

JO. I can't abide seeing a body stuffed into the wrong role.
HANNAH. Oh, I don't know, Miss Meg—it's good to make friends with that boy. He may take a shine to one of you.

MEG. Hannah!

HANNAH. Ho-ho!

She exits.

JO. (*Kicks a prop.*) This is all that abominable Brooks' fault, for tattling!

MEG. He isn't abominable!

JO. What?

Amy has entered, dressed to the gills.

MEG. YOU'RE abominable!

JO. What?!

Meg storms off.

Actresses. (*Looks at Amy.*) Why are you all dressed up?

AMY. Where is Laurie?

JO. Gone.

AMY. This is all your fault, Josephine! You have RUINED my day, and Meg's day, and—and CHRISTMAS!

She also runs off. Jo, looking for consolation, turns to Beth—who slips out.

Scene 8

The Laurences' fine house. Mr. Laurence reads. Offstage, Laurie takes a Latin lesson from Brooks. As their voices fade, a light knock on the door.

MR. LAURENCE. Enter.

No answer.

ENTER!

He bangs his cane once firmly. The door creaks open, slowly. Beth, very afraid—trembling—stands on the threshold. Mr.

Mr. Laurence + Beth

Laurence sees her and starts up—he seems quite struck by her. He bows. A moment of silence.

Madame.

Pause. Beth is ready to flee. Beth opens her mouth to speak, but no sound comes out.

BETH. (*A completely inaudible whisper; all the audience will see is her lips moving.*)—Mr. Laurence—

MR. LAURENCE. I can't hear you, madame—

BETH. (*Barely a whisper, now almost in tears.*) Mr. Laurence, sir I came to ask you—

MR. LAURENCE. Speak up—

BETH. (*Summoning up all her courage.*) Mr. Laurence, sir I came to ask you—if you won't let, please, your grandson do our—theatrical.

Beat. She's ready to bolt at any moment.

MR. LAURENCE. Why do you girls all think Theodore needs rescuing? Am I—as your sister said, an ogre?

BETH. N—no, sir. Lonely.

MR. LAURENCE. Me!

BETH. Laurie, sir. And he was kind about my piano, and looked so happy when Meg said he might join our comp'ny. And if not—our—our play is a disaster, said Jo, and Amy said our—our Christmas is—ruined.

MR. LAURENCE. What is your name?

BETH. B—Beth.

MR. LAURENCE. You must think me the villain from Mr. Dickens' book, Beth March, to ruin Christmas.

BETH. I—I think people don't always see exactly what they do, sir.

Beat.

MR. LAURENCE. I imagine you see.

I had a little girl once, with eyes like yours.

He looks at her. She looks away, embarrassed, and can't help but look at the big shining piano.