satisfied, and worries you till you’re ready to fly out the window or cry?’

‘It’s naughty to fret, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross, and my hands get so stiff, I can’t practice well at all.’ And Beth looked at her rough hands with a sigh that any one could hear that time.

‘I don’t believe any of you suffer as I do,’ cried Amy, ‘for you don’t have to go to school with impertinent girls, who plague you if you don’t know your lessons, and laugh at your dresses, and label your father if he isn’t rich, and insult you when your nose isn’t nice.’

‘If you mean libel, I’d say so, and not talk about labels, as if Papa was a pickle bottle,’ advised Jo, laughing.

‘I know what I mean, and you needn’t be statirical about it. It’s proper to use good words, and improve your vocabulary,’ returned Amy, with dignity.

‘Don’t peck at one another, children. Don’t you wish we had the money Papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me! How happy and good we’d be, if we had no worries!’ said Meg, who could remember better times.

‘You said the other day you thought we were a deal happier than the King children, for they were fighting and fretting all the time, in spite of their money.’
‘Bless the child! She’s gone and put ‘Mother’ on them instead of ‘M. March’. How funny!’ cried Jo, taking one up.

‘Isn’t that right? I thought it was better to do it so, because Meg’s initials are M.M., and I don’t want anyone to use these but Marmee,’ said Beth; looking troubled.

‘It’s all right, dear, and a very pretty idea, quite sensible too, for no one can ever mistake now. It will please her very much, I know,’ said Meg, with a frown for Jo and a smile for Beth.

‘There’s Mother. Hide the basket, quick!’ cried Jo, as a door slammed and steps sounded in the hall.

Amy came in hastily, and looked rather abashed when she saw her sisters all waiting for her.

‘Where have you been, and what are you hiding behind you?’ asked Meg, surprised to see, by her hood and cloak, that lazy Amy had been out so early.

‘Don’t laugh at me, Jo! I didn’t mean anyone should know till the time came. I only meant to change the little bottle for a big one and I gave all my money to get it, and I’m truly trying not to be selfish any more.’

As she spoke, Amy showed the handsome flask which replaced the cheap one, and looked so earnest and humble in her little effort to forget herself that Meg hugged her on
mother was upstairs collecting clothes for the poor Hummels.

Not a very splendid show, but there was a great deal of love done up in the few little bundles, and the tall vase of red roses, white chrysanthemums, and trailing vines, which stood in the middle, gave quite an elegant air to the table.

‘She’s coming! Strike up, Beth! Open the door, Amy! Three cheers for Marmee!’ cried Jo, prancing about while Meg went to conduct Mother to the seat of honor.

Beth played her gayest march, amy threw open the door, and Meg enacted escort with great dignity. Mrs. March was both surprised and touched, and smiled with her eyes full as she examined her presents and read the little notes which accompanied them. The slippers went on at once, a new handkerchief was slipped into her pocket, well scented with Amy’s cologne, the rose was fastened in her bosom, and the nice gloves were pronounced a perfect fit.

There was a great deal of laughing and kissing and explaining, in the simple, loving fashion which makes these home festivals so pleasant at the time, so sweet to remember long afterward, and then all fell to work.

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servant enters with a letter and a bag from Hagar, who has mysteriously disappeared. The latter informs the party that she bequeaths untold wealth to the young pair and an awful doom to Don Pedro, if he doesn’t make them happy. The bag is opened, and several quarts of tin money shower down upon the stage till it is quite glorified with the glitter. This entirely softens the stern sire. He consents without a murmur, all join in a joyful chorus, and the curtain falls upon the lovers kneeling to receive Don Pedro’s blessing in attitudes of the most romantic grace.

Tumultuous applause followed but received an unexpected check, for the cot bed, on which the dress circle was built, suddenly shut up and extinguished the enthusiastic audience. Roderigo and Don Pedro flew to the rescue, and all were taken out unhurt, though many were speechless with laughter. the excitement had hardly subsided when Hannah appeared, with ‘Mrs. Mee’s compliments, and would the ladies walk down to supper.’

This was a surprise even to the actors, and when they saw the table, they looked at one another in rapturous amazement. It was like Marmee to give them a little treat for them, but anything so fine was unheard of since the departed days of plenty. There was ice cream, actually two dishes of it, pink and white, and cake and fruit and
‘You can’t ask Mother for new ones, they are so expensive, and you are so careless. She said when you spoiled the others that she shouldn’t get you any more this winter. Can’t you make them do?’

‘I can hold them crumpled up in my hand, so no one will know how stained they are. That’s all I can do. No! I’ll tell you how we can manage, each wear one good one and carry a bad one. Don’t you see?’

‘Your hands are bigger than mine, and you will stretch my glove dreadfully,’ began Meg, whose gloves were a tender point with her.

‘Then I’ll go without. I don’t care what people say!’ cried Jo, taking up her book.

‘You may have it, you may! Only don’t stain it, and do behave nicely. Don’t put your hands behind you, or stare, or say ‘Christopher Columbus!’ will you?’

‘Don’t worry about me. I’ll be as prim ad I can and not get into any scrapes, if I can help it. Now go and answer your note, and let me finish this splendid story.’

So Meg went away to ‘accept with thanks’, look over her dress, and sing blithely as she did up her one real lace frill, while Jo finished her story, her four apples, and had a game of romps with Scrabble.
remembered how they had chatted about cricket when he brought the cat home.

That put Jo at her ease and she laughed too, as she said, in her heartiest way, ‘We did have such a good time over your nice Christmas present.’

‘Grandpa sent it.’

‘But you put it into his head, didn’t you, now?’

‘How is your cat, Miss March?’ asked the boy, trying to look sober while his black eyes shone with fun.

‘Nicely, thank you, Mr. Laurence. But I am not Miss March, I’m only Jo,’ returned the young lady.

‘I’m not Mr. Laurence, I’m only Laurie.’

‘Laurie Laurence, what an odd name.’

‘My first name is theodore, but I don’t like it, for the fellows called me Dora, so I made the say Laurie instead.’

‘I hate my name, too, so sentimental! I wish every one would say Jo instead of Josephine. How did you make the boys stop calling you Dora?’

‘I thrashed ‘em.’

‘I can’t thrash Aunt March, so I suppose I shall have to bear it.’ And Jo resigned herself with a sigh.

‘Don’t you like to dance, Miss Jo?’ asked Laurie, looking as if he thought the name suited her.
came up and offered his grandfather’s carriage, which had just come for him, he said.

‘It’s so early! You can’t mean to go yet?’ began Jo, looking relieved but hesitating to accept the offer.

‘I always go early, I do, truly! Please let me take you home. It’s all on my way, you know, and it rains, they say.’

That settled it, and telling him of Meg’s mishap, Jo gratefully accepted and rushed up to bring down the rest of the party. Hannah hated rain as much as a cat does so she made no trouble, and they rolled away in the luxurious close carriage, feeling very festive and elegant. Laurie went on the box so Meg could keep her foot up, and the girls talked over their party in freedom.

‘I had a capital time. Did you?’ asked Jo, rumpling up her hair, and making herself comfortable.

‘Yes, till I hurt myself. Sallie’s friend, Annie Moffat, took a fancy to me, and asked me to come and spend a week with her when Sallie does. She is going in the spring when the opera comes, and it will be perfectly splendid, if Mother only lets me go,’ answered Meg, cheering up at the thought.

‘I saw you dancing with the red headed man I ran away from. Was he nice?’
‘There never was such a cross family!’ cried Jo, losing her temper when she had upset an inkstand, broken both boot lacings, and sat down upon her hat.

‘You’re the crossest person in it!’ returned Amy, washing out the sum that was all wrong with the tears that had fallen on her slate.

‘Beth, if you don’t keep these horrid cats down cellar I’ll have them drowned,’ exclaimed Meg angrily as she tried to get rid of the kitten which had scrambled up her back and stuck like a burr just out of reach.

Jo laughed, Meg scolded, Beth implored, and Amy wailed because she couldn’t remember how much nine times twelve was.

‘Girls, girls, do be quiet one minute! I must get this off by the early mail, and you drive me distracted with your worry,’ cried Mrs. March, crossing out the third spoiled sentence in her letter.

There was a momentary lull, broken by Hannah, who stalked in, laid two hot turnovers on the table, and stalked out again. These turnovers were an institution, and the girls called them ‘muffs’, for they had no others and found the hot pies very comforting to their hands on cold mornings.
hospital for infirm dolls. No pins were ever stuck into their cotton vitals, no harsh words or blows were ever given them, no neglect ever saddened the heart or the most repulsive, but all were fed and clothed, nursed and caressed with an affection which never failed. One forlorn fragment of dollanitiy had belonged to Jo and, having led a tempestuous life, was left a wreck in the rag bag, from which dreary poorhouse it was rescued by Beth and taken to her refuge. Having no top to its head, she tied on a neat little cap, and as both arms and legs were gone, she hid these deficiencies by folding it in a blanket and devoting her best bed to this chronic invalid. If anyone had known the care lavished on that dolly, I think it would have touched their hearts, even while they laughed. She brought it bits of bouquets, she read to it, took it out to breathe fresh air, hidden under her coat, she sang it lullabies and never went to be without kissing its dirty face and whispering tenderly, 'I hope you'll have a good night, my poor dear.'

Beth had her troubles as well as the others, and not being an angel but a very human little girl, she often 'wept a little weep' as Jo said, because she couldn’t take music lessons and have a fine piano. She loved music so dearly, tried so hard to learn, and practiced away so patiently at
Florence’s mama hadn’t a particle of taste, and Amy suffered deeply at having to wear a red instead of a blue bonnet, unbecoming gowns, and fussy aprons that did not fit. Everything was good, well made, and little worn, but Amy’s artistic eyes were much afflicted, especially this winter, when her school dress was a dull purple with yellow dots and no trimming.

‘My only comfort,’ she said to Meg, with tears in her eyes, ‘is that Mother doesn’t take tucks in my dresses whenever I’m naughty, as Maria Parks’s mother does. My dear, it’s really dreadful, for sometimes she is so bad her frock is up to her knees, and she can’t come to school. When I think of this deggerredation, I fell that I can bear even my flat nose and purple gown with yellow skyrockets on it.’

Meg was Amy’s confidante and monitor, and by some strange attraction of opposites Jo was gentle Beth’s. To Jo alone did the shy child tell her thoughts, and oft her big harum-scarum sister Beth unconsciously exercised more influence than anyone in the family. The two older girls were a great deal to one another, and each took one of the younger sisters into her keeping and watched over her in her own way, ‘playing mother’ they called it, and put their
garden, where Beth and Amy were snow-balling one another.

‘That boy is suffering for society and fun,’ she said to herself. ‘His grandpa does not know what’s good for him, and keeps him shut up all alone. He needs a party of jolly boys to play with, or somebody young and lively. I’ve a great mind to go over and tell the old gentleman so!’

The idea amused Jo, who liked to do daring things and was always scandalizing Meg by her queer performances. The plan of ‘going over’ was not forgotten. And when the snowy afternoon came, Jo resolved to try what could be done. She saw Mr. Lawrence drive off, and then sallied out to dig her way down to the hedge, where she paused and took a survey. All quiet, curtains down at the lower windows, servants out of sight, and nothing human visible but a curly black head leaning on a thin hand at the upper window.

‘There he is,’ thought Jo, ‘Poor boy! All alone and sick this dismal day. It’s a shame! I’ll give up a snowball and make him look out, and then say a kind word to him.’

Up went a handful of soft snow, and the head turned at once, showing a face which lost its listless look in a minute, as the big eyes brightened and the mouth began...
'I only said I thought so.'
'But you like me in spite of it?'
'Yes, I do, sir.'

That answer pleased the old gentleman. He gave a short laugh, shook hands with her, and, putting his finger under her chin, turned up her face, examined it gravely, and let it go, saying with a nod, 'You've got your grandfather's spirit, if you haven't his face. He was a fine man, my dear, but what is better, he was a brave and an honest one, and I was proud to be his friend.'

'Thank you, sir,' And Jo was quite comfortable after that, for it suited her exactly.

'What have you been doing to this boy of mine, hey?' was the next question, sharply put.

'Only trying to be neighborly, sir.' And Jo to how her visit came about.

'You think he needs cheering up a bit, do you?'

'Yes, sir, he seems a little lonely, and young folks would do him good perhaps. We are only girls, but we should be glad to help if we could, for we don't forget the splendid Christmas present you sent us,' said Jo eagerly.

'Tut, tut, tut! That was the boy's affair. How is the poor woman?'
‘I was thinking about our ‘PILGRIM’S PROGRESS’,’ answered Beth, who had not heard a word. ‘How we got out of the Slough and through the Wicket Gate by resolving to be good, and up the steep hill by trying, and that maybe the house over there, full of splendid things, is going to be our Palace Beautiful.’

‘We have got to get by the lions first,’ said Jo, as if she rather liked the prospect.
into their midst and made much of him, and he found something very charming in the innocent companionship of these simple-hearted girls. Never having known mother or sisters, he was quick to feel the influences they brought about him, and their busy, lively ways made him ashamed of the indolent life he led. He was tired of books, and found people so interesting now that Mr. Brooke was obliged to make very unsatisfactory reports, for Laurie was always playing truant and running over to the Marches’.

‘Never mind, let him take a holiday, and make it up afterward,’ said the old gentleman. ‘The good lady next door says he is studying too hard and needs young society, amusement, and exercise. I suspect she is right, and that I’ve been coddling the fellow as if I’d been his grandmother. Let him do what he likes, as long as he is happy. He can’t get into mischief in that little nunnery over there, and Mrs. March is doing more for him than we can.’

What good times they had, to be sure. Such plays and tableaux, such sleigh rides and skating frolics, such pleasant evenings in the old parlor, and now and then such gay little parties at the great house. Meg could walk in the conservatory whenever she liked and revel in bouquets, Jo browsed over the new library voraciously, and convulsed
‘Bring with you the limes you have in your desk,’ was the unexpected command which arrested her before she got out of her seat.

‘Don’t take all.’ whispered her neighbor, a young lady of great presence of mind.

Amy hastily shook out half a dozen and laid the rest down before Mr. Davis, feeling that any man possessing a human heart would relent when that delicious perfume met his nose. Unfortunately, Mr. Davis particularly detested the odor of the fashionable pickle, and disgust added to his wrath.

‘Is that all?’

‘Not quite,’ stammered Amy.

‘Bring the rest immediately.’

With a despairing glance at her set, she obeyed.

‘You are sure there are no more?’

‘I never lie, sir.’

‘So I see. Now take these disgusting things, two by two, and throw them out of the window.’

There was a simultaneous sigh, which produced quite a little gust, as the last hope fled, and the treat was ravished from their longing lips. Scarlet with shame and anger, Amy went to and fro six dreadful times, and as each doomed couple, looking oh, so plump and juicy, fell from
her reluctant hands, a shout from the street completed the anguish of the girls, for it told them that their feast was being exulted over by the little Irish children, who were their sworn foes. This—this was too much. All flashed indignant or appealing glances at the inexorable Davis, and one passionate lime lover burst into tears.

As Amy returned from her last trip, Mr. Davis gave a portentous ‘Hem!’ and said, in his most impressive manner...

‘Young ladies, you remember what I said to you a week ago. I am sorry this has happened, but I never allow my rules to be infringed, and I never break my word. Miss March, hold out your hand.’

Amy started, and put both hands behind her, turning on him an imploring look which pleaded for her better than the words she could not utter. She was rather a favorite with ‘old Davis’, as, of course, he was called, and it’s my private belief that he would have broken his word if the indignation of one irrepressible young lady had not found vent in a hiss. That hiss, faint as it was, irritated the irascible gentleman, and sealed the culprit’s fate.

‘Your hand, Miss March!’ was the only answer her mute appeal received, and too proud to cry or beseech, Amy set her teeth, threw back her head defiantly, and
Beth suddenly turned very red, and hid her face in the sofa cushion, quite overcome by such an unexpected discovery.

Jo let Laurie win the game to pay for that praise of her Beth, who could not be prevailed upon to play for them after her compliment. So Laurie did his best, and sang delightfully, being in a particularly lively humor, for to the Marches he seldom showed the moody side of his character. When he was gone, Amy, who had been pensive all evening, said suddenly, as if busy over some new idea, ‘Is Laurie an accomplished boy?’

‘Yes, he has had an excellent education, and has much talent. He will make a fine man, if not spoiled by petting,’ replied her mother.

‘And he isn’t conceited, is he?’ asked Amy.

‘Not in the least. That is why he is so charming and we all like him so much.’ ‘I see. It’s nice to have accomplishments and be elegant, but not to show off or get perked up,’ said Amy thoughtfully.

‘These things are always seen and felt in a person’s manner and conversations, if modestly used, but it is not necessary to display them,’ said Mrs. March.

‘Any more than it’s proper to wear all your bonnets and gowns and ribbons at once, that folks may know
CHAPTER EIGHT

‘Girls, where are you going?’ asked Amy, coming into their room one Saturday afternoon, and finding them getting ready to go out with an air of secrecy which excited her curiosity.

‘Never mind. Little girls shouldn’t ask questions,’ returned Jo sharply.

Now if there is anything mortifying to our feelings when we are young, it is to be told that, and to be bidden to ‘run away, dear’ is still more trying to us. Amy bridled up at this insult, and determined to find out the secret, if she teased for an hour. Turning to Meg, who never refused her anything very long, she said coaxingly, ‘Do tell me! I should think you might let me go, too, for Beth is fussing over her piano, and I haven’t got anything to do, and am so lonely.’

‘I can’t, dear, because you aren’t invited,’ began Meg, but Jo broke in impatiently, ‘Now, Meg, be quiet, or you will spoil it all. You can’t go, Amy, so don’t be a baby and whine about it.

