

**Task:** write an alternative ending to the story. Your characters, setting and plot should remain true to the storyline apart from the last couple of chapters. You may not introduce new characters. Student name withheld.

**Bibliography:** Alcott, Louise May 2004, Little Women, Hinkler Pty Ltd, Victoria.

## Little Women

**The story so far.** Jo arrives home from New York after realizing she has fallen in love with Professor Bower and remains convinced her feelings for Laurie are sisterly...

### Chapter 22: Beth's Secret

Jo was extremely excited to return home after being in New York for so long. The fact that it was spring back in New England was another incentive for her to return. She longed to see Marmee's garden bloom, the flowers hesitantly unveiling themselves. Jo had always loved springtime for it was the only season where she could pick beautiful dandelions and primroses to give to the neighbors without asking anything in return. Another reason she was happy to return was that Laurie was off to Europe with his grandfather for a while. She felt guilty for feeling glad but the awkwardness between them was palpable ever since his 'confession'. Honestly, Jo only loved Laurie like a brother and no more. Her heart twisted as she recalled his face when she said she didn't return his feelings. He looked like a pup that was swiftly kicked.

Jo was jotted out of her thoughts when the train started slowing down. She got up and hauled her suitcase from the top of her seat, cursing under her breath when her hand was banged on the wall. She exited the compartment, waiting until the train came to a full stop. When she stepped out of the train, the first thing she did was stand on her tiptoes, searching for a certain brown-haired mother. But who she found instead almost made her drop her suitcase on her foot.

"Laurie..." she exclaimed weakly. He stared at her for a moment before walking forward and taking her luggage from her. She was too shocked to protest.

"Good afternoon, Jo," he said quietly, like the shy boy he used to be.

"Urn... G-good afternoon," she stuttered, blinking rapidly. "I thought you were in Europe with Grandpa Laurence?" she asked after recovering from the surprise.

"I swear... If this is another one of Marmee's matchmaking tricks..." she thought, grimacing inwardly.

"I was supposed to be but Grandpa caught a terrible fever and could not travel until he recovered." Seeing Jo's panicked face, he quickly continued, "No, no! It's not the Scarlet Fever! It's just a normal one but he seems to get faint whenever he stands."

Jo breathed a sigh of relief. She didn't think she could stand it if another loved one caught the Scarlet Fever. It was bad enough that Beth had to endure it. 'At least now I know Marmee was not lulling me into a sense of security when she wrote that letter. Another talk about children and VII...'

They stood awkward in the middle of the railway station for a few moments before Laurie asked, "To the coach?"

Jo blushed and nodded. Laurie led her to the coach and put her cases at the back.

"Why wasn't Marmee here to fetch me?" Jo asked as they got on the coach.

A frown settled over Laurie's face for a short second before it disappeared. "She was engaged in some charity work. It was supposed to be held tomorrow but for unforeseen circumstances, it was done today. Mrs. March had to attend," he answered.

"Oh," was her brief reply. The ride back home was a silent and strained one. Neither of them uttered a word and most of it was spent avoiding each other's eyes. 'This is why I don't wish for love. If it fails to work, this is what it is reduced to. Awkward silences and refusal of eye contact,' she thought and sighed. When they reached home, Jo thanked him and quickly went into the house. As soon as she went through the door, she was smothered by Marmee and Beth. She grinned happily and hugged them back. All of her thoughts flew out of her mind, except for one. She was finally home.

One week later, Laurie was walking towards the river, a thousand thoughts hovering in his mind. He had escaped the stone mansion for some cool air and to organize his thoughts. He couldn't stand to watch his grandfather shiver in his sleep. The fever was not fatal but that did not ease him.

