

Little Women: Helping Father

Louisa May Alcott published Little Women in 1868-1869. It tells the story of the March family: Father, Marmee, and their four daughters, Meg, Jo, Beth, and Amy. They live in Massachusetts during the Civil War. Father, a once wealthy man, has lost his fortune. His family tries to manage while he is serving in the Union Army. In this passage, Marmee has just received a telegram to come to Washington, D.C. because Father is very sick. The family races to find money and complete errands for Marmee's trip. As they come together in the evening, Jo has not returned. Laurie, the boy who lives next door, is with them.

Chapter Fifteen: A Telegram

They began to get anxious, and Laurie went off to find her, for no one knew what freak Jo might take into her head. He missed her, however, and she came walking in with a very queer expression of countenance, for there was a mixture of fun and fear, satisfaction and regret in it, which puzzled the family as much as did the roll of bills she laid before her mother, saying with a little choke in her voice, "That's my contribution toward making Father comfortable and bringing him home!"

"My dear, where did you get it? Twenty-five dollars! Jo, I hope you haven't done anything rash?"

"No, it's mine honestly. I didn't beg, borrow, or steal it. I earned it, and I don't think you'll blame me, for I only sold what was my own."

As she spoke, Jo took off her bonnet, and a general outcry arose, for all her abundant hair was cut short.

"Your hair! Your beautiful hair!" "Oh, Jo, how could you? Your one beauty." "My dear girl, there was no need of this." "She doesn't look like my Jo any more, but I love her dearly for it!"

As everyone exclaimed, and Beth hugged the cropped head tenderly, Jo assumed an indifferent air, which did not deceive anyone a particle, and said, rumpling up the brown bush and trying to look as if she liked it, "It doesn't affect the fate of the nation, so don't wail, Beth. It will be good for my vanity, I was getting too proud of my wig. It will do my brains good to have that mop taken off. My head feels deliciously light and cool, and the barber said I could soon have a curly crop, which will be boyish, becoming, and easy to keep in order. I'm satisfied, so please take the money and let's have supper."

"Tell me all about it, Jo. I am not quite satisfied, but I can't blame you, for I know how willingly you sacrificed

your vanity, as you call it, to your love. But, my dear, it was not necessary, and I'm afraid you will regret it one of these days," said Mrs. March.

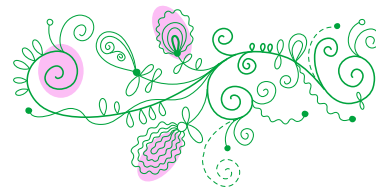
"No, I won't!" returned Jo stoutly, feeling much relieved that her prank was not entirely condemned.

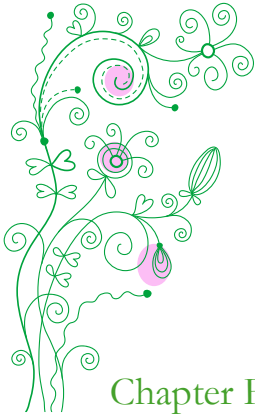
"What made you do it?" asked Amy, who would as soon have thought of cutting off her head as her pretty hair.

"Well, I was wild to do something for Father," replied Jo, as they gathered about the table, for healthy young people can eat even in the midst of trouble. "I hate to borrow as much as Mother does, and I knew Aunt March would croak, she always does, if you ask for a ninepence. Meg gave all her quarterly salary toward the rent, and I only got some clothes with mine, so I felt wicked, and was bound to have some money, if I sold the nose off my face to get it."

Answer the following questions about the passage.

1. How did Jo get the money?
2. Who cut Jo's hair?
3. What is a ninepence?
4. How did Meg spend her quarterly salary?





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Answer the following questions about the passage.

Answers: Student's answers will vary; example of correct answers:

1. How did Jo get the money?

She sold her hair.

2. Who cut Jo's hair?

A barber

3. What is a ninepence?

A coin worth nine pennies

4. How did Meg spend her quarterly salary?

To help pay for the rent