You are going somewhere with Laurie, I know you are. You were whispering and laughing together on the
comical red imps, sparkling elves, and the gorgeous princes and princesses, Jo’s pleasure had a drop of bitterness in it. The fairy queen’s yellow curls reminded her of Amy, and between the acts she amused herself with wondering what her sister would do to make her ‘sorry for it’. She and Amy had had many lively skirmishes in the course of their lives, for both had quick tempers and were apt to be violent when fairly roused. Amy teased Jo, and Jo irritated Amy, and semioccasional explosions occurred, of which both were much ashamed afterward. Although the oldest, Jo had the least self-control, and had hard times trying to curb the fiery spirit which was continually getting her into trouble. Her anger never lasted long, and having humbly confessed her fault, she sincerely repented and tried to do better. Her sisters used to say that they rather liked to get Jo into a fury because she was such an angel afterward. Poor Jo tried desperately to be good, but her bosom enemy was always ready to flame up and defeat her, and it took years of patient effort to subdue it.

When they got home, they found Amy reading in the parlor. She assumed an injured air as they came in, never lifted her eyes from her book, or asked a single question. Perhaps curiosity might have conquered resentment, if Beth had not been there to inquire and receive a glowing
‘You know something about it, and you’d better tell at once, or I’ll make you.’ And Jo gave her a slight shake.

‘Scold as much as you like, you’ll never see your silly old book again,’ cried Amy, getting excited in her turn.

‘why not?’

‘I burned it up.’

‘What! My little book I was so fond of, and worked over, and meant to finish before Father got home? Have you really burned it?’ said Jo, turning very pale, while her eyes kindled and her hands clutched Amy nervously.

‘Yes, I did! I told you I’d make you pay for being so cross yesterday, and I have, so..’

Amy got no farther, for Jo’s hot temper mastered her, and she shook Amy till her teeth chattered in her head, crying in a passion of grief and anger...

‘You wicked, wicked girl! I never can write it again, and I’ll never forgive you as long as I live.’

Meg flew to rescue Amy, and Beth to pacify Jo, but Jo was quite beside herself, and with a parting box on her sister’s ear, she rushed out of the room up to the old sofa in the garret, and finished her fight alone.

The storm cleared up below, for Mrs. March came home, and having heard the story, soon brought Amy to a sense of the wrong she had done her sister. Jo’s book was
nature, softened Jo’s resentment and healed the breach. It was not a happy evening, for though they sewed as usual, while their mother read aloud from Bremer, Scott, or Edgeworth, something was wanting, and the sweet home peace was disturbed. They felt this most when singing time came, for Beth could only play, Jo stood dumb as a stone, and Amy broke down, so Meg and Mother sang alone. But in spite of their efforts to be as cheery as larks, the flutelike voices did not seem to chord as well as usual, and all felt out of tune.

As Jo received her good-night kiss, Mrs. March whispered gently, ‘My dear, don’t let the sun go down upon your anger. Forgive each other, help each other, and begin again tomorrow.’

Jo wanted to lay her head down on that motherly bosom, and cry her grief and anger all away, but tears were an unmanly weakness, and she felt so deeply injured that she really couldn’t quite forgive yet. So she winked hard, shook her head, and said gruffly because Amy was listening, ‘It was an abominable thing, and she doesn’t deserve to be forgiven.’

Well, that she marched off to bed, and there was no merry or confidential gossip that night.
us all our lives to conquer them. You think your temper is
the worst in the world, but mine used to be just like it.’

‘Yours, Mother? Why, you are never angry!’ And for
the moment Jo forgot remorse in surprise.

‘I’ve been trying to cure it for forty years, and have
only succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every
day of my life, Jo, but I have learned not to show it, and I
still hope to learn not to feel it, though it may take me
another forty years to do so.’

The patience and the humility of the face she loved so
well was a better lesson to Jo than the wisest lecture, the
sharpest reproof. She felt comforted at once by the
sympathy and confidence given her. The knowledge that
her mother had a fault like hers, and tried to mend it,
made her own easier to bear and strengthened her
resolution to cure it, though forty years seemed rather a
long time to watch and pray to a girl of fifteen.

‘Mother, are you angry when you fold your lips tight
together and go out of the room sometimes, when Aunt
March scolds or people worry you?’ asked Jo, feeling
nearer and dearer to her mother than ever before.

‘Yes, I’ve learned to check the hasty words that rise to
my lips, and when I feel that they mean to break out
against my will, I just go away for a minute, and give

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myself a little shake for being so weak and wicked,’ answered Mrs. March with a sigh and a smile, as she smoothed and fastened up Jo’s disheveled hair.

‘How did you learn to keep still? That is what troubles me, for the sharp words fly out before I know what I’m about, and the more I say the worse I get, till it’s a pleasure to hurt people’s feelings and say dreadful things. Tell me how you do it, Marmee dear.’ ‘My good mother used to help me.’

‘As you do us...’ interrupted Jo, with a grateful kiss.

‘But I lost her when I was a little older than you are, and for years had to struggle on alone, for I was too proud to confess my weakness to anyone else. I had a hard time, Jo, and shed a good many bitter tears over my failures, for in spite of my efforts I never seemed to get on. Then your father came, and I was so happy that I found it easy to be good. But by-and-by, when I had four little daughters round me and we were poor, then the old trouble began again, for I am not patient by nature, and it tried me very much to see my children wanting anything.

‘Poor Mother! What helped you then?’

‘Your father, Jo. He never loses patience, never doubts or complains, but always hopes, and works and waits so cheerfully that one is ashamed to do otherwise before him.'
'Yes. I asked him to help me so, and he never forgot it, but saved me from many a sharp word by that little gesture and kind look.'

Jo saw that her mother’s eyes filled and her lips trembled as she spoke, and fearing that she had said too much, she whispered anxiously, ‘Was it wrong to watch you and to speak of it? I didn’t mean to be rude, but it’s so comfortable to say all I think to you, and feel so safe and happy here.’

‘Mama Jo, you may say anything to your mother, for it is my greatest happiness and pride to feel that my girls confide in me and know how much I love them.’

‘I thought I’d grieved you.’

‘No, dear, but speaking of Father reminded me how much I miss him, how much I owe him, and how faithfully I should watch and work to keep his little daughters safe and good for him.’

‘Yet you told him to go, Mother, and didn’t cry when he went, and never complained, or seem as if you needed any help,’ said Jo, wondering.

‘I gave my best to the country I love, and kept my tears till he was gone. Why should I complain, when we both have merely done our duty and will surely be the happier for it in the end? If I don’t seem to need help, it is because
Feeling almost happy again, she laid by a few ferns and roses for herself, and quickly made up the rest in dainty bouquets for the breasts, hair, or skirts of her friends, offering them so prettily that Clara, the elder sister, told her she was ‘the sweetest little thing she ever saw’, and they looked quite charmed with her small attention. Somehow the kind act finished her despondency, and when all the rest went to show themselves to Mrs. Moffat, she saw a happy, bright-eyed face in the mirror, as she laid her ferns against her rippling hair and fastened the roses in the dress that didn’t strike her as so very shabby now.

She enjoyed herself very much that evening, for she danced to her heart’s content. Everyone was very kind, and she had three compliments. Annie made her sing, and some one said she had a remarkably fine voice. Major Lincoln asked who ‘the fresh little girl with the beautiful eyes’ was, and Mr. Moffat insisted on dancing with her because she ‘didn’t dawdle, but had some spring in her’, as he gracefully expressed it. So she had a very nice time, till she overheard a bit of conversation, which disturbed her extremely. She was sitting just inside the conservatory, waiting for her partner to bring her an ice, when she heard a voice ask on the other side of the flowery wall...
Meg couldn’t refuse the offer so kindly made, for a desire to see if she would be ‘a little beauty’ after touching up caused her to accept and forget all her former uncomfortable feelings toward the Moffats.

On the Thursday evening, Belle shut herself up with her maid, and between them they turned Meg into a fine lady. They crimped and curled her hair, they polished her neck and arms with some fragrant powder, touched her lips with coralline salve to make them redder, and Hortense would have added ‘a soupcon of rouge’, if Meg had not rebelled. They laced her into a sky-blue dress, which was so tight she could hardly breathe and so low in the neck that modest Meg blushed at herself in the mirror.

A set of silver filagree was added, bracelets, necklace, brooch, and even earrings, for Hortense tied them on with a bit of pink silk which did not show. A cluster of tea-rose buds at the bosom and a ruche, reconciled Meg to the display of her pretty, white shoulders, and a pair of high-heeled silk boots satisfied the last wish of her heart. A lace handkerchief, a plumy fan, and a bouquet in a shoulder holder finished her off, and Miss Belle surveyed her with the satisfaction of a little girl with a newly dressed doll.

‘Mademoiselle is chatmante, tres jolie, is she not?’ cried Hortense, clasping her hands in an affected rapture.
Keeping that warning carefully in mind, Margaret got safely downstairs and sailed into the drawing rooms where the Moffats and a few early guests were assembled. She very soon discovered that there is a charm about fine clothes which attracts a certain class of people and secures their respect. Several young ladies, who had taken no notice of her before, were very affectionate all of a sudden. Several young gentlemen, who had only stared at her at the other party, now not only stared, but asked to be introduced, and said all manner of foolish but agreeable things to her, and several old ladies, who sat on the sofas, and criticized the rest of the party, inquired who she was with an air of interest. She heard Mrs. Moffat reply to one of them...

‘Daisy March—father a colonel in the army—one of our first families, but reverses of fortune, you know; intimate friends of the Laurences; sweet creature, I assure you; my Ned is quite wild about her.’

‘Dear me!’ said the old lady, putting up her glass for another observation of Meg, who tried to look as if she had not heard and been rather shocked at Mrs. Moffat’s fibs. The ‘queer feeling’ did not pass away, but she imagined herself acting the new part of fine lady and so got on pretty well, though the tight dress gave her a side-
ache, the train kept getting under her feet, and she was in constant fear lest her earrings should fly off and get lost or broken. She was flirting her fan and laughing at the feeble jokes of a young gentleman who tried to be witty, when she suddenly stopped laughing and looked confused, for just opposite, she saw Laurie. He was staring at her with undisguised surprise, and disapproval also, she thought, for though he bowed and smiled, yet something in his honest eyes made her blush and wish she had her old dress on. To complete her confusion, she saw Belle nudge Annie, and both glance from her to Laurie, who, she was happy to see, looked unusually boyish and shy.

‘Silly creatures, to put such thoughts into my head. I won’t care for it, or let it change me a bit,’ thought Meg, and rustled across the room to shake hands with her friend.

‘I’m glad you came, I was afraid you wouldn’t,’ she said, with her most grown-up air.

‘Jo wanted me to come, and I have to tell you how you looked, so I did,’ answered Laurie, without turning his eyes upon her, though he half smiled at her maternal tone.

What shall you tell her?’ asked Meg, full of curiosity to know his opinion of her, yet feeling ill at ease with him for the first time.
'Pin it round your neck, and then it will be useful,' said Laurie, looking down at the little blue boots, which he evidently approved of. Away they went fleetly and gracefully, for having practiced at home, they were well matched, and the blithe young couple were a pleasant sight to see, as they twirled merrily round and round, feeling more friendly than ever after their small tiff.

‘Laurie, I want you to do me a favor, will you?’ said Meg, as he stood fanning her when her breath gave out, which it did very soon though she would not own why.

‘Won’t I!’ said Laurie, with alacrity.

‘Please don’t tell them at home about my dress tonight. They won’t understand the joke, and it will worry Mother.’

‘Then why did you do it?’ said Laurie’s eyes, so plainly that Meg hastily added...

‘I shall tell them myself all about it, and ’fess to Mother how silly I’ve been. But I’d rather do it myself. So you’ll not tell, will you?’

‘I give you my word I won’t, only what shall I say when they ask me?’

‘Just say I looked pretty well and was having a good time.’
‘It does seem pleasant to be quiet, and not have company manners on all the time. Home is a nice place, though it isn’t splendid,’ said Meg, looking about her with a restful expression, as she sat with her mother and Jo on the Sunday evening.

‘I’m glad to hear you say so, dear, for I was afraid home would seem dull and poor to you after your fine quarters,’ replied her mother, who had given her many anxious looks that day. For motherly eyes are quick to see any change in children’s faces.

Meg had told her adventures gayly and said over and over what a charming time she had had, but something still seemed to weigh upon her spirits, and when the younger girls were gone to bed, she sat thoughtfully staring at the fire, saying little and looking worried. As the clock struck nine and Jo proposed bed, Meg suddenly left her chair and, taking Beth’s stool, leaned her elbows on her mother’s knee, saying bravely...

‘Marmee, I want to ‘fess’.
‘I thought so. What’s it, dear?’
‘Shall I go away?’ asked Jo discreetly.
‘Of course not. Don’t I always tell you everything? I was ashamed to speak of it before the younger children,
Then she told the various bits of gossip she had heard at the Moffats’, and as she spoke, Jo saw her mother fold her lips tightly, as if ill pleased that such ideas should be put into Meg’s innocent mind.

‘Well, if that isn’t the greatest rubbish I ever heard,’ cried Jo indignantly. ‘Why didn’t you pop out and tell them so on the spot?’

‘I couldn’t, it was so embarrassing for me. I couldn’t help hearing at first, and then I was so angry and ashamed, I didn’t remember that I ought to go away.’

‘Just wait till I see Annie Moffat, and I’ll show you how to settle such ridiculous stuff. The idea of having ‘plans’ and being kind to Laurie because he’s rich and may marry us by-and-by! Won’t he shout when I tell him what those silly things say about us poor children?’ And Jo laughed, as if on second thoughts the thing struck her as a good joke.

‘If you tell Laurie, I’ll never forgive you! She mustn’t, must she, Mother?’ said Meg, looking distressed.

‘No, never repeat that foolish gossip, and forget it as soon as you can,’ said Mrs. March gravely. ‘I was very unwise to let you go among people of whom I know so little, kind, I dare say, but worldly, ill-bred, and full of these vulgar ideas about young people. I am more sorry
to hope and wait for it, and wise to prepare for it, so that when the happy time comes, you may feel ready for the duties and worthy of the joy. My dear girls, I am ambitious for you, but not to have you make a dash in the world, marry rich men merely because they are rich, or have splendid houses, which are not homes because love is wanting. Money is a needful and precious thing, and when well used, a noble thing, but I never want you to think it is the first or only prize to strive for. I’d rather see you poor men’s wives, if you were happy, beloved, contented, than queens on thrones, without self-respect and peace.’

‘Poor girls don’t stand any chance, Belle says, unless they put themselves forward,’ sighed Meg.

‘Then we’ll be old maids,’ said Jo stoutly. ‘right, Jo. Better be happy old maids than unhappy wives, or unmaidenly girls, running about to find husbands,’ said Mrs. March decidedly. ‘Don’t be troubled, Meg, poverty seldom daunts a sincere lover. Some of the best and most honored women I know were poor girls, but so love-worthy that they were not allowed to be old maids. Leave these things to time. Make this home happy, so that you may be fit for homes of your own, if they are offered you, and contented here if they are not. One thing remember, my girls. Mother is always ready to be your confidante,
Father to be your friend, and both of hope and trust that our daughters, whether married or single, will be the pride and comfort of our lives.’

‘We will, Marmee, we will!’ cried both, with all their hearts, as she bade them good night.
CHAPTER TEN

As spring came on, a new set of amusements became the fashion, and the lengthening days gave long afternoons for work and play of all sorts. The garden had to be put in order, and each sister had a quarter of the little plot to do what she liked with. Hannah used to say, ‘I’d know which each of them gardings belonged to, ef I see ‘em in Chiny,’ and so she might, for the girls’ tastes differed as much as their characters. Meg’s had roses and heliotrope, myrtle, and a little orange tree in it. Jo’s bed was never alike two seasons, for she was always trying experiments. This year it was to be a plantation of sun flowers, the seeds of which cheerful land aspiring plant were to feed Aunt Cockle-top and her family of chicks. Beth had old-fashioned fragrant flowers in her garden, sweet peas and mignonette, larkspur, pinks, pansies, and southernwood, with chickweed for the birds and catnip for the pussies. Amy had a bower in hers, rather small and earwiggy, but very pretty to look at, with honeysuckle and morning-glories hanging their colored horns and bells in graceful wreaths all over it, tall white lilies, delicate ferns, and as many...
brilliant, picturesque plants as would consent to blossom there.

Gardening, walks, rows on the river, and flower hunts employed the fine days, and for rainy ones, they had house diversions, some old, some new, all more or less original. One of these was the ‘P.C’, for as secret societies were the fashion, it was thought proper to have one, and as all of the girls admired Dickens, they called themselves the Pickwick Club. With a few interruptions, they had kept this up for a year, and met every Saturday evening in the big garret, on which occasions the ceremonies were as follows: Three chairs were arranged in a row before a table on which was a lamp, also four white badges, with a big ‘P.C.’ in different colors on each, and the weekly newspaper called, The Pickwick Portfolio, to which all contributed something, while Jo, who reveled in pens and ink, was the editor. At seven o’clock, the four members ascended to the clubroom, tied their badges round their heads, and took their seats with great solemnity. Meg, as the eldest, was Samuel Pickwick, Jo, being of a literary turn, Augustus Snodgrass, Beth, because she was round and rosy, Tracy Tupman, and Amy, who was always trying to do what she couldn’t, was Nathaniel Winkle. Pickwick, the president, read the paper, which was filled
Although he suffers from a cold,  
We joy to hear him speak,  
For words of wisdom from him fall,  
In spite of croak or squeak.

Old six-foot Snodgrass looms on high,  
With elephantine grace,  
And beams upon the company,  
With brown and jovial face.

Poetic fire lights up his eye,  
He struggles ‘gainst his lot.  
Behold ambition on his brow,  
And on his nose, a blot.

Next our peaceful Tupman comes,  
So rosy, plump, and sweet,  
Who chokes with laughter at the puns,  
And tumbles off his seat.

Prim little Winkle too is here,  
With every hair in place,  
A model of propriety,  
Though he hates to wash his face.

