

APPENDIX I

BIOGRAPHY OF THE AUTHOR

Louisa May Alcott, the second daughter of Amos Bronson Alcott and Abigail "Abba" may was born in Germantown, Pennsylvania on November 29, 1832. At an early age, Louisa and her family moved to Boston, Massachusetts where her father pursued his teaching career by setting up the The Temple School. Bronson Alcott was well known for his controversial teaching methods which relied more on student involvement and a belief that children should enjoy learning. In 1840 the family moved to concord where prominent American author and close friend of the Alcott's, Ralph Waldo Emerson, helped the family to set up residence. Louisa enjoyedthe country atmosphere of concord and found her time divided between acting out plays with her sister which she had written and nature walks with Hendry David Thoreau. In 1843, the Alcott family took part in an experimental communal village known as the fruits land. Here Bronson Alcott wished to further his beliefs in transcendentalism and bring his daughters a a greater understanding of nature. Unfortunately the project failed and the family returned to concord in 1845 taking up residence at Hillside.

Unable to guarantee his family a steady income, Bronson moved the Alcotts back to Boston in 1849. At this point, Louisa began to feel more and more responsible for her family's financial needs and started taking on as many jobs as a young girl could find. She began reading for an elderly father and his invalid sister, but this eventually turned sour when Louisa received next to

nothing for her work. At the same time, Louisa and her sister Anna took to teaching small children and mended and washed laundry in an effort to help provide for the growing Alcott family. In 1852 Louisa's first poem, "Sunlight" was published in Peterson's magazine under the pseudonym, flora Fairfield. Although modest payment was received, Louisa was beginning a career that would bring her great fame and end her financial worries.

Three years later, in 1855, her first book, *flower fable* was published. At this point, the Alcott family moved to Walpole, New Hampshire but Louisa stayed on in Boston to further her literary career. Tragedy struck the family in 1856 when the third daughter, Lizzie, contracted scarlet fever. Lizzie would recover for the time being but her illness forced the Alcott's back to Concord where Emerson purchased Orchard House for the family. Lizzie's sickness returned and she passed away on March 14, yet happiness was soon to follow as Anna, the oldest announced that she was to be married. Anna's wedding and Lizzie's death forced Louisa to return to Concord house in 1857. She wished to help comfort her mother during this time and try to help alleviate the loss of two daughters.

Louisa saw that her loving heart was needed by more than just her family and she headed for Washington, DC. In 1862 to serve as civil war nurse, like many other nurses, Louisa contracted typhoid fever although she recovered, she would suffer the poisoning effects of mercury (the doctors at the time had used calomel, a drug laden with mercury to cure typhoid) for the rest of her life. Her stay in Washington prompted Louisa to write *Hospital sketches* which was published in 1863 followed by *Moods* in 1864. At this point Louisa's publisher,

Thomas Niles, told her that he wanted “a girls story” from her. Having spent her life with three of the most interesting girls, Louisa wrote furiously for two and a half months and produced *little women* based on her own experiences growing up as a young woman with three other sisters. The novel, published September 30, 1868, was an instant success and sold more than 2,000 copies immediately. In fact the country was so taken with Louisa’s story that her publisher begged for a second volume. April 4, 1869 saw the release of the second volume with a response of more than 13,000 copies being sold immediately. Alcott’s story of Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy had launched her into stardom and helped to alleviate the family’s financial problems. Louisa followed up her success with old fashioned girl in 1870.

Needing a break, Louisa and her youngest sister may headed off to Europe in 1870. The next few years, however, saw Alcott’s career grow and grow as book after book was published and enjoyed by huge audience of young readers. *Little Men* was published in 1871 followed by work in 1873, *Eight Cousins* in 1874, and *Rose in Bloom* in 1876. During this time, Alcott became active in the women’s suffrage movement, writing for “*The Woman’s Journal*” and canvassing door to door trying to encourage women to register to vote. In 1879 Alcott became the first woman in Concord to register to vote in the village’s school committee election. Unfortunately, Abba’s health was failing and she passed in November of 1877.

Yet sorrow was not to last long in the Alcott family as May announced her marriage to a wealthy European in 1878. May gave birth the following year, November 8, 1879 to Louisa May Nieriker. Sadly complications arose, and May

died December 29th of the same year. Her dying wish was for Louisa to care for her namesake, Lulu. In 1880 Lulu moved to Boston with Louisa and helped to bring joy and fulfillment to Alcott's life. In 1885 Louisa moved what remained of her family into elegant Louisburg Square, Boston. Still writing as best as she could, for the mercury poisoning she had received early in life was beginning to take its toll, Louisa published *Jo's Boy's* in 1886. Her father's health finally failed and he passed March 4, 1888. Two days later, at the age of 56, Louisa May Alcott died in Boston, leaving a legacy in wonderful books to be admired and cherished for generations to come.

