



From Jo March's Attic

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FROM JO MARCH'S ATTIC is the latest collection of Alcott's short stories edited by Madeleine B. Stern and Daniel Shealy. The previous volumes, as well as FROM JO MARCH'S ATTIC, contain stories written by Alcott for periodicals in the years before the success of her first juvenile novel, LITTLE WOMEN, first published in 1868. Written between 1867 and 1869, the tales in FROM JO MARCH'S ATTIC were published in FRANK LESLIE'S LADY'S MAGAZINE under the pseudonym A. M. Barnard.

Like Jo March, her counterpart in the semi-autobiographical LITTLE WOMEN, Alcott wrote sensationalistic "potboilers" to help support her family. Because the stories in FROM JO MARCH'S ATTIC were meant for genteel ladies, the sensationalism was toned down, but Alcott used mildly shocking devices such as suicide and poisonings. One tale, "My Mysterious Mademoiselle," even contains homosexual undercurrents, when a man is attracted to a boy disguised as a young lady traveling alone. Every story explores love or marriage in some form.

In these stories, love and marriage are not often allied. More often marriage is a means to an end. Countess Varazoff, in the tale that bears her name, marries a Russian aristocrat to obtain the influence to free her Polish mentor. In "Dr. Dorn's Revenge," Evelyn's pride leads her to marry a man other than the one she loves. Marriage is a prize in "Which Wins?," where two women compete to see who can make the better match. In "La Belle Bayadere," Philip marries for money, betraying the woman he loves and the woman he marries. Only in "Honor's Fortune" does a couple marry happily for love.

Alcott also provides suspense and tragedy within the context of love and marriage. In "Fatal Follies," the couple marry for love, but each fears murderous intentions of the other. "Betrayed by a Buckle" is about a young artist who discovers his fiance is not who she claims to be. FATE IN A FAN is about the love of a daughter for her father and its tragic results. Although more than a hundred years has passed, the stories in FROM JO MARCH'S ATTIC continue to connect with modern life. Within a historical context, timeless issues are explored with true skill.

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