

SLIGHTLY BIGGER WOMEN

by Anne Basting and Tina Binns

April, 2015

Staged as part of the UWM 2014-15 Theatre Season

Cast

Hal Kerr- John Brooke

Graham Billings - Laurie

Youa Thao - Marmee

Corinne Roth - Meg

Clare Scott - Jo

Katie Seidl - Amy

Allyson Robinson - Beth

Part One

SET: There are 3 wooden chairs in the center. 4 Hope Chests in the corners.

TIME: Concord, MA, during the American Civil War. Christmas.

AT CURTAIN: Players enter as Christmas Carolers, singing "Ding Dong Merrily on High." They enter the space and sing, then dance to Ding Dong instrumental music.

All but the March sisters exit. The sisters prepare for Christmas, hanging a wreath, setting the table, trimming a tree. Exhausted, they sit down after fighting over who should get one of the 3 seats - "no after you..." "after you..."

JO steps out, takes a deep breath and begins reading from a big book. She reads out loud to no one in particular and her sisters don't take notice that she is narrating their lives.

JO

"My sisters and I remember That winter as the coldest of our childhood. A temporary poverty had settled upon our family some years before. But necessity is indeed the mother of invention. Somehow, in that dark time, our family — the March family — seemed to create it's own light."

MARMEE begins to enter and BETH takes notice.

BETH

Marmee! Marmee's home!

All the girls, including Jo, flock to MARMEE. They fight over who gets to give her their chair.

AMY

Marmee! We waited and waited! We've been expectorating you for hours!

JO

It's *expecting*, feather head.

JO steps out continuing her reading. It should be apparent though that she's only half reading. She knows the text by heart. Her sisters continue to act out their greetings to MARMEE behind her.

MARMEE

Oh oh oh, my dearest daughters.

JO

Our mother raised us alone as our father fought in the war against the South. She was our Marmee and we were her—

ALL

—Little women!

JO looks at her sisters, somewhat shocked that they have jumped on her line. AMY smirks and BETH shrugs. JO looks as if she's about to say something, so MARMEE jumps in and keeps the scene going.

MARMEE

Now, Miss Amy, what do I have here?

MARMEE pulls a letter from her pocket.

AMY

Father!

They all gather around MARMEE as she reads aloud.

MARMEE

"My dearest family, I am well and safe. Our battalion is encamped on the Puh-tom-ic. December makes a hard cold season for all of the men so far from home. I find my best comfort in your affection. I pray that your own hardships will not be too great to bear. Give them all my dear love and a kiss..."

MARMEE does so, kissing each girl. Then, she folds the letter up again and they all sing "Ding, Dong Merrily on High". After the first verse, JO steps out and narrates again. As she speaks, the singing gets softer. MARMEE exits and LAURIE enters. He goes unnoticed as AMY, MEG, and BETH prepare for the next scene. LAURIE holds a large frame that makes it seem like he is looking through a window.

JO

Next to us lived Mr. Laurence and his grandson, Theodore — whom we affectionately called Laurie. Laurie had been raised in Italy among artists, but Mr. Lawrence refused to have a vagrant for a grandson. So long as Laurie lived with him, he would be a proper gentleman. He was like a prisoner in that big old house. Meg became cross with me if I tried to speak to Laurie since a "gentleman" is supposed to speak to a "lady" first. Of course, I found that to be nonsense. Why would Laurie think less of me for speaking to him?

LAURIE stands at the edge of the stage, watching them longingly, through an old frame, as though from next door. Not in a creepy way, but as if he wants to be involved.

JO

So, what do we think of the boy—

AMY

—He's hardly a boy. He's a *man*—

JO

Do you think he is being held captive by that awful old grandfather of his?

MEG

Jo, please don't say "awful". It's slang.

BETH

He looks so lonely. Do you think he'll come to call?

JO

Maybe he has a secret. Perhaps something tragic happened to him in Europe!

MEG

I've heard he's had no upbringing at all. He was raised in Italy among artists and Mr. Lawrence refuses to have a vagrant for a grandson.

AMY

Oh, where did you hear that, Meg?

MEG

Oh, I don't know. I only hear it every time Jo reads-

JO

-Doesn't he have a noble brow? If I were a boy, I'd want to look just like that. Imagine having to give up Italy to come live here in Concord!

AMY

I shouldn't mind living in such a nice house and having such fine things.

The girls move away from the window/frame and MEG, having seen their neighbor's nicer house can't help but long for a bit more.

MEG

It hardly feels like Christmas this year without presents.

AMY

I am desperate for some drawing pencils.

JO

I wish I didn't have to work for Great-Aunt March, the miserable old miser.

MEG

Jo!

JO

It's true!

AMY

And you, Beth? What do you want for Christmas?

BETH

I want father to come home and the war to be over.

MEG

We all want that, sweet Beth.

BETH glances out the window once more.

BETH

They do have a beautiful piano!

JO

Well, when I become a writer, I'll buy you the best piano in creation.

AMY

Or you could come over and play mine. I'm going to marry a handsome man and be disgustingly rich.

JO

I wouldn't marry for money. What if his business busts? Besides, the paper pays five whole dollars for every story they print! Why, I have ten stories I could write right now! That's fifty dollars—

MEG

Gentlemen, I dislike all of this talk of money. It isn't refined!

