meg had expected to wear her simple grey dress. But she found that it would not do among the fine evening dresses of her friends; so she wore the white dress which she had meant to keep for the bigger party on the next night. Even this looked very poor by the side of the other dresses, and she knew from their looks, that the other girls thought so too.

 فلاً، أنا سعيدة، وسأحاول أن لا أفكر في أرغب بشيء جديد الواحد فقط، وأخبر أختي كل التحضيرات; وضعت الملابس البسيطة في حقية السفر، وانطلقت متحمسة في رحلتها.

وجدت أن آل موفات أشياء فعلاً، فشملتهم كبير وملء بالأشياء الثمينة. وكان كل من السيد والسيدة موفات شبيهاً وفرح العرض. كانا حزينين لل المتحدة والملاذ، وما يشتريه ولكنهما كانوا طيبين، وتفية جميلة.

تمتعت ميغ بحياة الكسل واللامبالاة، والوقت الكافي لتصنيف شعرها وارتداء ملابسها، والخروج مع الآخرين. أثناء النهار كانت تذهب في العرية وفي اللمسة كانوا يذهبون خضور المسيرات، ويبدأ أن الجميع يحبون ميغ الخفيلة، وكانت سعيدة جداً، وعندما رأت كل الأشياء الجميلة لدى آل موفات تمت أن تصبح غنية، وعندما تكبر بمنزلها، رأت كم كان صغيراً وبقياً.

وخلال الأسبوع الثاني، كانت الاستعدادات تتم لإثارة حفلة صغيرة، وكان من الموقعي أن ترتدي ميغ ثوباً الرمادي البسيط. ولكنها رأت أنه لم يكن مناسباً أمام أثواب صديقاتها الجميلة؛ لذا ارتدى الثوب الأبيض الذي كانت ترى ارتداه في حفلة أكبر الليلة الثالثة. ولكن هذا أيضاً بدأ قليلاً جداً أمام الأثواب الأخرى، وقد عرفت من النظارات إليها أن الفتيات الأخريات يعتقدن ذلك أيضاً.
When she was feeling very troubled about her dress, a servant brought in a large box and a letter. To everyone's surprise, both were for Meg. When the box was opened the girls saw the loveliest roses.

"What fun," said Annie, "we didn't know you had a lover."

"The letter is from my mother," said Meg, "and the roses are from Laurie."

After reading her mother's letter, Meg felt happy again. When the party began she danced and sang and was so happy that she looked even prettier than usual. She was enjoying every minute until she happened to hear Mrs. Moffat talking to her daughter Belle.

"How old is young Laurence?"

"About sixteen or seventeen."

"He would make a good husband for one of the March girls," said Mrs. Moffat. "He'll be quite rich when his grandfather dies. I expect Mrs. March is making her plans, although it is so early. Clearly the girl doesn't think of it yet."

"Poor girl!" replied Belle. "She has only that one old white dress; do you think we might offer to lend her another? She's very proud, but perhaps she wouldn't mind."

"We'll see," said Mrs. Moffat. "I shall ask young Laurence to come to the party tomorrow."
Meg was very angry when she heard her mother spoken of like this. For the first time she began to understand how other people might think of Laurie's friendship with herself and her sisters, and she felt unhappy too that these people should think like this about her old dress. She hid her feelings, however, and no one knew what she had heard.

The next morning Belle Moffat said to her, "Mother has asked Mr. Laurence to the party tonight."

"He won't come," said Meg, laughing.
"Why?"
"He's too old; he's over seventy."
"Of course we mean the young man."
"There isn't a young man. Laurie is only a boy."
"But he's nearly your age," said Belle.
"Oh no," said Meg. "He's only about fifteen, and I'm nearly seventeen.
"It's very nice of him to send you flowers."
"Yes, he often does - to all of us - because there are so many in his house, and we love them so.

Just then Mrs. Moffat came into the room and asked what the girls were going to wear for the big party that night.
"I shall wear my red silk," said Sallie. "What are you going to wear, Meg?" she asked.
"My white one again," said Meg, "although it got rather dirty last night."
"Why don't you send home for another?"
"Because I haven't another," said Meg.
"Only one dress? How strange!" said Sallie; but she did not finish because Belle Moffat shook her head at Sallie, and said kindly: "There is no need for Meg to have a lot of dresses. She is not really old enough to go to many parties yet. As it happens, Meg," she went on, "there is a blue dress of mine which is too small for me, and I should love you to wear it."

"You are very kind," said Meg, "but I don't mind my old dress if you don't. It does well enough for a little girl like me."

"Oh, do wear it, Meg, and do let me help you to get ready for the party. You're so pretty; I should love to dress you without telling the others, and then show them what a real beauty you are. Please do, Meg!"

Meg did not like to say «No» to such a kind offer, and she wanted very much to see how she would look dressed in a really grown-up dress. She therefore decided to forget her former feelings about the Moffats, and promised to do as Belle wished.

That evening Belle and the French servant, Hortense, shut themselves in Meg's room and set to work on her. They powdered her face, neck and arms; they waved her hair. Then they put on the blue dress which was so small in places that it hurt her, and was so low at the neck that she felt undressed. Then they
put on jewellery and ear-rings. She had high blue shoes and she carried her flowers in a silver holder.

Belle and Hortense were delighted. «Come and show yourself," they said.

"I feel both over-dressed and undressed," said Meg. She did indeed look very pretty, but her dress was not right for so young a girl, and many people at the party asked who she was. Just as she was talking with a group of young men she saw Laurie. He bowed to her, but looked so surprised that she wished she had worn her old white dress.

"I'm glad you came," she said.

"Jo wanted me to come, to tell her how you looked. »

"What will you tell her?»

"I shall say that I did not know you: you looked so grown up and unlike yourself.»

"The girls dressed me up for fun. Don't you like my dress?»

"I do not," said Laurie.

"Why not?»

"I do not like that sort of dress, and I don't think it is right for you.»

"You are the unkindest boy I ever knew," said Meg, and turned away, only to hear one of the older men say, «They are making a fool of that little girl. She looked so sweet last night, but now they have made her a painted doll.»

رأت جوداً غالياً أزرق وحملت أزهارها بعلبة من فضة.

كانت بيل وهورنتس مسرورتين. وقالتا: "عالي وناظري إلى نفسك."

قالت ميغ: "شعرت بأنني مرتدية الكثير من الملابس، وفي الوقت نفسه بأنني لا أرتدي شيئاً. بدت جملة فعلاً ولكن ثوبها لم يكن مناسبًا لنا، مثلها وقد تساءلت العديد من الناس في الحلقية من تكون. وبينما كانت تتكلم مع بعض الشبان رأته لوري. اختم أمامها، ولكنها تدهشأ حتى أنها تمت لو كانت قد ارتدت ثوبها الأبيض القديم. قال: "أنا مسرورة لأنك أتبت." 

"لقد أرادت جود أن تأتي لأخيرها كيف تبدأ."

