Chapter Fifteen
THAT BAD BOY

In the next few days Laurie discovered that Jo had a secret. He did his best to make her tell him what it was. Very soon he saw that it was about Meg and Mr. Brooke, and he made up his mind to have some fun with them.

Meg herself was acting rather strangely.

"Meg is in love," said Jo to her mother. "She doesn't eat much, she lies awake at night, and she goes off by herself. What shall we do about it?"

"We can do nothing but wait and be kind to her, until Father comes back to put things right," said her mother.

A little later, Jo was handing out letters from the postbox. "Here's one for you, Meg," she said.

The next minute there was a cry from Meg.

"What is it, my child?" asked her mother, while Jo took the letter from Meg and read it.

"It's all a mistake," said Meg. "John Brooke didn't send this. Oh, Jo! How could you do it?"

And Meg hid her face in her hands and cried as if her heart was broken.

"Me! I've done nothing. What is she talking about?" cried Jo, surprised.

الفصل الخامس عشر
ذلك الصبي السيئ

اكتشف لوري في الأيام القليلة التالية أن جو تخفي سراً، فبذل جهده ليحملها على البرح به. وسرعان ما وجد أنها بشأن ميج والسيد بروك، فقد العزم على التسلية معهم.

ميج نفسها كانت تتصرف بغربة نوعاً ما. قالت جو لأمها: "إن ميج عاشقة. فهي لا تأكل كثيراً، وتبقى يافطة في الليل، كما أنها تبقى ببفردها. ماذا سنفعل بشأن ذلك؟" قالت والدتها: "لا يسعنا فعل أي شيء سوى الانتظار وأن تكون لطفاء معها. ربما يعود والدك ويضع الأمور في نصابها.

بعد قليل، قالت جو وهي توزع الرسائل من صندوق البريد: "هنا واحدة لك يا ميج:

وفي اللحظة التالية، انتقلت صبيحة من ميج. سألت والدتها: "ما الأمر يا طفلي؟" فيما أخذت جو الرسالة من ميج وقرأها.

قالت ميج: "إن هذا كل خطأ، إن جون بروك لم يرسلها. أوه، جوا! كيف سمعك القيام بذلك؟"

ثم خѣبت ميج وجهها بيدها وكتبت كأنا قلبياً تحدث:

هفت جو وهي مندهشة: "أنا أنا لم أفعل شيئاً. ما الذي تتحدث عنه؟"
Meg looked very angry as she gave Jo another letter: «You wrote this, and Laurie helped you. How could you be so unkind to us both?»

Jo and her mother read the letter:

My dearest Meg,

I can no longer wait to tell you how much I love you. I dare not tell your mother and father yet, but I think they would let us marry if they knew that you loved me too. Mr. Laurence will help me to get some well-paid work, and then, my sweet girl, you will make me happy. I beg you to say nothing to your family yet but to send one word of hope through Laurie to your loving John.

«Oh, that bad boy!» Jo began.

«Jo, are you sure that you did not help Laurie with this letter?» asked her mother.

«Indeed, Mother, I did not help. I never saw that letter before; I should not have written such a silly letter.»

«The writing is like John's,» said Meg.

«Did you reply to the letter?» her mother asked.

«Yes, I did,» said Meg.

«What did you write?»

«I wrote that I was too young to do anything about his letter, or to have secrets from you, and that he must speak to my father.»

Jo and her mother smiled.
"You have been very wise," said Jo. "Well, Meg, what did he write after that?"

"In this letter which Jo has just brought, he says that he has never written me such a love letter, and that he is very sorry that my bad sister, Jo, has tried in this way to make fun of us."

Jo picked up the two letters and read them through carefully: then she said quickly: "I don't believe John Brooke ever saw these letters. I think that Laurie wrote them both, and that he still has Meg's letter."

"Go and bring Laurie at once," said her mother to Jo. "I shall find out what he has done, and see that he does nothing of the kind again."

While Jo was gone, Mrs. March tried to find out what Meg's feelings were about John. "Do you love him enough to wait for him?" she asked.

"I am so angry that I don't want to think about loving any man for a very long time - perhaps never," replied the usually gentle Meg.

Meg ran out of the room as she heard Laurie come into the house with Jo. Mrs. March looked so serious that Laurie saw that she knew what he had done. She spoke to him alone for a long time. The two girls did not know what she said, but when Laurie came out of the room, he was very solemn, and they knew that he would never forget what had been said to him.

"I'll never tell Brooke till my dying day," he said to Meg, "and I do hope that you will forgive me."
«I will try,» said Meg, «but it was a very wrong thing to do.»

He looked so unhappy that Meg and her mother forgave him. Only Jo had nothing to say to him. When she did not speak, he bowed to her, turned round and went home.

As soon as he had gone, Jo wished that she had been kinder, and in a few minutes she set off for the big house to tell him so. She asked at first for his grandfather.

«Is Mr. Laurence in?» she said to the servant.
«Yes, miss, but I don't think he will see you.»
«Why not? Is he ill?»
«Oh, no, miss, but Mr. Laurie has made him angry, and I dare not go near him. Mr. Laurie has shut himself in his room and won't answer when I speak to him. Dinner is ready and they don't come to eat it!»

«I'll go and see what the trouble is,» said Jo. She went to Laurie's room and spoke to him through the door. Laurie called out, «Stop that, or I'll open the door and make you stop!»

Jo spoke again, and when the door opened she ran in. She saw that he was really angry, and so she went down on her knees and said, «Please forgive me. I came to be friends again.»

«Oh, get up and don't be silly,» said Laurie. «Grandfather has just shaken me, and I won't bear it. If anyone else had done it -...»
"I don't think anyone else will dare to do that if you look as angry as you do now. Why did he shake you?"

"Because I wouldn't tell him why your mother sent for me. I promised her that I wouldn't tell anyone about those letters I wrote. He was very angry and shook me. Then I was angry too, and I ran up to my room."

"But he didn't know that you had made a promise. I think you ought to go back and tell him that you wish you had not done what gave us all pain—though you cannot tell him what it was."

"No, I won't!"

"Now, Laurie, don't be silly. You can't stay here in your room for ever."

"I don't mean to stay. I shall run away and see the world—and enjoy myself."

"If I were a boy," she said, "we would run away together and have a wonderful time, but it wouldn't be right for a girl. I want you to make friends with your grandfather. If I get him to say he has forgiven you, will you promise not to run away?"

"Yes, but he won't do it—even for you."

Jo went at once to the old gentleman's room. He said, "Come in," in an angry voice.

"It's only Jo, sir," she said. "I've come to bring back a book and ask for another."

He looked at her as if he knew that this was not her real reason for coming.
«What has that boy been doing?» he asked. «Your mother sent for him, so I am sure that he has done something very wrong. What is it?»

«He did do wrong,» said Jo, «but we have forgiven him, and after what he has said to us we are all sure that he will not do the same thing again. We all promised not to tell what he had done.»

«That won't do,» said Mr. Laurence. «I wish to know whether he has been in any way unkind to your mother. If he has, I must beat him.»

«No, he has done nothing to my mother,» said Jo. «She does not wish anyone to know what happened, and Laurie promised her that he would not tell anyone. That is why he could not tell you, sir and I hope that you will forgive him.»

«Well, if that is so, I suppose I must,» said Mr. Laurence; «but he often makes me very angry, and I don't know how things will end if we go on in this way.»

«I'll tell you, sir,» said Jo. «He will run away.»

At this Mr. Laurence looked very troubled. «Very well! Go and bring him down to dinner,» said Mr. Laurence.

«But he won't come, sir. He is so angry because you said that you did not believe him when he said that he could not tell. And I think the shaking hurt his feelings very much.»

Mr. Laurence tried to look serious, but Jo laughed. She knew that she had won her point.
"I think if you write him a letter, saying that you now know that he promised my mother not to tell what he had done - and that you would not have shaken him if you had known this earlier - he will see how foolish he had been, and he will come down."

Mr. Laurence laughed again, and wrote the letter in such words as one gentleman might use to another after a really serious quarrel.

Jo kissed the top of his head. She took the letter, ran up to Laurie's room and put it under the door. She waited while he read it. Then he opened the door and said, «What a good fellow you are, Jo! Was grandfather very angry with you?»

«No; hardly angry at all.»

«Well, I seem to have been in trouble with everyone. Even you would not forgive me.»

«Go and eat your dinner with your grandfather,» said Jo.

Everyone thought that this was the end of the matter; but Meg remembered. She never spoke of John Brooke, but she thought of him often, and dreamed of him more than ever.
Chapter Sixteen
FATHER IS BACK

After her mother's return, Beth got better every day. A small bed was put in the sitting-room for her, and she was able to stay there during most of the day, enjoying the company of her mother and sisters and her much-loved cats.

The news from Washington was good. Mr. March was getting better. John Brooke was still with him, and he wrote to say that they hoped to come home early in the New Year. So the March family were expecting a very happy Christmas, and with Laurie's help they made plans for having a great deal of fun.

«I am so happy,» said Beth, «that if only Father was here I couldn't possibly be any happier.»

«And so am I! - And so am I!» said all the others.

Sometimes in this strange world, things happen just as they do in story-books and it was so with the March family on this wonderful Christmas Day.

The girls and their mother were looking very happily at the Christmas presents which they had given to one another and those which had come to them from the Laurences next door. While they were doing this, Laurie opened the door and quietly put in his head.
"Here's another present for the March family," he said in a strange voice.