BETH

We'll all grow up someday, Meg. We may as well know what we want.

MEG

What did you say Beth?

BETH

We'll all grow up someday, Meg. We may as well know what we...— you know what I said. I have to say it over and over.

AMY

Oh I do wish we could grow up —

MEG

—Let's do something else, shall we? Let's practice our play, shall we?

With that being said, the girls remove their pipes and what garments of men's clothing they are wearing and instead get into their characters for their melodramas.

MEG

Now, what did we decide to call it again, Jo, and where did we leave off?

JO

The great tale of Rodrigo and the Lady Zara, and you were confessing.

MEG

Oh yes! That's right!

MEG gets down on her knees and begins to "pray".

MEG

Oh, Lord, I have sinned against meself and me lover Rodrigo!

JO

You have to say "sinned" as if you've really sinned.

MEG

Sinned. Sinned!

JO

Rodrigo!

JO turns her attention to AMY who is playing the part of Rodrigo. AMY makes her "entrance", but she's moving in an overly-feminine way. Like a princess or a ballerina.

JO

You arrive seeking the Duke of Lankershire! (*As the duke*) Hark ye! Who goes there? Why it's...it's Rodrigo! ...Rodrigo? ...Amy!

AMY

I want to be Lady Zara! I'm exhaustified of being the boy.

LAURIE holds up the frame and looks in again, hoping to join. Disappointed.

MEG

Exhausted, Amy. Exhausted.

JO

You're too little to play Zara!

BETH comes forward, trying to remedy the situation, and offers AMY her garb.

BETH

Here, Amy, you can be the witch Hagar.

AMY

No! She's old and ugly and she barely has any lines!

MEG

Who else will be our Rodrigo?

LAURIE holds up his frame again looking hopeful. JO waves to him "just a minute..."

AMY

I don't care! I don't want to be a boy and I don't want to play this game any longer if I can't be Lady Zara!

JO

Well then, on that note...Gentlemen, I propose the admission of a new member to our theatrical society. Theodore Laurence. Let's put it to a vote.

AMY

Nay! He'll laugh at our acting!

MEG

He'll think it's only a silly game.

JO

No, he won't.

MEG

Jo, What will he think of us?

AMY

We bear our souls and tell the most appalling secrets.

MEG

It would be quite improper.

JO

Please? Let's just give him a try!

JO waves at LAURIE again to come over. LAURIE drops the frame and he is suddenly there. When the other girls see him, they scamper to the other side of the room as if he's a disease.

MEG

Jo!

AMY

Traitor!

LAURIE

Fellow artists, may I humbly present myself as a loyal and very humble servant to this club. I can offer my services of acting and singing to you.

JO

We'll be the judge of that!

LAURIE

I promise to never reveal what I have been told in confidence here.

The other three do not seem convinced. The Disney feel is starting to unravel.

JO

Come now, he's promised to keep our secrets and he's being friendly. What say you?

MEG

Jo—...we can't.

JO

But why not? Amy, didn't you want to be Lady Zara? You can now because we have a new Rodrigo!

LAURIE

I would love to take your place as Rodrigo, Amy.

MEG

Laurie, I'm sorry, but the offer Jo has made is perfectly improper.

JO

Why are you so against this?!

MEG

We shouldn't even be speaking with him -- women -- in the theatre!?! If anyone finds out...It's shameful!

AMY

Oh we'll be perfectly ostramified!

JO and MEG stare each other down in an awkward silence.

LAURIE

Perhaps I should go—

JO

No. You stay right where you are.

MEG

It's completely improper!

JO

You're the one making it improper!

LAURIE

You have my sincerest, my most humblest apologies for any discomfort I might have caused you lovely and kind-hearted ladies.

AMY and BETH

Awwww. How sweet. Let him play.

JO

Yes! Let me just give you a quick introduction to the story.

As she tells it, the sisters enact it.

JO

The charming Rodrigo (LAURIE) and the beautiful and kind Zara (AMY) are desperately in love. But Hugo (JO points to herself) also fancies her and vows to slay Roderigo and have Zara for his very own.

Hugo visits the witch Hagar (BETH) and demands a potion to kill Rodrigo. Meanwhile, Rodrigo visits Zara and pledges his love - but is refused by her father Don Pedro (MEG) for being too poor. Rodrigo is bereft - and nearly kills himself. But Hagar gives him hope. Hugo insists on a duel - and Hagar sets the potion in Hugo's drink - which he drinks out of desperate thirst. *(JO, as Hugo, drinks the poison and dramatically dies. A second after she dies, she excitedly jumps back up and continues the story)* Rodrigo magically discovers that Hagar has filled his bag with gold - and the two lovers tumble into a desperate embrace with the approval of Don Pedro.

LAURIE

Oh that does sound like great fun!

MEG

But it's not a game to be playing in front of a man.

JO

Oh, Meg! Loosen your corset!

MEG

Jo!!

JO

Meg!

MEG
Josephine!!

JO
Margaret!!

AMY
Oh this is just horrible. Worse than when I burn your book manuscript and nearly die falling through the ice!

TENSE PAUSE (all focus turns to AMY)

AMY
Let's move on! Marmee!

MARMEE quickly enters, handing JO her book and ending that scene. JO gives MEG one last glare.

MARMEE
Oh my dear girls who never **EVER** fight! Here is your book.

