Oh, Zara! Beautiful Zara! *(Pulls imaginary pistol.)* I give you one final chance, or you die!

AMY. I love you, Roderigo.

JO. I'm not Roderigo, I'm Hugo.

AMY. Are you the hero or the villain?

JO. Well, which do you think?! I'm pointing a pistol at you. Amy, we have to perform this tonight! Aren't you at all acquainted with the story?

AMY. Don't worry. I know my lines.

JO. Well, speak them, then!

AMY. All right, let me get set. *(Sets a chair out to faint on.)* Here I go. *(Delivers her line:)* "I'm fainting!"

(AMY *faints into the chair.)*

JO. You can't faint into a chair—you have to just drop, or it's not fainting. Look here—do it this way: clasp your hands so— *(Staggers across the room.) This* is your line, Amy: Roderigo! Save me! Save me!

(JO *sings out a shriek and falls to the floor.)*

AMY. *(Squeaks:)* Roderigo! Roderigo!

(AMY *faints.)*

MEG. She sounds as though someone is sticking her with pins.

JO. Amy, are you seriously trying?

AMY. Yes, I'm trying—and you're not so brilliant. You don't look like Hugo the villain.

JO. Well, wait 'til I put on the big red boots. *(As Hugo:)* And I think— *(Draws imaginary sword.)* —the glint of my sword will impress you—

AMY. And you sound like you've got a frog in your neck, and I don't want to rehearse any more.

MEG. A frog in her throat, Amy.

AMY. I don't want to rehearse any more. We've rehearsed this play every day for a month and it's become tiresome.

JO. Is that so!

AMY. Yes, that's so. I'm nearly bored to tears with this stupid old play. Even if you did write it!

MEG. Amy, a play can't be any good unless it's properly rehearsed.

JO. It's too late. When the audience laughs at you, Amy, just don't blame me.

AMY. Marmee and Hannah won't laugh. They'll say I'm pretty!

JO. *(Groans, drops to her knees.)* They will, too, and you'll be satisfied! I see right through you, Amy. You're transparent as glass.

AMY. You do not. You don't know my thoughts.

JO. Oh, don't I? "Marmee and Hannah will tell me I'm pretty!" And that's all you want out of life. Christopher Columbus!

AMY. Is not. And don't swear.

JO. I'll swear if I like, and what's more— *(Sits up, puts her hands in her pockets, whistles.)*

AMY. Don't, Jo—it's so boyish!

JO. That's why I do it. You know where I belong?—with Father at the war. I'd disguise myself in a uniform and go to battle like any soldier.

AMY. Well, go if you must. You have the boots.

BETH. Don't tempt her, Amy.

JO. Yes, and wouldn't I fight fiercely? Fight and die, if I had to.

BETH. Don't say that, Jo!

JO. It's just talk, Bethy. But I won't be an old poke forever.

AMY. An old poke?

JO. A fellow with nothing to do but knit.

AMY. You aren't a "fellow."

JO. Am if I say so.

AMY. I detest rude, unladylike girls!

JO. And I hate niminy-piminy chits!

(AMY *puts her cloak on.)*

MEG. Now, Jo and Amy!

JO. Where are you going?

AMY. I have an errand.

JO. You can't go now. The pudding's almost done. We can't have you gone when the celebration's starting.

JO. May I call you that? Theodore is too much, but I like "Teddy" and I think it suits you.

LAURIE. Then call me Teddy.

(They ascend to the garret.)

So this is your special hideaway. May I really come in?

JO. Well, usually no one is allowed in but me. But, yes, you may.

(Sets a large cushion between them, sits, hugging her knees.)

I call it my garret and pretend that I'm a brilliant writer and that I live here, at the top of the house, midst a bustling city.

LAURIE. All alone?

JO. What of it?

LAURIE. Oh…nothing. Going to show me a story?

JO. Oh, I don't think so.

LAURIE. Oh…I'll wager you are a brilliant writer.

