

A TRUE STORY ABOUT A GIRL

Once there were four little girls who lived in a big, bare house, in the country. They were very poor, but they had the happiest times you ever heard of, because they were very rich in everything except money. They had a wonderful, wise father, who knew stories to tell, and who taught them their lessons in such a beautiful way that it was better than play. They had a lovely, merry, kind mother, who was never too tired to help them work or watch them play; and they had all the great green country to play in. There were dark, shadowy woods, and fields of flowers, and a river. And there was a big barn.

One of the little girls was named Louisa. She was very pretty, and ever so strong; she could run for miles through the woods and not get tired. And she had a splendid brain in her little head; it liked to study, and it thought interesting thoughts all day long.

Louisa liked to sit in a corner by herself, and write thoughts in

her diary; all the little girls kept diaries. She liked to make up stories out of her own head, and sometimes she made verses.

When the four little sisters had finished their lessons, and had helped their mother sew and clean, they used to go to the big barn to play; and the best play of all was theatricals. Louisa liked theatricals better than anything.

They made the barn into a theatre, and the grown people came to see the plays they acted. They used to climb up on the hay for a stage, and the grown people sat in chairs on the floor. It was great fun. One of the plays they acted was Jack and the Bean-Stalk. They had a ladder from the floor to the loft, and on the ladder they tied a squash vine all the way up to the loft, to look like the wonderful bean-stalk. One of the little girls was dressed up to look like Jack, and she acted that part. When it came to the place in the story where the giant tried to follow Jack, the little girl cut down the bean-stalk, and down came the giant tumbling from the loft. The giant was made out of pillows, with a great,

fierce head of paper, and funny clothes.

Another story that they acted was Cinderella. They made a wonderful big pumpkin out of the wheelbarrow, trimmed with yellow paper, and Cinderella rolled away in it, when the fairy godmother waved her wand.

Louisa loved all these plays, and she made some of her own and wrote them down so that the children could act them.

But better than fun or writing Louisa loved her mother, and by and by, as the little girl began to grow into a big girl, she felt very sad to see her dear mother work so hard. She helped all she could with the housework, but nothing could really help her tired mother except money. She needed money for food and clothes, and some one grown up, to help in the house. But there never was enough money for these things, and Louisa's mother grew more and more weary, and sometimes ill. I cannot tell you how much Louisa suffered over this.

At last, as Louisa thought about it, she came to care more about helping her mother and her father and her sisters than anything else in all the world. And she began to work very hard to earn money. She sewed for people, and when she was a little older she taught some little girls their lessons, and then she wrote stories for the papers. Every bit of money she earned, except what she had to use, she gave to her dear family. It helped very much, but it was so little that Louisa never felt as if she were doing anything.

Every year she grew more unselfish, and every year she worked harder. Of all her work, she liked writing stories best, but she did not get much money for them, and some people told her she was wasting her time.

At last, a publisher asked Louisa, who was now a woman, to write a book for girls. Louisa said, "I'll try," to the publisher. When she thought about the book she remembered the good

times she used to have with her sisters in the big, bare house in the country. And so she wrote a story and put all that in it; she put her dear mother and her wise father in it, and all the little sisters, and besides the jolly times and the plays, she put the sad, hard times in,--the work and worry and going without things.

When the book was written, she called it "Little Women," and sent it to the publisher.

And, children, the little book made Louisa famous. It was so sweet and funny and sad and real,--like our own lives,--that everybody wanted to read it. Everybody bought it, and much money came from it. After so many years, little Louisa's wish came true: she bought a nice house for her family; she sent one of her sisters to Europe, to study; she gave her father books; but best of all, she was able to see to it that her beloved mother, so tired and so ill, could have rest and happiness. Never again did her dear mother have to do any hard work, and she had pretty things about her all the rest of her life.

Louisa Alcott, for that was Louisa's name, wrote many beautiful books after this, and she became one of the most famous women of America. But I think the most beautiful thing about her is what I have been telling you: that she loved her mother so well that she gave her whole life to make her happy.