JO
Fine. What's next?

She thumbs through the pages until she finds a passage that suits her. As JO speaks, the girls prepare for the next scene, but MARMEE hangs around.

JO
"Summers were filled from sunrise to sunset with gathering and gardening and wistful word games and dreaming of all we could become."

MARMEE looks over JO's shoulder at the pages

MARMEE
Am I in this one?

JO
Uh...no. Sorry, Marmee. You weren't written into this one.

MARMEE
Off I go to roll more bandages...

MARMEE sighs and leaves, somewhat bored.

LAURIE, AMY, BETH, JO, and MEG spread out a blanket and plop down on the ground, tired from hiking to their picnic spot.

LAURIE

What is the game now, dear Jo? Or am I to remain silent - I'm pleased to obey Meg's wishes - as long as I am in the good company of the March sisters. It's dull as a desert in my house.

MEG

You may participate Laurie, but I'm afraid it won't improve upon your desert.

AMY

We play Pilgrim's Progress - and dream of our ideal futures, our celestial cities!

MEG

...That sounds rather dull, doesn't it?

JO

Oh, but wouldn't it be grand if we could make all our the castles in the air come true?

LAURIE

I'm afraid I've made so many I couldn't live in all of them.

MEG

You'll have to pick your favorite.

JO

If I tell mine, will you tell yours?

LAURIE

Yes, if the ladies will too.

MEG

We will. Go on, Laurie.

LAURIE

Well - after I'd seen as much of the world as I want to, I'd like to settle in Germany and have just as much music as I choose. I'm to be a famous musician myself, and all creation is to rush to hear me. And I'm never to be bothered about money or business, but just enjoy myself and live for what I like. That's my favorite castle. What's yours, Meg?

MEG

I should like a lovely house, full of all sorts of luxurious things nice food, pretty clothes, handsome furniture, pleasant people, and heaps of money. I am to be mistress of it, and manage it as I like, with plenty of servants, so I never need work a bit.

LAURIE

Wouldn't you have a master for your castle in the air?

MEG

I did say `pleasant people'.

JO

Where are the wise, good husband and angelic children?

MEG

You'd have nothing but horses and novels in yours.

JO

Oh! I'd have a stable full of Arabian steeds, rooms piled high with books, and I'd write out of a magic inkstand, so that my works should be as famous as Laurie's music. I want to do something splendid before I go into my castle, something heroic or wonderful that won't be forgotten after I'm dead. I think I shall write books, and get rich and famous, that would suit me, so that is my favorite dream.

AMY

I have ever so many wishes! I'd like to marry a handsome man. I'd like to be rich! I'd like to have gorgeous children — a girl and a boy. But most of all, I'd like to be an artist and go to Rome and draw fine pictures! I'd draw all the beautiful landscapes Italy has to offer and become the best artist in the whole world.

There is a silence as they enjoy their fantasies until LAURIE realizes they have forgotten about BETH.

LAURIE

And what about you, Beth?

BETH

Oh, me? Mine is to stay at home safe with Father and Mother, and help take care of the family.

LAURIE

Is that -- all?

BETH

Since I have my little piano, I am perfectly satisfied. I only wish we may all keep well and be together, nothing else.

AMY

Nothing else?

BETH hesitates and thinks about it.

BETH

Well, actually—

JO clears her throat and nudges BETH. BETH looks to her sister and JO shakes her head, causing BETH to sigh and reluctantly answer...

BETH

Nothing else...

LAURIE

I do wonder if any of us will ever get our wishes.

BETH

(cynically) Do you wonder - really?

JO

Chin up Bethie - remember this? "I've got the key to my castle in the air, but whether I can unlock the door remains to be seen"

AMY

Here's my key! *(Holding up her pencil.)*

BETH

Here's mine - *(mimics dying)*

MEG

Oh, Beth, don't be so morbid-

JOHN BROOKE suddenly enters, looking flustered. LAURIE tries to hide behind JO, but JOHN sees him anyway.

JOHN

Theodore Laurence! This is the third lesson in a row you've missed. Your grandfather will be highly displeased to find you mingling with...*women...*

JOHN and MEG suddenly lay eyes on each other. It's love at first sight in the sappiest way. MEG breaks away from her sisters without looking back and gets closer to JOHN. LAURIE, BETH, AMY, and JO all exchange confused looks and then gather together to watch the following events unfold.

JOHN
Well...hello.

MEG
Hello.

JOHN
I'm — uh — I'm John. John Brooke. Laurie's tutor.

MEG
I'm...Margaret, Margaret March.

Behind her, JO mouths "Margaret!?" and scoffs.

JOHN
I'm delighted to meet you, Margaret, Margaret March

MEG
Oh, the pleasure is all mine, John. John Brooke.

The two gaze lovingly into each other's eyes...which is terribly awkward for everyone else. JO forces a cough and clears her throat and JOHN suddenly becomes re-aware that everyone else is there.

JOHN
Oh! I'm terribly sorry. Have I interrupted something?

JO
Yes.

MEG
Oh, but it was nothing really. We were just talking about our 'castles in the air'.

JOHN
Castles...?

MEG

Our dreams. Childish things, really.

AMY

(childishly) My dreams are *not* childish!

BETH

(*Muttering*) At least you get to have dreams...your book won't let me.

