

THE OTHERS. (Variously.) DELIVERANCE!

AMY. ...Line!

BETH. Sword to her—

AMY. (Drops the sword, screams girlishly.) Eek! (Picking it up.) Deliverance—

JO. Stop, stop—

AMY. Speed to the breast of my manly foe—!

She moves stylistically to stab Jo in the heart.

JO. STOP! This isn't working.

AMY. Of course it's not working, you won't let me get my lines out!

JO. The problem here is that Amy is not a convincing gentleman—

Amy reacts badly.

And if it's not realistic, why should we care?

MEG. This is a play about a wizard.

JO. But without any truth, it's dry and stakeless.

MEG. Perhaps I could play the gentleman, and Amy Lucella!

AMY. (Excited.) Ooh—

JO. Amy's too little.

AMY. (Pure rage.) OOH!

JO. I regret to inform you, Amy, that you are dismissed.

AMY. "Dismissed"?!

JO. You can't help who you are, dear. But I shall give you a nonspeaking role: a fairy/or a servant / or—

AMY. Servant!

JO. (Snaps.) —a woodland creature!

AMY. You cannot dismiss me—because I QUIT! This role is STUPID and this play is STUPIDER—it's for CHRISTMAS but it doesn't have anything to DO with that, no angels or nativity or Saint Nick or ANY-THING—

JO. Seasonal pageants are BORING, Amy, I am TRYING to do something ORIGINAL—

AMY. and YOU, stupid old Josephine, are absolutely—AUTOMATIC!

Laurie, Jo, Meg - play

They all take a second trying to figure that out—

MEG. ...autocratic.

AMY. RRRRAARNNNGGGH!

Amy throws down the sword and storms off.

JO. There are no small roles, Amy, only small actors!

MEG. Jo, this is supposed to be fun.

BETH. Maybe—maybe it's hard for Amy because, she, she's pretending to be someone who's so different from herself. Maybe if this play were about—real stories, about girls like us—

JO. —those stories are even more boring than seasonal pageants. No, no, the play is perfect—

MEG. Ahrm—

JO. I just need to rethink casting.

MEG. You don't mean to put Beth in?

BETH. (Terrified.) No—!

JO. I don't want anybody in the wrong role. I shall just SPIRIT UP an errant knight, a wandering gentleman—somewhere, SOMEHOW...

She wanders up to the playing space, seems to be thinking, then gets possessed, chants a "spell."

hmm hummena—humeena, HUMEENA HUMMENA SHALAKA-ZAM!

During Jo's spell—a chest has begun rocking as if possessed, scaring the wits out of Beth—and out pops Laurie, brandishing a prop sword.

MEG. Mr. Laurence!

JO. The Brave Valentino! EN GARDE!

LAURIE. EN GARDE!

Laurie and Jo duel boisterously—it may devolve into wrestling—with much En Gardeing and ha-HAing. Very Errol Flynn. Beth hides from the stranger.

MEG. JO! May I speak to you for a moment?

JO. Hold, Valentino—the diva wishes an aside!

Meg pulls Jo aside forcibly.

MEG. We don't want boys here, Jo! He'll make fun of us!

JO. Laurie isn't like that, Meg! We've become such friends in the last week! And he knows loads about swordfighting and mustachios and wonderful man things that I, for one, want to know!

MEG. This is a ladies' club!

LAURIE. A few of these keys are broken, aren't they? I tinker around with my own piano a bit, perhaps I could fix them?

Beth, petrified, nods. He starts fiddling with the keys.

JO. —See!!! Gentle as any girl! And he's lonely in that big house, with nobody to talk to but his mean old grandfather and that stuffy tutor Brooks.

MEG. Mr. Brooks isn't stuffy.

JO. Please, Meg, please? (*Echoing Meg's plea back to her.*) I want it—I need it, so much.

Beth hesitatingly plays a note or two; it sounds a little better.

MEG. Mr. Laurence.

She gives an elaborate actress curtsy.

Welcome to our comp'ny.

Laurie gives an elaborate bow back. Jo jumps on him and pumps his arm up and down.

JO. Beth, strike up a victory march!

Beth shyly starts playing.

LAURIE. I'll find a way to fix those keys—

Amy stomps back on; she's been crying.

AMY. You MUST allow me to do Valentino, I've finally got it to stick—oh. My. God.

She sees Laurie, is mortified.

LAURIE. The damsel! (He may bow.)

Amy feels her beard, looks at her boyish outfit, squeals in despair, and runs off. Beth almost goes after her.

JO. Play/Beth! PLAY!

Hannah has entered.

HANNAH. Ladies—

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JO. EN GARDE!

Beth plays a victory song. Jo and Laurie roughhouse.

L'AURIE. EN GARDE!

HANNAH. LADIES!

Mr. Laurence, an imposing old gentleman with a cane, has entered.

A Gentleman's Come Calling.

L'AURIE. Grandfather!

MR. LAURENCE. —Brooks tells me that you've been neglecting your studies, Theodore.

L. AURIE. (I—)

MR. LAURENCE. You have a part to play, sir. And not amongst the women.

LAURIE. Grandfather—

MR. LAURENCE. We are too old for these games! (*Bangs cane down.*) Come!

Laurie leaves the stage. They begin to exit.

10. No—!

MEG. (Whispered.) Io!

10. (*Getting tangled up but persisting.*) You can't keep him locked away, like an ogre! He's a growing boy, he needs company and amusement, and—and sunlight in which to bloom!

MEG. (*Mortified*) My God, Jo, what are you saying?

MR. LAURENCE. He doesn't need your rescue, madam, he's not some damsel in distress.

O. He's a gentleman in distress! And without him, our play is a disaster. Please?!!!

Beth, from behind the piano, arises. Mr. Laurence notices her for the first time. He starts—then turns and exits. Laurie, unhappily, bows to Jo and follows.

(In any other circumstance this would be the worst profanity possible.)
Christopher Columbus.

MEG. Jo, you shouldn't have interfered.

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