

LITTLE WOMEN

screenplay by Robin Swicord

adapted from the novel
Little Women
by Louisa May Alcott

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First Draft Rev.

LITTLE WOMEN

EXT: LAURENCE HOUSE. CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS. WINTER 1863.
DAY. SCATTERED SNOWFALL.

Rural New England town, with clapboard houses. Skeletal trees stand stark against a raw gray sky. A light powdering of snow dusts the muddy street. It is Christmas Eve. A wagon rattles by, a cut spruce tied to the boards behind the bundled DRIVER.

Evergreen boughs are draped in the cheerless windows of a fine but austere Georgian home. Dark-hooded COACHMEN unload leather boxes and trunks from a carriage, and SERVANTS carry them into the house, passing--

-- LAURIE (18, fine-featured, sensual mouth, longish hair), who stands about awkwardly, trying to help. The servants brush past, ignoring him. Laurie, shivering in his shirtsleeves, peers curiously next door:

POV - EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE. WINTER DAY. SCATTERED SNOWFALL.

A smallish, two-storey New England house with a high roof. The front door is wreathed with holly boughs tied with bits of red flannel. The windows are curtained, except for a large attic window under the eaves, which is warmly lit. From there comes cosy feminine laughter, muffled VOICES.

Intrigued, Laurie stares up at the house. Who lives there?

Jo's voice comes in, OVER, suspenseful, as if in reply:

JO'S VOICE (OVER)

"All eyes turned toward the bridal party with great curiosity, for neither bride nor groom removed their masks...."

INT: LARGE GARRET. ORCHARD HOUSE. WINTER DAY.

Amid topsy-turvy boxes and ruined furniture, FOUR YOUNG MEN lounge around an old scarred desk strewn with books. A card says: "Pickwick Society". As the CAMERA moves closer --

JO'S VOICE (cont'd)

"When the marriage rite was over, the spectators gathered around the Count, demanding explanation..."

The "young men" are four sisters, dressed in cast-off men's clothing. BETH (14, pre-Raphaelite face, odd and shy) is dressed in a boy's coat and cap, with a paper badge: "P.S.".

JO'S VOICE (cont'd)

"I only know that it was a whim of my timid daughter Viola. Unmask, my children, and receive my blessing."

AMY (12, an adorable beauty with golden curls, a stubborn mouth) listens raptly. Amy wears her father's frocked coat with its sleeves absurdly rolled, and a dented stove-pipe hat.

JO'S VOICE (cont'd)

"The bridegroom's mask fell, disclosing not Count Antonio, but the noble face of Ferdinand Devereaux, the artist lover --"

MEG (18, demure beauty, natural grace) gasps, and laughs. She wears a man's great coat and "smokes" a curved pipe.

JO'S VOICE (cont'd)

-- and leaning on his breast where now flashed the star of an English earl, was the lovely, radiant Viola.

JO MARCH (17, tall; lively, intelligent face, masses of beautiful, unruly hair) is fully dressed as a man, from trousers and boots to flowing cravat. She "acts" the part:

JO MARCH (cont'd)

"My lord, you scornfully bade me claim your daughter when I could boast as vast a fortune as Count Antonio. I can do more! Even you cannot refuse the Earl of Devereux when he gives his ancient name and boundless wealth for the gentle hand of this fair lady, now my wife."

Jo kisses Meg's hand with a flourish. Amy and Beth applaud.

MEG MARCH

(dryly)

Excellent story, Mr. Snodgrass, you out did yourself this week.

BETH MARCH

Oh Jo, you ought to publish it! I mean really publish it, not just in the Pickwick Portfolio.

MEG MARCH

Mr. Tupman, are you demeaning our fine newspaper?

The sisters laugh. Jo hands over the smudged document to Meg, and goes to uncover their tea. Meg reads aloud, mock-stern:

MEG MARCH

Ahem. A Mr. Nathaniel Winkle has contributed an interesting piece --
(with a glance at Amy)
-- actually more of an apology.

Through the garret window, Jo notes the piles of luggage being unloaded from the Laurence carriage below.

MEG MARCH (cont'd)

"I hope you will pardon N. Winkle's badness for not writing in this illustrious -- One L? -- paper because he can't write, he has so many lessons --"

AMY MARCH

I do, I spent weeks on French today!

MEG MARCH

-- If Mr. N. Winkle studied his spelling, it would be well.
(ignoring Amy's pout)
Mr. Tupman, will you read yours?

BETH MARCH

(blushing, hiding)
Oh no, please, Meggie --

JO MARCH

(correcting her)
- "Mr. Pickwick".

-- as Jo pours the tea, and peers over at the Laurence house:

POV - INT/EXT: LAURENCE HOUSE. WINTER DAY. (FALLING SNOW.)

Inside, Laurie leans over a writing table; he looks lonely.

MEG MARCH (over)

"The History of a Squash. Once upon a time a farmer planted a little seed and after a while it became a vine and bore many squashes..."

Amy, reading over Meg's shoulder, pipes up disparagingly:

AMY MARCH

"She cut it up and boiled it, added a pint of milk, two eggs" -- Beth, this isn't a story, it's a recipe!

BETH MARCH

Oh - I never know what to write --!

JO MARCH

The first rule of all writing, Mr. Tupman -- never write what you know. (gazing out at Laurie)
What do we think of the boy? Is he a captive, like Smea in Nicholas Nickleby?

Amy, peering out curiously as she takes the nicest teacup --

AMY MARCH

He does look feeble-minded.

JO MARCH

He'd have to be, coming to live with that awful old man.

POV - EXT: LAURENCE HOUSE. WINTER DAY. LIGHT SNOWFALL.

Stern-looking MR. LAURENCE (60, unsmiling, hooded eyes, brutal mouth, silver hair) sends the unloaded carriage away.

AMY MARCH

Don't say "awful", Jo, it's slang.

MEG MARCH

Apparently the boy has had no upbringing at all, he was reared among artists and vagrants in Italy, Mr. Laurence says --

JO MARCH

- Italy! Lucky.

MEG MARCH

They say the old man intends to prepare him for business, the boy stands to inherit his grandfather's entire firm.

JO MARCH

Give me the artists and vagrants.

MEG MARCH

You didn't complain when Aunt March gave us each a dollar.

BETH MARCH

Christmas is different.

JO MARCH

Ha, I earned that money! I'm the one enslaved to that crabby old miser...Fetching things for her the live-long day. "Oh, Josy-phine!"

AMY MARCH

My, a whole delicious dollar. I'm desperate for drawing pencils.

MEG MARCH

I must have new gloves, I'm mortified to leave the house.

JO MARCH

You, Beth? What do you want?

BETH MARCH

I wish the War would end, so Father could come home.

Jo kisses Beth, and hugs her protectively.

MEG MARCH

(with tender sorrow)

That will take more than a dollar.

AMY MARCH

Name something else.

BETH MARCH

A - piano?

-- and shrinks shyly when Meg and Amy laugh, amused.

JO MARCH

Wait till I'm a writer, I'll buy you the best piano in creation.

AMY MARCH

And if she doesn't, you can come over and play mine. When I marry, I'm going to be disgustingly rich.

MEG MARCH

(gently, but pointed)
And what if the one you love is a
poor man, but good, like Father?

Amy, looking critically at her reflection in her spoon:

AMY MARCH

It isn't like being stuck with the
nose you get - One does have a
choice as to whom one loves. Why,
Belle Gardiner had four proposals.
She'll never want for new gloves.

JO MARCH

I wouldn't marry for money -- what
if his business goes bust? Look
what happened to Father. Besides,
down at the Spread Eagle they pay
five dollars for every story they
print. Two stories would be ten
dollars, and ten stories is fifty
dollars! Why, I have ten stories in
my head right now.

MEG MARCH

Oh dear. I dislike all this money
talk. It isn't refined.

JO MARCH

(sardonic edge)
Well. If lack of attention to
personal finances is a mark of
refinement, the Marches are the most
elegant family in Concord.

Amy gazes out the window, at young Laurie sitting alone.

AMY MARCH

(wistful, but practical)
We'll all grow up someday, Meg. We
might as well know what we want.

CUT TO:

EXT: HOPE HOUSE. SAME SNOWY DAY, LATER. ALMOST DUSK. WINTER.

The settlement house is a dilapidated, shingle-sided house in
need of paint, with windows shuttered against the snow. A
brave little sign says: "Hope House". Ragged, gaunt-faced
WOMEN and CHILDREN huddle in the cold, waiting for a hand-out.

Jo, in thick shawl and skirt, takes the steps of the house two at-a time. She carries --

INT: SETTLEMENT HOUSE. SAME SNOWY DAY. ALMOST DUSK. WINTER.

-- a tin pail of supper for MRS. MARCH (50, earthy, clear-eyed New England eccentric), who is sorting rags and clothes and twisted old leather shoes. Jo kisses her mother --

JO MARCH

Supper. Apples and baked potatoes.
You wanted candlestubs, Marmee?

MRS. MARCH

Exactly. Mrs. Ruth, Mrs. Juba --

-- gesturing for the TWO FREEDWOMEN to share her meal. The women are making up bundles of food and clothes. Mrs. March starts rubbing candlewax vigorously on a rag, saying:

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

We've nearly finished the Christmas bundles. Look - Stender Bakery gave us twenty loaves! Oh, Jo -
(unfolds a letter for Jo)
Father is well. His battalion is encamped on the Potomac - No, read it at home with your sisters, that will be our Christmas gift. -- Oh, Mrs. Shaunessey!

An IRISH WOMAN (30, coarse and hopeless) leads a THIN, COUGHING BOY (4) and a BLIND WOMAN. Mrs. March waves a note at her:

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

A Mrs. Chester on Church Street has need of a domestic -- she says you may bring your child if he's quiet. A dollar a week, and breakfast.

IRISH WOMAN

And her? I can't leave her.

-- the old woman with sightless eyes. Mrs. March falters.

MRS. MARCH

Perhaps she may sit in the kitchen.

Mrs. Shaunessey takes the scrap of paper, like a shred of hope, and turns away, maneuvering her child and mother before her. Worried and discouraged, Mrs. March turns back to Jo --

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

Oh dear. I had to be very artful to convince Mrs. Chester to take the little boy.

Removing her leaky leather boots, and wrapping her stockinged feet with waxy rags --

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

(dryly, with humor)

I did not point out to Mrs. Chester that at present the only difference between poor Mrs. Shaunessey and myself is the precarious salary I earn here, such as it is -- and the bit that you and Meg bring in. If any one of us were to be discharged, it would be our family standing in that line, while the church-going people of Concord speculated about our character. -- Wait, Mrs. Juba, I'm taking that to the Hummels.

-- indicating a heaped Christmas basket. Jo winds her own shawl about Marmee's shoulders --

JO MARCH

"Hummels"? More Germans?

MRS. MARCH

- They sent a child in this morning, I don't know how he found us, not a word of English. The husband's a laborer, the work disappeared, now he's gone. Six children, and Mrs. Hummel about to issue another --

She stamps her rag-wrapped feet in her leaky boots --

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

- Gracious, I'm comical.

(kisses Jo)

Kiss your sisters for me, and don't stay up late!

MRS. RUTH (45, slender African woman) opens the door as Mrs. March ducks out with an armload. Her voice sails back:

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

Merry Christmas!

CUT TO:

INT: MEG AND AMY'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT. (SNOW)

By candlelight, Meg brushes Amy's golden hair, and ties it in rag curls. Amy has a clothespin clipped on her nose. From somewhere, distantly, comes faint piano music.

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT. (SNOW)

Jo and Beth cuddle together at the snowy window, wrapped in a counterpane, listening intently. From next door, exquisite PIANO MUSIC. Beth wipes a tear with a fold of her nightgown.

BETH MARCH

How does he make it sound so sad?

JO MARCH

I like sad things. Awful terrible things. Nothing ever happens to us.

BETH MARCH

Oh Jo, don't say that!

JO'S POV - EXT: LAURENCE HOUSE. NIGHT. SNOWFALL.

Through the gauze of lace, Jo can glimpse Laurie at the piano.

JO MARCH

Perhaps he has a tragic secret.
(savoring this)
A tragic, European secret.

BETH MARCH

Perhaps he's just lonely.
(alarming thought)
You don't think he'll try to call?

JO MARCH

What would he see in us? After living in Italy...
(sighs, dissatisfied)
If only I could go to Europe. Somehow I won't be myself until I see Europe...Doesn't he have a noble brow? If I were a boy, I'd want to look just like that. A noble figure. With a tragic secret.

Jo suddenly grabs a floppy red velveteen "thinking" cap. Scrambling around for writing paper --

JO MARCH (cont'd)

"The Lost Duke of Gloucester"! Who
turned his back on a fortune -
because - it's -- slave money!
His father trades in human flesh.
Dammit, I need writing paper...

She scans some papers and, inventively, starts erasing them --

JO MARCH (cont'd)

So - he leaves Barbados --

BETH MARCH

(sleepily)

I thought he was a duke in England.

JO MARCH

His mother's family. Forbidden
marriage.

BETH MARCH

I like your forbidden marriages.

Jo tucks Beth in, grabs the candle, and flies out of the room.

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE NIGHT. (EXT: SNOWFALL)

Jo sits up late by the small light of the candle, scratching
pen over paper, her velveteen hat slipped sideways on her head.
Jo's lips move as she whispers to herself, writing. Outside,
snow falls steadily.

CUT TO:

EXT: HOVEL BEHIND A CARRIAGE HOUSE. NIGHT. SNOWFALL.

Snow drifts and nearly obscures a windowless hovel, no larger
than a coal shed. Inside:

INT: HOVEL BEHIND A CARRIAGE HOUSE. NIGHT. (EXT: SNOW)

A scene of dismal poverty:

A thin little GERMAN GIRL (8) offers her mother a cup of water.
MRS. HUMMEL (26, ravaged face) lies motionless, pale and damp
with fever. THREE SMALL CHILDREN sleep huddled like little
rats under one frayed blanket; TWO OLDER CHILDREN lie passively
under a piece of burlap sacking, too hungry to sleep. WIND
whistles at the broken door, stuffed with rags.

Mrs. March tips a little lamp oil into her hand, and with her fingertips, massages the chest of a very tiny NEWBORN BABY.

MRS. MARCH

There...He's pinking up...

As Mrs. March swaddles the baby, she glances at Mrs. Hummel with concern. The little daughter whispers, in German:

HUMMEL GIRL

She won't drink.

The door suddenly blows open, with a blast of snow. Infant in her arms, Mrs. March quickly reaches to close the door --

HER POV - EXT: MEWS BEHIND THE CARRIAGE HOUSE. NIGHT. (SNOW)

The alley is a windswept landscape of sparkling snow. Every dark shape is softened and transformed by an outline of snow.

Holding the tiny bundle close, Mrs. March turns her face to the falling Heavens, and closes her eyes in prayer.

CUT TO:

INT: KITCHEN - ORCHARD HOUSE. CHRISTMAS DAY.

Meg rushes about, helping HANNAH (40, African Freedwoman, scarred face but innate dignity) put breakfast on the table. Hannah arranges a few sausages on a plate of baked apples.

MEG MARCH

Oh what miraculous food! Isn't this just like the old days, Hannah?

Hannah smiles, uncomplaining. Beth toasts bread over the wood stove. Amy polishes a single orange, admires this rare object.

AMY MARCH

We shouldn't eat it, we should just look at it.

MEG MARCH

Jo! Jq! Get out of bed!

INT: DINING ROOM/PARLOR. ORCHARD HOUSE. CHRISTMAS DAY.

Jo grumpily appears, her unmanageable hair loose and wild. As Meg lays kindling in the dining room fireplace:

MEG MARCH

Go to The Rooms and fetch Marmee,
Hannah's put together an absolute
Christmas miracle -

JO MARCH

- Is that a sausage??

Evading Jo's fingers, Beth sails the platter onto the table.
Thrilled, the sisters crowd around the table:

AMY MARCH

Oh, butter! Isn't butter divine?
(prays fervently)
God, thank you for this breakfast.

The front door opens: Marmee, in snowy boots, exhausted. Cries
of: "Marmee!" and "Merry Christmas!". As Beth embraces her --

MRS. MARCH

Oh, yes...It's Christmas.

She kisses each daughter. The girls' chatter rises and Beth
starts thumping out a Christmas song on their warped old piano.

MRS. MARCH

Hannah, I need my kit of remedies.
(turning to her girls)
Darlings, the Hummels are in a bad
way -- I just stopped home to fetch
some medicine and raid the pantry.

Beth stops playing. Marmee angrily grabs up their firewood:

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)

If you could see this poor family!
What sort of man would abandon those
starving children? And who did he
think would care for them?? He left
them to die, that's what he did.

Into the subdued silence:

BETH MARCH

Might we send the Hummels our bread?

MRS. MARCH

Oh, Beth.

Jo jumps up with the dairy crock --

JO MARCH

Take the butter, too, butter's no
good without bread to put it on.

Amy silently adds the single orange. Meg looks at her sisters,
and in one movement, the girls start packing up their feast.

Hearing their voices and laughter, Hannah comes in with the kit
of homeopathic remedies, and is amazed to see Jo glide past
with the coffee pot, headed for the door, followed by Amy, Meg
and Marmee with the porridge and sausages, Beth with firewood.

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE/LAURENCE HOUSE. WINTER. DAY. (SNOW)

Laughing, the March girls plow through knee-deep snow. Jo
kicks up her long skirts, raising powdery plumes of snow --

JO MARCH

Wonderful snow! Don't you wish we
could roll about in it like dogs!

On the steps of the Laurence house, dressed for church, Laurie
and grim old Mr. Laurence stare, astonished:

Jo plows by with the steaming coffee pot, followed by her
sisters and Mrs. March carrying platters of food and kindling.

JO MARCH

Lovely weather for a picnic!

- which makes Beth and Amy giggle. Meg clutches Jo, mortified:

MEG MARCH

Jo! You should let him speak first.
Is he watching? Don't look back!
Oh dear, what will he think of us?

MRS. MARCH

I'm sure by now our neighbors are
convinced we're quite insane.

With a cordial nod to old Mr. Laurence, Mrs. March parades on,
erect and proper, carrying the absurd platter of sausages.

Mr. Laurence sternly nudges Laurie toward their carriage.

EXT: RURAL STREET, CONCORD. CHRISTMAS DAY. SNOW.

The Laurence carriage clatters past the parading Marches, who,
with fits of giggles, are butchering the "Wassail Song" as they

carry their feast through the snow.

MEG AND AMY

..."Love and joy come to you, and to
you your wassail too!..."

Laurie looks back from the carriage window as he is carried
away. On his face is a poignant longing: to be part of this
lively family. Jo waves to him.

CUT TO:

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE - CONCORD. CHRISTMAS EVENING. SNOW.

Over the stillness, faint voices carry, sweetly:

FEMALE VOICES

"For the beauty of the earth/
For the beauty of the skies..."

The Orchard House curtains are slightly parted to reveal a
cosy, familial tableau: The March girls gather around an
ancient piano, as Beth accompanies their hymn:

MARCH SISTERS (cont'd)

"For the love which from our birth/
Over and around us lies..."

The CAMERA, an intruder, draws back slightly.

FADE DOWN

INT: KITCHEN/LAUNDRY ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NEW YEAR'S DAY.

A choreographed flurry: Hannah rubs a stub of wax over the
flatiron as she irons Meg's green silk dress. Jo struggles to
style Meg's hair as Amy heats the curling irons, and prattles
on with rapturous jealousy:

AMY MARCH

Meg and Jo, you have to tell me
everything about Belle Gardiner.
What her nose looks like, and about
her ring! Sally Gardiner says it's
an emerald, can you imagine? Sally's
going tonight, she's only thirteen.
Oh, fathom having a cousin who's
engaged! Everyone's lucky but me.

Beth is scrubbing at a stain in Meg's white gloves --

BETH MARCH

Meg, it's not coming out, perhaps
I'd better dye them with tea?

MEG MARCH

Oh dear...What if I meet someone?
I can't spend the entire evening
concealing my gloves -

Meg lets out a curdling scream. Startled, Hannah burns herself
on the flatiron. Jo has taken the curling iron out of Meg's
hair -- and with it come all of Meg's lovely bangs.

MEG MARCH

You've ruined me! I can't go, I'm
not going!

JO MARCH

Well, good. I'm not going either.

Meg rushes to peer at herself in a mirrored cabinet door, as
Beth hastily makes a cold tea-compress for Hannah's burn.

MEG MARCH

I'll just be a dried-up old spinster
because I never have any suitors,
and I never have anything to wear --

JO MARCH

Ha! You've Marmee's silk dress and
heels! All I have is your old tartan
with a big ugly scorch in the back!

MEG MARCH

- You always stand too close to the
fire! Oh Jo, look what you've done!

AMY MARCH

Here, we'll tie a bow in front, Meg,
it's very becoming. Look.

(as she fixes Meg's hair:)

You don't need lots of suitors. You
only need one if he's the right one.