Then he opened the door wider, and in his place a tall man appeared - so much covered up that his face could not be seen. Behind him was another - tall man, who tried to say something but did not seem able to speak.

The first tall man uncovered his face and, with cries of delight; the girls saw that he was their father. It is not possible to tell of all that happened afterwards. The girls and their mother put their arms round Mr. March and kissed him. Quite by mistake, the second tall man - Mr. Brooke - kissed Meg. Hannah came from the kitchen to join in the general happiness, and to tell them that the Christmas dinner would soon be ready.

Mrs. March said to her husband, «Before we have dinner, you and Beth must have a little rest.»

She put each of them into a big chair, but Beth did not stay long in her own chair; she joined her father in his chair, and they did not have as much rest as they ought to have done because they could not stop talking to one another.

Laurie and his grandfather and Mr. Brooke all came to dinner, and it was a very happy party. After dinner the visitors went away, for they knew that the

قالت السيدة مارش لزوجها: "قبل أن نتناول العشاء، ينبغي أن أتخذ إن وجب استراحة قصيرة." ثم وضعنا كلاً منهما في كرسي كبير، لكن وجب لما تمكن طويلًا في كرسيها؛ بل انضمت إلى أبيها في كرسيه، ولم بتلا الراحة التي كان ينبغي أن يحصلنا عليها لأنهما لم يستطيعا الكف عن التحدث إلى بعضهما.

أني لوري وجدتا والسيد بروك كلهم للعشاء، وكانت حفلة مفرحة جداً. وقد رحل الزائرون بعد العشاء لأنهم علموا أن أفراد عائلة مارش
March family would like to be alone together, and also that Beth and Mr. March needed rest.

That evening the little family was gathered round the fire in the sitting room. Mr. March was telling them how it happened that he came home earlier than they expected.

"When the weather became better," he said, "the doctor thought that I might come—and I wanted so much to surprise you all. I could not have done it without Brooke. He has been such a help on the journey—and, indeed, all through my illness, as your mother knows."

"Yes, indeed," said Mrs. March, "he is a most kind and helpful young man."

There was a happy, far-away look in Meg's eyes. "Such a happy Christmas," she said, "and it has been such a happy year."

"How can you say that it was a 'happy year'"? said Jo. "There was Father's illness, and then Beth's illness—and all sorts of nasty things."

I think that a lot of nice things have come to us this year," said Beth. "We've got to know Laurie and his grandfather, and I've played on the big piano next door, and I have a dear little piano of my own."

"And you went to the Hummels, and the baby died.

..."
in your arms, and you got scarlet fever, and nearly died of it," said Jo.

"It was rather a hard road for you all to travel," said Mr. March, "and the last part of it was certainly very hard; but from all that your mother has told me I know how well you have done, and I am proud of my little women."

Meg was sitting beside him. He took her hand in his, and he noticed that her fingers had become hard with needle work.

"Meg, my dear," he said, "I know how much work you have done to help your mother and sisters, and I am proud of this little hand. I hope that there will still be some time before I am asked to give it away."

He smiled down upon her and pressed the hand which he wanted so much to keep near him. Meg tried to look as if she did not know what her father meant, but she did not do it very well, and she knew that Jo was looking at her rather sadly.

Beth said quietly in her father's ear, "Say something nice about Jo. She has tried so hard, and she has been so very kind to me."

"Although Jo's hair is so short," said Mr. March, "she does not seem to be so like a boy as she was when I went away. I don't think she wants to be a boy..."
And now what have you to say about Beth? asked Amy. She badly wanted to hear what he would say about herself, but she was willing to wait.

"There is so little of her," said Mr. March, "that I do not know what to say. She might easily hide away so that we could not see her, but I do not think that she is quite so afraid of showing herself as she was.

Then he remembered how nearly he had lost her. He held her close, and said with his face against hers: "I've got you safe, my Beth, and I mean to keep you now."

He then looked down at Amy, who was sitting at his feet. He passed his fingers through her shining hair as he spoke: "I think that Amy is rather tired, for she has been running about all the afternoon. She wishes to be useful, and does not now think so much about being beautiful. That is a better way of making life beautiful for herself and others."

They were all silent for a time. There was a dream-like look on Beth's face, and Jo said to her:

"Any more. She is more careful about her dress, and she doesn't about the house as boys do. In fact she has become a nice quiet little woman I rather miss my wild girl, but if get in her place a strong hearted woman I shall be very happy. I couldn't find anything beautiful enough to be bought with the twenty-five dollars she sent me."

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«What are you thinking of, Beth?»

«I was thinking,» said Beth, «of that day when we all went up the hill, taking our work with us, and we looked at the hills beyond the river, to the sun shining behind the golden clouds. Laurie joined us, you will remember, and we all talked about our dreams for the future. Now, isn't this like one of our dreams come true?»

«I think it is,» said Jo.
Chapter Seventeen
WE ARE JUST FRIENDS

On the next day Mr. March sat in a big chair in the sitting-room, and the girls spent much of their time with him; now that their father was home again they felt that they could not see too much of him.

They looked out at the snow-man which Jo and Laurie had made, and some of them were surprised that neither Laurie nor Mr. Brooke came in to see them. Mr. and Mrs. March often looked at Meg, as if they were thinking a great deal about her and the young man next door. They thought that something must happen soon. This state of uncertainty was not good for the little family, and Jo could see very plainly that it was not good for Meg.

Meg did not look very happy. It was clear that one of her dreams had not yet come true.

"What is the matter with us all?" she said.

"You know very well what is the matter," said Jo. "It is your John who is causing all this trouble."

"Don't say 'my John'; it isn't right and it isn't true," said Meg, but she spoke the words "my John" as if they were not entirely unpleasant to her. "I've told you I don't care much about him. We are just friends,

الفصل السابع عشر
ذئب مجرد أصدقاء

في اليوم التالي جلس السيد مارش في كرسي كبير في غرفة الجلوس، وأمضت الفتيات معظم وقتهن معه؛ ومنا أن والدهن عاد إلى المنزل مجدداً، فقد شعرن أنهن لن يروه كثيرا.

نظرن إلى رجل التلجد الذي صنعته جو ولوري، وبعضهن استغربن عدم مجيء لوري والسيد بروك لرؤيتهم. وغالباً ما نظر السيد والسيدة مارش إلى ميغ، وكأنما يفكرون بها كثيراً وبالرجل الشباب في الجوار. ظننوا أن أمرٌ لا بد أن يحدث قريباً. هذه الحالة من الفقد لم تكن لعائلتهم الصغيرة، واستطاعت جو أن ترى بوتوم بالغ أنه لا يناسب ميغ.

لم تبد ميغ سعادته جداً. إذ كان واضحًا أن أحد أحلامها لم يتحقق بعد.

قالت: "ما بالنا جميعنا؟"

قالت جو: "تعرفين جيداً ما الأمر، إنه صديقك جون الذي يسبب كل هذه المشكلة."

قالت ميغ: "لا تقولي صديقك جون; هذا ليس صحيحًا وليس حقيقًا، لكنها طلقت بالكلمتين: صديقك جون. وكانهما ليستا غير عيبتين"
and now that he is back again we shall all be as we were before."

"I don't think we can," said Jo. "You are not like yourself. You seem so far away from me. I can see what has happened, and so can Mother. When it comes I can bear it like a man, but I wish it was all settled; I hate waiting. If you wish to do it, do it quickly and get it over."

Meg had some needlework in her hand. She was looking at it carefully, and seemed to be very busy. At last she said softly, "I can't do or say anything if he does not speak. And I don't think he will speak, because Father told him that I was too young to be married."

Meg looked as if she was not sure that her father was quite right on this point.

"If he does ask you to marry him," said Jo, "do you know what you will say? Will you tell him plainly that Father thinks you are too young, or will you go red, and begin to cry, and at last fall into his arms, just as people do in the story-books?"

"I'm not as weak and silly as you think," said Meg. "I know exactly what I am going to say. I have planned it all so that I shall not be taken by surprise."

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

"Well," said Meg, "if he speaks - and, as I've told you, I don't think he will - I shall say 'Thank you, Mr."

"Kalia. "لقد أخبرتك بأنني لا أكره له كثيرا. خن معدن أصدقاء, والآن بما أنه عاد, ستكون أصدقاء, مثلما كاتا في السابق."

قالت جو: "أنا أعتقد أنا ليستطيع ذلك. قالت لابنها كسابع عهد. تبديت بيئة جدا عني. أستطيع أن أرى ماذا حدث, وكذلك تستطيع والدتها. وعندما يحدث, أستطيع أن أتحمل كرجل, لكنني أريد أن أرى ماذا يهم;
فأنا أكره الانشار. إذا رحبت في تحقيقه: حققي سرعة وأنتي الأم."

كانت ميج تحمل شغلًا بالإبرة بيدها. كانت تنظر إليه بعناية وبدت أنها مشغولة جداً. أخبرت قالت بركة: "لا يساعي فعل أو قول أي شيء إن لم يكلم هو. ولا أعتقد أنه سيكلم, لأن والداه أخبرته بأنى صغيرة جداً كي أتزوج."

بدت ميج وكأنها ليست متأكدًا من أن والدها محتاً في وجهة نظره.

