

Preface

About the author

Louisa May Alcott (1832-1888), the author of *Little Women*, and her three sisters were born in Boston, a seaport and the capital of the American state of Massachusetts.

At the age of eight, she moved to nearby Concord with her family. There she spent the happiest years of her youth, even though she experienced the constant threat of poverty. The Alcotts had only a modest cottage, but the girls used a neighboring barn to perform plays that Louisa wrote.

She was educated at home and became a schoolteacher in Boston. Her first story was sold when she was twenty years old, and two years later her first full-length book was published. What pleased her the most about her writing, as she became more and more famous, was the sales of her books made her family's life more comfortable and less of a struggle. *Little Women*, published in 1869, has become one of America's classics.



Louisa May Alcott

About the characters

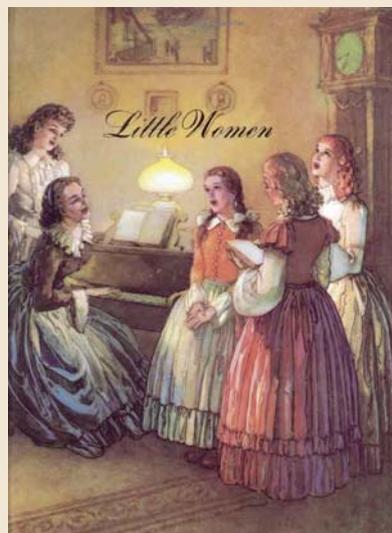
Mr. and Mrs. March	are parents of four lovely daughters. Mrs. March takes care of the family while Mr. March serves in the Union Army during the American Civil War.
Meg	the oldest daughter, is thoughtful and considerate. She devotes herself to the family.
Joe	the second oldest daughter, is outspoken and straightforward. She enjoys writing very much.
Beth	the third oldest daughter, is quiet and tender. Beth likes to play the piano.
Amy	the youngest daughter, is a little naughty but adorable. Amy has a talent for painting.
Aunt March	Mr. March's sister, owns a large fortune but lives a lonely life.
Laurie	the Marches' neighbor, lives with his grandfather, Mr. Laurence. Laurie is the only child in a wealthy family. He is kind and attentive.
John	Laurie's tutor, falls in love with Meg.

About the story

Little Women is the story of the March family, a family that is used to hard work and suffering. Although Mr. March is away with the Union Army, the four sisters, Meg, Jo, Amy, and Beth and their mother keep their spirits high. Mrs. March is involved in local charity affairs, and under her influence, the girls always generously offer their help to people in need.

At a big party during the Christmas season, the March sisters meet a young man named Laurie and have a wonderful time. Because of Mr. March's injury, the sisters must face the real challenge of being independent. Things get worse when Beth contracts scarlet fever and struggles with the illness.

With the strains of separation and reunion with loved ones, plus the adventure to the outside world pursuing their careers, the March sisters become mature, gain wisdom, and find the happiness through their family life.





Christmas at the Marches' Home



Everything was covered with snow. The Christmas season arrived again for the girls of the March family. They longed for nice gifts, but their family's financial¹ situation was too tight to afford any.

Meg, the oldest of the four sisters, started with a sigh, "It just doesn't seem like Christmas without presents."

Amy, the youngest sister, frowned and whispered, "I am desperate² for colored pencils."

Jo, the second sister, said, "Honestly, I wish I didn't have to work for Aunt March, that old miser³."

Beth raised her eyebrows and uttered⁴, "I'd like the war to end so Father can come home . . ."

- 1 financial [faɪnənsiəl] (a.) 財務的
- 2 desperate [dɪspɜːrət] (a.) 極度渴望的
- 3 miser [ˈmɪzər] (n.) 守財奴
- 4 utter [ˈʌtər] (v.) 說



“Oh, sweet Beth, that’s what we all want!” the other sisters declared together.

Then Jo shared her wish of becoming a writer someday. Amy was confident that she would be very rich, because she would marry a wealthy man.

Amy amused⁵ her sisters further with her philosophical⁶ saying, “We’ll all grow up someday. We might as well know what we want.”

When Mrs. March came home, the girls happily exclaimed “Mommy” and dashed⁷ to the door to greet her. Mrs. March surprised the girls with a letter from their father, and they read it aloud together.



Check Up Choose the correct answer.

- ___ 1. The March family didn’t have enough money to buy Christmas gifts. True False
- ___ 2. Which sister wanted to be a writer?
- A Meg
- B Jo
- C Amy

⁵ amuse [3]mju:z] (v.) 使發笑

⁶ philosophical [f0l3]sA:f0kl] (a.) 哲學的

⁷ dash [dʌʃ] (v.) 急奔





The girls felt relieved that their father was safe and sound, but they felt sorry that he had to endure the loneliness of being separated from the family.