And Jo. He tried to forget about her during her absence but failed. Every time he saw a woman of potential, he rejected her because they didn't have Jo's thick blonde hair or her passionate grey eyes. Every woman he met, he compared to the beautiful Jo March but none could meet his standards. He was not lying when he said that Jo was the only woman for him. He had only caught glimpses of her in the past week, which saddened his heart greatly. Jo was attached to Beth's hip, never leaving her sister for more than an hour. But he would rather endure this current pain than the one he felt when she left for New York. He thought that maybe a trip to Europe would cleanse his mind of Jo but apparently fate wanted to torture him a tad more. Ignoring his hurt feelings, he tried to stay strong, especially in Jo's presence. He knew from experience that Jo despised people who sulked, so he refrained from stomping off like a petulant child. He decided stop his spoiled acts and man up. He would work hard to mould himself into the man that Jo deserved. A better man. It was an extremely uncharacteristic thought for him but he believed that this was the time to change. He smiled fondly when he recalled the memory of them both playing at the riverside. How he wished things would be as easy as it was in the past but he could not help loving Jo. If only she loved him back...

He was pulled out of his trip down the memory lane when he spotted the very person who was floating in his thoughts sitting near the big willow tree beside the river. He contemplated running back to the mansion but decided to gather his courage and face her like a man. She did not even notice him approach, her eyes staring blankly into the distance. "Jo?" he called out uncertainty. She turned her head towards him, her lips curved in a faint smile that did not reach her eyes. He knew that took that clouded her face; it was the one that appeared when Beth contracted the Scarlet Fever. He quickly crouched near her, letting his arm reside on her shoulders without hesitation. "What happened?" he murmured quietly as his thumb rubbed soothing circles on her shoulder. She glanced up at him; her eyes brimmed with tears as her lower lip quivered. She blinked and two fat tears fell from her eyelids. Laurie held her tighter, providing the support she needed so desperately. A few moments later, the tears started falling like rain and she spat out all her problems in a long, hiccupping conversation.

And so, under the shade of a willow tree, Laurie and Jo became each other's comfort once more.

### **Chapter 23: Laurie and Jo**

The days following Jo's breakdown led to a warming friendship between Jo and Laurie. Jo knew that Laurie still had feelings for her (she caught him staring at her sometimes) but he was veiling them for her sake. Jo felt oddly touched by it. The Laurie she knew before going to New York would probably have trudged away in a hissy fit but the new Laurie seemed to have grown up and taken in his problems in a stride. She felt incredibly proud of him. That morning, Jo asked Laurie to accompany her to town to buy some music sheets for Beth. He eagerly accepted, knowing that this was one of his chances to spend time with her.

"Do you think any compositions from the Baroque will suit Beth?" Jo asked as they were walking past stores.

"She doesn't have all of them yet?" he gasped in mock-surprise. "Really?"

"Don't tease, Laurie," she laughed, happy that she could feel at ease with him. "And still, you haven't given me any suggestions yet!"

"If I must!" he smiled at her. "Does Beth have any from Johann Sebastian Bach? His pieces were quite artistic and held an intellectual depth. Grandpa likes him quite a bit; I'm surprised he never recommended it to Beth."

Beth had gone to bed early that day to rest and Jo was left with nothing to do. She considered trying to write but dismissed the idea almost immediately. She couldn't work in this current state of mind. Sighing, she went to the window of her bedroom and froze cold. Lo and behold, there was Laurie at the gate of his house talking with a lady. Jo's eyes narrowed into slits and she looked closer at the girl, trying to identify her. 'Mercy me, it was Annie Moffat!' Annie was one of Meg's 'friends' who was awfully social. Meg thought that Annie was stylish, Jo begged to differ! Just seeing the dress she was wearing now... Hah! 'Didn't they tell her that tan went out of style two seasons ago?' Suddenly, Laurie threw his head back in laughter as Annie giggled daintily beside him. Jo felt a red-hot anger rising up in her at

the scene. She tore her eyes away, not wanting to burn with that image anymore. When she cooled down Jo tilted her head in confusion. 'Why am I feeling such ire for Annie? Surely, Laurie can have other female friends as well...' she thought. In the end, she concluded that her maternal instincts were at fault. After all, she didn't have feelings for Laurie, so jealousy was out of the question.

