

Part 1: Chapter 3 Summary

The March home is filled with excitement, as Meg and Jo have been invited to a New Year's Eve dance at the Gardiner's. All four girls become involved with helping Jo and Meg dress in the best of their shabby gowns and too-tight shoes.

When the girls arrive at the party, Jo is clearly ill at ease. She stands stiffly on the sidelines longing to join a group of young men in a conversation about skating. She eventually retreats into an alcove to avoid being asked to dance and exposing a burn on the back of her dress. In the alcove she finds Mr. Laurence's grandson, who is also avoiding the crowd.

At first the interactions are stiff and formal, but soon Jo and Laurie (Theodore Laurence's nickname) find themselves absorbed in easy conversation. Jo wants to hear all about Laurie's experiences studying abroad. When Laurie asks Jo to dance a polka, she confides in him about the burn on her dress. Laurie shows her a vacant hall where they can dance without exposing Jo to ridicule.

After Meg twists her ankle dancing, Jo introduces her to Laurie. The three share refreshments and laughter as Meg rests her foot in a side room. At the end of the evening, Laurie gives his neighbors a ride home in his carriage.

Part 1: Chapter 3 Analysis

We begin to see some of the differences in the March sisters. Meg is more concerned with social standing and appearance than Jo. She coaches Jo in etiquette and begs her not to do anything embarrassing. Not having pretty gloves and silk gowns is painful for Meg, whose friends Sallie Gardiner and Annie Moffat both come from wealthier families.

Class and gender differences seem of little consequence to Jo and her new friend Laurie. They are able to talk easily and enjoy each other's company. We begin to see that Jo often defies conventional female stereotypes. She is a tomboy who prefers the conversations and company of boys to more feminine pursuits. Both sisters will face their own struggles as they discover who they are and how to fit into society while remaining true to themselves.

The introduction of Laurie is a key point in the story. Much of the rest of the book will revolve around the relationship between the Laurence boy and Jo March.

Part 1: Chapter 4 Summary

The holidays are over, and it's back to the drudgery of everyday life. Both Meg and Jo work to contribute to the upkeep of the household. Meg is a governess and Jo is a companion and helper for her elderly Aunt March. Beth, who is too timid to attend school, helps Hannah and Marmee at home while Amy attends school.

Though the sisters find their daily activities to be somewhat of a burden, they try to cheer each other with stories at dinnertime. Beth tells about seeing Mr. Laurence buy a large fish for a poor woman at the market. Marmee tells a tale of a man she met who had sent four boys off to the war. Two had been killed, one was a prisoner and one was ill, yet

the man was glad to sacrifice for his country.

Part 1: Chapter 4 Analysis

Tales of the generosity of others give the girls perspective on their own lives and again instruct the reader on the virtue of unselfishness. One reason Alcott's characters have remained popular is that readers can easily relate to the character's struggles with envy and pride.

More of the personality of each sister is revealed as we see her daily life. Meg envies the wealth of the family she works for and Jo, an avid reader, enjoys the library at Aunt March's. Amy, with eye for beauty, longs for beautiful clothes and sketches the beauty she sees around her.

Part 1: Chapter 5 Summary

Jo has not seen her new friend Laurie since the dance. On a snowy afternoon after she sees Mr. Laurence leave his home, Jo shovels a patch through the hedge and tosses a snowball up to Laurie's window. He looks out and invites her in.

Having been confined inside with a cold, Laurie confesses that he is bored and lonely in the big house. Jo convinces him to visit the March home soon. Laurie gives Jo a tour of the Laurence house. He leaves her alone in the library for a few moments. In the meantime, she studies a portrait of Mr. Laurence and says aloud, "he's got kind eyes though his mouth is grim, and he looks as if he has a tremendous will. He isn't as handsome as my grandfather, but I like him."

She is embarrassed when she realizes that Mr. Laurence has entered the room and had heard her comments. The gentleman is impressed with Jo's spunk and honesty and he likes the spark of life she brings to Laurie. Before returning home, Jo listens to Laurie play the grand piano. She notices that something about the music upsets the elder Mr. Laurence.

Part 1: Chapter 5 Analysis

Jo's courageous nature is revealed as she ventures next door to see the Laurence boy. Though Mr. Laurence apparently knew Mrs. March's father, the two neighbors have never been on visiting terms. Jo sets out to rectify this situation.

Jo is the sister least bothered by class differences or social mores. She finds the Laurence home beautiful and filled with wonderful things, but not intimidating. The fact that Laurie is rich and she is poor never seems to stand in the way of their friendship.

We also see Jo's honest nature. When Mr. Laurence overhears her straightforward critique, she does not attempt to deny or alter her words. Her honesty endears her to the older gentleman.

Alcott gives us a clue into Laurie's past at the end of the chapter when Mr. Laurence seems uncomfortable when his grandson plays the piano.