قالت جو: "إن هو طلب منك الزواج, هل تريد أن ما تقولين؟ هل سنخبرته بوضوح أن والدك يعتقد بأنك صغيرة جداً, أو هل ستستخرجين وتبدأين بالبكاء, وآخرين تقف بين ذراعي, تماماً مثلما يفعل الناس في الروايات؟"

قالت ميج: "لست ضعيفة وشفافة كما تظنين. أعرف تماماً ما أقوله."

لقد خططت لذلك كله كيلا تصدمي المفاجأة." نسأل جو: "هل تسمحين بإخباري بما ساتقولين؟" "حسنًا," قالت ميج, "إن هو تحدث - و, مثلما قلت لك, لا أعتقد أنه سيفعل - سأقول: شكراً لك يا سيدي بروك, إنه لطف منك، لكن
Brooke, it is very kind of you; but Father says that I am too young at present to think of such things, and I quite agree with him. So please do not say any more, but let us be friends, just as we used to be."

"I don't believe you will ever say that," said Jo, "and if you do, I am sure that he will not believe you. He will do just what lovers always do in the story-books, and then you will fall into his arms, if only because you don't want to hurt his feelings."

"You may learn a lot from the story-books you read," said Meg, "but you are quite wrong about John and me. I shall say exactly what I have told you. And then I shall stand up, and bow to him, and walk quickly out of the room."

Meg had no sooner said this than they heard the front door open, and a voice speaking in the hall.

It was the voice of John Brooke.
Chapter Eighteen
YOU'LL BE SORRY, MISS!

Meg and Jo both rose to their feet as the door of the sitting-room opened and the young man of whom they were talking stood before them.

"Good afternoon," he said. "I come to ask about your father. I do hope that he is not too tired after the long journey?"

"He is resting," said Jo, "but I am sure that he would like to see you. I will go and tell him that you are here."

"Don't wake him if he is asleep," said John Brooke.

"I expect he is reading," said Jo, and she went away quickly, leaving Meg and John alone together.

"Now we shall see what will happen," she thought. "I'm not going to be in any hurry to tell Father that he is here. I'll give them time to have a nice talk. We shall all feel better when we know what they are going to do."

As soon as Jo had gone, Meg also began to move towards the door.

"I am sure that Mother would like to see you, Mr. Brooke," she said. "Please sit down, and I will go and call her."

الفصل الثامن عشر
ستندمين يا آنسة!

نهضت ميغ ووجو بسرعة عندما فتح باب غرفة الجلوس ووقف الشاب الذي كنا نتحدثان عنه أمامهما.

قال: "عمسنا مساء. لقد جئت أسأل عن والدكما. آمل ألا يكون مرهقا بعد الرحلة الطويلة."

قالت جو: "إنه يستريح، لكنني متأكدة من أنه يود أن يراك. سأذهب وأخبره أنك هنا."

قال جون بروك: "لا توقظه إن كان نائمًا." قالت جو: "أتوقع أنه يقرأ. ثم انتقلت بسرعة تاركة ميغ ووجو معاً برفدها. أخذت تفكر: "الآن سنرى ما سوف يحدث. لن أكون في عبء من أمرى لإتخاذ والدي أنه هنا. سأتمحهما الوقت لأجراه حديث جميل. سنشعر جميعاً بتحسن عندما نعرف ما الذي سيفعله." وما أن ذهب جو، حتى بدأت ميغ تتحرك في اتجاه الباب. قالت: "أنا متأكدة أن أبي تود رؤيتك يا سيد بروك. أرجوك تفضل بالجلوس، وسأذهب كي أتداخلي."
John Brooke looked very hurt.

"Don't go, Meg," he said. "Are you afraid of me?"

He had never called her Meg before, and she was surprised to find how sweet it was to hear him say it. As she wished to appear friendly and easy, she put out her hand and said:

"How can I be afraid of you when you have been so kind to Father? I only wish I could thank you for it."

"Shall I tell you how you can thank me?" asked Mr. Brooke. He was holding her small hand in his own, and looking down at her with so much love in his brown eyes that her heart began to beat very fast. She felt that she must run away, but also she wanted very much to stay and hear what she knew that he was going to say.

"Meg, dear," he said, "I love you so much. Do you think that you can love me a little in return?"

Somewhere at the back of her mind Meg knew that this was the time for her to say to Mr. Brooke exactly what she had told Jo that she meant to say. She knew also that, after speaking those words, she ought to bow to him, and walk quickly from the room. But her hand was still in his, and all that she could say was:

"Oh, please don't. I'd rather not."
She spoke so softly, and her head was so low, that he had difficulty in hearing the foolish little reply.

"I don't want to trouble you," he said, "I only want to ask whether you care for me - just a little."
"I - I don't know," she said.

Strange enough, he seemed quite pleased with this reply. He smiled at her and said: "Will you try to find out? I want to know so much. If you think that you can love me, I shall work hard for us both; but I can't do that unless I know what the end will be."

Meg saw that he was smiling, and a strange thought came into her mind, for she remembered some words that Anne Moffat once said to her. "It's best not to let young men think that they can do what they like with us," Anne said. "Make them wait a little, and then you will have more power over them later on."

Her hand was still in his, but she pulled it away. "I can't tell you anything," she said. "Please leave me alone and go away."

"Do you really mean that?" asked John Brooke.

The smile had now quite passed away from his face and he looked very unhappy.

"Yes, I do; I don't want to be troubled about such
things. Father says I need not; I am too young, and I'd rather not say any more.

"Mayn't I hope that, some day, you will change your mind? I'll wait, and say nothing until you have had more time. Don't play with me, Meg. I didn't think you would do that!"

He stood looking at her so sadly, and with so much love in his brown eyes, that Meg could not help feeling that she had been unkind to him. He moved towards the door, and Meg followed him. Then the door opened and a new visitor appeared.

"Aunt March!" cried Meg, for she could not have been more surprised if it had been a fairy or a Father Christmas.

Aunt March stood in the doorway, looking first at Meg and then at the young man. The young man was very pale and the young woman was very red. It was not difficult to see that the talk which they had been having was of unusual importance to them both.

"What's all this?" cried the old lady, striking the table with her stick.

"It's Father's friend," said Meg. "I'm so surprised to see you, Aunt March!"

"I can see you are surprised," said Aunt March, sitting down. As she did so, John Brooke went out quietly, saying something about going to see Mr. March.
«Who is he?» asked Aunt March. «Your father's friend; what friend?»

«Mr. Brooke,» said Meg. «The friend who was so kind to Father when he was ill. He went to Washington with Mother when the telegram came, and he stayed with Father all the time he was there, and brought him home on Christmas Day. I do not know what we should have done without him.»

«Ah, now I remember,» said Aunt March. «Brooke - young Laurence's teacher. Are you in love with him?»

«Don't speak so loud,» cried Meg. «He may hear. Shall I go and call Mother?»

«Not yet. I've something to say to you and I must say it at once. Now, tell me, do you mean to marry this young man? If you do, not one penny of my money will ever go to you. Remember that, and don't be a silly girl.»

This was exactly what was needed in order to drive away the foolish thoughts which had entered Meg's head when she felt that John Brooke was too sure of her. She no longer wished to make him unhappy, or to gain power over him, for she knew now how much she loved him.

«I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March, and you can leave your money to anyone you like,» she said, with spirit.
Aunt March looked very angry. «You'll be sorry, miss,» she said, «when you've tried love in a very small house, and have found that it won't work.»

«I'm not afraid of being poor,» cried Meg. «I've been very happy so far, and I know I shall be happy with him, because he loves me, and I -»

Meg stopped there, for just then she remembered that she had not made up her mind - that she had told 'her John' to go away; and that perhaps he was quite near, and was hearing all that she and her aunt were saying.

There was something in the girl's happy face which made Aunt March feel that, although she herself was rich, she was a poor old woman living alone.

«Well, I will have nothing more to do with you,» said Aunt March. «You are a very silly girl, and you have lost more than you think by what you have said to me. I came to see your father, but I don't feel that I want to see him now. I'm going home, and my last words to you are - I've done with you for ever. Don't expect any help from me when you are married to your Mr. Brooke. Let his friends take care of you. You will get nothing from me.»

Aunt March spoke so loud that she could be heard all over the house. She then went to her carriage and drove away.
which was waiting for her in the street, and drove away in great anger.

When Meg was left alone she did not know whether to laugh or cry. She was not given much time in which to make up her mind, for the next minute John Brooke came in.

"Oh, Meg," he said, "I couldn't help hearing - and I am so glad that I heard what you said to the old lady. How brave and good you were! And you do love me a little, Meg! You meant what you said?"

"I didn't know how much I loved you until Aunt March said those things about you," Meg began.

"And I needn't go away, but I can stay and be happy, may I, dear?"

Now here was another chance for Meg to speak the words which she had prepared so carefully - the words which she told Jo that she would say to Mr. Brooke before bowing to him and walking from the room.

But she did nothing of the kind, for - just as Jo expected - she said "Yes, John," and then she allowed John to take her in his arms and kiss her.

When Jo came down she found them both sitting in the same chair, and she knew at once that all was lost.
Meg jumped up, looking both proud and happy. John Brooke laughed and kissed Jo - to her great surprise.

«Let us have your good wishes, Sister Jo,» he said.

Jo threw up her hands and ran out of the room without saying a word.
Chapter Nineteen
YOU DON'T LOOK TOO HAPPY

Jo found her father still resting, and her mother and the two little girls with him.

«Oh, Father, please come down quick,» she said, «and stop John Brooke from kissing Meg! She seems to like it — and he even kissed me, and asked for my good wishes — as if I had any!»