HANNAH

(shakes her head)
Listen to that child.

BETH MARCH

Meg isn't going to be married right
away, is she?

JO MARCH

No. She's never getting married.

MEG MARCH

With your help, I never will!...
Hannah, dear, show me your wrist.

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE - FRONT STEPS. EVENING. (SNOW).

Jo and Meg bundle to leave -- Meg splendid in green silk, Jo passable in her scorched tartan. They hear Marmee call:

MRS. MARCH (over)

I'll send for you at eleven! Girls!
Have you nice handkerchiefs?

MEG & JO

Yes, Marmee!

JO MARCH

- She'd ask us that if we were
running away from an earthquake.

Meg halts to apply spit to Jo's eyebrows and pinch her cheeks:

MEG MARCH

Now, mind you don't eat much supper.
And keep your backside to the wall.
And don't shake hands with people,
it isn't the thing anymore. Oh, I
have a wonderful feeling about
tonight.

As they pass the Laurence house, Jo cranes her head, looking for the Laurence boy -- but the Laurence windows are dark.

INT: BALLROOM AND CORRIDORS - THE GARDINER HOUSE. NIGHT.

Waltz music. COUPLES swirl past a cluster of MUSICIANS. GIRLS hover around BELLE (19, pretty; seems too young for marriage), admiring Belle's modest engagement ring.

A LADY in a plumed shawl brushes past Jo, who leans against the paneled wall, out of place and bored. Jo deftly plucks a tiny feather and begins to amuse herself by blowing on the feather, letting it land on her shoulder. She suddenly goes alert:

In a nearby drawing room, MRS. GARDINER gestures with her fan, pointing Jo out to a RED-HEADED YOUNG MAN who is partnerless.

Alarmed, Jo scoots along the wall and ducks into the corridor. To her dismay, the Red-Headed Young Man comes out, seeking her.

Jo quickly slips back into the ballroom and takes cover behind some GUESTS. But there is that Red-Headed Young Man again, craning his head, looking for Jo.

Jo bolts toward a sweep of draperies, and ducks behind them --

INT: ALCOVE BEHIND DRAPERIES - BALLROOM. GARDINER HOUSE. NIGHT.

-- and collides intimately with the Laurence boy, who is crouched behind the drapery, eating a dish of French ice.

JO MARCH
Jehosephat! I'm sorry.

LAURIE
No, stay! I just came in here so I could stare at people.

Laurie smiles shyly. He has taken off his jacket, his soft tie is loose. He keeps his voice low, as if they are conspiring:

LAURIE (cont'd)
Should I put on my jacket? I never know the rules here. I'm Laurie - Theodore Laurence, but I'm called Laurie.

JO MARCH
(whispers)
Jo March.

She puts out her hand, and then, remembering Meg's advice, quickly withdraws it - just as Laurie puts out his hand.

JO MARCH
Who were you staring at?

LAURIE
You, actually. What game were you playing?

JO MARCH
I don't know, but I think I won.
(laughs, pleased)
Sorry. Who else?

They peek through the drapery together, whispering --

LAURIE

I'm quite taken with that one.

JO MARCH

Belle Gardiner? She's engaged.

LAURIE

Not Miss Gardiner. The very beautiful one, with the eyes.

He means Meg, who looks very pretty, with a flowery frill poised on her forehead to hide her frizzled bangs.

JO MARCH

That's Meg. My sister.

(jealous, as he keeps staring)

She's completely bald in front.

(off his double-take)

Did you really live in Italy among artists and vagrants?

LAURIE

My mother was Italian. A pianist. Grandfather disapproved of her.

JO MARCH

Truly? - I saw a play like that.

("casually", to impress him)

As it happens, I'm going to Europe.

(honesty prevails)

Actually, my great Aunt March is, one of these days, and she has to take me, I work as her companion. It's excruciating but I'll do it forever if it gets me to Europe.

(eating his sorbet)

Do you speak French or Italian?

LAURIE

(in French)

English at home, French at school - The Conservatory of Music in Vevey.

(adds, unhappily)

Now Grandfather's having me tutored. He insists I go to college.

JO MARCH

I'd commit murder to go to college.

Do you read a lot?...Oop -!

(dropping sorbet on her front)

I have to read to Aunt March, hours and hours. I do all the voices.

LAURIE
(amused)
I'll bet you do.

JO MARCH
If I weren't going to be a famous
writer, I'd go to New York and
pursue the stage. Are you shocked?

LAURIE
Very.

He grins, pleased.

INT: CORRIDOR NEAR BALLROOM - GARDINER HOUSE. NIGHT.

In the secluded corridor, Jo and Laurie dance with spirited
silliness. Neither dances well. Jo nearly tramples Laurie --

JO MARCH
Sorry! I can't get used to - At
home, Meg makes me take the man's
part...Oops...Shame you don't know
the girl's part - Are you looking at
the back of my dress? You cheat!

-- as Laurie tries to glimpse Jo's burned spot. Laughing, Jo
and Laurie spin around, like cats chasing each other's tails --

JO MARCH (cont'd)
-- You promised you wouldn't look!

Giggling and half-colliding, Jo and Laurie stumble across Meg
sitting on the servants' stairs, tearfully clutching her ankle.

MEG MARCH
Oh Jo! Jo, I've sprained my ankle.

LAURIE
I shouldn't wonder, in those shoes.

Meg recoils in dismay at his rude manner.

JO MARCH
This is our neighbor, Laurie. The
captive. Oh poor Meg. Oh dear.

MEG MARCH
(weeping again)
A perfectly good party, ruined.

LAURIE
Here, let me see.

MEG MARCH
(humiliated, covers ankle)
Don't, please!

JO MARCH
I'll go tell Mrs. Gardiner -

MEG MARCH
NO! I'd be mortified! She'd think
I'd been sampling the punch.

JO MARCH
But Meg - how will we get home?

ABRUPT CUT TO:

INT: MOVING CARRIAGE - NIGHT.

The carriage rocks along with Laurie and Jo and unhappy Meg cramped together. Meg's stockinged foot is propped on Laurie's knee, and Laurie holds a snowball on it.

JO MARCH
Some arnica will put it good as new.

Meg gives Laurie a formal look -- trying to keep her dignity in an impossible circumstance.

MEG MARCH
I'm really very much obliged for the
carriage, Mr. Laurence.

With a charming smile, barely touched with sexual knowlege --

LAURIE
My pleasure, Miss March.

INT: ORCHARD HOUSE - STAIRCASE AND FAMILY PARLOR. NIGHT.

Amy, a clothespin clipped to her nose, crouches on the stairs in her nightgown, listening wide-eyed to the SOUND of the CARRIAGE arriving. VOICES below: Marmee, Jo and Meg. Amy starts down the stairs, and then freezes as she hears:

LAURIE'S VOICE
Not at all. Good night, Mrs. March.

Amy scoots back up the stairs. The door closes below, and only female voices remain:

MRS. MARCH

A rag, and the arnica in my kit.

JO MARCH

...I'll get it.

Amy can't wait -- she flies down the stairs:

AMY MARCH

Did you ride in his carriage??

(immediately)

You two have all the fun! Oh Jo, is he very romantic?

JO MARCH

(offended)

Not in the slightest.

MEG MARCH

-- He's a dreadful boy.

MRS. MARCH

(examining the ankle)

Well, he did a good deed, putting ice on this. To bed, Miss Amy.

AMY MARCH

He put ice on your ankle? With his own hands??

JO MARCH

Oh, stop being swoony.

MRS. MARCH

I won't have my girls being silly about boys. Up to bed. Jo, dear.

Jo escorts Amy, firmly. As they disappear up the stairs:

AMY MARCH

Everything lucky happens to Meg.

JO MARCH

(with unexpected ferocity)

You mustn't be sippy about Laurie, any more than you'd be sippy about a dog, or a chair. I hope we shall be friends with him.

AMY MARCH

With a boy??

JO MARCH

He isn't a boy. He's Laurie.

CUT TO:

Playful period MUSIC, tin whistle and pianoforte:

EXT: REAR GARDEN, ORCHARD HOUSE & LAURENCE HOUSE. DAY. (SNOW)

Laughing, Jo and Amy pull Laurie on a sled around the yard as he tries to steer, shouting instructions. Laurie plows into a drift, and emerges covered with snow.

Laurie coaxes Beth onto the sled -- she is afraid to ride, and she is also a little afraid of Laurie.

Compromise: Jo and Beth ride on the sled together, with Laurie "hitched" to the sled, pulling them around the garden as if he were a horse. Not wanting to be left out, Amy climbs onto the sled too. Laurie feigns collapse, face first into the snow.

Amy yanks off Laurie's boot. Laurie hops around on one foot, trying to chase her. Beth grabs the boot from Amy and tosses it to Laurie. Laurie yanks the boot back on, and holds Beth's hand high: Champion! He is hit in the face with a snowball.

The culprit, Jo, laughs and then runs, with Laurie chasing her.

Dialogue segues in:

On one side of the low garden wall, Meg and Marmee observe the snowball fight; on the Laurence side of the wall, Laurie's tutor, MR. JOHN BROOKE (25, a good face and reserved manner) looks on. In a hidden way, Meg takes in handsome Mr. Brooke.

JOHN BROOKE

Your young ladies are unusually active, Mrs. March, if I may say so.

MRS. MARCH

You may, Mr. Brooke. As a teacher, you know the value of exercise for young boys. It is my own opinion that girls are no different in their need for exertion. Feminine weakness and fainting spells are the direct result of our confining young girls in the house, bent over their needlework in restrictive corsets.

-- this delivered in a manner most genteel and conversational.
At "corset", Meg blanches, stricken:

MEG MARCH

Marmee.

To help Mr. Brooke over his momentary loss of speech:

MRS. MARCH

Your young student is an athlete.

JOHN BROOKE

He is, thank you, a good one. But he makes an unruly scholar. I've my work cut out for me. I regret that his grandfather is away much. We are fortunate to make your family's acquaintance. One hopes your girls will be a gentling influence.

A snowball whizzes past. Mrs. March puts an arm around Meg, to guide her indoors, and replies with an ironic smile --

MRS. MARCH

Indeed, Mr. Brooke.

As Meg and her mother go in, Meg's voice comes back, faintly:

MEG MARCH

Marmee, must you speak to everyone about corsets??

CUT TO:

INT: KITCHEN - THE MARCH HOUSE. MORNING. WINTER DAY.

Bedlam and bad moods around breakfast. Laundry hangs everywhere, drying; Beth scampers after KITTENS, Hannah rattles pans, Jo bolts toast, Marmee scribbles a letter as Meg irons Amy's sash and Amy rushes to finish a slate full of sums. A kitten springs, and clings to Meg's skirt like a burr.

MEG MARCH

Ow! Beth, if you don't keep these horrid cats in the cellar, I'm going to drown them!

Jo seizes the kitten and tosses it to Beth, who lets out a cry.

MRS. MARCH

Girls! I must get this letter off.

AMY MARCH

Is three hundred divisible by seven?

JO MARCH

Everything's divisible by everything.
(hustling Amy into her cloak)
- Hurry, you'll make us late!

EXT: STREETS OF CONCORD. WINTER DAY. (SLUSH)

Miserable February day. A bony old HORSE strains as her MASTER berates and beats her -- the old mare is hitched to a wagon mired in the slush. PEOPLE with raw, cold faces avert their eyes from a UNION SOLDIER AMPUTEE begging in the street.

Clutching her slate, Amy slogs through sloppy snow after Jo and Meg. Jo bundles her skirts around her knees, swearing blackly:

JO MARCH

Blast these wretched skirts! By Jehosephat, next winter I'm wearing trousers.

AMY MARCH

(scandalized at the thought)
You are not! And don't say "blast" and "wretch" and you-know-what.

JO MARCH

I like good strong words.

Amy stumbles, and her slate lands in a puddle. Jo strides on. Amy retrieves her slate -- erased. She bursts into tears.

AMY MARCH

Oh blast!

Meg comes back to put Amy to rights. She glances anxiously at a FINE HOUSE: Meg's WEALTHY MISTRESS' dour face peeks out, and her TWO SPOILED CHILDREN with her.

MEG MARCH

Oh, there's Mrs. King, I'm tardy.

AMY MARCH

Oh Meg, must I go to school today?
Mayn't I go to work with you? Please.
I can hardly hold my head up at school, I owe at least a dozen limes.

JO MARCH

Limes??

MEG MARCH

- Are limes the fashion now?

AMY MARCH

Of course they are, it's nothing but limes now, everyone keeps them in their desks and trades them for beads and things, and all the girls treat each other at recess. If you don't bring limes to school, you're nothing, you might as well be dead. I've had ever so many limes, and I can't pay anyone back.

JO MARCH

No wonder you never learn anything at that school.

But Meg is untying the corner of her handkerchief --

MEG MARCH (cont'd)

I know how it feels to do without any little luxuries, when everyone around us takes such treats for granted. But we are not the Hummels. Not yet. Here's a quarter - Marmee gave me the rag money this month.

Amy throws her arms around Meg. Disgusted, Jo strides off. Meg hurries toward the service entrance of the wealthy house.

INT: MR. DAVIS' SCHOOL. DAY. (EXT: WINTER)

Mr. Davis' School for Young Ladies is in a dreary, formal house, with the front parlor given over to school desks. WELL-TO-DO YOUNG LADIES (ages 9 to 14) hang up their wraps. The foyer ripples with gossip:

MISS JENNY SNOW

Amy March has pickled limes!

Amy, blushing pleurably, takes a smallish parcel out of her cloak as she hangs it up. Girls surround Amy. Plump, sweet-faced MARY KINGSLEY (10) whispers, excited:

MISS MARY KINGSLEY

Oh, have you limes, Amy dear?

AMY MARCH

Yes - I'll treat you at noon.

MISS MARY KINGSLEY

Here - Wear my carnelian ring.

-- slipping her ring onto Amy's finger. MAY CHESTER (14, patrician beauty, quite spoiled) overrides the giggling girls:

MISS MAY CHESTER

(cutting)

How ever did you get limes, Amy?
Were they donated to Hope House?

A shocked chorus of: "May!", mixed with appreciative giggles. Amy whirls on May in anger -- but at that moment MR. DAVIS (50, repressed) raps sharply with his pointer.

MR. DAVIS

I will have your slates, please.

Quickly Amy conceals the limes. The young ladies stack their slates on Mr. Davis' table, as they each chime with a curtsy:

AMY MARCH

Good morning, Mr. Davis.

-- trying to hide her slate underneath Jenny's, as she ducks past with her limes. Mr. Davis stops Amy with his pointer:

MR. DAVIS

Miss March, where are your sums?

AMY MARCH

I - dropped my slate in the snow,
Mr. Davis.

He stares at her coldly, positive from her guilty expression that she is lying.

MR. DAVIS

Let us examine the extent of your idleness, Miss March. Bring me your copybook, please.

Amy manages to slip her packet of limes inside her desk. Ignoring her classmates' sly glances, Amy brings Mr. Davis her copybook. He flips through the pages. He stops. With a sneer, he displays: Excellent pen sketches of aquiline noses.

MR. DAVIS

What is this, Miss March?

Amy is paralyzed. May Chester speaks up:

MISS MAY CHESTER

Miss March is modest, Mr. Davis.
May I say? She dislikes her nose,
and wishes it had a finer point.

Much mean laughter, quelled by Mr. Davis' unamused stare.

MR. DAVIS

Further proof that it is as useful
to educate a young woman as it is to
educate a female cat.

He rips the offending page out and hands the copybook to Amy, who is scarlet with humiliation. As Amy returns to her desk, she whispers savagely to May:

AMY MARCH

You'll not get a single pickled lime
from me, May Chester. I hope you go
straight to Hell.

A ripple of giggles. May Chester immediately raises her hand:

MISS MAY CHESTER

Excuse me, Mr. Davis? Did you not
forbid us to indulge in limes?

Amy whips around, horrified.

MR. DAVIS

Indeed. I will not have that
distracting fad in my school.

MISS MAY CHESTER

Miss March misunderstood, Sir -- she
has a whole packet in her desk.

Mr. Davis advances and yanks open Amy's desk. He seizes the brown parcel and dumps its contents into Amy's desk. Amy tries to cover the limes with her hands --

AMY MARCH

Oh, please Mr. Davis --

-- but Mr. Davis strides to the window and flings it open.

MR. DAVIS

Throw them out.

The others watch solemnly as Amy carries her limes to the

window, biting back her tears; and drops the precious limes into the snow, several at a time. When she is done:

MR. DAVIS

Put out your hand.

Amy holds out her trembling little hand, palm up. Mr. Davis turns her hand knuckles up, raises his lethal-looking pointer, and SWISH! -- down it comes.

CUT TO:

INT: FRONT PARLOR - PLUMFIELD ESTATE. WINTER. DAY.

A clock ticks loudly. Even in repose, AUNT MARCH's face is severe and disappointed. The old woman nods in her chair, as Jo reads aloud from "Belsham's Essays", purposely droning:

JO MARCH

"Secondly, the immortality of the soul is asserted to be in consequence of its immateriality as in all leipothymic cases, a total cessation of perception takes place, which is consistent with the idea of its natural immortality...

(interpolating)

And immorality and physicality - and I think you've finally dozed off.

Aunt March is asleep, and so is her small black POODLE. Pleased, Jo tiptoes to the many bookshelves and takes down "David Copperfield". As she turns away, she notices:

POV THROUGH WINDOW - EXT: THE GATES OF PLUMFIELD ESTATE. DAY.

Oddly enough, her sister Amy stands forlornly at the gates. It takes a moment for Jo to realize that Amy is weeping.

Jo flies out of the room. Both the poodle and Aunt March startle awake. The little dog skitters after Jo, yapping. Aunt March pulls her shawl about her, with a shrewish complaint --

AUNT MARCH

Josyphine, there's a draft!

EXT: PLUMFIELD ESTATE. WINTER. DAY.

Jo races down the broad front walk to the gates --

JO MARCH
Is it Father??

Weeping, Amy shakes her head and mutely holds up her hand, to display a red stripe across the back of her fine young hand.

CUT TO:

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. WINTER. LATE DAY.

JO MARCH
He ought to be arrested at once! And if not arrested, then strangled!

As Jo rages, Mrs. March paces in indecision, tears of anger brimming. Meg and Beth bathe Amy's hand in rose glycerin.

MEG MARCH
What should we do, Marmee?

JO MARCH
We should go over there and beat the tar out of him with his own stick!

MRS. MARCH
Oh...I wish your Father were here.

JO MARCH
Can't we have him arrested??

MRS. MARCH
Mr. Davis can beat his pupils freely -- as well as his children, and his wife and his horse, for that matter. And so shall the law remain, as neither women nor children nor horses have the vote.

(then, new resolve)
I shall write this man a letter.

JO MARCH
Oh, a letter - That'll show him.

Ignoring her, Mrs. March sits down at her writing desk.

JO MARCH (cont'd)
It's an appalling school. Amy knew more going in than she knows now.
(over Amy's protest)
-- True! Your spelling's atrocious, your Latin absurd --

AMY MARCH

(small and crushed)

Mr. Davis said it was as useful to educate a woman as to educate a female cat.

Marmee glances up in renewed outrage.

JO MARCH

I really must strangle Mr. Davis.

MRS. MARCH

We should take care not to embrace violence, Jo.

(reads aloud as she writes)

"I often see such marks on the defenseless ladies who come to Hope House seeking refuge from their husbands and fathers. Never did I expect to find such a mark on my own daughter! ..."

EXT: STREETS OF CONCORD. WINTER. LATE DAY.

A BATTERED WOMAN turns to stare at Jo racing down the street, hair flying, skirts clutched high, Marmee's letter in hand.

MRS. MARCH'S VOICE (cont.)

"And at the hands of her teacher! I assure you, if you hit and humiliate a child, the only lesson she'll learn is to hit and to humiliate!"

INT: MR. DAVIS' SCHOOL. WINTER. LATE DAY.

Mr. Davis half-rises behind his desk, astonished --

MRS. MARCH'S VOICE (cont.)

"What right have you to strike any child? In God's eyes, we are all children, and we are all equals."

Jo slams the letter onto his desk so firmly that the inkstand topples onto his papers. Mr. Davis hastily jumps out of the way of the flowing ink. Seeing that Jo is emptying Amy March's desk, Mr. Davis quickly opens Marmee's letter --

MRS. MARCH'S VOICE (cont.)

"I withdraw my daughter Amy from your school."

Jo seizes Mr. Davis' pointer, and turns on Mr. Davis --

JO MARCH
Is this the weapon?

Mr. Davis involuntarily recoils. Jo smiles unpleasantly.

JO MARCH (cont'd)
It's mine now.

She is gone, taking his pointer -- leaving Mr. Davis to stare after her, bewildered, clumsily mopping up the spreading ink.

