

SYNOPSIS

Title : **Little Women**
Author : **Louisa May Alcott**
Publish Year : **1983**
Publisher : **Signet Classic**

Little Women was originally written for children; however it soon came to be read and enjoyed by older people also. The story is largely autobiographical. The March girls are Louisa's own sisters and she herself is the heroine, Jo. The oldest daughter is Meg, who has to earn her living as a governess for a group of children in the neighbourhood. Next was Jo, a spirited tomboy, who is the central character of the book. Throughout the course of the book she develops a serious interest in writing and eventually decides that she would like to become an author. The third girl is Beth, a sickly child who rarely leaves the house, but who always enjoys life and has a positive attitude. The youngest is Amy, a selfish spoiled child who dreams of someday becoming a famous artist. The Mother, who is named Marmee, is portrayed as a patient, loving parent. The father is away serving in the army and is not a central character in the book.

The oldest sister Meg is very lovely and feminine. She often has a hard time understanding Jo and her independent free spirit. All of the March girls frequently display an unselfish attitude towards each other as well as to others less fortunate than themselves. During the Christmas season the girls were confronted with the problem of what to give Marmee, their mother. At first each thought only of her own desires and pleasures, but they eventually they ended up buying a gift for Marmee instead. Oh Christmas morning they insisted on sharing their breakfast with the Hummels, a poor family who did not have anything to eat.

The girls love perform plays. This is one of their greatest forms of entertainment. On New Years Eve, the March girls attended a dance and there Jo met Laurie. He soon became familiar part of their family circle and was especially close friends with Jo. He eventually falls in love with Jo and asks her to marry him. Jo really thinks of Laurie as a brother, and she thinks that she will probably remain an old maid who devotes her tie exclusively to writing. She tries to convince Laurie that they are not made for each other. At first Laurie is heartbroken, but he goes away to Europe where he later falls in love with and marries Amy. Jo does become an author and manages to sell many of her stories.

The saddest moment of the story is when Beth dies. Beth had always lived her life bravely and she is able to face death in the same way. This makes a great impression on Jo and helps her to cope with Beth's death. Jo later marries Professor Bhaer, a man who is quite a few years older than her.

On their mother's sixtieth birthday they all gather and hold a great celebration at Plumfield, a boy's school that Jo started with her husband. Marmee states that she could wish for nothing better than that their present happiness continue for the rest of their life.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Louisa May Alcott was born on November 29, 1832 in Germantown, Pennsylvania. She spent all her life around Boston and in Concord, Massachusetts where Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry David Thoreau were her friends and neighbours. Her father Amos Boston Alcott, was a transcendentalist philosopher, writer and teacher. His ideas of education were far ahead of his time. His marriage with Abba May produced four daughters. Their first child, Anna Sewal Alcott, was born on March 16, 1831. A year later Louisa May Alcott was born. She was named after her mother's sister Louisa May Greele. Their third daughter was born on June 24, 1835. They named her Elizabeth Peabody Alcott. Their fourth daughter was born on July 16, 1840. They named her Abigail May Alcott.

During Louisa May Alcott's childhood, her family moved to Boston, and she lived thereafter in the Boston Concord area. She had her early education from her father. Later on she was given instruction and guidance by Ralph Waldo Emerson and Henry Thoreau, family friends.

Louisa May Alcott was born into a family that loved books and writing. As soon as she was able to write, she was given a journal in which she could write her life experiences. This was a custom that she and her sister continued all their lives. Louisa began writing about her life, adventures and achievements at an early age. This became a habit for her. She admired some of the grown ups around her.

At age 16, Louisa decided she had to earn money to support her family. She started a little school, but it was not successful. She wrote for her students

that turned out to be her first book, *Flower Fables*, published in 1854. Afterward she went to Boston in 1849 to find work. During this period she wrote constantly. Her first novel, *Moods*, was published in 1864. When the American Civil war broke out, she assisted the North in nursing wounded soldiers until she herself became sick from overwork. She returned home to rest and in 1863 wrote *Hospital Sketches*, her first successful book. In 1867, the publishing house of Roberts Brothers in Boston urged her to write a story for girls. She hesitated but agreed to try, and wrote the first part of *Little Women*. She based the story upon her own experiences. The publication of *Little Women* in 1868 enable Louisa to give her family security and comfort. The book became so popular that readers demanded a sequel, which was published in 1869 as part II of *Little Women*. Later, *Little Men* (1871) continued the story of the March family. *An Old-Fashioned Girl* (1869) was based on Louisa's experience in earning her own living. They were followed by *Eight Cousins* (1874) and *Rose in Bloom* (1876).

Louisa May Alcott as a girl, a young lady and a mature woman had many dreams. By the tie of her death, she had attained financial success and achieved independence. On March 6, 1888 at 3:30 in the morning, she died peacefully from a deep dreaming sleep. She was buried at sleepy hollow Cemetery in the family plot on Author's ridge (Delamar, 1990:83).

In the novel *Little Women* Alcott wrote about experiences in the life of four sisters and their mother Marmee. In chapter I in the novel *Little Women*, sh began to write

“Christmas won’t be Christmas without any presents,” grumbled Jo, lying on the rug. It’s so dreadful to be poor!” sighed Meg, looking at her old dress. “I don’t think it’s fair for some girls to have lots of pretty things, and other girls nothing at all,” added Amy, with an injured sniff. “We’ve got father and mother, and each other, anyhow,” said Beth, contentedly, from her corner....(3)

Louisa May Alcott collected her thoughts from gazing out of the window at the whispering pine trees. From her thoughts, the parts of her story began to take shape. The title she made came from her father’s term for his four daughters-his “Little Women.”

Alcott’s main characters were the four Alcott sisters. Their lives were much like the Alcott’s lives. She gave her characters strong identity. Anna could be recognized in the oldest sister, “Meg.” She was pretty, domestic and fond of riches. Louisa was the aspiring writer, “Jo.” She was independent, brash and of passionate temperament. Beth had her own name from Elizabeth. She was a gentle and courage personality. May appeared as the artist, “Amy.” She was a little spoiled, charming and loving. Anna’s beloved, John Pratt, was drawn as John Brooke. The name was chosen because the Pratts were from “Brook Farm.” Additional characters had to be invented. She created them among the familiar circle of friends and relatives. The boy next door in the story came to her as she remembered two boys whom she called my boy.” She named “Laurie” after Ladislav Wisniewski whom she had met in Europe. Alf Whitman, the dependable friend, was “Lawrence.” Therefore, Alcott admitted that she had drawn Laurie and

Mr. Lawrence from these real people, but the other characters that were in the story were made up.