

LITTLE WOMEN

BY

KITTY NESIUS BELETIC

An Adaptation of the novel

by Louisa May Alcott

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CHARACTERS

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT	Narrator. May use Voice over or Actor.
MARMEE	Mother of Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy March. Kind, generous, righteous, intelligent, deliberate.
MEG/HUGO	Oldest of the March girls. Pretty, proper, romantic. Money conscious.
JO/RODERIGO	Second oldest daughter. Fanciful, dramatic, loves to read. Headstrong but very kind. A bit of a tomboy.
BETH	Third oldest daughter. Sweet, kind, gentle. Frail. Completely loving and totally devoted to her family. Spiritual nature.
AMY/ZARA	Youngest daughter. Feminine, impetuous, a bit spoiled by everyone. Most like Jo in nature.
LAURIE (THEODORE LAURENCE)	Next-Door neighbor to the March family. Closest in age to Jo. Very wealthy. An only child. Romantic, playful, in love with Jo. Dashing handsome. Very winning.
JOHN BROOKE	Laurie's tutor. Not much older than Laurie. Fancies himself MUCH wiser. Gallant and a philosopher. In love with Meg.
AUNT MARCH	Older sister of Mr. March. Wealthy spinster who doesn't always approve of the way her nieces are being raised. Loves them all in her own way. A bit grouchy and bossy.
FRIEDRICH BHAER	A professor in New York City. German born. Handsome, kind, intellectual, passionate. In love with Jo.

MR. MARCH	Husband and father to Marmee and the March girls. Away during the war.
MR. DAVIS	Schoolteacher
MRS. KIRKE'S 3 CHILDREN	Jo's charges while she lives in Manhattan.
ORPHANS	From the Concord Orphanage. Act I, Scene II.
SCHOOLCHILDREN	Friends of Amy's. Act I, Scene III. (See Scene for individual parts)
PARTY GUESTS	Act I, Scene VIII. Sally Moffat's party. (See Scene for individual parts)

SETTING - LATE 1800'S, CONCORD, MASSACHUSETTS and NEW YORK CITY

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louisa May Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania in 1832. Her family moved to Concord, Massachusetts, just outside Boston when she was very young. She was the second daughter of Amos Bronson Alcott, a writer and a leader in the Transcendentalist movement. From childhood, Louisa showed talent in writing and acting. She first wrote for publication at the age of sixteen. By 1860, she was a contributor to the Atlantic Monthly. In 1863, her Hospital Sketches were published. She became editor of a juvenile periodical, Merry's Museum, in 1867. Her most famous and possibly the best-loved story for girls, is Little Women. Little Men and Jo's boys continued the account of the family described in Little Women. Her works include: An Old-Fashioned Girl, Eight Cousins, Flower Fables, Rose In Bloom, Jack and Jill, and Under the Lilacs. She died in 1888.

NOTE FROM PLAYWRIGHT

When I was 10 years old, I read Little Women 3 times in a row. I read it once again in college and until the resurgence of the movie, I had not realized the impact it had on my life. In a time when tales of helpless princesses and ever-present knights on white horses were rampant, Little Women was indeed an unusual message. I had intended to expound here about education and values, but in reading the forward to my copy of this cherished novel, I found I could not have said it any better than Anna Quindlen: "The notion of the deeply felt

is more important than the cleverly imagined is only one among many lessons the Alcott novels teach young readers. From the moment that we first meet the March sisters, it is clear that we are not in the presence of the female icons who were so much a staple of girls' fiction, sugar-sweet and totally unrecognizable as sisters of ourselves. For Amy, Beth, Jo and Meg, quarrels are inevitable. Money and privilege sing their siren song. Values are sometimes difficult to maintain. And only hard work and character and the willingness to forgive ourselves and others make life livable."

DEDICATION

To Mary Nesius, my mother, who first introduced me to Louisa May Alcott's writings. She will always be Marmee to me.