The year is gone, we still unite  
To joke and laugh and read,  
And tread the path of literature  
That doth to glory lead.
the black mask. When that is off we shall see how he regards the fair maid whose heart he cannot win, though her stern father bestows her hand,’ returned the troubadour.

‘Tis whispered that she loves the young English artist who haunts her steps, and is spurned by the old Count,’ said the lady, as they joined the dance. The revel was at its height when a priest appeared, and withdrawing the young pair to an alcove, hung with purple velvet, he motioned them to kneel. Instant silence fell on the gay throng, and not a sound, but he dash of fountains or the rustle of orange groves sleeping in the moonlight, broke the hush, as Count de Adelon spoke thus:

‘My lords and ladies, pardon the ruse by which I have gathered you here to witness the marriage of my daughter. Father, we wait your services.’ All eyes turned toward the bridal party, and a murmur of amazement went through the throng, for neither bride nor groom removed their
ancient name and boundless wealth in return for the beloved hand of this fair lady, now my wife.

The count stood like one changed to stone, and turning to the bewildered crowd, Ferdinand added, with a gay smile of triumph, ‘To you, my gallant friends, I can only wish that your wooing may prosper as mine has done, and that you may all win as fair a bride as I have by this masked marriage.’

S. PICKWICK

Why is the P. C. like the Tower of Babel?

It is full of unruly members.

THE HISTORY OF A SQUASH

Once upon a time a farmer planted a little seed in his garden, and after a while it sprouted and became a vine and bore many squashes. One day in October, when they were ripe, he picked one and took it to market. A grocerman bought and put it in his shop. That same morning, a little girl in a brown hat and blue dress, with a round
We mourn the loss of our little pet,
And sigh o’er her hapless fate,
For never more by the fire she’ll sit,
Nor play by the old green gate.

The little grave where her infant sleeps
Is ‘neath the chestnut tree.
But o’er her grave we may not weep,
We know not where it may be.

Her empty bed, her idle ball,
Will never see her more;
No gentle tap, no loving purr
Is heard at the parlor door.

Another cat comes after her mice,
A cat with a dirty face,
But she does not hunt as our darling did,
Nor play with her airy grace.

Her stealthy paws tread the very hall
Where Snowball used to play.
But she only spits at dogs our pet
So gallantly drove away.

She is useful and mild, and does her best,
But she is not fair to see,
And we cannot give her your place dear,
‘Mercy on us! What has happened?’ cried Jo, staring about her in dismay.

Meg ran upstairs and soon came back again, looking relieved but rather bewildered, and a little ashamed.

‘Mother isn’t sick, only very tired, and she says she is going to stay quietly in her room all day and let us do the best we can. It’s a very queer thing for her to do, she doesn’t act a bit like herself. But she says it has been a hard week for her, so we mustn’t grumble but take care of ourselves.’

‘That’s easy enough, and I like the idea, I’m aching for something to do, that is, some new amusement, you know,’ added Jo quickly.

In fact it was an immense relief to them all to have a little work, and they took hold with a will, but soon realized the truth of Hannah’s saying, ‘Housekeeping ain’t no joke.’ There was plenty of food in the larder, and while Beth and Amy set the table, Meg and Jo got breakfast, wondering as they did why servants ever talked about hard work.

‘I shall take some up to Mother, though she said we were not to think of her, for she’d take care of herself,’ said Meg, who presided and felt quite matronly behind the teapot.
all she saw. They disliked her, but had been taught to be kind to her, simply because she was old and poor and had few friends. So Meg gave her the easy chair and tried to entertain her, while she asked questions, criticized everything, and told stories of the people whom she knew.

Language cannot describe the anxieties, experiences, and exertions which Jo underwent that morning, and the dinner she served up became a standing joke. Fearing to ask any more advice, she did her best alone, and discovered that something more than energy and good will is necessary to make a cook. She boiled the asparagus for an hour and was grieved to find the heads cooked off and the stalks harder than ever. The bread burned black, for the salad dressing so aggravated her that she could not make it fit to eat. The lobster was a scarlet mystery to her, but she hammered and poked till it was unshelled and its meager proportions concealed in a grove of lettuce leaves. The potatoes had to be hurried, not to keep the asparagus waiting, and were not done at all. The blancmange was lumpy, and the raspberries not as ripe as they looked, having been skillfully ‘deaconed’.

‘Well, they can eat beef and bread and butter, if they are hungry, only it’s mortifying to have to spend your whole morning for nothing,’ thought Jo, as she rang the
good for us, and lighten as we learn to carry them. Work is wholesome, and there is plenty for everyone. It keeps us from ennui and mischief, is good for health and spirits, and gives us a sense of power and independence better than money or fashion.’

‘We’ll work like bees, and love it too, see if we don’t,’ said Jo. ‘I’ll learn plain cooking for my holiday task, and the dinner party I have shall be a success.’

‘I’ll make the set of shirts for father, instead of letting you do it, Marmee. I can and I will, though I’m not fond of sewing. That will be better than fussing over my own things, which are plenty nice enough as they are.’ said Meg.

‘I’ll do my lessons every day, and not spend so much time with my music and dolls. I am a stupid thing, and ought to be studying, not playing,’ was Beth’s resolution, while Amy followed their example by heroically declaring, ‘I shall learn to make buttonholes, and attend to my parts of speech.’

‘Very good! Then I am quite satisfied with the experiment, and fancy that we shall not have to repeat it, only don’t go to the other extreme and delve like slaves. Have regular hours for work and play, make each day both useful and pleasant, and prove that you understand
Mrs. March glanced at Meg, who was looking very pretty in her gingham morning gown, with the little curls blowing about her forehead, and very womanly, as she sat sewing at her little worktable, full of tidy white rolls, so unconscious of the thought in her mother's mind as she sewed and sang, while her fingers flew and her thoughts were busied with girlish fancies as innocent and fresh as the pansies in her belt, that Mrs. March smiled and was satisfied.

'Two letters for Doctor Jo, a book, and a funny old hat, which covered the whole post office and stuck outside,' said Beth, laughing as she went into the study where Jo sat writing.

'What a sly fellow Laurie is! I said I wished bigger hats were the fashion, because I burn my face every hot day. He said, 'Why mind the fashion? Wear a big hat, and be comfortable!' I said I would if I had one, and he has sent me this to try me. I'll wear it for fun, and show him I don't care for the fashion.' And hanging the antique broadbrim on a bust of Plato, Jo read her letters.

One from her mother made her cheeks glow and her eyes fill, for it said to her...

My Dear:

Little Women
Sunshine and laughter were good omens for a pleasure party, and soon a lively bustle began in both houses. Beth, who was ready first, kept reporting what went on next door, and enlivened her sisters’ toilets by frequent telegrams from the window.

‘There goes the man with the tent! I see Mrs. Barker doing up the lunch in a hamper and a great basket. Now Mr. Laurence is looking up at the sky and the weathercock. I wish he would go too. There’s Laurie, looking like a sailor, nice boy! Oh, mercy me! Here’s a carriage full of people, a tall lady, a little girl, and two dreadful boys. One is lame, poor thing, he’s got a crutch. Laurie didn’t tell us that. Be quick, girls! It’s getting late. Why, there is Ned Moffat, I do declare. Meg, isn’t that the man who bowed to you one day when we were shopping?’

‘So it is. How queer that he should come. I thought he was at the mountains. There is Sallie. I’m glad she got back in time. Am I all right, Jo?’ cried Meg in a flutter.

‘A regular daisy! Hold up your dress and put your hat on straight. It looks sentimental tipped that way and will fly off at the first puff. Now then, come on!’

‘Oh, Jo, you are not going to wear that awful hat? It’s too absurd! You shall not make a guy of yourself,’
minute, hammering down a wicket with all her might, while Fred hit the stake and declared himself out with much exultation. She went off to get her ball, and was a long time finding it among the bushes, but she came back, looking cool and quiet, and waited her turn patiently. It took several strokes to regain the place she had lost, and when she got there, the other side had nearly won, for Kate’s ball was the last but one and lay near the stake.

‘By George, it’s all up with us! Goodbye, Kate. Miss Jo owes me one, so you are finished,’ cried Fred excitedly, as they all drew near to see the finish.

‘Yankees have a trick of being generous to their enemies,’ said Jo, with a look that made the lad redden, ‘especially when they beat them,’ she added, as, leaving Kate’s ball untouched, she won the game by a clever stroke.

Laurie threw up his hat, then remembered that it wouldn’t do to exult over the defeat of his guests, and stopped in the middle of his cheer to whisper to his friend, ‘Good for you, Jo! He did cheat, I saw him. We can’t tell him so, but he won’t do it again, take my word for it.’

Meg drew her aside, under pretense of pinning up a loose braid, and said approvingly, ‘It was dreadfully
thanked her, and went on their way rejoicing, never knowing the difference, for there were so many other heads like them in the world that no one thought anything of it. The knight in whom I’m interest went back to find the pretty face, and learned that the princesses had spun themselves free and all gone and married, but one. He was in a great state of mind at that, and mounting the colt, who stood by him through thick and thin, rushed to the castle to see which was left. Peeping over the hedge, he saw the queen of his affections picking flowers in her garden. ‘Will you give me a rose?’ said he. ‘You must come and get it. I can’t come to you, it isn’t proper,’ said she, as sweet as honey. He tried to climb over the hedge, but it seemed to grow higher and higher. Then he tried to push through, but it grew thicker and thicker, and he was in despair. So he patiently broke twig after twig till he had made a little hole through which he peeped, saying imploringly, ‘Let me in! Let me in!’ But the pretty princess did not seem to understand. As she picked her roses quietly, and left him to fight his way in. Whether he did or not, Frank will tell you.’

‘I can’t. I’m not playing. I never do,’ said Frank, dismayed at the sentimental predicament out of which he
Ned, frank, and the little girls joined in this, and while it went on, the three elders sat apart, talking. Miss Kate took out her sketch again, and Margaret watched her, while Mr. Brooke lay on the grass with a book, which he did not read.

‘How beautifully you do it! I wish I could draw,’ said Meg, with mingled admiration and regret in her voice.

‘Why don’t you learn? I should think you had taste and talent for it,’ replied Miss Kate graciously.

‘I haven’t time.’

‘Your mamma prefers other accomplishments, I fancy. So did mine, but I proved to her that I had talent by taking a few lessons privately, and then she was quite willing I should go on. Can’t you do the same with your governess?’

‘I have none.’

‘I forgot young ladies in America go to school more than with us. Very fine schools they are, papa says. You go to a private one, I suppose?’

‘I don’t go at all. I am a governess myself.’

‘Oh, indeed!’ said Miss Kate, but she might as well have said, ‘Dear me, how dreadful!’ for her tone implied it, and something in her face made Meg color, and wish she had not been so frank.
'facinating’, but as Grace didn’t know the exact meaning of either word, fastidious sounded well and made a good impression.

An impromptu circus, fox and geese, and an amicable game of croquet finished the afternoon. At sunset the tent was struck, hampers packed, wickets pulled up, boats loaded, and the whole party floated down the river, singing at the tops of their voices. Ned, getting sentimental, warbled a serenade with the pensive refrain...

Alone, alone, ah! Woe, alone,
and at the lines...

We each are young, we each have a heart,
Oh, why should we stand thus coldly apart?

He looked at Meg with such a lackadaisical expression that she laughed outright and spoiled his song.

‘How can you be so cruel to me?’ he whispered, under cover of a lively chorus. ‘You’ve kept close to that starched-up Englishwoman all day, and now you snub me.’

‘I didn’t mean to, but you looked so funny I really couldn’t help it,’ replied Meg, passing over the first part of his reproach, for it was quite true that she had shunned him, remembering the Moffat party and the talk after it.
CHAPTER THIRTEEN

Laurie lay luxuriously swinging to and fro in his hammock one warm September afternoon, wondering what his neighbors were about, but too lazy to go and find out. He was in one of his moods, for the day had been both unprofitable and unsatisfactory, and he was wishing he could live it over again. The hot weather made him indolent, and he had shirked his studies, tried Mr. Brooke's patience to the utmost, displeased his grandfather by practicing half the afternoon, frightened the maidservants half out of their wits by mischievously hinting that one of his dogs was going mad, and, after high words with the stableman about some fancied neglect of his horse, he had flung himself into his hammock to fume over the stupidity of the world in general, till the peace of the lovely day quieted him in spite of himself. Staring up into the green gloom of the horse-chestnut trees above him, he dreamed dreams of all sorts, and was just imagining lolling on the ocean in a voyage round the world, when the sound of voices brought him ashore in a flash. Peeping through the meshes of the hammock,
looked up, espied the wistful face behind the birches, and beckoned with a reassuring smile.

‘May I come in, please? Or shall I be a bother?’ he asked, advancing slowly.

Meg lifted her eyebrows, but Jo scowled at her defiantly and said at once, ‘Of course you may. We should have asked you before, only we thought you wouldn’t care for such a girl’s game as this.’

‘I always like your games, but if Meg doesn’t want me, I’ll go away.’

‘I’ve no objection, if you do something. It’s against the rules to be idle here,’ replied Meg gravely but graciously.

‘Much obliged. I’ll do anything if you’ll let me stop a bit, for it’s as dull as the Desert of Sahara down there. Shall I sew, read, cone, draw, or do all at once? Bring on your bears. I’m ready.’ And Laurie sat down with a submissive expression delightful to behold.

‘Finish this story while I set my heel,’ said Jo, handing him the book.

‘Yes’m.’ was the meek answer, as he began, doing his best to prove his gratitude for the favor of admission into the ‘Busy Bee Society’.
Jo looked at her friend as if she did not understand him, then began to laugh as if mightily amused at something.

‘There are two which I want to have come out, but I must wait a week.’

‘What are you laughing at? You are up to some mischief, Jo,’ said Laurie, looking mystified.

‘So are you. What were you doing, sir, up in that billiard saloon?’

‘Begging your pardon, ma’am, it wasn’t a billiard saloon, but a gymnasium, and I was taking a lesson in fencing.’

‘I’m glad of that.’

‘why?’

‘You can teach me, and then when we play HAMLET, you can be Laertes, and we’ll make a fine thing of the fencing scene.’

‘Laurie burst out with a hearty boy’s laugh, which made several passers-by smile in spite of themselves.

‘I’ll teach you whether we play HAMLET or not. It’s grand fun and will straighten you up capitally. But I don’t believe that was your only reason for saying ‘I’m glad’ in that decided way, was it now?’

‘No, I was glad that you were not in the saloon, because I hope you never go to such places. Do you?’
‘Of course I don’t. It’s ridiculous, it won’t be allowed. My patience! What would Meg say?’
‘You are not to tell anyone. Mind that.’
‘I didn’t promise.’
‘That was understood, and I trusted you.’
‘Well, I won’t for the present, anyway, but I’m disgusted, and wish you hadn’t told me.’
‘I thought you’d be pleased.’
‘At the idea of anybody coming to take Meg away? No, thank you.’
‘You’ll feel better about it when somebody comes to take you away.’
‘I’d like to see anyone try it,’ cried Jo fiercely.
‘So should I!’ And Laurie chuckled at the idea.
‘I don’t think secrets agree with me, I feel rumpled up in my mind since you told me that,’ said Jo rather ungratefully.
‘Race down this hill with me, and you’ll be all right,’ suggested Laurie.

No one was in sight, the smooth road seemed invitingly before her, and finding the temptation irresistible, Jo darted away, soon leaving hat and comb behind her and scattering hairpins as she ran. Laurie reached the goal first and was quite satisfied with the success of his treatment,
Down dropped the rubbers, and the tea was very near following, as Meg put out her hand, with a face so full of gratitude that Mr. Brooke would have felt repaid for a much greater sacrifice than the trifling one of time and comfort which he was about to take.

‘How kind you all are! Mother will accept, I’m sure, and it will be such a relief to know that she has someone to take care of her. Thank you very, very much!’

Meg spoke earnestly, and forgot herself entirely till something in the brown eyes looking down at her made her remember the cooling tea, and lead the way into the parlor, saying she would call her mother.

Everything was arranged by the time Laurie returned with a note from Aunt March, enclosing the desired sum, and a few lines repeating what she had often said before, that she had always told them it was absurd for March to go into the army, always predicted that no good would come of it, and she hoped they would take her advice the next time. Mrs. March put the note in the fire, the money in her purse, and went on with her preparations, with her lips folded tightly in a way Jo would have understood if she had been there.

The short afternoon wore away. All other errands were done, and Meg and her mother busy at some necessary
borrow as much as Mother does, and I knew Aunt March would croak, she always does, if you ask for a ninepence. Meg gave all her quarterly salary toward the rent, and I only got some clothes with mine, so I felt wicked, and was bound to have some money, if I sold the nose off my face to get it.’

‘You needn’t feel wicked, my child! You had no winter things and got the simplest with your own hard earnings,’ said Mrs. March with a look that warmed Jo’s heart.

‘I hadn’t the least idea of selling my hair at first, but as I went along I kept thinking what I could do, and feeling as if I’d like to dive into some of the rich stores and help myself. In a barber’s window I saw tails of hair with the prices marked, and one black tail, not so thick as mine, was forty dollars. It came to me all of a sudden that I had one thing to make money out of, and without stopping to think, I walked in, asked if they bought in, and what they would give for mine.’

‘I don’t see how you dared to do it,’ said Beth in a tone of awe.

Oh, he was a little man who looked as if he merely lived to oil his hair. He rather stared at first, as if he wasn’t used to having girls bounce into his shop and ask him to
Major Lion does picket duty at night. A salute of twenty-four guns was fired on receipt of good news from Washington, and a dress parade took place at headquarters. Commander in chief sends best wishes, in which he is heartily joined by...

    COLONEL TEDDY

Dear Madam:

    The little girls are all well. Beth and my boy report daily. Hannah is a model servant, and guards pretty Meg like a dragon. Glad the fine weather holds. Pray make Brooke useful, and draw on me for funds if expenses exceed your estimate. Don’t let your husband want anything. Thank God he is mending.

