

Little Women: A Christmas Without Presents
Adapted by Robin Proett Olson
Script Excerpt

MEG

I don't mean to act any more after this time; I'm getting too old for such things.

JO

You won't stop, I know, as long as you can trail round in a white gown with your hair down, and wear gold-paper jewelry. We ought to rehearse tonight. Come here, Amy, and do the fainting scene. You are as 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. I don't care if Hugo does come at me with a pistol.

NARRATOR 1

Returned Amy, who was not gifted with dramatic power but was chosen because she was small enough to be borne out shrieking by the villain of the piece.

JO

Do it this way; clasp your hands so, and stagger across the room, crying frantically, "Roderigo! Save me! Save me!"

AMY

(Imitating Jo badly) Roderigo! Save me! Save me!

(Amy tries to fall gracefully into a chair.)

JO

It's no use! Do the best you can when the time comes, and if the audience laughs, don't blame me.

MEG

It's the best we've had yet.

BETH

I don't see how you can write and act such splendid things, Jo. You're a regular Shakespeare!

JO

Not quite. I do think "The Witch's Curse, an Operatic Tragedy", is rather a nice thing; but I'd like to try Macbeth, if we only had a trap-door for Banquo. I always wanted to do the killing part. "Is that a dagger I see before me?"

MEG

No, it's the toasting fork, with mother's shoe on it instead of the bread. Beth's stage-struck!

Marmee enters from outside

MARMEE (Narrator 1)

Glad to find you so merry, my girls.

NARRATOR 4

The girls thought the grey cloak and unfashionable bonnet covered the most splendid mother in the world.

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 looked tired to death. Come and kiss me baby.

NARRATOR 5

As they gathered about, Mrs. March said, with a particularly happy face.

MARMEE

I've got a treat for you.

JO

A letter! A letter! Three cheers for father!

MARMEE

Yes, a nice long letter. He is well, and thinks he shall get through the cold season better than we feared. He sends all sorts of loving wishes for Christmas, and an especial message to you girls.

BETH

When will he come home, Marmee?

MARMEE

Not for many months unless he is sick. He will stay and do his work faithfully as long as he can and we won't ask for him back a minute sooner than he can be spared. Now come and hear the letter.

ALL

They all drew together,

NARRATOR 1

Mother in the big chair,

NARRATOR 5

with Beth at her feet,

NARRATOR 3

Meg

NARRATOR 4

and Amy

NARRATORS 3 & 4

perched on either arm of the chair,

NARRATOR 2

And Jo leaning on the back, where no one would see any sign of emotion if the letter should happen to be touching.

NARRATOR 1

Very few letters were written in those hard times that were not touching, especially those which fathers sent home.

NARRATOR 3

In this one little was said of the hardships endured, the dangers faced,

NARRATOR 5

Or the home-sickness conquered.

NARRATOR 4

It was a cheerful, hopeful letter,

NARRATOR 2

Full of lively descriptions of camp life, marches, and military news;

NARRATOR 1

And only at the end did the writer's heart overflow with fatherly love and longing for the little girls at home.

FATHER (VOICE OVER)

Give them all my dear love and a kiss. Tell them 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, but remind them that while we wait we may all work, so that these hard days need not be wasted. 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 bosom 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.

NARRATOR 2

Everybody sniffed when they came to that part.

AMY

I am a selfish girl! But I'll truly try to be better, so he mayn't be disappointed in me by and by.

JO

I'll try and be what he loves to call me, "a little woman", and not be rough and wild; but do my duty here instead of wanting to be somewhere else.

MEG

We all will! cried Meg. I think too much of my looks, and hate to work, but won't any more, if I can help it.

NARRATOR 2

Beth said nothing, but wiped away her tears with the blue army sock, and began to knit with all her might, losing no time in doing the duty that lay nearest her.

MARMEE

Do you remember how you used to play Pilgrim's Progress when you were little things? Nothing delighted you more than to have me tie my piece-bags on your backs for burdens, give you hats and let you travel through the house from the cellar to the housetop?

AMY

If I wasn't too old for such things, I'd rather like to play it over again.

NARRATOR 1

We never are too old for this, my dear, because it is a play we are playing all the time in one way or another. Our burdens are here, (*she indicates her heart*) our road is before us, and the longing for goodness and happiness is the guide that leads us through many troubles and mistakes to the peace, which is the true Celestial City. Now my little pilgrims suppose you begin again, not in play, but in earnest, and see how far you can get before Father comes home.

MEG

Let us do it. It is only another name for trying to be good, and the story may help us; for though we do want to be good, it's hard work, and we forget, and don't do our best.

JO

We were in the Slough of Despond tonight, and Mother came and pulled us out as Help did in the book.

MARMEE

Look under your pillows, Christmas morning, and you will find your guidebook.

NARRATOR 4

They talked over the new plan while old Hannah cleared the table;

NARRATOR 5

Then out came the four little work-baskets, and the needles flew as the girls made sheets for Aunt March.

ALL

At nine they stopped work,

NARRATOR 2

and sang, as usual, before they went to bed.

NARRATOR 3

It had become a household custom, for the mother was a born singer.

NARRATOR 5

The first sound in the morning was her voice, as she went about the house singing like a lark; and the last sound at night was the same cheery sound, for the girls never grew too old for that familiar lullaby.

ALL

TWINKLE TWINKLE LITTLE STAR
HOW I WONDER WHAT YOU ARE.
UP ABOVE THE WORLD SO HIGH
LIKE A DIAMOND IN THE SKY.
TWINKLE TWINKLE LITTLE STAR
HOW I WONDER WHAT YOU ARE.

