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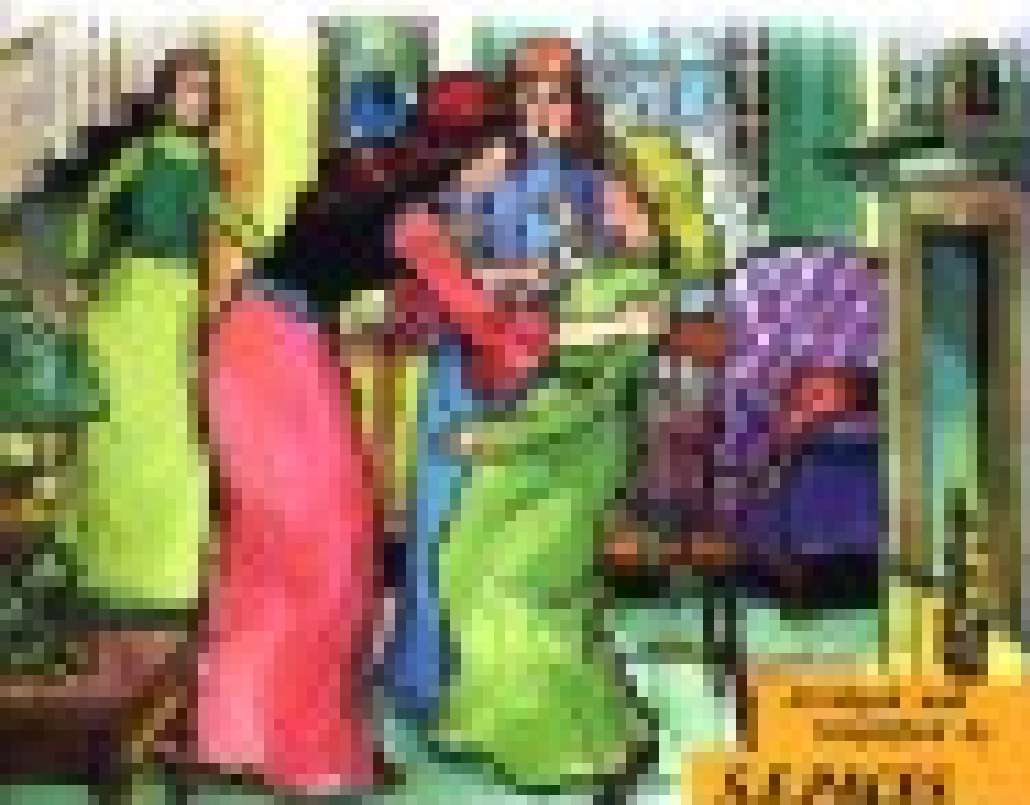


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英语课外自学文库·第三辑·I

张道真 主编

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《小妇人》

L. M. 奥尔科特

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序

这次应社会科学文献出版社之邀，主编了这套《英语课外自学文库》，旨在为英语学习者创造一个良好的英语阅读环境。

长期以来，我深感国内缺乏适当的英语读物，在书店能够看到的英文原版图书不是价格昂贵，就是鸿篇巨制，对在校的学生及英语学习者来讲，这样既会造成畏难情绪又不实用，对培养他们学习英语的兴趣、提高他们的英语水平极为不利。社会科学文献出版社针对这种情形，同时配合他们的“自学英语行动计划”，精心策划出版《英语课外自学文库》，并诚邀我担纲主编，他们用心良苦，我也欣然应允。

《英语课外自学文库》首批编辑出版的各辑图书都是依据在世界各地流传广泛而受欢迎的英语文学作品缩写而成（以后还要出版各类英文版知识性读物），是长期在非英语国家从事英语教育的英国专家 S.E. Paces 特意为中国学生精心打造的。

这样的简写读本实际上也非常适合中国的初学英语的成年人。有些内容只要掌握上千词汇甚至几百词汇就能阅读，同时，语法结构也简单化。更为可取的是，每册图书都配有一张动画光盘，既可以像唱卡拉 OK 那样随字幕跟读，又可以在光盘上做相应的练习，而且光盘还具有修改练习错误的功能。总之，是一套听说读写兼顾，很实用又很有趣味的英语读物。