APPENDIX II

SYNOPSIS OF THE STORY

Alcott preface *little women* with an excerpt from John Bunyan's seventeenth century work *the pilgrim's progress*, an allegorical novel about leading a Christian life. Alcott's story begins with the four March girls, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy, sitting in their living room, lamenting their poverty. The girls decide that they will each buy themselves a present in order to brighten the Christmas. Soon, however, they change their minds and decide that instead of buying presents for themselves, they will buy presents for their mother, Marmee. Marmee comes homewith a letter from Mr March, the girls father, who is serving as a union chaplain in the civil war. The letter inspires the girls to bear their burdens more cheerfully and not to complain about their poverty.

On Christmas morning, the girls wake up to find books, probably copies of *the pilgrim's progress*, under the pillows. Later that day, Marmee encourages them to give away their breakfast to a poor family, the Hummels. Their elderly neighbor, Mr Laurence, whom the girls have never met, rewards their charitable activities by sending over a feast. Soon Meg and Jo are invited to attend a New Year's party at the home of Meg's wealthy friend, Sally Gardiner. At the party, Jo retreats to an alcove, and there meets Laurie, the boy who lives with Mr. Laurence. While dancing, Meg sprain her ankle. Laurie escorts the sisters home. The Marches regret having to return to their daily routine after the holiday festivities.

Jo visits Laurie when he is sick, and meets his grandfather, Mr. Laurence. She inadvertently insults a painting of Mr. Laurence in front of the man himself. Luckily, Laurie's grandfather admires Jo's spunk and they become friends. Soon, Mr. Laurence meets all the sisters, and Beth becomes his special favorite, Mr. Laurence gives her his deceased granddaughter's piano.

The girls have various adventures, Amy is caught trading limes at school, and the teacher hits her punishment. As a result, Mr. March withdraws her daughter from school. Jo refuses to let Amy go with her to the theater. In retaliation, Amy burns Jo's manuscript, and Jo, in her anger, nearly lets Amy drown while ice skating. Pretty Meg attends her friend Annie Moffat's party and after allowing the other girls to dress her up in high style, learns that appearances are not everything. While at the party, she hears that people think she intends to marry Laurie for his money.

That year, the Marches form the pick wick club, in which they write a family newspaper. In the spring, Jo smuggles Laurie into one of the club meetings, and he becomes a member, presenting his new circle with a postbox. At the beginning of June, the Marches decide to neglect their housework. At the end of a lazy week, Marmee takes a day off too. The girls spoil a dinner, but everyone ends up laughing over it. One day, Laurie has English friends over, and the Marches go on a picnic with them. Later, Jo gets a story published for the first time.

One dark day, the family receives a telegram saying that Mr. March is sick in the hospital in Washington D.C. Marmee goes to tend to him, and Jo sells

her hair to help finance the trip. Beth goes to visit the Hummel, and after one of her visits, she contracts scarlet fever from the baby Hummel. Beth teeters on the brink of death until Marmee returns. Meanwhile, Amy spends time at Aunt March's house in order to escape the disease. Beth recovers, though not completely, and Mr. Brooke, Laurie's tutor, falls in love with Meg, much to Jo's dismay. Mr. Brooke and Meg are engaged by the end of part one.

Three years pass before part two begins. Mr. March is home from the war, and Laurie is nearly done with school. Soon, Meg marries and moves into a new home with Mr. Brooke. One day, Amy decides to have a lunch for her art school classmates, but poor weather ruins the festivities. Jo gets a novel published, but she must cut it down in order to please her publisher. Meanwhile, Meg struggles with the duties of keeping house, and she soon gives birth two twins, Demi and Daisy. Amy gets to go to Paris instead of Jo, who counted on the trip, because their Aunt Carroll prefer Amy's lady like behavior in a companion.

Jo begins to think that Beth loves Laurie. In order to escape Laurie's affections for her, Jo moves to New York so as to give Beth a chance to win his affections. There Jo meets professor Bhaer, a poor German language instructor. Professor Bhaer discourages Jo from writing sensationalist stories, and she takes his advise and finds a simpler writing style. When Jo returns home, Laurie proposes to her, but she turns him down, Beth soon dies.

Amy and Laurie reunite in France, and they fall in love. They marry and return home. Jo begins to hope that professor Bhaer will come for her. He does, and they marry a year later. Amy and Laurie have a daughter named Beth, who is

sickly. Jo inherits plumfield, Aunt March's house, and decides to turn it into a boarding school for boys. The novel ends with the family happily gathered together, each sister thankful for her blessings and for each other.