

LITTLE WOMEN

1 One night when Beth looked among the books upon her table, to find something to make
2 her forget the mortal weariness that was almost as hard to bear as pain, as she turned
3 the leaves of her old favourite, Pilgrims' Progress, she found a little paper, scribbled over
4 in Jo's hand. The name caught her eye and the blurred look of the lines made her sure
5 that tears had fallen on it.

6 "Poor Jo! She's fast asleep, so I won't wake her to ask leave. She shows me all her
7 things, and I don't think she'll mind if I look at this", thought Beth, with a glance at her
8 sister, who lay on the rug, with the tongs beside her, ready to wake up the minute the
9 log fell apart.

10 MY BETH

11 Sitting patient in the shadow
12 Till the blessed light shall come,
13 A serene and saintly presence
14 Sanctifies our troubled home.
15 Earthly joys and hopes and sorrows
16 Break like ripples on the strand
17 Of the deep and solemn river
18 Where her willing feet now stand.

19 O my sister, passing from me,
20 Out of human care and strife,
21 Leave me, as a gift, those virtues
22 Which have beautified your life.
23 Dear, bequeath me that great patience
24 Which has power to sustain
25 A cheerful, uncomplaining spirit
26 In its prison-house of pain.

27 Give me, for I need it sorely,
28 Of that courage, wise and sweet,
29 Which has made the path of duty
30 Green beneath your willing feet.
31 Give me that unselfish nature,
32 That with charity divine
33 Can pardon wrong for love's dear sake—
34 Meek heart, forgive me mine!

35 Thus our parting daily loseth
36 Something of its bitter pain,

37 And while learning this hard lesson,
38 My great loss becomes my gain.
39 For the touch of grief will render
40 My wild nature more serene,

41 Give to life new aspirations,
42 A new trust in the unseen.

43 Henceforth, safe across the river,
44 I shall see forever more
45 A beloved, household spirit
46 Waiting for me on the shore.
47 Hope and faith, born of my sorrow,
48 Guardian angels shall become,
49 And the sister gone before me
50 By their hands shall lead me home.

51 Blurred and blotted, faulty and feeble as the lines were, they brought a look of
52 inexpressible comfort to Beth's face. As she sat with the paper folded between her
53 hands, the charred log fell asunder. Jo started up, revived the blaze, and crept to the
54 bedside, hoping Beth slept.

55 "Not asleep, but so happy, dear. See, I found this and read it. I knew you wouldn't care.
56 Have I been all that to you, Jo?" she asked, with wistful, humble earnestness.

57 "Oh, Beth, so much, so much!" and Jo's head went down upon the pillow beside her
58 sister's.

59 "Then I don't feel as if I'd wasted my life. I'm not so good as you make me, but I have
60 tried to do right. And now, when it's too late to begin even to do better, it's such a
61 comfort to know that someone loves me so much and feels as if I'd helped them."

62 "More than anyone in the world, Beth. I used to think I couldn't let you go, but I'm
63 learning to feel that I don't lose you, that you'll be more to me than ever, and death
64 can't part us, though it seems to."

65 "I know it cannot, and I don't fear it any longer, for I'm sure I shall be your Beth still,
66 to love and help you more than ever. You must take my place, Jo, and be everything to
67 Father and Mother when I'm gone. They will turn to you, don't fail them, and if it's hard
68 to work alone, remember that I don't forget you, and that you'll be happier in doing that
69 than writing splendid books or seeing all the world, for love is the only thing that we can
70 carry with us when we go, and it makes the end so easy."

71 "I'll try, Beth." and then and there Jo renounced her old ambition, pledged herself to a
72 new and better one, acknowledging the poverty of other desires, and feeling the blessed
73 solace of a belief in the immortality of love.

74 So the spring days came and went, the sky grew clearer, the earth greener, the flowers
75 were up fairly early, and the birds came back in time to say goodbye to Beth.

76 As she had hoped, the 'tide went out easily', and in the dark hour before dawn, on the
77 bosom where she had drawn her first breath, she quietly drew her last, with no farewell
78 but one loving look, one little sigh.