NARRATOR 1

Merry Christmas. Chapter 2.

NARRATOR 2

Jo was the first to wake in the grey dawn of Christmas morning. No stockings hung at the fireplace, and for a moment she felt as much disappointed as she did long ago, when a little sock fell down because it was so crammed with goodies. Then she remembered her mother's promise, and, slipping her hand under her pillow, drew out a little crimson-covered book.

She opens the book and begins breaking it in properly.

JO

Merry Christmas, Meg. Look under your pillow.

MEG

The Pilgrim's Progress by John Bunyan. The Pilgrim's Progress from This World to That Which is to Come. Delivered under the Similitude of a Dream Wherein is Discovered the Manner of His setting Out, His Dangerous Journey and Safe Arrival at the Desired Country.

Meg and Jo begin together and then Meg takes over the reading.

MEG & JO

As I walked through

Beth and Amy slowly wake, look for their books and join their older sisters.

MEG

The wilderness of this world, I lighted on a certain place where was a Den, and I laid me down in that Place to sleep: and, as I slept, I dreamed a dream. I dreamed and behold, I saw a man clothed with rags standing in a certain place, with his face from his own house, a book in his hand, and a great burden upon his back. I looked, and saw him open the book, and read therein;

JO

Unable to contain herself, her flair for the dramatic, takes over.
And as he read, he wept, and trembled and, not being able longer to contain, he brake out with a lamentable cry saying, What shall I do?

Amy is agitated with the proceedings.

MEG

Girls, Mother wants us to read and love and mind these books, and we must begin at once. We used to be faithful about it; but since Father went away, and all this war trouble unsettled us, we have neglected many things. You can do as you please; but I shall keep my book on the table here, and read a little every morning as soon as I wake for I know it will do me good, and help me through the day.

Amy slips out with her present behind her back as Narrator 1 as HANNAH, enters.

BETH

Where is Mother?

The three girls prepare the gifts for Marmee.

HANNAH (NARRATOR 1)

Goodness only knows. Some poor creeter come a-beggin', and your ma went straight off to see what was needed. There never was such a woman for givin' away vittles and drink, clothes and firin', replied Hannah, who had lived with the family since Meg was born, and was considered by them all more as a friend than a servant.

MEG

She will be back soon, I think; so have everything ready. Why, where is Amy's bottle of cologne?

JO

She took it out a minute ago, and went off with it to put a ribbon on it, or some such notion, replied Jo, dancing about the room to take the first stiffness off the new army slippers.

BETH

How nice my handkerchiefs look, don't they! Hannah washed and ironed them for me, and I marked them myself, said Beth, looking proudly at the somewhat uneven letters which had cost her such labor.

MEG

Bless the child! She's gone and put "Mother" on these instead of "M. March."

How funny!

BETH

Isn't it right? I thought it was better to do it so, because your initials are 'M. M.', and I don't want anyone to use these but Marmee.

MEG

It's all right, dear, and a very pretty idea, quite sensible, too, for no one can ever mistake them now. It will please her very much.

They hear the door open.

JO

There's Mother. Hide the basket, quick!

They begin to sing and greet Marmee, only to find it is Amy.

JO

Where have you been, and what are you hiding behind you?

AMY

Don't laugh at me, Jo! I didn't mean anyone should know till the time came. I only meant to change the little bottle for a big one, and I gave all my money to get it, and I'm truly trying not to be selfish any more. You see, I felt ashamed of my present, after reading and talking about being good this morning, so I ran round the corner and changed it the minute I was up; and I'm so glad, for mine is the handsomest now.

The door opens again and they restart the Marmee overtures.

JO, MEG, AMY & BETH

Merry Christmas, Marmee!

MEG

Many of them!

JO

Thank you for our books.

AMY

We read some,

BETH

and mean to, every day.

MARMEE

Merry Christmas, little daughters! I'm glad you began at once, and hope you will keep on. But I want to say one word before we sit down. Not far away from here lies a poor woman with a little newborn baby. Six children are huddled into one bed to keep from freezing, for they have no fire. There is nothing to eat over there, and the oldest boy came to tell me they were suffering hunger and cold. My girls, will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?

NARRATOR 5

They were all unusually hungry, having waited nearly an hour,

NARRATOR 4

And for a minute no one spoke.

JO

I'm so glad you came before we began!

NARRATOR 3

Meg was already covering the buckwheats, and piling the bread into one big plate.

BETH

May I go and help carry the things to the poor little children?

MARMEE

I thought you'd do it. You shall all go, and help me, and when we come back we will have bread and milk for breakfast, and make it up at dinnertime.

They journey to the Hummels.

NARRATOR 4

A poor, bare, miserable room it was,

NARRATOR 5

With broken windows, no fire,

NARRATOR 3

Ragged bed clothes, a sick mother, wailing baby,

NARRATOR 2

And a group of pale, hungry children cuddled under one old quilt, trying to keep warm.

MRS. HUMMEL (Narrator 1 as German mother)

Ach, mein Gott! It is good angels come to us.

JO

Funny angels in hoods and mittens.

They collect children from the audience as they do the following narration, feeding them, etc.

NARRATOR 1

In a few minutes it really did seem as if kind spirits had been at work there.

NARRATOR 4

The girls spread the table, set the children round the fire, and fed them like so many hungry birds

NARRATOR 3

laughing, talking, and trying to understand the funny broken English.

NARRATOR 1

The girls had never been called angel children before.

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