

CHAPTER 3

The party

'Jo! Jo! Where are you?' called Meg.

'Here!' answered Jo.

Meg ran up to the top of the house. Jo was in her favourite place by the window ... with a book.

'Look!' cried Meg. She had a paper in her hand. 'It's from Mrs Gardiner. She's having a New Year party tomorrow night. She wants us to go! What can we wear?'

'Well, that's not a problem,' said Jo. 'You've only got one dress. Me too.' She thought for a minute. 'But my dress has a big hole in the back.'

'Then you must sit all evening,' said Meg, 'with your back to the wall.'

'My gloves have got holes in, too,' said Jo. 'I can't wear them.'



'No gloves?' cried Meg. 'Gloves are so important, Jo. You must have gloves! I can't go with you if you haven't!'

'I've got an idea,' Jo said. 'Give me one of your gloves. Then we can each wear one good glove. We can have a bad glove in the other hand.'

* * *

At last, Meg and Jo were ready. They walked out of the house and across the garden.

'Have a good time, girls!' Mrs March called after them. 'Have you got nice handkerchiefs?'

'Yes,' cried the girls and they laughed. Marmee always asked that question when they went out.

Meg and Jo didn't go to parties often. They were a little

shy. At the party, they met Mrs Gardiner's daughter, Sallie. Sallie's friend, Annie Moffat, was there too. Meg, Sallie and Annie talked about clothes and fashion. It was boring for Jo. She stood with her back against the wall and watched a group of boys. She heard the word 'skating'. Now *that* was interesting. Jo loved skating. She wanted to talk to the boys. A young man with red hair walked across the room.

'Help! He's coming to ask me to dance!' Jo thought. She quickly moved into a little room. She wanted to be alone.

She looked around. She wasn't alone. There was a boy in the room.



'Oh, I'm sorry,' said Jo. 'I didn't know ...' She started to go out again.

The boy laughed. 'That's all right,' he said. 'Please stay.'

'I think I know you,' said Jo. 'Don't you live near us?'

'Next to you,' said the boy. He and Jo both laughed.

'Thank you for your nice Christmas present, Mr Laurence,' Jo said.

'My grandfather gave it to you, Miss March,' said the boy.

'I'm not Miss March. I'm only Jo,' said Jo.

'And I'm not Mr Laurence,' said the boy. 'I'm only Laurie. My name's Theodore but I don't like it. So I'm Laurie.'

Women in

When we read *Little Women*, we learn a lot about life in America in the 1800s. Things were different then for everyone, but they were very different for girls and women.



The man was the head of the family.

Life for women ...

In the 1800s, women usually stayed at home. They cleaned the house and cooked and sewed. They didn't often go out to work and many girls didn't go to school.



Women from very poor families worked as servants. Women from families like the March family in *Little Women* sometimes worked as governesses. There weren't any other jobs for women! The Civil War started to change things. Hospitals needed women. For the first time men saw that women were useful! Later, there were women doctors. Slowly, other jobs were possible too.

... and life for men

The man was the head of the family in those days. It was his job to give his family a home, food and clothes. His wife and children belonged to him. His wife's money and all her things belonged to him too!

the 1800s

Tennis and skating

Women had big, long dresses in the 1800s so it was difficult to play sports. It wasn't possible for them to wear trousers in those days. Some women skated or played tennis in their long skirts, but it wasn't easy.

There were no sports for women at the first Olympic Games in Athens in 1896. In 1900, there were just two sports open to women: tennis and golf.



No school for girls!

Girls in the 1800s didn't need to learn important things because women stayed at home. Not many girls went to school. No women went to university. Universities were for men only. The University of Iowa was the first American university to open its doors to women in 1855. The first English university was the University of London in 1878.

The vote

At the time of *Little Women*, women didn't vote. The first country to give women the vote was New Zealand, in 1893. In the United States, it was 1920. In Britain, it was 1928. And in Switzerland, it was only in 1971.

When did women first vote in your country? What do you think was the best thing about living in the 1800s? What was the worst?



What do these words mean?

You can use a dictionary.

belong golf servant tennis
university vote