Mr. and Mrs. March saw at once what had happened. They smiled at one another and went down together. Jo threw herself on the bed and began to cry; but when she stopped for a minute, and told the sad news to Beth and Amy, they did not cry as she expected that they would. They seemed quite pleased for they liked John Brooke, and when they understood that he would now be their brother they thought that it was very nice. Jo got no help from them, so she went to her little room at the top of the house and told her troubles to the friendly mice.

No one ever knew what happened in the sitting-room that afternoon. There was a great deal of talking, and Mr. Brooke surprised his friends by the spirit with which he told them about his plans.

الفصل التاسع عشر
لا تبدين فرحة جداً

وجدت جو والدها يستريح، وكانت والدتها وأختها الصغيرتان معه.
قالت له: "أو، أبي، أرجو أن تبلغ سرعة وانحن جون بروك من تقبلها في اليوم الذي ترغب في ذلك — حتى أن فلني وطلب أميني الطيبة — وكان لدي منها!«

اكتشف السيد والسيدة مارش في الحال ما حدث. ابتسما لبعضهما ونزلوا معًا. ألقى جو يدًا على السرير وبدأت بالبكاء؛ لكن عندما توقفت للحظة، وقعت النبأ الحزين ليث وآمي. لم تكتما ما تعم�بت بل بدأ مسرورين لأنهم تطابن جون بروك، وعندما فهما أن الآن سيصبح صبرهما، ظننا أن أمر طريف للغاية. لم تنظر جو بالتشاؤم منهما، وهكذا ذهبت إلى غرفتها الصغيرة في أعلى المنزل وحدثت القاً اللطيف عن مناها.

لم يذكر أحد ما حدث في غرفة الجلوس بعد ظهر ذلك النهار... وكان هناك الكثير من الكلام، كما أن السيد بروك فاجأ أصدقاءه بالروح التي تحدث بها عن خططه.
«I'm going to work very hard,» he said. «I've got something to work for now, and I am sure that I shall make a lovely home for my dear Meg.»

Mr. and Mrs. March already loved him as a son. They knew how good he was, and they allowed him to arrange everything exactly as he wanted.

When they all went into the evening meal, Meg and John looked so happy that Jo felt that she must try to look happy herself, and she did her best.

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

«No, I'm sure I can't,» answered Meg, who looked as if she was living in a dream, lifted far above such common things as bread and butter.

«How full both of unhappiness and happiness the year has been,» said Mrs. March; «and how thankful we ought to be that, at the end of it, we are all here, happily together, and with John to keep us company.»

«I hope that the next year will end better,» said Jo, who found it hard to see Meg with that dreamlike look upon her face.

«And I hope that the year after that will end better still,» said John Brooke. He smiled at Meg and added, «I have made my plans and I mean that it shall.» He looked as if everything was possible for him now.

إذ قال: "سوف أبذل قصارى جهدي. لذا الآن ما أعمل لأجله، وأنا متأكد من أنني سأبني منزلًا جميلًا لعزيزيتي ميج." لقد أجهز السيد والسيدة مارش كابين لبما. كانا يدركان كيف هو طيب، فسمحا له بترتيب كل شيء كما رغب تماماً.

عندما دخل الجميع لتناول وجبة المساء، بدت ميج وجون سعدين جداً حيث شعرت جوان أن عليها هي نفسها أن تحاول أن تبدو سعيدة، وقد بدأت ما يرامها لتحقيق ذلك.

قالت آمي: «لا تستطيعن القول إن ما من شيء مفرح يحدث الآن، هل تستطيعن ذلك يا ميج؟» "لا، أنا متأكد أنني لا أستطيع ذلك.» أجابت ميج، التي بدت وكأنها تعيش في حلم، وقد رفعت بعداً عن الأشياء العادية كأنها تغيز الأشياء.

قالت السيدة مارش: "كم كانت السنة مليئة بالسعادة والسعادة، وكمن ينتبغي لنا أن تكون ممتينين في نهايتها لأننا كننا هنا معاً بفرح، وبصحبتنا جون.»

أمل أن تنتهي السنة التالية على نحو أفضل. قالت جوي التي وجدت من الصعب مشاهدة ميج بتلك النظرة الحالة التي كسب وجهها.

قال جون بروك: "أمل أن تنتهي السنة التي تلتها على نحو أفضل أيضاً.» تبتسم لي ميج وأضاف قائلاً; "قد وضعت خطط، وأنا أعني أنها ستكون كذلك.» بدأ وكأن كل شيء ممكن بالنسبة إليه الآن.
«It seems too short a time for me,» said Meg. «I've so much to learn before I shall be ready.»

«You have only to wait. I shall do the work,» said John.

«Here comes Laurie,» said Jo, who had been looking through the window, and had seen Laurie coming up the garden path with some lovely flowers in his hand.

When he entered the room he went up to Meg, gave her the flowers and said, «For Mrs. John Brooke.»

Then he offered his good wishes to them both.

«I knew that you would get what you wanted,» he said, turning to his teacher. «You always do. When you make up your mind to do a thing, it's done.»

«It's very kind of you to say so,» said John Brooke. «I thank you for your good wishes and I ask you now to come to my wedding which I hope will be in the year after next.»

«I'll come to it even if I'm at the end of the earth,» said Laurie. «We'll both be there, won't we, Jo? But what's the matter?» he went on, more quietly. «You don't look too happy.»

«It will never be the same again. I have lost my dearest friend,» said Jo, who was almost crying.
"You've got me anyhow," Laurie answered. "I may not be much good, but I'll stand by you, Jo, all the days of my life; upon my word I will. I shall have finished at college before long, and then we'll go away somewhere and see what the world is like. Wouldn't that please you?"

"I think it would please me, but we can't know what may happen in three years," said Jo.

"That's true. Don't you wish you could take a look forward, and see what will be happening then? I do!"

"I don't think I do," said Jo, "for it might be something sad, and everyone looks so happy now; I can't think that they will be any happier in three years' time. And perhaps they won't be so happy."

Jo's eyes went slowly round the room, looking at the happy faces. Her father and mother sat quietly together, thinking of all that had happened to them both since they first met, over twenty years ago. How much joy they had had together! How much pain they had suffered! And now their four girls were growing up. They were good girls.

"I have no fears for them," said their father. "They will suffer, as we have done, but also I think that they will be very happy."

أجاب لوري: "أقد حصلت علي على أي حال، ربما لن أكون ذات فائدة كبيرة، لكنني سأتفنّي إلى جانبك طيلة أيام حياتي يا جو; أقسم بأنني سأفعل. سأنتهي دراستي في الجامعة، ومن ثم نرحل إلى مكان ما ونشاهد كيف هو العالم. أن يسرك ذلك؟"

"قالت جو: "أعتقد أنه يسرني، لكننا لا ندري ما يمكن أن يحدث خلال ثلاث سنوات.
"هذا صحيح. ألا ترغبين في التطلع نحو المستقبل وتخيل ما يمكن أن يحدث آنذاك؟ أنا أرغب في ذلك!"

"قالت جو: "لا أظن أني أفعل، لأنه ربما يكون شيئاً حزيناً، فيما الجميع يبدون في منتهى النور الحان; ولا أعتقد أنهم سيكونون أكثر فرحاً خلال السنوات الثلاث. وربما لن يكونوا سعداء هكذا.

جالبت عينا جو حول الغرفة، ناظرة إلى الوجهة الفرحة. جلس والدها وأمها معاً بهدوء، يفكرا في كل ما حدث فيما بعد، منذ فترتهما الأول، منذ عشرين سنة. كم من الهجة انسجاماً معًا! كم من الألم عاناه! والآن إن بناهما الأربعه يكبرون. إنهن فتيات صالحات.

قال والدهن: "لست أخشى عليهن. سوف يعمنين مثلما خن فعلاً، لكنني أظن أنهن سيكنن في غاية السعادة أيضاً."
The father and mother looked at the faces of the young people who were gathered round the fire - Meg and Jo, Beth and Amy, Laurie and John Brooke. «What will happen to them?»
Chapter Twenty
MEG'S LITTLE HOUSE

More than a year has passed since the March family, with Laurie and John Brooke, were gathered round the fire on a winter evening, as was told in the last chapter.

John Brooke was working very hard in an office and saving money in the hope that before long he would be able to make a home for Meg. Meg looked prettier than ever. She had spent the time in working as well as waiting, and in learning to do many things which would be useful to her when she married.

Jo never went back to Aunt March, for the old lady had grown to like Amy while Amy was with her at the time of Beth's illness, and she asked Amy to spend her mornings with her. In return, she promised that Amy should have drawing lessons in the afternoons from one of the best teachers in the town. This pleased Amy very much; and it pleased Jo also, for Jo wished to give as much of her time as possible to writing. She wrote stories for the newspapers, and she was very pleased with the dollars which she was
sometimes paid for them. Jo also spent much of her time with Beth, who had not been well since her illness. Although not really ill, Beth was never again so rosy and strong as she used to be. Yet she was always hopeful and happy, always busy with the quiet duties she loved, and she was everybody's friend.

Laurie went to college to please his grandfather, and he was having a happy time there. He made many friends, for he was liked by everybody, and he often brought his friends home with him. When this happened, the girls of the March family were asked to meet them.