**ACT I – Voice Over or LOUISA MAY
ALCOTT seated at desk writing
and thinking. To be decided by
Director. Will be referred to as
V/O throughout script.**

LOUISA: (V/O, OVER MUSIC)

Because young people like to know "how people look," I will take this moment to give you a little sketch of the four sisters. Margaret, the eldest of the four, is sixteen and very pretty with large eyes, plenty of soft brown hair, a sweet mouth and white hands, of which she is rather vain. Fifteen-year-old Jo is very tall, thin and reminds one of a colt. Her long, thick hair is her one beauty. She has the uncomfortable appearance of a girl who is rapidly shooting up into a woman and doesn't like it. Elizabeth, or Beth, as everyone calls her -- is a rosy, bright-eyed girl of thirteen, tall for her age but with a shy manner and a peaceful expression. Amy, though the youngest, is a most important person, in her own opinion at least. A regular snow-maiden with blue eyes, who always carries herself like a young lady mindful of her manners.

You might think it more appropriate for one of the March sisters to tell this story...Or perhaps Marmee, their beloved mother should share the tale. But no, in the end, I choose another to speak. One who is well versed and who understands best just what goes on in the hearts and lives of those four frolicsome girls. I dare not tell you who I am, for it truly doesn't matter. Suffice it to say that I shall soon take you back into a time much different from our own...yet much the same. Oh, you will hear from me again. But for now, open your eyes and hearts to embrace the March family ...

(LIGHTS UP)

.....Marmee, Meg, Jo, Beth and little Amy.

ACT I

SCENE I

SETTING: The March Household

AT RISE: Sisters are dressed in "Pickwick Club"
Garb. MEG is finishing a reading.

MEG

"When he had finished, the hunchback protruded his dark lips, no doubt to kiss the kind hand which had brought so welcome a relief; but the damsel, perhaps recollecting the violent assault of the foregoing night, quickly drew back her hand with the same start of terror that a child does from a dog which he fears will bite him. The poor fellow then fixed on her a look full of reproach and unutterable woe."

(SIGHS)

Such a tragic story this is...

AMY

I think it's boring and miserable. Who wants to hear about the poor and the sick when you are sick and tired of being poor!?

MEG

Hush now, Amy. That's not a charitable thing to say! Especially at Christmastime.

JO

Christmastime! Fiddlesticks....Christmas won't be Christmas this year without any presents.

MEG

(SIGHS, LOOKING DOWN AT HER OLD DRESS)

It is dreadful to be poor!

AMY

I just don't think it's fair for some girls to have plenty of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all.

BETH

We've got father and mother and each other.

JO

We haven't got father, and shall not have him for a long time because of this silly old war.

(A TINY SILENCE AS EVERYONE THINKS ABOUT FATHER)

MEG

You know the reason mother proposed not having any presents this Christmas is because it is going to be a hard winter for everyone. She thinks we ought not to spend money for pleasure, when our men are suffering so in the army. We can't do much, but we can make our little sacrifices, and ought to do it gladly. But I am afraid I don't...

JO

Mother didn't say anything about our money. Let's each buy what we want and have a little fun. I'm sure we work hard enough to earn it.

MEG

I know I do. Teaching those tiresome children nearly all day, when I'm longing to enjoy myself at home.

JO

You don't have half such a hard time as I do. How would you like to be shut up for hours with a nervous, fussy old lady, who is never satisfied and worries you till you're ready to cry?

BETH

It's naughty to complain, but I do think washing dishes and keeping things tidy is the worst work in the world. It makes me cross and my hands get so stiff, I can't practice the piano well at all.

AMY

(STANDING)

I don't believe any of you suffer as I do. You don't have to go to school with impertinent girls who laugh at your dresses and label your father if he isn't rich.

MEG

Let's not peck at one another.

(SIGHS AGAIN)

Don't you wish we had the money papa lost when we were little, Jo? Dear me! How happy and good we'd be if we had no worries!

