

[BETH plays the final chords of music as the AUDIENCE applauds and the ACTORS bow. HANNAH exits to the kitchen. MARMEE goes and kisses each of the four girls]

MARMEE. My clever girls!

MEG. I never thought I could do it! Did you see me shaking?

AMY. I do wish you would write less violent plays, Jo. Look at my shoe!

BETH. I think it is Jo's finest play yet!

JO. Oh, I just don't know. Did you like it, Marmee? Really like it?

MARMEE. It was thrilling! I am so proud of all of you! But listen...

[aloud to all] I have a special surprise for you all!

JO. What is it, Marmee?

AMY. A surprise?

MARMEE. Compliments of Mr. Laurence next door... [She points to

HANNAH, who enters pushing a wheeled cart filled with food and flowers. Gasps and cheers from all]

AMY. Ice cream! Fruit cake!

JO. And chocolates!

BETH. And such lovely flowers! In winter!

MEG. Oh, Marmee!

MARMEE. Everyone, please join us. And Merry Christmas to you all [Noise and laughter as ALL surround the cart except MARMEE and JO]

JO. Old Mr. Laurence sent it? What in the world put such a thing into his head?

MARMEE. Hannah told one of his servants about your breakfast party for the Hummels this morning. He is an odd old gentleman, but hearing of it pleased him so. He sent a note to me this afternoon asking if he might offer a few trifles in honor of the day.

JO. A few trifles? Christopher Columbus!

[JO and MARMEE join the others as the LIGHTS fade out.]

Scene Four

JOSEPHINE. The Laurence mansion was just a stone's throw from our house. In fact, we seemed to live in the shadow of that great rambling house. Old Mr. Laurence was a private sort of person, a stem-looking old gentleman who only went out under cover of his big black carriage. We girls had paid little attention to the inhabitants of the dark house and their goings-on until that December. Mr. Laurence's grandson Theodore came to live there right after Thanksgiving, but he seemed as secretive and reclusive as his grandfather.

[LIGHTS come up on the drawing room inside the Laurence house (see Production Notes)]

JOSEPHINE. I had a strong suspicion that it was the grandson who was responsible for our Christmas surprise. I was determined to find out and waited all morning the next day until I saw the old man's carriage drive away.

[LAURIE enters the drawing room with JO, in her coat, following behind]

LAURIE. I am so sorry but you have just missed my grandfather. He's gone into town.

JO. [Big disappointment] Has he? That is disappointing. You must excuse me then. So sorry to disturb you— [She starts to go]

LAURIE. No...please! You mustn't go.

JO. I only came to thank Mr. Laurence for the—

LAURIE. Come in! We never get visitors, you see, and I— You're Josephine, aren't you?

JO. Why, yes. I mean no. I'm only Jo. You see, Mr. Laurence, I only came—

LAURIE. I'm not Mr. Laurence. I'm only Laurie.

JO. Laurie Laurence? What an odd name!

LAURIE. No. My first name is Theodore but I don't like it because the fellows at school called me Dora for short. So I made them say Laurie instead.

JO. I hate my name too. Josephine! So sentimental! I wish everyone would say Jo instead. How did you make the boys stop calling you Dora?

LAURIE. I thrashed them.

JO. Oh, Well, I can't very well thrash Aunt March so I suppose I shall have to bear it. This room is capital! Just capital! Boy, what I could do with a room like this!

LAURIE. You mean for one of your plays?

JO. How do you know about that?

LAURIE. [*Embarrassed*] Oh...well... You see, I am very much alone here. Grandfather likes his books and his quiet and—I get awfully bored, you understand, and so— Oh! Sometimes you forget to put down the curtain at the sitting room window and I've seen you rehearse.

JO. You have!

LAURIE. How I wish I could have seen the performance last night. But there were some ladies blocking the view—I am sorry.

JO. Don't be sorry.

LAURIE. You see, sometimes when the lamps are lit, it's like looking at a picture to see the fire and you all gathered around your mother and I can't help watching it. I haven't a mother, you know...

JO. And that's why you've come to live with your grandfather?

LAURIE. Grandfather took me out of school last fall and brought me here to be tutored privately. Grandfather doesn't hold much store in schools and such. So here I am.

JO. It must be dull as blazes all alone in a big old house like this— Oh! Excuse my slang.

LAURIE. That's quite all right.

JO. Christopher Columbus! If I'd known you were interested, I'd have let you play Rodrigo!

LAURIE. I'd have done my best. I played MacDuff in school once.

JO. You did? Did they have a trap door?

LAURIE. [*Grabs fire iron*]

"Then yield thee, coward,

And live to be the show and gaze o' the time!"

JO. [*Grabs an iron also*]

"Yet I will try the last. Before my body

I throw my war-like shield. Lay on, MacDuff—"

[*They sword-fight with the irons and laugh. MR. LAURENCE and JOHN BROOKE enter and watch them unseen*]

LAURIE. Would this do for your Rodrigo?

JO. Capital! [*They fight again with LAURIE stabbing JO, who falls dramatically to the ground. LAURIE ends on the floor laughing*]

JO. I tell you, Mr. Laurence—

LAURIE. Ah...!

JO. Laurie. We'll never draw that curtain any more and I give you leave to look as much as you like. Better yet, come over and join us. We are neighbors, aren't we? Not strangers.

LAURIE. Yes. But...

JO. Oh. Your grandfather. [*They both look at the portrait*] Yes, he does seem a frightful old bird. But I'm sure I shouldn't be afraid of him. His mouth is grim, true, but he has kind eyes. He isn't as handsome as my grandfather was but I think I like him all the same.

MR. LAURENCE. Thank you, ma'am. [*LAURIE and JO jump to their feet*]

LAURIE. Grandfather! You're back already?

MR. LAURENCE. [*Advancing into the room, growling*] So you're not afraid of me, hey?

JO. [*Afraid*] Not much, sir...

MR. LAURENCE. And you don't think me as handsome as your grandfather?

JO. Not quite, sir...

MR. LAURENCE. And my mouth is grim?

JO. Well, I...

MR. LAURENCE. But you like me in spite of it?

JO. Yes, I do...sir.

MR. LAURENCE. [*Laughs, letting her know that the growl was just pretend*] You've got your grandfather's spirit, even if I haven't his face. He was a fine man, my dear. What is better, he was a brave and honest one and I was proud to be his friend.

JO. Thank you, sir.

MR. LAURENCE. [*Pretending to be gruff again*] But what have you been doing with this boy of mine, hey?

JO. Only trying to be neighborly, sir.

MR. LAURENCE. Of course. Something I am somewhat lacking in, you might say.

JO. Oh, no! In fact, I came to thank you for the splendid Christmas present you sent us yesterday.

MR. LAURENCE. Tut, tut. That was very much the boy's doing. John! [*JOHN BROOKE steps into the room; LAURENCE speaks to Jo*] This is Mr. Brooke, my grandson's tutor. John, has your pupil been attentive today?