Amy was the one who most enjoyed this high honour. She was very pretty. She thought so herself, and she was glad when the young men allowed her to see that they thought so too. Meg was thinking too much of her own John to think much of Laurie's young men. Beth had nothing to say to them, and she often wondered how Amy could be so brave as to talk to them as much as she did. Jo also talked to them, and it was clear that they all liked her very much, as she liked them. But none of them fell in love with her, while few escaped some loving thoughts about Amy.

It pleased Amy when she saw that they were always rather sad when they went away from her.

وقد فرحت أمي عندما رأت أنهم يخونون عندما يرحلون بعيداً عنها.
Very soon John Brooke had enough money to buy a house for Meg. It was a very small house with a little garden. The garden did not look very well because it had only just been planted with seeds, but Meg saw it as it would be when the flowers were out. Most of the things in the little house were presents from her family and Laurie. Beth made the cloths for dusting and washing-up. Jo and Amy helped their mother to prepare the house for Meg and her husband. Aunt March sent a large number of very beautiful table-cloths and bed-clothes as a wedding present, but as she had said she would never give Meg anything, she pretended that the present was sent by a friend. Everyone laughed at the way in which she sent a present without breaking the promise which she had made to herself when she was angry with Meg.

At last everything was ready. Meg and her mother went through the house together, and Mrs. March said:

«Do you like it, Meg? Does it seem like home, and do you think that you will be happy here?»

«Yes, Mother, I love it, and I know how much I ought to thank you all; but I am almost too happy to talk about it.»

«If only she had a few servants!» said Amy who had just come into the sitting-room after helping
Hannah to arrange the kitchen.

«No, Amy,» said Meg. «I don’t need a servant. I mean to do the work myself, and there will only be just enough to keep me busy - as I wish to be.»

«Sallie Moffat has four servants,» said Amy.

«Well, she is a rich man's wife,» replied Meg, «and she has a large house. In this house there is no room for servants; but I feel that John and I will be very happy here - perhaps much happier than Sallie and her husband in their large house.»

While she was speaking, Laurie came in, and a little later, when the others had gone, Jo and he walked home together.

«Perhaps,» said Laurie, «you will be the next to marry.»

«Don’t say such a thing!» cried Jo. «I'm not one of that sort. Nobody will want me, and that's a good thing, for there should always be one unmarried daughter in a family.»

«You won't give anyone a chance,» said Laurie - and, as he spoke, there was more colour than usual in his sunburnt face. «There is a side of you - at least I hope there is - which you don’t like letting a fellow see.»
«I don't like that sort of thing,» said Jo. «I'm too busy, and I think it's very sad that families should be broken up in that way.»

There was a long silence between them, which lasted until they parted at the gate. Then Laurie said, «Mark my words, Jo, you will be the next to go.»
Chapter Twenty One
SOME THING IS TROUBLING BETH

The year which passed after Meg's marriage was a very happy one for the March family. Meg often came to see her father and mother as she promised that she would; but towards the end of the year she became the mother of two babies - a boy and a girl. These children were greatly loved by their young aunts, and especially by Beth, who spent much of her time in helping Meg to look after them.

Jo worked hard at her writing, and many of her stories appeared in the newspapers. Amy learned much from the lessons which were paid for by Aunt March; she could now draw very well. Another rich aunt - Aunt Carroll - was so pleased with Amy's work that she offered to take her to Europe. Mr. and Mrs. March were willing that she should go, and Amy looked forward with delight to seeing the pictures painted by the world's greatest artists - for she had already decided that she would be a great artist herself.

One evening, soon after Amy went away with Aunt Carroll, Mrs. March and Jo were sitting together; and Mrs. March said: "Jo, I want to talk to you about Beth. I am troubled about her."
«Why, Mother, what is the matter?» said Jo.

«I thought that Beth has seemed unusually well since Meg's babies came.»

«It is not her health that I am thinking of, it is her spirits. I am sure that something is troubling her, and I want you to find out what it is.»

«What makes you think so, Mother?»

«She often sits alone. She doesn't talk to me or her father as she used to do, and one day I found her crying over Meg's babies. This isn't like our Beth. It troubles me.»

«Have you asked her about it?»

«I have tried once or twice, but she looked so unhappy that I stopped.»

«Dear Jo, you are so strong - and such a help,» said Mrs. March. «Now, you will try to find out what is troubling Beth, won't you?»

Jo promised, and for some days she watched Beth very carefully.

One afternoon she and Beth were sitting together. Jo was writing. Beth sat at the window with some needlework in her hands, but her fingers did not move, and soon the work dropped on the floor and Beth looked silently out of the window.

Then someone passed below, and a voice - it was Laurie's voice - called out, «All is well. I'm coming in tonight!»
«Why, Mother, what is the matter?» said Jo.
«I thought that Beth has seemed unusually well since Meg's babies came.»
«It is not her health that I am thinking of, it is her spirits. I am sure that something is troubling her, and I want you to find out what it is.»
«What makes you think so, Mother?»
«She often sits alone. She doesn't talk to me or her father as she used to do, and one day I found her crying over Meg's babies. This isn't like our Beth. It troubles me.»
«Have you asked her about it?»
«I have tried once or twice, but she looked so unhappy that I stopped.»
«Dear Jo, you are so strong - and such a help,» said Mrs. March. «Now, you will try to find out what is troubling Beth, won't you?»
Jo promised, and for some days she watched Beth very carefully.

One afternoon she and Beth were sitting together. Jo was writing. Beth sat at the window with some needlework in her hands, but her fingers did not move, and soon the work dropped on the floor and Beth looked silently out of the window.

Then someone passed below, and a voice - it was Laurie's voice - called out, «All is well. I'm coming in tonight!»
Beth smiled and waved her hand as the quick footsteps died away. Then she said softly, as if speaking to herself, «How strong and well and happy he looks.»

A thought came to Jo - «Beth is in love with Laurie! That is the reason for the unhappiness which Mother has noticed in her. And Laurie makes love to so many girls. He even makes love to me - which sometimes spoils our friendship. But I won't have it. He must love Beth, now that it is so plain that she is in love with him.»

Jo lay long awake that night. She was just dropping off to sleep when she thought that she heard Beth crying. She went to Beth's bedside and asked: «What is it, dear Beth?»

«I thought you were asleep.»

«Is it the old pain, that you had after you were ill, that is troubling you again?»

«No, it is a new one; but I can bear it,» said Beth, trying to keep back her tears.

«Tell me about it; perhaps I may be able to help.»

«No one can help; but lie down here, dear Jo. I'll be quiet, and perhaps we can go to sleep together.»

They were soon asleep, but Jo woke early and her thoughts moved very quickly. That morning she said to Mrs. March, «Mother, I want to go away somewhere this winter for a change.»
Mrs. March looked up, surprised. "But why, Jo? And where will you go?"

"I want something new. I feel restless, and I want to be seeing and doing and learning more than I am now. And I've got a plan. You will remember that your friend, Mrs. Kirke, who has a hotel in New York, wrote to ask if you knew anyone who would teach her children and give her some help in the house. I want to write to her and offer my services."

"Are these your only reasons for wishing to go away?" said Mrs. March.

"No, Mother."

"May I know the others?"

Jo looked up and looked down and then said slowly, "Yes, Mother. I am afraid that Laurie is getting to like me too much."

"Then you don't care for him in the way in which it is clear that he begins to care of you?"

"No, Mother. I love the dear boy, as I always have – but not in the way he wishes."

"Have you spoken to Beth?" asked Mrs. March.

"Yes, she would not tell me what her trouble was; but, Mother, I think I know it. I believe that she is in love with Laurie."

"I had not thought that," said Mrs. March, "but it is clear that, for Laurie's sake, you had better go away for a time."
The matter was soon arranged. Mrs. Kirke wrote that she would be delighted to have Jo in her hotel. When Laurie was told that she was going he came to say good-bye to her.

«It won't do a bit of good, Jo,» he said. «My eye is upon you; so mind what you do, or I'll come to New York and bring you home.»
Chapter Twenty Two
JO IN NEW YORK

New York, November

Dear Mother and Beth, I'm going to write you long letters while I am here. I've a great deal to tell, although I'm not, like Amy, a fine young lady travelling in Europe.

Mrs Kirke is so kind to me that I feel quite at home, even in this big house full of strange people. She gave me a funny little bed-sitting-room under the roof - all she had - but it is warm, and there is a nice table by a sunny window where I can sit and write when I finish teaching Mrs. Kirke's little girls, or helping in the house.

I shall have my meals with the children at present, and I like this better than sitting down at the great table with all the other people in the house. My little girls are pretty children - rather spoiled, I think, but I told them some stories and soon made friends with them.

On the first day I was here I saw something I liked. This house is very high, and it is a long way...
from the ground floor to the top. I saw a little servant-girl coming up with a heavy load of coal. Then I saw a gentleman, who was coming up behind her. He took the coal from her hand, carried it to the top, and put it down at the door where it was wanted. Then he turned to the little servant, smiled kindly, and said: At is better so. The little back is not strong enough for such a heavy load."

I thought he spoke like a German, and Mrs. Kirke told me that he was Mr. Bhaer of Berlin.

"He is always doing thing like that," she said. "He is very learned and good, but very poor. He is taking care of two little boys, the sons of his sister who married an American and died here. He lives by teaching German and I am glad to let him use my sitting-room for some of his lessons."

Mrs. Kirke's sitting-room has a glass door, and it is close to the room in which I teach my little girls, so that when I pass I can see Mr. Bhaer at his work. I am glad of this, as I like him. But don't be afraid, Mother. He is almost forty, so it is quite safe!