Soon enough, their sentimental⁸ notion⁹ was replaced with cheerful festivity; the girls sang Christmas carols until bedtime. As usual, Jo stayed up

late writing about her fantasy world.

On the Christmas day, Jo woke up to the delightful aroma¹⁰ of breakfast being prepared by Meg and their maid, Hannah. Mrs. March had gone out to help a German family, the Hummels.

⁸ sentimental [ˈsentʃməntl] (a.) 多愁善感的

⁹ notion [ˈnoʃn] (n.) 想法

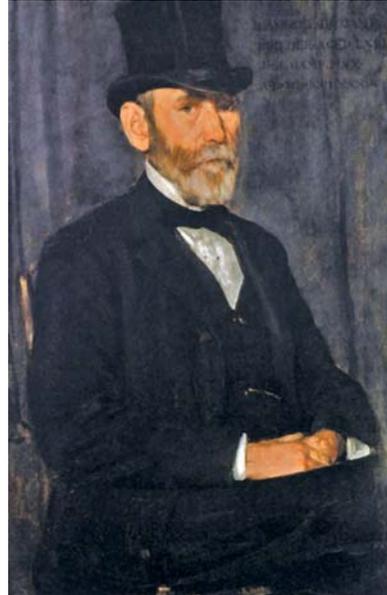
¹⁰ aroma [ˈrəʊmə] (n.) 香味



Mrs. Hummel and her six kids had been living in harsh poverty since Mr. Hummel passed away. Beth, equipped¹¹ with exceptionally noble morals¹², motivated¹³ the sisters to deliver¹⁴ some food to the Hummels.

On their way back home from delivering the food, the March girls noticed that a young man and his grandfather were moving into a fine residence¹⁵ nearby.

The old man was Mr. Laurence. Full of curiosity, the sisters chatted all night about the lonely-looking young man's background.



Check Up Choose the correct answer.

- ___ 3. Mr. March sent a letter home. True False
- ___ 4. Mrs. March prepared breakfast. True False

- 11 equip [ə'kwɪp] (v.) 配備；具有
12 morals ['mɔːrəlz] (n.) (pl.) 道德
13 motivate ['mɒtɪveɪt] (v.) 激發
14 deliver [dɪ'lɪvə] (v.) 運送
15 residence ['rezɪdəns] (n.) 宅邸



Jo and Meg were going to attend¹⁶ a New Year's party.

Meg was dressing up for the party. Jo was using a hot iron stick to curl Meg's hair while chatting with the other girls. Beth was glad she didn't have to socialize¹⁷ with strangers but could stay home with Amy.

Suddenly, a burning smell caught Jo's attention. She had ruined Meg's hair. That caused quite a panic¹⁸ until Amy decorated Meg's burnt hair with a ribbon, and Meg looked fantastic, as usual.

At the party, Meg was constantly occupied, since many young men invited her to dance. Unexpectedly, Jo bumped into the newcomer in their neighborhood, Laurie, the grandson of old Mr. Laurence. They had a wonderful time.

Alas, Meg twisted¹⁹ her ankle and had to leave early. The sisters were thankful to Laurie, the Marches' new acquaintance²⁰, because he had kindly offered them a comfortable ride home in his carriage²¹.

Check Up Choose the correct answer.

___ 5. Meg bumped into Laurie at the party. True False

- 16 attend [3}tend] (v.) 出席
- 17 socialize [}so7N3la0z] (v.) 交際
- 18 panic [}pSn0k] (n.) 驚慌
- 19 twist [}tw0st] (v.) 扭傷
- 20 acquaintance [3}kwe0nt3ns] (n.) 相識的人
- 21 carriage [}kSr0dI] (n.) 馬車



EXERCISES

A Multiple Choice.

- _____ ❶ How did Meg meet her future husband?
- a) A matchmaker arranged a blind date for her.
 - b) She met him at the annual republican convention.
 - c) He is a senior in her school who later works for her father.
 - d) He used to be the tutor of her neighbor.
- _____ ❷ According to Jo, what did John steal from Meg?
- a) Her handkerchief.
 - b) Her digital camera.
 - c) Her glove.
 - d) Her rifle.
- _____ ❸ What did Jo do to support her family when they were in need?
- a) She cut her long hair and sold it when faced with financial emergency.
 - b) She opened the tap and filled up the tub with hot water.
 - c) She used solar power to operate a fridge.
 - d) She decided to move to New York to live with Mr. Bhaer.
- _____ ❹ Which of the following does not belong to Beth's daily routine?
- a) Sharing food with the poor neighbors.
 - b) Wearing her overall to do the laundry and cooking at home.
 - c) Going to the church to do cleaning for the monks.
 - d) Collecting memorable items for her family.