

Louisa and Her Little Women

By Claudia Haas

Email: claudiahaas12@gmail.com

<https://claudiahaas.com>

Copyright January 2, 2024

Louisa and her Little Women
By Claudia Haas

RUNNING TIME: 35-40 minutes

CAST: 8 (5 female, 3 male)

Louisa (female) 19-20; sees her writing as a necessity to life and a way out of debt

Anna (female) 20-21; wants a traditional, comfortable life; voracious reader of royalty

Lizzie (female) 16-17; homebody; few wants; loves kittens

May (female) 11; artist,* temperamental

*May was 10 at Hillside so you could go younger; I am playing with history just a bit

Alfie (male) 17-19; affable neighbor; fellow actor

John (male) 20; sort of courting Anna

Mr. Alcott (male) adult; father of the “little women;” intellectual, cannot hold a job

Mrs. Alcott (female) adult; mother of the “little women,” passionate social worker

Henry David Thoreau (male) 30-ish; young at heart and in spirit and seems young

*TIME: June-July 1850’s: There are varying dates as to when the Alcotts left Concord. Some say 1855. For their ages, I am thinking closer to 1855 but leaving it a bit vague.

SYNOPSIS: Louisa May Alcott said her years at Hillside were the happiest in her life. Much of *Little Women* was based on her years there with her sisters. The play chronicles the last two weeks at Hillside before they were forced to give it up due to financial hardship and move to Boston. The sisters were used to poverty but would do anything to at least stay together in one home.

Curtain Scene: It is in dim light so you can: 1. Not really paint the curtains. 2. Hang the 1-2 curtain panels up with the paint on them just prior to the scene. 3. Have extra sets of curtains and have May paint them and have the unpainted for the earlier part of the play. 4. Anything else you can think of. *Remember: after the curtains have been painted, they are removed so you don’t see them again.

Louisa and Her Little Women

SCENE 1

(Lights up inside the Alcott home – their “Hillside” home in Concord, MA. Piles of books and scribbles are everywhere. Maybe we spy MAY’S paintings. The dining room table has LOUISA’S atlas that she used as a desk along with pages and pages of writings. There are quills about, paints, music books, fabrics being sewn.)

LIZZIE enters and cleans off the dining room table as best she can – putting things “somewhere.”

LOUISA and MAY enter together. MAY has her school books and LOUISA has the mail and maybe a basket of sewing to finish. MAY dumps her school books on the dining room table as LOUISA sifts through the mail, squirrels away one letter – up her sleeve? in a pocket? and leaves the rest on the table.)

MAY

I am never going back! If Mary and Clara were on fire and I had a glass of water – I’d drink it. If Priscilla was struck in a ditch, I’d cover her with bugs!

LOUISA

So it was another delightful day at school?

MAY

And I don’t need you making fun of me. And is that soup I am smelling for dinner? Again? It’s too hot for soup!

(ANNA enters with books which she dumps on the dining room table.)

ANNA

And how is everyone this fine evening?

MAY

I want to lock all my classmates in outhouses.

LOUISA

A fate worse than death!

(LIZZIE enters.)

LIZZIE

Get everything off the table! *(Beat.)* Please. I just cleared it.

MAY

Are you making soup again?

LIZZIE

What else can I make with the few ingredients we have?

LOUISA

At least salt it. You never put in enough salt.

LIZZIE

And you use way too much.

LOUISA

I like food salty. It suits me.

ANNA

They say you catch more flies with honey than vinegar.

LOUISA

I'll keep that in mind if I ever become a frog.

LIZZE

Ahem. Table. Please. We are just setting it for four. Mother and Father are dining with the Hawthornes.

(They clear the table – putting things “somewhere.” LOUISA takes ANNA aside.)

LOUISA

Something's afoot. In all the years we have been here, Mother and Father have never dined with the Hawthornes.

ANNA

There's always a first time.

LOUISA

I wonder if we're moving again.

ANNA

Why would you say that?

LOUISA

Mr. Hawthorne is looking for a bigger house and conveniently Mother and Father are dining with them tonight. I am just putting two and two together.

ANNA

Maybe it's best to wait and see if it's true.

LOUISA

Maybe it's best to make plans if it is.

(LOUISA peeks at her letter..)

ANNA

Good news?

LOUISA

Probably not. It's skinny so there cannot be a check in it. Mr. Thoreau taught me that.

(LOUISA exits into kitchen.)

MAY

Three more days of misery and then school ends.

ANNA

Lou and I always wanted to go to a proper school. Consider yourself lucky.

MAY

I'd rather stay home with Lizzie. She wouldn't torture me.

LIZZIE

My good nature may expire soon if we don't get this table set.

LOUISA *(Entering)*

I added an onion. Old Man Clemons gave me one as a tip for hemming his pants.

LIZZIE

You know what Father says...

LOUISA

They grow underground which means they are a vegetable from the devil. I was feeling devilish.

ANNA

They do add flavor.

MAY

Which your soup needs.

LIZZE

You stay home and try and feed a family of six with what we have in the kitchen.

LOUISA

Is this "Lizzie" speaking? Sweet Lizzie who Father calls the "Sea of Tranquility."

