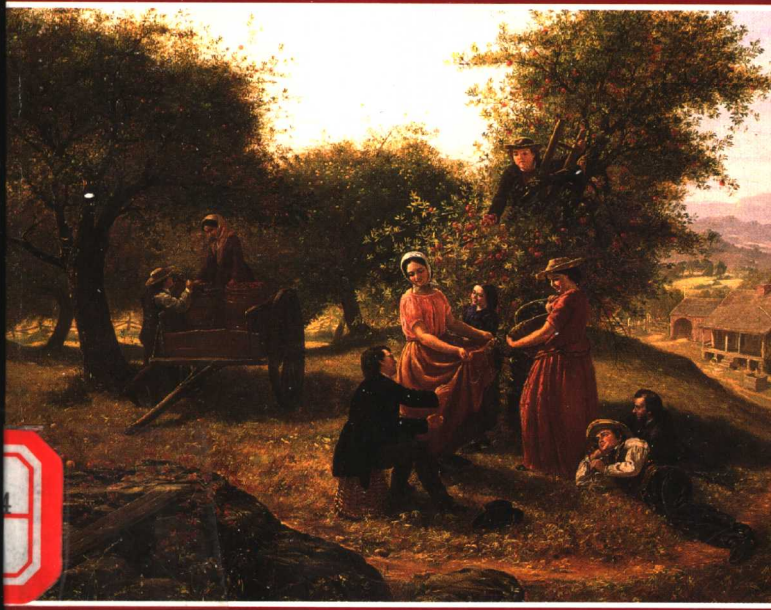
Jo's Boys
by Louisa May Alcott



JO'S BOYS

Louisa May Alcott

BANTAM BOOKS
NEW YORK • TORONTO • LONDON • SYDNEY • AUCKLAND

A BANTAM CLASSIC

JO'S BOYS
A Bantam Classic Book / October 1995

PUBLISHING HISTORY
Jo's Boys *was first published in 1886*

"Apple Gathering," 1856 by Jerome Thompson, 1814–1886. Courtesy of Art Resource, N.Y.

ISBN 0-553-21449-7

Published simultaneously in the United States and Canada

Bantam Books are published by Bantam Books, a division of Bantam Doubleday Dell Publishing Group, Inc. Its trademark, consisting of the words "Bantam Books" and the portrayal of a rooster, is Registered in U.S. Patent and Trademark Office and in other countries. Marca Registrada. Bantam Books, 1540 Broadway, New York, New York 10036.

PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES OF AMERICA

OPM 0 9

Louisa May Alcott

Born in 1832, Louisa May Alcott was the second child of Bronson Alcott of Concord, Massachusetts, a self-taught philosopher, school reformer, and utopian who was much too immersed in the world of ideas to ever succeed in supporting his family. Although Louisa hired herself out as a domestic servant at age nineteen, it was through her writing that she finally brought them financial independence.

Her brief service as a Civil War nurse resulted in *Hospital Sketches* (1863), but she earned more from the lurid thrillers she began writing in 1861 under the pseudonym A. M. Barnard. These tales, with titles like "Pauline's Passion and Punishment," featured strong-willed and flamboyant heroines but were not identified as Alcott's work until the 1940s.

Fame and success came unexpectedly in 1868. When a publisher suggested she write a "girl's book," she drew on memories of her own childhood and wrote *Little Women,* depicting herself as Jo March, while her sisters Anna, Abby May, and Elizabeth became Meg, Amy, and Beth. *Little Women,* to its author's surprise, struck a chord in America's largely female reading public and became a huge success. Louisa was prevailed upon to continue the story, which she did in *Little Men* (1871) and *Jo's Boys* (1886). In 1873 she published *Work: A Story of Experience,* an autobiography in fictional disguise with an all too appropriate title.

As a famous writer, she continued to turn out novels and stories and to work for the women's suffrage and temperance movements. She died in Boston in March of 1888.