CUT TO:

INT: MEG AND AMY'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Amy is tucked in, clothespin clipped on her nose. Marmee sits on the bed, talking gently as Meg brushes Marmee's long hair.

MRS. MARCH
You'll take your lessons from Jo and Meg, and study here at home. It won't be easy. We tease Jo because she's always got her nose in a book, but an education gives every woman a means of earning her livelihood. You may not think you'll need to, but then, neither did I.
(pushing sadness away)
Mr. Davis' violent methods aside, you must govern yourself, dear, and not give into your little vanities.

Amy nods, on the verge of tears. Marmee removes the clothespin from her nose and kisses her, tenderly.

FROM JO'S POV, AS SHE STANDS IN THE HALLWAY, WATCHING

Jo watches Meg brush Marmee's hair. In the soft candlelight, Amy and Meg and Marmee make a peaceful, inclusive picture. Jo turns away, thoughtfully.

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM. ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Beth kneels, praying. In their bed, Jo lies awake, worried, unable to read. Beth climbs into bed, and takes her hand:

JO MARCH

Beth? Don't tell Marmee. I rather crave violence. "The Lost Duke of Gloucester" is swimming with filth and gore.

(whispers, with relish)

Yesterday I had Lady Anne violated in her sitting room.

(at Beth's gasp, renewed guilt:)

I don't have a prayer of going to heaven, do I?

BETH MARCH

It's only a story, stories don't have much to do with real life.

Jo turns in bed, restlessly, her mind alive.

JO MARCH

I disagree. The best stories, even ghastly ones, have a great deal of real life in them.

(frustrated)

But when does real life begin?

Jo gives up on sleep. Gathering up her papers and writing cap, Jo kisses Beth, and heads for her Muse in the attic.

CUT TO:

EXT: REAR OF ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. DAY. [WIND]

A raw and windy day. Laughing, their skirts blowing, Meg and Jo stagger up the kitchen stairs with a heavy bundle of firewood. As they begin stacking the wood on the porch:

LAURIE

Jo! Come over! You too, Meg! It's dull as tombs around here!

-- Laurie waving as he leans out of his study window. Then abruptly, Laurie is yanked backward, and Mr. Brooke appears:

JOHN BROOKE

Mr. Laurence, one doesn't shout at ladies as if they were cattle!

(cordial nod to Jo & Meg)

My apologies.

As Brooke firmly closes the window, he pauses for a moment:

BROOKE'S POV - EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. DAY. [WIND]

Gracefully clutching her blowing skirts, lovely Meg holds the kitchen door open to admit a parade of KITTENS.

Sensing something, Meg glances up at the Laurence house, and sees Mr. Brooke draw back, quickly.

INT: STAIRS - ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. SAME DAY. [RAIN]

Preparations: Beth pounds out an "Arabesque" on the ancient piano as Jo and Meg scurry, gathering odd household objects. Meg rummages through the costume bench on the stair landing:

MEG MARCH

"The Marchioness de Montanescue".

(finding a lavender shawl)

Ahhh!... "Lady Violet"!

JO MARCH

Where's Rodrigo? Amy!

-- smearing lampblack into her brows. Amy appears, sulking:

AMY MARCH

Do I have to be a boy again?

JO MARCH

Boys have the best parts.

INT: STUDY - LAURENCE HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. SAME DAY. [RAIN]

At a broad table, Laurie bends over a page of Greek. His chair creaks rhythmically as he jiggles his leg, bored. He can see:

POV - EXT: WINDOWS OF ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. [RAIN]

Under the gables, the Marches' garret window glows. Inside, barely visible through the dusty panes, faint shadows move.

LAURIE

What do those girls do over there all day?

JOHN BROOKE

(dryly)

Over the Mysteries of Female Life, there is drawn a Veil, best left undisturbed.

John Brooke moves off distractedly. Laurie, gazing glumly out the window, brightens:

POV - EXT: WINDOWS OF ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. [RAIN.]

Jo appears at a lower window and beckons to Laurie: Come here!

Laurie glances over his shoulder, to see if his tutor is gone.

CUT TO:

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. SAME DAY. [RAIN]

In the most humble and makeshift manner, the Pickwick Society rehearses a play:

Meg [in Lady Violet's lavender shawl] and Beth as the "Marchioness de Montanescu" [black duster and veil], and Amy [doublet and stockings] are assembled about the "stage" -- a bare floor, with a "castle tower" of old furniture stacked on itself. Jo, in moustache and trousers, is the Playwright, Stage Manager - and the Duke of Gloucester himself.

Meg kneels dramatically before "The Marchioness":

MEG MARCH

Oh dear Marchioness, pray for me! I
have doubly sinned, against myself,
and my brother Rodrigo.

JO MARCH

"Rodrigo arrives at the castle tower."
(prompting from her book)
- Mr. Winkle, you arrive, seeking the
Duke of Gloucester.

Amy grabs the lavender shawl and wraps it about her, pouting.

AMY MARCH

I want to be Lady Violet.

BETH MARCH

(intervening helpfully)
She could be a child bride.

JO MARCH

Ohhh. That's good, Mr. Tupman!

MEG MARCH

- Then who'll play Rodrigo?

Jo takes up Pickwick's gavel and taps the desk, with mischief:

JO MARCH

Ahem! Mr. President and Gentlemen of the P.S., I wish to propose the admission of a new member, who would add immensely to our literary and theatrical endeavors. I propose -- Theodore Laurence as an honorary member of the Pickwick Society.

Meg and Beth and Amy exchange wary looks. Meg is particularly disapproving.

MEG MARCH

Very well, Mr. Snodgrass. We'll put it to a vote. In favor, say "Aye".

BETH MARCH

Aye!

(blushes at their stares)
He - he has been most generous in lending me his sheet music.

AMY MARCH

Well, I say nay! He'll laugh at our playacting and make fun of us later.

MEG MARCH

(poignantly)
He'll think it's only a game.

JO MARCH

He won't, upon my word as a gentleman!

MEG MARCH

When it's only ladies, we don't guard our conduct in the same way -

AMY MARCH

We bare our souls and tell our most appalling secrets. -

MEG MARCH

Young Laurence would find us improper.

JO MARCH

Teddy won't do anything of the sort. Oh please, let's try him, shall we?

-- throwing open the door of a hidden cabinet [called a "hide", built into old New England homes] to reveal Laurie crouched

inside, flushed with laughter. A chorus of shrieks:

MEG & AMY & BETH
Jo, you traitor! - How could you!

Laurie, equal to the occasion, gives a gracious salutation:

LAURIE
Mr. President and gentlemen, I am
Samuel Weller, actor, and loyal and
very humble servant of the club. --

JO MARCH
We'll be the judge of that.

LAURIE
(over their laughter)
In token of my gratitude, and as a
means of promoting communication
between adjoining nations - shouting
from windows being forbidden - I shall
provide a Post Office in our hedge --

-- here producing a whimsical old BIRDHOUSE with hinged roof --

LAURIE (cont'd)
-- The further to encourage the
baring of our souls and the telling
of our most appalling secrets.
(taking an oath, earnestly)
I do pledge never to reveal what I
receive in confidence here.

He has made his case well. Meg hands Laurie his playscript:

MEG MARCH
Take your place, Mr. Weller.

The CAMERA draws back, leaving a tableau of now five players
assembled on the worn boards of the "stage".

FADE OUT

EXT: WOODS OF CONCORD. EARLY SPRING. EARLY MORNING. DAY.

On a woodland path, Jo's boots crunch ice-matted evergreen
needles. As she enters the sanctuary of the old forest, Jo
crouches to loosen her boot laces. The woods are silent,
except for the strange groans of the timbers as they sway.

Jo takes down her hair and shakes it free, ties her jacket about her waist. Dropping to a runner's crouch, she looks ahead at the trail that winds off through the dense canopy of evergreens. She takes off.

Long hair flying, Jo runs through the woods. Now her full beauty can be seen -- Jo is a natural athlete, and as wild as the thin-flanked MOTHER DEER and NEWBORN FAWN she startles.

Gracefully Jo lifts her skirt and hurdles a narrow frozen stream, and runs on.

EXT: NEAR FIELDS, APPROACHING CONCORD - LATER. DAY.

Jo walks freely along the muddy road toward the winter-barren trees of Concord. With her wild mane of hair and glowing face, Jo makes an unusual sight. A FARMER BOY, passing in his cart, turns his head to stare.

EXT: FRONT GARDEN OF ORCHARD HOUSE. EARLY SPRING. DAY.

Arriving home, Jo reaches into the hedge and opens the lid of Laurie's birdhouse "post office", and lets out a cry of glee: Four theatre tickets.

INT: PARLOR/DINING ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. AFTERNOON. DAY.

Beth, carrying a cup of tea, tiptoes through the dining room. Marmee teaches a circle of FREEDWOMEN and IMMIGRANT WOMEN, who haltingly sound out words from children's primers.

Beth dodges Jo, who rushes about the parlor. Amy, who has a cold, cuddles miserably on the sofa with her sketchbook:

AMY MARCH

I want to go to the theatre, I never go anywhere.

JO MARCH

You weren't asked. Beth, where in tarnation is Marmee's opera glass?

AMY MARCH

You're just hogging Laurie. Oh Meg, can't I go, please?

-- to Meg, who descends looking handsome and nervous in her rather shabby finery; adjusting her capricious hoop skirt.

MEG MARCH

Laurie only reserved four seats...oh dear, I hope this doesn't fly up...

AMY MARCH

Laurie could get another ticket --

JO MARCH

- Not together. And you couldn't sit alone, so Laurie would give you his place, and the three of us would be stuck with awful Mr. Brooke.

At "awful Mr. Brooke", Meg sends Jo a look. She soothes Amy:

MEG MARCH

Rest your eyes and drink your ginger tea.

JO MARCH

-- And besides, you're weeks behind in algebra.

(takes away Amy's sketchbook)

I won't have a sister who's a lazy ignoramus. Here -

(shoves a math book at her)

Finish the pages I've marked. And don't sulk, you look like a pigeon.

A KNOCK at the door, and Jo bolts. At the slam of the door --

AMY MARCH

You'll be sorry for this, Jo March!

CUT TO:

EXT: NEAR ORCHARD HOUSE AND LAURENCE HOUSE. LATER. NIGHT.

Returning from the theatre, Meg and Mr. Brooke walk together, formally. Laurie and Jo, in high spirits, peruse the playbill:-

JO MARCH

"Mrs. Nell Watson" - Didn't she faint wonderfully, Meg? If only I were the fainting type.

Jo feigns a swoon. Laurie puts his hands in his pockets --

LAURIE

If only I were the catching type.

-- catching Jo at the last possible instant.

JOHN BROOKE

Young Laurence informs me that you are an aficionado of the theatre, Miss March. Do you go often?

MEG MARCH

(with a nervous look at Laurie)
Oh no. Rarely.

Laurie smiles at Meg mischievously.

JOHN BROOKE

I confess I'm distracted at the theatre, thinking about the peculiar lives of the actors themselves. When one considers the immodesties Mrs. Watson suffers, one wonders what sort of lady would seek such a life.

To Meg's utter dismay --

JO MARCH

Meg is a sensational actress! We're always putting on wild theatricals.

MEG MARCH

(faint, embarrassed)
It's just - something we play at.

They walk on. Laurie catches Jo by the waist and detains her:

LAURIE

Jo. What do you think of that?

-- looking ahead at Meg and John walking together. Meg's arm is on his, and John's head inclines toward Meg attentively. Annoyed, Jo shoves Laurie away, but Laurie catches her again:

LAURIE

Let's see what they do.

Meg and John Brooke have reached the gate. Meg offers John her hand. Breaking free, Jo catches up --

JO MARCH

Thank you very much, and good night!

-- hurrying Meg through the gate. Laurie and Mr. Brooke call "Good Night!". As soon as possible, Meg turns on Jo, hotly:

MEG MARCH

That was rude.

JO MARCH

You plastered yourself on him!

MEG MARCH

It's proper to take a gentleman's arm, if it's offered!

They step inside, mid-quarrel --

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

-- where Marmee is quietly writing letters, alone. Meg and Jo, instantly complicit, are all smiles.

MRS. MARCH

How was the play, amusing?

Meg drops a kiss on Marmee's temple as Jo sheds her jacket --

JO MARCH

Wonderful, I'm absolutely inspired by the love scene.

-- sending Meg a narrow look. Meg returns the look. Jo grabs her writing cap and heads upstairs, hearing below:

MRS. MARCH

You look warm, Meg dear, was the theatre overcrowded?

INT: AMY AND MEG'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

From the upstairs hall, Jo sees Amy propped in bed, reading -- or pretending to. A fire burns brightly in the small grate.

JO MARCH

Still sulking?

Amy ignores her, pretending to read. Jo eyes her for a moment.

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Beth sleeps. Jo puts on her velveteen writing cap, and gathers her pen, her ink bottle -- and looks around for her manuscript, puzzled...Where is it? Jo searches. A look of horror crosses her face, as she realizes where her manuscript is.

INT: AMY AND MEG'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jo strides past Amy's bed to the grate, and sees what burns so bright -- her composition book, flames devouring its blackened pages as the title disappears: "The Lost Duke Of Gloucester".

Jo turns on Amy, and the look on her face is terrible indeed. Amy's smug grin changes to fear. She cries out as Jo lunges --

AMY MARCH

I didn't do it!

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Hearing the bang of furniture and Amy's screams, Marmee and Meg hurry upstairs --

INT: AMY AND MEG'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

JO MARCH

I hate you! I'll never forgive you!
As long as I live!

-- slapping and shaking Amy in a wild rage. Marmee manages to wrench Jo away. Meg throws herself over Amy, but Jo cannot be contained. Delivering a final hard kick, Jo screams --

JO MARCH

You're not my sister, you're
nothing, you're dead!

Beth, awakened, halts in the doorway, frightened by the sight of Jo's fury. Jo, weeping over the charred remnant of her manuscript, allows Marmee to lead her away.

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE NIGHT.

Lying in bed, Jo is stony with anger, her cheek pillowed on her clenched fist. Marmee, in nightclothes, kisses her goodnight.

MRS. MARCH

It is a great loss, and you've every
right to be put out. But don't let
the sun go down upon your anger.
Forgive each other, and begin again
tomorrow.

Amy hovers in the doorway listening, weebegone.

JO MARCH
I will never forgive her.

Marmee sends Amy an oblique look that nonetheless conveys, See what you've done? Amy turns away, tearfully.

CUT TO:

VERY CLOSE ON THE GLINTING BLADE OF AN OLD-FASHIONED ICE SKATE slicing across an icy plane, shearing up a fine plume of icy crystals with a sharp, ANGRY SOUND.

EXT: WALDEN POND - FROZEN. EARLY SPRING. DAY.

Jo skates in long, confident strides - she has traded her long skirt for a knee-length one with matching woolen bloomers. She calls to Laurie across the frozen pond:

JO MARCH
Watch out here, it's weak.

LAURIE
And careful here! --

-- tossing a stick of wood onto the ice to mark it. He and Jo skate toward each other, immediately intent on their game.

JO MARCH
Last ice we'll have this year, I guess. To the mark, there?

-- pointing to where a red scarf marks the goal, some distance out on the pond. Laurie and Jo toe up, shoulder-to-shoulder:

LAURIE
You say go.

JO MARCH
No, you say.

AMY MARCH
(distant)
Laurie! Jo! Wait for me!

Jo and Laurie see Amy hurrying, stumbling through the sparse woods, dangling her skates by their straps.

JO MARCH
Ignore her. Ready? Go!

She and Laurie take off, fast, in tight competition, headed for the other side of the pond.

On the shore, Amy straps on her skates, waves a mittened hand:

AMY MARCH

No fair!

Jo and Laurie race closely, one pulling ahead, and then the other, skates flashing and ice flying. Laurie edges ahead -- but suddenly his skate catches a burr frozen into the ice, and Laurie goes sprawling, into Jo's immediate path.

Jack be nimble -- Jo hurdles Laurie and skates on, fast and clean, to the mark. She scoops up the red scarf, and glides back toward Laurie, holding the scarf out to him.

LAURIE

Good one. I'll set it for the next.

He skates with the scarf in the other direction, to set the goal again. Jo glances coolly toward the shore, to see if Amy has noted her victory.

But Amy is not on the shore, nor is she skating on the pond. With a sudden pang of horror, Jo sees:

POV - ON THE OTHER SIDE OF WALDEN POND

Amy's red-and-white stocking cap floats in a gaping patch of dark water -- the ice is broken through.

Jo screams --

JO MARCH

Amy!

-- and skates toward the broken ice. Her skates cannot go fast enough, she moves in exaggerated slow-motion. Jo senses something dark blur past her --

It is Laurie, who reaches the jagged hole first, and stretches full out on the ice. The ice groans deeply, warning.

LAURIE

Bring me a rail!

Jo grabs up the stick. Beneath her, the ice cracks with a strange wobbly sound, sending out a dark ray beneath the opaque surface.

LAURIE

Throw it!

Jo heaves the stick, javelin-style. Under her feet, the ice splits to a long crack. Jo stretches out on the ice and eases herself toward the jagged hole, where Laurie holds the stick.

Now Jo can see Amy's small figure flailing in the black water, her mittened hand trying to grasp the rail that Laurie extends.

AMY'S BOBBING POV - LAURIE AND JO LYING ON THE ICE

In vain, Laurie tries to guide the rail to Amy's hand. Behind him, edging forward on her belly, Jo crawls toward the hole.

Amy's mittened hand catches the rail, but slips, and Amy goes under. She bobs up, gasping, and then Jo and Laurie's arms are there, dragging Amy out of the water.

Laurie struggles out of his coat and wraps it around Amy. Her teeth are chattering, she can barely speak:

AMY MARCH

Can't feel my legs...

Jo strips off her own woolen skirt, leaving only bloomers on, and bundles her skirt around Amy's wet legs.

Laurie picks Amy up in his arms, and thus burdened, he and Jo hurry toward the woods, toward home.

CUT TO:

INT: AMY & MEG'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE DAY.

Jo and Amy's damp clothes are draped in front of the grate.

MEG MARCH

Jo March, I'm absolutely stricken.
You walked all the way home from
Walden Pond in only your bloomers??
(giggles)
What did Laurie say?

Jo looks momentarily cross -- she is feeding soup to Amy, who cuddles confidingly against Jo. Amy has been tucked in bed with a hotwater bottle and Marmee's duvet. Beth curls nearby with her offering: a tangle of KITTENS and her favorite dolls.

AMY MARCH

Meg, you mustn't be silly about
Teddy. He's one of us.

BETH MARCH

Indeed, he is now.

A flicker of concern crosses Amy's face, and she must whisper:

AMY MARCH

Jo. Do you love Laurie more than
you love me?

JO MARCH

Don't be such a beetle. I'll never
love anyone as I love my sisters.

Amy slips her hand into Jo's. Jo holds it tightly.

POV - INT: AMY & MEG'S ROOM. LATER - EVENING

Marmee pauses at the door of Amy and Meg's room, and sees:

Jo, in her writing cap, curled next to Amy on the bed, pen and
paper propped on her knees. Amy is helping her reconstruct
"The Lost Duke Of Gloucester":

AMY MARCH

You left out the best part. Remember
before that, Lady Ann succumbs to
the Duke of Gloucester's rival -?

JO MARCH

Right, yes, the grotto scene.

AMY MARCH

I adore the grotto scene...

Marmee turns away, a relieved smile easing her careworn face.

CLOSE DOWN

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE. BEAUTIFUL SPRING DAY.

The Marches' house is transformed by sunshine and a profusion
of spring flowers. Hannah emerges, carrying a small trunk to
the waiting carriage, and hands it to the DRIVER.

Inside the house --

INT: STAIRS AND FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. SPRING DAY.

Aunt March perches formally on a parlor chair, her cane firmly planted in front of her and her POODLE on her lap. To Marmee:

AUNT MARCH

I am able to take Margaret as far as the Moffats in Boston, but I cannot stay to chaparone her.

MRS. MARCH

Mrs. Moffat assures me that Meg will be in the best of company.

AUNT MARCH

A reputation is destroyed in a moment, and never repaired.

INT: MEG & AMY'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. SPRING DAY.

Jo turns out the bureau drawers, as Meg stands by, flushed and anxious, clutching a single white glove. Amy and Beth apply the finishing stitches to Meg's new pale yellow dress --

AMY MARCH

Wait till they see you in this dress, Meg - You'll have a dozen proposals!

JO MARCH

I've told Laurie he has to show you off and keep you from being a wallflower, upon penalty of death - Where is that miserable glove??

INT: STAIRCASE AND PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. SPRING DAY.

Jo hurries downstairs carrying Meg's new dress and a riotous garden bouquet wrapped in paper. She hears Aunt March:

AUNT MARCH

Abba, I shake my head at the way you are managing Margaret. How is she to be married, without a proper debut?

Mrs. March touches her Union brooch, with its portrait of her husband.