LIZZIE

I'm sorry. It is hot and Heathcliff ran away and I guess I am out of sorts.

LOUISA

Heathcliff can't have gone far. He likes his dinner. Have you searched the attic?

LIZZIE

I've searched everywhere.

LOUISA

We'll look after we eat.

LIZZIE

Thank-you. Look. I even baked bread! Do you want me to bring the soup out or shall we serve ourselves?

MAY

Let's make clean-up easy and serve ourselves.

(LIZZIE and MAY exit into the kitchen. LOUISA opens her mail.)

ANNA

And?

LOUISA

No.

ANNA

I'm sorry. What did you send them?

LOUISA

The latest. "The Witch's Curse."

ANNA

The audience loved it. It's filled with passion!

LOUISA

I know. But according to the publisher:

"Our readers are of the female persuasion. As such, I think many murders are not suited to the delicate constitutions of our reader. If you have writings that are more tame and that quiet the emotions, we will be happy to read it." Sincerely, blah-blah-blah.

ANNA

That's encouraging!

LOUISA

That my writing is too excitable for women?

ANNA

That they're willing to read more of your writing. That one gentleman in Boston wasn't so kind.

LOUISA

Yes. The one that ended with, "please don't send anything else" was not encouraging.

ANNA

But still – you keep writing.

LOUISA

Ideas burst out of my hands. A small part of me believes that somewhere I will find an editor who is a good fit for my work. Maybe he isn't around yet. But will be in the future.

(MAY and LIZZIE enter with their soup and bread as ANNA and LOUISA exit into kitchen.)

How is it?

MAY

Not bad. A bit salty.

LIZZIE

That sneaky Louisa. She added salt when I wasn't looking. She always thinks she knows better than us.

LOUISA *(Peeking out.)*

And I do!

(MAY throws some rolls or bread at her.)

LIZZIE

I just baked that!

(There is the sound of a crash and a loud meow.)

LOUISA

We found Heathcliff!

ANNA *(Entering.)*

Another charming dinner at the Alcotts.

(And everyone settles down to their dinner, passing rolls and butter and

possibly all speaking about their day all at one as the lights go down.)

END OF SCENE

SCENE 2

(LIGHTS UP on the outskirts of the ALCOTT'S land. ALFIE is with LOUISA. LOUISA has a notebook. It is the following morning.)

ALFIE

It is a nice morning.

LOUISA

Yes. Charming.

ALFIE

I was wondering... I know you're busy ... you seem to always be busy these days... but I thought ... if it would suit you, of course...if you wouldn't mind...

LOUISA

Is there an actual question coming?

ALFIE

Would you like to take a walk through my farm? Lots of things have sprouted and the garden is filled with butterflies and well... I thought you might enjoy it.

LOUISA

That would be very special but/

(Thoreau approaches. He also has a notebook.)

THOREAU

Louisa! Sorry, I'm late. I was looking for notes for tutoring the girls later and I'm afraid my room is a clutter of paper.

LOUISA

It's not a problem. Alfie has been keeping me company. Alfie, I would love to have a walkabout on your farm.

ALFIE

But you are otherwise engaged.

LOUISA

Mr. Thoreau has kindly offered to advise me on my writing. With all my rejection slips, I could hardly turn him down. We'll do our walk another time?

ALFIE

Absolutely. Well... Good day to you both.

(ALFIE exits.)

THOREAU

Nice lad.

LOUISA

We've been friends ever since we moved to Hillside. He's always eager to please.

THOREAU

Indeed.

LOUISA

So, what do you think? Wait! Don't tell me yet. I need to get my head on straight.

(LOUISA paces.)

In a minute. *(Beat.)* All right. I think I'm ready.

THOREAU

It shows promise. Your edits are quite good.

LOUISA

Thank goodness. I redid the opening as you suggested.

“To and fro, like a wild creature in its cage, paced that handsome woman, with bent head, and restless steps. Some mental storm, swift and sudden as a tempest from the tropics had swept over her and left its marks behind. As if in anger of the beauty, all her ornaments had been flung away. Despair had murdered hope.”

Right from the beginning, I have put the reader midway into the story without any exposition. She's pacing. She's agitated. She threw away her jewels so she is probably rich. She is handsome – probably beautiful. Don't you think the readers now wants to know more?

THOREAU

I have no quibble with any of your writing. You entice the reader. But then you bring them down a slippery slope of blood and thunder. Not everyone wants to relax with blood and guts.

LOUISA

And why not? We are all bound to our bodies which is a mixture of blood and guts.

THOREAU

Which some people would like to forget about.

LOUISA

There's an endless stream of writings about achieving your heart's desire and it's all been done to death.

THOREAU

You will get no argument from me. But do know that the editors have to sell their magazines and if the stories prove to be too lurid and sales go down, that doesn't help anyone.

LOUISA

Am I supposed to write what I think people want to hear? Where's the honesty in that? Where's the joy of discovering your voice instead of hiding it?

THOREAU

I am probably the last person you should ask – for what do I have but a failed book.

LOUISA

It's a beautiful book – the details of your trip are exquisite. I felt like I was on the trip with you.