Half past an hour later, Jo was skipping to the garden while ignoring Laurie and Beth who were openly laughing at her. "What has got you so happy today, Jo?" Beth asked between laughs.

"I simply do not know," her sister replied, her skip never faltering. "I just woke up this morning feeling as if I should enjoy life as it is." Jo threw her head back and smiled as her skin absorbed the sun's rays. Beth smirked secretly when she noticed that Laurie had paused in his steps to gaze at Jo. She had seen that same look on John and Father's face whenever they glanced at their partners.

"Look at those apples. Apples; such a simple name, yet it is such a delicacy," Jo said adoringly. "How I wish I could just climb that tree like I did when I was younger..."

"You will do no such thing!" Beth laughed, grinning wider than she had ever this early autumn.

"Of course not, it is unladylike for me to do so," came the pouty reply.

"Fortunately, you ladies have me to snatch said apples for you," Laurie said charmingly.

"And it will do you good if you went and fetched them now," Jo said as she smacked his shoulder playfully.

"Do you see the abuse I have to endure daily, Beth?" he implored.

"Go!" Jo pushed him towards the tree as Beth giggled in the background.

Laurie grabbed onto a branch and hauled himself up the tree. It would be an atrocity should anyone from town see him like this but thankfully the garden was hidden from the public eye by his family's enormous mansion. Jo had unfolded the picnic blanket and lay it on the springy grass. She and Beth sat on the soft fabric, talking about nothing and everything at the same time. Beth was covered by another blanket to protect her from the slight autumn chill. Only when Laurie started to drop down the apples did they move to pile the fruits on the blanket.

"Oh my..." Beth moaned when she took the first bite. "These apples are wonderful!"

"Did I not tell you so?" Jo smiled cheekily. Laurie fell to the ground, dusting his hands on his coat. He glanced at the pile and said, "Goodness me, I'm sure Mrs. March will be able to make a dozen apple pies with the amount that you both are collecting."

"That's an over exaggeration. Then again, we aren't the ones who picked them, Laurie," Jo replied offhandedly as she fixed her eyes on the branches of the tree above them.

"Oh look! There's one mighty big and juicy apple residing at the top of that tree," she spoke while pointing. "What I would give to taste such a fine piece of fruit..."

Laurie looked above thoughtfully before he grasped a branch and pulled himself up the tree once more.

"Laurie! What on earth are you doing?" Jo gasped, her back going as straight as a ramrod.

"Well, taking that precious apple of course," he replied as he started climbing.

"Are you insane?" she hissed. "That apple is up extremely high! Get back down here! "

"Not until I get your apple!" his voice emerged from the falling leaves. "And don't try to dissuade me!" Jo let out a short yell of frustration and crossed her arms angrily over her chest, a red flush spreading to her cheeks. Beth stayed quiet throughout the whole exchange, her eyes oddly observant.

"Ah ha! Success!" Laurie's voice came from the near branches. He only landed back onto the ground when he was hit on the head by a flying apple. "Ouch!"

"You deserved that you idiot! What pleasure would you gain from giving me such a fright?!" Laurie dodged to the left just as another apple sailed dangerously close to his ear. He knew he'd better make amends quickly, before he died of an apple pelting.

"Jo! I know it was with risks but look what I have for you..." he said, putting the shiny apple out of his coat. His grey eyes remained steely before she slowly melted. He sat cautiously on the blanket and held the apple out to her. "Forgive me?" he asked, dark eyes penetrating her. She frowned for two moments before she slowly smiled and plucked the apple from his hands. Beth watched silently as the two gazed at each other with their lips curved in equally tender smiles.

'Oh sister dearest,' she thought, 'if only you would accept the love that is being borne upon you so clearly.'