BETH

Meg, you said just yesterday that you thought we were a lot happier than the King children, for they are fighting all the time, in spite of their money.

MEG

So I did, Beth. Well, I think we are...for though we do have to work, we make fun for ourselves and are a pretty jolly set.

BETH

I have a Christmas idea. One that can make Christmas morning very special.

MEG

What's that, Beth?

BETH

Let's each get Marmee something for Christmas, and not get anything for ourselves.

JO

That's like you, dear! What will we get?

MEG

I shall give her a nice pair of gloves.

JO

Walking shoes, the best to be had!

BETH

Some handkerchiefs, all hemmed.

AMY

I'll get a little bottle of cologne. She likes it, and it won't cost much, so I'll have some left to buy my drawing pencils.

JO

(EXCITEDLY)

Let's let Marmee think we are getting things for ourselves and then surprise her. We must go shopping tomorrow afternoon, Meg. There is so much to do about the play for the orphans for Christmas night.

BETH

How's the play coming, Jo?

JO

I am nearly finished. But I shall need cooperation with rehearsal. In fact, we ought to rehearse tonight. Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene. You are stiff as a poker in that.

AMY

I can't help it. I never saw anyone faint and I don't choose to make myself all black and blue, tumbling flat as you do.

JO

Fiddlesticks, Amy! Do it this way. Clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, "Roderigo! Save me! Save me!"

AMY

Roderigo! Save me! Save me!

**(FAINTS VERY CAUTIOUSLY. JO BEGINS TO INSTRUCT AS
MARMEE ENTERS AND TAKES OFF HER CAPE)**

MARMEE

Glad to find you so merry, girls!

BETH

Marmee!

MARMEE

Well, dearies, how have you got on today? There was so much to do, getting the boxes ready to go tomorrow, that I didn't come home to dinner. Has anyone called, Beth? How is your cold, Meg? Jo, you look tired to death. Come and kiss me, baby.

**(MARMEE SITS IN THE CHAIR AND THE GIRLS CLUSTER ABOUT
THEIR MOTHER, EACH WANTING HER ATTENTION)**

Were you rehearsing for the play as I came in? The supervisor at the orphanage says the children are very excited to come. It's very good of you to do it for them.

**(GIVES A SPECIAL LOOK AT JO. THEN SHE SMILES BROADLY AT
EACH OF THE GIRLS)**

MEG

What has happened, Marmee? Why are you grinning so?

MARMEE

I have a special treat before supper, darlings.

BETH

A letter! A letter! You have a letter from father! Oh, read it, Mother.

(MARMEE PRODUCES THE LETTER TO THE GLEE OF THE GIRLS. THEY GATHER CLOSER TO SEE. AMY GRABS THE LETTER AND BEGINS TO READ)

AMY

Darling family, There is much to be thankful for in this upcoming special season. As the army chaplain, I am consTisten...consTist...

MARMEE

Consistently.

(AMY HANDS MARMEE THE LETTER)

I am consistently reminded of how blessed I truly am to have such a beautiful family to whom I can write. As the war continues, so do I, in my battle to keep up the morale of the soldiers who are cold and tired from fighting. It is only when I think of my lovely wife and daughters that I can yet speak with another soldier in despair. My love and kisses to all. Marmee dear, tell my darlings I think of them by day, pray for them by night and find my best comfort in their affection at all times. A year seems very long to wait before I see them. I know they will remember all I said to them, that they will be loving children to you, will do their duty faithfully, fight their enemies bravely, and conquer themselves so beautifully, that when I come back to them I may be fonder and prouder than ever of my little women.

(EVERYONE HAS A TEAR)

AMY

I am a selfish girl! But I'll truly try to be better.

MEG

We all will!

MARMEE

Come now, let's celebrate our good news from father with a song. Shall we sing one, just for him?

BETH

I know just the one, Marmee. His favorite.