THOREAU

And I am grateful to have two fans. You and my brother. (*Beat.*) Tell me, did you ever think about writing about your world?

LOUISA

I don't think the life of a laundress and seamstress would delight many readers. They probably have enough dreariness at home and want to escape. I read to escape.

THOREAU

Here's an assignment: try walking through the woods and then go home and write your impressions on it. You don't have to worry about character or plot right now. Just exercise your eye and see if it can speak to your writing hand. It's freeing to notice your surroundings instead of living in your head. Look around. Right this very minute. What do you see?

LOUISA

All those cobwebs. They are beginning to dwarf the flowers. I should sweep them away.

THOREAU

But you can't. Because for all you know, they are handkerchiefs for the fairies. What if the fairies spread them around your flowers to protect them?

LOUISA

That idea is a bit whimsical for a naturalist.

THOREAU

To appreciate nature, you need a good eye and maybe a background in biology. But a touch of whimsy doesn't hurt. Try spending five minutes here watching and then write about it.

LOUISA

I don't have the time.

THOREAU

Trust me. You have five minutes. I'll wager that after five minutes of taking in what is good in the world, you will be more productive than ever. Deal?

LOUISA

(Beat.) Deal.

THOREAU

My tutor job awaits.. Today we will plant seedlings and speak of the goodness of the earth. Then I am off to my afternoon as a surveyor. You are not the only one with many jobs to try and put food on the table. Now, just stay here and soak in what the world gives you. I'll see you in a few days. I look forward to it. I will miss these times.

LOUISA

Are you leaving so soon?

THOREAU

No. But I thought ... I was told that your family... forgive me, I misspoke. I often do these days.

(THOREAU exits. LOUISA stands confused and impatient – maybe shaking her leg or her hands waiting for the five minutes to pass. And soon, she settles down, breathes in the aroma of the woods and looks at the sky as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 3

(The next afternoon. LIZZIE is in the living room bandaging MAY'S hand. LOUISA enters.)

LOUISA

I need a break! May? What are you doing home early?

MAY

Before you criticize, Mother says I was right to come home. Because teacher rapped me on my hand until my knuckles bled.

LIZZIE

Mother says she doesn't have to return to school.

LOUISA

There are only two days left.

MAY

I never have to return to that horrid place ever!

LOUISA

Why don't you start from the beginning?

MAY

I punched Charley. He said my flower drawings were terrible.

LOUISA

How did he see your flower drawings?

MAY

I was finishing one up during arithmetic.

LOUISA

Because arithmetic is a good time to start drawing.

MAY

I already know that lesson by heart. I didn't want to waste my time listening to the same stuff over and over. And then Charley peered over at me, took my pencils and said they were the ugliest flowers he'd ever seen.

LOUISA

So you punched him!

MAY

I sure did.

LOUISA

That is reasonable.

LIZZIE

Understandable maybe. But not reasonable. You are old enough to control your temper.

MAY

Now your sounding like Teacher. She came over and rapped my hands hard. Twice for punching Charley and twice for not doing the arithmetic. When I showed her my arithmetic work for the day – which was perfect – she rapped me again. Is that “reasonable?”

LOUISA

No. I'd like to give her knuckles a few raps! And Charley. What did Teacher do next?

MAY

I didn't stay to find out. I grabbed my drawings, shoved Charley, got my pencils back and ran home.

LOUISA

And I am glad you did. Horrid teacher! I guess you'll have to get your education the same way we all did – from Father. He's not a great breadwinner but he is a good teacher.

LIZZIE

You shouldn't talk like that.

LOUISA

Just the truth. Don't we all work to support this family?

MAY

If I'm not in school, I could also work.

LOUISA

Those days will come soon enough. Be grateful you have time for your drawing.

MAY

I can't draw with my hands all swollen.

LOUISA

You've captured our garden perfectly. I do declare you are a genius with color. They're giving me some ideas.

(ANNA enters.)

ANNA

What's this? A sister gathering? Why wasn't I invited?

LOUISA

You're home early. I was just taking a small break.

ANNA

The twins are sick so they let me go for the day. What's everyone else's excuse?

MAY

I ran away from school.

LIZZIE

I was just cleaning her wounds.

ANNA

I may faint from all this excitement. But I am sure there is some soup to sustain me.

LIZZIE

You will be happy to know that there is no soup. Mother is concocting something in the kitchen.

OTHERS (ad lib)

Oh, thank goodness, etc.

LIZZIE

If that's the thanks I get for keeping you warm and fed most of the winter...

ANNA

Dear Lizzie. We love you but it is June and we are warm enough.

LIZZIE

I feel underappreciated. I am going to visit the kittens. At least, they appreciate me.

(LIZZIE exits.)

LOUISA

My work break's over. My fingers are itching to hem yet another one of Clement's trousers. I swear he must be shrinking. It such an exciting life, isn't it?

(To ANNA.)

Take this and read it later. When you are not near me and I can't see you reading it. It's just ... some scribblings. It's different. Mr. Thoreau's idea. See you all later for dinner.

MAY

Were you going to tell me something about my drawings?