"وماذا ستخبرها؟" 

"سأخبرها أنني لم أعرفك وأنك بدت كبيرة جداً وغير نفسي."

"لقد أستمي الفتيات ذلك للنسالية. ألا يعجبك ثوب؟" 

قال لوري: "كلا. لا يعجبني." 

"لأحب هذا النوع من الملابس، ولا أظن أنه مناسب لك."

قالت ميغ: "أنت أقصى صبي عرفته، والتفتت بعيداً، تسمع أحد الرجال يقول: "إنهم يجعلون من تلك الفتاة الصغيرة سخرية. لقد بدت جميلة جداً الليلة الماضية ولكنهم الآن قد جعلوا منها لعبة ملونة. "
«Oh!» thought Meg, «I wish I'd been wiser and worn my own dress, even if it is old.»

Laurie came back and asked her to dance. «I don't like your dress,» he said, «but I like you.»

Meg smiled and stood up with him.

«Take care you don't fall over my long dress - I know I was silly to wear it.»

They had often danced together at home, and in the pleasure of the dance they forgot their little quarrel. They both danced well and were very happy.

«Promise me that you won't tell them at home about my dress. It would trouble mother.» Laurie promised. Just then Ned Moffat came to ask Meg to dance. Laurie watched them, and after the dance he was surprised to see Meg drink several glasses of wine. He went across and said to her, «Don't drink much of that, Meg.»

«I'm not Meg tonight,» she said with a laugh. «I'm a different girl in this dress.»

When the next dance came, the wine had 'gone to her head' and she danced faster and faster. Later, she was talking and laughing rather loud with a group of young men. Laurie was very unhappy about her, but he had no chance of speaking to her again before the party ended and he had to go home.

The next morning Meg had such a bad head that she stayed in bed, and on the following day, when her visit ended, she was rather glad to go home.
After the journey, she sat with her mother and Jo in the evening, looking round at the little room.

"Home is a nice place," she said, "and it is so pleasant to be quiet."

"I'm glad to hear you say so. I thought you might not think so," said her mother, who had a feeling, as she listened to Meg's story, that something was troubling her daughter.

"Mother, there is something else which I must tell you," said Meg.

"Shall I go?" asked Jo.

"Of course not," said Meg. "You know that I tell you everything."

"We are waiting," said her mother, smiling but a little troubled.

"Well, I told you they dressed me up, but I didn't tell you how they made me look. Laurie did not like my dress. I heard one man call me a 'painted doll.' I know it was silly, but I wanted, for once, to see how it felt to be dressed like that. Then the boys gave me some wine and that made me even more silly. I am so sorry, Mother."

"Is that all, Meg?" asked her mother. "I think there is still something more which is troubling you."

"Yes," said Meg and she went on to tell what Mrs. Moffat had said about Laurie. "She said that you were making plans for him to marry one of us because he will be rich."
Mrs. March looked very angry. Jo cried out at once. "I never heard anything so silly. Just wait till I see the Moffats! And won't Laurie laugh when he hears you want him to marry one of us!"

"If you tell Laurie, I shall never forgive you," said Meg. "She must not tell, Mother!"

"No, Jo," said Mrs. March. "You must never tell such foolish things. I ought not to have let you go to stay there, Meg. The Moffats may be kind, but they think more of money than of anything else. I hope that your visit there has not been bad for you."

"I enjoyed part of it very much - it was such fun! But I've learnt a great deal - among other things I know now how silly I was," Then she went on: "But do you make plans for us, Mother?"

"Yes, my dear, like all mothers, I make plans, but not the ones Mrs. Moffat spoke about. You and Jo are both old enough to know what I want for you. Of course I want you to be beautiful and good; and I want you to marry and be happy, because the best thing for any girl is to be happily married. It is right to think of it, Meg; right to hope for it; and wise to prepare for it, so that when the time comes you may be a good and happy wife. But I do not want you to marry rich men just because they are rich and can give you large houses and other good things. I would rather see you poor men's wives, if you are happy and loved."

بنت السيدة مارش ذابت جدًا. وصرخت جو في الحال: "لم أسمع شيئًا بهذا السخافة من قبلي. أنا آتي أي الأموال Àفان يضحك لوبي عندما يسمع أملك فيديه أن يزوج إحداها!" قالت مي: "إذا أخبرت لوبي، فلن أغفر لك أبداً. يجب أن لا تخبره يا أمي.

قالت السيدة مارش: "لا، يا جو، يجب أن لا تقولي أشياء سخيفة كهذه. كان علي أن لا أدعك تذهب إلى هناك، يا ميغ. قد يبدو أن موفات طيبين ولكنهم همهم الأكبر هو المال، أتمنى أن لا تكون زيارة تلك سيدة بالنسبة لك."

"لقد استمتعت كثيرًا بسمى منها - وكان مسلياً جداً. ولكنني تعلمت أشياء كثيرة. كما أتي أعرف الآن كم بدعت سخيفة. ثم تابعت: "ولكن هل تشعرين الخطط لنا، يا أمي؟"

"أجل يا عزيزي، مثل جميع الأمهات، أضع خططًا، ولكن ليس كتلك تحدثت عنها السيدة موفات. أنت وجو كبيران كنائبة لنعرف ما أريد لكما. بالطبع أريدكما جميلاً وصغيرين، وأريدكما أن تتزوجا وتكونا سعيدتين، لأن الأفضل لكل فتاة أن تكون سعيدة بزواجها. ومن الصواب التفكير بذلك يا ميغ، من الصواب أن نأمل بذلك؛ ومن الحكمة أن نتحضر له؛ وعندما تحين الوقت قد تستطيعين زوجة صلبة وسليمة. ولكن أريدكما أن تزوجي رجلاً أحبًا. فقط لأنهم أحبه ويقدرون ذلك من الأشياء الجيدة. أحب أن أراك زوجات رجال فقراء، إن كنت سعيدات وتشعر بالحب."

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Chapter Nine
A VERY BAD DAY!

After Meg returned, the four girls began to enjoy the spring. They went for long walks, gathering wild flowers; they worked in the garden, where each had a part to herself, planting it with whatever flowers she liked. They went in a boat on the river with Laurie; in fact Laurie took part in most of the things which they did. On rainy days they wrote for the little weekly newspaper, put together by Jo, which Meg read aloud to them in Jo's top room every Saturday night. After a time, Laurie was allowed to write for this newspaper, and to be present at the Saturday night readings.

It was because of this that he thought of making the old bird-house into a post-office. It was near the wall separating the gardens and could be used by both families. They 'posted' all sorts of things to each other - poems and garden-seeds, music letters and cakes. Even old Mr. Laurence joined in the fun and sent unexpected presents, while his gardener, who was very friendly with old Hannah, sent her a love letter. How they all laughed! Beth was the postman for the March family, and they all enjoyed the fun of having their own post-office.
Soon the spring ended and it was summer. One warm day in June, Meg came back from her work and called to the others: «The King children are going away tomorrow for three months at the sea. So I am free! I have no work for three months. How I shall enjoy it!»