JO. Time will tell, but not today.

LAURIE. Well, this is capital—to have the whole attic to yourself.

JO. Yes, and actually I'm not alone. There's Scrabble.

LAURIE. Scrabble? Who or what is Scrabble?

JO. Oh, he's quite intelligent. Excellent listener. A rat—there he is behind your foot.

LAURIE. *(Jumps away:)* Yipes!

JO. Gone again. Good-bye, Scrabble!

LAURIE. I don't believe he exists at all!

JO. Oh, he does and I read him all my stories.

LAURIE. Should I be jealous?

JO. No.

LAURIE. Some people have a muse or an angel. Leave it to Jo March to have a rat!

JO. Oh, I do like you! Forgive me for being cranky. I'm writing a book of fairy tales. I've been working on it forever and the last story won't come out right. I'm afraid I've been lazy and restless since Christmas. All of us have, though we try to be good.

LAURIE. Perhaps you try too hard and in the wrong direction. You say you're cranky, lazy, and restless? That won't do. What you need is actual wickedness. I think you should smoke cigars.

JO. Mind your tongue, Teddy. My word, no one talks to me as you do.

LAURIE. Good!

JO. No one dares.

LAURIE. I think I'm about to be sent home.

JO. Yes, you are because I want to write.

LAURIE. All right, but first I want to show you something. Come to the window.

*(*LAURIE *leads her down to the window on the landing.)*

What do you see?

JO. A birdhouse?

LAURIE. It was a purple martin house, but I cleaned it out for a post office. There's a cubbyhole for each of us—for Meg, Amy, Beth, and for me and for you—so if I can't see you constantly, at least we can exchange letters.

JO. Splendid! It's positively literary. Get out of here, so I can write you a letter.

*(*LAURIE *exits.)*

Scene 6: Vanity Fair

*(*MARMEE *enters, sits in her rocker, takes up her needlepoint.* AMY *enters.)*

AMY. When is Meg coming home?

MARMEE. You asked me that a half hour ago, darling. Do you remember what I said?

AMY. She's not coming home 'til tomorrow.

MARMEE. That's right.

AMY. It seems like forever.

MARMEE. It's only a weekend.

(Lights up on JO *in the attic, writing in her fairy-tale book.)*

MARMEE. Yes, dear, she is. In fact, she wants out of bed already.

JO. Laurie did it all. I skated far ahead though I knew she was behind us and if she did die, it would be my fault! It's my dreadful temper!

MARMEE. I know, dear, I know.

JO. You don't know. You can't guess how bad it is. I'm afraid I'll do something horrible someday and spoil my life and everyone will shun me.

MARMEE. *(Takes* JO *in her arms:)* Jo, dear, listen. You think your temper is the worst in the world, but mine used to be just like it.

JO. Yours, Mother? Why, you are never angry.

MARMEE. I've been trying to cure it for forty years and have only nearly succeeded in controlling it. I am angry nearly every day of my life.

JO. You are, aren't you. You really are. When you fold your lips tight together—

MARMEE. Oh, do I?

JO. Yes, you do.

MARMEE. Well, I've had a hard time of it, Jo, and shed bitter tears over my failures.

JO. But you have some secret.

MARMEE. I don't think I do. Well, perhaps one, but it's a mystery.

JO. What?

MARMEE. Just that. It's a mystery—what makes people do as they do: myself, sometimes so bitter, and at other times, able to control my temper. And when I contemplate that, it makes it easier to forgive.

JO. You mean grace.

MARMEE. Yes! And I mean life itself—it's mysterious what makes people do things that annoy, petty things, sometimes terrible things that shouldn't be allowed and I find I must allow them. But often I don't understand.

JO. You understand one thing. That it's better not to explode.

MARMEE. *(Laughs.)* Yes! Usually so. I'll tell you what I understand— *(Embraces her.)* I understand you, my darling.

JO. You do, don't you.

MEG. I'm sure I did. We're all so grateful to you, Mr. Brooke. I can't imagine how to thank you.