LOUISA

Later. Let me give it a think. The hems of Clems await!

(LOUISA exits.)

MAY

She always does that. She says something mysterious and then leaves.

ANNA

Lou knows how to make an exit. And what are you doing home?

MAY

I was teased at school and I need some cheering up.

ANNA

I could read to you from my book about the French Court. There's a wonderful page describing the gowns the princesses wore. I can read you the description and you can draw it.

MAY

I'm in the mood for flowers. They're cheery and more real than royal gowns. What do you think?

ANNA

The tulips look like they have too many lips.

MAY

They call that "artistic license."

ANNA

But then nobody knows what they are.

MAY

You did!

ANNA

You asked for my opinion!

MAY

And the correct answer would be, "These are perfect, May. You will be a fine artist one day."

ANNA

"These are perfect, May. You will be a fine artist one day."

MAY

You're just saying that.

ANNA

Just remember what a good sister I have been to you when you're rich and famous for your paintings.

MAY

Do you really think that could happen?

ANNA

I am counting on it. I foresee you being in great demand as a flower-painter and Louisa writing novels that will shake the world. As for me, I will get married and settle down in Concord and send the two of you my dressmaker bills. Maybe I can find a French seamstress.

MAY

I love how you dream.

ANNA

In the end, sometimes that's all that we have.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 4

Lights up on the Alcott Family – LOUISA, ANNA, MAY, LIZZIE, and MR. and MRS. ALCOTT.

LOUISA

We are moving.

MRS. ALCOTT

Yes.

LOUISA

And you were going to tell us – when? When we saw the furniture being moved from the house.

MRS. ALCOTT

I believe we just told you now.

MAY

I don't want to move! I love it here.

MRS. ALCOTT

We have found ... new opportunity in Boston. It's a thriving city and it will be good for all of you to get out of the confines of Concord and experience more of the world.

LOUISA

We are in debt, aren't we?

MR. ALCOTT

That's none of your concern. The opportunities for you in Boston are tremendous. The city is filled with history, culture, and learned people/

LOUISA

/people that you will spend time philosophizing with while the rest of us work our fingers to the bone to support your non-working lifestyle. Mark my words, we are going to be expected to work off more of Father's debts.

MAY

Since I am not going back to school, I can work to help out. I am more than happy to sacrifice my schooling for the betterment of this family.

LOUISA

You will go to school in Boston. None of us could go. One of us needs to be properly taught.

MR. ALCOTT

I made sure you had a fine education – even though our society does not think women have need of that. I have looked out for your mind as well as your body and soul.

LOUISA

You have dragged us through countless experiments. You left us to harvest the farm at Fruitlands while you lay all comfy in your bed with one of your convenient headaches. No wonder we are always in debt. You remember, Anna? How old were we? Eleven? Twelve? Out in the bitter cold digging up failed crops.

MR. ALCOTT

The farm would have succeeded if we had had enough committed people. People are afraid of new ideas/

LOUISA

/people are afraid of starving to death/

MR. ALCOTT

/my dear daughter who believes she knows everything at the tender age of nineteen – you would do well to open the drawers of your mind to listen instead of opening them to make sweeping pronouncements. Your mind is a library. Use all the information you have stored for honesty discussion, for compassion. Close the drawers that are mere scribbings with nothing to offer but discontent. You will find life much sweeter.

(A moment.)

MAY

Can we go back to my schooling? Because it is not as much fun as you think to be the poorest student in class.

LOUISA

Would you rather clean the dirty laundry of others? I'd rather be a poor student than spend hot summer days over a hotter washtub scrubbing until my fingernails fall off.

MAY

I would rather draw.

LOUISA

And I would rather write.

LIZZIE

Do the kittens stay here or go with us?

MR. ALCOTT

I... hadn't thought about it.

LOUISA

It would be good to address the things that matter in this family instead of making another dubious financial decision.

MR. ALCOTT

And the kittens matter?

LIZZIE

They matter to me.

MRS. ALCOTT

Then, we will figure it out. I don't know if we can take them all but I promise you they will all have loving homes. As will we.

LOUISA

Homes? As in the plural?

MRS. ALCOTT

Of course we will spend as much time together as possible.

MR. ALCOTT

Boston apartments are small. I'm afraid we cannot afford a place that will house the six of us. But we have arranged accommodations for Anna and Louisa. For free rent and meals, Anna will teach cousin Abigail's children. Louisa will be working for cousin Seymour and his family.

LOUISA

Teaching?

MR. ALCOTT

Household chores.

LOUISA

So a maid.

MRS. ALCOTT

Lizzie will stay home and help with my chores so I can work with the immigrant population. They are sorely lacking goods and services. We are fortunate to have homes. Others are not as fortunate.

LOUISA

And what will Father do?

MR. ALCOTT

This and that. I will be available to help where I can. Meanwhile, I do have some business to attend to. There are a lot of loose ends to tie up. I may be back late.

(MR. ALCOTT exits.)

MRS. ALCOTT

Everything will be fine. We've done this before. I'll see to dinner.

(MRS. ALCOTT exits.)

