LOUISA'S
LITTLE WOMEN

Based on *Little Women* (Part One)
by Louisa May Alcott

Adapted for the stage by
Beth Lynch and Scott Lynch-Giddings

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PUBLISHED BY

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STORY OF THE PLAY

This play tells two interweaving stories: the story of the fictional March family, four teenage girls and their mother, during the American Civil War, and the story of their creator, Louisa May Alcott.

The *Little Women* story line begins and ends with Christmas, covering both great and small events in these women's lives from 1861 to 1862.

The "Louisa" story line explores the life of Louisa May Alcott in brief scenes which complement the scenes from *Little Women*: Louisa as a child, learning enlightened principles at her father's knee; as a teenager, befriended by Emerson and Thoreau; as a young nurse during the Civil War; as a famous author, fighting for women's suffrage.

AUTHORS' NOTES

Louisa's Little Women was conceived and realized as a vehicle for Louisa May Alcott's words to live on stage. This new adaptation places greater faith in Alcott's original creation, relying on her words and choices more scrupulously than its predecessors.

Furthermore, in seeking to keep faith with Alcott's intentions, it covers only what is now regarded as "Part One" of the novel. Throughout the latter half of the nineteenth century, the title *Little Women* applied specifically to this section. Part Two was generally published in a separate volume under one of several titles, such as *Little Women Wedded, Nice Wives* or most commonly, *Good Wives.* Alcott's notes indicate that she had not intended to marry off her Jo—corresponding to her own decision in life not to marry—and that the romantic complications of Part Two were created in concession to her publisher's demands. This adaptation is also unique in its inclusion of complementary scenes illustrating significant events in Alcott's life. These scenes, too, rely largely on her own words.

Due to the overwhelming fame of her greatest novel, few modern readers are aware of her prolific output. In fact, one of her novels, *The Long Fatal Love Chase*, finally found its way into print for the very first time in 1995. The scenes from Alcott's life include material from "A Pair of Eyes," one of her many melodramatic short stories; "Hospital Sketches," her fictionalized recollections from her service as a Civil War nurse; letters and journal entries recounting her involvement in the Underground Railroad, the women's suffrage movement, and her intimate friendships with Emerson and Thoreau; and a poignant, unpublished poem entitled "Love," which was found among her papers shortly after her death.

CAST OF CHARACTERS
(12 M, 9 W, 6 or more women as extras, doubling possible except Mr. Marsh/Brunson)

MRS. MARCH (**"MARMEE"**): Mother of the "Little Women."
MEG: Her 17-year-old daughter.
JO: Her 16-year-old daughter.
BETH: Her 13-year-old daughter.
AMY: Her 12-year-old daughter.
MR. MARCH: Their father, a chaplain in the Union army.
AUNT MARCH: Mr. March's wealthy, elderly aunt.
THEODORE LAURENCE ("LAURIE"): A 16-year-old boy, a next-door neighbor.
JOHN BROOKE: Early 20s, Laurie's tutor.
DR. BANGS: A family physician.
LOUISA MAY ALCOTT: Portrayed by a single actress at various stages of her life from childhood to old age.*
WIFE: A wealthy woman with hypnotic powers from Alcott's short story "A Pair of Eyes."
HUSBAND: Like "Wife," a character in Alcott's short story.
FRANK LESLIE: An Englishman, living and working in Boston as editor of *Frank Leslie's Illustrated News* periodical.
BRONSON ALCOTT: Louisa's father, a renowned educator and philosopher (the same actor as Mr. March).
HENRY DAVID THOREAU: An unconventional writer, thinker and naturalist.
JULIA WARD HOWE: A poet and civil rights activist.
AN ARMY SURGEON
A SOLDIER
AN ORDERLY
GILBERT LAKE: A young reporter.
EXTRAS: Young women portraying delegates, nurses and Amy's schoolmates

**Directors may wish to utilize a child actress for Act I, Scene 4, where Louisa is a 7-year-old girl.*

SYNOPSIS OF THE PLAY

ACT I

Scene 1: The office of Frank Leslie, publisher. Boston, MA, 1868.
Scene 2: The March family home. Christmas Eve, 1861.
Scene 3: The same. Christmas Day.
Scene 4: The Alcott home, Boston. Autumn, 1839.
Scene 5: The March home. Christmas evening.
Scene 6: Outside Emerson's house in Concord. Summer, 1846.
Scene 7: Outdoors, near the March home. September, 1862.
Scene 8: The National Congress of Women, Syracuse, NY. October, 1875.
Scene 9: The March home. November, 1862.