MRS. MARCH

In our present circumstances -

AUNT MARCH

(overriding, sharply)

Your circumstances will not change when your husband returns! My nephew is foolish with money, and he has grown no wiser through impoverishment. Your family's only hope is for Margaret to marry well. 'Though I don't know who marries governesses.

(seeing Jo and flowers)

And this one has entirely spoiled her disposition with books. Are those for me, Josyphine?

Jo resentfully keeps a tight grip on the flowers --

JO MARCH

They're for Mrs. Moffat. Marmee, Meg's frantic, she's lost her glove and she's only got one pair.

AUNT MARCH

She can't arrive without gloves! The Moffats are people in Society --!

MRS. MARCH

(keeping her temper)

Tell Meg she may borrow mine.

Jo clatters upstairs, shouting with unnecessary vigor:

JO MARCH

Meg! Meg! Take Marmee's!

Aunt March winces, covering her ears.

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE. BEAUTIFUL SPRING DAY.

Aunt March's carriage pulls away, as Marmee and Jo and Beth and Amy wave farewell from the front gate.

JO MARCH

Imagine having to ride all the way to Boston with Aunt March.

CUT TO:

INT: MANY ROOMS IN THE MOFFAT HOUSE - BOSTON. SPRING. DAY.

This is not little Concord. The Moffat House is sumptuous even by Boston standards. SERVANTS move briskly across the polished floors, carrying stunning flower arrangements, polishing silver, removing window coverings: all in preparation for a ball. In a drawing room, a HARPIST tunes a magnificent harp.

In the kitchen, MRS. MOFFAT (50, stout, elegant, kind) gives instructions to her COOKS. In the laundry room, a FREEDWOMAN presses a beautiful ballgown.

In the midst of this grand, airy, strange house, the CAMERA spies something familiar: Meg's new pale yellow dress.

The UPSTAIRS MAID carefully carries Meg's dress up the impressive main stairs, toward FEMALE VOICES and laughter.

INT: DRESSING ROOM IN SUITE OF BEDROOMS. MOFFAT HOUSE. EVENING.

Meg turns away from her mirror -- she looks lovely in her new dress and Marmee's gloves, but a little colorless compared to the OTHER HOUSE GUESTS (five in all) who pass through the dressing room, giggling and talking as they dress.

MISS SALLY MOFFIT (18, bubbly), eats cake as she dresses, attended by Miss Belle Gardiner, whose beauty and self-possession have only increased since her engagement party.

MISS BELLE GARDINER

Sally, you won't be able to draw your laces! At my coming-out party, I didn't eat for weeks beforehand.

As Meg joins them, a little shyly:

MISS SALLY MOFFIT

Oh, I do like that color on you!

MISS BELLE GARDINER

It's pale as butter. The nicest I've seen cotton since the War broke out. But you had it made up so plain.

Belle's own low-cut bodice is an intricate showcase of stitches and tucks and silver filigree lace.

MEG MARCH

Well, I - do my own sewing, and -

MISS BELLE GARDINER

(laughs, beautifully)

But you can send out piecework so cheaply, with all these hordes of German and Irish around. We'd rather have them working than begging.

(shows off her petticoat)

Mother sent my entire trousseau out to be tucked. Mrs. Finster's on Charles Street carries silk pieces ready-made. I'll take you there.

MISS SALLY MOFFIT

The Marches haven't bought silk in years. They have views on Slavery.

(to Meg)

Daisy, isn't it true your father's school had to close when he let in a little dark girl?

Conversation pauses, and heads turn to stare at Meg curiously.

MISS BELLE GARDINER

(dismisses this, pleasantly)

We're all Abolitionists, I hope. Besides, the silk at Mrs. Finster's isn't milled in the South. It's made right here, over in Lynnfield.

VARIOUS FEMALES

No? Indeed? This isn't China silk?

MISS SALLY MOFFIT

What a cheat!

MEG MARCH

They use child labor.

Heads swivel back to Meg in dismay. She goes on, earnestly:

MEG MARCH (cont'd)

All the silk mills do. Whole families of children, as young as six years old, working fourteen hours a day in abominable conditions. Their little bodies crippled over. For a dollar a week.

A slight, hostile pall falls: Every girl except for Meg is wearing silk. Belle takes Meg's hand sweetly, protective:

MISS BELLE GARDINER

The poor are always with us. But
you are so good to remind us, Miss
March.

A French maid, HORTENSE (25, mignon and very knowing) delivers
a lovely profusion of roses. The girls gasp appreciatively.

MISS BELLE GARDINER

(reads card)

Miss March! You have a lover?
"Mr. Theodore Laurence".

Impressed, the other girls begin re-evaluating Meg March.

MEG MARCH

(flustered)

Oh no - Laurie's merely a friend.

SALLY MOFFIT

(insinuating)

Mother did hear that your families
had become close.

MEG MARCH

Truly, he isn't my beau! My sister
Jo put him up to this, I'm sure -

-- but Belle is impulsively leading Meg to her own room --

INT: BELLE'S BEDROOM - SUITE OF ROOMS. MOFFAT HOUSE. EVENING.

-- to Belle's own mirror. In contrast to the glamorous Belle
in her dazzling ballgown, Meg looks plain.

MISS BELLE GARDINER

May I tell you something? This is
an afternoon dress.

Meg looks crestfallen. Belle Gardiner kisses her cheek.

MISS BELLE GARDINER

I'm going to make you my pet.
(calling her French maid)
Hortense! Vienne ici! --

Belle throws open her armoire, and starts taking out clothes --

MISS BELLE GARDINER (cont)

-- Tonight Miss March shall have as many conquests as she likes.

(laughs, excited. To Meg:)

I mustn't have any, now that I am engaged. Will you indulge me?

Her French maid Hortense puts her hands under Meg's sternum and pushes up - Meg's bosom expands two inches.

HORTENSE

You have no corset?

Meg stares shyly at the exotic beauty mark on Hortense's sensual upper lip. Hortense smiles, conspiratorially.

CUT TO:

INT: BALLROOM AND DRAWING ROOMS - MOFFAT HOUSE. NIGHT.

A much grander affair than the New Year's dance at the Gardiners' in Concord. Here are gathered the most important members of Boston Society: GENTLEMEN in fine waistcoats and hats, LADIES in clunky old family jewels and beautiful gowns.

Laurie, arriving, gives his hat to the HOUSEMAN. In formal clothes, Laurie looks even more handsome. As he buttons his kid gloves, Laurie hears a burst of LAUGHTER:

A group of EAGER YOUNG MEN cluster around someone: Meg, in a sky-blue silk gown. Meg has been transformed: her beautiful shoulders are bare, her bosom nearly spills from an elaborate bodice. Her arms are looped with bracelets, and her lips and cheeks have been touched with paint. Meg's eyes sparkle with her new power, and more than a little champagne.

Miss Belle Gardiner sees Laurie stride toward Meg, and nudges her HUSBAND-TO-BE: Now the entertainment begins.

MR. NED MOFFAT (21) gives Meg another glass of champagne, and deftly removes her empty one. Meg flirts boldly with MR. PARKER (21), picking up her silk skirts and putting out one pretty shoe so that her slender ankle shows:

MEG MARCH

I would dance with you, Mr. Parker, but I fear for my new slippers. My credo is "Don't Tread On Me".

She is rewarded by more laughter. Someone takes her champagne glass from her hand, and Meg turns with a coquettish giggle --

To her shock, it is Laurie, his smile failing to mask his displeasure. He hands her glass to Mr. Moffat, rudely:

LAURIE

Miss March, I thought your family were Temperance people.

MEG MARCH

Laurie -

-- her hand going to her neckline in sudden modesty. But Laurie catches her wrist:

LAURIE

No, don't cover up, there may be one or two gentlemen here who haven't seen all your charms.

(malicious grin)

I promised Jo I'd show you off.

Meg tries to pull away, but Laurie pulls her to him firmly and moves her into a waltz.

MEG MARCH

The girls dressed me up, and I rather like it!

LAURIE

Yes, it reveals a whole new Meg.

-- frankly looking her over, so that Meg blushes. GUESTS incline their heads, gossiping about them. Brazenly touching her bare shoulders and borrowed pearls, Laurie teases --

LAURIE

I want to report everything to Jo. What do you call this?

-- fingering a tiny bit of ruching at the point of Meg's décolletage. Meg slaps his hand away. Laurie catches Meg's wrist again, and laughing, whispers something. Breaking away, Meg picks up her skirts and hurries out.

Mrs. Moffat, elephantine in silk and lace, looks on with interest; she whispers to her daughter Sally:

MRS. MOFFAT

So, they are in love.

INT: PRIVATE ALCOVE, NEAR BALLROOM - MOFFAT HOUSE. NIGHT.

On the verge of tears, Meg wipes Belle's coralline salve from her lips. She freezes helplessly, when from the next alcove:

MALE VOICE

Best thing that could happen to the Marches, a match with the Laurences.

FEMALE VOICE

The mother is a very practical woman.

The VOICES move off. Laurie, contrite, finds Meg:

LAURIE

Meg? I'm sorry. You're so beautiful, I was...almost afraid of you.

MEG MARCH

(subdued, humiliated)

Will you tell Jo how I've behaved?

LAURIE

Of course not. If you won't tell anyone how I've behaved.

Her tears spill. Laurie puts his arm around her, comforting.

MEG MARCH

I was just playing a part. To see how it felt to be Belle Gardiner.

(mocking herself)

With four proposals and twenty pairs of gloves.

LAURIE

You're worth ten of those other girls.

The moment changes, and they move away from each other, self-consciously. Meg trips on her skirts, and Laurie catches her.

MEG MARCH

This ridiculous dress. I've been tripping over it all night.

LAURIE

Tie some of it around your neck, where it could do you some good.

Meg blushes again, laughing with Laurie.

CUT TO:

INT: UPSTAIRS - ORCHARD HOUSE. ANOTHER NIGHT.

Meg's trunk and bundles are in the hall, and her pale yellow dress hangs on a door -- she has not yet unpacked.

MRS. MARCH (VOICE)
Laurie may keep his promise, but
other tongues will wag.

INT: JO AND BETH'S BEDROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

In nightclothes, Marmee brushes Jo's lustrous mane. Meg lies across the bed, face buried in a pillow.

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)
Ladies guard their modesty for one
very practical reason --

Meg lifts her face to listen.

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)
-- We are not highly valued, as men
are. We are forbidden to govern, or
vote or inherit land. We may not
preach nor study medicine nor law -

Jo is listening intently also, as Marmee brushes her hair.

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)
- We are more property than people:
A woman belongs to her father, who
gives her away in marriage to her
husband. As a piece of property,
you've very few protections, except
those you gain by earning the high
opinion of others.

-- braiding Jo's mane, fingers flying through the thick hair --

MRS. MARCH (cont'd)
If others in your society think well
of you, they will rise to your
defense. But if you give them
reason for reproach, they'll think
you deserve whatever insult comes.

JO MARCH
What do you mean by "insult?"

MRS. MARCH

I hope you will never know.

(to Meg)

Laurie may flirt and tipple champagne, but as a female you are held to another standard. Your modesty is your only power.

MEG MARCH

(ashamed, but disagrees)

I felt quite powerful that night.

Mrs. March nods wisely, sad.

MRS. MARCH

I'm sure you had them enthralled.
But it turns. And they resent you.
And then the gossip begins.
(turning the lampwick low)
I'll tell you where your strength is:
You'll rear the next generation.

With a smile, Marmee goes out, leaving Jo troubled:

JO MARCH

And if I don't marry and have children?
Does it mean I'm nothing?

CUT TO:

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. SUMMER. NIGHT.

Moths flit around Jo's candle as she writes, urgently, her hand flying over a copybook. Jo is lit with a creative fire: illuminated inside her are scenes inhabited by people, voices. Jo's lips move, she paces and laughs, gesturing to herself; and returns again to the page, her pen racing over the lines.

CUT TO:

EXT: ROWS OF SHOPS - CONCORD. LATE SUMMER, 1864. DAY.

Above the row of shops, in a second-story window, a fencing lesson can be seen: TWO FENCERS bouting.

From the street-level door, Laurie emerges in fencing whites, carrying his mesh mask and foil. He strides along, and stops:

POV - ALLEY, WITH DIRTY STAIRS LEADING UP TO AN OFFICE DOOR

Jo March walks slowly down the stairs. Over her head hangs a dentist's sign: GIANT PLASTER FALSE TEETH. He does not see the grimy door she has left: Spread Eagle Publishers.

Concerned, Laurie meets up with Jo, startling her:

LAURIE

Jo, was it horrible? How many did you have out?

Jo glances around, bewildered, and sees the dentist's sign.

JO MARCH

(mischievous)

Well, there's one that might come out, but only if it's very good.

She grabs his sword and bouts with an imaginary enemy as they stride along.

LAURIE

You weren't at the dentist! - Where were you?

JO MARCH

Secret.

LAURIE

We don't keep secrets -!

He tries to grab his sword, but she avoids, playfully:

JO MARCH

You can no longer be trusted. Now that you're *matriculating* at Harvard College. Swearing fraternal oaths.

LAURIE

(capturing his sword, deftly)
It so happens that I have a secret.

JO MARCH

Ha.

LAURIE

-- About Meg. And a certain former tutor of mine.

(this stops Jo)

- Now employed at the firm of Laurence and Laurence.

He pins Jo delicately with the point of his foil, and grins.

LAURIE (cont'd)
You first.

Jo eyes him warily, and then turns on her heel.

JO MARCH
Liar.

LAURIE
Has our Meg mislaid a certain
personal article? Such as a glove?

Jo halts again, surprised. Laurie grins: Touché.

INT: KITCHEN - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

Jo bursts in, outraged. Hannah and Meg are making biscuits --

JO MARCH
John Brooke stole your glove!

MEG MARCH
What glove - Not my white one?

JO MARCH
Brooke's had it forever! Laurie
says he keeps it in his pocket.

MEG MARCH
(oddly thrilled)
Oh Jo, are you quite sure?

JO MARCH
Laurie swears it.

Meg's face is pink, and to Jo's dismay, she actually looks pleased. She goes back to cutting biscuits.

JO MARCH (cont'd)
You must tell John Brooke to return
it! Hannah, don't you think Mr.
Brooke should give it back?

HANNAH
Iddn't what I think that matters.

-- with the same secretive smile. From the front room:

MRS. MARCH (VOICE)

Jo! Meg!

JO MARCH

Well, I'm going to tell Marmee.

She starts for the door, but Marmee comes in, pale, with a yellow telegraph cable in her hand:

MRS. MARCH

The Washington Hotel Hospital. Your father has been wounded.

CUT TO:

INT: FAMILY PARLOR AND FOYER - ORCHARD HOUSE. EVENING.

Bustle of activity, and grim faces: Hannah packs medicine into the small trunk, Meg and Amy rush about with stacks of muslins. Marmee, in travelling clothes, is at her desk, with Beth:

MRS. MARCH

Carry a letter to Mrs. Juba at The Rooms, Mrs. King will take my place. Look in on the Hummels...

AMY MARCH

Where is Jo? - it's almost seven!

MEG MARCH

Doing battle with Aunt March, to get Marmee's railway ticket.

Laurie rushes in from the foyer, with a bottle of wine --

LAURIE

Grandfather is sending a bottle of spirits for Mr. March. I'm to drive you to the station.

He swings Marmee's trunk to his shoulder, and disappears again.

Meg hurries into the foyer -- and directly into John Brooke, who is dressed for travel. Meg steps back, flustered.

MR. JOHN BROOKE

I came to offer myself as an escort.
(at Meg's expression, clarifies:)
To your mother.

Mr. Brooke sees Marmee, and bows, courtly:

MR. JOHN BROOKE

Mrs. March, if you'll permit me --
Mr. Laurence has commissions for me
in Washington. I should like to be
of service to you there.

(takes her hand)

We could not let you travel alone.

MRS. MARCH

Oh, Mr. Brooke. How kind you are.

MR. JOHN BROOKE

I'll get your valise -- Are we to go
on the seven o'clock train?

MRS. MARCH

Yes, but I - I sent Jo out --

JO MARCH

I am here.

Jo hands Marmee some money, with a strange expression.

MRS. MARCH

Twenty-five?? - Can Aunt March spare
it?

JO MARCH

I couldn't bear to ask her.

Jo removes her hat: Her hair is shorn very close, hacked off
in a ragged and tufted fashion that looks quite strange.

JO MARCH (cont'd)

I sold my hair.

-- looking around with a little laugh. Everyone stares,
appalled, and then comes the shocked chorus: Jo, your hair,
your beautiful hair!, with Amy's most clear:

AMY MARCH

Jo, how could you? Your one beauty!

JO MARCH

I like it.

(then, bravely)

It'll grow back.

Marmee, with tears in her eyes, kisses Jo's shorn brow. Jo and
Marmee embrace. Amy and Beth and Meg huddle around Marmee:

MEG MARCH

Tell Father we love him --

BETH MARCH

Tell him we pray for him --

AMY MARCH

Bring him home.

Hannah tearfully embraces Marmee, hands her a loaf of bread.

HANNAH

I never forget his kindness.

One last hug, and Marmee whispers:

MRS. MARCH

I shall miss my little women.

CUT TO:

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE NIGHT.

Beth wakes, and sits up. Strange: Jo is not in bed. In the moonlight, Beth sees Jo huddled on the dowdy old armchair, weeping quietly. Beth puts her arms around her:

BETH MARCH

Are you thinking of Father?

Jo shakes her shorn head. With heartfelt misery, she whispers:

JO MARCH

My hair.

-- and begins to laugh and cry at the same time. Beth hugs her tightly, as they both laugh, and shed a few more tears.

CUT TO:

EXT: STREETS OF CONCORD. FALL MORNING. DAY.

AUTUMN WIND blows hard, sending leaves spiraling along the dirt road, shaking the scarlet maples and yellow oaks of Concord. SCHOOL CHILDREN trundle a "pumpkin man" in a toy wagon, past a CHESTNUT MAN hawking roasted nuts from his steaming cart.

Inside Orchard House --

INT: KITCHEN - ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL MORNING. DAY.

Morning bustle. Short-haired Jo and Meg are bent over the family's account books, frowning and whispering about money. Amy takes blackened potatoes out of the clanking old oven --

AMY MARCH

Oh dear. This stove.

JO MARCH

Pack them up, we'll eat them anyway.

Amy accidentally drops a potato on the floor -- it splits. Jo is a little sharp to Beth, who pokes around in the pantry:

JO MARCH

There's no more cornmeal, nor coffee either. The grocer won't let us have anything more on account.

BETH MARCH

I can't go to the Hummels empty-handed.

JO MARCH

Oh fry the Hummels. You spent hours there last week.

Meg and Jo pull on their cloaks, talking in concerned whispers:

MEG MARCH

...Mustn't write of this to Marmee, she has enough burdens now.

JO MARCH

I hate money.

AMY MARCH

Here, you'll be late to work!

-- hurrying after them with their scorched potatoes.

Beth picks up her potato, and slips it into her pocket; and quietly goes out the back door.

CUT TO:

EXT: HOVEL BEHIND A CARRIAGE HOUSE. FALL. DAY.

Beth approaches the dilapidated shed. A baby wails inside.

BETH MARCH
Um - Fraulein Hummel?

The door is thrown aside, and Mrs. Hummel, carrying her baby, gives forth with a distraught torrent of German. Beth is bewildered, scared. She holds out her blackened potato: Is this what you want?

Desperate to show her, Mrs. Hummel pulls Beth inside --

INT: HOVEL BEHIND A CARRIAGE HOUSE. DAY.

The Hummel children are ill; their lips cracked and bloody. The 8-year old girl sits up with a shriek. Mrs. Hummel hands Beth her whimpering baby, and goes to her daughter.

Beth looks at the infant's tiny, feverish face: its sunken, frightened eyes and bloody lips. Beth clutches the baby to her, helplessly, as Mrs. Hummel's stream of German goes on.

CUT TO:

EXT: FRONT GARDEN OF ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL. LATE DAY.

Arriving home, Jo peers into the birdhouse "post box" and finds a fragrant pear inside. Smiling, Jo enters Orchard House --

INT: FOYER - ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL. LATE DAY.

-- calling, pear in hand, as she sorts the afternoon post:

JO MARCH
Laurie's home!
(adding dryly:)
He must need money. ...We'd have a
week's groceries on what the boy
spends at billiards --.

Jo stops at an envelope: "MR. JOSEPH MARCH." She breathes out:

JO MARCH (cont'd)
Jeshosephat.

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL. LATE DAY.

Jo rushes in, waving a five-note and a Spread Eagle --

JO MARCH

Meg! You won't believe it!

-- but Meg is not here. Beth, slumped at her piano with her head pillowed on her arms, lifts her face --

JO MARCH (cont'd)

I sold "The Lost Duke Of
Gloucester!" Five whole dollars.
I'm an author!

(adding sardonically)

Although I might point out, I got
five times as much for selling a
hank of hair -

(stops, concerned:)

Beth?