## **Chapter 24: The Saddest Days**

Laurie's heart broke for Jo as she fell to pieces during Beth's preparation to leave this world. She stayed beside Beth constantly and the only place he could find her was in Beth's room. He did not mind, for he knew she needed space to create her last memories of her sister. Amy had been informed of her sister's illness and was on her way home instantly. Laurie knocked on the March's door tentatively. A tired-looking Mrs. March opened the door and spoke before he could. "She's upstairs. Go, now." He nodded

respectfully and walked up the stairs, knowing full well where to go. He rapped his knuckles on the door twice before slowly opening the door. There, lay the love of his life, crouched over a desk near the bed, her quilt scratching away on the parchment. "Jo ... ?" he called quietly, glancing at Beth's sleeping form. She looked so old and worn but he knew she was spending the last days of her life in happiness.

"Laurie, I cannot speak to you at this moment," Jo said tersely. He sighed and stared at her. Her whole body was stiff except for her hand which was still dancing on the parchment. Her hair seemed unwashed and straggly from stress and her dress was all wrinkled. But in his eyes, she never looked more beautiful. He opened his mouth to speak but then shut it resolutely. He would give her time, because truthfully, that was all she needed. With one last glance at her hunched figure, he sighed and shut the door. He was there, gripping her shoulder when Beth passed away. The sobs that ripped her throat tore his soul. How could God be so cruel as to hit this family with such a devastating blow? But he knew there was a reason for everything.

After Beth's death, all Jo did was stare blankly into the distance, never focusing on anything. Laurie tried to talk to her, to console her but she kept quiet, never responding. The old him would have thrown a fit but the new him did not. 'She needs time and space,' he repeated the mantra in his head daily. Amy took pity and spent some time with him but it was not the same. Beth's death also had an impact on his life. His grandfather was sadder now that the child who reminded him of Laurie's mother also died. And Laurie himself was missing Beth's comforting silence and her love for music. Life seemed even quieter without her, though an outsider would protest, saying that Beth was a silent girl. Her very aura filled the room, not her voice.

A few days later, Laurie walked into a silent house, which wasn't very surprising anymore. What was surprising was the fact that Jo was not at her usual perch at the window still beside the piano. When he looked back at the door, Mrs. March was there, leaning on the door frame staring at him. It was quite frightening, how she seemed to know where he was in her house and whenever he wanted to talk, she was there. He was not used to it, for he was raised by his grandfather.

"I encouraged her to write again," Mrs. March said, reading the question from his face. "She's up in her room now, writing faster than a typewriter ever could. Beth is helping her write." Laurie nodded solemnly. He understood what she was saying. Jo needed more time.

"That's fine, Mrs March. I'll be at home if you need me. Inform me, please, when she finishes her story," he said politely. She gave him a small nod, a smile forming on her face as he left. No matter how much time she needed, he would wait for her forever.

When Laurie read her story, he felt her joy, sadness and pain. For him, only her writings could make him feel so. He could see the elation on her face when Mrs. March told her that Jo's story was published in a magazine. And especially when they told her they wanted her to write more. He could not help but feel the joy that leaked from her in waves. The grief was erased from her face but there was still something that was not right... He didn't

know what it was but there was still something bothering her. So when he finally had the chance, he asked her outright what the problem was.

"What ails you, Jo?" he had asked when he was in the March household.

"And don't try to lie to me; I know there is something wrong."

She let out a large sigh, knowing that she could not fool him now. "I feel... guilty. If I did not spend so much time outside all those years ago, I would not have caught a cold. I could have gone to the Hurnmels instead of being with Beth and spared her the pain of the Scarlet Fever. If I was not sick at the time, m-maybe Beth would still be with us today," she let out a small sob.

"Shh now..." he said, wrapping his arm around her shoulders "it was not your fault. There is no use dwelling on the 'what if's and 'could have's. God has just taken Beth back to his side, for he probably adores her too much. It's not your fault..." Jo did not cry but she heaved dry sobs into his shoulder. "I just wish it could have been different."