She found Jo equally happy, but very tired after preparing her aunt's clothes and seeing her off for a long stay in the country.

«What will you do with your free time?» asked Amy.

«I shall stay in bed late in the mornings,» replied Meg, «and then get up and do nothing - nothing but rest all day.»

«I would not like that,» said Jo. «I have brought back plenty of books, and I shall read, and read - that is, when I'm not having fun.»

«Don't let us do any lessons, Beth,» said Amy. «If Meg and Jo do nothing but play and rest, we ought to do the same.»

«Well, I will, if Mother doesn't mind. I want to learn some new music and I must make some summer clothes for my dolls.»

«May we all be really free, Mother,» asked Meg, «and just do nothing but what we like?»

«You may try your plan for a week, and see how you like it. I think that, by the end of the week, you will be very tired of all play and no work.»
«Oh no,» said Meg. «I shall love it.»

The next morning Meg came down late to breakfast. She did not enjoy eating it alone, and the room was dirty because Beth had not cleaned it. Amy had left her books lying about. Jo had not changed the flowers. Only her mother's corner of the room looked as usual.

Meg sat dreaming of the pretty dresses she would like to buy. Jo had gone out after breakfast to spend the morning on the river with Laurie. Beth left the breakfast things for Hannah to wash and went to look for something from which to make doll's clothes. When she was tired of this she left all the things on the floor and went to her piano.

Amy put on her best white dress and sat in the garden. When she got tired of doing nothing she went for a walk and was caught in the rain, which spoilt her dress.

In the evening the girls told their mother how much they had enjoyed the day, but Mrs. March did not think that they looked very happy. All that week their work was done by Hannah and Mrs. March, and so the house was well looked after, while Meg sat trying to make her clothes look like Annie Moffat's, and Jo read until her eyes were tired, and she quarreled with everyone - even with Laurie. Amy was the most unhappy, because she found that, without Meg and Jo to help her, she had nothing to do except

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draw, and she soon grew tired of that. Beth sometimes forgot that she was supposed to be lazy, and she went on with some of her usual work, but even she was less peaceful and happy than usual.

On the last day of the week Mrs. March decided to give the girls a lesson. When they came down in the morning there was no breakfast, and the kitchen fire had not been lighted. Meg went upstairs to see what was the matter.

«I am not ill,» said Mrs. March. «Hannah and I are very tired, so I have given Hannah a day's rest and I shall stay quietly in my room and go out later for a walk. You will have to do without us.»

Jo was pleased to have something to do. She and Meg prepared the breakfast and took some to their mother. The tea was badly made and the eggs were hard, but Mrs. March only smiled. She had taken some food up before, knowing what sort of breakfast the girls might bring, but she did not let them see that she did not eat what they had brought.

«They are going to have a hard day, but it will do them good,» she thought.

Meg was not at all pleased with the way she had cooked the breakfast, so Jo offered to get the dinner. Remembering her quarrel with Laurie, she thought she would ask him to dinner and make friends again.

«You had better see what there is before you ask any friends,» said Meg.
"Oh, there's plenty of meat and green stuff, and I shall get some fish and some fruit, and make some coffee."

"Don't try too many things, Jo. You can't really cook anything but sweets, and you had better ask Mother before you buy anything."

"Of course I shall," said Jo, going to Mrs. March's room. Her mother looked up from her book and said, "Buy what you like. I shall be going out to dinner later on."

Jo could hardly believe it was her mother sitting in a chair reading so early in the morning.

"Nothing seems right this morning," she said to herself. "There's Beth crying - that is always a sign that there is something wrong with this family."

She hurried down to find Beth crying as though her heart would break. Her little bird, Pip, was lying dead. His food box was empty and there was no water.

"I made him die," cried Beth. "I forgot to feed him. Oh, Pip, how could I be so unkind?"

Jo picked up the little bird and found it quite dead.

"I'll never, never have another bird," cried Beth. "I'm too bad to have one."

Jo would have liked to stay with Beth, but she had so much to do that she had to leave her to the others and go back to the kitchen to 'wash up'. Here she found that the water was cold, as the fire had not been
lighted. It took some time to light it, and she decided that it would be best to go out to buy the food while waiting for the water to get hot. She bought some fish - but not enough for the party, and some not very good fruit. She found that she did not know much about buying food.

Meg had promised to make the bread but she sat talking to her friend, Sallie Gardiner, and forgot.

Jo opened the door. «Did you remember the bread?»

«Oh! I'll make it now,» said Meg.

She made it hurriedly, so it was heavy and burnt.

Miss Croker was an old lady whom they tried to help; but not one liked her. She arrived to dinner just after Mrs. March had gone out For a walk; so Meg had to sit and talk to her while Jo cooked the dinner. There were so many things to do! The meat had to be cooked - and the fish; and the fruit had to be prepared, and the table had to be set ready.

At last Jo rang the bell. The dinner was nearly an hour late. Poor Jo! Everything had gone wrong. The meat was cooked too much; the fish was cooked too little and there was not enough of it; and the bread was black.

Amy laughed; Miss Croker looked angry and Meg looked hurt. Only Laurie was kind, and talked and laughed as though he was enjoying his dinner.

«Well,» thought Jo, «the fruit will be good,
because I put plenty of sugar on it and we have cream to put on it."

Miss Crocker tasted it first, and quickly drank some water. Laurie ate his bravely without saying a word; then Amy, who had taken rather a lot, began to cry out. She got up quickly and ran from the table.

«What is it?» asked Jo.

«You put salt instead of sugar,» said Meg. «and the cream is bad because you forgot to put it in the ice-box.»

Jo's face was very red and she was nearly crying. When she looked at Laurie she saw that he was trying not to laugh. Quite suddenly she laughed too—laughed until the tears ran down her face. So did all the others, even Miss Crocker.

Meg helped Jo to clear the table, and to 'wash up' and clean the kitchen, while Laurie took Amy for a drive. They were so tired that they did not wish to do any more work that day, but as there were friends coming to tea they had to hurry to be ready.

When Mrs. March came back she found the three girls still working. They were not able to sit down and rest until late in the evening.

«What a very bad day!» said Jo to her mother.

«Not a bit like home,» put in Amy.

«Not without you,» said Beth, putting her arms round her mother.
"Well, girls," said Mrs. March, "are you pleased with this week, and do you want another week like it?"

"I don't," said Jo.

"Nor I," said the others.

"You think, then, that it is better to have a few duties, and to work for the others?"

"I'm tired of this week," said Jo. "I mean to begin work again."

"Suppose you learn to cook," said her mother. "Every girl ought to learn that," she added, smiling, for she had met Miss Crocker and heard about Jo's dinner.

"Mother," said Jo, "did you go away just to let us see how silly we were?"