Beth is flushed, and her eyes are glassy and red from weeping.

BETH MARCH

The Hummel baby is dead.

(holds her head)

I feel so very strange.

CUT TO:

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM. ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Amy tends to Beth, who shivers under many blankets. Meg confers as Jo frantically pages through a homeopathic Materia Medica:

MEG MARCH

She's burning up but she says she's
freezing. She has a terrible thirst
but she won't drink.

JO MARCH

I - I think that's arsenicum, but
she looks more like belladonna --

Hannah appears at the door, still in her coat; frightened.

HANNAH

I seen the Hummels. Two children,
taken to Jesus. Scarlet fever.

At these words, Amy's eyes open in terror. Her hand, which had been caressing Beth's coverlet, involuntarily lifts.

HANNAH (cont'd)

You and Miss Jo won't be harmed, you
had it when you were babies. But
Miss Amy -
(looks at Amy, with fear)
- We have to send you away.

ABRUPT CUT TO:

EXT: CARRIAGE ON POST ROAD - CONCORD. FALL. WINDY NIGHT.
CLOSE ON CARRIAGE WHEELS turning, bearing Amy urgently away.

INT: CARRIAGE - MOVING. WINDY NIGHT.

Terrified, Amy clings to Laurie, her face against his coat.
Laurie is frightened too. A small lamp swings, nightmarishly.

AMY MARCH

She won't die, will she, Laurie?
Oh, God wouldn't let her die! Oh, I
don't want to go away!

LAURIE

I'll come and see you every day,
I swear it, you won't be alone.

THEIR POV FROM CARRIAGE - EXT: PLUMFIELD ESTATE. NIGHT.

The HOUSEMAN opens the groaning iron gates of Plumfield.

Amy buries her face against Laurie, and whispers:

AMY MARCH

I'm afraid of Aunt March.

LAURIE

If she's unkind to you, I'll come
and take you away from here.

AMY MARCH

Where will we go?

LAURIE

Paris.

Amy laughs through her tears. Another desperate thought --

AMY MARCH

Laurie, if I get scarlet fever and die, give Meg my box with the green doves on it. And let Jo have my turquoise ring. -

LAURIE

I will.

AMY MARCH

(clings again, scared)
I don't want to die. I've never even been kissed. I've waited my whole life to be kissed, and what if I miss it?

Laurie laughs, but at Amy's tearful look, he gives in to tenderness. Keeping a straight face:

LAURIE

Tell you what - I promise to kiss you before you die.

Amy hugs him and, furtively, she kisses his coat sleeve.

EXT: PLUMFIELD ESTATE. FALL. WINDY NIGHT.

Amy stands at the open door and watches Laurie's carriage roll away, leaving her alone at Aunt March's.

CUT TO:

INT: BETH & JO'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY & NIGHT, MONTAGE.

Jo dips a cloth in water, touches it to Beth's parched and bloody lips. Her cracked lips move in silent delirium.

LAPSE TO:

Beth is declining, she is barely conscious. Meg and Hannah and Jo bathe Beth's arms and legs, to bring the fever down.

LAPSE TO:

Beth does not move. Laurie listens restlessly as Hannah and Meg and Jo huddle in whispered disagreement:

HANNAH

No reason to send for Mrs. March -

MEG MARCH

- She can't leave Father and he's not well enough to travel.

JO MARCH

Beth needs Marmee, she depends on her, she's never been strong --

MEG MARCH

What if we send for Marmee, and Father gets worse?

Laurie slips out, unnoticed by the women. Hannah comforts Jo.

MEG MARCH (cont'd)

And how would we pay for the train?...

INT: FRONT PARLOR - PLUMFIELD ESTATE. GLOOMY DAY.

The funereal clock ticks. Aunt March sits rigidly, knitting lace with tiny stitches. Amy sits with Aunt March's great Bible open in her lap; holding very still, being very good.

INT: BETH & JO'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jo kisses Beth's thin fingers, to no response. Tears brim in Jo's eyes. She knows full well that she cannot save Beth.

Jo looks up: In the doorway is forbidding old Mr. Laurence, accompanied by DR. BANGS (50, aloof; the best money can buy).

MR. LAURENCE

Miss March. If we may - I wish my own physician, Dr. Bangs, to examine the little girl.

ANOTHER ANGLE

His satchel open on the bed, Dr. Bangs takes Beth's pulse, listens to her respiration. He turns away, grimly:

DR. BANGS

I can do nothing. If I bleed her, it would finish her. Best to send for the mother.

Laurie speaks up from the hallway:

LAURIE

Forgive me, but I have already done so. Mrs. March arrives on the 2 a.m. train this night.

Jo embraces Laurie gratefully, and buries her face in his shoulder. They hold each other: Comrades in grief.

CUT TO:

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM. ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE NIGHT/DAWN.

Still in her travelling cloak, Marmee leans over Beth's still face, taking her in -- not as a grieving mother, but as a practitioner. Mrs. March strips off her gloves, and feels Beth's burning forehead, her cold hands. Marmee yanks up the coverlet and feels Beth's icy feet. Dispatching her girls:

MRS. MARCH

Bring a basin of vinegar and rags - we must draw the fever down from her head. I'll need my kit, Hannah.

(hurrying out)

We will not sleep tonight.

INT: STAIRS AND FOYER - ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE NIGHT/DAWN.

Mrs. March hurries down the stairs -- and halts:

Absurdly, an exquisite little ROSEWOOD PIANO blocks the foyer. Old Mr. Laurence stands beside it, formally, hat in hand.

MR. LAURENCE

Mrs. March, I have brought your little daughter a piano.

Mrs. March is stunned. Mr. Laurence's stern voice wavers:

MR. LAURENCE (cont'd)

It belonged to my little girl. She died of smallpox. Should have given it to your daughter some time ago. She's musical, isn't she?

MRS. MARCH

(cautiously)

Thank you, Mr. Laurence. I'm sure Beth will be very happy to have it. Could you -?

-- gesturing to a valise. Mr. Laurence hands her the case.

MRS. MARCH

Thank you.

Hurrying back up the stairs, Marmee passes Meg rushing down:

MRS. MARCH

(dry Yankee restraint)

Be careful, there's a piano in the
foyer.

CUT TO:

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE DAY.

Jo, disoriented, wakes at her table. She rises with a start,
and her Pilgrim's Progress falls to the floor. Jo hurries
out --

INT: UPSTAIRS - ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE DAY.

-- and stops:

On a chair outside Beth's room, Hannah weeps into her apron.
With foreboding, Jo rushes into her room --

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. LATE DAY.

Beth's bed is empty.

Then Jo sees: Beth rests in the armchair, wrapped in a quilt,
as Marmee and Meg feed her soup. Beth, though ghostly and
ravaged, has come back.

In wordless relief, Jo kneels and puts her shorn head in Beth's
lap. With a thin little hand, Beth strokes Jo's short curls.

CUT TO:

EXT: STREETS OF CONCORD. CHRISTMAS EVE 1864. TWILIGHT. [SNOW].

In the last, lavender light, CHURCH BELLS toll over the silence
of the snow.

The holly-trimmed windows of Orchard House glow cosily. From
inside comes the sound of a PIANO, and VOICES:

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. CHRISTMAS EVE NIGHT. [SNOW]

A small gathering: The Laurences have joined the Marches for a quiet Christmas Eve. With Laurie are two college friends: FRED (19, earnest but lively) and AVERILL (19, corpulent and shy).

Laurie supports frail Beth beside him at her little rosewood piano. They play carols together; Beth's delicate fingers on the treble, Laurie's strong hand striking the bass. Averill occasionally joins in, in a pleasant basso rumble.

LAURIE

Are we tiring you?

BETH MARCH

No, I like having your friends here.

Laurie's friend Fred sits near pretty Amy, "helping" her sort colored yarn for Aunt March, who is crewel-embroidering. Aunt March looks on them indulgently -- she has become fond of Amy.

Old Mr. Laurence pores over the chessboard: Jo has his Queen trapped. Jo can't help but smile, which irks the old man.

LAURIE

Are you trouncing him, Jo? I did warn you, Grandfather.

JO MARCH

Not at all. This kind man has gallantly allowed me to prevail. Shall I bring coffee, Mr. Laurence?

Laurie's eyes follow Jo: Something is different in the way he looks at her. Jo goes into the kitchen --

INT: KITCHEN - ORCHARD HOUSE. CHRISTMAS EVE. NIGHT.

-- where Marmee and Meg prepare the coffee. To Jo's dismay, she hears:

MRS. MARCH

You would have a very long engagement. John has much to secure before he can marry. He has no house, his position is uncertain. John has written to Mr. Laurence -

JO MARCH

"John"? Do you mean Mr. Brooke?

Marmee and Meg startle -- Meg has a letter in her hand.

JO MARCH (cont'd)
You call him "John" now?

MRS. MARCH
Well...He is there at Washington
Hospital with Father every day. -

JO MARCH
- That conniving Rook! Sneaking
around currying up to the King and
Queen -

MEG MARCH
Jo!

JO MARCH
- Just so he can steal Meg! Oh,
Meg, you wouldn't leave us?

Meg hesitates, evasively; then --

MEG MARCH
I'm not like you, Jo. I want to be
married.

JO MARCH
I beg you, consider the way Brooke
has gone about this! The man pegs
your glove, declares himself to
Father, notifies his employer -!
It's as if you aren't awake but only
dreaming, while Brooke sets about
acquiring you!

MRS. MARCH
It's nothing to be decided now.

MEG MARCH
I don't even know my own feelings.

Mrs. March kisses Meg reassuringly, and they go out with the
coffee tray, leaving Jo in the kitchen to sulk.

A moment later, Jo hears a CRY from the parlor, and then many
VOICES at once. She hurries out --

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. CHRISTMAS EVE. NIGHT.

In familial embrace, Amy and Meg and Marmee and Beth and Aunt March surround MR. MARCH (60, tall, with an intellectual stoop and kind face), in his Union colonel's uniform. He is pale and weary, with his arm and neck bound in a splint and sling -- but he looks on his daughters' faces with pride.

Jo rushes to Father, to add her joyful hug. Babble of voices:

AMY MARCH
What a Christmas present!

MEG MARCH
You shaved your beard!

BETH MARCH
You look handsome.

AUNT MARCH
He's very puny.

MR. MARCH
Let me see my Jo. -
(inspecting her short hair)
Why, this could become the fashion.

During their laughter, a busy flurry, as Father is made comfortable on the sofa --

MRS. MARCH
Come and rest - Meg, take his cloak.

MR. MARCH
I'm not used to this, don't coddle
this soldier too much...

Averill and Fred and Mr. Laurence gather around. Mrs. March pulls off Father's dirty boots and hands them gingerly to Jo.

MRS. MARCH
Outside, and give them a good shake.

Jo carries the boots to the foyer, and stops in disbelief --

INT: FOYER - ORCHARD HOUSE. CHRISTMAS EVE. NIGHT. [SNOW]

Framed by the snowy doorway, John Brooke and Meg passionately kiss.

CUT TO:

INT: PARLOR & STAIRS. CHRISTMAS EVE. SLIGHTLY LATER. NIGHT.

The house seems to be filled with men talking and laughing, their broad backs turned to the room as they surround Mr. March, making him a central figure: Mr. Laurence and John Brooke, Averill and Fred Vaughn and Laurie, in their heavy masculine boots and dark waistcoats, their voices rumbling:

JOHN BROOKE

The cholera took more men than the
Rebs, as I understand it, Sir...

MR. MARCH

...Agriculture isn't taught, and it
should be, it should be required...

FRED VAUGHN

Perhaps the freedmen could be given
land in the West...

MR. LAURENCE

...Yes, or mark my words, a feudal
system will arise, as in India...

The March women have drifted insubstantially to the edges. Their light chatter is barely heard, as they tidy up the cups and adjust the lamp wicks. Meg and Amy giggle together, arms linked, whispering about John Brooke.

Jo sits on the costume box on the stair landing, pensively gazing down through the stair rail. Laurie goes to the stairs:

LAURIE

Isn't it wonderful, Jo?

JO MARCH

Yes. Wonderful.

-- but her expression is strangely sad, and knowing. VOICES,
singing, slowly fade up and continue over --

FADE UP

INT: SOLARIUM - LAURENCE HOUSE. SPRING 1867. DAY. HEAVY RAIN.

RAIN pours down the glass walls of the solarium. Meg and John Brooke stand together, in Quaker-ish clothes, as WEDDING GUESTS walk around them in a circle, hands joined, singing a blessing:

19
21
11

WEDDING GUESTS

For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies,
For the love which from our birth,
Over and around us lies...

Jo and Beth and Amy are "maids of honor" in plain, dove gray suits. Laurie, older, and handsome in a formal coat, smiles teasingly at Jo, who is solemn and elegant, her hair grown long again. Beth is still frail, with ever-present shadows under her eyes. The greatest change is in Amy, who has become a graceful young woman of sixteen. [CASTING: from this moment on, Amy is played by a different actress, who must look a great deal like our young Amy, and share her essential qualities].

Beautiful Meg inclines her head submissively against John Brooke, who could not look more proud. The sisters' voices rise sweetly, and then go silent, as the CAMERA pulls away --

EXT: SOLARIUM - LAURENCE HOUSE. SPRING. DAY. RAIN.

Rain batters the little glass house. Inside, shadows move.

CUT TO:

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM. NIGHT. [RAIN]

After the wedding. Exhausted, Jo and Beth and Amy take off their bridesmaids' finery. As they help each other undress, Beth sinks to the bed, a little dizzy. She doesn't look well.

BETH MARCH

Oh my. I think I've had too much excitement.
(waves it away with a laugh)
Didn't our Meg look a perfect rose?

AMY MARCH

It wasn't a fashionable wedding, but there's never been a better one.
(then)
Her flowers might have been nicer.
(then, amending)
I'm sure Meg will be happy.

-- hanging up her suit with care, and doing up the buttons.

JO MARCH

-- Behind the mask of his name, as his wife, in his home.

-- stripping off her suit and heaping it on the floor.

AMY MARCH

Pooh, it's her home too.

JO MARCH

- It's his castle.

AMY MARCH

Hardly a castle...
(giggles unkindly)

BETH MARCH

I like John Brooke.

JO MARCH

We all like John Brooke. But there must be an alternative to marrying him. The last thing I would do is go from hearth to hearth, as Meg has done - From child to wife, with nothing in between.

(promising herself)

I shall go to Europe, or die.

AMY MARCH

Perhaps for your wedding trip. When do you think Laurie will ask you?

JO MARCH

(glares at her)

He wouldn't dare.

Jo unpins her corsage and tosses it away. Amy picks it up, and eyes Jo with poignant envy.

CUT TO:

MOVING POV CAMERA - EXT: REAR GARDENS OF ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

A painting class, led by an elderly female ART TEACHER. Several YOUNG LADIES sit with perfect posture, inclining their heads to their work: ornamenting china with painted flowers.

Aunt March, under a silk parasol, talks privately with Mrs. March, who listens intently, with a serious expression.

The CAMERA pauses on Amy, in her lovely little summer hat; she paints violets on a teacup, and her brushwork is exquisite.

But Laurie is not seeking Amy. The CAMERA moves on --

EXT: REAR GARDEN OF LAURENCE HOUSE. SUMMER DAY.

On the other side of the low wall, Laurie glides quietly, hunter-like. He seems manly, taller; and intent on something in a specifically masculine way.

POV - EXT: REAR GARDENS OF ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

Alone in a shady corner of the garden, Beth sleeps on a folded quilt, her face pale and thin. But Laurie is not seeking Beth.

Laurie slips over the rear wall, and disappears.

EXT: WOODS OF CONCORD, NEAR WALDEN POND. SUMMER. DAY.

Among the evergreens, Jo runs barefoot along her woodland path, hair streaming, her blouse open to a thin camisole.

She splashes through the little flowing stream, and races on --
-- toward a rustic stone stile, where the path widens to a meadow. Laurie steps into her path, startling her.

JO MARCH

Teddy! Your houseman said you
would not be home 'til night.

-- turning aside hastily to fasten up her blouse.

LAURIE

I could not wait so long.

They fall in beside each other comfortably as they walk. Jo teases him sardonically:

JO MARCH

Hail the conquering graduate. Is
Grandfather exceedingly proud?

LAURIE

Yes. And exceedingly bent on
locking me up in one of his offices.

JO MARCH

Well. The old gent would expect you
to join his firm, Teddy, wasn't that
the point?

LAURIE

So you're taking his side.

(over Jo's protest)

Why is it Amy may paint china, and you have the freedom to scribble away, while I must put my shoulder to the wheel -

JO MARCH

(overriding him, insulted)

- I do work at my scribbles, you know. We depend on that money.

They have reached the rustic stone stile --

JO MARCH (cont'd)

And if Amy paints china, it's only because china is what a lady paints. Any broader ambition would be condemned as "masculine". Whereas, if you wish to study music -

LAURIE

- I'd have to defy Grandfather.

JO MARCH

Yes - and not the whole of society!
(adding)
That is freedom, as far as it goes.

Laurie broods unhappily. Then:

LAURIE

I can't go against the old man.

She touches him sympathetically. Encouraged, Laurie draws Jo closer:

LAURIE

When I imagine myself in that life, I can think of only one thing that would make me happy.

He smiles into her eyes, tenderly. Jo's quizzical expression gives way to alarmed realization: Laurie is courting her.

JO MARCH

. Oh. - Oh, Teddy, don't!

LAURIE

You must hear me, Jo -

-- but Jo puts her hand to his mouth to stop the words. Laurie kisses her fingers, then kisses Jo on the mouth.

JO MARCH

Wait -!

He kisses her again, and Jo is drawn into the kiss for a long moment before she pulls away. Jo looks at Laurie, shocked; less by his betrayal than by the revelation of her own desire.

LAURIE

You do love me, Jo, I know you do.

JO MARCH

(flustered)

Let us talk about this reasonably.

LAURIE

I have loved you since the moment I clapped eyes on you. What could be more reasonable than to marry you?

JO MARCH

We'd kill each other.

LAURIE

Nonsense -

JO MARCH

Neither of us can keep our temper.-

LAURIE

I can. Unless provoked. --

JO MARCH

-- We're both stupidly stubborn, especially you, we'd only quarrel -

LAURIE

I wouldn't! --

JO MARCH

You can't even propose without quarreling!

Laurie stops, and laughs. He draws her to him possessively --

LAURIE

Jo, dear Jo, I swear I'd be a saint. I'd let you win every argument.

JO MARCH

- Oh, you'd let me? -

LAURIE

- And I'd take care of you, and give you every luxury you've ever been denied, and you can be a fine lady, you won't have to work and scribble away at your little stories.

(at her reaction, he amends:)
I'm not saying you *couldn't* write. Probably you won't even want to.

JO MARCH

I can't put it away, as you've put away your music -!

LAURIE

Well, if it gives you pleasure...
(on to more important things)
Grandfather will give us his house in London. He wants me to learn the business there. Ha! Can't you see me bashing around London?

JO MARCH

London.
(fighting temptation)
Oh, I'm not a wife. I'm awkward and literary and I say things...I'm hopeless about fashion. You really ought to have someone fashionable.

LAURIE

I want you.

-- spoken so tenderly that Jo is agonized. She turns away:

JO MARCH

oh - Please do not ask me.

Laurie is stunned by her refusal. She tries to ease the blow:

JO MARCH

I am so desperately sorry, Teddy.
(making it worse)
If I could force myself to love you, I would. But I have finally won my freedom. And I cannot give it up, for anyone.

Laurie turns on her, his voice breaking emotionally --

LAURIE

You say you won't but you will.

JO MARCH

I won't! -

LAURIE

There'll come a time when you'll
meet some man - a good man - and
you'll love him tremendously and
live and die for him -!

(overriding her)

I know you will, Jo. And I'll be
hanged if I stand by and watch!

He strides away; leaving Jo standing at the stile, sickened.

CUT TO:

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE - CONCORD. SUMMER. LATE DAY.

Jo comes through the gate, and past the hedge, with a guilty
glance toward the Laurence House. In the hedge, she sees:

The little birdhouse mailbox is gone.

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jo paces miserably. She has been crying, and looks as if she
could cry again. From next door she hears Laurie's piano
music: the heartbreaking Scena Pathetica.

Amy appears at the door with a parcel of books, and stops short
at the sight of Jo wiping away a tear.

JO MARCH

I am leaving Concord.

AMY MARCH

Whatever has happened?

(when Jo cannot answer)

Is it Laurie?

JO MARCH

I have refused him.

AMY MARCH

(stunned)

You can take it back, it's just a
misunderstanding -

JO MARCH

No.

Laurie's poignant music fills the silence. Jo whispers, pained:

JO MARCH (cont'd)

Listen to him.

AMY MARCH

Oh Jo, are you very sure?

Jo nods, but a tear spills again.