阅读原文著作，听原声讲话，通过英语学习英语，是吸收英语知识，掌握英语规律最有效的途径。大量阅读英语著作的作用很多，首先是培养阅读的兴趣和能力。认真读完这几十本简写著作，在为

精彩的故事所吸引的同时，英文阅读自然也打下了初步基础；其次是巩固课内所学知识，提高整体英文水平。课堂上所学的知识，孤零零很难巩固，如果在阅读中反复印证，就会既丰富了语法知识，又扩大了词汇量，不知不觉中语言修养就得到了稳步提高；再有就是通过阅读，能开拓视野，体会异域风情和文化背景，扩大知识面，反过来又为进一步学好英语打下基础。另外，在这里我要建议读者要充分利用原声朗读光盘来学习语音，提高口语能力。在读完一本书或一段文字之后，结合跟读录音，像讲故事一样的进行复述。试试看，你的英文水平会有神速的进步。

我念书的时候条件艰难，英文原著不容易找，我是千方百计地寻觅。现在，国家逐步富裕起来，有条件出版更多更好的英语读物给莘莘学子，让他们很容易从学校图书馆里借来阅读，让他们很容易从书店里买来做藏书随时翻阅。希望这套颇具规模的《英语课外自学文库》成为可以让学生们尽情遨游的英语学习海洋，成为广大读者乐而忘返的英语学习乐园。那么，作为主编，更作为一名英语教育工作者，我将倍感欣慰。

张道真

2003年7月于深圳

Introduction

LOUISA MAY ALCOTT (1832–1888) is one of the best-known American writers of the nineteenth century and "*Little Women*" is her most popular book. It gives us a picture of American life in the early nineteenth century. The March family is really the author's own family and Jo, the tom-boy and bookworm, is really the author herself.



The story of the March family is continued in another popular book, "*Good Wives*". The same characters are also to be found in two other books, "*Little Men*" and "*Jo's Boys*" written by the same author.



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I

*Mrs. March's four daughters*

It was nearly Christmas. Outside the snow was falling. In their comfortable sitting-room, *Mrs. March's* four daughters sat by the fire, talking. Of course they were talking about Christmas and Christmas presents. They were not feeling very happy. Once the family had been rich. Now it was rather poor. The March girls had little money for Christmas presents.

Let us meet the March girls. The eldest was *Margaret*, who was called *Meg*. She was sixteen years old and very pretty. Her hair was light brown in colour. She had beautiful grey eyes. Her feet and hands were small, and she was proud of them.

Then came *Josephine*, who was called *Jo*. She was fifteen years of age. *Jo* was tall and thin. Her "only beauty" (so she said) was her thick, red-brown hair. *Jo* always wished that she were a boy. Indeed, she thought like a boy, talked like a boy, and walked like a boy. *Jo* loved reading and wanted to be a famous author when she grew up.

The third daughter, *Elizabeth*, called *Beth*, was thirteen. Everybody loved *Beth* because she was so gentle and thoughtful. *Beth* had a sweet face and bright eyes. She was very fond of music and played the piano very well.

Amy, the youngest of the sisters, was twelve. With her golden hair and blue eyes, she looked very pretty. She herself thought that she was beautiful. She liked painting and drawing. She wanted to be a famous artist when she grew up.

"Christmas won't be Christmas without presents," *Jo* said sadly.

"I hate to be poor," Meg said, looking down at her old dress.

"So do I," Amy said. "At school, the girls are always laughing at my dresses. I feel so ashamed."

"You shouldn't," Meg said. "Your dresses may be old, but you always look nice."

"Other girls have such lovely things," Amy complained.

"Never mind," Beth said in a gentle voice, "we have father and mother."

"We haven't got father, and we shall not have him for a long time," Jo said sadly.

The girls fell silent then. Their thoughts went to their father, who was far away. Their father was serving in the army, for this was war-time. There was a war between the northern part of the United States and the southern part.