Ask your bookseller for
Bantam Classics by
these American writers:

Louisa May Alcott
Sherwood Anderson
Willa Cather
Kate Chopin
James Fenimore Cooper
Stephen Crane
Theodore Dreiser
W.E.B. Du Bois
Ralph Waldo Emerson
Benjamin Franklin
Charlotte Perkins Gilman
Alexander Hamilton, James Madison,
and John Jay
Nathaniel Hawthorne
O. Henry
Henry James
Helen Keller
Abraham Lincoln
Jack London
Herman Melville
Edgar Allan Poe
Upton Sinclair
Gertrude Stein
Harriet Beecher Stowe
Booth Tarkington
Henry David Thoreau
Mark Twain
Edith Wharton
Walt Whitman

JO'S BOYS

Contents

I

Ten Years Later

IF anyone had told me what wonderful changes were to take place here in ten years, I wouldn't have believed it," said Mrs Jo to Mrs Meg, as they sat on the piazza at Plumfield one summer day, looking about them with faces full of pride and pleasure.

"This is the sort of magic that money and kind hearts can work. I am sure Mr Laurence could have no nobler monument than the college he so generously endowed; and a home like this will keep Aunt March's memory green as long as it lasts," answered Mrs Meg, always glad to praise the absent.

"We used to believe in fairies, you remember, and plan what we'd ask for if we could have three wishes. Doesn't it seem as if mine had been really granted at last? Money, fame, and plenty of the work I love," said Mrs Jo, carelessly rumpling up her hair as she clasped her hands over her head just as she used to do when a girl.

"I have had mine, and Amy is enjoying hers to her heart's content. If dear Marmee, John, and Beth were here, it would be quite perfect," added Meg, with

a tender quiver in her voice; for Marmee's place was empty now.

Jo put her hand on her sister's, and both sat silent for a little while, surveying the pleasant scene before them with mingled sad and happy thoughts.

It certainly did look as if magic had been at work, for quiet Plumfield was transformed into a busy little world. The house seemed more hospitable than ever, refreshed now with new paint, added wings, well-kept lawn and garden, and a prosperous air it had not worn when riotous boys swarmed everywhere and it was rather difficult for the Bhaers to make both ends meet. On the hill, where kites used to be flown, stood the fine college which Mr Laurence's munificent legacy had built. Busy students were going to and fro along the paths once trodden by childish feet, and many young men and women were enjoying all the advantages that wealth, wisdom, and benevolence could give them.

Just inside the gates of Plumfield a pretty brown cottage, very like the Dovecote, nestled among the trees, and on the green slope westward Laurie's white-pillared mansion glittered in the sunshine; for when the rapid growth of the city shut in the old house, spoilt Meg's nest, and dared to put a soap-factory under Mr Laurence's indignant nose, our friends emigrated to Plumfield, and the great changes began.

These were the pleasant ones; and the loss of the dear old people was sweetened by the blessings they left behind; so all prospered now in the little community, and Mr Bhaer as president, and Mr March as chaplain of the college, saw their long-cherished dream beautifully realized. The sisters divided the care of the young people among them, each taking the part that suited her best. Meg was the motherly friend of the young women, Jo the confidante and defender of

all the youths, and Amy the lady Bountiful who delicately smoothed the way for needy students, and entertained them all so cordially that it was no wonder they named her lovely home Mount Parnassus, so full was it of music, beauty, and the culture hungry young hearts and fancies long for.

The original twelve boys had of course scattered far and wide during these years, but all that lived still remembered old Plumfield, and came wandering back from the four quarters of the earth to tell their various experiences, laugh over the pleasures of the past, and face the duties of the present with fresh courage; for such home-comings keep hearts tender and hands helpful with the memories of young and happy days. A few words will tell the history of each, and then we can go on with the new chapter of their lives.

Franz was with a merchant kinsman in Hamburg, a man of twenty-six now, and doing well. Emil was the jolliest tar that ever "sailed the ocean blue." His uncle sent him on a long voyage to disgust him with this adventurous life; but he came home so delighted with it that it was plain this was his profession, and the German kinsman gave him a good chance in his ships; so the lad was happy. Dan was a wanderer still; for after the geological researches in South America he tried sheep-farming in Australia, and was now in California looking up mines. Nat was busy with music at the Conservatory, preparing for a year or two in Germany to finish him off. Tom was studying medicine and trying to like it. Jack was in business with his father, bent on getting rich. Dolly was in college with Stuffy and Ned reading law. Poor little Dick was dead, so was Billy; and no one could mourn for them, since life would never be happy, afflicted as they were in mind and body.

