MEG. We're here—

AMY. All of us.

BETH. Jo—tell me a story.

JO. Now?

Beth nods weakly.

BETH. A real one.

JO. Once upon a time, there was a family. A father, a mother—and four girls. But the best of them all, the conscience of the family—her name was Beth.

BETH. And when that girl died…

JO. In this story, Beth, the girl never dies.
She stayed with that family. And together, they were whole.

MEG. And together, they were safe.

AMY. And together they lived happily ever after.

JO. They *lived.*
…Beth?

Beth's eyes have closed again. Lights fade.

Scene 16

The next day, the parlor. Amy sits with her head in her hands, exhausted. She's been crying, hard. The door's bell rings—it is Laurie, sneaking in.

AMY. Laurie! *(Calling off.)* Meg, Jo! *(To Laurie.)* Where have you been?

Jo and Meg have entered.

JO. Laurie—!

He opens the door—and hands in Marmee.

MEG. Marmee—!

A frozen, tense moment as she looks for news—

JO. The fever broke, Marmee! Beth is so much better!

Marmee grabs Jo's hands, almost cries. They support her to the couch, surround her. She raises her head.

MARMEE. Merry Christmas, girls.
We have brought you—a very late present.

Mr. Brooks has entered, supporting a man in uniform: Robert March. He's on crutches, a bandage around his head. The girls all freeze, looking at him. Amy runs to him first, a little girl again.

AMY. Papa!!!!

*They all run to him, so much crying and hugging—saying "Father, Papa!" * Hannah enters, and freaks out. The girls are all in hysterics of joy. Jo goes to Laurie; Meg, to Mr. Brooks.*

HANNAH. MR. MARCH! *(Sobbing in joy.)* Mrs. March!

She accosts Marmee.

How fast can those newfangled telegrams go, I just wrote to you this morning—!

MARMEE. Laurie fetched us yesterday, Hannah.

HANNAH. Mr. Theodore, I ought to have you whipped

She pulls Laurie to her bosom and smothers him.

OH MR. MARCH TO HAVE YOU HOME AGAIN!

Laurie frees himself as she sobs and collapses on Mr. March.

JO. *(To Laurie.)* Old fellow, how can I ever thank you?

MEG. Mr. Brooks—how can I ever thank you?

BROOKS. —call me John.

Meg takes his hand—now she presses it to her cheek. He sinks down to his knee.

JO. Laurie—do something!—Mr. Brooks is behaving dreadfully, and Meg likes it!

LAURIE. You haven't taken any of the decorations down yet?

JO. What shall we do?

LAURIE. Jo! Look!

Above Laurie and Jo, the mistletoe. He kisses her. Amy looks

* See overlapping dialogue at end of script.

over, sees them, and screams. *Marmee bounds over to try to stop her.*

MARMEE. Shh, Amy, SHH!

HANNAH. Don't wake—

Too late. In the doorway, in her white nightgown, stands Beth, like a ghost. She is weak, starts on a few tottering steps—and then flies into her father's arms.

Blackout.

End of Act One