"Doesn't everyone?" he agreed. He looked at the clock on the wall and started to loosen his grip on Jo. He didn't want to leave at such an inopportune time but Grandpa Laurence was waiting for him back at the mansion to discuss about their coming trip to Europe.

"Don't let me go, please," Jo's voice startled him. "Just... hold on to me."

Laurie nodded dumbly and clutched her tighter, hoping to give her the comfort she needed. Grandpa Laurence and Europe could wait. Jo could not. And like all those years ago, he murmured soothing words in her ear and rocked her back and forth.

## **Chapter 25: An Unexpected Guest and Surprises**

On one fine summer afternoon, the two eldest March girls were found clutching their sides in laughter. The source of this laughter joined in as well.

"Tell me it is not true, Teddy!" Jo gasped between laughs. She had taken to calling him Teddy nowadays for she thought that it was now time for him to embrace the first name that his parents had lovingly given him. Of course, that did not prevent her from slightly altering the name; 'Theodore' was a mouthful.

"I wish I could! I told her to desist from her advances but she would not listen and fell flat in the middle of her angry rant," he replied, out of breath from the laughter.

"How I long to see Annie in that situation. Yes, she is a good friend but she can also be mighty spoiled!" Meg piped in, smiling at the image of her friend unsuccessfully trying to woo Laurie, falling face first in the wet dirt when she tripped.

"Ooh... I'm sure her face will be stained red if she faces Teddy again for the next few days," Jo chuckled. Suddenly, the sound of someone knocking on the porch door floated into the living room.

"I shall see who it is," Jo said, standing from her seat on the couch. She walked to the door and opened it.

She gasped when she saw who it was. "Mr. Bower!"

"Good afternoon, Miss March. I hope you do not mind if I accepted your invitation a tad late," he said, a smile lurking underneath his beard.

"Oh of course not," she stammered, blushing tightly. "Please, come in."

She led him to the living room where the two occupants snapped their heads up to look at the new visitor.

"Teddy, Meg, this is Professor Bower; the one that I wrote about in my letters during my stay in New York," she introduced.

"Oh, so this is the Mr. Bower you have been writing about..." Meg said, smiling a tad uncertainly. She could see the age gap between Jo and Mr. Bower and she did not know whether she should be apprehensive or not.

"Nice to meet you," Laurie said, shaking the older man's hand firmly. He could feel something akin to jealousy starting to emerge. Jo looked at this man as if she was worshipping him; surely that was a bad sign?

"Pleasure to meet you both. Miss March has told me quite a lot about you and her family during her stay. I enjoyed her tales from her childhood," Mr. Bower replied, smiling fondly. "Indeed..." Laurie murmured, leaning back on the couch as Jo fired questions to Mr. Bower about the Kirke's who were in New York. He did not like the competition Mr. Bower presented for Jo's affections and he hoped that nothing would bloom out of his presence.

The days that followed Mr. Bower's unexpected arrival left Laurie extremely annoyed. Jo had spent most of her time with him, sharing his knowledge. He barely saw her anymore and when he did, she was with Mr. Bower. Unfortunately, Professor Bower was here to stay. He had been appointed to teach at a nearby college and that stamped him as a permanent figure in Jo's life. He was starting to believe that maybe Jo would never love him the way he wanted. He was terribly disheartened by this revelation but he tried to keep his spirits high. After all, it was not like the pair was to be engaged or something of that sort. He was walking into town when he saw Mr. Bower and Jo walking towards him. They both had not noticed him for Mr. Bower was busy talking while Jo listened attentively. Laurie was hoping to avoid them but Jo had spotted him and waved in greeting. He swallowed his grimace and ignored his twisting stomach, waving back. He could not stand seeing her with him. Then he turned and started walking quickly towards town, leaving a confused Jo behind.