Rob and Teddy were called the "Lion and the

Lamb"; for the latter was as rampant as the king of beasts, and the former as gentle as any sheep that ever baaed. Mrs Jo called him "my daughter", and found him the most dutiful of children, with plenty of manliness underlying the quiet manners and tender nature. But in Ted she seemed to see all the faults, whims, aspirations, and fun of her own youth in a new shape. With his tawny locks always in wild confusion, his long legs and arms, loud voice, and continual activity, Ted was a prominent figure at Plumfield. He had his moods of gloom, and fell into the Slough of Despond about once a week, to be hoisted out by patient Rob or his mother, who understood when to let him alone and when to shake him up. He was her pride and joy as well as torment, being a very bright lad for his age, and so full of all sorts of budding talent, that her maternal mind was much exercised as to what this remarkable boy would become.

Demi had gone through College with honour, and Mrs Meg had set her heart on his being a minister—picturing in her fond fancy the first sermon her dignified young parson would preach, as well as the long, useful, and honoured life he was to lead. But John, as she called him now, firmly declined the divinity school, saying he had had enough of books, and needed to know more of men and the world, and caused the dear woman much disappointment by deciding to try a journalist's career. It was a blow; but she knew that young minds cannot be driven, and that experience is the best teacher; so she let him follow his own inclinations, still hoping to see him in the pulpit. Aunt Jo raged when she found that there was to be a reporter in the family, and called him "Jenkins on the spot. She liked his literary tendencies, but had reason to detest official Paul Prys, as we shall see later. Demi knew his own mind, however, and tranquilly carried out his plans, unmoved by the tongues of the anxious mam-

mas or the jokes of his mates. Uncle Teddy encouraged him, and painted a splendid career, mentioning Dickens and other celebrities who began as reporters and ended as famous novelists or newspaper men.

The girls were all flourishing. Daisy, as sweet and domestic as ever, was her mother's comfort and companion. Josie at fourteen was a most original young person, full of pranks and peculiarities, the latest of which was a passion for the stage, which caused her quiet mother and sister much anxiety as well as amusement. Bess had grown into a tall, beautiful girl looking several years older than she was, with the same graceful ways and dainty tastes which the little Princess had, and a rich inheritance of both the father's and mother's gifts, fostered by every aid love and money could give. But the pride of the community was naughty Nan; for, like so many restless, wilful children, she was growing into a woman full of the energy and promise that suddenly blossoms when the ambitious seeker finds the work she is fitted to do well. Nan began to study medicine at sixteen, and at twenty was getting on bravely; for now, thanks to other intelligent women, colleges and hospitals were open to her. She had never wavered in her purpose from the childish days when she shocked Daisy in the old willow by saying: "I don't want any family to fuss over. I shall have an office, with bottles and pestle things in it, and drive round and cure folks." The future foretold by the little girl the young woman was rapidly bringing to pass, and finding so much happiness in it that nothing could win her from the chosen work. Several worthy young gentlemen had tried to make her change her mind and choose, as Daisy did, "a nice little house and family to take care of". But Nan only laughed, and routed the lovers by proposing to look at the tongue which spoke of adoration, or professionally felt the pulse in the manly hand offered for her acceptance. So all

departed but one persistent youth, who was such a devoted Traddles it was impossible to quench him.

This was Tom, who was as faithful to his child sweetheart as she to her "pestle things", and gave a proof of fidelity that touched her very much. He studied medicine for her sake alone, having no taste for it, and a decided fancy for a mercantile life. But Nan was firm, and Tom stoutly kept on, devoutly hoping he might not kill many of his fellow-beings when he came to practise. They were excellent friends, however, and caused much amusement to their comrades, by the vicissitudes of this merry love-chase.

Both were approaching Plumfield on the afternoon when Mrs Meg and Mrs Jo were talking on the piazza. Not together; for Nan was walking briskly along the pleasant road alone, thinking over a case that interested her, and Tom was pegging on behind to overtake her, as if by accident, when the suburbs of the city were past—a little way of his, which was part of the joke.

Nan was a handsome girl, with a fresh colour, clear eye, quick smile, and the self-poised look young women with a purpose always have. She was simply and sensibly dressed, walked easily, and seemed full of vigour, with her broad shoulders well back, arms swinging freely, and the elasticity of youth and health in every motion. The few people she met turned to look at her, as if it was a pleasant sight to see a hearty, happy girl walking countryward that lovely day; and the red-faced young man steaming along behind, hat off and every tight curl wagging with impatience, evidently agreed with them.

Presently a mild "Hallo!" was borne upon the breeze, and pausing, with an effort to look surprised that was an utter failure, Nan said affably:

"Oh, is that you, Tom?"