    Your sincere friend and servant,

    JAMES LAURENCE
reading the Washington dispatches over and over. Beth kept on, with only slight relapses into idleness or grieving.

All the little duties were faithfully done each day, and many of her sisters’ also, for they were forgetful, and the house seemed like a clock whose pendulum was gone a-visiting. When her heart got heavy with longings for Mother or fears for Father, she went away into a certain closet, hid her face in the folds of a dear old gown, and made her little moan and prayed her little prayer quietly by herself. Nobody knew what cheered her up after a sober fit, but everyone felt how sweet and helpful Beth was, and fell into a way of going to her for comfort or advice in their small affairs.

All were unconscious that this experience was a test of character, and when the first excitement was over, felt that they had done well and deserved praise. So they did, but their mistake was in ceasing to do well, and they learned this lesson through much anxiety and regret.

‘Meg, I wish you’d go and see the Hummels. You know Mother told us not to forget them,’ said Beth, ten days after Mrs. March’s departure.

‘I’m too tired to go this afternoon,’ replied Meg, rocking comfortably as she sewed.

‘Can’t you, Jo?’ asked Beth.
'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, but looking a little ashamed of her inconsistency.

‘Why don’t you go yourself?’ asked Meg.
‘I have been every day, but the baby is sick, 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 sicker and sicker, and I think you or Hannah ought to go.’

Beth spoke earnestly, and Meg promised she would go tomorrow.

‘Ask Hannah for some nice little mess, and take it round, Beth, the air will do you good,’ said Jo, adding apologetically, ‘I’d go but I want to finish my writing.’

‘My head aches and I’m tired, so I thought maybe some of you would go,’ said Beth.

‘Amy will be in presently, and she will run down for us, suggested Meg.

So Beth lay down on the sofa, the others returned to their work, and the Hummels were forgotten. An hour passed. Amy did not come; Meg went to her room to try on a new dress, Jo was absorbed in her story, and Hannah was sound asleep before the kitchen fire, when Beth...
that she was ‘happy, oh, so happy!’ while Laurie departed, feeling that he had made a rather neat thing of it.

‘That’s the interferingest chap I ever see, but I forgive him and do hope Mrs. March is coming right away,’ said Hannah, with an air of relief, when Jo told the good news.

Meg had a quiet rapture, and then brooded over the letter, while Jo set the sickroom in order, and Hannah ‘knocked up a couple of pies in case of company unexpected’. A breath of fresh air seemed to blow through the house, and something better than sunshine brightened the quiet rooms. Everything appeared to feel the hopeful change. Beth’s bird began to chirp again, and a half-blown rose was discovered on Amy’s bush in the window. The fires seemed to burn with unusual cheeriness, and every time the girls met, their pale faces broke into smiles as they hugged one another, whispering encouragingly, ‘Mother’s coming, dear! Mother’s coming!’

Every one rejoiced but Beth. She lay in that heavy stupor, alike unconscious of hope and doubt and danger. It was a piteous sight; the once rosy face so changed and vacant, the once busy hands so weak and wasted, the once smiling lips quite dumb, and the once pretty, well-kept hair scattered rough and tangled on the pillow. All day she say so, only rousing now and then to mutter, ‘Water!’
pillowed on her hand, the dreadful pallor gone, and breathing quietly, as if just fallen asleep.

‘If Mother would only come now!’ said Jo, as the winter night began to wane.

‘See,’ said Meg, coming up with a white, half-opened rose, ‘I thought this would hardly be ready to lay in Beth’s hand tomorrow if she—went away from us. But it has blossomed in the night, and now I mean to put it in my vase here, so that when the darling wakes, the first thing she sees will be the little rose, and Mother’s face.’

Never had the sun risen so beautifully, and never had the world seemed so lovely as it did to the heavy eyes of Meg and Jo, as they looked out in the early morning, when their long, sad vigil was done.

‘It looks like a fairy world,’ said Meg, smiling to herself, as she stood behind the curtain, watching the dazzling sight.

‘Hark!’ cried Jo, starting to her feet.

Yes, there was a sound of bells at the door below, a cry from Hannah, and then Laurie’s voice saying in a joyful whisper, ‘Girls, she’s come! She’s come!’
however, a very valuable copy of one of the famous pictures of the world, and Amy’s beauty-loving eyes were never tired of looking up at the sweet face of the Divine Mother, while her tender thoughts of her own were busy at her heart. On the table she laid her little testament and hymnbook, kept a vase always full of the best flowers Laurie brought her, and came every day to ‘sit alone’ thinking good thoughts, and praying the dear God to preserve her sister. Esther had given her a rosary of black beads with a silver cross, but Amy hung it up and did not use it, feeling doubtful as to its fitness for Protestant prayers.

The little girl was very sincere in all this, for being left alone outside the safe home nest, she felt the need of some kind hand to hold by so sorely that she instinctively turned to the strong and tender Friend, whose fatherly love most closely surrounds His little children. She missed her mother’s help to understand and rule herself, but having been taught where to look she did her best to find the way and walk in it confidingly. But Amy was a young pilgrim, and just now her burden seemed very heavy. She tried to forget herself, to keep cheerful, and be satisfied with doing right though no one saw or praised her for it. In her first effort at being very, very good, she decided to
‘I’m afraid there is, but we must hope for the best, so don’t cry, dear.’ And Laurie put his arm about her with a brotherly gesture which was very comforting.

When he had gone, she went to her little chapel, and sitting in the twilight, prayed for Beth, with streaming tears and an aching heart, feeling that a million turquoise rings would not console her for the loss of her gentle little sister.
looking at the plump little hand, with the band of sky-blue stones on the forefinger, and the quaint guard formed of two tiny golden hands clasped together.

‘I’ll try not to be vain,’ said Amy. ‘I don’t think I like it only because it’s so pretty, but I want to wear it as the girl in the story wore her bracelet, to remind me of something.’

‘Do you mean Aunt March?’ asked her mother, laughing.

‘No, to remind me not to be selfish.’ Amy looked so earnest and sincere about it that her mother stopped laughing, and listened respectfully to the little plan.

‘I’ve thought a great deal lately about my ‘bundle of naughties’, and being selfish is the largest one in it, so I’m going to try hard to cure it, if I can. Beth isn’t selfish, and that’s the reason everyone loves her and feels so bad at the thoughts of losing her. People wouldn’t feel so bad about me if I was sick, and I don’t deserve to have them, but I’d like to be loved and missed by many friends, so I’m going to try and be like Beth all I can. I’m apt to forget my resolutions, but if I had something always about me to remind me, I guess I should do better. May we try this way?’
‘My Dearest Margaret,

‘I can no longer restrain my passion, and must know my fate before I return. I dare not tell your parents yet, but I think they would consent if they knew that we adored one another. Mr. Laurence will help me to some good place, and then, my sweet girl, you will make me happy. I implore you to say nothing to your family yet, but to send one word of hope through Laurie to,

‘Your devoted John.’

‘Oh, the little villain! That’s the way he meant to pay me for keeping my word to Mother. I’ll give him a hearty scolding and bring him over to beg pardon,’ cried Jo, burning to execute immediate justice. But her mother held her back, saying, with a look she seldom wore...

‘Stop, Jo, you must clear yourself first. You have played so many pranks that I am afraid you have had a hand in this.’

‘On my word, Mother, I haven’t! I never saw that note before, and don’t know anything about it, as true as I live!’ said Jo, so earnestly that they believed her. ‘I’d had taken part in it if I’d done it better than this, and have written a sensible note. I should think you’d have known Mr. Brooke wouldn’t write such stuff as that,’ she added, scornfully tossing down the paper.
‘I only said I was too young to do anything about it yet, that I didn’t wish to have secrets from you, and he must speak to father. I was very grateful for his kindness, and would be his friend, but nothing more, for a long while.’

Mrs. March smiled, as if well pleased, and Jo clapped her hands, exclaiming, with a laugh, ‘You are almost equal to Caroline Percy, who was a pattern of prudence! Tell on, Meg. What did he say to that?’

‘He writes in a different way entirely, telling me that he never sent any love letter at all, and is very sorry that my roguish sister, Jo, should take liberties with our names. It’s very kind and respectful, but think how dreadful for me!’

Meg leaned against her mother, looking the image of despair, and Jo tramped about the room, calling Laurie names. All of a sudden she stopped, caught up the two notes, and after looking at them closely, said decidedly, ‘I don’t believe Brooke ever saw either of these letters. Teddy wrote both, and keeps your crow over me with because I wouldn’t tell him my secret.’

‘Don’t have any secrets, Jo. Tell not, Mother and keep out of trouble, as I should have done,’ said Meg warningly.

‘Bless you, child! Mother told me.’
sister’s desk for stamps, found a bit of paper scribbled over with the words, ‘Mrs. John Brooke’, whereat she groaned tragically and cast it into the fire, feeling that Laurie’s prank had hastened the evil day for her.
slammed the door, ‘I hate estimable young men with brown eyes!’

There never was such a Christmas dinner as they had that day. The fat turkey was a sight to behold, when Hannah sent him up, stuffed, browned, and decorated. So was the plum pudding, which melted in one’s mouth, likewise the jellies, in which Amy reveled like a fly in a honeypot. Everything turned out well, which was a mercy, Hannah said, ‘For my mind was that flustered, Mum, that it’s a merrycle I didn’t roast the pudding, and stuff the turkey with raisins, let alone bilin’ of it in a cloth.’

Mr. Laurence and his grandson dined with them, also Mr. Brooke, at whom Jo glovered darkly, to Laurie’s infinite amusement. Two easy chairs stood side by side at the head of the table, in which sat Beth and her father, feasting modestly on chicken and a little fruit. They drank healths, told stories, sang songs, ‘reminised,’ as the old folks say, and had a thoroughly good time. A sleigh ride had been planned, but the girls would not leave their father, so the guests departed early, and as twilight gathered, the happy family sat together round the fire.

‘Just a year ago we were groaning over the dismal Christmas we expected to have. Do you remember?’ asked
possession of the other hand, so that she had no way of hiding her face as he bent to look into it.

His tone was properly beseeching, but stealing a shy look at him, Meg saw that his eyes were merry as well as tender, and that he wore the satisfied smile of one who had no doubt of his success. This nettled her. Annie Moffat’s foolish lessons in coquetry came into her mind, and the love of power, which sleeps in the bosoms of the best of little women, woke up all of a sudden and took possession of her. She felt excited and strange, and not knowing what else to do, followed a capricious impulse, and, withdrawing her hands, said petulantly, ‘I don’t choose. Please go away and let me be!’

Poor Mr. Brooke looked as if his lovely castle in the air was tumbling about his ears, for he had never seen Meg in such a mood before, and it rather bewildered him.

‘Do you really mean that?’ he asked anxiously, following her as she walked away.

‘Yes, I do. I don’t want to be worried about such things. Father says I needn’t, it’s too soon and I’d rather not.’

‘Mayn’t I hope you’ll change your mind by-and-by? I’ll wait and say nothing till you have had more time. Don’t play with me, Meg. I didn’t think that of you.’ 

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had distilled no bitter drop. Earnest young men found the gray-headed scholar as young at heart as they, thoughtful or troubled women instinctively brought their doubts to him, sure of finding the gentlest sympathy, the wisest counsel. Sinners told their sins to the pure-hearted old man and were both rebuked and saved. Gifted men found a companion in him. Ambitious men caught glimpses of nobler ambitions than their own, and even worldlings confessed that his beliefs were beautiful and true, although ‘they wouldn’t pay’.

To outsiders the five energetic women seemed to rule the house, and so they did in many things, but the quiet scholar, sitting among his books, was still the head of the family, the household conscience, anchor, and comforter, for to him the busy, anxious women always turned in troubulous times, finding him, in the truest sense of those sacred words, husband and father.

The girls gave their hearts into their mother’s keeping, their souls into their father’s, and to both parents, who lived and labored faithfully for them, they gave a love that grew with their growth and bound them tenderly together by the sweetest tie which blesses life and outlives death.
but the power to cook wholesome food for my little girls, and help myself when I could no longer afford to hire help. You begin at the other end, Meg, dear, but the lessons you learn now will be of use to you by-and-by when John is a richer man, for the mistress of a house, however splendid, should know how work ought to be done, if she wishes to be well and honestly served.

‘Yes, Mother, I’m sure of that,’ said Meg, listening respectfully to the little lecture, for the best of women will hold forth upon the all absorbing subject of housekeeping. ‘Do you know I like this room most of all in my baby house,’ added Meg, a minute after, as they went upstairs and she looked into her well-stored linen closet.

Beth was there, laying the snowy piles smoothly on the shelves and exulting over the goodly array. All three laughed as Meg spoke, for that linen closet was a joke. You see, having said that if Meg married ‘that Brooke’ she shouldn’t have a cent of her money, Aunt March was rather in a quandary when time had appeased her wrath and made her repent her vow. She never broke her word, and was much exercised in her mind how to get round it, and at last devised a plan whereby she could satisfy herself. Mrs. Carrol, Florence’s mamma, was ordered to buy, have made, and marked a generous supply of house and table...
‘Any time when John is away and you get frightened, Mrs. Meg, just swing that out of the front window, and it will rouse the neighborhood in a jiffy. Nice thing, isn’t it?’ And Laurie gave them a sample of its powers that made them cover up their ears.

‘There’s gratitude for you! And speaking of gratitude reminds me to mention that you may thank Hannah for saving your wedding cake from destruction. I saw it going into your house as I came by, and if she hadn’t defended it manfully I’d have had a pick at it, for it looked like a remarkably plummy one.’

‘I wonder if you will ever grow up, Laurie,’ said Meg in a matronly tone.

‘I’m doing my best, ma’am, but can’t get much higher, I’m afraid, as six feet is about all men can do in these degenerate days,’ responded the young gentleman, whose head was about level with the little chandelier.

‘I suppose it would be profanation to eat anything in this spick-and-span bower, so as I’m tremendously hungry, I propose an adjournment,’ he added presently.

‘Mother and I are going to wait for John. There are some last things to settle,’ said Meg, bustling away.

‘Beth and I are going over to Kitty Bryant’s to get more flowers for tomorrow,’ added Amy, tying a
‘Don’t be a peacock. I only moaned a trifle to keep the girls company.’ ‘Exactly. I say, Jo, how is Grandpa this week? Very amiable?’

‘Very. Why, have you got into a scrape and want to know how he’ll take it?’ asked Jo rather sharply.

‘Now, Jo, do you think I’d look your mother in the face and say ‘All right’, if it wasn’t?’ And Laurie stopped short, with an injured air.

‘No, I don’t.’

‘Then don’t go and be suspicious. I only want some money,’ said Laurie, walking on again, appeased by her hearty tone.

‘You spend a great deal, Teddy.’

‘Bless you, I don’t spend it, it spends itself somehow, and is gone before I know it.’

‘You are so generous and kind-hearted that you let people borrow, and can’t say ‘No’ to anyone. We heard about Henshaw and all you did for him. If you always spent money in that way, no one would blame you,’ said Jo warmly.

‘Oh, he made a mountain out of a molehill. You wouldn’t have me let that fine fellow work himself to death just for want of a little help, when he is worth a dozen of us lazy chaps, would you?’
thinks, and I’m going to have my little wedding just as I like it. John, dear, here’s your hammer.’ And away went Meg to help ‘that man’ in his highly improper employment.

Mr. Brooke didn’t even say, ‘Thank you,’ but as he stooped for the unromantic tool, he kissed his little bride behind the folding door, with a look that made Aunt March whisk out her pocket handkerchief with a sudden dew in her sharp old eyes.

A crash, a cry, and a laugh from Laurie, accompanied by the indecorous exclamation, ‘Jupiter Ammon! Jo’s upset the cake again!’ caused a momentary flurry, which was hardly over when a flock of cousins arrived, and ‘the party came in’, as Beth used to say when a child.

‘Don’t let that young giant come near me, he worries me worse than mosquitoes,’ whispered the old lady to Amy, as the rooms filled and Laurie’s black head towered above the rest.

‘He has promised to be very good today, and he can be perfectly elegant if he likes,’ returned Amy, and gliding away to warn Hercules to beware of the dragon, which warning caused him to haunt the old lady with a devotion that nearly distracted her.
There was no bridal procession, but a sudden silence fell upon the room as Mr. March and the young couple took their places under the green arch. Mother and sisters gathered close, as if loath to give Meg up. The fatherly voice broke more than once, which only seemed to make the service more beautiful and solemn. The bridegroom’s hand trembled visibly, and no one heard his replies. But Meg looked straight up in her husband’s eyes, and said, ‘I will!’ with such tender trust in her own face and voice that her mother’s heart rejoiced and Aunt March sniffed audibly.

Jo did not cry, though she was very near it once, and was only saved from a demonstration by the consciousness that Laurie was staring fixedly at her, with a comical mixture of merriment and emotion in his wicked black eyes. Beth kept her face hidden on her mother’s shoulder, but Amy stood like a graceful statue, with a most becoming ray of sunshine touching her white forehead and the flower in her hair.

It wasn’t at all the thing, I’m afraid, but the minute she was fairly married, Meg cried, ‘The first kiss for Marmee!’ turning, gave it with her heart on her lips. During the next fifteen minutes she looked more like a rose than ever, for everyone availed themselves of their privileges to the
fullest extent, from Mr. Laurence to old Hannah, who, adorned with a headdress fearfully and wonderfully made, fell upon her in the hall, crying with a sob and a chuckle, 'Bless you, deary, a hundred times! The cake ain't hurt a mite, and everything looks lovely.'

Everybody cleared up after that, and said something brilliant, or tried to, which did just as well, for laughter is ready when hearts are light. There was no display of gifts, for they were already in the little house, nor was there an elaborate breakfast, but a plentiful lunch of cake and fruit, dressed with flowers. Mr. Laurence and Aunt March shrugged and smiled at one another when water, lemonade, and coffee were found to be to only sorts of nectar which the three Hebes carried around. No one said anything, till Laurie, who insisted on serving the bride, appeared before her, with a loaded salver in his hand and a puzzled expression on his face.