After a time, Jo went on:

"Mother has said that we can each spend a dollar on ourselves."

"I'm going to buy some new music with my dollar," Beth said.

"I shall get some drawing pencils," said Amy.

"I shall buy a book," said Jo.

"And I . . . now, what shall I buy?" asked Meg. "A dollar isn't enough to buy a silk dress"

At that moment, the clock struck six. It was time for their mother to come home. Amy got up from her mother's chair and shook the cushions. Beth fetched her mother's slippers. Jo held them in front of the fire to warm them.

"Look! They're worn out," exclaimed Jo.

"I shall buy her a new pair with my dollar," Beth said.

"You won't! I shall!" Amy told her.

"I'm the eldest. I shall," Meg said.

"I'm the man of the family now since father's away," Jo told her sisters. "I promised father I'd look after mother. I shall buy the slippers."

"I know!" Beth cried, "Let each of us get something for mother. Don't let us spend our money on ourselves. Let us spend it on mother."

"That's a good idea," said Meg.

"That's the best plan," agreed Jo. Then she asked, "What shall we get for her?"

The girls were silent. They were thinking. Then Meg said, looking down at her own pretty hands, "I shall get her a pair of gloves."

"I shall get a pair of nice, warm slippers – the nicest that I can find," Jo said.

"I shall get some pretty handkerchiefs. And I'll sew her name in the corner," said Beth.

"I think I'll get a bottle of scent. It won't cost much. I may have some money left for my drawing pencils," said Amy.





The girls were feeling happier now. Then they began to talk about the play that they were going to act on Christmas night. Jo had written it. Her sisters had made the dresses and the scenery.

"It's the best play we've had till now," said Meg.

Beth, who thought that Jo was wonderfully clever, said, "Oh Jo! I don't know how you think of such clever things."

"Now, Amy," Jo said, "you must practise your part. You don't faint properly."

"How can I?" asked Amy, "I've never seen anybody faint. If I fall to the floor, I shall hurt myself."

"Fall into a chair then. That's easier," Jo told her.

"Oh no, it isn't!" Amy cried.

Their mother's footsteps sounded on the stairs. Jo ran to open the door. There was a feeling of great happiness in the room. Mother was home!



A letter from father



Mrs. March was a tall woman, rather stout, with a noble face. Her clothes were old-fashioned. That did not matter. In her daughters' eyes, she was the loveliest woman on earth.

She looked tired when she came in. All day she had been busy. Her work was war-work. She had to collect and pack food, medicine, and clothes for the soldiers. She took off her hat and coat. Her face brightened as she sat down by the fire. She put on her warm slippers. Her daughters gathered round her. This was the happiest hour of the day for them all.

The girls did all they could to make their mother comfortable. Meg arranged everything nicely on the tea-table. Jo put the chairs round the table. Beth went quietly from the sitting-room to the kitchen, bringing in the tea, the bread and butter, and the cake. Amy sat on the arm of her mother's chair. From that comfortable position, she told everybody what to do.

They sat down to have their tea. Then Mrs. March said, "I have a nice surprise for you when you've had your tea." "I know what it is," cried Jo. "It's a letter from father." "Yes, a nice, long letter," Mrs. March told them happily. "When is he coming home?" asked Beth.

"Oh! He doesn't say. But he'll come one day soon. You'll see, my dear."

When tea was over, they left the table and once more sat round the fire. Mrs. March sat in her big armchair. Beth sat



on the floor at her mother's feet. Meg and Amy sat on either arm of their mother's chair. Jo stood at the back of it. There, if the letter made her cry, nobody would be able to see her tears.

Mrs. March read the letter to the girls. It was a cheerful letter. The last part of it was written specially for the girls. "Tell them," Mr. March had written, "that I think of them very often, and that I pray for them. I know they won't forget what I said when I went away. They will help you all they can. They will comfort you and make you glad. They are good girls, and they will try to be even better. Then, when I am home again, I shall be proud of my 'little women'."