BROOKE. *(Takes her hand:)* Shall I tell you how?

MEG. Oh, no—please don't!

BROOKE. I won't trouble you. I only want to know if you care for me a little, Meg.

MEG. I don't know…

BROOKE. I can wait. And you can choose to discover if you do.

MEG. But I don't choose! I'm all flustered. Please go away and let me be!

(AUNT MARCH *enters.)*

AUNT MARCH. What's all this?

MEG. Hello, Aunt March!

(BROOKE *flees to the dining room.)*

AUNT MARCH. I came to call on your father.

MEG. Father's not yet arrived home. I'm *so* surprised to see you.

AUNT MARCH. That's evident. And who was that?

MEG. It's Father's friend.

AUNT MARCH. And what is "Father's friend" saying to make you blush like a peony?

MEG. Mr. Brooke came to get his umbrella.

AUNT MARCH. Brooke? That boy's tutor? Making a proposal? You haven't gone and accepted him, child?

MEG. Hush! He'll hear you.

AUNT MARCH. Do you mean to marry this—this—Mr. Grook? If you do, not one penny of my money goes to you.

MEG. I shall marry whom I please, Aunt March, and you can leave your money to anyone you like.

AUNT MARCH. Highty tighty! You'll be sorry, when you've tried love in a cottage and found it a failure. This—Frook is poor and has no rich relations, has he?

MEG. No, but he has many warm friends—

AUNT MARCH. He knows *you* have got rich relations. I suspect that's the secret of his liking.

MEG. ...No.

JO. What else do I have?

MEG. Well, you have…nice hands. Lovely eyes.

JO. They always say that, don't they, when a girl's a little homely. Nice hands, nice eyes.

MEG. Jo! You have fine, strong features. And you have…your mind!

(JO nods through her tears, almost satisfied.)

Scene 5: Secrets

(A spring afternoon, teatime. JO *sweeps the dining room floor while* MEG *reads a letter aloud to her.)*

MEG. "And this afternoon, he sat up in bed." Marmee says Father is sitting up in bed, Jo.

JO. Good.

MEG. He's definitely better.

JO. Good.

MEG. The danger's almost past, she says. Stop sweeping that floor and have a cup of tea, Jo. You've swept that floor twice today already.

JO. You're right.

MEG. "—and I miss you all, but thank God, and John Brooke for his constant assistance." John Brooke…

JO. We've been gilded angels for more than a month! I've scrubbed, dusted, swept, darned a million socks and I need a change.

MEG. *(Dreamily:)* Don't you think he's kind?

JO. Who?

MEG. Mr. Brooke.

JO. Why shouldn't he be kind?

MEG. He's done so much for us.

JO. Yes. And?

MEG. That's all.

JO. The chores really are all done, aren't they?

MEG. Very much so.

JO. I need a change, I really do. I'm going to the garret to work on my war story.

MEG. I thought you were writing a mystery.

JO. Finished that. At the moment, I prefer soldiers. Battle plans. Armaments. Strategies.

*(*BETH *enters from outdoors.)*

Hello, Beth!

MEG. You look tired, Bethy. Where've you been all afternoon?

JO. I'm off to run a war, Beth—if you'd like a visit, I'm in the garret.

*(*BETH *sneezes.)*

MEG. Bless you!

BETH. I—Jo—the Hummels' baby has been sick so Hannah and I took them some porridge. And, well—I feel quite—not quite right.

JO. Oh, don't you, dear? Let me look at you. *(Places her hand on* BETH's *forehead.)* I don't believe you have a fever.

MEG. Here's a cup of tea. *(Pours.)* Where's Hannah?

BETH. Hannah…well, Hannah went back with the doctor to his office.

MEG. Oh? Is Hannah sick?

BETH. Oh, no. She'll be straight home from the doctor's.

JO. You do seem a little off, Bethy. Would you like to curl up in my garret bed? I'd love to have you. I can scribble and you can drink tea.