'Has Jo smashed all the bottles by accident?' he whispered, 'or am I merely laboring under a delusion that I saw some lying about loose this morning?'

'No, your grandfather kindly offered us his best, and Aunt March actually sent some, but Father put away a little for Beth and dispatched the rest to the Soldier's Home. You know he thinks that wine should be used
CHAPTER TWENTY-SIX

It takes people a long time to learn the difference between talent and genius, especially ambitious young men and women. Amy was learning this distinction through much tribulation, for mistaking enthusiasm for inspiration, she attempted every branch of art with youthful audacity. For a long time there was a lull in the ‘mud-pie’ business, and she devoted herself to the finest pen-and-ink drawing, in which she showed such taste and skill that her graceful handiwork proved both pleasant and profitable. But over-strained eyes caused pen and ink to be laid aside for a bold attempt at poker sketching.

While this attack lasted, the family lived in constant fear of a conflagration, for the odor of burning wood pervaded the house at all hours, smoke issued from attic and shed with alarming frequency, red-hot pokers lay about promiscuously, and Hannah never went to bed without a pail of water and the dinner bell at her door in case of fire. Raphael’s face was found boldly executed on the underside of the moulding board, and Bacchus on the head of a beer barrel. A chanting cherub adorned the
‘There’s the rumble, they’re coming! I'll go onto the porch and meet them. It looks hospitable, and I want the poor child to have a good time after all her trouble,’ said Mrs. March, suiting the action to the word. But after one glance, she retired, with an indescribable expression, for looking quite lost in the big carriage, sat Amy and one young lady.

‘Run, Beth, and help Hannah clear half the things off the table. It will be too absurd to put a luncheon for twelve before a single girl,’ cried Jo, hurrying away to the lower regions, too excited to stop even for a laugh.

In came Amy, quite calm and delightfully cordial to the one guest who had kept her promise. The rest of the family, being of a dramatic turn, played their parts equally well, and Miss Eliott found them a most hilarious set, for it was impossible to control entirely the merriment which possessed them. The remodeled lunch being gaily partaken of, the studio and garden visited, and art discussed with enthusiasm, Amy ordered a brougham (alas for the elegant cherry-bounce), and drove her friend quietly about the neighborhood till sunset, when ‘the party went out’.

As she came walking in, looking very tired but as composed as ever, she observed that every vestige of the
some great social evil would be remedied or some great want supplied by unfolding the glories of the Pharaohs to an audience whose thoughts were busy with the price of coal and flour, and whose lives were spent in trying to solve harder riddles than that of the Sphinx.

They were early, and while Miss Crocker set the heel of her stocking, Jo amused herself by examining the faces of the people who occupied the seat with them. On her left were two matrons, with massive foreheads and bonnets to match, discussing Women’s Rights and making tatting. Beyond sat a pair of humble lovers, artlessly holding each other by the hand, a somber spinster eating peppermints out of a paper bag, and an old gentleman taking his preparatory nap behind a yellow bandanna. On her right, her only neighbor was a studious looking lad absorbed in a newspaper.

It was a pictorial sheet, and Jo examined the work of art nearest her, idly wondering what tortuous concatenation of circumstances required the melodramatic illustration of an Indian in full war costume tumbling over a precipice with a wolf at his throat, while two infuriated young gentlemen, with unnaturally small feet and big eyes, were stabbing each other close by, and a disheveled female was flying away in the background with her mouth wide open.
believed that this book was the most remarkable novel ever written.

‘But Mr. Allen says, ‘Leave out the explanations, make it brief and dramatic, and let the characters tell the story’,’ interrupted Jo, turning to the publisher’s note.

‘Do as he tells you. He knows what will sale, and we don’t. Make a good, popular book, and get as much money as you can. By-and-by, when you’ve got a name, you can afford to digress, and have philosophical and metaphysical people in your novels,’ said Amy, who took a strictly practical view of the subject.

‘Well,’ said Jo, laughing, ‘if my people are ‘philosophical and metaphysical’, it isn’t my fault, for I know nothing about such things, except what I hear father say; sometimes. If I’ve got some of his wise ideas jumbled up with my romance, so much the better for me. Now, Beth, what do you say?’

‘I should so like to see it printed soon,’ said Beth said, and smiled in saying it. But there was an unconscious emphasis on the last word, and a wistful look in the eyes that never lost their childlike candor, which chilled Jo’s heart for a minute with a forboding fear, and decided her to make her little venture ‘soon’.
the romance from the daily parting, when her husband followed up his kiss with the tender inquiry, ‘Shall I send some veal or mutton for dinner, darling?’ The little house ceased to be a glorified bower, but it became a home, and the young couple soon felt that it was a change for the better. At first they played keep-house, and frolicked over it like children. Then John took steadily to business, feeling the cares of the head of a family upon his shoulders, and Meg laid by her cambric wrappers, put on a big apron, and fell to work, as before said, with more energy than discretion.

While the cooking mania lasted she went through Mrs. Cornelius’s Receipt Book as if it were a mathematical exercise, working out the problems with patience and care. Sometimes her family were invited in to help eat up a too bounteous feast of successes, or Lotty would be privately dispatched with a batch of failures, which were to be concealed from all eyes in the convenient stomachs of the little Hummels. An evening with John over the account books usually produced a temporary lull in the culinary enthusiasm, and a frugal fit would ensue, during which the poor man was put through a course of bread pudding, hash, and warmed-over coffee, which tried his soul, although he bore it with praiseworthy fortitude.
it was to have a superior wife. But, although they had had company from time to time, it never happened to be unexpected, and Meg had never had an opportunity to distinguish herself till now. It always happens so in this vale of tears, there is an inevitability about such things which we can only wonder at, deplore, and bear as we best can.

If John had not forgotten all about the jelly, it really would have been unpardonable in him to choose that day, of all the days in the year, to bring a friend home to dinner unexpectedly. Congratulating himself that a handsome repast had been ordered that morning, feeling sure that it would be ready to the minute, and indulging in pleasant anticipations of the charming effect it would produce, when his pretty wife came running out to meet him, he escorted his friend to his mansion, with the irrepressible satisfaction of a young host and husband.

It is a world of disappointments, as John discovered when he reached the Dovecote. The front door usually stood hospitably open. Now it was not only shut, but locked, and yesterday's mud still adorned the steps. The parlor windows were closed and curtained, no picture of the pretty wife sewing on the piazza, in white, with a distracting little bow in her hair, or a bright-eyed hostess,
‘I’ve no objection,’ was Meg’s equally soothing remark. A few other topics of general interest were introduced by Mr. Brooke and wet-blanketed by Mrs. Brooke, and conversation languished. John went to one window, unfolded his paper, and wrapped himself in it, figuratively speaking. Meg went to the other window, and sewed as if new rosettes for slippers were among the necessaries of life. Neither spoke. Both looked quite ‘calm and firm’, and both felt desperately uncomfortable.

‘Oh, dear,’ thought Meg, ‘married life is very trying, and does need infinite patience as well as love, as Mother says.’ The word ‘Mother’ suggested other maternal counsels given long ago, and received with unbelieving protests.

‘John is a good man, but he has his faults, and you must learn to see and bear with them, remembering your own. He is very decided, but never will be obstinate, if you reason kindly, not oppose impatiently. He is very accurate, and particular about the truth—a good trait, though you call him ‘fussy’. Never deceive him by look or word, Meg, and he will give you the confidence you deserve, the support you need. He has a temper, not like ours—one flash and then all over—but the white, still anger that is seldom stirred, but once kindled is hard to quench. Be
me-tight, or wonder how a little thing composed of three rosebuds, a bit of velvet, and a pair of strings, could possibly be a bonnet, and cost six dollars. That night he looked as if he would like the fun of quizzing her figures and pretending to be horrified at her extravagance, as he often did, being particularly proud of his prudent wife.

The little book was brought slowly out and laid down before him. Meg got behind his chair under pretense of smoothing the wrinkles out of his tired forehead, and standing there, she said, with her panic increasing with every word . . .

‘John, dear, I’m ashamed to show you my book, for I’ve really been dreadfully extravagant lately. I go about so much I must have things, you know, and Sallie advised my getting it, so I did, and my New Year’s money will partly pay for it, but I was sorry after I had done it, for I knew you’d think it wrong in me.’

John laughed, and drew her round beside him, saying goodhumoredly, ‘Don’t go and hide. I won’t beat you if you have got a pair of killing boots. I’m rather proud of my wife’s feet, and don’t mind if she does pay eight or nine dollars for her boots, as they are good ones.’

That had been one of her last ‘trifles’, and John’s eye had fallen on it as he spoke. ‘Oh, what will he say when
While Amy dressed, she issued her orders, and Jo obeyed them, not without entering her protest, however, for she sighed as she rustled into her new organdie, frowned darkly at herself as she tied her bonnet strings in an irreproachable bow, wrestled viciously with pins as she put on her collar, wrinkled up her features generally as she shook out the handkerchief, whose embroidery was as irritating to her nose as the present mission was to her feelings, and when she had squeezed her hands into tight gloves with three buttons and a tassel, as the last touch of elegance, she turned to Amy with an imbecile expression of countenance, saying meekly...

‘I’m perfectly miserable, but if you consider me presentable, I die happy.’

‘You’re highly satisfactory. turn slowly round, and let me get a careful view.’ Jo revolved, and Amy gave a touch here and there, then fell back, with her head on one side, observing graciously, ‘Yes, you’ll do. Your head is all I could ask, for that white bonnet with the rose is quite ravishing. Hold back your shoulders, and carry your hands easily, no matter if your gloves do pinch. There’s one thing you can do well, that is, wear a shawl. I can’t, but it’s very nice to see you, and I’m so glad Aunt March gave you that lovely one. It’s simple, but handsome, and
might rush in and rescue her. So situated, she was powerless to check Jo, who seemed possessed by a spirit of mischief, and talked away as volubly as the lady. A knot of heads gathered about her, and Amy strained her ears to hear what was going on, for broken sentences filled her with curiosity, and frequent peals of laughter made her wild to share the fun. One may imagine her suffering on overhearing fragments of this sort of conversation.

‘She rides splendidly. who taught her?’

‘No one. She used to practice mounting, holding the reins, and sitting straight on an old saddle in a tree. Now she rides anything, for she doesn’t know what fear is, and the stableman lets her have horses cheap because she trains them to carry ladies so well. She has such a passion for it, I often tell her if everything else fails, she can be a horsebreaker, and get her living so.’

At this awful speech Amy contained herself with difficulty, for the impression was being given that she was rather a fast young lady, which was her especial aversion. But what could she do? For the old lady was in the middle of her story. Long before it was over, Jo was off again, making more droll revelations and committing still more fearful blunders.
‘Not the least, my dear,’ interrupted Jo, ‘so let us look amiable, and drop a card here, as the Kings are evidently out, for which I’m deeply grateful.’

The family cardcase having done its duty the girls walked on, and Jo uttered another thanksgiving on reaching the fifth house, and being told that the young ladies were engaged.

‘now let us go home, and never mind Aunt March today. We can run down there any time, and it’s really a pity to trail through the dust in our best bibs and tuckers, when we are tired and cross.’

‘Speak for yourself, if you please. Aunt March likes to have us pay her the compliment of coming in style, and making a formal call. It’s a little thing to do, but it gives her pleasure, and I don’t believe it will hurt your things half so much as letting dirty dogs and clumping boys spoil them. Stoop down, and let me take the crumbs off of your bonnet.’

‘What a good girl you are, Amy!’ said Jo, with a repentant glance from her own damaged costume to that of her sister, which was fresh and spotless still. ‘I wish it was as easy for me to do little things to please people as it is for you. I think of them, but it takes too much time to do them, so I wait for a chance to confer a great favor, and
‘I told you so,’ said Aunt March, with a decided nod to
Aunt Carrol.
Mercifully unconscious of what she had done, Jo sat
with her nose in the air, and a revolutionary aspect which
was anything but inviting.
‘Do you speak French, dear?’ asked Mrs. Carrol, laying
a hand on Amy’s.
‘Pretty well, thanks to Aunt March, who lets Esther
talk to me as often as I like,’ replied Amy, with a grateful
look, which caused the old lady to smile affably.
‘How are you about languages?’ asked Mrs. Carrol of
JO.
‘Don’t know a word. I’m very stupid about studying
anything, can’t bear French, it’s such a slippery, silly sort
of language,’ was the brusque reply.
Another look passed between the ladies, and Aunt
March said to Amy, ‘You are quite strong and well no,
dear, I believe? Eyes don’t trouble you any more, do
they?’
‘Not at all, thank you, ma’am. I’m very well, and mean
to do great things next winter, so that I may be ready for
Rome, whenever that joyous time arrives.’
May’s painted vases—that was one thorn. Then the all conquering Tudor had danced four times with Amy at a late party and only once with May—that was thorn number two. But the chief grievance that rankled in her soul, and gave an excuse for her unfriendly conduct, was a rumor which some obliging gossip had whispered to her, that the March girls had made fun of her at the Lambs’. All the blame of this should have fallen upon Jo, for her naughty imitation had been too lifelike to escape detection, and the frolicsome Lambs had permitted the joke to escape. No hint of this had reached the culprits, however, and Amy’s dismay can be imagined, when, the very evening before the fair, as she was putting the last touches to her pretty table, Mrs. Chester, who, of course, resented the supposed ridicule of her daughter, said, in a bland tone, but with a cold look...

‘I find, dear, that there is some feeling among the young ladies about my giving this table to a poor but my girls. As this is the most prominent and some say the most attractive table of all, and they are the chief getters-up of the fair, it is thought best for them to take this place. I’m sorry, but I know you are too sincerely interested in the cause to mind a little personal disappointment, and you shall have another table if you like.’
‘It shall be as you please, Mrs. Chester. I’ll give up my place here at once, and attend to the flowers, if you like.’

‘You can put your own things on your own table, if you prefer,’ began May, feeling a little conscience-stricken, as she looked at the pretty racks, the painted shells, and quaint illuminations Amy had so carefully made and so gracefully arranged. She meant it kindly, but Amy mistook her meaning, and said quickly...

‘Oh, certainly, if they are in your way,’ and sweeping her contributions into her apron, pell-mell, she walked off, feeling that herself and her works of art had been insulted past forgiveness.

‘Now she’s mad. Oh, dear, I wish I hadn’t asked you to speak, Mama,’ said May, looking disconsolately at the empty spaces on her table.

‘Girls’ quarrels are soon over,’ returned her mother, feeling a trifle ashamed of her own part in this one, as well she might.

The little girls hailed Amy and her treasures with delight, which cordial reception somewhat soothed her perturbed spirit, and she fell to work, determined to succeed florally, if she could not artistically. But everything seemed against her. It was late, and she was tired. Everyone was too busy with their own affairs to help...
only came, but stayed, laughing at her nonsense, admiring Amy’s taste, and apparently enjoying themselves very much. Laurie and his friends gallantly threw themselves into the breach, bought up the bouquets, encamped before the table, and made that corner the liveliest spot in the room. Amy was in her element now, and out of gratitude, if nothing more, was as spritely and gracious as possible, coming to the conclusion, about that time, that virtue was its own reward, after all.

Jo behaved herself with exemplary propriety, and when Amy was happily surrounded by her guard of honor, Jo circulated about the hall, picking up various bits of gossip, which enlightened her upon the subject of the Chester change of base. She reproached herself for her share of the ill feeling and resolved to exonerate Amy as soon as possible. She also discovered what Amy had done about the things in the morning, and considered her a model of magnanimity. As she passed the art table, she gazed over it for her sister’s things, but saw no sign of them. ’Tucked away out of sight,’ Jo said, thoughtfully, who could forgive her own wrongs, but hotly resented any insult offered her family.
CHAPTER THIRTY-ONE

London

Dearest People, Here I really sit at a front window of the Bath Hotel, Piccadilly. It’s not a fashionable place, but Uncle stopped here years ago, and won’t go anywhere else. However, we don’t mean to stay long, so it’s no great matter. Oh, I can’t begin to tell you how I enjoy it all! I never can, so I’ll only give you bits out of my notebook, for I’ve done nothing but sketch and scribble since I started.

I sent a line from Halifax, when I felt pretty miserable, but after that I got on delightfully, seldom ill, on deck all day, with plenty of pleasant people to amuse me. Everyone was very kind to me, especially the officers. Don’t laugh, Jo, gentlemen really are very necessary aboard ship, to hold on to, or to wait upon one, and as they have nothing to do, it’s a mercy to make them useful, otherwise they would smoke themselves to death, I’m afraid.

Aunt and Flo were poorly all the way, and liked to be let alone, so when I’d done what I could for them, I went and enjoyed myself. Such walks on deck, such
Wasn’t that nonsensical?

We only stopped at Liverpool a few hours. It’s a dirty, noisy place, and I was glad to leave it. Uncle rushed out and bought a pair of dogskin gloves, some ugly, thick shoes, and an umbrella, and got shaved ‘a la mutton chop, the first thing. Then he flattered himself that he looked like a true Briton, but the first time he had the mud cleaned off his shoes, the little bootblack knew that an American stood in them, and said, with a grin, ‘There yer har, sir. I’ve given ‘em the latest Yankee shine.’ It amused Uncle immensely. Oh, I must tell you what that absurd Lennox did! He got his friend Ward, who came on with us, to order a bouquet for me, and the first thing I saw in my room was a lovely one, with ‘Robert Lennox’s compliments,’ on the card. Wasn’t that fun, girls? I like traveling.

