

ACT I

SCENE 1: *Curtain opens. We see four girls sitting before a fireplace. MEG, the eldest, is sitting in Mrs. March's chair USR. JO is sprawled on the floor, reading in front of the fireplace, which sits between the two chairs in which MEG and AMY are sitting. A door leading to the kitchen sits DSR. A door USL leads to the upstairs and bedrooms, while a door DSL leads to the front door and outside. BETH is sitting on the floor next to AMY. Beside Mrs. March's chair is a small table.*

JO: *(Slamming the book closed.)* Christmas won't be Christmas without any presents!

AMY: I don't think it's fair for other girls to have pretty things, and we shall have nothing at all.

BETH: We've got Father and Mother and each other.

MEG: That is true, Beth. We *should* be thankful for what we have.

(JO stands defiantly, raising her hands in frustration.)

JO: We haven't got Father, and we won't for a long time. Not with the war going on in the South.

(MEG stands and places her hand on JO'S arm.)

MEG: That's why Mother suggested we *not* spend money on gifts, Jo, because it wouldn't be right—not with our soldiers suffering this winter out in the cold. Everyone has to make sacrifices.

JO: But we've only a dollar apiece! Donating *that* won't help very much, I'm afraid. I don't expect presents from you or Mother, but there was this book I've been wanting for so long!

BETH: I wanted some new piano music.

AMY: I wanted new drawing pencils. *(MEG, JO, and BETH turn and look at AMY in disbelief.)* I really do need them!

(JO takes the role of ringleader and addresses the younger GIRLS.)

JO: We work hard; I believe we've earned it. Let's each buy the thing we want and have some fun!

MEG: We do work hard. I know I do, teaching those tiresome children all day, but—

JO: How would you like to be shut up for hours with a fussy old lady till you're ready to fly out the window or cry? (*JO imitates an old lady.*) Dust the banister! Don't neglect the corners! You've left the floor unswept!

BETH: (*Nodding.*) I do so dislike washing dishes and tidying up.

AMY: I don't believe any of you suffer as I do! You don't have to go to school with such rude girls who laugh at your dresses and insult you because your nose isn't nice or insult your father because he isn't rich.

(*MEG, JO, and BETH nod in agreement.*)

MEG: Do you remember before Father lost his money, Jo?

JO: How can I *not* remember? We had so much fun back then.

MEG: Still, we do manage to have fun despite being poor.

(*JO sits down, cross-legged, and starts to whistle with her hands in her pockets.*)

AMY: Don't, Jo, it's so boyish!

JO: That's why I do it.

AMY: You are so unladylike! I detest rude, unladylike girls!

MEG: Amy! You ought to be ashamed. Jo, you are old enough to behave better. You're not a little girl anymore; you are a young lady.

JO: I wish I'd been born a boy.

BETH: (*Hugging JO in mock sympathy.*) Poor Jo! But it can't be helped, so you must make the best of it.

MEG: As for you, Amy, you are too particular and critical. Elegant manners are nice, but if you are not careful you'll grow to be a snob!

(*AMY lowers her head in embarrassment. The clock begins to chime.*)

MEG: Six o'clock? Hurry girls! Mother will be home soon! Beth, warm Mother's slippers. Amy, go fetch the tea from the kitchen.

(*AMY exits DSR quickly.*)

JO: (*Helping BETH hold up the slippers near the fire, both of them kneeling.*) Her slippers are so worn. She needs a new pair.

BETH: I know! Let's each get her something for Christmas with our money.

AMY: (*Entering DSR, placing the tea set on the end table next to Mrs. March's chair.*) With a single dollar? What could we buy with that?

MEG: I could get her some new gloves.

JO: I shall get her new slippers. (*JO thinks hard for a moment.*) Or do you think she'd like army shoes instead?

BETH: I could sew her some new handkerchiefs.

AMY: I could get her some perfume. That won't cost much, so I'd still be able to get my pencils! (MEG, JO, and BETH look at her again.) I truly do need them!

JO: (*Stands and paces.*) We'll go shopping tomorrow.

(*The GIRLS all agree excitedly. The GIRLS sit for a moment. JO stands with her hands in her pockets, rocking back and forth rather boy-like.*)

JO: (*Looks at the rest of the girls. Sighs heavily.*) We are truly the most boring group of girls in the whole of the world! I know, let's practice the play I wrote.

MEG: I don't think I'll act anymore after this play. I'm getting too old for such things.

JO: You won't stop! You enjoy it too much. Places everyone!

(*JO pulls out from behind a chair a cape, a hat with a feather, and a fake mustache. AMY pulls out a white veil, which she wraps around her head. MEG pulls on a black cloak, and BETH sits to one side with Jo's book to watch.*)

JO: (*Grasping AMY'S hand while AMY pretends to swoon.*) What ho, minion! I need thee! Come hither!

