

(MARMEE and MEG settled down to sewing; BETH to piano.
HANNAH enters with OLD MR. LAURENCE.)

HANNAH. Come in, sir. Look who I found at our door.

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Uninvited! A rogue and a beggar!

(BETH rises.)

HANNAH. More a king, at least to this household. (*Exits.*)

OLD MR. LAURENCE. (*To BETH:*) Sit down, dear girl. I didn't come to frighten you, I came to hear you play—

BETH. (*Clears her throat.*) Mr. Laurence—

OLD MR. LAURENCE. No, no, please don't say a word!

BETH. *Dear* Mr. Laurence—

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Sshh. Play.

BETH. (*Sits.*) What would you like to hear, sir?

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Oh, anything.

(BETH plays.)

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Very nice.

(BETH gets up, runs to him and kisses him.)

BETH. How kind you are!

MEG. Is that our Beth?

MARMEE. Knock me over with a feather!

JO. (*Offstage:*) Mother! Meg!

(LAURIE enters with AMY, wrapped in blankets, shivering in his arms. JO follows.)

MEG. Amy? What is it, Laurie?

LAURIE. She'll be fine, I think. Let's get her straight to bed.

JO. She fell through the ice.

MARMEE. Oh, my word!

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Shall I fetch a doctor?

AMY. I'm fine! I'm fine!

JO. She was following us and Laurie pulled her out and—

(MARMEE exits with AMY. JO sits alone on the sofa. LAURIE enters.)

LAURIE. She's all right. She'll want out of bed in a minute.

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

LAURIE. I think she's all right, Jo.

(Attempts to put his arm around her. JO shakes him off.)

OLD MR. LAURENCE. Come, my boy.

(The LAURENCES exit. MARMEE enters.)

MARMEE. She's fine, really. All rosy again.

JO. It's my dreadful temper! You can't guess how bad it is. I'll do something horrible someday and spoil my life.

MARMEE. *(Takes JO in her arms.)* Jo, dear, I have a temper.

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

MARMEE. I've been trying to cure it for forty years. I am angry nearly every day of my life.

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

MARMEE. Oh, do I?

JO. Yes, you do. But you don't storm and shout. You have some secret.

MARMEE. No, not really. It's a mystery. Myself, sometimes so bitter, and at other times, able to control myself.

JO. You mean grace.

MARMEE. Yes! And I mean life itself—it's mysterious what makes people do things that annoy, petty things, terrible things that shouldn't be allowed. Often I don't understand.