ANNA

They do have larger libraries in Boston. I bet they have more books on Louis XII than our one paltry book here.

LIZZIE

Since the apartments are small, there will be fewer chores.

MAY

I don't want to leave! All my memories are here.

LOUISA

Didn't you say that you were more than happy to leave?

MAY

School! I am happy to leave school. But I want all of my Christmasses here – in this big old rickety house with the barn.

LIZZIE

And the kittens.

LOUISA

Listen to me, sisters. When we are properly on our own, we are never going to get into debt. We will pay our own way or do without. That will give us freedom to live as we like.

ANNA

Imagine having the money to buy books from the bookstore and have the prettiest frock in town.

MAY

Or paints in every shade.

LIZZIE

And shelves filled with sheet music. And a kitten in every basket.

ANNA

We're dreaming.

LOUISA

I never dream. I plan.

ANNA

It looks like our parents have already made our plans.

MAY

If the plan involves a classroom, I will claw my way out.

LOUISA

That's the spirit!

ANNA

Sometimes ... it's better to accept what is. And do whatever comes next with grace.

LOUISA

That's Lizzie's job. To accept all.

LIZZIE

Is that what you think of me? That I am some sort of doormat where you can wipe your feet on me and I say, "thank-you?" I just don't like it when we fight. It tears me up inside. Nothing good comes of it. *(Pause.)* I'm going to help with dinner. And I would love it if all of you would be grateful to whatever lands on the dinner table.

(LIZZIE exits.)

LOUISA

Our little kitten has claws.

ANNA

Which she doesn't like to use. It's best that we remember that.

(Beat.)

MAY

I'll get dishes to set the table.

(MAY exits.)

LOUISA

I guess it's time to get into the spirit of things. I'll see what I can do to help.

(As LOUISA starts to go to the kitchen, ANNA stops her.)

ANNA

Your poem... it's wonderful.

LOUISA

Do you truly think so? From deep inside the far reaches of your heart?

ANNA

I felt like I was there – watching the sun. Isn't that words are supposed to do? Bring you to another place? I just finished a book called *The Initials* by a Baroness – Jemina Tautphoeus. She moved from England to Germany and wrote about the town she settled in./.

LOUISA

/wait! You read a book that was not about a royal family?

ANNA

/Stop! I was about to compliment you.

LOUISA

Please, continue.

ANNA

When I read the book – I thought Lou could write this. Lou could write about the people in Concord and make them interesting. Maybe everyone has a story. They did in the book.

LOUISA

You think I could write something sweet? I am the mistress of thunder and blood!

ANNA

But that poem you wrote showed another side of you. It placed me in the clearing just as the sun rose.

LOUISA

I don't know what to say. At the moment, words fail me.

ANNA

Words will never fail you.

(LOUISA hugs ANNA and they exit into the kitchen. The lights fade to black.)

SCENE 5

(It is evening. LIZZIE is curled up next to or by LOUISA doing embroidery or something similar. ANNA and MAY are similarly next to each other. ANNA is reading while MAY is drawing. It's a cozy setting.)

MAY

I've waited long enough. Tell me your idea for the set of the play, Louisa.

LOUISA

Does it matter? Since we will be gone in a few weeks and the new play will never see the light of day. Or night.

MAY

It matters to me. I can still do some improvements on my settings and maybe Boston will have an old barn where can do our theatrics. Or we can do it in our new apartment/

LOUISA

The new apartment that won't even fit all of us.

MAY

Come on, Louisa. Let's just make-believe it is happening.

ANNA

She's right. It will take our minds off our leaving.

LOUISA

Why not? Your garden drawing struck me. You had all those vines and the long stems and oversized leaves. I wondered what the painting would look like if you did it all in grey and black.

MAY

No color? But I like things pretty. You told me I was a genius with color, remember?

LOUISA

So if you're already a genius with color, you should work on your weaknesses. Imagine if your weaknesses became your strengths. If you could do both form and color – why there would be no end to what you could paint.

MAY

Gardens need color. Right, Anna?

ANNA

It is traditional.

LOUISA

Let's buck tradition.

MAY

What do you think, Lizzie?

LIZZIE

I think that both are interesting.

MAY

That's not an answer.

LIZZIE

You asked for my opinion. Don't ask if you don't like the answer.

(LIZZIE and MAY make a face at each other.)

MAY

You should take your own advice. You write the same things over and over.

LOUISA

I do not! I write about counts and kings and slaves and peasants...

MAY

Who all kill each other. You're all about blood. Maybe you should write about something closer to home.

ANNA

We're arguing about nothing. The playacting is done. We're never going to be able to perform Dickens' short story or whatever it is that you're scribbling now. We are destined for a mundane life.

MAY

Maybe you should stop reading about kings and queens because it depresses you that you are not one of them.

ANNA

Maybe you should appreciate that you are the one who gets to go to school and stop whining like hungry kitten.

LIZZIE

Kittens don't whine. They mew. Softly.

LOUISA

Stop squabbling. I am trying to edit something and I cannot think with the "sisterly-love background noise."

MAY

How many murders are in this story?

LOUISA

None.

LIZZIE

How much blood?