AMY MARCH

What if it is your only proposal?
With your behavior, you can hardly
expect -

(subsiding)

...to have very many.

JO MARCH

I must get away.

AMY MARCH

Aunt March is going to France --

JO MARCH

France? That would be ideal!

AMY MARCH

Jo -

JO MARCH

- I'd put up with anything to go!

AMY MARCH

- Jo, Aunt March has asked me to go
with her.

Jo stops, stricken. Amy goes on gently, but with pride:

AMY MARCH (cont'd)

I am to study painting. Aunt March
hopes, with a little polish, that I
shall find a good match abroad.

(then)

But perhaps Aunt March would not
mind if you stayed at Plumfield for
a time, while we are gone.

INT: JO AND BETH'S ROOM. ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jo lies across the bed, weeping as if her heart would break in pieces. Beth sits beside her, her hand curled around Jo's, in quiet sympathy.

FADE OUT

EXT: STREETS OF GREENWICH VILLAGE, NEW YORK. FALL 1867. DAY.

Down the narrow streets, a fast-moving HORSE-DRAWN TROLLEY clatters past MERCANTILE BUSTLE. A BAKER carries a huge sack of flour down a ladder, below the sidewalk where fire blazes in open ovens. BUTCHER BOYS in bloody clothes carry carcasses and heave them into a HORSE-DRAWN DRAY. A BREWER loads casks of beer into a cart. Ragged CHILDREN sell kindling from a barrel.

A group of WOMEN make their way past WORKING MEN, on their way to a rally; carrying a loosely bundled banner, which can be read only in part: "SUFFRAGE".

Among the crowd, a young woman burdened with carpet bags and a writing case peers uncertainly at a row of brownstones.

INT/EXT: KIRKE HOUSE. GREENWICH VILLAGE, NEW YORK. DAY.

The door opens, to Jo March outside, clutching her belongings.

JO MARCH

Mrs. Kirke?

The IRISH GIRL turns away wordlessly. Jo is jostled by YOUNG MEN who, arguing, hurry up the steps and push rudely past Jo into the house.

INT: MRS. KIRKE'S PRIVATE PARLOR - KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

MRS. KIRKE (35, red-haired, intelligent and always distracted) operates a small hand printing-press as she interviews Jo:

MRS. KIRKE

So. You are having an adventure in New York, before you settle down to marriage.

JO MARCH

(momentarily taken aback)
Is that what my mother wrote you?

Mrs. Kirke lifts out the printed sheet: a Temperance notice. KITTY and MINNIE (8 and 9, twin-like) appear and stare solemnly at Jo. Jo crosses her eyes, and the little girls giggle.

MRS. KIRKE (cont'd)

Kitty, Minnie - This is Miss March.
Her father is Colonel March, he knew
your papa.

(adds with a sigh)

The girls hardly remember Mr. Kirke.

YOUNG MEN trample past the open parlor door, arguing loudly.

MRS. KIRKE (cont'd)

He never imagined that his home
would become a boarding house and
his delicate wife an innkeeper.

Jo stares, as a HANDSOME YOUNG MAN brazenly winks at her.

CUT TO:

POV FROM WINDOW - EXT: GREENWICH VILLAGE STREET. NIGHT.

CARRIAGES rattle by below, their carnival-colored LANTERNS bobbing and dancing in the winter darkness, like fairy lights.

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. NEW YORK. NIGHT.

From the passageway, MALE VOICES intrude, arguing. Jo turns away from the window, and pulls her dressing gown tighter. She has barricaded the door of her little room with a dresser and chair. Jo picks up her pen, to write:

JO'S VOICE (over)

"Dear Meg...

INT: MEG'S SMALL KITCHEN. CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS. DAY.

Meg, in humble pinafore and dust cap, reads Jo's letter as she heats her flat irons for ironing:

JO'S VOICE (over)

"Mrs. Kirke believes that I am here
for a brief interlude of sensational
experience, before succumbing to a
matrimonial fate..."

EXT: CHATHAM SQUARE NEAR THE BOWERY. NEW YORK. DAY.

Portfolio under her arm and handkerchief to her nose, Jo makes her way through a crowded street, past garbage piles, seedy CONCERT SALOONS, THEATRES. Her gaze locks with the hopeless eyes of a bruised CHILD PROSTITUTE [Casting note: should be played by one of the Hummel children, for subliminal effect] being pimped by her UNSAVORY FATHER:

JO'S VOICE (over, cont'd)
"And while there is surely no lack of sensational experience of every kind available in such a city..."

EXT: OFFICES OF "THE WEEKLY VOLCANO". NEW YORK. DAY.

JO'S VOICE (over, cont'd)
"I hope any experience I gain here will be strictly literary -

Emerging from the masculine hurley-burley of Park Row, Jo squares herself bravely, and opens the doors of the publishing office. Cigar smoke wafts out.

INT: SMOKE-FILLED OFFICE OF "THE WEEKLY VOLCANO". DAY.

JO'S VOICE (over, cont'd)
" - and that all events of a romantic or sensational nature will be entirely confined to the page.

The editor DASHWOOD (35, physically dominant, cigar-smoking) shoves his door closed with his boot, and looks Jo over thoroughly, to her great discomfort. Jo draws back nervously as Dashwood leans forward to tap his cigar into his ashtray. He grins at her fear, pleased.

INT: DINING ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

At one table are Jo and Mrs. Kirke and MISS NORTON (75), the only women in the room, in a seeming universe of MEN.

JO'S VOICE (over, cont'd)
"I felt bold on leaving Concord, but I confess I find New York rough and strange, and myself strange in it.

As she eats, Jo feels men's eyes on her. She glances up, and her eyes meet FRIEDRICH BHAER's, at another table.

PROFESSOR BHAER (early 40s, rough featured, nearly handsome, kind eyes; hair touched with gray) looks away to respond to the conversation. Jo, unconsciously attracted, keeps staring.

JO'S VOICE (over, cont'd)
"Some days I do not know my self."

INT: MRS. KIRKE'S PRIVATE PARLOR. KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

Jo and Minnie and Kitty sit on the floor, legs out, bouncing colorful rubber balls in rhythm as they chant French verbs:

JO & MINNIE & KITTY
Fais, fait, faisons, faites, font...

JO'S POV - THROUGH DOORWAY OF PRIVATE PARLOR - INT: CORRIDOR

Professor Bhaer receives visitors in the corridor. The intellectual-looking YOUNG MEN treat him with effusive respect. Bhaer ushers his visitors upstairs, glimpsing --

POV - INT: MRS. KIRKE'S PRIVATE PARLOR

-- Jo sprawled on the floor, bouncing a ball. Their eyes meet. Jo's ball bounces up, as if surprised, bumping her in the nose.

Kitty and Minnie giggle, amused. Embarrassed, laughing, Jo recovers her ball, and sees: Professor Bhaer is gone.

CUT TO:

EXT: OFFICE OF "THE ATLANTIC GAZETTE". WINTER DAY.

A light flurry of sleety snow blows past the gilt-edged lettering on the office window: "THE ATLANTIC GAZETTE".

INT: OFFICE OF "THE ATLANTIC GAZETTE". WINTER DAY.

A COLORLESS CLERK at the front desk refuses Jo's portfolio:

COLORLESS CLERK
We don't publish this kind of
material.

JO MARCH
But, you haven't looked at it.

COLORLESS CLERK

Our subscribers are not interested
in sentiment and fairy stories, Miss.

GENTLEMEN waiting nearby exchange discreet smiles. Jo feels
her temper rise, but tries to control herself.

JO MARCH

It isn't a fairy story. -

COLORLESS CLERK

-- Try one of the ladies' magazines.

-- and turns to the next applicant, a GENTLEMAN.

EXT: PARK ROW - PRINTING HOUSE SQUARE. WINTER. [SLEET]. DAY.

Jo, disappointed and fuming, emerges from the offices of The Atlantic Gazette. She sees ahead of her:

A group of MEN lounge against the building, drinking openly:
SOLDIERS, UNEMPLOYED MEN, STREET DRUNKS, NEWSBOYS. The sight
of a young female walking alone creates a drunken stir:

VARIOUS MEN

I'm in love! ... Is it Mrs. or Miss?

Steeling herself, Jo clutches her portfolio and hurries past
the men. On closer view, the men seem more menacing:

VARIOUS MEN

Come here!...Lola! Hey Lola!...

Glass breaks, and Jo hurries faster; and then faster still,
with threatening laughter close behind her --

-- rounds the corner and collides with a MAN IN A GREAT DARK
COAT. Friedrich Bhaer. Her portfolio skids across the muddy
cobblestones and flies open, scattering pages. Jo and Bhaer
scramble, with Bhaer apologizing profusely in German:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Oh, I'm very sorry, I'm so clumsy!

Jo grabs for a page that blows under a WAGON WHEEL. Professor
Bhaer yanks her back, before she is struck by the cart.

CUT TO:

INT: BHAER'S ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE. WINTER. DAY.

Ritual: Friedrich Bhaer places two large sugar cubes in a small china cup, and pours in a stream of thick black coffee. He slides the cup across to Jo. He has a warm German accent, and his gaze is calm and direct: He misses nothing.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

When first I saw you, I thought,
"Ah. She is a writer."

JO MARCH

(flattered)

What made you think so?

Bhaer takes her right hand, briefly: Jo's forefinger and middle finger are permanently stained with ink.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

I know many writers. In Heidelberg.
I was a professor at the University.
(laughs, cheerful)
Here, I am only a man with an accent.

He stirs his coffee with a tiny spoon. Jo, unaccustomed to the demitasse cup, copies him exactly. She peeks around the book-strewn room, acutely aware that she and Bhaer are alone. Bhaer sips his coffee gingerly -- it is extremely hot. Jo sips hers.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Do you like it so?

JO MARCH

It's strong. I like it.

Bhaer smiles. Their eyes meet. Nervous, Jo peeks around and spies an embroidery hoop, with a half-finished tapestry.

JO MARCH

Where is your wife, Professor Bayer?

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Bhaer, Friedrich Bhaer. I have no wife.

(sees Jo looking at embroidery)

Ah. German men, we do fine work with a needle. When my students make trouble, it gives me patience.

-- demonstrating a stitch.

JO MARCH

When will you go back to Heidelberg?

Bhaer glances at her, as if to measure her interest.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

I am no longer at ease there. The fatherland of Goethe and Schiller is no more.

(dismisses this, smiling)

You don't know Goethe and Schiller.

JO MARCH

I do. My father read us all the German poets when I was a child. I cut my teeth on Faust.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Faust for a little girl??

JO MARCH

My mother and father were part of a - rather unusual circle in Concord. You know the word "Transcendentalist"?

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Ah...I have never a good definition.

JO MARCH

(laughs)

There is no good definition.

(then, taking the risk:)

They believe that within each of us is God, and that we can transcend the human condition to find our God within. But not through - teaching.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Yes! - This is German Romantic philosophy. One comes to know oneself through insight and one's - Experience.

He smiles, letting "Experience" hang for a moment, tantalizing.

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

You throw off all constraints, and become the person you determine yourself to be. There is a word for it: *bildung*.

(with regret)

It goes out of fashion now.

JO MARCH

Not in the March family, I'm afraid.

(at his expression)

It's just that with all of this -
idealism comes much emphasis on
perfecting oneself.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

(amused)

Ah. This makes a problem for you?

JO MARCH

I'm hopelessly flawed.

Bhaer laughs sympathetically, and proffers a beautiful little box of chocolates. Jo refuses, but watches Bhaer dip his chocolate in his coffee, and lick the melted sweet.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Take a leaf of grass from your poet
Walt Whitman, who transcends without
perfecting himself. He rides all
day up and down Broadway on an
omnibus, shouting poetry against the
roar of the carts. If we could
embrace our lives as he does.

(offers the chocolate again)

No? It's so sweet and dark.

Jo, tempted, shakes her head. In a casual breach of manners,
Bhaer licks his thumb, with unselfconscious enjoyment.

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

I think all of us are hopelessly
flawed.

JO MARCH

Fortunately, you are not a
Transcendentalist.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

No. I am Jewish.

Jo spills her coffee.

CUT TO:

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. WINTER DAY.

Beth rests on the old sofa, reading a letter from Jo. Beth
looks thinner, and her face is shadowed with a hidden pain.

JO'S VOICE (over)

"He is as poor as one might imagine
an itinerant philosopher to be...

INT: STAIRS AND LANDING - KIRKE HOUSE. WINTER DAY.

JO'S VOICE (cont'd over)

"...yet he is unfailingly generous
to all of us who live in the house.

As Friedrich Bhaer ascends the stairs, he is joyfully attacked by Minnie and Kitty, who rummage his pockets to find oranges. Bhaer sees Jo above on the landing. Bhaer smiles and holds up an orange: Would you like one? He reaches to hand it over the banister. Their fingertips meet.

JO'S VOICE (cont'd over)

"I am grateful to have a friend."

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. LATE NIGHT.

By candleglow, Jo writes, in her velveteen cap. As she works, she peels and eats Bhaer's orange with unconscious sensuality.

CUT TO:

EXT: THE LYCEUM HALL AND THEATRE. NEW YORK. WINTER DAY.

NEW YORK INTELLECTUALS files past a placard: "MRS. ELIZABETH CADY STANTON ON THE EMANCIPATION OF WOMEN".

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (VOICE)
The right to vote and the abolition
of slavery have been bound together
since the framing of our Constitution -

INT: THE LYCEUM HALL AND THEATRE. NEW YORK. WINTER DAY.

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON [gray hair, charismatic] holds forth:

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (cont'd)
- when our fathers and grandfathers
betrayed the freedoms set out in our
Declaration of Independence, and
denied both women and black people
the rights of citizenship.

In the shadows, a handful of AFRICAN-AMERICAN WOMEN listen:

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (cont'd)
This betrayal has created a wound so deep in our national character, our country may never recover. We have fought a terrible war among ourselves. Our slaves are at last free. But our women are not.

The smirking New York Herald REPORTER takes a swig of whiskey from a flask, and passes it to the smirking SUN REPORTER.

Jo looks out of place among Bhaer's YOUNG MALE STUDENTS. Bhaer glances over at Jo. Jo listens with a puzzled frown:

ELIZABETH CADY STANTON (cont'd)
By what line of reasoning do we deny women their basic rights? Women are the conscience of this country while men have lagged behind.

CUT TO:

INT: BHAER'S ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE - NEW YORK. NIGHT.

Friedrich Bhaer's students sprawl on Bhaer's sofas and rugs, engrossed in lively discourse and drinking wine. Jo sits, feeling awkward and out of place, and ignored:

JACOB MAYER
But if it is widely acknowledged that women bring a civilizing influence to society -

CHARLES BOTTS
(dry wit)
Female influence is so widely felt that to give her suffrage as well would create an imbalance of power.

Laughter. Friedrich Bhaer notices that Jo is quiet. He fills her wine glass and motions: Drink. Jo hesitates, and refuses. Bhaer leans to her and whispers, his face close:

FRIEDRICH BHAER
It's good. - You don't take wine?

JO MARCH
Only medicinally.

He shrugs, and generously pours a little more in her glass --

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Pretend that you have a cold.

With a smile, Bhaer turns his attention to the conversation. Jo tentatively tastes the wine: It is very good.

JOHN McCRACKEN

In truth, a woman has no need of suffrage if she has a husband.

JAMES JONES

- And if she has no husband?

JOHN McCRACKEN

Let her marry. -

CHARLES BOTTS

- Civilization requires it. Consider California, where women are few. Men have rapidly gone back to barbarism.

Jo, sipping her wine, starts to speak but is interrupted --

JACOB MAYER

If women are a moral and civilizing force, shouldn't they govern and preach and have the right to testify in court?

Over the burst of ridicule that greets this, Jo tries again.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

What is it, Miss March?

Jo is disconcerted as all eyes turn to her, challenging.

JO MARCH

I think it poor logic to say that because women are good, women should vote.

Charles Botts smiles with smug satisfaction. But Jo goes on:

JO MARCH (cont'd)

Men do not vote because they are good, they vote because they are male. Women should be guaranteed the same constitutional rights as men not because women are angels and men are animals; but because women, like men, are human beings and citizens of this country.

Bhaer hides a glad smile. McCracken lifts his glass to Jo --

JOHN MCCRACKEN

You should have been a lawyer, Miss March.

JO MARCH

I should have been a great many things, Mr. Botts.

Approving laughter. Jo's glass is refilled, and the conversation continues, with Jo included as an equal.

Friedrich Bhaer watches Jo: aware that he is falling in love.

CUT TO:

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. NEW YORK. WINTER DAY.

CHURCH BELLS toll. Jo, velveteen cap on her head, bends to her writing in profound concentration. A knock! and Jo startles.

EXT: UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR. KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

Jo cracks the door -- her writing cap is sipped sideways, ink smudges her cheek. Bhaer, dressed to go out, smiles:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Fraulein March. I am shocked to find that you work on your Sabbath.

JO MARCH

(guiltily)
Perhaps I shouldn't, but...I do.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

I shall keep you from further wickedness.

-- reaching around the door to remove her cloak from its hook -

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

On Sundays here it is a custom to meet in a *biergarten*.

JO MARCH

Beer garden -! Do people in New York drink on the Sabbath?

Friedrich Bhaer smiles, mischievously.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Perhaps they shouldn't, but they do.

EXT: CANAL STREET NEAR THE BOWERY. WINTER. DAY.

The frescoed store-fronts are shuttered for the Sabbath, but the beer gardens are open, and spill noisily with GERMAN FAMILIES and COUPLES.

Bhaer guides Jo through a door strung with garish lanterns --

FRIEDRICH BHAER

All the time hiding in your room! -
How do you know what to write, if
you do not experience Life?

INT: THE ATLANTIC GARDEN - THE BOWERY. WINTER. DAY.

JO MARCH

I feel as if I were in Europe.

-- taking in the crowded hall, its stagey "garden" motif: painted frescoes, bowers, paper vines and trellises. FAMILIES mill and socialize, as MUSICANS play lively German music.

Bhaer plucks a paper-and-twill "flower", with an ironic smile:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Well, the illusion of Europe.

He buys a sweet pickle from a PICKLE VENDOR, adding:

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

We emigrants are like snails, we
import our culture on our backs.
Do you miss your home?

JO MARCH

My sisters. Especially Beth.

He takes her in with his intent gaze.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

But you will stay here, I think.
Until you -? find something.

JO MARCH

Or it finds me.

CUT TO:

INT: UPSTAIRS CORRIDOR - KIRKE HOUSE. ANOTHER WINTER DAY.

Jo hurries down the hallway, elated, trying to tie on her bonnet as she juggles portfolio, newspaper and umbrella -- and at the same time re-reading a letter.

Jo pauses at Bhaer's door, but hesitates: Faintly, violin music can be heard. Should she disturb him? No. But as Jo turns away, her umbrella knocks open the door:

INT: BHAER'S ROOMS. WINTER DAY.

The sitting room is in great disarray. Bhaer stands in his shirt, violin under his chin. He stops, pleased to see Jo.

JO MARCH

Oh! I'm very sorry, I was - I -.
I have some good news.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Come in! Tell me. I'm sorry -
(apologizing for shirtsleeves)
- only mein Hemdbluse I have. Yes?

JO MARCH

A newspaper has taken two stories,
and they wish to see more.

Bringing his heels together, Bhaer bows over her hand, pleased.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

I must read!
(taking her paper)
"The Weekly Volcano" -- I do not
know this paper. Ah. "The Sinner's
Corpse", by Joseph March. You use
another name.

Bhaer starts to read. Slowly his expression changes. Bhaer turns away, and folds the newspaper carefully. His tone is polite but condemning:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

They pay well, I suppose.

Jo is crushed. Her jaw lifts defensively --

JO MARCH

People's lives are dull, they want
thrilling stories.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

People want whiskey, but I think you
and I do not care to sell it.

JO MARCH

- Yet you drink wine, rather freely!
Isn't that like saying, I'll own
slaves but I'm too moral to go to
Africa and steal them?

Bhaer laughs at her quick logic, but he is hurt and bemused.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

A little wine is nothing to this -
(the story's illustration)
This is a waste of your mind.
Lunatics and vampires!

JO MARCH

It will buy firewood for Marmee and
Father, and a new coat for Beth, and
she'll be grateful to have it.

Shaken and upset, Jo gathers her things and is gone, leaving
Bhaer wishing that he had not hurt her.

CUT TO:

INT: BHAER'S ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE. LATE NIGHT. [EXT: SNOW]

Bhaer paces restlessly; opens a book and then drops it, unable
to read. Despairing, he finishes the dregs of a wine glass.

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. LATE NIGHT. [EXT: SNOW]

Unable to write, Jo paces in her dressing gown, twisting her
velveteen writing cap in her hands; on the verge of tears.

A knock. Jo opens the door to Bhaer. He glances back and
steps in quickly - he shouldn't be seen entering Jo's room.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Miss March. I -. I do not want to be
your teacher.