I never shall get to London if I don’t hurry. The trip was like riding through a long picture gallery, full of lovely landscapes. The farmhouses were my delight, with thatched roofs, ivy, and to the eaves, latticed windows, and stout women with rosy children at the doors. The very cattle looked more tranquil than ours, as they stood knee-deep in clover, and the hens had a contented cluck, as if they never got nervous like Yankee biddies. Such perfect
color I never saw, the grass so green, sky so blue, grain so yellow, woods so dark, I was in a rapture all the way. So was Flo, and we kept bouncing from one side to the other, trying to see everything while we were whisking along at the rate of sixty miles an hour. Aunt was tired and went to sleep, but Uncle read his guidebook, and wouldn’t be astonished at anything. This is the way we went on. Amy, flying up—‘Oh, that must be Kenilworth, that gray place among the trees!’ Flo, darting to my window—‘How sweet! We must go there sometime, won’t we Papa?’ Uncle, calmly admiring his boots—‘No, my dear, not unless you want beer, that’s a brewery.’

A pause—then Flo cried out, ‘Bless me, there’s a gallows and a man going up.’ ‘Where, where?’ shrieks Amy, staring out at two tall posts with a crossbeam and some dangling chains. ‘A colliery,’ remarks Uncle, with a twinkle of the eye. ‘Here’s a lovely flock of lambs all lying down,’ says Amy. ‘See, Papa, aren’t they pretty?’ added Flo sentimentally. ‘Geese, young ladies,’ returns Uncle, in a tone that keeps us quiet till Flo settles down to enjoy the FLIRTATIONS OF CAPTAIN CAVENDISH, and I have the scenery all to myself.

Of course it rained when we got to London, and there was nothing to be seen but fog and umbrellas. We rested,
unpacked, and shopped a little between the showers. Aunt Mary got me some new things, for I came off in such a hurry I wasn’t half ready. A white hat and blue feather, a muslin dress to match, and the loveliest mantle you ever saw. Shopping in Regent Street is perfectly splendid. Things seem so cheap, nice ribbons only sixpence a yard. I laid in a stock, but shall get my gloves in Paris. Doesn’t that sound sort of elegant and rich?

Flo and I, for the fun of it, ordered a hansom cab, while Aunt and Uncle were out, and went for a drive, though we learned afterward that it wasn’t the thing for young ladies to ride in them alone. It was so droll! For when we were shut in by the wooden apron, the man drove so fast that Flo was frightened, and told me to stop him, but he was up outside behind somewhere, and I couldn’t get at him. He didn’t hear me call, nor see me flap my parasol in front, and there we were, quite helpless, rattling away, and whirling around corners at breakneck pace. At last, in my despair, I saw a little door in the roof, and on poking it, out a red eye appeared, and a beery voice said...

‘Now, then, mum?’

I gave my order as soberly as I could, and slamming down the door, with an ‘Aye, aye, mum,’ the man made
My dear Mamma,

Having a quiet hour before we leave for Berne, I’ll try to tell you what has happened, for some of it is very important, as you will see.

The sail up the Rhine was perfect, and I just sat and enjoyed it with all my might. Get Father’s old guidebooks and read about it. I haven’t words beautiful enough to describe it. At Coblenz we had a lovely time, for some students from Bonn, with whom Fred got acquainted on the boat, gave us a serenade. It was a moonlight night, and about one o’clock Flo and I were waked by the most delicious music under our windows. We flew up, and hid behind the curtains, but sly peeps showed us Fred and the students singing away down below. It was the most romantic thing I ever saw—the river, the bridge of boats, the great fortress opposite, moonlight everywhere, and music fit to melt a heart of stone.

When they were done we threw down some flowers, and saw them scramble for them, kiss their hands to the invisible ladies, and go laughing away, to smoke and drink beer. I suppose. Next morning Fred showed me one of the crumpled flowers in his vest pocket, and looked very sentimental. I laughed at him, and said I didn’t throw it, but Flo, which seemed to disgust him, for he tossed it out.
of the window, and turned sensible again. I’m afraid I’m going to have trouble with that boy, it begins to look like it.

The baths at Nassau were very gay, so was Baden-Baden, where Fred lost some money, and I scolded him. He needs someone to look after him when Frank is not with him. Kate said once she hoped he’d marry soon, and I quite agree with her that it would be well for him.

Frankfurt was delightful. I saw Goeth’s house, Schiller’s statue, and Dannecker’s famous Ariadne. It was very lovely, but I should have enjoyed it more if I had known the story better. I didn’t like to ask, as everyone knew it or pretended they did. I wish Jo would tell me all about it. I ought to have read more, for I find I don’t know anything, and it mortifies me.

Now comes the serious part, for it happened here, and Fred has just gone. He has been so kind and jolly that we all got quite fond of him. I never thought of anything but a traveling friendship till the serenade night. Since then I’ve begun to feel that the moonlight walks, balcony talks, and daily adventures were something more to him than fun. I haven’t flirted, Mother, truly, but remembered what you said to me and have done my very best. I can’t help it if people like me. I don’t try to make them, and it worries me.
upon by their daughters, and flattered enough by ladies of all ages to make a coxcomb of him, so she watched him rather jealously, fearing he would be spoiled, and rejoiced more than she confessed to find that he still believed in modest girls. Returning suddenly to her admonitory tone, she said, dropping her voice, ‘If you must have a ‘went’, Teddy, go and devote yourself to one of the ‘pretty, modest girls’ whom you do respect, and not waste your time with the silly ones.’

‘You really advise it?’ And Laurie looked at her with an odd mixture of anxiety and merriment in his face.

‘Yes, I do, but you’d better wait till you are through college, on the whole, and be fitting yourself for the place meantime. You’re not half good enough for—well, whoever the modest girl may be.’ And Jo looked a little queer likewise, for a name had almost escaped her.

‘That I’m not!’ acquiesced Laurie, with an expression of humility quite new to him, as he dropped his eyes and absently wound Jo’s apron tassel round his finger.

‘Mercy on us, this will never do,’ thought Jo, adding aloud, ‘Go and sing to me. I’m dying for some music, and I always like yours.’

‘I’d rather stay here, thank you.’
‘It’s not exactly going out to service, for Mrs. Kirke is your friend—the kindest soul that ever lived—and would make things pleasant for me, I know. Her family is separate from the rest, and no one knows me there. Don’t care if they do. It’s honest work, and I’m not ashamed of it.’

‘Nor I. But your writing?’

‘All the better for the change. I shall see and hear new things, get new ideas, and even if I haven’t much time there, I shall bring home quantities of material for my rubbish.’

‘I have no doubt of it, but are these your only reasons for this sudden fancy?’

‘No, Mother.’

‘May I know the others?’

Jo looked up and Jo looked down, then said slowly, with sudden color in her cheeks. ‘It may be vain and wrong to say it, but—I’m afraid—Laurie is getting too fond of me.’

‘Then you don’t care for him in the way it is evident he begins to care for you?’ And Mrs. March looked anxious as she put the question.
and be tragic. Beth must think I’m going to please myself, as I am, for I can’t talk about Laurie to her. But she can pet and comfort him after I’m gone, and so cure him of this romantic notion. He’s been through so many little trials of the sort, he’s used to it, and will soon get over his lovelornity.’

Jo spoke hopefully, but could not rid herself of the foreboding fear that this ‘little trial’ would be harder than the others, and that Laurie would not get over his ‘lovelornity’ as easily as heretofore.

The plan was talked over in a family council and agreed upon, for Mrs. Kirke gladly accepted Jo, and promised to make a pleasant home for her. The teaching would render her independent, and such leisure as she got might be made profitable by writing, while the new scenes and society would be both useful and agreeable. Jo liked the prospect and was eager to be gone, for the home nest was growing too narrow for her restless nature and adventurous spirit. When all was settled, with fear and trembling she told Laurie, but to her surprise he took it very quietly. He had been graver than usual of late, but very pleasant, and when jokingly accused of turning over a new leaf, he answered soberly, ‘So I am, and I mean this one shall stay turned.’
hero, she reposed awhile after the first attempt, which resulted in a tumble and the least lovely of the giant’s treasures, if I remember rightly. But the ‘up again and take another’ spirit was as strong in Jo as in Jack, so she scrambled up on the shady side this time and got more booty, but nearly left behind her what was far more precious than the moneybags.

She took to writing sensation stories, for in those dark ages, even all-perfect America read rubbish. She told no one, but concocted a ‘thrilling tale’, and boldly carried it herself to Mr. Dashwood, editor of the Weekly Volcano. She had never read Sartor Resartus, but she had a womanly instinct that clothes possess an influence more powerful over many than the worth of character or the magic of manners. So she dressed herself in her best, and trying to persuade herself that she was neither excited nor nervous, bravely climbed two pairs of dark and dirty stairs to find herself in a disorderly room, a cloud of cigar smoke, and the presence of three gentlemen, sitting with their heels rather higher than their hats, which articles of dress none of them took the trouble to remove on her appearance. somewhat daunted by this reception, Jo hesitated on the threshold, murmuring in much embarrassment...
remember his manners, so the second interview was much more comfortable than the first.

‘We’ll take this (editors never say I), if you don’t object to a few alterations. It’s too long, but omitting the passages I’ve marked will make it just the right length,’ he said, in a businesslike tone.

Jo hardly knew her own MS again, so crumpled and underscored were its pages and paragraphs, but feeling as a tender patent might on being asked to cut off her baby’s legs in order that it might fit into a new cradle, she looked at the marked passages and was surprised to find that all the moral reflections—which she had carefully put in as ballast for much romance—had been stricken out.

‘But, Sir, I thought every story should have some sort of a moral, so I took care to have a few of my sinners repent.’

Mr. Dashwoods’s editorial gravity relaxed into a smile, for Jo had forgotten her ‘friend’, and such it is only an author could.

‘People want to be amused, not preached at, you know. Morals don’t sell nowadays.’ Which was not quite a correct statement, by the way.

‘You mean, I should do with these alterations, then?’
mounted on his hobby, came ambling up to hold an intellectual tournament in the recess. The conversations were miles beyond Jo’s comprehension, but she enjoyed it, though Kant and Hegel were unknown gods, the Subjective and Objective unintelligible terms, and the only thing ‘evolved from her inner consciousness’ was a bad headache after it was all over. It dawned upon her gradually that the world was being picked to pieces, and put together on new and, according to the talkers, on infinitely better principles than before, that religion was in a fair way to be reasoned into nothingness, and intellect was to be the only God. Jo knew nothing about philosophy or metaphysics of any sort, but a curious excitement, half pleasurable, half painful, came over her as she listened with a sense of being turned adrift into time and space, like a young balloon out on a holiday.

She looked round to see how the Professor liked it, and found him looking at her with the grim expression she had ever seen him wear. He shook his head and beckoned her to come away, but she was fascinated by the freedom of Speculative Philosophy, and kept her seat, trying to find out what the wise gentlemen intended to rely upon after they had annihilated all the old beliefs.
forgot all about it, for to hear a German read Schiller is rather an absorbing occupation. After the reading came the lesson, which was a lively one, for Jo was in a gay mood that night, and the cocked hat kept her eyes dancing with merriment. The Professor didn’t know what to make of her, and stopped at last to ask with an air of mild surprise that was irresistible ...

‘Mees Marsch, for what do you laugh in your master’s face? Haf you no respect for me, that you go on so bad?’

‘How can I be respectful, Sir, when you forget to take your hat off?’ said Jo.

Lifting his hand to his head, the absent-minded Professor gravely felt and removed the little cocked hat, looked at it a minute, and then threw back his head and laughed like a merry bass viol.

‘Ah! I see him now, it is that imp Tina who makes me a fool with my cap. Well, it is nothing, but see you, if this lesson goes not well, you too shall wear him.’

But the lesson did not go well for a few minutes because Mr. Bhaer caught sight of a picture on the hat, and unfolding it, said with great disgust, ‘I wish these papers did not come in the house. They are not for children to see, nor young people to read. It is not well, and I haf no patience with those who make this harm.’
'I should like much to send all the rest after him,' muttered the Professor, coming back with a relieved air.

Jo thought what a blaze her pile of papers upstairs would make, and her hard-earned money lay rather heavily on her conscience at that minute. Then she thought consolingly to herself, ‘Mine are not like that, they are only silly, never bad, so I won’t be worried,’ and taking up her book, she said, with a studious face, ‘Shall we go on, Sir? I’ll be very good and proper now.’

‘I shall hope so,’ was all he said, but he meant more than she imagined, and the grave, kind look he gave her made her feel as if the words Weekly Volcano were printed in large type on her forehead.

As soon as she went to her room, she got out her papers, and carefully reread every one of her stories. Being a little shortsighted, Mr. Bhaer sometimes used eye glasses, and Jo had tried them once, smiling to see how they magnified the fine print of her book. Now it seemed to have on the Professor’s mental or moral spectacles also, for the faults of these poor stories glared at her dreadfully and filled her with dismay.

‘They are trash, and will soon be worse trash if I go on, for each is more sensational than the last. I’ve gone blindly on, hurting myself and other people, for the sake of
Laurie thanked her with a look that made her think in a sudden panic, ‘Oh, deary me! I know he’ll say something, and then what shall I do?’

Evening meditation and morning work somewhat allayed her fears, and having decided that she wouldn’t be vain enough to think people were going to propose when she had given them every reason to know what her answer would be, she set forth at the appointed time, hoping Teddy wouldn’t do anything to make her hurt his poor feelings. A call at Meg’s, and a refreshing sniff and sip at the Daisy and Demijohn, still further fortified her for the tete-a-tete, but when she saw a stalwart figure looming in the distance, she had a strong desire to turn about and run away.

‘Where’s the jew’s-harp, Jo?’ cried Laurie, as soon as he was within speaking distance.

‘I forgot it.’ And Jo took heart again, for that salutation could not be called loverlike.

She always used to take his arm on these occasions, now she did not, and he made no complaint, which was a bad sign, but talked on rapidly about all sorts of faraway matters, till they turned from the road into the little path that led homeward through the grove. Then he walked more slowly, suddenly lost his fine flow of language, and
He stopped short, and caught both her hands as he put his question with a look that she did not soon forget.

‘Really, truly, dear.’

They were in the grove now, close by the stile, and when the last words fell reluctantly from Jo’s lips, Laurie dropped her hands and turned as if to go on, but for once in his life the fence was too much for him. So he just laid his head down on the mossy post, and stood so still that Jo was frightened.

‘Oh, Teddy, I’m sorry, so desperately sorry, I could kill myself if it would do any good! I wish you wouldn’t take it so hard, I can’t help it. You know it’s impossible for people to make themselves love other people if they don’t,’ cried Jo inelegantly but remorsefully, as she softly patted his shoulder, remembering the time when he had comforted her so long ago.

‘They do sometimes,’ said a muffled voice from the post. ‘I don’t believe it’s the right sort of love and I’d rather not try it,’ was the decided answer.

There was a long pause, while a blackbird sang blithely on the willow by the river, and the tall grass rustled in the wind. Presently Jo said very soberly, as she sat down on the step of the stile, ‘Laurie, I want to tell you something.’
‘To the devil!’ was the consoling answer.

For a minute Jo’s heart stood still, as he swung himself down the bank toward the river, but it takes much folly, sin or misery to send a young man to a violent death, and Laurie was not one of the weak sort who are conquered by a single failure. He had no thought of a melodramatic plunge, but some blind instinct led him to fling hat and coat into his boat, and row away with all his might, making better time up the river than he had done in any race. Jo drew a long breath and unclasped her hands as she watched the poor fellow trying to outstrip the trouble which he carried in his heart.

‘That will do him good, and he’ll come home in such a tender, penitent state of mind, that I shan’t dare to see him.’ she said, adding, as she went slowly home, feeling as if she had murdered some innocent thing, and buried it under the leaves. ‘Now I must go and prepare Mr. Laurence to be very kind to my poor boy. I wish he’d love Beth, perhaps he may in time, but I begin to think I was mistaken about her. Oh dear! How can girls like to have lovers and refuse them? I think it’s dreadful.’ Being sure that no one could do it so well as herself, she went straight to Mr. Laurence, told the hard story bravely through, and then broke down, crying so dismally over
CHAPTER THIRTY-SIX

When Jo came home that spring, she had been struck with the change in Beth. No one spoke of it or seemed aware of it, for it had come too gradually to startle those who saw her daily, but to eyes sharpened by absence, it was very plain and a heavy weight fell on Jo’s heart as she saw her sister’s face. It was no paler and but littler thinner than in the autumn, yet there was a strange, transparent look about it, as if the mortal was being slowly refined away, and the immortal shining through the frail flesh with an indescribably pathetic beauty. Jo saw and felt it, but said nothing at the time, and soon the first impression lost much of its power, for Beth seemed happy, no one appeared to doubt that she was better, and presently in other cares Jo for a time forgot her fear.

But when Laurie was gone, and peace returned again, the vague anxiety returned and haunted her. She had confessed her sins and was forgiven, but when she showed her savings and proposed a mountain trip, Beth had thanked her heartily, but begged not to go so far away from home. Another little visit to the seashore would suit her better, and as Grandma could not be prevailed upon to
and no matter how high she flies, she never will forget home. I hope I shall see her again, but she seems so far away.’

‘She is coming in the spring, and I mean that you shall be all ready to see and enjoy her. I’m going to have you well and rosy by that time.’ began Jo, feeling that of all the changes in Beth, the talking change was the greatest, for it seemed to cost no effort now, and she thought aloud in a way quite unlike bashful Beth.

‘Jo, dear, don’t hope any more. It won’t do any good. I’m sure of that. We won’t be miserable, but enjoy being together while we wait. We’ll have happy times, for I don’t suffer much, and I think the tide will go out easily, if you help me.’

Jo leaned down to kiss the tranquil face, and with that silent kiss, she dedicated herself soul and body to Beth.

She was right. There was no need of any words when they got home, for Father and Mother saw plainly how what they had prayed to be was from seeing. Tired with her short journey, Beth went at once to bed, saying how glad she was to be home, and when Jo went down, she found that she would be spared the hard task of telling Beth’s secret. Her father stood leaning his head on the mantelpiece and did not turn as she came in, but her
‘Take a good look at it for her sake, and then come and tell me what you have been doing with yourself all this while,’ said Amy, seating herself, ready for a good talk.