"Yes, I wanted you to understand that we can only be happy in the home when each does her part. I thought it would be a good lesson for you to see what happens when no one helps in the house, and you each do only what you like, without thinking of the others. Aren't you all tired of having nothing to do?"

"Yes, we are!" said the girls.

"قالت السيدة مارش: "حسنًا يا بناتي، هل أنتين مسرورات بهذا الأسبوع، هل ترين أسبوعًا آخر مثله؟" "قالت جو: "أنا لا أريد." وقالت كل من الأخريات: "ولا أنا." "اعتقد أن من الأفضل الحصول على بعض الأعمال، والعمل للآخرين؟" "قالت جو: "لقد تعبت من هذا الأسبوع، وأريد أن أبدأ بالعمل ثانية."


"قالت جو: "أمي، هل ذهبت لكي تجلينا نرى كم كنا سخافين؟" "أجل، أردت أن تفهم أننا نكون سعداء في المنزل فقط عندما تقوم كل بواجبها. واعتقدت أنه سيكون درساً جيداً لكي أن ترين ماذا يحدث عندما لا نتعاون أحد في المنزل، وكل من تفعل ما يريده من دون التفكير بالآخرين. ألسنت جميعاً تعبات من عدم وجود شيء تفعله؟" "قالت البنات: "أجل، عن كذلك!"
Chapter Ten
DREAMS AND WISHES

One fine September day, the four sisters had walked to the shaded part of a hill not far from their house. Laurie, who had been very lazy that morning, found them all working under the trees. Meg was doing needlework, Amy was drawing, Beth was gathering pretty-coloured seeds, and Jo was reading from a book to the others.

They were all so busy that they did not notice Laurie until he was quite near. Then he said, "May I come in, please - or shall I be a trouble to you?"

Meg looked as if she did not want him to come, but Jo said: "Of course, you may come in. We should have asked you before, but we thought you wouldn't want to join such a party of girls."

"I always like your parties, but if Meg doesn't want me, I'll go away."

"You can stay if you do something," said Meg. "It's against the rules to be lazy here."

"I'll do anything you like if you let me stay. I'm so tired of being alone in the house."

"Then take this book and read to us," said Jo.

Laurie took the book and read it aloud to the end.
Then he said: «And now may I ask what this new plan is that you seemed to have started?»

«Shall we tell him?» Meg asked, looking at her sisters.

«Well,» said Jo, «after our first lazy week we each decided to do a certain amount of work every day. Mother likes us to be out of doors as much as possible, so we bring our work here and have very happy times. We've been pretending that we are pilgrims, and that dreamland is there, over the hill.»

Jo pointed, and Laurie looked through an opening in the wood, across the fields on the other side of the river, to the green hills in the distance which rose to meet the sky. The sun was low, and the clouds were shining in the golden light, like the walls of some wonderful city.

«Wouldn't it be fun if all our dreams came true, and we could live in them?» said Jo.

«I have dreamed so many that it would be hard to say which one I'd most like to come true,» said Laurie.

«Well, you'll have to decide,» said Meg. «Now tell us which of your dreams you like best.»

«I'll tell mine if you will all tell yours.»

«Yes,» said the girls, «we will. Now, Laurie.»

«After I'd seen as much of the world as I wanted to,» said Laurie, «I would go to live in Germany, and have as much music as I wanted, and at last become a music critic.»
famous musician myself. I would never trouble about money or business, but I would just live for what I like. That's my dream. Now, what's yours, Meg?»

Meg took a long time before she said slowly, «I should like a lovely house, full of lovely things, nice food, pretty clothes, plenty of money, pleasant people.»

«Wouldn't there be a man in your house?» asked Laurie.

«I said 'pleasant people', said Meg, not looking at him.

«Why don't you say you'd like a good-looking, wise husband,» said Jo, «and some dear little children? You know that your dream house wouldn't be perfect without them.»

«Well, you would have nothing but pens and paper and books in yours,» replied Meg hotly.

«Of course; I should have rooms filled with books, and a pen which would help me to write books of my own - to make me the most famous writer in the world.»

«My dream is just to stay safe at home with Mother and Father, and help to take care of the family,» said Beth.

«No other wishes?» asked Laurie.

«Not since I had my little piano.»

«I have very many wishes,» said Amy, «but my favourite is to go to Rome, paint pictures, and be the greatest artist in the world.»

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«Oh! » said Laurie. «We all want to be rich and famous except Beth.»

«I wonder where we shall all be in ten years' time?» said Jo.

«I hope I shall have done something to be proud of by then,» said Laurie, «but I'm almost afraid I'm too lazy, Jo.»

«Mother says you'll work when you have some good reason to make you work.»

«Does she? I hope she's right. I ought to work to please Grandfather, but he wants me to go to college for four years, and then be a merchant and look after his ships. But I don't want that sort of life - I should hate it. If I go to college for four years, that ought to be enough for Grandfather. If there was anyone else to stay with him, I'd run away at once to Germany and my music.»

Laurie spoke more angrily than they had ever heard him speak before.

«You ought to do as your grandfather wants, Laurie,» said Jo. «if he sees that you work hard now and at college, I am sure he will be kind to you. There will be no one to stay with him if you go away.»

That night, when Beth played to his grandfather the simple music which the old man loved, Laurie stood outside in the shadow, and listened. He said to himself, «How lonely Grandfather would be if I went away! I'll let my dream go, and I'll stay with him while he needs me, for I am all he has.»

曰: "أو؛ كننا نريد أن نصبح أغنى ومثيرين ما عدا بيث.

قال جو: "أتساءل أين سنكون بعد عشر سنوات.

قال لوري: "أمل أن أكون قد فلدت شيئاً أتخرجه حتى ذلك الحين، ولكنني أخشى أنني كسول جداً يا جو.

تقول أمي إنك تعمل عندما تجد سبباً وجيهاً بدافعك إلى ذلك.

حقاً أهل أن تكون على حق. على أن أعمل لأسعد جدي، ولكنه يريدني أن أذهب إلى الجامعة لأربع سنوات ثم أصبح تاجراً وأهتم بفسفته. ولكني لا أحب ذلك النوع من الحياة - سأكره ذلك. إن ذهبت إلى الجامعة لمدة أربع سنوات، فسكون ذلك كافياً جداً. ولو كان هناك شخص آخر ليلقبوه معي، لذهبتي فوراً إلى ألمانيا والموسيقى.

تكلم لوري بغضب لم يغدهه من قبل.

قال جو: "عليك أن تفعل ما يريد جدك، يا لوري. وإن رأى أنك تعمل بجهد الآن وفي الجامعة، فأننا متأكدين بأنه سيكون لطيفًا معك. إن ليس هناك أحد ليبقى معي إن رحلت.»

وفي تلك الليلة، عزفت بينج لجود الموسيقى البسيطة التي أحبتها الرجل العجوز، وكان لوري يقف في الخارج متفاوتاً يستمع. قال لنفسه: "كم سيكون جدي بعيداً إن رحلت، أحتاج إلى حلمي وسألني معه ما دام يحتفظ، أنا كل ما يملكه."
Chapter Eleven
A NASTY TELEGRAM

"November is the most unpleasant month in the whole year," said Meg, standing at the window one grey afternoon, looking out at the frozen garden.