Thursday

Yesterday was a quiet day. I spent it in teaching my little girls - Kitty and Minnie - and in writing in my own room. I was in the sitting-room last evening when Mr. Bhaer came in with some newspapers for Mrs. Kirke. She wasn't there; but Minnie said to him very pretty, "This is Mother's friend, Miss March."

خادمة صغيرة صاعدة بحمل ثقيل من الفحم. ثم رأيت سيدها صادقاً
وراءها. تناول الفحم من يدها، حمله إلى الأعلى، ووضعه عند الباب
حيث ينبغي استخدامه. ثم انتظرت إلى الخادمة الصغيرة، أبتسم بحنان،
وقال: "هذا أفضل. الظهر الصغير ليس قوي كافية لتحمل هذا الحم
قليل.

ظنت أنه تحدث كألماني، ثم أخبرته السيدة كيرك أنه السيد بيير من
برلين.

قالت: "هو دائماً يقوم بمهل هذه الأعمال. إنه متعلم جداً وطيب،
لكنه قصير جداً. إنه يعتني بولددين صغيرين، هما ابنتيه شقيقته المتزوجة من
أمريكي والتي توفيت هنا. هو يكسب عيشه من خلال تعليم الألمانية.

ويسعده أن أسمح له باستخدام غرفة جلوسي لإعطاء دروسه.

غرفة جلوس السيدة كيرك باب زجاجي، وهو محاك للغرفة التي
أعلم بها بناتي الصغيرات، وعدناهم. أستطع أن أرى السيد بيير
منكأ على عمله، ما يفرحني لأنني معجبة به. لكن لا تخافي يا أمي. فهو
تقرأ في الأربعين، وهو أمن للغابة!

الخميس

الأمر كان يوماً هادئاً. أمضيت في تعليم البنات الصغيرتين - كيتي
وميني - وفي الكتابة في غرفتي الخاصة. كنت في غرفة الجلوس مساء
البارحة عندما دخل السيد بيير هنا. بدأ تقرأ بعض الصحف إلى السيدة كيرك.
لم تكن هناك؛ لكن ميني قالت له بلطف باللغة: "هذة الآنسة مارش،
صديقة والدتي."
Kitty, her little sister, added, «Yes, and we like her very much. She tells us lovely stories.»

Mr Bhaer and I both bowed and then we laughed.

«Ah yes, Mees March,» he said. «I know that you tell them lovely stories, for I hear them laugh. But sometimes I know that these little girls are not good. They do not work as they should and that hurts you. Now, Mees March, when they are bad like this you must call me and I will come.» He pretended to look very cross, like an angry schoolmaster, and the little girls laughed with delight.

I told him that I would certainly ask for his help when I needed it, and he went away.

I happened that I saw him again on the same day, for, when I passed his room, the door was open, and I saw that he was doing some needlework. I felt so sorry that he had no one to do this work for him, but he seemed quite happy, and did not mind my seeing him. He waved his needle at me and laughed. «I am busy, you see, Mees March,» he said.

Jo and Mr. Bhaer soon became good friends. He gave her lessons in German, and he allowed her, in return, to do some of his needlework. It was a pleasant winter and a long one, for Jo did not leave Mrs. Kirke until June. When the time came for her to go, the children cried, and Mr. Bhaer looked very sad.
«Going home?» he said. «Ah, you are happy that you have a home to go to.»

«Now, sir,» said Jo, «Don’t forget that if you ever travel our way, I want you to come and see us.»

«Do you? Shall I come?» he asked, with a strange look on his face which Jo did not see.
Chapter Twenty Three
THE SOONER THE BETTER

Laurie worked very hard during his last year at college and he left it with high honours.

When the great day was over, he and Jo walked home together.

"You've done very well, Laurie," said Jo. "I'm proud of you. What are you going to do now?"

"That is for you to decide," said Laurie, in a voice which at once made Jo feel that the moment which she had feared, and which she had wished to put off as long as possible, had come at last.

"Jo," he said, "you must hear me. We've got to talk, and the sooner the better for both of us."

"Say what you like then," said Jo, "I'll listen."

"You must know what I'm going to say," he began. "I've loved you ever since I've known you, Jo. I couldn't help it; you've been so good to me. I've tried to show it, but you wouldn't let me. Now I must have an answer. I can't go on like this any longer."

"I wanted to save you this," said Jo. "I thought you understood."

"I know you did; but girls are so strange, you

239
never know what they mean. They say 'No' when they mean 'Yes', and drive a man out of his mind just for the fun of it.

"Laurie, you know I'm not like that! You are very dear to me. You're the best friend I ever had; and now you've done so well at college I'm very proud of you. But I can't love you in the way you want me to. I've tried, but I can't."

"Really, truly, Jo?"

"Oh, Laurie, I'm so sorry," she said. "I wish you wouldn't take it so hard. I can't help it. You know that one can't make oneself love anyone - in that way."

"Some girls do."

"I don't believe it's the right sort of love, and I'd rather not try it."

They were silent for some time and then Jo said, "Laurie, I want to tell you something."

He started as if he had been shot, threw up his head and cried, "Don't tell me that, Jo; I can't bear it!"

"Tell you what?"

"That you love that old man."

"What old man?"

"That old German whom you were always writing about - they showed me your letters. If you tell me that you love him - I don't know what I shall do."
Jo wanted to laugh, but she kept herself from doing so, and only said, «Don't be so silly, Laurie. I'm not in the least in love with him, or with anybody. And he isn't old, or bad, but good and kind, and - after you - he's the best friend I have.»

Laurie looked very sad. «What will happen to me?» he said.

«You'll love someone else, like a good boy, and forget all this trouble.»

«I can't love anyone else; and I'll never forget you, Jo, never! never!»

With that he jumped over the gate and walked quickly away along the river bank.
Chapter Twenty Four
LOVE CANNOT BE FORCED

"Now," said Jo to herself as Laurie had passed out of sight, "something must be done about this, and it is I who must do it."

She went to Mr. Laurence and told him the whole story of what had happened. The old gentleman was very kind. He found it difficult to understand how any girl could help loving Laurie; but he knew, even better than Jo, that love cannot be forced, and he decided that Laurie must have a complete change in order to help him get over his trouble.

Laurie came home very tired. His grandfather met him as if he knew nothing. They had their evening meal and afterwards they sat and talked as usual, although they both found it difficult to do so.

Laurie seemed so unhappy that at last Mr. Laurence could bear it no longer. He got up, and after walking restlessly for a few minutes about the room, he turned to Laurie and said, as gently as a woman, "I know, my boy, I know."

There was no answer for a minute. Then Laurie asked, almost angrily: "Who told you?"

"Jo, herself."

الفصل الرابع والعشرون
الحب ليس بالقوة

قالت جو لنفسها فيما توارى لوري عن النظر: "الآن لا بديل من القيام بشيء فيما يتعلق بهذا، وأنا من يجب أن تقوم به.

ذهب إلى السيد لورانس وأخبرته قصة كل ما جرى. كان السيد العجوز طبيبا جدا. لقد وجد من الصعب أن يفهم كيف تستطيع أي فتاة مقاومة حب لوري؛ لكنه عرف حتى أكثر من جو، أن الحب لا يمكن أن يفرض، فقرر أن لوري ينبغي أن يتغير كلياً يساعد نفسه على التغلب على هذا الأمر.

عاد لوري إلى المنزل منهك. اتفقت جده وكأنه لا يدرك شيئا. تناولوا وجبة المساء وبعد ذلك جلسوا وتحدثوا كمتتدي، مع أن كلهموا وجد من الصعب فعل ذلك.

بدا لوري تعباً لدرجة أن السيد لورانس لم يعد يتحمل المزيد. فتهض، وبعد أن يجلب بطقه لدقائق قليلا حول العرفة، انتقل إلى لوري وسأل بلطف يساوي لطف المرأة: "أعرف، يا ولدي، أعرف."

لم يكن هناك أي جواب لحظة. ثم سأل لوري يغضب تقريبا: "من أخرى؟"

"جو نفسها."
«Then there's an end of it,» said Laurie, and he looked even more unhappy.

«Not quite,» said Mr. Laurence. «I want to say one thing, and then there shall be an end of it. You won't care to stay at home just now, perhaps?»

«I'm not going to run away from a girl. Jo can't stop me from seeing her, and I shall stay as long as I like.»

«Not if you are the gentleman I think you are,» said Mr. Laurence quietly. And then, with a very kind look in his eyes, the old man went on, «My dear boy, I feel it almost as much as you do. I love Jo, and I hoped that she would become your wife - and my granddaughter. But the girl can't help it. I'm old enough to know that; and I also know that the only thing for you to do now is to go away for a time. Where will you go?»

«Anywhere. I don't care what happens to me!»

«Now, my boy, take it like a man. Most men go through this sort of thing once in their lives. Why not go to Europe as you always meant to do when you left college?»

«But I didn't mean to go alone.»

«I don't ask you to go alone. There's someone ready and glad to go with you anywhere in the world.»

«Who, sir?»
«Myself. My business in London needs looking after. I hoped that, when you had some training, you would be able to do it; but I can do it better myself. I shall want you with me in London for a short time, so that you can understand the business when it becomes yours; but don’t think that I want to keep you there longer than is necessary.

You can go to France, Germany, Switzerland, Italy - any where you like, and enjoy the pictures, the music and all the things that you’ve always cared about.»