MEG: (*Slouching under her cloak.*) Why dost thou calleth me, Iago?

JO: (*Breaking character.*) No! My name is "Hugo"! What kind of a name is "Iago"? Ick!

MEG: I really don't see what the problem is, Jo.

JO: The problem is that you got the line wrong! Do try to get it right.

MEG: Very well. (*Meg slouches again.*) Why dost thou calleth me . . . Timothy?

(*All the GIRLS, except JO, giggle loudly at this. JO is outraged.*)

JO: You're not even trying!

MEG: Come now, Jo—

JO: Moving on! (*JO regains her composure and gets back into character.*) I need from thee a potion to make fair Zara— (*JO points to AMY.*) swoon with love for me, and another to poison her betrothed.

MEG: It shall be as thou wishest . . . Timothy.

(*JO is about to shout at MEG when MRS. MARCH enters DSL.*)

MRS. MARCH: How are you, my girls?

GIRLS: Mother!

(MRS. MARCH *sits in her chair. AMY and MEG throw off their costumes. BETH helps MRS. MARCH put on her slippers, AMY sits in her lap, JO grabs the costumes and deposits them behind the chair. MEG pours the tea.*)

MRS. MARCH: I've got a treat for you.

JO: A letter from Father!

MRS. MARCH: (*Nods, pulls out two letters.*) Yes. A long letter at that. (*MRS. MARCH opens the first letter and begins to read.*) He is well, and sends us his love. His duty as Chaplain shall keep him in the Union a while longer—

GIRLS: But mother! Oh, it is not fair! This Christmas shall be so unhappy without Father!

MRS. MARCH: *But* he is hopeful, and looks forward to returning home. He also wishes that you will all continue to be brave while he is gone, so that when he returns home he can see what beautiful little women you have become.

(*There is a moment of silence.*)

JO: (*Soberly, with mustache still fluttering above her mouth.*) I'll try to do what he says, and become a little woman, and not be so rough and wild.

MRS. MARCH: That's wonderful, darling.

JO: I just wish that I was a boy so I could be near him! I could go as a drummer-boy.

AMY: But you're not a boy, Jo.

MRS. MARCH: That's right. What would ever happen to the rest of us if you were gone, Jo?

JO: I suppose. I just wish that I could be near him.

MRS. MARCH: As do we all, Jo. Now, what have my darling girls been up to today? I haven't seen you since early this morning!

BETH: We practiced Jo's play!

MRS. MARCH: Oh, you have? I think it's wonderful.

JO: (*Disappointed.*) But Meg won't even try anymore.

MRS. MARCH: Oh, I'm sure that you'll find some way to make it work. You always do, my darling. You're a modern Shakespeare!

JO: (*Brightening up a bit.*) Not quite. I do think that the scene where Hugo is murdered is quite dramatic, but I'd like to try something as dramatic

as *Macbeth*. If only we had a trapdoor! I always wanted to do the killing part. (JO becoming very dramatic.) “Is that a dagger I see before me?”

AMY: No, it’s not. It’s the second letter that you see before you!

(ALL laugh.)

MEG: What *is* the other letter, Mother?

MRS. MARCH: An invitation to Mrs. Gardiner’s Christmas party. It is addressed to you, Meg—and to Jo.

MEG: Oh! What fun! May I see it?

(MRS. MARCH hands the letter to MEG who reads it excitedly.)

MEG: “To Mrs. March. Mrs. Gardiner would be delighted and honored by the presence of Miss Margaret March and Miss Josephine March. We await their attendance at the Christmas dance in the Gardiner’s house. Sincerely, Mr. and Mrs. Gardiner”! (MEG, turns to MRS. MARCH.) Oh, Mother, may we go?

MRS. MARCH: Of course, darling.

MEG: But what shall we wear?

JO: What we always wear to parties, silly. (JO pauses, a shocked look passing over her face.) Oh, Mother! But my dress!

MRS. MARCH: There is nothing to be done about it, darling. The party is tomorrow.

MEG: What about gloves? (MEG turns to JO.) Yours are spoiled and stained with punch and lemonade.

JO: I couldn’t help it. I can’t grasp anything with them on!

MEG: Well, you cannot go with spoilt gloves, but you must *not* go without!

JO: Well, I dislike them anyway, so without gloves I shall go!

MEG: But—

MRS. MARCH: Now, girls. Meg, you have a nice pair of gloves. Jo, I’m afraid that you are right. You will have to make do without any, as I cannot afford a new pair for you.

MEG: Oh, all right. (MEG smiles as she looks at the letter again.) A party! A true party! And we were invited!

(Lights down. Curtain close.)