But she did not get it, for though he joined her and answered all her questions freely, she could only learn that he had roved about the Continent and been to Greece. So after idling away an hour, they drove home again, and having paid his respects to Mrs. Carrol, Laurie left them, promising to return in the evening.

It must be recorded of Amy that she deliberately prinked that night. Time and absence had done its work on both the young people. She had seen her old friend in a new light, not as ‘our boy’, but as a handsome and agreeable man, and she was conscious of a very natural desire to find favor in his sight. Amy knew her good points, and made the most of them with the taste and skill which is a fortune to a poor and pretty woman.

Tarlatan and tulle were cheap at Nice, so she enveloped herself in them on such occasions, and following the sensible English fashion of simple dress for young girls, got up charming little toilettes with fresh flowers, a few jewels, and all manner of dainty devices, which were both inexpensive and effective. It must be confessed that the artist sometimes got possession of the woman, and
indulged in antique coiffures, statuesque attitudes, and classic draperies. But, dear heart, we all have out little weaknesses, and find it easy to pardon such in the young, who satisfy our eyes with their comeliness, and keep our hearts merry with their artless vanities.

‘I do want him to think I look well, and tell them so at home,’ said Amy to herself, as she put on Flo’s old white silk ball dress, and covered it with a cloud of fresh illusion, out of which her white shoulders and golden head emerged with a most artistic effect. Her hair she had the sense to let alone, after gathering up the thick waves and curls into a Hebe-like knot at the back of her head.

‘It’s not the fashion, but it’s becoming, and I can’t afford to make a fright of myself,’ she used to say, when advised to frizzle, puff, or braid, as the latest style commanded.

Having no ornaments fine enough for this important occasion, Amy looped her fleecy skirts with clusters of azalea, and framed the white shoulders in delicate green vines. Remembering the painted boots, she surveyed her white satin slippers with girlish satisfaction, and chased down the room, admiring her aristocratic feet all by herself.
‘I meant the first dance. May I have the honor?’

‘I can give you one if I put off the Count. He dances devinely, but he will excuse me, as you are an old friend,’ said Amy, hoping that the name would have a good effect, and show Laurie that she was not to be trifled with.

‘Nice little boy, but rather a short Pole to support ... A daughter of the gods, Devinely tall, and most devinely fair,’

was all the satisfaction she got, however.

The set in which they found themselves was composed of English, and Amy was compelled to walk decorously through a cotillion, feeling all the while as if she could dance the tarantella with relish. Laurie resigned her to the ‘nice little boy’, and went to do his duty to Flo, without securing Amy for the joys to come, which reprehensible want of forethought was properly punished, for she immediately engaged herself till supper, meaning to ask if he then gave any signs penitence. She showed him her ball book with demure satisfaction when he strolled instead of rushed up to claim her for the next, a glorious polka redowa. But his polite regrets didn’t impose upon her, and when she galloped away with the Count, she saw Laurie sit down by her aunt with an actual expression of relief.
tender mercies of the help, for an Irish lady now presided over the kitchen department. Being a domestic man, John decidedly missed the wifely attentions he had been accustomed to receive, but as he adored his babies, he cheerfully relinquished his comfort for a time, supposing with masculine ignorance that peace would soon be restored. But three months passed, and there was no return of repose. Meg looked worn and nervous, the babies absorbed every minute of her time, the house was neglected, and Kitty, the cook, who took life ‘aisy’, kept him on short commons. When he went out in the morning he was bewildered by small commissions for the captive mamma, if he came gaily in at night, eager to embrace his family, he was quenched by a ‘Hush! They are just asleep after worrying all day.’ If he proposed a little amusement at home, ‘No, it would disturb the babies.’ If he hinted at a lecture or a concert, he was answered with a reproachful look, and a decided ‘Leave my children for pleasure, never!’ His sleep was broken by infant wails and visions of a phantom figure pacing noisely to and fro in the watches of the night. His meals were interrupted by the frequent flight of the nesting genius, who deserted him, half-helped, if a muffled chirp sounded from the nest above. And when he read his paper of an evening, Demi’s
'No, my dear. I've told him he must go to sleep, as you 
bid him, and he must, if I stay here all night.'

'But he'll cry himself sick,' pleaded Meg, reproaching 
herself for deserting her boy.

'No, he won't, he's so tired he will soon drop off and 
then the matter is settled, for he will understand that he 
has got to mind. Don't interfere, I'll manage him.'

'He's my child, and I can't have his spirit broken by 
harseness.'

'He's my child, and I won't have his temper spoiled by 
indulgence. Go down, my dear, and leave the boy to me.'

When John spoke in that masterful tone, Meg always 
obeyed, and never regretted her docility.

'Please let me kiss him once, John?'

'Certainly. Demi, say good night to Mamma, and let 
her go and rest, for she is very tired with taking care of 
you all day.'

Meg always insisted upon it that the kiss won the 
victory, for after it was given, Demi sobbed more quietly, 
and lay quite still at the bottom of the bed, where he had 
wriggled in his anguish of mind.

'Poor little man, he's worn out with sleep and crying. 
I'll cover him up, and then go and set Meg's heart at rest.'
thought John, creeping to the bedside, hoping to find his rebellious heir asleep.

But he wasn’t, for the moment his father peeped at him, Demi’s eyes opened, his little chin began to quiver, and he put up his arms, saying with a penitent hiccup, ‘Me’s dood, now.’

Sitting on the stairs outside Meg wondered at the long silence which followed the uproar, and after imagining all sorts of impossible accidents, she slipped into the room to set her fears at rest. Demi lay fast asleep, not in his usual spreadeagle attitude, but in a subdued bunch, cuddled close in the circle of his father’s arm and holding his father’s finger, as if he felt that justice was tempered with mercy, and had gone to sleep a sadder and wiser baby. So held, John had waited with a womanly patience till the little hand relaxed its hold, and while waiting had fallen asleep, more tired by that tussle with his son than with his whole day’s work.

As Meg stood watching the two faces on the pillow, she smiled to herself, and then slipped away again, saying in a satisfied tone, ‘I never need fear that John will be too harsh with my babies. He does know how to manage them, and will be a great help, for Demi is getting too much for me.’
touched the wound that was not healed yet. Both tone and shadow struck Amy, for she had seen and heard them before, and now she looked up in time to catch a new expression on Laurie’s face—a hard bitter look, full of pain, dissatisfaction, and regret. It was gone before she could study it and the listless expression back again. She watched him for a moment with artistic pleasure, thinking how like an Italian he looked, as he lay basking in the sun with uncovered head and eyes full of southern dreaminess, for he seemed to have forgotten her and fallen into a reverie.

‘You look like the effigy of a young knight asleep on his tomb,’ she said, carefully tracing the well-cut profile defined against the dark stone.

‘Wish I was!’

‘That’s a foolish wish, unless you have spoiled your life. You are so changed, I sometimes think—’ There Amy stopped, with a half-timid, half-wistful look, more significant than her unfinished speech.

Laurie saw and understood the affectionate anxiety which she hesitated to express, and looking straight into her eyes, said, just as he used to say it to her mother, ‘It’s all right, ma’am.’
Amy preserved a discreet silence, but there was a conscious look in her downcast face that made Laurie sit up and say gravely, ‘Now I’m going to play brother, and ask questions. May I?’

‘I don’t promise to answer.’

‘Your face will, if your tongue won’t. You aren’t woman of the world enough yet to hide your feelings, my dear. I heard rumors about Fred and you last year, and it’s my private opinion that if he had not been called home so suddenly and detained so long, something would have come of it, hey?’

‘That’s not for me to say,’ was Amy’s grim reply, but her lips would smile, and there was a traitorous sparkle of the eye which betrayed that she knew her power and enjoyed the knowledge.

‘You are not engaged, I hope?’ And Laurie looked very elder-brotherly and grave all of a sudden.

‘No.’

‘But you will be, if he comes back and goes properly down on his knees, won’t you?’

‘Very likely.’

‘Then you are fond of old Fred?’

‘I could be, if I tried.’
rebellion over, the old peace returned more beautiful than ever. With the wreck of her frail body, Beth’s soul grew strong, and though she said little, those about her felt that she was ready, saw that the first pilgrim called was likewise the fittest, and waited with her on the shore, trying to see the Shining Ones coming to receive her when she crossed the river.

Jo never left her for an hour since Beth had said ‘I feel stronger when you are here.’ She slept on a couch in the room, waking often to renew the fire, to feed, lift, or wait upon the patient creature who seldom asked for anything, and ‘tried not to be a trouble’. All day she haunted the room, jealous of any other nurse, and prouder of being chosen then than of any honor her life ever brought her. Precious and helpful hours to Jo, for now her heart received the teaching that it needed. Lessons in patience were so sweetly taught her that she could not fail to learn them, charity for all, the lovely spirit that can forgive and truly forget unkindness, the loyalty to duty that makes the hardest easy, and the sincere faith that fears nothing, but trusts undoubtingly.

Often when she woke Jo found Beth reading in her well-worn little book, heard her singing softly, to beguile the sleepless night, or saw her lean her face upon her
little, and this seemed to assure her that her life had not been useless, that her death would not bring the despair she feared. As she sat with the paper folded between her hands, the charred log fell asunder. Jo started up, revived the blaze, and crept to the bedside, hoping Beth slept.

‘Not asleep, but so happy, dear. See, I found this and read it. I knew you wouldn’t care. Have I been all that to you, Jo?’ she asked, with wistful, humble earnestness.

‘OH, Beth, so much, so much!’ And Jo’s head went down upon the pillow beside her sister’s.

‘Then I don’t feel as if I’d wasted my life. I’m not so good as you make me, but I have tried to do right. And now, when it’s too late to begin even to do better, it’s such a comfort to know that someone loves me so much, and feels as if I’d helped them.’

‘More than any one in the world, Beth. I used to think I couldn’t let you go, but I’m learning to feel that I do. I lose you, that you’ll be more to me than ever, and death can’t part us, though it seems to.’

‘I know it cannot, and I don’t fear it any longer, for I’m sure I shall love your Beth still as love and help you more than ever. You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to Father and Mother when I’m gone. They will turn to you, don’t fail them, and if it’s hard to work
alone, remember that I don’t forget you, and that you’ll be happier in doing that than writing splendid books or seeing all the world, for love is the only thing that we can carry with us when we go, and it makes the go easy.’

‘I’ll try, Beth.’ And then and there Jo renounced her old ambition, pledged herself to a new and better one, acknowledging the poverty of other desires, and feeling the blessed solace of a belief in the immortality of love.

So the spring days came and went, the sky grew clearer, the earth greener, the flowers were up fairly early, and the birds came back in time to say goodbye to Beth, who, like a tired but trustful child, clung to the hands that had led her all her life, as Father and Mother guided her tenderly through the Valley of the Shadow, and gave her up to God.

Seldom except in books do the dying utter memorable words, see visions, or depart with beatified countenances, and those who have sped many parting souls know that to most the end comes as naturally and simply as sleep. As Beth had hoped, the tide went out easily and in the dark hour before dawn, on the bosom where she had drawn her first breath, she quietly drew her last, with no farewell but one loving look, one little sigh.

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CHAPTER FORTY-ONE

Amy’s lecture did Laurie good, though, of course, he did not own it till long afterward. Men seldom do, for when women are the advisers, the lords of creation don’t take the advice till they have persuaded themselves that it is just what they intended to do. Then they act upon it, and, if it succeeds, they give the weaker vessel half the credit of it. If it fails, they generously give her the whole. Laurie went back to his grandfather, and was so dutifully devoted for several weeks that the old gentleman declared the climate of Nice had improved him wonderfully, and he had better try it again. There was nothing the young gentleman would have liked better, but elephants could not have dragged him back after the scolding he had received. Pride forbid, and whenever the longing grew very strong, he fortified his resolution by repeating the words that had made the deepest impression, ‘I despise you.’ ‘Go and do something splendid that will make her love you.’

Laurie turned the matter over in his mind so often that he soon brought himself to confess that he had been selfish and lazy. But even when a man has a great sorrow, he
wild oats, and women must not expect miracles.’ I dare say you don’t, Mrs. Grundy, but it’s true nevertheless. Women work a good many miracles, and I have a persuasion that they may perform even that of raising the standard of manhood by refusing to echo such sayings. Let the boys be boys, the longer the better, and let the young men sow their wild oats if they must. But mothers, sisters, and friends may help to make the crop a small one, and keep many tares from spoiling the harvest, by believing, and showing that they believe, in the possibility of loyalty to the virtues which make men manliest in good women’s eyes. If it is a feminine delusion, leave us to enjoy it while we may, for without it half the beauty and the romance of life is lost, and sorrowful forebodings would embitter all our hopes of the brave, tenderhearted little lads, who still love their mothers better than themselves and are not ashamed to own it.

Laurie thought that the task of forgetting his love for Jo would absorb all his powers for years, but to his great surprise he discovered it grew easier every day. He refused to believe it at first, got angry with himself, and couldn’t understand it, but these hearts of ours are curious and contrary things, and time and nature work their will in spite of us. Laurie’s heart wouldn’t ache. The wound
Leaving his sentence unfinished, he seized pen and paper and wrote to Jo, telling her that he could not settle to anything while there was the least hope of her changing her mind. Couldn’t she, wouldn’t she, and let him come home and be happy? While waiting for an answer he did nothing, but he did it energetically, for he was in a fever of impatience. It came at last, and settled his mind effectually on one point, for Jo decidedly couldn’t and wouldn’t. She was wrapped up in Beth, and never wished to hear the word love again. Then she begged him to be happy with somebody else, but always keep a little corner of his heart for his loving sister Jo. In a postscript she desired him not to tell Amy that Beth was worse, she was coming home in the spring and there was no need of saddening the remainder of her stay. That would be time enough, please God, but Laurie must write to her often, and not let her feel lonely, homesick or anxious.

‘So I will, at once. Poor little girl, it will be a sad going home for her, I’m afraid.’ And he opened his desk, as if writing to Amy had been the proper conclusion of the sentence left unfinished some weeks before.

But he did not write the letter that day, for as he rummaged out his best paper, he came across something which changed his purpose. Tumbling about in one part.
was having little experiences of her own, which made her rather wish to avoid the quizzical eyes of ‘out boy’.

Fred Vaughn had returned, and put the question to which she had once decided to answer, ‘Yes, thank you,’ but now she said, ‘No, thank you,’ kindly but steadily, for when the time came, her courage failed her, and she found that something more than money and position was needed to satisfy the new longing that filled her heart so full of tender hopes and fears. The words, ‘Fred is a good fellow, but not at all the man I fancied you would ever like,’ and Laurie’s face when he uttered them, kept returning to her as pertinaciously as her own did when she said in look, if not in words, ‘I shall marry for money.’ It troubled her to remember that now, she wished she could take it back, it sounded so unwomanly. She didn’t want Laurie to think her a heartless, worldly creature. She didn’t care to be a queen of society now half so much as she did to be a lovable woman. She was so glad he accepted her for the dreadful things she said but took them so beautifully and was better than ever. His letters were such a comfort, for the home letters were very irregular and not half so satisfactory as his when they did come. It was not only a pleasure, but a duty to answer them, for the poor fellow was forlorn, and needed petting, since Jo persisted.
shorten her visit, for since it was too late to say goodbye to Beth, she had better stay, and let absence soften her sorrow. But her heart was very heavy, she longed to be at home, and every day looked wistfully across the lake, waiting for Laurie to come and comfort her.

He did come very soon, for the same mail brought letters to them both, but he was in Germany, and it took some days to reach him. The moment he read it, he packed his knapsack, bade adieu to his fellow pedestrians, and was off to keep his promise, with a heart full of joy and sorrow, hope and suspense.

He knew Vevay well, and as soon as the boat touched the little quay, he hurried along the shore to La Tour, where the Carrols were living en pension. The garçon was in despair that the whole family had gone to take a promenade on the lake, but no, the blonde mademoiselle might be in the chateau garden. If monsieur would give himself the pain of sitting down, a flash of time should present her. But monsieur could not wait even a ‘flash of time’, and in the middle of the speech he rose to find mademoiselle himself.

A pleasant old garden on the borders of the lovely lake, with chestnuts rustling overhead, ivy climbing everywhere, and the black shadow of the tower falling far
that no one could comfort and sustain her so well as Laurie, and Laurie decided that Amy was the only woman in the world who could fill Jo’s place and make him happy. He did not tell her so, but she was not disappointed, for both felt the truth, were satisfied, and gladly left the rest to silence.

In a minute Amy went back to her place, and while she dried her tears, Laurie gathered up the scattered papers, finding in the sight of sundry well-worn letters and suggestive sketches good omens for the future. As he sat down beside her, amy felt shy again, and turned rosy red at the recollection of her impulsive greeting.

‘I couldn’t help it, I felt so lonely and sad, and was so very glad to see you. It was such a surprise to look up and find you, just as I was beginning to fear you wouldn’t come,’ she said, trying in vain to speak quite naturally.

‘I came the minute I heard. I wish I could say something to comfort you for the loss of dear little Beth, but I can only feel, and...’ He could not get any further, for her too turned bashful all of a sudden, and did not quite know what to say. He longed to lay Amy’s head down on his shoulder, and tell her to have a good cry, but he did not dare, so took her hand instead, and gave it a sympathetic squeeze that was better than words.
sorrow. Sacred moments, when heart talked to heart in the silence of the night, turning affliction to a blessing, which chastened grief and strengthened love. Feeling this, Jo’s burden seemed easier to bear, duty grew sweeter, and life looked more endurable, seen from the safe shelter of her mother’s arms.

When aching heart was a little comforted, troubled mind likewise found help, for one day she went to the study, and leaning over the good gray head lifted to welcome her with a tranquil smile, she said very humbly, ‘Father, talk to me as you did to Beth. I need it more than she did, for I’m all wrong.’

‘My dear, nothing can comfort me like this,’ he answered, with a falter in his voice, and both arms round her, as if he too, needed help, and did not fear to ask for it.