79 When morning came, for the first time in many months the fire was out, Jo's place was
80 empty, and the room was very still. But a bird sang blithely on a budding bough, close
81 by, the snowdrops blossomed freshly at the window, and the spring sunshine streamed
82 in like a benediction over the placid face upon the pillow, a face so full of painless peace
83 that those who loved it best smiled through their tears, and thanked God that Beth was
84 well at last.



COMPREHENSION QUESTIONS

1 What is 'Pilgrims' Progress' (line 3)?

- A** Beth's progress in her search
 - B** The poem
 - C** A book
 - D** A type of plant
-

2 Why does the writer use the word scribbled (line 3)?

- A** Jo had scribbled on the book
 - B** Jo's handwriting was neat
 - C** Jo's handwriting was messy
 - D** Jo drew a picture on the paper
-

3 Why did the name catch Beth's eye (line 4)?

- A** Jo is her sister
 - B** Pilgrims' Progress was her favourite
 - C** The poem was addressed to her
 - D** The poem was named after her
-

4 Why was Beth sure tears had fallen on the little paper (line 4)?

- A** The lines weren't straight
 - B** The words were blurred
 - C** It was a sad poem
 - D** Beth was crying
-

5 What 'gift' does the writer of the poem want (line 21)?

- A** For their sister to leave them
 - B** Patience
 - C** Patience, courage and an unselfish nature
 - D** Courage and an unselfish nature
-

6 Who is the 'serene and saintly presence' (line 13)?

- A** God
 - B** Beth
 - C** Jo
 - D** The blessed light
-

7 Which writing techniques are used in 'prison-house of pain' (line 26)?

- A** Alliteration and a metaphor
 - B** Alliteration and a simile
 - C** Onomatopoeia and a simile
 - D** Allegory and a metaphor
-

8 What is meant by the path being green in the phrase 'made the path of duty/ Green beneath your willing feet.' (lines 29-39)?

- A** The person walking the path is green with envy
 - B** The path being green shows that it is the correct path
 - C** The path is green as the person is willing to walk it
 - D** The path is grassy and soft to walk on
-

9 Which of the following best describes how the poem made Beth feel?

- A** Earnest
 - B** Confused
 - C** Arrogant
 - D** Comforted
-

10 Why was Beth's sister on the rug?

- A** Poor people don't have enough beds
 - B** She wanted to be near the tongs
 - C** So she could keep the wood burning
 - D** It was warm near the fire
-

11 Who is Jo?

- A** Beth's sister
 - B** Beth's mother
 - C** Beth's friend
 - D** The maid
-

12 Who wrote the poem 'My Beth'?

- A** Beth's mother
 - B** Beth
 - C** Jo
 - D** It is not mentioned in the text
-

13 Which of the following is closest in meaning to 'feeble' (line 51)?

- A** Exhaustion
 - B** Weak
 - C** Boring
 - D** Confusingly
-

14 What type of word is '*comfort*' (line 61)?

- A** Noun
 - B** Verb
 - C** Adjective
 - D** Adverb
-

15 Which of the following lines of the poem tells Beth that she has helped Jo (line 61)

- A** Earthly joys and hopes and sorrows (line 15)
 - B** Meek heart, forgive me mine! (line 34)
 - C** My great loss becomes my gain. (line 38)
 - D** Henceforth, safe across the river, (line 43)
-

16 What does Beth tell Jo to do?

- A** Not to be scared
 - B** Love her
 - C** Write splendid books or see the world
 - D** Look after their parents
-

17 When does Beth die?

- A** On a spring day, before sunrise
 - B** On a summer morning
 - C** On a spring afternoon
 - D** It is not mentioned in the text
-

18 Why is the fire out 'for the first time in many months' (line 79)?

- A** Spring has just begun, and it is no longer cold
 - B** Jo has left to see the world
 - C** Beth has passed away
 - D** Beth has gotten better and no longer needs it
-