LOUISA

No blood. Just sunshine.

MAY

It's hard to believe that you have given up blood for sun.

LOUISA

I am merely taking my own advice and doing what you should be doing – working on my weaknesses.

MAY

Why don't you read the poem to us?

LOUISA

No.

MAY

Are you worried we won't like it?

LOUISA

Not at all. But I am in a contrary mood where I think I should have the sun fall from the sky and burn everyone to a crisp. But my heart is not in it. My heart is not into anything right now. We need something ... tangible. Something to hold onto. A plan of some sort. Yes, that's what I need – to devise a plan so we can stay here.

ANNA

There's nothing we can do to change Mother's or Father's mind. Nothing.

LOUISA

I'm not thinking of changing their minds. I'm thinking of changing their debt. Suppose we could find a way to decrease the debt? Then, we could stay here. Let's make a list of all the things we could do to earn money. Be creative. I bet I could work at the mill. I work everywhere else.

ANNA

They don't allow women.

LOUISA

Ha! They don't want to pay a woman a living wage. If a man can do it, I can do it.

ANNA

They'll take one look at your skirts and laugh you down the hill.

LOUISA

True. But I wonder if Alfie's family could use a farmhand. I could do that. Quick, May – write this down. "Louisa will look for farm work."

ANNA

So, if you are working in a farm all day, I suppose I could help mother with the sewing.

LOUISA

That's the spirit. Add that to the list, May. Let's take charge. Let's steer our own ship!

LIZZIE

I could hem. My fingers are small and I make very even stitches. All of you have admired my cross-stitch.

LOUISA

Perfect. These are great ideas. Our teapot is boiling hot.

MAY

I can paint houses! It's the same as painting on paper but with a bigger paintbrush.

ANNA

No. You are the one who needs to go to school. We may need you tom support all of us later.

LOUISA

We are a strong ship sailing to a land that's debt-free. Are we together on this?

ALL OTHERS (Not in unison.)

Aye, Aye Captain!

(LOUISA Holds out her hand and gestures for the others to join her. They gather in a circle and they all touch hands.)

LOUISA

All for one!

ALL

And one for all!

(The lights fade to black..)

SCENE 6

(It is the next morning. ALFIE and LOUISA are outside the Alcott home.)

LOUISA

What do you think?

ALFIE

You want to be – a farm hand? But – it's not seemly.

LOUISA

Balderdash. It's no more unseemly than slaving over a hot tub of dirty laundry every day.

ALFIE

You'd get muddy.

LOUISA

I've been muddy. I lived.

ALFIE

I don't see my parents hiring you. I'm sorry. My mother would be mortified.

LOUISA

It's funny what mortifies people these days. A woman working in the field would be scandalous. But a family unable to put food on the table barely lifts an eyebrow.

ALFIE

It's not fair. I agree. But you're not going to change people.

LOUISA

I am not looking to change people. I am looking to earn an honest wage. Then we won't have to move to Boston.

ALFIE

There are other ways. Other ways of staying here. Have you perhaps thought about ... marriage?

LOUISA

No.

ALFIE

Oh. *(Pause.)* You're old enough.

LOUISA

Am I a spinster now?

ALFIE

NO! You're far too pretty for that.

LOUISA

Pretty is as pretty does. But thank-you for that.

ALFIE

I will inherit the farm someday. A farmer's wife is not a bad life.

LOUISA

Not at all. One day, someone will be lucky to have you.

ALFIE

This is not going as I planned. Please listen to me. Hear me out.

LOUISA

I'm listening.

ALFIE

I love you, Louisa. I have for some time now. I've only just beginning to realize it. I would give you a comfortable home. Time for you to write. I'd do anything/

LOUISA

/Please. No more. I care for you, Alfie. I always have and I always will. But you're too good for me. I won't make you happy. I know that deep in my bones.

ALFIE

I don't agree.

LOUISA

You'll come around. You'll see the truth in this when you find the right person who will love you without pause, without equivocation. I don't want to lose you as a friend. You have been my dearest, closest companion for five years and at present, that is exactly what I need. Please let us stay close – as a brother and sister would be.

ALFIE

I'll... try.

(ANNA and JOHN enter.)

LOUISA

No tutoring today?

ANNA

The family heard we are leaving and quickly found a new teacher for the twins. Our plan is not going well. If anything, we now have less income than before. Hi, Alfie. Do you have any need of a few farmhands? I'm not as strong as Louisa. And I don't care for mud but I will do my best.

ALFIE

That's not exactly a ringing endorsement. I had best be on my way.

(ALFIE exits.)

ANNA

Did I say something wrong?

LOUISA

Let's just say that he doesn't need a farmhand but a wife would be acceptable.

ANNA

What?

LOUISA

Later. What do you think, John? Do you think I would be a suitable farmhand?

JOHN

I don't rightly see that. It's not traditional.

LOUISA

Oh thunderation. If we could overcome what is deemed "traditional," the world would be a finer place.

JOHN

I don't disagree. But my parents would. And they make all the decisions about the farm.

LOUISA

But you will inherit it one day. Surely you have some input.

JOHN

I don't wish to be farmer. It can go to my brother. I am happier in an office. Much cleaner.