Teddy had made himself scarce throughout the week and Jo was puzzled as to why. Yes, she had Mr. Bower for company (and what lovely company he was) but she missed her good friend Teddy. Her feelings for Professor Bower

were starting to change, though she did not know why. Instead of looking at him in a romantic light, she now saw him as a teacher who was kind enough to share his wisdom with her. She also started to notice Teddy even more; the way the corners of his eyes crinkled when he laughed, or when he grinned at her, making her stomach roll pleasantly. She did not know what it meant and she did not know if she wanted to. She was listening to Mr. Bower telling her of his views on Shakespeare's Hamlet.

"Gertrude loved Hamlet but she is a shallow, weak woman who seeks affection and status more urgently than moral rectitude or truth..." he said. Jo nodded but she could feel her mind drifting. She stared into his blue eyes as he spoke passionately about the play. She tried to summon the adoration she had felt for him but failed. Instead, her mind associated a certain dark-haired friend with the feeling. She tried shaking herself out of her thoughts, for they were illogical. She felt nothing but sibling love for Teddy, did she not? Then why did a warm feeling spread through her whenever she thought of him? Why did the thought of seeing him made her smile? And most importantly, why was she just realizing this now?

'I love him!' the thought hit her like a slap in the face. Then she gasped loudly, interrupting Professor Bower from his speech. 'I'm in love with Theodore Laurence,' she repeated again in her mind. She felt like running to him and confessing her love to him, just to hear him say it back. She had always written stories of this kind of love but she never thought she would feel it in real life and for Teddy nonetheless! She had to tell him now because the feelings were released and she could not hold them back.

"Miss March, are you alright? Miss March?" Mr. Bower called out, anxiety creeping into him as he looked at her blank, shocked face. "I'm sorry, Mr. Bower, I have something to attend to!"

She ran towards the Laurence mansion, uncaring of people's thoughts about her unladylike action. Laurie was very shocked when a flustered and wild-eyed Jo burst into his house without a knock. "Teddy!" she cried, launching herself at him, hugging him tight. He stood still in surprise before he relaxed and savored the feeling of her arms wrapped around him.

"What's wrong?" he asked, knowing that Jo did not randomly hug him without a reason. She pulled back and started talking faster than a train. "I'm sorry I didn't realize it earlier but when I was walking with Mr. Bower, all I could see was you instead of him and that surprised me quite a bit! Then this feeling of warmth rose and I was confused but then I grasped the fact that this was the feeling I so often write about. I do not know how to explain this and I cannot imagine your pain when I rejected you but now I know you were not some adolescent who was overthinking his feelings! I know now that you were true and you did love me and I'm hoping you still do. I felt such anger towards Annie for trying to pursue you but I had mistaken it as protectiveness, not jealousy. Beth had advised me before her death to not ignore this but I had not known what she was wasting her energy on but now I see! Everything was so obviously under my nose but I was as blind as a bat to it. But you have unknowingly opened my eyes! And I know I am rambling nothings and your ear is bleeding now but I cannot stop because what I have been trying to say is that I love you! "

His mind processed the information slowly, for she spoke so quickly that it took time for him to understand. Then he stared at her, dark eyes wide in shock. "Do..do you really mean it?" he asked, afraid that he had just imagined it all in his dreams.

"Yes, I mean it. I am in love with you, Theodore Laurence, and I will spend forever apologizing for not realizing this sooner," she whispered looking at him as if he were her sun, moon and stars. His face split into a wide grin as he laughed, hugging her tight and spinning her around. Her giggles filled his ears making him feel like the luckiest man on earth. 'Happy' was not an adequate enough word to describe his feelings right now.

"I love you too, Josephine March. Always have, always will," he said after setting her feet back down on the ground.

She blinked and smiled at him demurely. He leaned down and whispered into her ear, "I told you once before and I shall tell you again. We are meant to be."

