

# Little Women

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT



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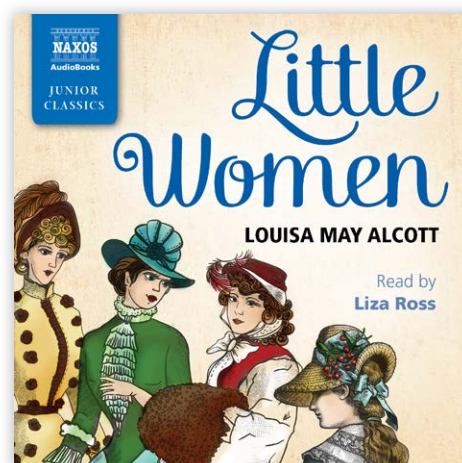
JUNIOR  
CLASSICS

Read by  
**Liza Ross**

*Little Women*, closely based on Louisa M. Alcott's own experience of family life, was first published in 1868 and has never lost its extraordinary power to move and delight, from the heartrending story of gentle Beth to the humorous adventures of tomboyish Jo, and Meg's vain attempts to cut a fashionable figure in 'society'...



**Liza Ross's** film work includes *The Current War*, *55 Steps*, *Florence Foster Jenkins*, *Leap Year*, *Return to the Secret Garden* and *Batman*. Her many TV appearances include *Emmerdale*, *At Home With the Braithwaites* and *Happy Birthday Shakespeare*. She has made frequent theatre appearances. Liza is an award-winning audiobook reader and has recorded many books for Naxos. Her extensive work as a voice artist also includes animation, computer games, voice-overs and BBC Radio Drama.



**Total running time: 3:31:38**

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1	Little Women	6:24	19	Out-of-doors	8:28
2	Mrs March arrives with a letter from Father	5:04	20	'You need a motive, Mother says'	4:40
3	The gray dawn of Christmas morning	2:47	21	October days begin to grow chilly	5:58
4	A visit to a poor family	3:05	22	'I know where Meg's glove is.'	6:09
5	Christmas Night – an Operatic Tragedy	4:52	23	November is the most disagreeable month	12:11
6	An invitation for Meg and Jo	3:56	24	Mother leaves	4:18
7	At the party	7:09	25	A tragedy	6:56
8	The morning after	1:39	26	Emergency action	3:54
9	Individual activities	14:11	27	Scarlet fever in the house	2:16
10	Jo goes out for some exercise	7:37	28	The first of December	6:49
11	Jo meets Mr Laurence	5:52	29	The moment of crisis	5:52
12	Good times with Laurie	5:20	30	The meeting of mother and daughters	9:59
13	Beth finds a piano	2:50	31	The return of Father	4:20
14	Packing the 'go abroady' trunk	7:39	32	Jo and Meg have words	3:56
15	Laurie is sent an invitation	8:19	33	John Brooke arrives	4:11
16	Doing crazy things	6:19	34	Aunt March arrives	5:47
17	The first of June – Vacation!	6:06	35	'Sister Jo, congratulate us!'	7:57
18	Jo in the kitchen	8:25			

Abridged by Perry Keenlyside

Produced by Nicolas Soames

Post-production: Sarah Butcher and Beth Hammond

Engineer (speech): Simon Weir, Classical Recording Company

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# LOUISA MAY ALCOTT

## *Little Women*

Louisa May Alcott was born in Pennsylvania in 1832, and died in 1888. Her father was the impractically idealistic Bronson Alcott, member of a New England 'consociate' Christian community which attempted to live by high moral standards involving deliberate self-sacrifice for the common good.

While Alcott was running a school he insisted on allowing a black child to share in its educational benefits: as a result, the school was forced to close. Admirable and advanced as his moral standards undoubtedly were, the eventual result was that he and his family were plunged into debt. Louisa, one of four daughters, took it upon herself to mend the family's fortunes and, in September 1867, she agreed at a publisher's request to write 'a girl's book' – rather against her will. She had been writing since her childhood and had already been published, but *Little Women* was to be her first success – a runaway success, in fact, and in spite of both her and her publisher's initial reservations.