BETH. Yes!

*(*JO *and* BETH *ascend stairs.)*

MEG. I'm going to write Mother. Any messages?

JO. Won't you take a vacation, Meg?

MEG. But it's what I most want to do.

BETH. Don't tell her I'm sick.

JO. We won't. You're just tired.

*(*JO *and* BETH *exit.* LAURIE *enters, unnoticed by* MEG.)

MEG. *(To herself:)* Then, afterwards, I may write Mr. Brooke.

LAURIE. I'll do my best.

*(*LAURIE *exits.* MEG *and* AMY *rush to him and embrace him.)*

MEG. Oh, my heavens, Father!

AMY. It's Father!

FATHER. Hello, my dear Amy. Let's look at you, Meg.

AMY. Father, you're home! You're home!

FATHER. Ssssh. Where is she? My lieutenant? *(Goes to the bottom of the stairs.)* Guess who's home, Jo?

JO. *(Flies down the stairs, and into his arms:)* Father! Is it really you? Oh, Father! You look absolutely well!

FATHER. And you! You look fierce and wonderful. And let me see what's left of your hair.

*(*MARMEE *puts her finger to her lips, leads* AMY *and* MEG *out, leaving* JO *and* FATHER *alone together.)*

FATHER. Dear heart, thank you for the sacrifice.

JO. Oh, I didn't mind. *(Salutes.)* Army regulation.

FATHER. Well, you paid for my medicines, you know. Now, how's my Jo?

JO. I'm fine. Perfectly fine. With you home, how could I not be?

FATHER. There's something.

JO. Well, but it just seems that everyone is leaving us. Oh, but here you are, Father, home at last. Beth's gone. Meg is going. And now, I've sent Laurie away—I can't help it, but I won't marry him. I really can't, Father.

FATHER. No, perhaps not.

JO. I'm too young.

FATHER. Hmmm.

JO. That's all.

FATHER. There's some other reason, I think. What's on my Jo's mind?

JO. I always meant to…do things, you know. I never meant to marry.

FATHER. Well, that's a good reason to say no for now. What things do you mean to do?

JO. Oh, I'll sweep and work in the garden…

FATHER. Yes, and?

JO. —and iron the curtains, you know, and clean the carpets—

FATHER. Hmmm. And what about adventures?

JO. I'll have Hannah teach me to cook.

FATHER. What about artistic accomplishments?

JO. I'll—I could put violets in the window box and train a rose bush over the garden gate.

FATHER. What happened to writing?

JO. Nothing. I don't care for it—it's childish.

FATHER. Very strange. I don't know this young woman. Rather a drudge, I'd say. If I have the expression right, rather an *old poke.*

JO. Don't say that of me, Father! I just—I can't help it.

FATHER. What do you mean, you can't help it? I believe you could do almost anything you set your mind to. Really, Jo—you're trying my patience.

JO. Oh, no. Please ignore me. I'll come around, you'll see. Just, please don't pay me any mind.

FATHER. Jo, Jo, forgive your old Father. Something terrible is weighing you down. You really must tell me. Come, 'fess up.

JO. Well, it's simply…it's just that I told Beth…I promised Beth that I'd take her place and stay here at home with you and Mother and give up my wildness and my silly scribbling.

FATHER. Ah. That's it. I see, I see. And how did Beth respond to all these promises?

JO. She was too weak to answer. I don't like to remember it.

FATHER. Well, I'm going to answer for her. Mother and Father will take care of each other. Birds were meant to fly the nest, and in a year or so, you'll fly, too. Why, if I stayed home with my Mother and Father, would I be standing here now with my daughter, Jo?

JO. No, I suppose not.

FATHER. You're growing up. There's no stopping it—may as well go ahead. Beth would like to see you grow up. She loved you—your tenderness, but also your plans and ambitions. And as for your "silly scribbling," why, Beth would call it "writing," wouldn't she? She was always proud of your writing.