JOHN

And what are your dreams, Miss March?

MEG

My dreams? Oh, they're nothing too wild. I'd just like to have a quaint home with a loving husband and our children.

JO

Quaint? Christopher Columbus...

JOHN

That's a lovely dream!

AMY

But, Meg, I thought you wanted a big house with servants—

MEG

—Dreams can change, Amy.

LAURIE

In a heartbeat, apparently.

BETH

But, Meg, you've wanted that home for years. Why have you changed your mind now?

JOHN offers MEG his arm. She smiles and takes it.

MEG

I've grown up.

JO

In naught but a matter of minutes? You're just being boring because you think it will impress *John*, John Brooke.

MEG

Or perhaps I'm being "boring" because I've come to realize my place in society. Aunt March was right to leave you and take Amy to Europe. You've no manners at all!

BETH gasps at what MEG has just said and JO is taken aback. LAURIE, ever trying to make JO happy, tries to save this disaster of an interaction.

LAURIE

Europe? Meg, whatever are you talking about? Aunt March has promised—

MEG

Oh, don't be foolish! We all know she's going to eventually go back on her word and leave Jo behind. It's in the book!

MARMEE rushes in with JO's book.

MARMEE

Book? Did I hear my beautiful girls talking about the book? I have it right here if you need it.

MARMEE crosses to JO, but doesn't hand it to her right away. Instead, she has a nostalgic look on her face as she comes in too late to save everybody.

MARMEE

You know, when I was your age, I used to dream—

JO shakes her head.

MARMEE

Not in this one?

JO

Sorry Marmee. Let's just go on.

JO abruptly sticks her hand out for the book and MARMEE'S face falls. She hands it over and leaves.

JO

We've got to hold it together, people! Stick to the book!

(sighs)

We dreamed together in the summer and when winter came, we spent it looking out for each other and keeping company with one another. In the spring, we prepared for Meg to attend Sally Moffat's coming out. Myself, I'd rather be hung by the neck until dead than attend a fancy ball.

Aunt March was highly displeased that Meg did not have her own debut and had resigned herself to the idea that Meg would never marry.

JOHN and LAURIE leaves and all the sisters mill about excitedly, preparing MEG to go out. Even though they have moved on to a new scene, the tension is still there.

BETH

Wait until all of Boston sees you in this dress, Meg.

AMY

Oh, how I wish I could go, too! How I wish I could wear a dress like yours Meg and go to a ball just like Cinderella!

JO

I told Laurie he has to show you off and keep you from being a wallflower upon penalty of death! Where is that miserable glove!? Meg, can you simply go without it?

MEG

Jo, don't be so silly! No woman goes to a ball without her gloves! Keep looking!

All four sisters search, but to no avail.

MEG

Oh no, what will I do without it?

JO

Marmee! Marmee!

MARMEE enters at her daughter's call.

MARMEE

Yes, darlings! I am here. Marmee is here! Is there something I can finally do for you?

JO

Marmee, Meg's frantic. She lost her glove and she only has one pair!

AMY

She cannot go without gloves! The Moffat's are societal!

MEG

Society, Amy.

MARMEE

You're absolutely correct, Amy. She can not go without gloves.

JO

But why? Are hands suddenly scandalous?

AMY

Jo, it's fashion—

MEG

—And a proper lady *a/ways* wears her gloves! Whatever will John think of me without my gloves?

JO

But why? This is nonsense, Meg. You look just fine without them. And why is it that he suddenly matters—

MARMEE

—Jo, wasn't it you who wanted for us to "keep it together"?

MEG

"Keep to the book" you say, and now you're causing trouble!

JO

Your stupid gloves are a tiny detail anyway! This whole party is ridiculous anyway. You're just going to marry that poor tutor and have his babies. I really don't think he cares about your gloves.

MEG

You mock me Jo? Just because I've fallen in love?

JO

You're throwing all your dreams away for him!

MEG

Oh, and what about you, hypocrite!? What about you and Professor Bhaer?

MARMEE

Oh dear...

AMY

Everything is going wrong! This is perfectly disastruous!

BETH
EVERYONE, HUSH!

Everyone spins and looks at BETH, who has pretty much been forgotten by everyone. She comes forward.

BETH
Laurie? John? Will you join us please?

The men peek out from offstage, confused.

LAURIE
But we're not in this chapter —

JOHN
And she doesn't have her gloves—

BETH
Please?

Reluctantly, JOHN and LAURIE come on stage. They shift awkwardly, knowing they are horribly out of place and that this is not what the book says is supposed to happen.

BETH
Now, we've clearly messed this all up—

MEG
—Not we. Josephine has.

JO and MEG stare each other down. BETH rolls her eyes and gets between them.

BETH
Well, why don't we try all this again? From the beginning.

JO
The beginning?

BETH
The very beginning.

MEG
The book doesn't say anything about that...

AMY

Where is the beginning?

BETH

Christmas, of course. We'll start at the beginning, but do it a little differently. This time I get to be someone who lives!

MEG

You know that can't...

BETH

And Jo doesn't have to marry that creepy old professor.

JO

Beth...

BETH

And Amy can become an artist and Laurie and I go on tour playing piano --

LAURIE

Sounds good to me!

AMY

BETH! get hold of yourself.