«Well, sir,» said Laurie, «I can’t say ’No’ to your kindness. I’ll come.»
Chapter Twenty Five
WHY DIDN'T YOU TELL ME?

The letters which Jo had received in New York had said little about Beth's health, and nothing was said which might lead Jo to think that Beth was becoming worse. The change which was taking place from day to day was not noticed by her father and mother, but when Jo came back, after being away for so long, she saw the difference at once. She knew that Beth was very ill, and as she had saved a little money in New York, she asked her father and mother to allow her to take Beth to the seaside for a few weeks.

This gave great pleasure to Mr. and Mrs. March. They were glad that the two sisters should go away together, and they knew that Jo would take great care of Beth.

They went to a quiet place where there were not many people. The girls made few friends, for they liked to be alone together. They were drawn very close to one another by something of which, for some time, they did not speak - the knowledge that Beth had only a short time to live.

Jo felt quite sure that this was so, and she was glad when, one evening, Beth told her.
They had been watching a beautiful sunset, and when at last the sun went down Beth spoke of death - her own death, which she knew must be quite near. For a minute Jo was silent and her eyes were dim. Then she said, «I've feared it, dear Beth, and for some time I've known it, but I'm glad you've told me.»

«I've tried to tell you before,» said Beth, «but I couldn't. I've known it a long time. At first it was hard to bear, and I was unhappy; but I'm not unhappy now, because I know it's best; indeed it is.»

«Is this what made you so unhappy before I went away?» asked Jo.

«Yes, I gave up hoping then, but I didn't like to tell anybody.»

«Oh, Beth, why didn't you tell me?»

«Perhaps it was wrong; but I wasn't quite sure, and no one said anything, so I thought that I might be mistaken. I didn't want to give trouble when so much was happening - Meg's babies, and Amy going away, and you so happy with Laurie - at least I thought so then.»

«And I thought you loved him, Beth! I thought that your love for him was making you ill, and it was for that reason that I went away.»

Beth looked at Jo in great surprise.
«Why, Jo, how could I, when he was so much in love with you? I do love him dearly, he is so good to me, how can I help it? But he could never be anything to me but a brother.»

«Amy is left for him,» said Jo, «and they would do for each other very well. But I've no heart for such things now. I don't want to think about anybody but you, Beth. You must get well.»

«I want to, oh, so much! I try; but every day I lose a little strength, and I feel sure that I shall never get it back. It's like the sun going down, Jo. You can't stop it.»

«It shall be stopped,» cried Jo, «You're only nineteen and I can't let you go. I'll work and pray and fight against it.»

«Jo, dear, it's no good; don't hope any more. Let us be happy together while we can, for I don't have much pain. When we get home, Mother and Father won't need to be told that I shall not be with them very long, and they will need all the help that you can give them.»

She was quite right. No words were needed when the two girls went home.
Beth was tired after the short journey and she went at once to bed. When Jo came down she saw at once that her father and mother knew the truth. There was no need for her to tell them Beth’s secret.
Chapter Twenty Six
A VOICE THAT HE KNEW

While Beth lay dying, Amy was in Rome with Aunt Carroll, and Laurie was in London with his grandfather. For several months Laurie worked hard in trying to learn something of the great shipping business which one day would be his. Then he became restless, and Mr. Laurence felt that he should go away for a time.

"Laurie," he said, "when I asked you to come, I told you that I did not want to keep you here longer than was necessary. You've done well, my boy, and now it's time you had a change. Come with me as far as Paris. I shall be staying with friends there, but they are not the sort of people you would like, and I think that you had better move on by yourself."

"As you wish, sir," said Laurie.

"I have heard this morning," his grandfather went on, "that Mrs. Carroll and Amy March will soon be in Nice. They will be moving on there from Rome. Now Nice is a very pleasant place to spend Christmas. Why don't you go and join them there - after you've had a little tour by yourself?"

And so it happened that on the afternoon of...
Christmas Day, Laurie was walking down the English road at Nice – a wide walk, with beautiful flowers and trees on one side, and, on the other side, the sea. Laurie was lost in his own thoughts - not very happy thoughts - when he heard a voice that he knew:

"Oh, Laurie, is it really you! Your grandfather told us that you would be here, but we thought that you would never come."

"I've been wandering about," said Laurie, with a rather tired and unhappy look, "but I said that I would be here for Christmas, and here I am."

"How is your grandfather? Where are you staying? When did you come?"

"My grandfather is well; I am staying at the Chauvain; and I came last night," said Laurie, laughing at Amy's quick questions. "I called at your hotel last night, but you and your aunt were both out. Now tell me, what news have you had from home?"

"Not very good news. Beth is ill; I am afraid she is very ill. I feel that I ought to go home, but they all say 'stay' so I stay."

"I am sure you are right," said Laurie. "You could do nothing at home, and they must all be glad to know that you are enjoying yourself here."

They had now reached the hotel at which Amy and Mrs. Carroll were staying.

"There's a grand dance here tonight," said Amy. "Won't you come?"
A cloud seemed to pass over Laurie's face. «I don't think I'll come tonight,» he said; «but we must meet again before I go. It will be good to talk a little about home.»

When Laurie went to Nice he meant only to stay a week, but a month later he was still there. He was tired of being alone, and it was pleasant to be in a place where there was at least one person who came from 'home'. And Amy, too, was glad to see him, for they could talk together about the people and the places they both loved. Yet Amy was not happy about Laurie. She knew that he was wasting his time, and she felt that, if he was not careful, he would waste the rest of his life. «I must talk to him about it,» she thought.

One day, when they were walking together along the shore, she said: «Laurie, when are you going back to your grandfather?»
«Tomorrow.»
«You have told me that twenty times in the last month.»
«Well, I have felt that I shouldn't be of much use to him if I went. I hate business, and I'm sure that I shall never be any good at it. In fact I doubt, now, whether I shall ever be any good at anything.»
«But you did so well at college. You need not give all your time to the business; I am sure that your grandfather doesn't want that. What has happened to your music?»

فجءًا، يومًا، في ليل، لم تكن أم لوري بخيراً. كانت قد غيّرت روتينها، فقد شعرت أن هذه الرحلة كانت لها شكل غير طبيعي. كانت تشعر أن لها شيء غير طبيعي، ألم تكون كما كانت، أو ربما كانت شيء أبعد من ذلك.

أحبابها لوري، كان قد شعرت أنه يضيع وقته، وشعرت أنه، إن لم يكن حجرًا، سيضيع بقيته حياته. لذا فكرت: «لا بد أن أتحدث إليه عن ذلك.»

«أحبابها لوري، كنت تحتفي بالطبيعة.»
«أحبابها لوري، كنت تحتفي بالطبيعة.»

في النهاية، أدركت أنه يضيع وقته، وشعرت أنه، إن لم يكن حجرًا، سيضيع بقيته حياته. لذا فكرت: «لا بد أن أتحدث إليه عن ذلك.»

 wolcraft: "لا بد أن أتحدث إليه عن ذلك."

وذكرت: «لا بد أن أتحدث إليه عن ذلك.»

لقد أخبرته بذلك عشرين مرة في الشهر الماضي.»

«أحبابها لوري، كنت تحتفي بالطبيعة.»

«أحبابها لوري، كنت تحتفي بالطبيعة.»

فاسى، فقد شعرت بأنها لن يكون هناك فائدة كبيرة له إذا ما ذهبت. فأنا أكره العمل، وأنا متأكد من أنني لن أحسم القيام به. في الحقيقة أشك الآن في أن يكون هناك فائدة لأي شيء.»

لكنها فعلت حساسًا جداً في الكلية. ليس عليك أن تكرس كل وقتك للعمل؛ أنت متأكد من أنك لا بيد ذلك. ما الذي حل بموسيقاك؟"
«And what has happened to your art?» asked Laurie. «When you went to Rome weren't you hoping to become a great artist? Don't you remember our dreams?»

«Oh, Laurie, when I had seen those pictures, how could I go on hoping then?»

«It seems then that we are both in the same boat, my dear. We are rather lost and don't know what to do with ourselves!»

They were now close to the door of Amy's hotel.

«What I told you was really true,» said Laurie. «I'm going back to Grandfather tomorrow. I promise to learn some thing more about the business, and then I'll begin to think about my music, if you will promise me to think again about your art.»

«Good boy,» said Amy. «I'll do my best if you will do yours.»

They shook hands, and in another minute he was gone.

Amy thought, «How I shall miss him!»
Chapter Twenty Seven
HOW WELL WE PULL TOGETHER!

Laurie went back to his grandfather, who was now in London, and he spent his days in the shipping office, finding the work much less unpleasant as he came to know more about it. In the evenings be listened to some good music, and he wrote to Amy to tell her of what he was doing. It surprised him that he was no longer thinking quite so much about Jo. He had not written to her for some time. When her answer to his last letter came, it brought him sad news.

«Dear Laurie,» she wrote, it was nice to hear from you but I am so sorry that I have not written before and that my letter must give you pain. Beth is very ill. I spend most of my time at her bedside. I'm glad that you met Amy in Nice. If you write to her, please do not tell her that Beth is worse. We are hoping that when Amy comes home Beth may still be with us. Good-bye, dear Laurie. Please always keeps a little corner in your heart for your loving Jo.»

She added a little note at the end: «Please write to Amy often. She is very much alone, and your letters will do her good.»
"So I will, at once," said Laurie to himself. "Poor little girl. It will be a sad going home for her, I am afraid."