"That's the reason I was born in it," said Jo.

"If something very pleasant happens now, we shall all think it is a delightful month," said Beth, who took a hopeful view of everything, even in November.

"Yes," said Meg. "but nothing pleasant ever does happen in this family. We go along, day after day, without a bit of change, and with very little fun."

"You are sad, poor dear!" cried Jo. "And I'm not surprised, for you see other girls having a lovely time, while you do nothing but work, work from one year's end to another."

Beth, who was still looking out of the window, said, smiling. "Two pleasant things are going to happen: Mother is coming down the street, and Laurie is coming through the garden as if he had something nice to tell us."

Mrs. March and Laurie came in together. A few minutes later there was a ring at the front door, and Hannah came in with a letter.
«It's one of those nasty telegrams,» said Hannah, as if she was afraid that it would explode in her hand.

Mrs. March turned white as she took it, and when she had read it, she fell back, with a cry, in her chair.

Jo took up the telegram and read:
Mrs. March,
Your husband is very ill. Come at once.
S. Hale,
Blank Hospital, Washington.

For a few minutes everyone was silent. Then Mrs. March said, "I shall go at once, but it may be too late. Oh, children, children, help me to bear it!"

The girls gathered round their mother as she held out her arms to them. For a few minutes they all wept, until Hannah dried her tears and said, "I won't waste any more time in crying. I'll go and get your things ready for your journey."

"She's right - there is no time for tears now," said Mrs. March. "Stop crying, and let me think over my plans. Where is Laurie?"

"I am here," said Laurie. "What can I do to help?"

"Send a telegram to say that I will come by the morning train."

"I'll go at once," said Laurie. "Is there anything else I can do?"
"تستطيع أن تترك رسالة للعمة مارش، جو، أحضري لي قلماً ولبعض الورق.
وخرجت جو أن والدتها كانت تكتب للعمة مارش لتطلب منها المال للرحلة، وفكرت: "كم أتمنى لو كان لدي بعض المال لأعطيها.
قالت السيدة مارش: "الآن يا نوري، ما هو الرسالة، ليس عليك الإسارا فإن أستطيع الرجل حتى صباح الغد، جو، اذهب واشترى هذا الأشياء التي سأحتاجها ووالدك. بيث، اذهب إلى السيد لورانس واطلب منه بعض الشراب - الآن يمكنك طلب أي شيء لك. تعالي يا ميج ساعدني لانتقاء ملابس الرحلة.

لغرفة وحيدة الجميع جيداً بحيث لم يتسنى لهن الوقت للبكاء بعد ذلك طبعت بيج من واحاتنا أن تستريح قليلاً ركبتها تعود لها بعض الشاي، فيما هي تقوم بذلك، عاد السيد لورانس الجوز مع بيث.
قال: "لقد أخبرتي بيث عن مرض زوجك، إنه خسر جد حزين. هذا هو الشراب الذي طلبه، كما أحضرت هذه الأشياء التي ربما تكون مفيدة، يمكنك الوظيفه في أثناء غيابك سأبذل قصارى جهدي لمساعدة الفتيات. لكن هل تشعرين بأن يمكنك القيام بهذه الرحلة الطويلة بمفرده؟ هل ستحتلى بمغرفك؟"

بدت السيدة مارش للحظة كأنها ستكون سعيدة بمرافقتها، لأنها كانت نواعماً ما خائفة من القيام بالرحلة الطويلة بمفردها، لكنها سرعان ما قررت بأنها لم تستطع السماح للرجل المسن بالسفر مسافة طويلة كهذه.
could not allow the old man to go so far. She told him so, with the warmest thanks for his offer. He walked away, saying that he would be back soon.

Meg was bringing a cup of tea to her mother when she was surprised to meet Mr. Brooke.

"I have heard the sad news of your father's illness, Miss March," he said in a kind and quiet voice, which sounded very pleasant to Meg. "I am going to Washington for Mr. Laurence," he went on, "to buy some things which he needs there, and I have come to ask if Mrs. March will allow me to go with her. I shall be so glad if I can give her any help."

"How kind you are!" said Meg. "Mother will be very pleased. I am sure: and we shall all be glad to know that she has someone to take care of her."

Meg spoke as if in a dream and, she forgot herself entirely until something in the brown eyes looking down at her made her remember the cooling tea, and lead the way into the sitting-room, saying that she would call her mother.

Everything was arranged by the time that Laurie came back with a letter from Aunt March. It was not a very kind letter, but it enclosed the money for Mrs. March's journey. Jo had not yet come back, and they were all beginning to wonder what had happened to her. At last she walked in, put twenty-five dollars into her mother's hands and said, "This money is for Father - to help him in his illness and to bring him home."
"My dear, where did you get it?" asked Mrs. March. "I hope you haven't done anything foolish or wrong."

"No, I didn't steal it," said Jo, in a rather troubled voice. "I only sold what was my own." As she spoke she took off her hat, and they all cried out when they saw that her hair was cut short.

"Your hair! Your beautiful hair!"

"Oh, Jo, how could you?" cried Mrs. March.

She seemed unable to say any more, but she looked at Jo in a way which made Jo feel that what she had done had been worth doing.

That night, when they were all in bed, Amy and Beth were soon asleep. Meg thought that Jo was also asleep, until she heard a sound of quiet weeping.

"Jo, dear, what are you crying about?" she asked.

"My - my hair!" said poor Jo, trying to stop her tears. "But I'm not sorry," she said bravely. "I'd do it again tomorrow if I could."
Chapter Twelve

BETH GETS SCARLET FEVER

Breakfast was very early next morning. It seemed strange to the girls to be up at that early hour.

«Children, I leave you to Hannah's care - and dear Mr. Laurence will, I know, be a good friend to you. Go on with your work, and don't lose hope. Work is always a help in time of trouble.»

«Yes, Mother.»

«Meg, dear, look after your sisters. In any difficulty, ask Hannah or Mr. Laurence. Jo, write to me often, and be my brave girl, always ready to help. Beth, your music will help you, and you have your little home duties; and Amy, I know that you will be good and try to help the others all you can.»

«We will, Mother! We will!»

They heard the carriage coming; but although their hearts were very heavy they did not cry. They sent loving words to their father, knowing that he might never hear them. They kissed their mother quietly, and tried to wave their hands happily as she drove away.

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back, Mrs. Match saw it shining on the girls who
were standing at the gate with old Mr. Laurence, the
good Hannah and the friendly Laurie.

"How kind everyone is to us." she said, turning to
Mr. Brook who was sitting beside her in the carriage.

"Of course they are," he said, "because they all
love you."

Mrs. March felt that the kindness of the young
man would be a great help to her on her long journey.