JOHN

You as well, Laurie. You know that you are to go to Europe after Jo shatters your heart and settle for her younger sister, Amy, whilst you both travel together in a country only our protagonist expressed any interest in. The book declares it and it is what we have played for years.

BETH

Jo's the only one who gets to do anything fun.

MEG

That's not true!

BETH

Yes, it is and you know it! Amy's a brat but gets to marry Laurie. And you've (*to MEG*) got a stick up your bottom.

MEG

Beth! You're sounding like Jo!

BETH

Good, at least now you're all paying attention to me!

MARMEE

Oh my. Here we go again.

LAURIE

Ding Dong Merrily on High anyone?

LAURIE and JO try to sing. LAURIE plunks it out on the piano. The mood is sour.

BETH

...Fine. Ignore me again. Why would you pay attention? I'm just the wallflower who dies.

MARMEE goes over to Beth to comfort her.

MARMEE

Why don't we try to find that darned glove one more time dear?

JO

This is nonsense!

MEG

Please, Jo, not again.

JO

Why do we have to wear gloves? My hands are clean – I know how to wash.

MEG

Don't talk like that, Jo.

BETH

Oh, you ninnies! Let me just look one last place.

BETH goes to the hope chest in the corner of the room.

JO

Really, this is all so infuriating. It's just a glove and—

CHEST

—Gloves are stupid! (audio effect)

MEG

Jo – such language!

JO

I didn't say that!

MEG

Beth! Come talk sense into your sister.

JO

I didn't say anything!

MEG

She said – oh I can't...

JO

It came from here –

BETH reopens the chest –

HOPE CHEST

Gloves are Stupid! (audio)

Beth and Meg both gasp. JOHN goes to MEG's side and holds her close to protect her.

LAURIE

It's magic...

AMY

Magic? Magic is not in our book!

JO

My hope chest talks! Here, let me –

MEG

NO!

JO

Oh don't be such cowards. It's just a voice. It's not like it's going to change our tiny little world view...forever...

AMY

Oh for heavens sake Jo - open it!

JO OPENS IT

HOPE CHEST

Gloves are Stupid. I wore gloves I was a girl..and the reason I wore them was because other people wore them! But gloves are stupid! You don't need gloves in the summertime, They may have made some sense when there were lots of germs going around, and people wanted to protect their hands from other people's hands. But later on it became a nuisance and it got in the way.

JO

Thank you! Whoever you are!

BETH

What does it mean Jo?

MEG

It means we are bewitched!

AMY walks to her hope chest.

AMY

I want to try!

MEG

Amy - Don't!

MARMEE

Courage my dear.

Amy opens her chest

HOPE CHEST

A gentleman always opens the door for a lady.

AMY

That doesn't sound bewitched.

LAURIE

Sounds rather proper, actually.

MEG

A disembodied voice – no matter how proper – is still the devil’s work.

MARMEE

We are stuck in a never-ending loop of our lives thanks to Joe’s book! Perhaps a little devilment can do us some good.

JO

Try yours Bethie.

BETH

Oh do you really think I should?

AMY

Just do it, Beth!

BETH

Marmee?

MARMEE

Devil be damned!

MEG

Marmee!

MARMEE

Oh, do lighten up, dear Meg. We’ve nothing to lose.

BETH goes to her chest and slowly opens the lid.

...HOPE CHEST is silent.

MARMEE

Nothing.

JO

Fiddlesticks! It doesn’t talk!

BETH

No, wait. Look at this.

BETH pulls a letter from the chest.

BETH

It's a letter –

AMY

Was it there before?

BETH

It's dated October 17th, 2014

ALL GASP, MEG screams, is faint.

JOHN

2014, It's the devil for sure.

MARMEE

Go ahead and read it dear. It won't strike you dead any earlier than your scarlet fever will.

BETH

Dear Lizzie,

I am also very excited to have a pen-pal. I am 68 years old. I grew up in Racine, WI—

LAURIE

Wisconsin?

AMY

oh goodness – the Wild –er-ness.

JOHN

I do believe it only just became a state...

BETH

Shh! (*continues*)

—in a low- to middle-class family. I married my husband when I was 19 years old. I have two daughters, and 5 grandchildren - all boys. I didn't go to college. I wanted to but I didn't have the chance.

JOE

Me too!

BETH

I spent a lot of time with my family - we enjoyed camping at our trailer.

BETH

I lost my husband about 14 years ago.

MARMEE (Continues reading)

I have had many challenges in my life, all of which made me stronger and helped shape who I am today.

JO

She sounds just like us!

MARMEE

I imagined something so far in the future would be much different than our lives. Perhaps you read the date wrong dear Beth?

BETH

No, it's 2014.

LAURIE

Are there more? Perhaps the magic isn't quite done?

AMY goes to her Hope Chest.

AMY

I want my very own letter! Do you suppose there's one in mine?

AMY opens her HOPE CHEST

A gentleman always opens the door for a lady.

You never left the table until everybody was through eating.

No one ever rested on the table while they were eating dinner, their hands were always in their laps.

When you eat meat, you don't pick up the bone!

MEG

This isn't magic – it's moral instruction.

JO opens hers.

JO's HOPE CHEST

Olives should not be eaten with the fingers. The fingers should be eaten separately!

AMY

Eating fingers! It's horrifying!