JO MARCH

You have made that clear.

A tear brims, and Jo wipes it, quickly. Bhaer becomes more
upset at the sight of her tears:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

You misunderstand -! It is not for me to judge your work. You must please yourself, my - my opinion is nothing.

Another miserable tear falls. Bhaer, pained, barely stops himself from touching her face to wipe it away.

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

I am sorry. Please forgive me.

(then)

I make a gift. An Experience. Do you like the opera? We will see Faust.

Unable to stop the tears that brim over --

JO MARCH

You think I've sold myself to the Devil?

FRIEDRICH BHAER

No! Please, we put that behind.

-- and unexpectedly kisses Jo's tears with such familiarity and authority that it doesn't occur to Jo to resist. Bhaer gently puts her away from him, repeating tenderly:

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

We put that behind. And we go to the opera?

Jo nods, speechless. Bhaer goes, leaving Jo amazed at her feelings.

CUT TO:

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. ANOTHER WINTER EVENING.

Dressing for the opera: Jo, a little panicked, stabs herself as she tries to pin a frill on her dress. She notices her ink-stained fingers, and searches for her gloves. Jo catches sight of her reflection, and yanks off the silly frill in despair.

INT: FOYER - KIRKE HOUSE. WINTER EVENING.

Friedrich Bhaer waits, nervous. Giggling, Minnie and Kitty peek around the corner at the professor: Bhaer looks elegant in his Old World clothes.

Jo, hurrying down the stairs, catches herself when she sees Bhaer, and descends more gracefully. In her simple dress, Jo is beautiful, but she misinterpretes Bhaer's gaze:

JO MARCH

I - don't have an opera dress.

-- quickly putting on her cloak, to cover herself. One side of her cloak gets caught, and Jo turns comically, chasing her tail. Bhaer calmly places the cloak around her --

FRIEDRICH BHAER

You are perfect. Where we are sitting, we will not be so formal.

INT: STAGE OF OPERA HOUSE - NEW YORK. NIGHT.

POV OF STAGE - FROM SLIGHTLY OVERHEAD

Act III, Scene 2 of Gounod's Faust, adapted from Goethe's poem:

Innocent MARGUERITE and FAUST, an older German man, sing an exquisite love duet. Marguerite, newly in love with Faust, resists his advances. [In French or German]:

FAUST

O night of love, radiant sky,
O sweet passions! Silent bliss
brings heaven into our souls...

BACKSTAGE - STAGE WING, DOWNSTAGE LEFT

In the lurid shadows, STAGEHANDS prepare the next scene, hauling ropes, lugging scenery, whispering curses. Here is a separate world, where magic is made.

Seen through the ropes and pulleys and panels of richly-painted canvas scenery is the torch-lit stage and the ORCHESTRA below:-

On stage: The lovers almost kiss, but young Marguerite resists, frightened and shy --

FAUST

Cruel!

MARGUERITE

Leave me! Though I can hardly bear
it --

FAUST

Marguerite, you break my heart!

MARGUERITE

(sinks, beseeching)

I am afraid.

Backstage: MEPHISTO, the Devil himself in ghastly make-up and scarlet hose, awaits his cue, hovering behind Jo and Friedrich Bhaer, who watch the performance from the wing. Jo is riveted:

Nearby, on stage: Faust gently raises Marguerite, and sings to her sweetly [in French or German].

In the dark stage wing, Jo glances at Bhaer, questioning: What is happening? Friedrich leans close to whisper, interpreting:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Faust agrees to leave, to protect Marguerite's honor.

(takes Jo's hand, draws closer)

They will meet in the morning...

Entering on cue, Mephisto sweeps past dramatically, startling Jo. The BOY STAGEHAND sets off an explosion of smoke. Jo coughs and chokes. Bhaer whispers Mephisto's translation:

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Mephisto is angry, he wanted Faust to seduce her. "Professor, you should be sent to school again!"

(then)

He makes Faust spy on Marguerite. She thinks she is alone.

On stage: Marguerite opens a window to sing a beautiful aria.

Enthralled, Jo grips Bhaer's hand more tightly. His lips soft against her ear, Bhaer whispers Marguerite's words:

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

"He loves me. My heart overflows!
The nightbird sings...And all Nature
whispers, He loves you...He loves you."

These seem to be Bhaer's own words. Jo turns her head, and her eyes meet Bhaer's:

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

"Oh how sweet life is...Heaven
smiles at me."

Jo and Bhaer look at each other, caught in this moment: The rapt moment before a kiss, a kiss that does not yet come.

Faust rushes to take Marguerite in his arms, and Mephistopheles laughs his booming, cynical laugh. The CURTAIN falls.

CUT TO:

EXT: REAR OF OPERA HOUSE - 39TH AND BROADWAY. NIGHT. [SNOW]

Jo and Bhaer leave by the rear stage door, Bhaer turning back to wave farewell to his friend the STAGE MANAGER: A bientôt.

In contrast to the sensual colors and lush heat of the opera, the streets are cold and gray. Snow drizzles. Jo and Bhaer pass a BEGGAR, and Friedrich drops some coins in his bowl.

EXT: BROADWAY - IN FRONT OF OPERA HOUSE - NEW YORK. [SNOW]

The street is jammed with beautifully-dressed OPERA PATRONS hurrying into their COACHES. Bhaer guides Jo toward a horse-drawn OMNIBUS where PEOPLE board, handing over their fares.

Suddenly Bhaer halts, stricken, and glances back toward the Beggar in the alley --

FRIEDRICH BHAER

The money from my pocket, it was all
I have.

JO MARCH

(quickly, reassuring)
Oh, I'd much rather walk.

Bhaer glances around, at a loss. It is snowing harder now.

JO MARCH (cont'd)

The March family has a tradition of
giving away our last penny.

(sets off, imitating Bhaer)
We vill walk down Broadway, shouting
poetry against der roar of de carts!

They walk together down snowy city streets, laughing, making grandiose gestures and shouting out poetry that we do not hear.

Reprise Faust's love song, OVER: Oh night of love, radiant sky, O sweet passions!...

EXT: POCKET PARK - GREENWICH VILLAGE. LATE NIGHT. [SNOWING]

Snow falls heavily, transforming the tiny, deserted park into a hushed fairyland. Jo and Bhaer are almost home. Friedrich turns to encourage her:

FRIEDRICH BHAER
A little further, only...

He stops. Jo has turned her face up to the falling snow. Her cheeks are lightly flushed from walking. Her hood has fallen back, and snowflakes glitter in her thick hair. She is lovely.

JO MARCH
I've never seen the city at this hour.

Bhaer is drawn to her. Jo watches in wonder, her heart beating fast: Here it is. Friedrich bends closer, and closer still. Their warm breath clouds and mingles in the air. Time slows.

Jo closes her eyes, and their lips meet at last in a wonderful kiss.

CUT TO:

By contrast, it is "the gay season", when all of fashionable Europe comes to the summery climate in the South of France:

INT: HOTEL BALLROOM - NICE, FRANCE. LATE WINTER 1868. NIGHT.

A lively MASKED BALL is underway; quite different from Sally Moffit's coming-out ball in Boston some years ago. The gaiety and laughter, the glamorous ballgowns paired with the anonymity of the ornate masks, creates a certain licentious atmosphere. Champagne flows, and FOOTMEN serve it from silver trays.

A RUSSIAN PRINCE talks to a MASSIVE LADY dressed like Hamlet's mother, with a pearl bridle under her chin. YOUNG POLISH COUNTS dance with lightfooted AMERICAN and EUROPEAN DEBUTANTES.

Prominant among the dancers is a YOUNG BEAUTY in an embroidered silk BUTTERFLY MASK. Her pale shoulders and golden head rise from a white silk ballgown covered with a cloud of "illusion", and pinned with rosy clusters of azalea.

CLOSE ON LAURIE, WATCHING HER

Laurie crushes out his thin cigar, and finishes his glass. He looks older, and even more handsome and sure of himself. But

his smile is cynical, and he gives a debauched impression.

Laurie is distracted by SEVERAL LADIES who pass seductively, flirting -- they know Laurie well.

As the music ends, Laurie scans the dancers -- the Butterfly has retired to an alcove. With a shock, Laurie recognizes her chaparone: Aunt March, her cane at her side.

A CRY goes up nearby. A LADY's towering mask has ignited against a sconce, but the fire is quickly extinguished.

Laurie glances back at the Butterfly:

Amy March has removed her mask for a moment, to peer with concern toward the BALLGOERS still huddled about. At eighteen, Amy has bloomed -- she is quite beautiful and polished.

With a smile, Laurie slips his mask over his eyes: He wears The Imp, a charming and devilish face.

Amy sees The Imp approach with a slight swagger. His clothing is tight and fashionable. Aunt March frowns disapprovingly.

The Imp bows over Amy's hand, in the European style:

LAURIE

You have promised me this dance.

AMY MARCH

I do not know you, Sir.

LAURIE

You know me well. We rode in my carriage one night.

Amy glances at Aunt March, alarmed -- It isn't true! Aunt March, offended, raps Laurie's arm with her fan --

AUNT MARCH

Be gone, Satan!

Laughing, Laurie slips off his mask. Amy's face opens in incredulous surprise. She takes his hands with a happy cry:

AMY MARCH

Laurie! Oh, you wicked -! We heard you were in Florence.

LAURIE

I was, but I've been in Nice for the past week or so. -

-- as his attention strays to a FELINE-MASKED WOMAN who brushes past; they seem to know each other. Amy smiles ironically:

AMY MARCH

You have been much occupied with business, I am sure.

LAURIE

(blasé)

I'm not pursuing business just now. Grandfather agreed that I should concentrate on music for a while.

(hearing the orchestra)

Should we dance?

AMY MARCH

Oh. I fear every dance is taken.

LAURIE

Who has denied me my pleasure? --

(taking over her dance card)

"Fred Vaughn"? I know Fred Vaughn. He has twenty dances? Fred Vaughn??

FRED VAUGHN

Fred Vaughn.

(extending his hand)

Hullo, Laurence.

It is Fred, Laurie's college friend [last seen at Christmas in Concord], as earnest and awkward as ever -- no match for Amy.

LAURIE

(false bon ami)

Freddie!

FRED VAUGHN

- I heard you were in Greece.

LAURIE

I was.

Fred Vaughn takes Amy's arm, to lead her to the dance floor. Amy touches Laurie on his gloved hand, slyly --

AMY MARCH

Do come see us.

Laurie watches Fred lead Amy away. With feigned disinterest:

LAURIE

They are not engaged, are they?

AUNT MARCH

Not yet.

-- with the faintest enigmatic smile.

CUT TO:

INT: AUNT MARCH & AMY'S APARTMENTS - NICE. DAY.

Sunlight streams. Easels are set up randomly throughout a simple but well-appointed French salon, and on each easel is an instantly recognizable famous painting.

Laurie, a bit hungover, strolls about, looking at each painting pensively. Amy stands nearby, waiting his verdict. Laurie examines a Titian: seductive bodies, innocent faces.

LAURIE

They're good. And people buy them?

AMY MARCH

The Titian especially. I've copied this five or six times. Egg tempera. I also do it with a scarf here --
(indicates her own bosom)
All those - "eyes" get to be a bit much, staring down at one from the dining room wall.

Laurie laughs at this unexpectedly risqué remark. He touches the piano keys in a desultory way, then dismisses the piano.

LAURIE

I brought you flowers.

He opens a little box: Inside is a delicate nosegay, set into a silver bracelet that acts as a holder.

AMY MARCH

How lovely.

Laurie clasps it on her wrist, with a glib compliment --

LAURIE

It isn't what it should be, but you have improved it.

AMY MARCH

Please don't. I liked you much better when you were blunt, and natural.

LAURIE

It did not serve me well.

(changing, restlessly)

What does Amy March like to do on a day like this?

EXT: VALROSA - IN THE HILLS ABOVE NICE. SUNNY DAY.

A riot of roses: Roses climb decrepit stone walls, overhang the archways and spill over the balustrade that overlooks the Mediterranean and the white walls of Nice below.

Amy and Laurie pass through Valrosa's rose-covered gates in a little DONKEY CART. Amy has the reins, so Laurie dozes, hat over his face, his heels up.

A LIZARD scoots across the warm marble floors of a terrace. In a cool grotto, a marble nymph looks over her shoulder, at:

In a shady place on the grass, Laurie lounges, the picture of lassitude, watching Amy sketch. Ignoring him, she concentrates on her work. Laurie lazily fishes a flask from his pocket.

AMY MARCH

I find you changed.

(when he only smiles)

In fact, I despise you.

That gets his attention.

AMY MARCH (cont'd)

You don't work. You laze about spending money and courting women. You aren't serious about music.

LAURIE

My compositions are like your paintings. Mediocre copies of another man's genius.

AMY MARCH

(stung)

Then why don't you go to Grandfather in London, and make yourself useful?

LAURIE

I should. Why don't you reform me?

He smiles seductively, and has another drink.

AMY MARCH

I've someone more practical in mind.
I expect a proposal any day.

LAURIE

You do not love Fred Vaughn.

AMY MARCH

He is stable, and well-mannered -

LAURIE

- And has forty thousand a year.

AMY MARCH

I've always known I would not marry
a pauper.

(flirting)

You have failed to notice, but I
have improved myself. I am a
regular ornament to society.

LAURIE

You'll regret it.

(then)

I'll regret it.

Their eyes meet: They are attracted.

AMY MARCH

Who wants a man who lounges moodily
about the landscape like a lizard --

LAURIE

A lizard?? -

AMY MARCH

At least poor Fred is energetic.

LAURIE

(takes her in, anew)

You have grown into something
formidable.

AMY MARCH

Am I like Jo?

LAURIE

Nothing like Jo.

(closing in, playfully)

Didn't I promise you something?
Didn't I say I would kiss you
before you die?

AMY MARCH
(before the kiss meets)
Do you hear from Jo?

-- which Laurie feels as a blow. Taking a letter from her sketchbook:

AMY MARCH (cont'd)
I have a letter from her. She went to the opera. You might enjoy it...

A sketch falls out: A cartoon of Jo in her writing cap: "Genius burns". Laurie reads the letter briefly, with Amy watching. He thrusts it away --

LAURIE
It's hardly about opera at all, it's all about some penniless old German professor, who's no doubt showing her the ways of the world -!

Laurie stops, bitterly. Amy begins packing up her things. Bewildered, Laurie tries to help her, but Amy stops him.

AMY MARCH
I will not be courted by someone who is still in love with my sister.

LAURIE
(going after her)
I am not in love with Jo!

AMY MARCH
How do you explain your jealousy?

LAURIE
I envy her happiness.
(expansively, upset)
- I envy his happiness. I envy John Brooke for marrying Meg, I hate Fred Vaughn for his twenty dances, and if Beth had a lover, I'd despise him too. Just as you have always known you would not marry a pauper, I have always known that I should be part of the March family.

Amy feels an empathic tug of pain for Laurie, but --

AMY MARCH
I do not wish to be loved for my family.

LAURIE

Any more than Fred Vaughn wishes to
be loved for his forty thousand a
year?

Amy, wounded, stalks angrily toward the donkey cart. Laurie
follows, whacking savagely at the grass with his walking stick.

CUT TO:

INT: AUNT MARCH & AMY'S APARTMENTS - NICE. EVENING.

Amy moves about restlessly, unhappy. Aunt March, confined to
her chair, sips her tea and watches her niece, concerned.

The FRENCH MAID comes in with a tray, and on it a letter sealed
with gold wax. As Amy opens it, a bell chimes distantly. The
French Maid leaves to answer the door. Amy reads:

LAURIE'S VOICE (over)

"It is you I want, and not your
family. I have gone to London, to
make myself worthy of you. Please
do not do anything we shall regret."

Amy looks up, to see Aunt March's curious eyes on her. The
French Maid returns, with a bouquet of flowers:

FRENCH MAID

It is Monsieur Vaughn, M'nselle.
May I show him in?

On Amy's indecisive hesitation --

CUT TO:

EXT: KIRKE HOUSE - GREENWICH VILLAGE. SPRING. DAY.

The ICEMAN's cart passes down the street, past the Kirke house.
The boarding house windows are open to a light breeze. An
IRISH GARDENER plants red geraniums in the urns by the door.

And inside the house --

INT: STAIRS - KIRKE HOUSE. SPRING. DAY.

Jo, velveteen writing cap on her head, flips through Davis'
Encyclopedia as she hurries up the stairs; sidestepping Kitty
and Minnie as they scoot past, chasing a LITTLE WHITE PUPPY.

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. SPRING. LATER IN THE DAY.

Jo's desk is in havoc, with papers all over the room. Genius has been burning. Jo searches through the encyclopedia avidly.

A knock, and Friedrich Bhaer puts his head in: He has brought her a cup of coffee and a roll.

JO MARCH

Frederich, how long would strychnine take to dissolve? In brandy.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

(kisses her head, amused)
I have no idea.

JO MARCH

And... -- Is a rapier worn at the waist or only a saber?

FRIEDRICH BHAER

I think in these novels, the rapier, it is always concealed in the boot. By a man with a dark moustache.

JO MARCH

(sends him a look)
You'll see. This one is good.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

I don't care if it is terrible.

He kisses her again, happily, and leaves. Jo, her attention on her writing, barely notices that he is gone.

CUT TO:

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. NIGHT.

Exhausted, fully-clothed, Jo has fallen asleep on her bed, amid discarded papers. At the desk, Bhaer reads Jo's manuscript.

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. MORNING. DAY.

Jo wakes, and finds her manuscript on the bed beside her, with a little sprig of red geranium laid across it. She glances around: Bhaer is gone.

INT: DINING ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

The geranium tucked into her buttonhole and manuscript under her arm, Jo takes her place at the breakfast table, between Miss Norton and Mrs. Kirke --

JO MARCH

Good morning.

Her eyes meet Bhaer's across the room. Friedrich smiles, but applies himself to his porridge. Avoiding her?

Jo looks crestfallen, and a little wary.

INT: BHAER'S ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

Jo catches Bhaer in the corridor as he enters his door --

FRIEDRICH BHAER

So! It's very accomplished. And now? You find a publisher?

JO MARCH

(pleased)

I hope so. I want to show it to your publisher friend Mr. Fields. He liked the "Sinner's Corpse".

Bhaer hesitates, oddly.

JO MARCH (cont'd)

Friedrich, I am not asking you to give it to Fields. -

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Mr. Fields has heard me speak of you as a friend, and if he asks my opinion of this piece, I must give it honestly.

JO MARCH

And what is your opinion?

FRIEDRICH BHAER

That you should be writing something important, from the depths of your soul.

(re: manuscript)

There is nothing in this of the woman I am privileged to know.

JO MARCH
(voice rising passionately)
Friedrich, this is what I write! -

She becomes aware of a YOUNG STUDENT at the door, and stops.

FRIEDRICH BHAER
There is more in you than that. If
you have the courage to write it.

INT: CORRIDOR OUTSIDE BHAER'S ROOMS - KIRKE HOUSE. DAY.

Jo strides down the hall, clenching her manuscript in her fist. She yanks the geranium sprig out of her collar.

At her door, Jo glances down: A letter on the floor. Slowly Jo picks it up, sensing bad news, as:

MRS. MARCH'S VOICE (over)
Dear Jo. Beth is dying.

CUT TO:

INT: JO'S ROOM - KIRKE HOUSE. NIGHT.

Jo packs, desperately, tumbling her clothes into carpetbags, shoving papers into her writing case.

INT: TINY RAIL STATION. CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS. SPRING. DAY.

Carrying everything she owns, Jo rushes through the tiny station, and the workaday bustle of local freight: MAIL BAGS and MILK CANS. The TRAIN (unseen) pulls away from the platform.

MEG MARCH
Jo.

Meg March Brooke is six months pregnant, her belly swelled out under a pretty calico frock. Jo embraces Meg incredulously, puts her hands on Meg's belly.

JO MARCH
Why did you not tell me?

Scandalized, Meg glances about, embarrassed by her condition:

MEG MARCH
One hardly speaks of these things.

JO MARCH

It's wonderful, you look a perfect
Hausfrau! How is Beth?

Meg's face at once shadows, and she shakes her head.

MEG MARCH

You will find her much altered.

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

Beth is a skeletal wraith, her hair thin, her bony hands seemingly huge at the ends of her fragile wrists. She sleeps, her lips moving slightly, her forehead creased with pain.

Jo stares at Beth appalled. She puts her parcels down, and touches Beth's brow tenderly. In her sleep, Beth smiles. Jo picks up a vial of tincture beside the bed: inscribed "Opium".

Marmee comes up, quietly. She is older, silvered-haired and griefworn. Jo turns to Marmee, with a look of betrayal.

MRS. MARCH

She would not let us send for you
sooner.

(fighting her tears)

We have had Dr. Bangs in so many
times. But it is beyond all of us,
now. Dear Beth is worn out with it.
Yet she holds on.