When the carriage was out of sight, the girls came
inside the house and they began to cry. Hannah
wisely left them alone for a time. Then she came in
with a coffeepot, saying: "Now, my dears, remember
what your mother said, and don't cry any more. Come
and have a cup of coffee, and then we'll all work, as
we promised your mother we would."

They sat round the table drinking the coffee and Jo
said, "Hope and keep busy - that's what we must do.
Let's see who can remember it best. I shall go to Aunt
March as usual."

"I shall go to teach the King children," said Meg,
wishing that she hadn't made her eyes so red. "But I'd
much rather stay at home and attend to things here."

"No need of that," said Amy. "Beth and I can
keep house perfectly well. Hannah will tell us what to
do, and we'll have everything nice when you come
home."

This made the girls laugh and they all felt better
for it.
A few days later a letter came from their mother which made them all very happy. Although their father was still ill, he was getting better. After that, Mr. Brooke wrote every day, and his letters became more and more hopeful as the week passed. Meg, as the head of the family, read these letters to the girls; and soon they were all writing letters to their father and mother and to Mr. Brooke.

For a week the amount of goodness in the old house would have been enough to supply all the neighbours. But, when they knew that their father was getting better, the girls did not try quite so hard to be good, and little by little they fell back into the old ways.

Jo caught a bad cold because she forgot to keep her head covered up warmly after her hair was cut. Aunt March told her to stay at home until she was better, because she did not like to hear a person read with a cold in her head. Jo liked this, and was glad to spend the time sitting by the fire and reading all the books she could find. Meg went every morning to teach the little King girls, but she spent most of her time at home in reading, again and again, the letters sent by Mr. Brooke, and in writing to him and her mother. Amy forgot much of the housework which she had promised to do, and she sat drawing when she ought to have been helping Hannah.

Only Beth kept on working. She did many of the

بعد أيام قلائل وصلت رسالة من والديهم جاءتني في منتهى الفرح. ومع أن والدهما زال مريضًا، إلا أنه بدأ يتحسن. بعد ذلك، أخذ السيد بروك يكتب كل يوم، وأصبحت رسائله مفعمة بالأمل مع مرور الأسبوع، وكانت ميغ تعبر تلك الرسائل إلى الفتيات، بما أنها سيدة العائلة وسرعان ما بدأ الجميع بكتابة الرسائل لوالديهم، ووالديهم إلى السيد بروك.

وقد أسير أبوع داً كمية الطبية في البيت القديم كافة لتغمر الجيران كلهم. لكن، عندما علم أن والدهما قد بدأ بالتحسن، لم يحاول الفتيات بذل الجهد لكي تبقين طيات، وشيئًا فشيئًا عدن إلى عادتهم القديمة.

أصيبت جو بزكام ردي، لأنها نسيت أن تقي رأسها مغطى بدفء بعد أن قضى شعرها. وقد طلبت منها العمة مارش البقاء في المنزل ريماً تتفسح، لأنها لا ت كنت الإسعاف إلى امرأة تقرأ وقد أصيبت رأسها بزكام أحيث جو ذلك، وقد سرت بمرضية الوقت وهي جالسة بالقرب من النار تقرأ كل الكتب التي استطاعت أن تعرّف عليها. ذهبت مع كل صبح لتعلم فتيات عائلة كينغ الصغيرات، لكنها أمضت معظم الوقت في المنزل تقرأ ماراً وتكراً رسائل السيد بروك، وتكتب له ولوالديها. وقد نسيت أمي الكثير من العمل المنزلي الذي وعدت بالقيام به، فجعلت ترسم في حين كان عليها مساعدة حطة.

بيت فقط نابت على عملها، وقد قامت بالأعمال التي نسيتها
things her sisters had not, and she tried to be a help to everyone. One day she said to Meg: «I wish you would go and see the Hummels. You know that Mother told us not to forget them.»

"I'm too tired to go this afternoon," replied Meg, who was resting in a chair by the fire.

"Can't you go, Jo?" asked Beth.

"It is too stormy for me with my cold."

"I thought it was almost well."

"It's well enough for me to go out with Laurie, but not well enough to go to the Hummels," said Jo, laughing.

"Why don't you go yourself?" asked Meg.

"I have been to them every day," said Beth, "but the baby is ill, and I don't know what to do for it. Mrs. Hummel goes away to work, and Lottchen takes care of it; but it gets worse and worse, and I think you or Hannah ought to go."

"I'll go tomorrow," said Meg.

"I would go today," said Jo, "but I want to finish my writing. Why don't you ask Hannah for something nice, Beth, and take it around? The air will do you good."

"I am very tired," said Beth. "I did hope that one of you would go."

"Amy will be in soon and she will go for us."

"Well, I'll rest a little and wait for her."

So Beth sat in a big chair to rest, the others
returned to their work, and the Hummels were forgotten.

About an hour later, when Hannah was sleeping by the kitchen fire, Beth quietly filled a basket with good things for the poor children. Then she put on her coat and hat and went out into the cold air, with a heavy head and a sad look in her eyes. It was late when she came back, and no one saw her go quietly upstairs and shut herself in her mother’s room. Jo found her there half an hour later, sitting on the bed and looking very ill.

“What's the matter?” Jo cried; but Beth put out a hand as if to stop her sister from coming near.

“You've had scarlet fever, Jo, haven't you?” she asked.

“Yes; years ago, when Meg did. Why?”

“I'll tell you,” said Beth; and then, beginning to cry, she went on - «Oh, Jo, the baby's dead!»

“What baby?”

“Mrs. Hummel's; it died in my arms before she got home.»

“Oh! My poor dear! I ought to have gone,” said Jo, taking her sister in her arms as she sat down in her mother's big chair. «What did you do when the baby died?»

“I just sat and held it softly till Mrs. Hummel came back with the doctor. He said it was dead, and then he looked at the two other children, and said that
they had scarlet fever, and he told Mrs. Hummel that she ought to have called him before. But she said, “I’m so poor, and I tried to cure the baby myself, but now it’s too late, and it’s only with the help of others, Doctor, that I shall be able to pay you.” Then he smiled and was very kind, and he looked at me and he gave me some stuff which I must drink so that I may not get the fever.”

“No, you won’t get it!” cried Jo, holding her close.

“Oh, Beth, if you are ill I shall never forgive myself.”

“Don’t be afraid. I don’t think I shall have it badly. I’ve taken the stuff, and I feel better,” said Beth, trying to look as well as she could.

“If only Mother were at home!” said Jo. “I’ll call Hannah. She knows about illness.”

“Don’t let Amy come; she has not had it, and I should hate to give it to her. Are you sure that you and Meg can’t have it again?”

“I don’t think so, but I don’t care if I do,” said Jo, “because I allowed you to go to the Hummels in that way, when I was doing my writing at home.”