Then, sitting in Beth’s little chair close beside him, she told her troubles, the resentful sorrow for her loss, the fruitless efforts that discouraged, the want of faith that made life look so dark, and all the sad bewilderment which we call despair. She gave him entire confidence, he gave her the help she needed, and both found consolation in the act. For the time had come when they could talk together not only as father and daughter, but as man and
but we see it, and the Lord will bless you for’t, see ef He don’t.’

As they sat sewing together, Jo discovered how much improved her sister Meg was, how well she could talk, how much she knew about good, womanly impulses, thoughts, and feelings, how happy she was in husband and children, and how much they were all doing for each other.

‘Marriage is an excellent thing, after all. I wonder if I should blossom out half as well as you have, if I tried it?’ said Jo, as she constructed a kite for Demi in the topsy-turvy nursery.

‘It’s just what you need to bring out the tender womanly half of your nature, Jo. You are like a chestnut burr, prickly outside, but silky-soft within, and a sweet kernal, if one can only get at it. Love will make you show your heart one day, and then the rough burr will fall off.’

‘Frost opens chestnut burrs, ma’am, and it takes a good shake to bring them down. Boys go nutting, and I don’t care to be bagged by them,’ returned Jo, pasting away at the kite which the wind that blows would never carry up, for Daisy had tied herself on as a bob.

Meg laughed, for she was glad to see a glimmer of Jo’s old spirit, but she felt it her duty to enforce her opinion by
every argument in her power, and the sisterly chats were not wasted, especially as two of Meg’s most effective arguments were the babies, whom Jo loved tenderly. Grief is the best opener of some hearts, and Jo’s was nearly ready for the bag. A little more sunshine to ripen the nut, then, not a boy’s impatient shake, but a man’s hand reached up to pick it gently from the burr, and find the kernal sound and sweet. If she suspected this, she would have shut up tight, and been more prickly than ever, fortunately she wasn’t thinking about herself, so when the time came, down she dropped.

Now, if she had been the heroine of a moral storybook, she ought at this period of her life to have become quite saintly, renounced the world, and gone about doing good in a mortified bonnet, with tracts in her pocket. But, you see, Jo wasn’t a heroine, she was only a struggling human girl like hundreds of others, and she just acted out her nature, being sad, cross, listless, or energetic as the mood suggested. It’s highly virtuous to say we’ll be good, but we can’t do it all at once and it takes a long pull, a strong pull, and a pull all together before some of us even get our feet set in the right way. Jo had got so far, she was learning to do her duty, and to feel unhappy if she did not, but to do it cheerfully, ah, that was another thing! She had often
‘Don’t believe I can.’ But Jo got out her desk and began to overhaul her half-finished manuscripts.

An hour afterward her mother peeped in and there she was, scratching away, with her black pinafore on, and an absorbed expression, which caused Mrs. March to smile and slip away, well pleased with the success of her suggestion. Jo never knew how it happened, but something got into that story that went straight to the hearts of those who read it, for when her family had laughed and cried over it, her father sent it, much against her will, to one of the popular magazines, and to her utter surprise, it was not only paid for, but others requested. Letters from several persons, whose praise was honor, followed the appearance of the little story, newspapers copied it, and strangers as well as friends, admired it. For a small thing it was a great success, and Jo was more astonished than when her novel was commended and condemned all at once.

‘I don’t understand it. What is there be in a simple little story like that to make people praise it?’ he said, quite bewildered.

‘There is truth in it, Jo. That’s the secret. Humor and pathos make it alive, and you have found your style at last. You wrote with not thoughts of fame and money, and put
‘Yes, I hoped it would be so, ever since Amy wrote that she had refused Fred. I felt sure then that something better than what you call the ‘mercenary spirit’ had come over her, and a hint here and there in her letters made me suspect that love and Laurie would win the day.’

‘How sharp you are, Marmee, and how silent! You never said a worked to me.’

‘Mothers have need of sharp eyes and discreet tongues when they have girls to manage. I was half afraid to put the idea into your head, lest you should write and congratulate them before the thing was settled.’

‘I’m not the scatterbrain I was. You may trust me. I’m sober and sensible enough for anyone’s confidante now.’

‘So you are, my dear, and I should have made you mine, only I fancied it might pain you to learn that your Teddy loved someone else.’

‘Now, Mother, did you really think I could be so silly and selfish, after I’d refused his love, when it was freshest, if not best?’

‘I knew you were sincere then, Jo, truly; I have thought that it’s came back, and as I said again, you might perhaps, feel like giving another answer. Forgive me, dear, I can’t help seeing that you are very lonely, and sometimes there is a hungry look in your eyes that goes to my heart.

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CHAPTER FORTY-THREE

Jo was alone in the twilight, lying on the old sofa, looking at the fire, and thinking. It was her favorite way of spending the hour of dusk. No one disturbed her, and she used to lie there on Beth’s little red pillow, planning stories, dreaming dreams, or thinking tender thoughts of the sister who never seemed far away. Her face looked tired, grave, and rather sad, for tomorrow was her birthday, and she was thinking how fast the years went by, how old she was getting, and how little she seemed to have accomplished. Almost twenty-five, and nothing to show for it. Jo was mistaken in that. There was a good deal to show, and by-and-by she saw, and was grateful for it.

‘An old maid, that’s what I’m to be. A literary spinster, with a pen for a spouse, a family of stories for children, and twenty years hence a morsel for me. Perhaps, when, like poor Johnson, I’m old, I can’t enjoy it, solitary, and can’t share it, independent, and don’t need it. Well, I needn’t be a sour saint, nor a selfish sinner, and, I dare say, old maids are very comfortable when they get used to it,
but...’ And there Jo sighed, as if the prospect was not inviting.

It seldom is, at first, and thirty seems the end of all things to five-and-twenty. But it’s not as bad as it looks, and one can get on quite happily if one has something in one’s self to fall back upon. At twenty-five, girls begin to talk about being old maids, but secretly resolve that they never will be. At thirty they say nothing about it, but quietly accept the fact, and if sensible, console themselves by remembering that they have twenty more useful, happy years, in which they may be learning to grow old gracefully. Don’t laugh at the spinsters, dear girls, for often very tender, tragic romances are hidden away in the hearts that beat so quietly under the sober gowns, and many silent sacrifices of youth, health, ambition, love itself, make the faded faces beautiful in God’s sight. Even the sad, sour sisters should be kindly dealt with, because they have missed the sweetest part of life, if for no other reason. And looking at them with compassion, not contempt, girls in their bloom should remember that they too may miss the blossom time. That rosy cheek won’t last forever, that silver threads will come in the bonnie brown hair, and that, by and by, kindness and respect will be as sweet as love and admiration now.
world at large. That’s about it, isn’t it, Madame Recamier?’ asked Laurie with a quizzical look at Amy.

‘Time will show. Come away, Impertinence, and don’t shock my family by calling me names before their faces,’ answered Amy, resolving that there should be a home with a good wife in it before she set up a salon as a queen of society.

‘How happy those children seem together!’ observed Mr. March, finding it difficult to become absorbed in his Aristotle after the young couple had gone.

‘Yes, and I think it will last,’ added Mrs. March, with the restful expression of a pilot who has brought a ship safely into port.

‘I know it will. Happy Amy!’ And Jo sighed, then smiled brightly as Professor Bhaer opened the gate with an impatient push.

Later in the evening, when his mind had been set at rest about the bootjack, Laurie said suddenly to his wife, ‘Mrs. Laurence.’

‘My Lord!’

‘That man intends to marry our Jo!’

‘I hope so, don’t you, dear?’
Demi felt his back, as if expecting to find it like that of the watch, and then gravely remarked, ‘I dess Dod does it when I’s asleep.’

A careful explanation followed, to which he listened so attentively that his anxious grandmother said, ‘My dear, do you think it wise to talk about such things to that baby? He’s getting great bumps over his eyes, and learning to ask the most unanswerable questions.’

‘If he is old enough to ask the question he is old enough to receive true answers. I am not putting the thoughts into his head, but helping him unfold those already there. These children are wiser than we are, and I have no doubt the boy understands every word I have said to him. Now, Demi, tell me where you keep your mind.’

If the boy had replied like Alcibiades, ‘By the gods, Socrates, I cannot tell,’ his grandfather would not have been surprised, but when, after standing a moment on one leg, like a meditative young stork, he answered in a tone of calm conviction, ‘In my little belly,’ the old gentleman could only join in Grandma’s laugh, and dismiss the class in metaphysics.

There might have been cause for maternal anxiety, if Demi had not given convincing proofs that he was a true boy, as well as a budding philosopher, for often, after a
‘Truly, Marmar?’ asks Demi, with a brilliant idea in his well-powdered head.

‘Yes, truly. Anything you say,’ replies the shortsighted parent, preparing herself to sing, ‘The Three Little Kittens’ half a dozen times over, or to take her family to ‘Buy a penny bun,’ regardless of wind or limb. But Demi corners her by the cool reply...

‘Then we'll go and eat up all the raisins.’

Aunt Dodo was chief playmate and confidante of both children, and the trio turned the little house topsy-turvy. Aunt Amy was as yet only a name to them, Aunt Beth soon faded into a pleasantly vague memory, but Aunt Dodo was a living reality, and they made the most of her, for which compliment she was deeply grateful. But when Mr. Bhaer came, Jo neglected her playfellows, and dismay and desolation fell upon their little souls. Daisy, who was fond of going about peddling kisses, lost her best customer and became bankrupt. Demi, with infantile penetration, soon discovered that Dodo liked to play with ‘the bear-man’ better than she did him, but though hurt, he concealed his anguish, for he had no heart to insult a rival who kept a mine of chocolate drops in his waistcoat pocket, and a watch that could be taken out of its case and freely shaken by ardent admirers.
be to walk through life beside him, even though she had no better shelter than the old umbrella, if he carried it.

It was certainly proposing under difficulties, for even if he had desired to do so, Mr. Bhaer could not go down upon his knees, on account of the mud. Neither could he offer Jo his hand, except figuratively, for both were full. Much less could he indulge in tender remonstrations in the open street, though he was near it. So the only way in which he could express his rapture was to look at her, with an expression which glorified his face to such a degree that there actually seemed to be little rainbows in the drops that sparkled on his beard. If he had not loved Jo very much, I don’t think he could have done it then, for she looked far from lovely, with her skirts in a deplorable state, her rubber boots splashed to the ankle, and her bonnet a ruin. Fortunately, Mr. Bhaer considered her the most beautiful woman living, and she found him more ‘Jove-like’ than ever, though his hatbrim was quite limp with the little rills trickling down his shoulders (for he held the umbrella all over Jo), and every finger of his gloves needed mending.

Passers-by probably thought them a pair of harmless lunatics, for they entirely forgot to hail a bus, and strolled leisurely along, oblivious of deepening dusk and fog. Little
they cared what anybody thought, for they were enjoying the happy hour that seldom comes but once in any life, the magical moment which bestows youth on the old, beauty on the plain, wealth on the poor, and gives human hearts a foretaste of heaven. The Professor looked as if he had conquered a kingdom, and the world had nothing more to offer him in the way of bliss. While Jo trudged beside him, feeling as if her place had always been there, and wondering how she ever could have chosen any other lot. Of course, she was the first to speak—intelligibly, I mean, for the emotional remarks which followed her impetuous ‘Oh, yes!’ were not of a coherent or reportable character.

‘Friedrich, why didn’t you.’

‘Ah, heaven, she gives me the name that no one speaks since Minna died!’ cried the Professor, pausing in a puddle to regard her with grateful delight.

‘I always call you so to myself—I forgot, but I won’t unless you like it.’

‘Like it? It is more sweet to me than you can tell. Say ‘thou’, also, and I shall say your language is almost as beautiful as mine.’

‘Isn’t ‘thou’ a little sentimental?’ asked Jo, privately thinking it a lovely monosyllable.
Ah, happy mother! Well I know
You hear, like a sweet refrain,
Lullabies ever soft and low
In the falling summer rain.

‘Jo’ on the next lid, scratched and worn,
And within a motley store
Of headless, dolls, of schoolbooks torn,
Birds and beasts that speak no more,
Spoils brought home from the fairy ground
Only trod by youthful feet,
Dreams of a future never found,
Memories of a past still sweet,
Half-writ poems, stories wild,
April letters, warm and cold,
Diaries of a wilful child,
Hints of a woman early old,
A woman in a lonely home,
Hearing, like a sad refrain—
‘Be worthy, love, and love will come.’
In the falling summer rain.

My Beth! the dust is always swept
From the lid that bears your name,
As if by loving eyes that wept,
By careful hands that often came.
said Jo, tearing up the verses the Professor had treasured so long.

‘Let it go, it has done its duty, and I will have a fresh one when I read all the brown book in which she keeps her little secrets,’ said Mr. Bhaer with a smile as he watched the fragments fly away on the wind. ‘Yes,’ he added earnestly, ‘I read that, and I think to myself, She has a sorrow, she is lonely, she would find comfort in true love. I have a heart full, full for her. Shall I not go and say, ‘If this is not too poor a thing to give for what I shall hope to receive, take it in God’s name?’

‘And so you came to find that it was not too poor, but the one precious thing I needed,’ whispered Jo.

‘I had no courage to think that at first, heavenly kind as was your welcome to me. But soon I began to hope, and then I said, ‘I will have her if I die for it,’ and so I will!’ cried Mr. Bhaer, with a defiant nod, as if the walls of mist closing round them were barriers which he was to surmount or valiantly knock down.

Jo thought that was splendid, and resolved to be worthy of her knight, though he did not come prancing on a charger in gorgeous array.

‘What made you stay away so long?’ she asked presently, finding it so pleasant to ask confidential...
'I knew you’d stand by me, sir. Amy does too—I see it in her eyes, though she prudently waits to turn it over in her mind before she speaks. Now, my dear people,' continued Jo earnestly, 'just understand that this isn’t a new idea of mine, but a long cherished plan. Before my Fritz came, I used to think how, when I’d made my fortune, and no one needed me at home, I’d hire a big house, and pick up some poor, forlorn little lads who hadn’t any mothers, and take care of them, and make life jolly for them before it was too late. I see so many going to ruin for want of help at the right minute, I love so to do anything for them, I seem to feel their wants, and sympathize with their troubles, and oh, I should so like to be a mother to them!' Mrs. March held out her hand to Jo, who took it, smiling, with tears in her eyes, and went on in the old enthusiastic way, which they had not seen for a long while. 'I told my plan to Fritz once, and he said it was just what he would like, and agreed to try it when we got rich. Bless his dear heart, he’s been doing it all his life—helping poor boys, I mean, not getting rich, that he’ll never be. Money doesn’t stay in his pocket long enough to lay up any. But now, thanks to my good old aunt, who loved me
better than I ever deserved, I’m rich, at least I feel so, and we can live at Plumfield perfectly well, if we have a flourishing school. It’s just the place for boys, the house is big, and the furniture strong and plain. There’s plenty of room for dozens inside, and splendid grounds outside. They could help in the garden and orchard. Such work is healthy, isn’t it, sir? Then Fritz could train and teach in his own way, and Father will help him. I can feed and nurse and pet and scold them, and Mother will be my stand-by. I’ve always longed for lots of boys, and never had enough, now I can fill the house full and revel in the little dears to my heart’s content. Think what luxury—Plumfield my own, and a wilderness of boys to enjoy it with me.’

As Jo waved her hands and gave a sigh of rapture, the family went off into a gale of merriment, and Mr. Laurence laughed till they thought he’d have an apoplectic fit.

‘I don’t see anything funny,’ she said gravely, when she could be heard. ‘Nothing could be more natural and proper than for my Professor to open a school, and for me to prefer to reside in my own estate.’

‘She is putting on airs already,’ said Laurie, who regarded the idea in the light of a capital joke. ‘But may I inquire how you intend to support the establishment? If all
calmer waters, and the most rampant ragamuffin was conquered in the end. How Jo did enjoy her ‘wilderness of boys’, and how poor, dear Aunt March would have lamented had she been there to see the sacred precincts of prim, well-ordered Plumfield overrun with Toms, Dicks, and Harrys! There was a sort of poetic justice about it, after all, for the old lady had been the terror of the boys for miles around, and now the exiles feasted freely on forbidden plums, kicked up the gravel with profane boots unreproved, and played cricket in the big field where the irritable ‘cow with a crumpled horn’ used to invite rash youths to come and be tossed. It became a sort of boys’ paradise, and Laurie suggested that it should be called the ‘Bhaer-garten’, as a compliment to its master and appropriate to its inhabitants.

It never was a fashionable school, and the Professor did not lay up a fortune, but it was just what Jo intended it to be—‘a happy, homelike place for boys who needed teaching, care, and kindness’. Every room in the big house was soon full. Every little plot in the garden soon had its owner. A regular menagerie appeared in barn and shed, for pet animals were allowed. And three times a day, Jo smiled at her Fritz from the head of a long table lined on either side with rows of happy young faces, which all
extent, for some tried the pleasing experiment of drinking mild while standing on their heads, others lent a charm to leapfrog by eating pie in the pauses of the game, cookies were sown broadcast over the field, and apple turnovers roosted in the trees like a new style of bird. The little girls had a private tea party, and Ted roved among the edibles at his own sweet will.

When no one could eat any more, the Professor proposed the first regular toast, which was always drunk at such times—‘Aunt March, God bless her!’ A toast heartily given by the good man, who never forgot how much he owed her, and quietly drunk by the boys, who had been taught to keep her memory green.

‘Now, Grandma’s sixtieth birthday! Long life to her, with three times three!’

That was given with a will, as you may well believe, and the cheering once begun, it was hard to stop it. Everybody’s health was proposed, from Miss Laurence, who was considered their special person, to the astonished guinea pig, who had strayed from its proper sphere in search of its young master. Demi, as the oldest grandchild, then presented the queen of the day with various gifts, so numerous that they were transported to the festive scene in a wheelbarrow. Funny presents, some of them, but