These words made the girls feel sad. A big tear ran down Jo's nose and dropped off. Amy hid her head on her mother's shoulder, saying, "Oh, mother! I am so selfish. I know I am. But I will be better. I will! I will!"

"So will I," said Meg. "I think too much about dresses. I will think more about work and less about my clothes."

"And I will be better too," Jo said. "I'll work harder instead of dreaming — as I do. I'll be kinder and quieter. I'll think of others instead of thinking of myself. I won't get angry with anybody. I won't! I promise you, mother."

Beth said nothing. She wiped the tears from her eyes with the sock that she was knitting and went on with her work.

Hannah came in. Hannah was the faithful servant and friend of the family. She had lived with them since Meg was born. She began clearing the table. While she was doing this, the girls told her of their father's letter.

"Oh, Hannah! When will this war end, and father come home?"

"Let us thank God that he is well," Hannah replied.

After Hannah had cleared the table, the girls began their sewing. They were making sheets for *Aunt March*, their father's sister. It was dull work but that evening, the girls did not complain. They sewed busily while Jo read an interesting story to them.

At nine o'clock, they stopped sewing. The girls gathered with their mother round the piano. It was an old piano. Nobody but Beth could get any music out of it. Beth sat down to play. The others sang together. Every evening they did this. The songs were old and simple ones, chosen by their mother. Mrs. March had a good voice. And so had Meg. Amy was a poor singer. And Jo? Poor Jo sang like a frog!



A merry Christmas



On Christmas morning, Jo was the first to wake up. Her eyes went at once to the table beside her bed. There lay her Christmas present — a book from her mother. She picked it up. Joyfully she read the loving message which her mother had written inside the book. Then Jo woke Meg,

“Merry Christmas, Meg! Look on the table. There’s a present for you from mother.”

The younger girls also woke up.

“Merry Christmas, Beth!”

“Merry Christmas, Amy!”

“Merry Christmas to us all!”

The girls dressed quickly. Then they went downstairs to greet their mother and Hannah with “Merry Christmas!” Hannah was there, cooking the breakfast. Their mother had already gone out. Hannah explained to the girls where their mother had gone: “A boy came to ask your mother for help. His mother is ill.”

“We must get her presents ready,” Meg said. She looked into the basket which held their presents for their mother, “Where’s Amy’s bottle of scent?” she asked.

“I saw her with it five minutes ago,” Jo told her sister. “I expect she’ll bring it back in a moment.”

“My handkerchiefs look nice, don’t they?” Beth said.

“Why! You’ve put *Mother* in the corner, instead of *M. March*,” Jo exclaimed.

“Isn’t that right?” Beth asked anxiously. “You see, Meg is *M. March* too.”

"It's right and it's sensible," Meg told her. "Mother will be very pleased."

The girls heard the sound of a door shutting. "Here's mother! Hide the basket, quick!" cried Jo. But it wasn't their mother. It was Amy. She came in, trying to hide something behind her back.

"Where have you been?" asked Meg.

"And what are you trying to hide?" asked Jo.

"Well . . . I went to change that little bottle of scent for a big one. I gave all my money for it. I'm not going to be selfish any more," Amy said.

Meg kissed her sister. Beth ran to the window where her flowers were growing. She picked her loveliest rose. She gave it to Amy to tie on her bottle so that it looked very pretty.

"I wish mother would come. I'm feeling hungry," said Jo. Indeed they all wanted their breakfast badly.

The street door was opened and shut. This time it was their mother. Quickly they hid the basket behind a curtain.

"Merry Christmas, mother! And thank you for your books," they said.

"Merry Christmas!" answered their mother. Her face was troubled. "Listen, girls!" she said. "I've just come from a poor woman who is very ill. She has a new-born baby. Her six other children are lying in one bed to keep warm. The house is stone-cold. They've nothing to make a fire with. They've nothing to eat either. Will you give them your breakfast as a Christmas present?"

The girls were silent. They were all hungry. Already they had waited an hour for their breakfast. Then Jo said,

"It's good that you came before we began. Come on, girls!"