Those already familiar with the novel will by now have recognised Louisa as the model for Jo, the tomboyish, imaginative second sister of the story. In fact Alcott set out quite deliberately to base *Little Women* on her own memories of family life, something which in part accounts for the extraordinary warmth and truth of the writing. She changed some of the names, and made her father into the more heroic – but conveniently absent – figure we find in the novel. Alcott said that Mrs March, modelled on her mother, was 'not half good enough'. Given the extraordinary virtue of Mrs March, this is praise indeed. One of Alcott's sisters was actually called Beth, and she too became seriously ill with scarlet fever: an entry from Alcott's journal of the time notes that 'she sews, reads, sings softly, and lies looking at the fire.' And again: 'Last week she put her work away, saying that the needle was too heavy.' Listeners to this

edition of *Little Women* will have to wait for the sequel to discover Beth's eventual fate, but meanwhile few will fail to be moved by the chapter in which the crisis of her illness arrives in the early hours of the morning as the family awaits the urgent return of Mrs March.

Alcott's capacity to arouse a variety of emotion in her readers (or listeners) is one of her greatest strengths as a writer: not only does she write with remarkable ease and intelligence, she also conveys absolute sincerity and truth to life. The squabbles and the reconciliations, jealousies, generousities and absurdities of family life are wonderfully described. This is perhaps the more remarkable given the strong, at times almost cloying, weight of religious and moral emphasis: chapters are typically concluded by a miniature sermon from Mrs March, explaining the recent errors of the girls. Indeed, the whole novel is loosely based on the idea in Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress* of life as an experiential journey leading (if we keep on the path) towards the Celestial City. Stronger than all this, however, is that sense of truth to life which was, fortunately, Alcott's abiding virtue. Humour is never far away – especially in the form of Laurie, the boy next door whose kindly vivacity occasionally leads him into scrapes. But what all the characters have in common is the capacity to learn from their mistakes – and if this sounds too good to be true, be assured that it is not. It's interesting that the book has been filmed several times, and with some success, most recently in 1994: unless children become quite radically unlike the creatures we know today, the novel will never date.

Generations of children – boys as well as girls – have come to love *Little Women* and its sequels with a passion which few other books for younger readers can arouse.

**Notes by Perry Keenlyside**

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### The music on this recording was taken from the NAXOS catalogue

<b>BACH</b> SHEPHERDS MUSIC/CHRISTMAS ORATORIO Eteri Andjaparidze, piano	8.553461
<b>HAYDN</b> CAPRICCIO – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES VOL.6 Balázs Szokolay, piano	8.550215
<b>SCHUMANN</b> FIRST LOVE – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES VOL.9 Balázs Szokolay, piano	8.550218
<b>TCHAIKOVSKY</b> HUMORESQUE – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES VOL.9 Balázs Szokolay, piano	8.550218
<b>SCHUMANN</b> ANDANTE ESPRESSIVO – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES VOL.9 Balázs Szokolay, piano	8.550218
<b>MENDELSSOHN</b> SONG WITHOUT WORDS NO.40 – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES Péter Nagy, piano	8.550219
<b>WEBER</b> PIANO SONATA NO.1 – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES Péter Nagy, piano	8.550219
<b>SCHUMANN</b> LANGSAM – WORKS FOR OBOE AND PIANO József Kiss, oboe, Jenő Jandó, piano	8.550599
<b>BEETHOVEN</b> ANDANTE IN F – ROMANTIC PIANO FAVOURITES VOL.3 Balázs Szokolay, piano	8.550107
<b>SCHUMANN</b> SEHR INNIG from KREISLERIANA Paul Gulda, piano	8.550401
<b>SCHUMANN</b> EINSAME BLUMEN from Waldszenen Paul Gulda, piano	8.550401

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