"Looks like it. Thought you might be walking out today"; and Tom's jovial face beamed with pleasure.

"You knew it. How is your throat?" asked Nan in her professional tone, which was always a quencher to undue raptures.

"Throat? Oh, ah! yes, I remember. It is well. The effect of that prescription was wonderful. I'll never call homoeopathy a humbug again."

"You were the humbug this time, and so were the unmedicated pellets I gave you. If sugar or milk can cure diphtheria in this remarkable manner, I'll make a note of it. O Tom, Tom, will you never be done playing tricks?"

"O Nan, Nan, will you never be done getting the better of me?" And the merry pair laughed at one another just as they did in the old times, which always came back freshly when they went to Plumfield.

"Well, I knew I shouldn't see you for a week if I didn't scare up some excuse for a call at the office. You are so desperately busy all the time I never get a word," explained Tom.

"You ought to be busy too, and above such nonsense. Really, Tom, if you don't give your mind to your lectures, you'll never get on," said Nan soberly.

"I have quite enough of them as it is," answered Tom with an air of disgust. "A fellow must lark a bit after dissecting corpuses all day. I can't stand it long at a time, though *some people* seem to enjoy it immensely."

"Then why not leave it, and do what suits you better? I always thought it a foolish thing, you know," said Nan, with a trace of anxiety in the keen eyes that searched for signs of illness in a face as ruddy as a Baldwin apple.

"You know why I chose it, and why I shall stick to it if it kills me. I may not *look* delicate, but I've a deep-seated heart complaint, and it will carry me off

sooner or later; for only one doctor in the world can cure it, and she won't."

There was an air of pensive resignation about Tom that was both comic and pathetic; for he was in earnest, and kept on giving hints of this sort, without the least encouragement.

Nan frowned; but she was used to it, and knew how to treat him.

"She *is* curing it in the best and only way; but a more refractory patient never lived. Did you go to that ball, as I directed?"

"I did."

"And devote yourself to pretty Miss West?"

"Danced with her the whole evening."

"No impression made on that susceptible organ of yours?"

"Not the slightest. I gaped in her face once, forgot to feed her, and gave a sigh of relief when I handed her over to her mamma."

"Repeat the dose as often as possible, and note the symptoms. I predict that you'll 'cry for it' by and by."

"Never! I'm sure it doesn't suit my constitution."

"We shall see. Obey orders!" sternly.

"Yes, Doctor," meekly.

Silence reigned for a moment; then, as if the bone of contention was forgotten in the pleasant recollections called up by familiar objects, Nan said suddenly:

"What fun we used to have in that wood! Do you remember how you tumbled out of the big nut-tree and nearly broke your collar-bones?"

"Don't I! and how you steeped me in wormwood till I was a fine mahogany colour, and Aunt Jo wailed over my spoilt jacket," laughed Tom, a boy again in a minute.

"And how you set the house afire?"

"And you ran off for your band-box?"

"Do you ever say 'Thunder-turtles' now?"

"Do people ever call you 'Giddy-gaddy'?"

"Daisy does. Dear thing, I haven't seen her for a week."

"I saw Demi this morning, and he said she was keeping house for Mother Bhaer."

"She always does when Aunt Jo gets into a vortex. Daisy is a model housekeeper; and you couldn't do better than make your bow to her, if you can't go to work and wait till you are grown up before you begin lovering."

"Nat would break his fiddle over my head if I suggested such a thing. No, thank you. Another name is engraved upon my heart as indelibly as the blue anchor on my arm. 'Hope' is my motto, and 'No surrender', yours; see who will hold out longest."

"You silly boys think we must pair off as we did when children; but we shall do nothing of the kind. How well Parnassus looks from here!" said Nan, abruptly changing the conversation again.

"It is a fine house; but I love old Plum best. Wouldn't Aunt March stare if she could see the changes here?" answered Tom, as they both paused at the great gate to look at the pleasant landscape before them.

A sudden whoop startled them, as a long boy with a wild yellow head came leaping over a hedge like a kangaroo, followed by a slender girl, who stuck in the hawthorn, and sat there laughing like a witch. A pretty little lass she was, with curly dark hair, bright eyes, and a very expressive face. Her hat was at her back, and her skirts a good deal the worse for the brooks she had crossed, the trees she had climbed, and the last leap, which added several fine rents.

"Take me down, Nan, please. Tom, hold Ted; he's got my book, and I *will* have it," called Josie from