When Hannah came she at once made them both feel happier. “Every one has scarlet fever,” she said, “and no one dies of it if they are treated properly.” Jo believed her and she went up to call Meg. When they were together again, Hannah said, “Now I’ll tell you
what we'll do. We will have Dr. Bangs, just to look at you, dear, and to see that we start right. Then we'll send Amy off to Aunt March for a time, so that she may not catch the fever; and one of you girls can stay at home and help for a few days."

"I shall stay, because I'm the oldest," said Meg.

"I shall, because if I had done my duty and gone to see the Hummels, Beth would not be ill," said Jo.

"Which will you have, Beth?" asked Hannah.

"We don't need more than one."

"Jo, please," said Beth.

This settled the point, and Meg, feeling a little hurt, said, "I'll go and tell Amy."

When Amy heard that she was to be sent to Aunt March she was angry.

"I don't like Aunt March," she said, "and I don't wish to be sent off as if I am in the way."

"It's only to keep you well," said Hannah. "You don't want to have the fever, do you?"

"No. I don't; but I expect I shall have it, for I've been with Beth all the time."

Just then Laurie came in, and he was soon told of all that had happened. When he heard that Amy did not wish to go to Aunt March, he began to talk very kindly to her.

"Now, Amy," he said, "if you help your sisters and Hannah by going to Aunt March like a good little..."
girl, I will come to see you every day and I will take you out and we will have lovely times together.»

At last, when he had told her at some length about the lovely times they would have, Amy kissed him and said that she would go.

«Now, is there anything else I can do?» Laurie asked.

«Go and get Dr. Bangs,» said Meg. «We can't decide anything until he comes.»

«He's a good boy,» said Jo, watching him jump over the wall as he hurried away.
Chapter Thirteen
A SAD LOOK

When Dr. Bangs came he said that Beth had scarlet fever. He thought that she would have it lightly, but when he heard the story of the Hummels he looked serious. He said that Amy should go at once to Aunt March.

Beth soon became very ill. Dr. Bangs came to see her often, but he was a very busy man and he was glad to leave Beth in the care of the good Hannah. Meg did not go to teach the King children because it was thought that she might take the fever to them. She stayed at home and did housework. When she wrote to Mrs. March she felt that she ought to tell her mother about Beth's illness; but Hannah said, «No, my dear, don't say anything about it; Beth isn't so very bad, and it would be wrong to trouble your mother while your father is so ill.»

Mrs. March wrote from Washington that Mr. March was not so well, and that he would not be coming home for a long time. Beth grew worse, and Jo, who attended to her by day and night, was very troubled when she found that Beth did not know her, and that she called the others by wrong names, and often cried out for her mother.
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الفصل الثالث عشر

نظرية حزينة

عندما أتي الطبيب بانز قال إن بيث مصابة بالحمى القرمزية. اعتقد أنها ستصاب بها خفيفة، لكن عندما سمع قصة العائلة هامل، بدأ قلقاً وقال إن على آمي الذهاب فوراً إلى العمة مارش.

سرعان ما أصبحت بيث مريضة جداً، وغالباً ما جاء الطبيب بانز لرؤيتها، لكنه كان رجلاً شديد الانهماك، وكان مرتاحاً أن يترك بيث برعاية حنة الطيبة. لم تذهب ميغ لتعليم أطفال عائلة كينغ لأنها اعتقد أنها ربما تنقل الحمى لهم. بقيت في المنزل وقامت بالأعمال المنزلية. وعندما كتب إلى السيدة مارش، شعرت أنه ينبغي أن تخبر والدتها عن مرض بيث؛ لكن حنة قالت: لا يأ زرني، لا تقولي شيئاً عن ذلك؛ إذ إن حالة بيث ليست بهذا السوء، وسكون خطاً أن تقلقي والدتاك في حين أن والدك مريض جداً.

كتبت السيدة مارش من واشنطن أن السيد مارش ليس بحالة جيدة جداً، وأنه لن يعود إلى المنزل إلا بعد وقت طويل. ساءت حالة بيث، أما الجو التي كانت تعني بها نهاراً وليل، فقد تمتلك كثيراً عندما اكتشفت أن بيث لم تعرف إليها، وأنها كانت تنادي الآخرين باسماء خاطئة، وغالباً ما كانت تنادي والدتها.
One morning, when Dr. Bangs came, he looked at Beth for a long time, held one of her hot hands in both his own, and then said to Hannah: "If Mrs. March can leave her husband, I think she should come."

Jo, who was standing near, turned white. "I'll send a telegram at once," she said. She hurried off and was soon back again. While she was taking off her coat, Laurie came in with a letter saying that Mr. March was better. Jo read it thankfully, but the heavy weight did not seem lifted from her heart, and she looked so unhappy that Laurie asked quickly: "What is it? Is Beth worse?"

"I've sent for Mother," said Jo, with a sad look as she tried to get off her heavy shoes.

"I'm so glad," said Laurie. He put her in a chair and pulled off her shoes for her and then asked, "Did you do it yourself, without asking anybody?"

"No, the doctor told us to."

"Oh, Jo, it's not so bad as that, is it?" cried Laurie.

"Yes, it is; she doesn't know us; she doesn't look like my Beth - and there's nobody to help us bear it."

As the tears streamed fast down poor Jo's face, she put out her hand in a helpless sort of way as if feeling in the dark. Laurie took it in his, saying as he did so - "I'm here, Jo; hold on to me, dear!"
She could not speak, but she did «hold on,» and holding the friendly hand seemed to help her.

At last she said, «You are a good doctor, Laurie, and such a good friend.»

«I think that tonight I shall bring you something that will do you even more good,» said Laurie.

«What is it?» cried Jo, forgetting her sadness for a minute in her wonder.

«I sent a telegram to your mother yesterday, and Brooke answered that she would come at once. She will be here tonight. Aren't you glad I did it?»

«Laurie, you're a dear! How shall I ever thank you? But what made you think of that?»

«Well, you see, I got rather troubled, and so did Grandfather. We thought that Hannah was wrong in saying that your mother must not be told about Beth—and we didn't like what we heard about Beth; we thought your mother ought to know. So we sent a telegram; and your mother is coming by the train which gets here at two o'clock. I shall go and bring her to you.»

«Oh, Laurie, I'm so happy!» said Jo as he went away.

Jo then went to tell Hannah and Meg the good news that Mr. March was better, and that Mrs. March was coming home.

Dr. Bangs came, and after looking for some minutes at Beth, he said: «She is very near the time

«أحيرت قالت: "إنك لطيب ماهر يا لوري، وصديق طيب للغاية. " قال لوري: "أعتقد أنني الليلة سأحضر لك شيئاً يفيدك أكثر. " ما هو؟ صارت جرو وقد نسيت حزنتها للحظة في غمرة دهشتها. " لقد أرسلت برقية إلي والدتك يوم أمس، ورد بروك أنها ستأتي في الحال. ستكون هنا الليلة. ألسنت سعيدة لأنني فعلت ذلك؟ " لوري، إنك لرائع! كيف يسعني أن أشكرك؟ لكن ما الذي دفعك إلى التفكير في ذلك؟ " حسناً، تعلمني أنني قلت قيداً، وكذلك فعل جدي. اعتقنا أن حنة هي خاطئة في قولها إنك لطيب إخبار والدتك بشأن بيث… كما لم يرق لنا ما سمعنا عن بيث؟ اعتقنا أنه ينبغي لواتك أن تعرف. هكذا أرسلنا برقية، وأمك آتية في القطار الذي يصل إلى هنا عند الساعة الثانية. سذهب وآتي بها إليك.»