(voice giving out)

I don't know why she holds on.

Jo draws Marmee to her, and Marmee gives in to her grief, in silent sobs.

CUT TO:

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

By the dim glow of a single flame, Jo warms a cup of broth over a tea-candle. She smiles at Beth conspiratorially. Beth's eyes are bright and hot with pain.

JO MARCH

You're going to drink all of this
good broth. To make you strong.

She brings the spoon to Beth's mouth. Beth sips it, her eyes never leaving Jo's face. Her voice comes, faintly:

BETH MARCH

I am glad you are home.

JO MARCH

Would you like to go to the shore?

(when Beth nods)

We could take a cottage on Cape Ann.

The air would do you good.

Beth's CAT prowls onto the bed, and curls against Beth.

JO MARCH (cont'd)

Mrs. Pat-Paw wants to go too. First
you must get a little stronger.

Beth smiles slightly, and obediently takes another tiny sip.

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

A MUSIC BOX plays gaily. Jo cranes on a high wooden chair, pinning up a garland of paper flowers, a bower of paper vines. Jo rattles on entertainingly:

JO MARCH

...They're called *biertgartens* but
it's mostly families and children,
you can have lemonade...The first
time, I had lemonade and a pickle,
simultaneously, which is nothing I'd
recommend twice...

Beth watches Jo, in pain, her chest heaving with shallow breaths. The Cat prowls rhythmically over the bed, like a sentinel.

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT/DAWN.

Jo dozes protectively beside Beth, who sleeps, her Cat curled beside her. Suddenly Mrs. Pat-Paw goes alert, and springs away from Beth, startling Jo awake. Jo touches Beth's thin face to reassure herself. Beth sighs slightly; she is dreaming.

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

Jo reads aloud from Dickens' *Mr. Pickwick*. Beth lies awake, suffering, her breathing shallow and labored. Her Cat cowers under the dresser suspiciously, staring at Beth. Beth puts out her thin hand and beckons. Mrs. Pat-Paw backs away.

BETH MARCH
(with difficulty)
She won't come to me, Jo...Bad cat.

EXT: ORCHARD HOUSE. SPRING. NIGHT. [WIND]

The trees blow in the wind, with a sense of foreboding. The moon hides in narrow clouds, like an omen. Orchard House is dark, except for Jo and Beth's windows, which glow. From inside comes FEMININE LAUGHTER --

INT: JO & BETH'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT. [WIND].

Beth is alert, holding a cup of broth -- she looks revived and a little hilarious. Jo has been amusing her with imitations.

JO MARCH
(doing "Man With A Cigar")
Thank you, thank you --

-- bowing, and letting her "cigar" (a carrot) fall from her mouth. Beth laughs.

BETH MARCH
I feel stronger with you close by.

JO MARCH
Old Mrs. Pat-Paw and I are going to get you well yet.

-- reaching for the Cat. Mrs. Pat-Paw resists with a hiss, teeth bared. Jo clucks at her, scolding --

JO MARCH
Bad girl...

BETH MARCH
If God wants me with Him, there is none who will stop Him.

Their laughter evaporates.

BETH MARCH (cont'd)
I don't mind. I was never like the rest of you. Making plans about the great things I'd do. I never saw myself as anything much. Not a great writer, like you.

JO MARCH

Oh Beth. I am not a great writer.

BETH MARCH

But you will be.

(holds her hand tightly)

Oh Jo, I've missed you so.

(her eyes travel around room)

Why does everyone want to go away?

I love being home.

(then, puzzled)

But I don't like being left behind.

Now I am the one going ahead.

Jo starts to protest, but Beth reassures her, gently:

BETH MARCH (cont'd)

I am not afraid. I can be brave,
like you. The only hard part now is
leaving you all. I know that I shall
be homesick for you, even in Heaven.

Jo clasps Beth's hand fiercely, fighting tears.

JO MARCH

I will not let you go.

The Cat suddenly crouches, back arched, looking fearfully at
the window: She suddenly seems to be a wild creature.

Jo looks at the window, and glimpses some dark, heavy movement
beyond the glass. A Presence out there.

JO MARCH

What is it, Mrs Pat-Paw?

Wind moans against the pane, rattling it, making everything in
the room seem to vibrate slightly. The Cat purrs a low,
strange noise. Jo makes herself go to the window, and open it.

The instant the window is opened, Beth's Cat leaps to the sill,
and then onto a tree branch, and is gone into the night.

Jo closes the window and secures it. She turns to Beth --

Beth is asleep, her hand tucked under her cheek. But as Jo
looks at her, she realizes: Beth is past sleep, past dreaming.

Jo picks up Beth's delicate hand. It is as light as paper.
Beth is gone. Jo bows over her in grief.

FADE UP:

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

CLOSE ON HANDS, AND ROSES

Strong hands mash and twist the blooms of a bouquet of red roses, almost brutally, and scatter the rose petals over dark shining wood: A casket?

Grim-faced, controlling her grief, Hannah pulls roses apart, and casts petals by the handful onto Beth's beautiful rosewood piano, scatters them over the bench with its needlepoint cover.

Hannah drops a handful of petals into Beth's mending basket.

INT: BETH & JO'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

Hannah scatters rose petals on Beth's coverlet and pillow, and among her cherished dolls.

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

A feeling of mourning in the house. Father leans against the mantelpiece, his back to the room. Marmee finishes reading a telegram, and folds it away.

MRS. MARCH

Aunt March is bedridden and her rheumatism forbids a sea voyage. Amy must bide her time, and come home later.

(then)

It's just as well.

Jo speaks up, from Beth's piano bench:

JO MARCH

Will we never be all together again?

No one answers.

CUT TO:

EXT: WOODS OF CONCORD. SPRING. DAY.

Running on the woodland path, Jo sheds her black mourning coat, yanks open the button of her high black collar, shakes her hair free; running as if she could run away from Beth's death. She hurdles the narrow stream, and runs on.

Ahead on the widening path is the rustic stone stile, where Laurie kissed her.

Jo slows. She arrives at the stile, breathing hard, and rests; remembering. Among the sounds of birds and crickets and rustling leaves, Jo hears: Laurie playing Beethoven's Sonata Pathetique. For a moment, Jo is inconsolable.

Then she lifts her face: She knows what to do.

Jo runs toward the meadow, and home.

CUT TO:

INT: LAURENCE IMPORT-EXPORT FIRM. LONDON. DAY.

Laurie is changed: his hair is short, and he wears sober business clothes. His office is a serious, masculine room, with maps displayed on two panelled walls.

Laurie distractedly accepts a stack of mail from his OLDER MALE SECRETARY. Laurie double-takes at the envelope on top.

JO'S VOICE (over)

"Dearest Laurie. You may not have heard our sad news of Beth..."

Laurie opens the letter, and reads it quickly. His face changes: This is his first news of Beth. A phrase leaps out:

LAURIE

"Meg has entered her confinement, and Amy must stay with Aunt March in Vevey..."

As Laurie casts the letter aside and seizes his hat and gloves --

JO'S VOICE (over)

"This is far too great a sorrow to bear alone..."

When he is gone, the CAMERA moves in on the cast-off letter:

JO'S VOICE (over, cont'd)

"Will you come home to me, Teddy dear?"

CUT TO:

INT/EXT: HOTEL/CONVALESCENCE HOME - VEVEY, SWITZERLAND. DAY.

On the terrace of the hotel, against views of the Swiss Alps, PATIENTS recline or sit in wheelchairs, as NUNS tend to them.

In mourning clothes, Amy sits apart in a posture of grief, downcast; a simple ebony cross worn at her throat. She hears the unusual sound of rapid footsteps, and looks up:

Down the corridor, a MAN in a travelling coat strides toward the terrace -- Laurie. On his sleeve is a black mourning band.

Amy rises and hurries toward him --

Laurie strides toward her --

-- and they meet in a long-awaited embrace, as Laurie folds his arms around Amy comfortingly. She whispers tearfully:

AMY MARCH

Oh Laurie. I knew you would come.

CUT TO:

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. SPRING. DAY.

Jo, coming INTO FRAME, kneels before a simple trunk, marked in childish letters: "Beth". Weary with grief, Jo opens the trunk to put away Beth's folded nightgown and her dolls.

Inside, Jo spies something, which she takes out, with wonder: Old copies of the PICKWICK PORTFOLIO, and Beth's "P.S." badge.

As if she will see her sisters gathered there, Jo turns to look at her desk, covered with dustcloths. Faint ECHO of laughter.

Carrying Beth's doll with her, Jo crosses to her desk, and pulls the sheet away. Under it, on the scarred wood, a blank sheet of paper waits, almost magically.

Jo slowly opens a drawer, and takes out a bottle of ink, a pen. She sits at the desk, holding the doll to her, close. Tears come to Jo's eyes. And then Jo smiles, and picks up the pen.

She bends over the paper, to write. Her voice comes faintly:

JO'S VOICE (over)

"It's so dreadful to be poor,"
sighed Meg, looking down at her old
dress. "Christmas won't be
Christmas without any presents..."

INT: GARRET OF ORCHARD HOUSE. SUMMER. NIGHT.

As seen before: Moths flit around Jo's candle as she writes, urgently, velveteen cap on her head. Jo seems illuminated from within, by old and cherished scenes. A voice comes faintly:

BETH'S VOICE (over)

"...the real charm of it lay in Beth's happy face, as she leaned over the new piano and lovingly touched the beautiful black and white keys..."

VOICES OVERLAP, LAPSE TO:

AMY'S VOICE (over)

"During the next few minutes the rumor circulated that Amy March had got twenty-four delicious limes..."

The manuscript is a stack of blotted pages now. It increases magically with every VOICE that OVERLAPS:

MEG'S VOICE (over)

"I told you they dressed me up, but I didn't tell you that they powdered and squeezed and made me look a fashion plate..."

JO'S VOICE (overlaps)

"As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet. A general outcry arose, for all her abundant hair was cut short. Jo, how could you, your one beauty!"

As Jo bends over the final page, the VOICES of all four sisters rise, faintly, singing the blessing from Meg's wedding:

SISTERS' VOICES

"For the beauty of the earth,
For the beauty of the skies
For the love which from our birth
Over and around us lies..."

The manuscript is finished. Jo stares at it for a long moment. Then she slips it inside a large brown envelope, and looks at it uncertainly: What do I do with this?

On impulse, Jo plucks up a geranium from the little jar on her desk, and tucks the sprig into the envelope. She writes in a large hand: "Professor Friedrich Bhaer, 11 Waverly Place..."

FADE DOWN

INT: UPSTAIRS - ORCHARD HOUSE. SUMMER DAY.

CAMERA follows Hannah [older] bringing a bowl of chipped ice to where Marmee and a MIDWIFE (30, Irish) spread the bed with starched linens. Meg's gasps OVERLAP from the next scene:

INT: MEG & AMY'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. SUMMER DAY.

Meg leans over the starched bed, laboring. Her thin white shift is damp with sweat. She clenches the sheets, focused, with the concentration of an athlete. Jo, her sleeves rolled to bare her strong forearms, supports Meg from behind, pressing hard on the base of Meg's spine. Meg gasps:

MEG MARCH

Harder...

Jo presses harder. Meg nods, mute with pain: That is better.

LAPSE TO:

Meg squats, her arms around Jo's waist, gripping Jo. Each breath is a singular, heroic effort: Breathe in. Breathe out.

INT: UPSTAIRS - ORCHARD HOUSE. NIGHT.

John Brooke and Mr. March sit together outside the closed door, excluded, in a posture of resigned and anxious waiting. Through the impassive door, faintly, they can hear sobs and murmurs.

The sound of Meg's BREATHING OVERLAPS from the next scene, as the CAMERA moves in closer on the door --

INT: MEG & AMY'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAWN.

CLOSE ON JO AND MEG'S FACES, TOGETHER

Her breath coming shorter and shorter now, Meg gazes into Jo's eyes. Their eyes are locked - it is as if Jo's gaze is a lifeline to which Meg courageously holds, so as not to be washed under and swallowed up by this tumult of pain.

CAMERA moving in closer on Jo's eyes, travelling inside --

CUT TO:

INT: MEG & AMY'S ROOM - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAWN.

The Midwife places a squirming bundle in Jo's arms. Jo looks in incredulous wonder at this very tiny BABY GIRL, her niece.

Meg, slumped in bed, is drained of color and strength. A very tiny BABY BOY lies beside Meg, nursing fiercely at her breast. Meg and Jo's eyes meet. Meg smiles weakly, with gratitude.

Marmee takes the Baby Girl. Jo sits by Meg, who grips Jo's hand, wordlessly, and kisses it. The sisters are bonded again.

CUT TO:

EXT: KITCHEN DOOR - REAR OF ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL. DAY.

The trees have turned golden. Laundry billows on the line: dozens of diapers. In the garden, Hannah and silver-haired Marmee harvest winter squash. From the kitchen come familiar voices and GIGGLING:

INT: KITCHEN - ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL. DAY.

Meg bathes her BABY BOY (3 months old) in the sink, carefully cradling his head. Jo, liberally smudged with flour, kneads several loaves of bread at the kitchen table, with the BABY GIRL (3 months old) on a sling at her hip:

MEG MARCH

What of your friend? The German. In New York. I fancied...well -
(at Jo's look, she laughs)
- that you discussed more than books and opera with him.

JO MARCH

(suddenly intent on her work)
We were more than friends.
(then)
We did not part well.

MEG MARCH

John and I do not always agree. But then we mend it.

-- bundling her Baby Boy, and placing him in the bassinet.

JO MARCH

It - is lost, I fear. I sent him something, and...He did not respond.

MEG MARCH
Foolish man.

Jo hands over the Baby Girl for her bath --

JO MARCH
No. I am a failure at romance.
(then, confessing)
I sometimes think of Laurie.

MEG MARCH
(surprised)
You wish you had accepted him?

JO MARCH
(ruefully)
I don't know what I wish.

The front gate BELL jingles distantly. Jo looks at her floury hands with dismay, annoyed --

JO MARCH
The butcher's boy.

-- glancing about: Meg has a slippery baby in hand, and Marmee is in the garden. Jo grabs a dollar from a little stone crock.

JO MARCH
- I'll get it.

INT: FOYER AND FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. DAY.

Jo throws open the front door and shoves the floury dollar at: Laurie. He grins broadly, and kisses her flour-smudged cheek. Jo recovers her speech:

JO MARCH
Teddy. We were speaking of you,
this is magic -!

LAURIE
Truly.

-- hugging her, then holding her away to look at her:

LAURIE (cont'd)
Oh Jo, you are -
(taking her in, laughing)
- so absolutely...covered with
flour!

JO MARCH

I've gotten you dusty -
(brushing him with floury hands)
Oh - oh, dear, it's worse!

LAURIE

I have something for you.

-- holding up one hand as he turns away.

JO MARCH

Should I call the others?

LAURIE

Not yet --

-- his eyes meeting hers with an implicit promise. Jo waits, thrilled. With the manner of one presenting the most precious treasure, Laurie draws into view --

LAURIE

May I present my wife?

Amy March, looking as happy and as lovely as a new bride should look, pauses at the doorway, as if not certain of her welcome.

Jo stares at her, shocked speechless. Amy laughs, and throws her arms about Jo with a delighted laugh, and kisses her.

CUT TO:

INT: FAMILY PARLOR - ORCHARD HOUSE. FALL. EVENING.

Everyone is gathered around the hearth: Amy and Laurie and old Mr. Laurence; Hannah and Meg and John Brooke and the babies; Marnie and Father and Jo. Amy is seated for the moment in Laurie's lap, with Laurie's arms around her in a relaxed and familiar way. He talks to Mr. March and John Brooke, who warm themselves at the fire; while the women chatter around Amy:

MEG MARCH

Have you ever seen a more beautiful ring...

MRS. MARCH

(admiring the gift of a shawl)
We have long heard of Brussels lace.

Amy senses Jo watching her. She disengages, to come sit by Jo, who is seated slightly apart, rocking one of the babies.

AMY MARCH

You look most natural.

(then)

Jo? - You must tell me the truth, as my sister. Which is a relation stronger than marriage. Do you mind at all?

They look at Laurie, who is idly playing Beth's piano, even as he joins in the men's conversation.

JO MARCH

I was - surprised.

(laughs at her understatement)

But I think I don't mind. As long as you will always live close by. I could not bear losing another sister.

Jo clasps Amy's hand, with its beautiful wedding ring. The two women sit together, and play with Meg's baby.

CUT TO:

INT: FRONT PARLOR - PLUMFIELD ESTATE. WINTER. DAY.

DARKNESS. Then SHUTTERS are thrown open:

Aunt March's parlor is dusty and abandoned, with some of the furniture gone. It has not been inhabited for a while. Jo pulls down a cloth from a mirror. Behind her, she sees:

Marmee and Father and Amy and Meg wander through the stilled and dusty rooms, footsteps echoing.

INT: OTHER ROOMS - PLUMFIELD ESTATE. WINTER. DAY.

The dining table is immense -- it could seat thirty people easily. Amy opens a china cabinet: Hundreds of dishes.

AMY MARCH

Goodness, Jo, what will you do with so many dishes?

Marmee peers into the kitchen:

MRS. MARCH

One would require an income just for the coal to heat this place. What could Aunt March have been thinking?

Jo, touching the leather-bound books on a library shelf:

JO MARCH

Most likely she felt sorry for me.
A homeless spinster. Poor Aunt.
Living here all those years, alone.

Mr. March sadly surveys a huge room with beautiful windows.

MR. MARCH

It would have made a fine school.

Jo sneezes from the dust, and makes her pronouncement:

JO MARCH

I'll keep the books, and sell the
rest.

She turns away. DARKNESS, as if the shutter has banged shut.

CUT TO:

EXT: STREETS OF CONCORD. WINTER. DAY. [RAIN]

On muddy streets lined with BANKS and WHOLESALE SHOWROOMS, Jo exits a door: "Hoffman & Schwarz". The street is populated with MEN in dark coats and winter boots. Jo slogs through the wet ruts of mud, lifting her skirts, cursing under her breath. CARTS and CARRIAGES rock past, spattering her.

A clap of THUNDER. A drop of rain splats on a DOCUMENT Jo carries: A real estate deed. Jo casts about, to spot: "NOTARY PUBLIC". With relief, Jo hurries toward the sign. A HORSE CART blocks her way as she tries to cross the street.

Suddenly the skies open, pouring RAIN. Jo puts her head down and runs --

-- straight into a MAN in a GREAT DARK COAT, carrying an open umbrella. Her bonnet knocked askew, Jo apologizes blindly:

JO MARCH

Oh! I am so very sorry, I --

Her words stop in her throat. Friedrich Bhaer.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

Miss March, I stopped at your home,
but I could not wait long, I have
only an hour in Concord, before my
train goes on to Boston.

Jo stares at him inanely, becoming drenched as she stands in the rain. Friedrich holds his umbrella over Jo, and fumbling to open a bundle that he has secured inside his coat --

FRIEDRICH BHAER

You sent me a beautiful manuscript.
Never have I read such a...I gave it
to my friend. Ach, the rain! -- He
sends you this, Mr. Fields.

-- taking out a typeset PRINTER'S GALLEY. Bhaer's large hand obscures the title, but the author's name is boldly clear:

"Josephine March", published by "James T. Fields, New York".

FRIEDRICH BHAER

It is a very beautiful book.

Jo is overwhelmed, she cannot quite believe what she holds.

FRIEDRICH BHAER (cont'd)

He wants to bring it out right away.
If you agree.

JO MARCH

(overcome)

Yes... Thank you.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

For nothing. It was an honor to read it.
(then, apologetically)
I did not tell you before. I wanted
to...to make a --

JO MARCH

- An Experience.

Friedrich smiles, relieved.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

May I write to you from the West?

JO MARCH

(dismayed)

You're going out West?

FRIEDRICH BHAER

The schools are young there --
(self-deprecating saile)
They need professors, and they don't
mind the accent.

JO MARCH

(shaken)

I - I don't mind it, either.
I like it. I mean -

Casting about, she sees the deed in her hand. It anchors her.

JO MARCH (cont'd)

You see, my aunt left me Plumfield.

(at his puzzled expression)

It isn't really a field, it's a house. A rather large house. I've been trying to sell it but it isn't good for anything except a school and nobody seems to want a school. Except me. I want a good school, one that would be open to anyone who wanted to learn. My friend Laurie and my sister Amy seem to think I can make it go, with a bit of their help, and -

(laughs)

- I'll be needing someone who knows how to teach.

(plaintively, meaning more)

Don't go so far away.

Friedrich is amazed at her offer; but he is more amazed that Jo loves him.

FRIEDRICH BHAER

How could I refuse such a gift?

Gott in Himmel - Of course I will stay.

(he cradles her face)

Will you have me?

In response, Jo kisses him, in the midst of the mud and rain; ignoring PASSERSBY, who are offended to see Friedrich Bhaer and Jo March kissing gratefully under his umbrella.