(RUNS TO THE PIANO)

AMY

Start us off, Marmee. He loves to hear you sing...

(ALL GATHER AROUND THE PIANO. MARMEE LEADS SINGING WITH THE GIRLS QUICKLY JOINING IN)

SONG - THE FIRST NOEL/MARMEE, GIRLS

**THE FIRST NOEL THE ANGELS DID SAY
WAS TO CERTAIN POOR SHEPERDS IN FIELDS AS THEY LAY
IN FIELDS WHERE THEY LAY KEEPING THEIR SHEEP
ON A COLD WINTER'S NIGHT THAT WAS SO DEEP
NOEL NOEL NOEL NOEL BORN IS THE KING OF ISRAEL
NOEL NOEL NOEL NOEL BORN IS THE KING OF ISRAEL**

(SING ONE TIME THROUGH. AS LIGHTS FADE DOWN, 2ND VERSE IS USED AS UNDERSCORING FOR LOUISA)

LOUISA (V/O, OVER MUSIC)

Jo was the first to rise on Christmas morning. She quickly awakened the others so they could plan their surprise for Marmee before she arose. Much to their amazement, Marmee was already up and out, heeding the call of a hungry family. Upon her return, she was pleased and surprised to tears for the generous gifts from her daughters. Even Amy had mended her ways and bought a large bottle of cologne, not leaving any money for drawing pencils. Upon hearing the sad state of the needy family just visited by Marmee, it was Beth who suggested they take their scrumptious breakfast as a Christmas gift to those who needed it more. Upon their return, the girls were delighted to find Christmas treasures hidden by Marmee under their pillows. The rest of the day became one of business and merriment in preparation of the party for the orphans...

(WHEN VOICE OVER IS FINISHED, STAGE SHOULD BE SET FOR...)

ACT I

SCENE II

SETTING: THE MARCH HOUSE/CHRISTMAS DAY

AT RISE: A PLAY WITHIN A PLAY SET UPSTAGE. CRUDE SET WITH CARDBOARD CASTLE TURRET WITH WINDOW, SITTING FLOOR LEVEL ON ONE SIDE. FRAME WITH CURTAIN FEIGNING BACKSTAGE FOR ENTRANCES AND EXITS ON THE OTHER SIDE. ORPHAN GUESTS SITTING AT AN ANGLE TO WATCH SHOW. AS SCENE OPENS, ORPHANS ARE LINED UP SINGING THE 3RD VERSE OF "THE FIRST NOEL", DIRECTED BY AMY. BETH IS AT THE PIANO. JO GRABS MEG FOR QUICK CONVERSATION AS BETH SEATS THE ORPHANS FOR THE PLAY. AMY GOES BEHIND CURTAIN)

SONG - THE FIRST NOEL/ORPHANS

JO

(AFTER SONG)

Meg!

(GRABS HER ARM)

MEG

What Jo?

JO

I spoke to him!

MEG

(BARELY PAYING ATTENTION AS SHE READIES FOR THE PLAY)

To whom?

JO

That Laurence boy. He was in the window, as if waiting for one of us to walk by. I decided if he was so brazen to stare out at us all the time, I should speak to him to find out what's on his mind.

MEG

You didn't! Oh, Jo, how forward!

JO

Oh Fiddlesticks, Meg. It wasn't forward at all. Turns out he's been waiting for one of us to notice him. I think he's very lonely, Meg, and he's ever so nice. I invited him to come to the play.

MEG

You didn't! Oh Jo, this will never do. Mother will be so cross with your manners!

JO

I'm only being neighborly. Besides, he couldn't come, but promised to invite us to his house! Oh Meg, isn't it splendid? I mean to go if he does. You can just hang your manners if it means never having adventures.

MEG

(WHISPERING)

Enough Jo.

(SPEAKING NORMALLY)

MEG (Cont'd)

The children are getting too much for Beth to handle alone. Make the announcement ...

