

spell, to keep her out of harm's way. Now come along, my lamb; up to bed with you.

Hannah and Beth move towards the stairs

The front door bell rings

Jo All right, Hannah. I'll see who it is.

Jo goes to the front door

Laurie's voice is heard in greeting

Hannah and Beth exit upstairs

Jo hustles Laurie into the parlour

Laurie (*as he is pushed in*) Steady on, Jo! What's going on?

Jo You've had scarlet fever, haven't you? I remember you telling me that you had it when you were very young.

Laurie Yes, why should you . . .

Jo It's Beth; we think she's caught it and we don't want to take any chances of passing it on.

Laurie Oh, I am sorry. What can I do to help?

Jo Nothing at the moment, but if it is as bad as we fear, Amy must go to stay with Aunt March until Beth is better. Meg is out in the kitchen breaking the news to her now, but if I know Amy, Meg won't have an easy task, for Aunt March petrifies her. Laurie, Amy thinks a lot of you and takes notice of what you say. Try to make her see that it is only for her own good if we have to send her away.

Laurie Well, I'll try to do what . . .

Jo There's my good boy! (*She moves to the stairs*) Now I must go up and help Hannah; you wait here in case you're needed.

She moves up the stairs, but pauses to indicate that his diplomacy is needed at once, for Amy bursts into the room in a great rage, and with a somewhat exasperated Meg in tow

Amy (*as she enters*) No, Meg, no! I'd rather have the fever ten times over than go to Aunt March!

Meg But, my dear, if Beth is really ill we shall be busy nursing her, and it would be no help to anyone if you are sick too.

Amy I don't wish to be sent off as if I was in the way! Besides it's always so horrid at Aunt March's with her rules and orders and "things-to-do" and lectures on "how-one-should behave". I should have to do all the things Jo does—like feeding that awful parrot. It always screams at me when I go near it and pecks at my hair. And I cannot endure her fat, cross, little beast of a dog either, for it snarls and yelps whenever it sees me. And the cook is so bad-tempered I dare not go near the kitchen, and the coachman is deaf, and the . . .

Laurie Whoa! There is no need to go on and on and on! We gather that you don't greatly relish a stay with your Aunt March; but you must be a

sensible little woman and do as the others say. You don't *want* to be sick, do you?

Amy No, I'm sure I don't; but I dare say I shall be, for I've been with Beth all the time.

Laurie That's the very reason you ought to go away at once, so that you may escape it. Change of air will keep you well. I advise you to be off as soon as you can for scarlet fever is no joke, miss.

Amy But everything is so grim at Aunt March's. It's just like Orphans in the Underworld!

During the next speech Jo appears on the stairs. She stops to listen and remains still throughout the ensuing dialogue

Laurie I'll tell you what I'll do. If you go to Aunt March's I'll come every day and take you out driving or walking. Now, it wouldn't be so grim, would it, with me popping in to tell you how Beth is, and to take you out galling? The old lady likes me, and I'll be as sweet as possible to her to make things easy for you.

Amy (*considering the proposition*) Will you take me out in the trotting-wagon with the new pony?

Laurie On my honour as a gentleman.

Amy And come every single day?

Laurie See if I don't.

Amy And bring me back the minute Beth is well?

Laurie The identical minute.

Amy And, perhaps—take me to the theatre?

Laurie A dozen theatres if necessary.

Amy (*slowly and somewhat reluctantly*) Well—all right then—if Beth is really ill, then I'll go.

Laurie Good girl!

Meg (*with relief*) Oh, thank you, Laurie! Now, Amy, I'm going to get the doctor at once. I think the sooner Beth is under his care the better. Aunt March will be here shortly, so just be a good girl, and do as you are asked.

Meg moves into the hall, takes her bonnet and cloak from the hallstand and pulls them on as she goes out of the front door

Jo descends the last few stairs and enters the room

Jo (*moving in as Meg goes out*) Thank you, Laurie, you're a real trump.

Laurie How is Beth?

Jo I think she feels a little better now that she is lying down. The baby's death has upset her a good deal, poor dear. (*Rumpling her hair*) Oh, what a trying world it is! No sooner do we get out of one trouble than down comes another. There doesn't seem to be anything to hold on to when Mother's not here, so I'm all at sea.

Laurie (*trying to cheer her up*) Well, haul in your tops'l, Jo, and tell me if I should telegraph to her.

Jo That's what troubles me. I think we *ought* to tell her if Beth is really ill, but Hannah says we mustn't, for Mother can't leave Father just yet, and it