

Little Women

Louisa May **Alcott**




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The text is recorded in full.




These symbols indicate the beginning and end of the extracts linked to the listening activities.



Portrait of Louisa May Alcott.

About the Author

 Louisa May Alcott was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania, on 29 November 1832. She was the second of four daughters. She grew up in Concord, Massachusetts. Her father was a philosopher and a teacher, and taught his daughters at home.

Some of the Alcott family friends were famous writers like Nathaniel Hawthorne, Henry David Thoreau, and Ralph Waldo Emerson.

When Louisa was a young woman she worked as a governess ¹, servant, ² teacher and writer to help her family. She loved writing

1. **governess** : (especially in the past) a woman who teaches the children of a rich family in their home and lives with them.
2. **servant** : a person who does domestic jobs, e.g. cooking and cleaning in another person's house for money.

and at the age of twenty-two she published ¹ her first book, *Flower Fables* (1854). During the American Civil War she worked as a nurse in a hospital in Washington, DC.

Little Women was her first successful book. It is about her family and her experiences as a young girl. Young Louisa was like her character Jo March in the story. She was a tomboy ² and she wrote plays ³ for the little family theater in the attic.


Little Women was published in two volumes in 1868 and 1869. The book became very popular at once. Two of her other books about the March family are *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). She also wrote *Hospital Sketches* (1863), *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1869), *Eight Cousins* (1874), *Rose in Bloom* (1876) and collections of short stories. She died in 1888 and is buried in Sleepy Hollow Cemetery in Concord.



1 COMPREHENSION CHECK

Fill in the information about the author.

Name: (0)	Louisa May Alcott
.....	
Date and place of birth: (1)	
.....	
Family friends: (2)	
.....	
Jobs: (3)	
.....	
First successful book: (4)	
.....	
Other books: (5)	
.....	
Date of death: (6)	
.....	



L. M. Alcott.

1. **published** : put in the newspaper.
2. **tomboy** : a young girl that likes the same games and toys that boys like.
3. **plays** : theatrical presentations such as dramas or musicals.

The Characters


Top left : John Brooke, Mr March, Aunt March, Laurie, Mr Laurence,
Mrs March, Beth, Meg, Amy, Jo





CHAPTER ONE

Merry Christmas

It was almost Christmas. Four girls sat by the fire in their living room. There was a lot of snow outside. 

“Christmas won’t be Christmas without presents,” said Jo.

“It’s terrible to be poor!” said Meg.

“Some girls have a lot of pretty things, but we don’t have many,” said Amy.

“But we have mother and father, and this nice, warm home,” said Beth.

“Father isn’t here now,” said Jo. “And who knows when he’ll return.” Their father was away with the Union Army. ¹

Margaret, or Meg, was sixteen years old and very pretty. She had light brown hair and big brown eyes. She liked pretty clothes. Josephine, or Jo, was fifteen, and she was tall and thin. She had gray eyes and long dark hair. She liked climbing ² trees and doing things that boys do. Elizabeth, or Beth, was thirteen, and had

1. **Union Army** : the Union Army was the army of the North in the American Civil War.

2. **climbing** : going up something.



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brown hair and kind blue eyes. She was gentle ¹ and very timid, and loved playing the piano. Amy was only twelve. She was lively and happy. She felt important and thought she was very pretty, with her blonde hair and blue eyes.

“Mother will soon be home. Oh poor Mother, it’s snowing outside,” said Beth.

“Let’s put her slippers ² near the fire,” said Jo. She looked at them. “These slippers are very old.”

“I can get her some new slippers with my dollar,” said Beth. This Christmas the sisters had only one dollar each to spend.

“No, *I* can!” said Meg.

“No, *I* am going to buy the slippers for mother,” said Jo loudly.

“Oh, girls,” said Beth quietly, “Let’s each buy mother something, but not anything for ourselves.” She always thought about other people.

“Alright,” said Meg happily. “I can buy her a pair of gloves.” ³

“And I can buy her some handkerchiefs,” ⁴ said Beth.

“Mother likes perfume,” said Amy. “I can buy her a little bottle.”

“Let’s go out tomorrow and buy mother’s Christmas presents,” said Beth.

Mrs March came home and took off her wet coat. She sat down near the warm fire and the girls sat near her.

“I have a letter from father!” she said happily. She read it to the girls. Father’s letter was cheerful and full of love for his girls. He told them to work at home and to wait for his return.

“When will he come home, mother?” asked Beth.

1. **gentle** : calm and quiet.

2. **slippers** :



3. **gloves** :



4. **handkerchiefs** :







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“Not for many months,” said Mrs March. “He must stay and do his work. And we must work to help all the poor soldiers at war.”

After dinner the girls made socks and gloves for the soldiers.

The next day was Christmas Eve, and at nine o'clock in the evening Beth played the piano and they sang Christmas carols.¹ Then they went to bed.

Jo got up early on Christmas morning.

“Merry Christmas, everyone!” she said happily.

The four girls dressed quickly and went to the kitchen. Hannah, the family's servant, was already there. There was a special Christmas breakfast for the family on the table.

“Merry Christmas, Hannah. Where's mother?” asked Meg.

“A poor woman came to ask her for some help, so she went to see her,” said Hannah.

The girls put their mother's presents in the living room. Just then Mrs March opened the front door.

“Merry Christmas!” they all said together.

“And a Merry Christmas to you,” said Mrs March. “Listen, girls, there's a very poor woman near here. She and her family came here from Germany – they're immigrants. Her name is Mrs Hummel and she has six children and a new baby. They have no fire and no food on Christmas Day. Will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?”

The girls were hungry and looked at the good food on the table.

“I'm glad we didn't start eating,” said Jo.

“Oh, yes,” said Beth. “We must take it to that poor family.”

1. **carols** : religious song sung at Christmas.

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“I’ll take the cakes,” said Amy. Cakes were her favorite food, and it was difficult for Amy to give away something she liked.

“I’ll prepare a nice basket ¹ for them,” said Meg.

“Good,” said Mrs March. “When we come back we can have some bread and milk.”

When they returned home, the sisters gave their mother the presents. She was very happy.

In the evening the four sisters performed ² a play in the attic. Some friends came to see it too. Everyone had fun and laughed. Jo liked writing stories and plays.

After the play the girls and their friends went downstairs to the kitchen. There were all kinds of delicious food on the table. And there were beautiful flowers too. The girls were very surprised.

“Where did this come from?” asked Amy.

“And the flowers?” asked Jo.

“Mother did it!” said Meg.

“No,” said Mrs March, “Old Mr Laurence sent it.”

“Mr Laurence and his grandson live alone in that big house and I don’t think they have any friends,” said one of the girls. “I think the grandson’s shy. ³ He stays at home and studies with his tutor.” ⁴

“I heard that he traveled to Europe,” said Amy.

“Old Mr Laurence knows we helped the Hummel family and he was pleased,” said Mrs March. “I don’t know him, but I think he’s a kind gentleman.”

1. **basket** :



2. **performed** : presented in front of other people.

3. **shy** : afraid of meeting new people.

4. **tutor** : private teacher.