(MEG GOES TO HELP BETH QUIET THE CHILDREN. BETH TAKES HER PLACE AT THE PIANO. MEG GOES BEHIND THE CURTAIN. JO MAKES A SWEEPING BOW AND MAKES ANNOUNCEMENT)

JO

(GRANDLY)

Welcome on this comely night to our modest home and humble entertainment. The production you are about to see has never before been performed. We are pleased to announce its premier showing here in the household of the March family. And now, without further ado, ladies and gentlemen, "a gloomy castle..."

(ORPHANS APPLAUD AS JO SWEEPS BACKSTAGE BEHIND THE CURTAIN. BETH PLAYS FOREBODING MUSIC. ENTER MEG, DRESSED AS HUGO THE MAGNIFICENT...THE VILLAIN. MUSIC CUE)

HUGO

Alas, I, Hugo the magnificent, have fallen in love with the beautiful Zara. But she loves another. Roderigo is his name and I shall be forced to do away with him if he continues his pursuit! What to do and how to do it! But hark! What do I see....Look! In the window yonder! Why yes, as I suspected, the beautiful Zara comes forward. I must hide!

(HIDES BEHIND A VERY FAKE LOOKING BUSH. ENTER ZARA IN CASTLE WINDOW)

ZARA

What a beautiful night it is! Or is it simply that my love is near?

(ORPHANS GIGGLE AT THE WORD "LOVE")

HUGO

Does she know I am here?

ZARA

Yes! That is it! I can feel his presence and had I merely to leap from this window, he would catch me in his arms.

HUGO

She does know I am here!

ZARA

But alas, I cannot see him. I must call his name.

HUGO

...and I will answer, my love!

ZARA

Roderigo! Roderigo!

HUGO

Roderigo!?

(ENTER RODERIGO)

RODERIGO

Who calls?

ZARA

It is I, your sweetest Zara!

HUGO

And I, your greatest foe, Hugo the Magnificent!

ZARA

Hugo!

(HUGO COMES FORWARD SWORD DRAWN. RODERIGO IS SURPRISED AS IS ZARA)

RODERIGO

Hugo the Magnificent! You are a wretched creature. Begone with you! Do not bother my Zara again!

HUGO

(LAUGHING WICKEDLY)

You are wrong, my friend! It is I who shall have the fair maiden. She does not love you. She has told me herself.

ZARA

You wicked monster, Hugo! I do not love you. It is Roderigo I love! Oh, Roderigo, I am faint with horror!

RODERIGO

(WHISPERS TO AMY)

Not yet, Amy! Don't faint in the castle!

(OUT LOUD)

Fear not, my lady Zara! I will defend your honor!

HUGO

But not for long!

AMY

I did not hear your words, Roderigo. Oh, I am so frightened, I could faint!

1-2-14

RODERIGO

(WHISPERS AGAIN TO AMY)

Amy, stop it! Don't try to faint in the castle... it will f...

HUGO

Stand aside, man, or I'll lunge you through. Fear not, sweetest Zara. In only a moment you'll be mine!

AMY

(MUCH TO THE DISMAY OF JO)

Roderigo! Roderigo! Save me!

(TRIES TO FAINT AND KNOCKS DOWN CASTLE. COMES TUMBLING OUT ON THE FLOOR. JO LOSES PATIENCE AS CHILDREN HOWL WITH LAUGHTER)

JO

I told you not to faint inside the castle, Amy March! Why will you never listen to me!

AMY

I couldn't hear what you were saying, Jo! Stop being so cross with me. It's just a silly old play!

JO

Which you have just ruined by being your old stubborn self!

(BETH QUIETS THE CHILDREN AS MEG SPEAKS)

MEG

Hush, both of you! Children, would you like to sing a Christmas song? Who wants to sing "The Merry Christmas" song?