MARMEE

It's a joke, Amy. Our friends from the future are funny

BETH

Look, here's another...

(in general, the characters are astonished by and comment on the letters as they are read)

Dear Lisa,

Ever since I was a young girl, I knew I wanted to work at a bank. My older brothers all worked at banks, so it was something that ran in the family. Math was my favorite subject. After I graduated from highschool, I got a job as a teller at M&I Bank in Milwaukee.

JOHN

A woman working at a bank...astounding!

JO pulls a letter out of her hope chest.

JO

Dear Savanna,

When I was in college, the only options were secretary, teacher, nurse or wife. I wanted to be an archeologist - but that wasn't even in the realm of possibility. Once, when I was visiting a friend in the hospital, a woman in a white coat walked in and Dennis said "hello nurse." And she said "I'm the DOCTOR."

BETH

We can be doctors? I want to be a doctor!

LAURIE

I'm so happy for you all – it seems the future holds great things for the ladies –

JO

Dear Amora,

"You seem to me a wonderful, gifted woman who has so many questions about your future. I look at life now from a different view. I have burned my candle down and am near the end, close to going dark."—

LAURIE (continuing)

"You are strong and burning brightly, eager to live the life you want. Life to me is like a huge road trip."—

AMY

A road trip?

MARMEE

Perhaps she means a journey? Like the ones people took to Oregon or California?

JO

"We start our trip thinking we know what our destination is, but there are detours along the way that we have to handle to reach our goal - things like illness and money problems.

Keep your sense of humor and look at life as the great adventure it is - you have the ability to make your world as you want it to be and be happy."

AMY

Oh I want to fly into the future to meet her! Do you think she's in here? Can I fall through? (*she looks into the chest and tries to call to her*) Can you hear me?

Hello? Hello? Hello?

MARMEE

There is wisdom in these letters.

AMY races to the other chests to see if she can find people in them.

AMY

Hello! Hello! Are you in there?

JO

"Dear Kena,

When I was in college, long distance phone contact with home meant using real money deposited into a pay phone in the hallway of my dormitory. So I wrote letters. Now I use e-mail so easily!" —

All are stumped.

MEG

What is E...mail?

LAURIE

What is a Payphone?

JOHN

Ahem....I have no idea.

AMY pulls a penny from a pocket.

AMY

Do you suppose this could pay for a phone?

AMY drops the penny into the hope chest.

AMY

Hello? Hello?

HOPE CHEST

“There was no such things as jeans - popular jeans. They were for workmen...and women especially wouldn’t wear that kind of a thing.”

MEG

Well, I should hope not! The very thought!

LAURIE

What are jeans?

BETH

“Dear Bianca,

I, in a word, am OLD. 80 years old. What I think of often is “the circle of life.” I think I stole that phrase from a song in “The Lion King” but it’s true...

I think it is interesting that you want to be a mechanic - because my dad was a mechanic.”

AMY

I found one! My very own letter!

“Dear Amber,

I am 93 years old. I am one of 5 siblings born to parents who emigrated from Sweden in 1909. My life has been so rich and so full, it seems like a dream too good to be true.

Martha”

MARMEE

Such long lives! 80, 93 - and so vital!

BETH

Does anyone get sick and die anymore?

LAURIE walks over to one of the chests and takes his turn pulling out a letter.

LAURIE

Listen to this one -

Dear Di,

I am so happy to write to you and admire your courage to leave China and come to the United State for your education. I wish you success in finding a job in your chosen field of nursing.
From Margaret

JOHN

A student from China? How fascinating! It must have taken them months to travel by ship!

MARMEE

What a gift we've been given – a portal to the future – to see how the world will change.

LAURIE

What will it mean for us?

AMY

Do the young women write back? *(yelling into the hope chest)* Do. You. Write. Back?

Everyone moves to the Chests and pull out more letters. The following is done more rapidly. Letters cover the floor. They read them and pour through them, stopping and looking up to read.

JOHN

My name is Mileva, I was born in Serbia. I am starting my first year at UW-Milwaukee and in a couple of years I plan on graduating and continuing my education to either become a doctor or a physicians assistant—

AMY

— “My name is Melissa and I am a sophomore. Ever since I can remember, the only thing I wanted to be when was older was a dancer.” A dancer!

MARMEE (continues)

But my father was raised in a traditional, very strict mexican family and didn't see dance as a career.

BETH

“I come from a family of very strong women and I just want to live up to that. I feel that sometimes I am not doing enough. I guess I know who I want to be - I am just stuck between going out on my own limb...”

As everyone is wrapped up in their own letters, BETH takes a moment to hold the letter to her heart before she folds up this letter and puts it in her pocket.

JO

My name is Bianca. I have always wanted to be a mechanic. But my dad kicked me out of the garage because it was “too dangerous!” Now I want to be a detective!

MEG

I’ve decided to be a psychologist. As a strong women in the 21st century, I feel as though I can accomplish anything I set my mind to—

MARMEE

— I am studying Criminal Justice with the intention of becoming a police officer —

LAURIE

—I want to be a photojournalist.

JOHN

A customs officer in Japan.

BETH

A forensic pathologist or forensic archeologist.

AMY

I want to be a sculptor, a writer, and a geographer.

MEG

A traveling journalist.

JO

A Teacher

MARMEE

A well-respected business woman!