ACT II

Scene 1: The same. The afternoon of the same day.
Scene 2: Georgetown Union Hotel Hospital, Washington, DC. Mid-December, 1862.
Scene 3: The March home. A rainy November afternoon.
Scene 4: Georgetown Union Hotel Hospital, Washington, DC. Mid-January, 1863.
Scene 5: The March home. November, 1862.
Scene 6: The same.
Scene 7: The March home. December, 1862.
Scene 8: A street in Boston. December, 1887.
Scene 9: The March home. December, 1862.

SETTING

The entire play takes place in only two settings, the sitting room of the March family's home, and a "neutral" DS area, defined by special lighting. All of the scenes from Alcott's novel take place in the sitting room, except for Act I, Scene 7, an outdoor picnic. The complementary scenes illustrating events in Alcott's life take place in the neutral space.

The *Little Women* scenes take place between the Christmas seasons of 1861 and 1862. The sitting room includes: a spinet or upright piano and bench; an archway leading offstage to the foyer and front door; a window seat which overlooks the front or side of the house; a fireplace with tools; a small, potted fern plant decorated for Christmas (referred to in the script as their Christmas "tree"); a small, round dining/tea table and chairs with doilies; a sofa with pillows; an upholstered chair (referred to in the script as Marmee's chair); and a staircase near the front door leading to the bedrooms upstairs. Furniture for the publisher's office and the hospital include a simple desk, chair and cot.

ACT I
Scene 1

(AT RISE: 1868. The office of Frank Leslie, a publisher. LESLIE sits at a desk DSR, reading a manuscript of Alcott's short story "A Pair of Eyes." LOUISA, 36 years old, stands nearby watching the scene which Leslie reads, being enacted DSC by HUSBAND and WIFE. Husband stands before his wife, transfixed by her mesmeric powers.)

WIFE: Years ago I learned the mysterious gift I was endowed with, and fostered it. For, unblessed with beauty, I hoped its silent magic might draw others near enough to see, beneath this cold exterior, the woman's nature waiting there. The first night I saw you, I felt at once, "There is the one I seek!" I sensed your strength. I knew you would not easily submit. Yet witness how I have succeeded, beyond my hopes! How you bend to the merest whim of my will!

(With a look and/or gesture from HER, the MAN uncontrollably falls to his knees.)

HUSBAND: Yes! Yes, I know it's true—and I curse you for it!
WIFE: But, despite my powers, I resolved I would have your love a free gift—or none! You offered me your hand, and believing that it held a loving heart, I took it—only to find that heart barred against me, and another woman's name engraved upon its door! Was this a glad discovery for a wife to make?
HUSBAND: In Heaven's name, forgive me!
WIFE: If only you had given any sign of affection, any shadow of regret—but you did not. So, it has come to this.
HUSBAND: I beg you, take back all you have given me, leave me stripped of every earthly blessing—but free me from this unnatural subjection, which is more terrible to me than death!
WIFE: I will not.

HUSBAND: Are you implacable? Will you rob me of all self-control? All peace?
WIFE: I will. I have outlived my love, but pride still remains. I will not be pitied as an injured woman. I will have atonement for my grief. You owe me this, and I claim it!
HUSBAND: No! *(HE struggles to his feet.)* I will break this bond that holds me!
WIFE: Too late! Too late comes pity or pardon, liberty or happy life! Henceforth, you are the slave of this ring, and when I command, you must obey.
HUSBAND: No! I will leave this place, and never cross its threshold again!

(HE struggles to leave, making little progress, and obviously with great mental anguish.)

WIFE: *(With an idle gesture, SHE "releases" HIM, and he stumbles forward.)* Go when and where you choose, put land and sea between us—but when I summon you, despite all resistance, you will come back to me.
HUSBAND: Never!
WIFE: Oh, but you shall. I have bought you with my wealth, and bound you with my mystic art, and now, body and soul—
HUSBAND: No!! *(HE wails and flees from the stage, while his WIFE strides off, laughing triumphantly.)*

(LIGHTS up on LESLIE and LOUISA.)

LESLIE: Something less than a ringing endorsement of marriage, Miss Alcott—however apt.
LOUISA: Spoken with the cool detachment of an editor, Mr. Leslie—and a thoroughly married man, too. But I'm not trying to be satirical. This is pure blood-and-thunder, nothing more.
LESLIE: Have you a title yet?
LOUISA: "A Pair of Eyes," I think. Or, perhaps, "Modern Magic."

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