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when there will be a quick change - either for better or worse. I will come again later." The girls never forgot that night. They had no sleep, for they kept watch in Beth's room, with the sad feeling of being powerless which comes to us in hours like these.

Midnight came. Then another hour went by and nothing happened except that they heard Laurie starting for the station.

It was past two o'clock. Jo was standing at the window listening for the sound of the carriage; then she heard a movement by the bed, and, turning quickly, saw Meg kneeling by the bedside with her face hidden. She thought, «Beth is dead, and Meg is afraid to tell me.»

She went to the bed and saw that the look of pain on the lovely face of her little sister was gone. Beth looked as if she was at peace, and Jo said, «Goodbye, dear, dear Beth; good-bye!»

This waked Hannah, who had been taking a little rest. She came to the bed, looked at Beth, felt her hands, and then cried, «The fever has turned; she's sleeping easily. And now she'll soon be better. Oh, how wonderful it is!»

Before the girls could believe that it was true, the doctor came. He was rather an ugly man, but they thought his face was quite beautiful when he said with a fatherly look at them, «Yes, my dears, I think the little girl will get better this time. Keep the house quiet; let her sleep, and when she wakes, give her -.»
What they were to give they never heard, for they both went out into the dark hall and, holding each other close, wept tears of joy.

«If only Mother would come now!» said Jo.

«Listen!» cried Meg. «I think I hear the sound of the carriage.»

The sounds came nearer. Then there was a ring at the door. Hannah opened it, and they heard a call from Laurie, «Girls, she's come! She's come!»
Chapter Fourteen
MR BROOKE AND THE GLOVE

Beth woke from a long sleep to find her mother looking down upon her. She was too weak to wonder at anything, but she returned the loving kiss which her mother gave her, and then, without speaking, soon went to sleep again. While Mrs. March sat at the bedside, holding Beth's hand, she told the others all her news.

Evening came. Meg was in the sitting-room writing to her father to tell him of her mother's safe arrival. Jo went quietly to Beth's room where she found her mother in her usual place. Jo walked about the room, looking undecided and not very happy.

"What is the matter, dear?" asked Mrs. March.

"I want to tell you something, Mother."

"About Meg?"

"How did you know? Yes, it's about her. It's a little thing but it troubles me."

"Beth is asleep; speak low and tell me," said Mrs. March.

Jo settled herself on the floor at her mother's feet.

"Last summer," she said, "Meg left a pair of
gloves in the Laurences' house; and only one was returned. Laurie said to me: «Mr. Brooke has got it. He keeps it with his own gloves. Once he dropped it and I made fun about it. Then Mr. Brooke said that he liked Meg but dared not tell her because she was so young and he is so poor.»

Jo looked up into her mother's face: «Now, aren't you sorry to hear this?»

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

«I don't know anything about love and all that foolishness,» cried Jo. «In stories, girls show it by getting red in the face and growing thin and acting foolishly. Meg does not do that: she eats and drinks and sleeps like anyone else, but she gets a little red when Laurie makes fun about lovers.»

«Then do you think that Meg does not care about John?»

«Who?» cried Jo.

«Mr. Brooke. We began to call him John in Washington, and he likes it.»

«Oh! I know you'll take his part!» said Jo, who felt that this talk was not going to end as she wished it.

«He has been quite open about it. He told us that he loves Meg, but he wants to be able to give her a good home before he asks her to marry him. And I would not allow Meg to promise to marry anyone while she is so young.»

لورانس: وقد أعيد واحد منهم فقط. قال لي لوري: "إنه لدى السيد بروك. إنه يحتفظ به مع أنه، ذات مرة أسرته، فسخرته منه. بعد ذلك قال السيد بروك إنه أحبت ميج، ولكنه لم يجرؤ على إخبارها لأنها صغيرة جداً وهو في غاية الفقر." تظننت خو إلى وجه أمها وقالت: "الآن، ألا تشعرين بالأسف لسماع ذلك؟" سألت السيدة مارش: هل تظن أن ميج تكون له؟ صاحت جو: "لا أعرف شيئاً عن الحب وعن كل تلك الخصائص. ففي الروايات تظهر الفتيات ذلك بحرص الوجوه وتناحول التصرف بعناية. ميج لا تفعل ذلك، فهي تأكل وتشعر وتتلم مثل أي شخص آخر، ولكنها تعمر قليلاً عندما يخسر لوري من العشق." إذن هل تعتقدين أن ميج لا تكون لها؟" هتفت جو: "من؟"

السيد بروك. لقد بدأنا نندده جون في واشنطن. وهذا يروق له. "أوه، أعرف أنك ستتفقين إلى جانبها!" قالت جو التي أعطت أن هذا الحديث لن يتهدى مثلما اشتهرت. كان صريحاً فيما يختص بهذا الأمر. لقد أخبرنا أنه يحب ميج، لكنه يريد أن يكون قادرًا على منحها بنية جيدة قبل أن يطلب الزواج بها. وأنا لن أسمح لميج أن تعد بالزواج بأي إنسان وهي صغيرة جداً."
"Of course not!" said Jo. "I knew there was trouble coming! I wish I could marry Meg myself."

Mrs. March smiled. Then she said, "Jo, I don't want you to say anything to Meg. When John comes back and I see them together, I shall be able to see what her feelings are."

"I see it all now," said Jo. "They'll go about the house like lovers, and we shall have to get out of their way, and she will be of no use to tile any more. Oh, dear! Why aren't we all boys? Then there wouldn't be any trouble."

Jo looked up and saw the look of sadness in her mother's face. "You don't like it, Mother. I'm so glad! Let's send him away, and we'll all be happy together again."

"I ought not to feel sad, Jo. It is quite right that you should all have homes of your own. But it must be some years before John can make a home for her. I hope that things will go well for her."

"Don't you wish that she would marry a rich man?" asked Jo. "I had planned to have her marry Laurie, and to have plenty of money all her life. Wouldn't that be nice? He's rich and kind and good, and he loves us all."

"Don't make plans for other people, Jo. Time and their own hearts will make your friends' marriages. Making such plans may spoil your friendships."

"Well, I won't. But I hate to see things going..."
wrong, when a pull here and a cut there would straighten them out. I wish there was something one could drink to stop one growing up."

Meg came into the room with the finished letter in her hand.

"It's beautifully written," said Mrs. March, looking at the letter. "Please add: "Mother sends her love to John"."

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