(ORPHANS CHEER AND LINE UP TO SING DURING INTRO)

SONG - MERRY CHRISTMAS/ORPHANS & MARCH GIRLS

ORPHANS

**IF YOU HEAR THE ANGELS SING MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND YOU HEAR THE SLEIGHBELLS RING CHING CHING CHING
CAROLERS A-CALLING FOR MORE GOOD WISHES
HOLLYBERRY WREATHS BECKON ALL TO COME IN**

(SONG –MERRY CHRISTMAS/ORPHANS CONT'D)

**THIS WILL BE A JOYOUS TIME MERRY CHRISTMAS
SINGING IN THREE QUARTER TIME 1-2-3!
SHARING IN A DINNER THAT'S SO DELICIOUS
OPENING A PACKAGE FOR YOU AND FOR ME**

**NOW I HEAR THE ANGELS SING MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND I HEAR THE SLEIGHBELLS RING CHING CHING CHING
CAROLERS A-CALLING FOR MORE GOOD WISHES
HOLLYBERRY WREATHS BECKON ALL TO COME IN**

ALL: (MARCH GIRLS SING COUNTER MELODY)

**NOW I HEAR THE ANGELS SING MERRY CHRISTMAS
AND I HEAR THE SLEIGHBELLS RING CHING CHING CHING
CAROLERS A-CALLING FOR MORE GOOD WISHES
HOLLYBERRY WREATHS BECKON ALL TO COME IN
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HOLLYBERRY WREATHS BECKON ALL TO COME IN!**

**(MARMEE ENTERS DURING SONG AND WATCHES THE
CHEERFUL SCENE. SHE HAS BROUGHT A BEAUTIFUL TRAY OF
GOODIES FOR ALL, COMPLETE WITH CANDLES AND HOLLY)**

MARMEE

Such sweet voices must be very thirsty and hungry! We have a special surprise for everyone!

(ORPHANS CHEER AGAIN)

1-2-16

AMY

Where did you get such splendid treats?

BETH

Marmee! This is too much!

(BETH TAKES TRAY FROM MARMEE AND EXITS WITH ORPHANS IN TOW. AMY FOLLOWS)

MARMEE

Oh it's not from me.

(SHE LOOKS AT JO)

Apparently Mr. Theodore Laurence saw you girls taking your breakfast to the Hummel family this morning. He told his grandfather who thought it such a grand gesture on your part that he decided to give his own Merry Christmas surprise!

JO

I TOLD you he was a fine fellow!

MEG

I still think you were very bold.

JO

Fiddlesticks, Meg! It just goes to show you what a judge of character YOU are. Sometimes manners just get in the way of knowing someone really! I mean to go to visit...

(LOOKS AT MARMEE)

...if I'm invited!

(EXITS)

(MARMEE SLIPS HER ARM THROUGH MEG'S AS THEY EXIT)

MARMEE

That child never ceases to amaze me, Meg.

MEG

(LAUGHING)

Me too, Marmee.

(MUSIC SWELLS AS LIGHTS DIM. LOUISA TALKS OVER MUSIC)

LOUISA (V/O)

The Christmas season faded quickly into January and it was back to work and school for the March family. When Mr. March lost his property, the two oldest girls begged to be allowed to do something toward their own support. Their parents consented and both fell to work. Meg found a place as a governess, and felt rich with her small salary. Jo happened to suit Aunt March who needed an active person to wait upon her. The childless old lady had offered to adopt one of the girls when troubles came, and was much offended because her offer was declined. But the Marches only answered that they could never give up one of their girls. Beth was too bashful for school. She suffered so much there that it was given up and she did her lessons at home with her father. And then there was Amy. She was in a fair way to be spoiled, for everyone petted her. Meg was her confidant and on one particular day, Amy confessed to her that she was in debt for at least a dozen pickled limes to her school friends. Meg softened and gave Amy the rag money her mother had given her that week so that Amy could pay her debts. Amy hugged Meg as hard as she could and ran off as Meg stood watching her little sister with a smile.