ANNA

Oh. Forgot – here's the reason John and I joined you. You have mail.

LOUISA

Probably a rejection.

ANNA

It's not skinny.

LOUISA

It's... oh my. That's a check. A real, honest-to-goodness check – in my name! A check for five dollars. FIVE DOLLARS, ANNA! I need to show this to Mother. This could change everything.

(LOUISA exits.)

ANNA

Thanks for keeping me company this afternoon. It helped to keep my mind off things.

JOHN

Is the move a certainty?

ANNA

It's looking like it. Our plans to earn extra money are not working.

JOHN

Will you ... visit?

ANNA

I get one day off every two weeks. Mother and Father will probably expect me to visit them.
(*Beat.*) Will you ... visit?

JOHN

I occasionally have the opportunity to do business in Boston. I will try. I was hoping to be part of your theatrical group. I thought I could maybe be ... a dashing lover?

ANNA

And I would be the sweet young thing in distress. And you – would save me.

JOHN

I wish I could... save you from Boston. Who knows? There's theatre in Boston. You could be the toast of the town.

ANNA

I think that dream is gone. I need to help support the family.

JOHN

Anna? Dare to dream another dream. Who knows? It may come true.

ANNA

I do have another dream. Who knows if that can come true? (*Beat.*) I should help with dinner. Feeling sorry for our situation won't change a thing. The family still needs to eat.

JOHN

I'll see you before you leave?

ANNA

That would be lovely.

(And with an affectionate gesture between the two, JOHN exits. As ANNA starts for her house she meets with MRS. ALCOTT and LOUISA on the porch. MAY is nearby listening.)

ANNA

I was just coming in to help with dinner. Has Louisa told you the good news?

MRS. ALCOTT

Yes. The money will come in very handy for the move. We need to clean the curtains. Mrs. Hawthorne loved them and I want them in tip-top shape.

LOUISA

Mother, if I earned a check this week, I can do it again and again. Give me a chance.

MRS. ALCOTT

Can you earn two checks a day for a year? Can any writer do that?

LOUISA

Do we need that much?

MRS. ALCOTT

I'm afraid we need even more than that. Still write, Louisa. Just don't expect things to change overnight.

(MRS. ALCOTT goes into the house. LOUISA and ANNA may have a hug. MAY runs into the house slamming the door which startle the SISTERS as the lights go to black.)

SCENE 7

(It is night time – after midnight. MAY comes downstairs with her paints. She either throws some paint on the curtains or paints them a bit manically with a brush. When she is done, LOUISA comes downstairs.)

LOUISA

Hello? Who is up at this time? Hello.... May! You should be in bed.

MAY

I was. I will go back now.

LOUISA

What are you doing?

MAY

Nothing.

LOUISA

The curtains... what have you done to the curtains?

MAY

I splotted paint all over them. I fixed it so we won't have to move. The Hawthornes will never want this house now. You said you had a plan. Well this is my plan. Your plan didn't work.

LOUISA

I shouldn't have spoken until I was sure of the outcome. I gave you hope. Oh Maisey-May, I shouldn't have done that. I'm sorry.

MAY

My plan will work. You'll see. They're not getting the curtains so they won't want the house.

LOUISA

Oh my sweet, little baby sister – they'll just get new curtains.

MAY

I love it here. I'm not going to Boston. I'll live in our old barn with the kittens. I won't leave.

LOUISA

It's not forever.

MAY

I won't leave.

(LOUISA embraces MAY as the lights fade to black.)

SCENE 8

(It is the next morning. LOUISA, ANNA, and LIZZIE enter. They have been up since the early morning hours scrubbing the curtains.)

ANNA

It's no use. We can't get all the paint out.

LIZZIE

I'll try again in an hour. They just need to soak.

(MRS. ALCOTT enters.)

MRS. ALCOTT

Good morning. Oh my – didn't we have more curtains?

LIZZIE

They're in the washtub.

MRS. ALCOTT

I did want them clean. Is there more to this story?

MAY

I did it. And I don't feel bad at all. I painted the curtains. They're really ugly now and we can't sell the house.

MRS. ALCOTT

Of course, we will sell the house. But we'll probably get less money for it.

LOUISA

It's my fault. I told May we wouldn't have to move. That I'd figure out something – I'd make a plan. I should have kept my mouth shut.

MRS. ALCOTT

There was a plan?

LOUISA

Yes. I really thought I could get us out of debt.

MRS. ALCOTT

Don't you think I have worked the numbers every which way to see if we could stay? You can be headstrong, Louisa. Sometimes it's good to trust your mother. I'll see to breakfast.

(MRS. ALCOTT exits.)

ANNA

Now what?

LOUISA

We pack.

LIZZY

It's a new beginning.

MAY

It's over, then?

LOUISA

Let's take a page from Lizzie's book. It's a beginning. Just think, you'll never have to see Charley again.

MAY

That's a good thought.

(MR. ALCOTT enters.)

MR. ALCOTT

Good morning. *(Beat.)* Didn't we have curtains?

LIZZIE

They're in the wash.