Soon after Laurie left Nice, Mrs. Carroll and Amy travelled slowly towards Switzerland. They were at Vevay when Amy received the sad news of Beth's death. Laurie also heard it in London, and he decided that he would go at once to Vevay and give Amy what help he could. Jo had written that they still did not wish her to come home earlier than had been arranged.

Laurie knew Vevay very well. When the boat touched the land he stepped out and hurried along the shore to the hotel where Mrs. Carroll and Amy were staying. He found Amy sitting in a pleasant old garden by the side of the lovely lake. When she saw him she jumped up and ran to him: "Oh, Laurie, Laurie! I'm so glad you've come."

"I couldn't help coming," he said. "I only wish that I could say something that would help you to bear the loss of dear little Beth."

"You needn't say anything. It is so good to have you here. Aunt Carroll is very kind, but you seem like one of the family. How long can you stay?"

"As long as you want me, dear."
"So well that I wish we might always pull in the same boat. Will you, Amy?"

"How well we pull together!" said Amy.

"For a moment he seemed not to hear. Then, with a little start, he said: 'I'm not tired, but you may row as you do. I'll let you row; it will do me good.'"

"You must be tired," she said. "Resist little and let me row; I'll do me good."

Then her eyes met Laurie's. He had stopped rowing and he was looking at her so seriously that she felt that she must speak— as if to wake him from a dream.

"You must be tired," she said. "Resist little and let me row; it will do me good."

"For a moment he seemed not to hear. Then, with a little start, he said: 'I'm not tired, but you may row as you do. I'll let you row; it will do me good.'"

"You must be tired," she said. "Resist little and let me row; it will do me good."

Then her eyes met Laurie's. He had stopped rowing and he was looking at her so seriously that she felt that she must speak— as if to wake him from a dream.
For some time Amy made no reply. They went on pulling together. Then, as the boat touched the shore, Laurie asked his question again, and was answered very softly:

«Yes, Laurie.»

They were very happy when they returned to the hotel.

لم تعط آمي أي جواب لفترة من الوقت. تابعا التجذيف معاً. ثم، عندما لامس المركب البابسة، طرح لوري سؤاله مجدداً، فأجيب بنعومة بالغة:

"نعم، يا لوري."

كانا سعيدين جداً عندما عادا إلى الفندق.
Chapter Twenty Eight  
I WILL SURELY COME

For some time after Beth's death, Jo was very unhappy. She missed the little sister to whom she had given so much loving care, and with whom she had spent so many hours of every day. She tried to fill her time by working for her mother in the house, and by helping Meg with her babies. She knew that Meg and John were very happy, and she could see that Meg was both a happier and a better woman because she was a wife and mother.

«It is plain that marriage has been good for her,» she thought. «I wonder whether it would be good for me; or am I - as I have so often thought - to be alone all my life? Perhaps I'll just watch other people's lives, and put what I see into books, instead of having a real life of my own.»

When the news came that Amy and Laurie were to be married, Mrs. March was uncertain of the way in which Jo would take it, and she allowed Jo to see this uncertainty.

«Oh, Mother,» said Jo, «did you really think that I
could be so selfish and silly as to mind Laurie marrying Amy when I wouldn't marry him myself?"

Jo found that the house-work which she was doing for her mother and for Meg was not enough to fill her life, and she decided to go on with her writing. She went up to the room at the top of the house where, in old days, she and Meg spent so many happy hours.

«How long ago that seems,» she thought. «We were young girls then, and now Meg is married and has two babies, and Beth is dead, and Amy is going to marry Laurie, and I am left alone.»

She decided to look again at the stories she had written and half-written long ago. "I'm older than I was then," she thought, "and perhaps a little wiser because of what I've suffered. If I begin writing again now, I think I know some things which it will be worth while to write about."

She turned to the big box which contained all the stories that she had written, and some old letters which she had forgotten. Among these she found a little note written to her by Mr. Bhaer one evening in New York when he had promised to give her a German lesson, but was afraid that he might be late.
"Wait for me, my friend," he wrote. "I may be a little late, but I will surely come."

"Oh, if he only would!" said Jo to herself. "How good and kind to me he always was! And how I should love to see him; for everyone seems to be going away from me."
Chapter Twenty Nine
GLAD TO SEE YOU

Laurie and Amy were married at an American church in Paris. Old Mr. Laurence was so pleased that his grandson was to be married to "one of the girls next door," that he wished the marriage to take place soon — almost as much as the young people themselves. Mr. and Mrs. March made no difficulty, for they thought it right that Amy and Laurie should be married while they were still in Europe, and spend a few weeks there before returning to America. They did not wish to have a wedding at home so soon after Beth's death.

On the day on which Mr. Laurence and the young people were expected home, Mr. and Mrs. March went to the station to meet them and Jo stayed at home to help Hannah prepare a meal. Looking out of the front door, she saw Laurie hurrying up the garden path, as she had so often seen him in the old days. She ran to meet him.

"Laurie! My dear Laurie!" she cried.
"Dear Jo!"
Jo took the hand which Laurie held out to her, and they both knew that a strong and beautiful friendship

الفصل التاسع والعشرون
يسعدني جداً أن أراك

تزوج لوري وآمي في كنيسة أمريكية في باريس. وقد فرح السيد لورانس كثيراً لأن حفيده سيتزوج من "إحدى الفتيات في الجوار" بحيث تمنى أن يتم الزفاف بسرعة — تقريباً مثلما تمنى الزوجان الشابان تسيهما. لم يستجب السيد أو السيدة مارش أية صعوبة، إذ ظن أن من المناسب أن تتزوج آمي ولوري فيما هما في أوروبا، وأن يتضمن أسابيع قليلة هناك قبل العودة إلى أميركا. لم يكونا يرغبان في إقامة حفل زفاف في المنزل بسرعة بعد وفاة بيث.

في اليوم الذي كان يوقع قدوم السيد لورانس والزوجين الشابين إلى المنزل، ذهب السيد والسيدة مارش إلى الحطة للقاءهم، فيما لبثت حيو في المنزل كي تساعد حنة في إعداد الطعام، فيما هي تنظر إلى خارج الباب، رأيت لوري بسرير عبير ومرصد محايدة، بينما رأت دائماً في الأيام الغابرة، فعزمت على اللقاء وهي تتفاءل:
"لوري! عزيزي لوري!
"عزيزي جوا!
أخذت جو البلدين التي مدتها لوري لها، وقد أدرك كلاهما أن صداقة
had taken the place of their childish love for one another.

Soon the small sitting-room was quite full. Amy came in first. "Where is she? Where is my dear old Jo?" she cried. Meg and John Brooke followed, each carrying one of their children. Then came old Mr. Laurence with Mr. and Mrs. March. It was a very happy family party, and no one would have thought that any of them could have been much happier by the arrival of another person. But when the meal was over, and Meg and John had taken their children home, a strange thing happened. The front door bell rang and Jo answered it. A tall bearded gentleman stood before her in the darkness. At first Jo seemed not to know who he was, and then she cried out, "Oh, Mr. Bhaer, I am so glad to see you!"

"And I am very glad to see Miss March," he replied.

"Come in," said Jo; and he was about to follow her when he heard voices.

"But no," he said, "you have a party."

"No, it isn't a party," said Jo. "It's only the family. My sister and her husband and his grandfather have just come home, and we are all very happy together. Do come in and make one of us."
Chapter Thirty
NOTHING BUT MY LOVE

The business which brought Mr. Bhaer from New York lasted for some weeks, and during that time he came often to see the March family. Then for nearly a week he did not come, and Jo wondered, rather unhappily, what the reason could be.

One afternoon Jo said to Mrs. March:
"Mother, do you want anything in the town? I have to go there to get some paper for my writing."

Mrs. March asked Jo to buy a number of things, and then she said: "If you happen to meet Mr. Bhaer, bring him home to tea. I quite look forward to seeing the dear man again."

"How good she is to me," Jo thought. "What do girls do who haven't a mother to help them through their troubles?"

She bought the paper she wanted, and she was just going to buy the things for her mother when she met Mr. Bhaer. He seemed very happy to see her. "What are you doing here, my friend?" he asked.

"I am buying things for Mother," she said. Just then she saw that it was beginning to rain.

"May I go also, and help carry your things for
you; and will you come under my umbrella, for I see that you have none?"

Jo thanked him and they walked on together, both under the same umbrella.

"Why have you not been to see us?" Jo asked.

"We thought that you have gone."

"Did you think that I should go without coming to see the friends who have been so kind to me?"

"No, I didn't; but we wondered why you didn't come."

"I thank you all," he said, "and I will come one time more before I go."

"You are going, then?"

"Yes; I have no longer any business here. It is done."

"And as you wished, I hope?"

"I ought to think so, for I have found a way to get my bread and to help the two boys - my sister's sons."

"Tell me, please?" said Jo. "I like so much to know about you - and the boys."

"That is so kind. My friends have found a place for me in a college, where I shall teach German."

"That is good news," said Jo. "I am so glad, for we shall hope now to see you often."

"Ah? But we shall not meet often, I fear. The college is far away - in the far west."

It is possible that if Jo and her friend had not been
walking under the same umbrella – and therefore very close together – he might not have seen the tears which she could not keep back. But he did see them.

«Why do you cry?» he asked.

«Because you are going away.»

«Jo,» he said, «I have not riches and I have not youth; I have nothing but my love to give you.»

She took his hands in hers. «Is not that enough?»