AMY

A museum curator.

MEG

“I am 23...Since I was a little girl I could picture myself being this beautiful, precious, and gracious wife, with a beautiful family., living the “dream” lifestyle and I’m proud to say that next year in March - I”M GETTING MARRIED!!!” So now we’re making big wedding plans. My mom’s making most of the plans because her and my dad are renewing their vows the same day for 30 years of marriage so it’s going to be a double wedding.”

Hah! See, Jo? Perhaps things don't change so much.

JO

But...with all these opportunities in 2014, why would she want that?

JOHN

People can have whatever castle in the air they wish, Jo.

MEG

And with all of these possibilities. She can do anything she wants. If being married is what she wants — well, then I say more power to her!

BETH

"After highschool, I came out to my parents."

AMY

Is that like Sally Moffat's coming out party?

MARMEE

I don't think so, dear Amy.

BETH

"My parents are both Polish Catholic immigrants. Declaring I was a lesbian (*MEG gasps at that vulgar word*) was not acceptable to them in the slightest." What's a lesbian?

All shrug except JOHN, who steps up to the plate. This is a very obscure reference in 1865, and he's quite proud of himself for knowing it.

JOHN

I believe it's a woman who loves other women, although it could be more general. You see, there was an ancient Greek poet— *(around the sixth century BC, and she came from an island...)*

JO

Thank you John. Amy?

AMY

"Threats were made that they were going to kick me out, or they were going to leave me with my sister and go back to Poland." How horrendous! She didn't even do anything wrong.

MARMEE (Reading over AMY's shoulder)

I would never abandon my girls like that, no matter who they fell in love with.

LAURIE

(Receiving the letter from AMY; reading with intrigue) “At UWM, I took a class in gay, lesbian and bisexual psychology. It was as if I was sitting there, playing back to myself all of my life experiences, and then it just clicked.” (Hands the letter to JO)

JO

“ I want to fight for equality among people of different orientations, races, and genders. I want to know that I am doing something that isn't just benefiting me.” That's what I want, too! (hands the letter back to BETH) I want to go to college. I want to learn psychology—

BETH

(Reading more to herself than the group) “And one day, I hope to get married as well.”

JO

(groaning) Just when I was starting to like her...

MEG

Isn't that part of her fight for equality, Jo? Being able to marry the woman she loves?

JO grumbles something like assent.

AMY

A wedding with two brides, in two beautiful dresses—it'd be like a fairy story!

LAURIE

The future really is limitless—but what does this mean for us?

JO

I'll tell you what it means...it means I'll be making some changes.

JO breaks away from the group and picks up the book they've been religiously following. She grins and rips the pages out of it that she doesn't like and then takes up a pen and begins scribbling in it, writing a new story. She speaks as she frantically writes.

JO

This is the story of Lady Zara - who dreams of being a dancer.

AMY dances.

LAURIE

And her cruel father, Don Pedro, so says “dancing is for harlots and prostitutes!”

JOHN
Theodore!

LAURIE
“Dancing isn’t a lucrative career choice for a young lady.”

BETH
In despair, she goes one last time to a dance shop - and spends her last pennies on a pair of slippers.

They stop for a moment. Everyone — including JO — looks to MEG for her contribution to the story. For a moment, she looks like a deer in the headlights. But after a moment, she smiles.

MEG
...Little does she know that the salesperson is really Hagar, the witch, and they are enchanted slippers.

JO
Her true love Rodrigo --

MARMEE
Rodrigo is a shy, clumsy neighbor boy who admiringly watches her dance.

AMY
And Lady Zara invites him to dance with her.

JO
Against the wishes of her father Don Pedro.

LAURIE bursts forward, finally willing to join in on this new story, as he finds his inner Patrick Swayze.

LAURIE
Nobody puts Lady Zara in a corner!

JOHN
...What does that mean?

LAURIE
I haven’t the faintest idea...But it felt right!

HUGO and RODRIGO exchange a glare before RODRIGO dramatically extends his hand to LADY ZARA. She smiles coyly and accepts his hand.

AMY

They go back to the witch/salesperson to get magic slippers for him too.

MARMEE

They invite the father to dance, too.

MEG

But he refuses...

JOHN

Until the salesperson convinces him to try - And for the first time in his life, he feels free.

AMY

They create a world famous family dance company and you can only get tickets at exorbitantly high prices on StubHub.

JO

Exorbitantly, you goose.

BETH

And none of them catch scarlet fever!!

ALL

And none of them catch scarlet fever!

LAURIE spreads out a picnic blanket and they all plop down on it laughing.

LAURIE

Who wants to have a picnic?

MEG

Beth, with all these possibilities, what's your castle in the air, now?

BETH

A police officer. No — a detective. No — I've got it! An MD/PhD communicable disease specialist!

ALL CHEER.

MARMEE joins them.

AMY

Marmee - what are you doing?

MARMEE

Do you think you stop dreaming just because you pass 40? No, my dearests. I want to open a floral shop and travel to Japan to learn the great art of ikebana.

ALL CHEER.

JO

I want to be a writer.

PAUSE

MEG

That's it?

EVERYONE

Boring!

JO

Fine, then. I want to be a journalist!

ALL CHEER

JOHN

I want to be the inventor of the payphone.

CHEER!

LAURIE

Of email!

CHEER!