MR. ALCOTT

That's the spirit! Thank you for helping to get everything fresh and ready for the new owners. I am off to town. Your mother has arranged for some families to pick up our beds. Apparently there is a need. And if there's a need, your mother will find it.

(MR. ALCOTT exits.)

LOUISA

All right. To work, Sisters! I'll go through the books. I know which ones I borrowed.

LIZZIE

I'll help mother pack up the kitchen. The kitchen is tiny in Boston and we won't have room for everything.

ANNA

I'll sort through the fabric. We can't afford to have dresses made anyway.

LOUISA

Save the light blue for you. You always look good in that color.

MAY

I could save everyone the trouble and just throw paint everywhere so that the Hawthornes would find the place unbearable.

ALL except MAY

NO!

MAY

Just a thought.

LOUISA

What is this stuck between books? Is this something to be thrown? Sisters! Remember this! Mother made this angel for Anna and I when we were little. It went on top of our Christmas tree. With a new piece of fabric and a needle and thread, I can make her as good as new. She is our past, present and now – our future.

LIZZIE

Our sweet angel!

MAY

I wonder why she wasn't put into our Christmas box.

LOUISA

I think it was serendipity. That we were meant to find her today. We are taking the angel. I will get her new ribbons for her halo. Remember our first Christmas here?

LOUISA

We didn't have a tree but Father cut down branches and plopped them in a pot.

LIZZIE

And we decorated them with cranberries and a few cookies. And perched the angel on the tallest branch...which kept falling over...

LOUISA

We were afraid to put a candle on the branches because they were turning brown and Mother was afraid of a fire.

LIZZIE

We'll never have another Christmas here again. I wish I knew last year that it would be our last one. Then I would have memorized the candle glow...

MAY

The cookies we ate from the tree before the day began. I wish...

LOUISA

I know what she's wishing.

ANNA

So do I. You're wishing for one more Christmas at Hillside, isn't that so?

(LIZZIE nods her head, "yes" as the SISTERS come together.)

LOUISA

I'll make our first Christmas in Boston special. I promise.

(Lights fade to black.)

SCENE 10

(It is the next evening – the ALCOTTS last one in HILLSIDE. They are just finishing dinner. There may be boxes or the rooms are even a spit sparser than before. The family is quiet. Maybe all we hear is the noise of clinking eating utensils.)

MR. ALCOTT

We are all so quiet. Let's have a walk down memory lane. You're all thinking of the past, so let's give our thoughts breath. First, a toast to this rickety old barn of a house we have called "home."

ALL

Hear, hear!

MR. ALCOTT

What will you take from here?

LIZZIE

All the kittens that drew their first breaths in the barn. Mrs. Hawthorne said she would take care of them.

ANNA

I'll remember all the walks in the woods. And the air and the sky and the newness of every day.

MAY

I'll remember the garden and the colors that changed every month from April through October.

LOUISA

And I'll remember that Father moved the shed over to the house and made a walk through so that I could have my own room to write. I'm not always a grateful daughter but my memory is strong.

(We hear singing outside the home.)

JOHN, ALFIE, and THOREAU

Here we come a-wassailing among the leaves so green,
Here we come a-wandering, so fair to be seen.

Love and joy come to you and to you your wassail, too,
And God bless you, and send you,
A happy new year, and God send you a happy new year.

(SOMEONE goes to the door and lets the carolers in. ALFIE may have a tin of cookies, THOREAU may have some notebooks and JOHN may have some cheese. Adjust according to your own whims. As they set up, they continue to sing.)

Bring us out a table, and spread it with a cloth;
Bring us moldy cheese and
Some of your Christmas load.

Love and joy come to you, and to you your wassail, too,
And God bless you and send you a happy new year.
And God send you a happy new year.

MRS. ALCOTT

Oh my! What goodness is this?

THOREAU

We couldn't send you off without a proper last Christmas!

JOHN

And unlike the song, we do not expect moldy cheese. We have brought our own.

LIZZIE

All we need is the angel.

LOUISA

I'll get it!

(And LOUISA empties a box throwing its contents everywhere.)

ALFIE

I am sorry we couldn't arrange a Christmas goose.

THOREAU

And a few small presents to send you on your way. I want you to open these in Boston so you have something to look forward to. For now, Eat, drink and be merry!

(Someone starts singing "Auld Lang Syne" and others slowly join in. Arrange what works best for your cast.)

SOME OF THE CAST

Should old acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind?
Should old acquaintance be forgot
In the days of auld lang syne.

For auld lang syne, my dear
For auld lang syne
We'll drink a cup of kindness yet
For the sake of auld lang syne.

And surely you will buy your cup
And surely, I'll buy mine!
We'll take a cup of kindness yet
For the sake of auld lang syne

ANNA and LOUISA

We two who've paddled in the stream
From morning sun till night
The seas between us roared and swelled
Since the days of auld lang syne.

ALL CAST

For old acquaintance be forgot
And never brought to mind

Should auld acquaintance be forgot
In the days of auld lang syne.

*(And with whatever vignette/freeze you want to create to say “good-bye” to the audience,
the lights will fade to black.)*

END OF PLAY