## **Chapter 26: Happy Endings**

Mr. Bower had found a soul mate in Hannah, the girls' caretaker, after Jo paired with Laurie. He claimed that he had mistaken his feelings for her from the years of solitude and had finally known what love felt like with Hannah. Jo could not be happier for him. Laurie was just pleased that his only competitor was no longer trying to chase the love of his life. Speaking of Jo and Laurie, they had become inseparable since their declarations of love. Whenever Jo was, Laurie was not far behind. Both their families (and many of the townsfolk) let out an overdue sigh of relief when they found out that the pair was finally together after all these years.

"Took you long enough," John said good-naturedly while Jo blushed. Laurie just grinned and held her tighter to his side. Their family and friends thumped Laurie's back in congratulations while Jo almost became deaf from the squealing that her sisters did when they discovered that she and Laurie were finally a couple. She was teased mercilessly by countless people throughout the months.

"Oh, spare me sister!" cried Meg. "My tooth aches whenever I am around the pair of you," teased Meg when she caught Laurie stroking Jo's cheek in the gardens. Truthfully, she was elated that her 'tomboy' sister had finally opened her heart to Laurie's love.

Mrs. March was even more enthusiastic than her other children at this news. Amy herself had found her match in the form of a certain rich man named Fred Vaughn. Finally, all of her daughters had found someone to spend their lives with. If only Beth was here to share this happiness with her.

Jo was dizzily happy from her relationship with Laurie. Never did the thought enter her mind that she would return his feelings. Only now did she truly feel the ecstasy of love. She never tired seeing his face and her heart beat like a hummingbird whenever he gave her that look of love.

"I will do anything for you, regardless of the cost," he once told her, effectively melting her into a puddle with his words.

It wasn't long before Jo and Laurie got married, much to everyone's delight. Amy's marriage came soon after in a big, happy ceremony. Meg was the bridesmaid at both weddings and she was honored to be chosen for such a title twice. A few months later, Aunt March passed away, leaving Plumfield, her big mansion to Jo in her will. Everyone was shocked at Aunt March's kindness, even after her death. Jo was forever thankful to her great-aunt for it was the mansion that made her secret wish come true.

She had always wanted to open a school for poor young boys because she of all people knew what it felt to miss out on education. She wanted it to be a home-like school where the youngsters could be taken care of and taught at the same time. She already had the head teacher in mind - Professor Bower. She also invited Hannah to come along to take care of the children, for Professor Bower would never go anywhere without her. Mrs. March claimed that she had held Hannah for too long and there were no more children in her house to be taken care of. Jo had no experience with taking care of children, so having Hannah along to help her was a blessing. Her husband was to take care of the finances, since it would be hard to obtain money from poor boys who could not afford to pay. He suggested that they let rich children in as well to help pay the expenses and thought up a sack load of schemes. She had showered him in kisses for the wonderful ideas he contributed.

A year later, the school opened its doors to the children who needed the education. Jo and Hannah had their hands full taking care of ten boys who were staying at the school, along with two of her own boys - Rob and Teddy - who came afterwards. All the rooms were fitted and the gardens flourished with flowers and trees. Pets were also allowed, so a regular menagerie of animals filled the sheds. There was never a silent moment in Plumfield with the children constantly up and about. Truly, it was one of her greatest successes

Jo leaned on the door frame, smiling tenderly at the scene before her. The older boys were studying for a coming test and outside the window, she could see the younglings playing soccer at the field. Sometimes she wondered how she could get so lucky in life but her Laurie kept reminding her that she deserved it all. Speaking of her husband, she could feel familiar arms wrap around her waist, a chin resting on her shoulder.

"What are you thinking about, beautiful?" he asked, his deep voice sending tingles through her, even after all these years. It was suffice to say that she was as deeply in love with him as she was ten years earlier.

"Just pondering about how perfect our lives are," she replied, leaning against his body. He was her supporting pillar who was always there when she desperately needed him. "Mm.... It is perfect isn't it?" he answered, smiling at their son who waved happily at them.

Jo sighed contentedly and reveled in her blissful state. All was well, and in the end, that was all that mattered.

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