AMY

I will be a great artist.

CHEER!

MARMEE

And what will be your medium?

AMY

I see myself smeared in chocolate - in a black box theater - with lots of yelling - and the lamenting of politicians!

PAUSE. AWKWARD PAUSE.

JO

Yay! (in a small voice)

AMY

I'm a strong, independent woman, now! I'll do what I want!

MARMEE

Oh, what a wonderful world it will be...we really can do anything. Be anything we dream of.

They all redo the dance from the opening - with more modernized movements to Boogie Woogie Bugle Boy of Company B.

LAURIE sits down and reads a letter tired out by the dance -

LAURIE

I'm not so sure that the future is all daisies and lemondrops.

MARMEE

What did you find?

LAURIE

"Dear Rachel, you asked about my life -- I was born in Illinois, came to Milwaukee as a child and graduated in Journalism from Marquette University... just before -- World War II began."

MARMEE

The war between the north and south isn't bad enough?

The entire world goes to war.

Twice.

(Laurie hands her a letter)

MARMEE

Dear Lisa,

I always wanted to be a nurse, but I grew up with many siblings and we did not have the money for me to go to school. I married at 21, but my husband died one month later at war.

LAURIE

Dear Kelsi,

You ask an interesting question - do you ever think you were restricted in any way because of circumstances beyond your control? Well, Uncle Sam sent me a letter telling me I had to go into the army and I had no choice but to go.

Roger

MARMEE

"When the war came the men of fighting age all left. It was a hard, but wonderful time for me.

Women were needed to work in factories. To manage stores."

Suffering and opportunity - strange bedfellows indeed.

JO

Clearly, the future is not simply our fanciful castles in the air - I wonder -- In their world of e-mail and payphones. Of women detectives and gender studies classes -- What still needs to change for them?

A light comes up on the audience. Everyone is still. A little scared. They assess the audience.

BETH

Marmee?

MARMEE

What dear?

BETH

Do you see them?

MARMEE

Of course I do dear.

AMY

I'm scared.

LAURIE

It's ok Amy

JO

I do believe we're in the world of the letters.

BETH

They are all wearingpants!

MEG

-And no gloves!

JOHN

They have holes in their ears.

LAURIE

And ink on their arms.

JO

Laurie, John - Marmee - Sisters -
Welcome to the future! Let's go meet it!

Jo marches forward, but no one follows her.

JO

Oh - Come on!

JO leads the group over to Stage Left Audience. All follow.

JO establishes the year, shift to Center - the location - Shift to stage right -- establish that they know the story of Little Women and they have been watching.

LAURIE

I am SO FULL of questions

EVERYONE agrees.

JO

Let's ask them!

They fan out into the audience in 2's and 3's.

MARMEE

Who wins the war?

BETH

Do people still die of scarlet fever?

AUDIENCE - no.

Beth wants to hug the person. She hesitates, but does anyway. The others gasp.

BETH (to the audience member)

Oh thank you! Don't worry, I'm not contagious.

All ask their questions and when they are done, come together in the middle to marvel at the information they have learned.

JO has an idea - she goes and gets her book, opens it and reads.

JO

And then the characters from *Little Women* burst forth from the limitations of their 19th century world into 2015 - where everyone would realize just how right the transcendentalists were the whole time - every individual can fulfill their unique potential - as god made them.

MARMEE

Remember Jo - it's not all daisies and lemondrops -

JO

Yes - for us to reach our castles in the air, what still has to change?

MARMEE

Let's ask them, and then we'll tell Amora and Margaret

JOHN

And Bianca and Katie

LAURIE

Amber and Di

AMY

And we'll write it down and send it to our friends in the letters!

JO is getting paper and pens and clipboards for the cast.

They write it down on a piece of the paper "torn" from the book.

Amy gathers all the answers and puts them in the Hope Chests - Amora! We need a woman president! She eventually stands in the center, and others begin to hear her. They gather around her.

JO

I am going to write a new book - The March family was radical then, and we'll be radical now.

LAURIE

No more *Little Women*.

MARME

Slightly Bigger Women?

ALL

Noo...

JO

Who cares about the title. It'll be brimming with stories of (improv blend of Lady Zara and answers from what changes still need to happen.)

All step forward with their improvised version of what their character in the Lady Zara melodrama would do in 2015.

MARMEE looks at the door.

MARMEE

I believe we're ready dears.

ALL

For what Marmee?

MARMEE

For us to go into 2015 and fight for the fulfillment of every individual.

JOHN

Go - out?

MARMEE

We're ready Hal.

JOHN/HAL

I believe you're right. I'm going to...(actor describes their dream)
Corinne, are you ready?

MEG/CORINNE

I'm going to... (actor describes their dream)
Aly?

BETH/ALY

I'm going to ... (actor describes their dream)
Graham?

LAURIE/GRAHAM

I'm going to...(actor describes their dream)

Katie?

AMY/KATIE

I'm going to... (actor describes their dream)

What about you Youa?

MARMEE/YOUA

I'm going to.... (actor describes their dream)

Claire, are you coming? (they are hesitant...afraid a bit, no after you after you...after you...)

Jo stays behind - taking a moment to put the book to rest.

JO

We all have the keys to our castles in the air. Let's go unlock them shall we? Turn out the lights when you're done.

Lights out at the end!