

Call back



(As Jo speaks her last line the LIGHTS SLOWLY DIM DOWN TO A COMPLETE BLACKOUT. There is a pause. The clock strikes three o'clock; then the half-hour; then four o'clock; then the half-hour. As the clock strikes five o'clock the LIGHTS SLOWLY COME UP TO FULL. It is dusk outside the window and the lamp on the table is lighted. BETH is discovered curled up in the easy chair. She is crying softly. She has a handkerchief in one hand and a camphor bottle in the other. On her lap is a large closed book. After a few moments Jo comes down the stairs and enters the room. Suddenly hears BETH sob and then discovers her in the chair.)

Jo/Beth

Jo: (Crosses hastily to R. of BETH) Why, Beth—you're crying! What on earth —— (Starts to put her arm around BETH.)

BETH: (Pushes Jo away) You—you better keep away from me, Jo.

Jo: (In amazement) Keep away? What do you ——?

BETH: (Anxiously) You've had scarlet fever, haven't you?

Jo: (Mystified) Years ago—when Meg did. Why?

BETH: Then I'll tell you. Oh, Jo—the baby's dead! (Sobs.)

Jo: What baby?



BETH: Mrs. Hummel's! It—it died in my lap before she got home.

Jo: (Tenderly) My poor dear—how dreadful for you! I ought to have gone.

BETH: It wasn't dreadful, Jo—only so sad! I saw in a minute that it was sicker, but Lottchen said her mother had gone for a doctor, so I took the baby and let Lotty rest. It seemed asleep, but all of a sudden it gave a little cry, and trembled, and then lay very still. I tried to warm its feet, and Lotty gave it some milk, but it didn't stir, and I knew it was dead. (Breaks down and sobs.)

Jo: (Sits on right arm of BETH's chair and puts her arm around her) Don't cry, dear! What did you do?

BETH: I just sat and held it softly till Mrs. Hummel came with the doctor. He said it was dead, and looked at Heinrich and Minnie, who have got sore throats. "Scarlet fever, ma'am! Ought to have called me before," he said crossly. Mrs. Hummel told him she was poor, and had tried to cure the baby herself, but now it was too late, and she could only ask him to help the others, and trust to charity for his pay. He smiled then, and was kinder—but it was very sad. I cried with them till he turned round, all of a sudden, and told me to go home and take belladonna right away, or I'd have the fever.

Jo: (Suddenly frightened—hugs BETH closer) No, you

Callou





won't! Oh, Beth, if you should be sick I never could forgive myself. What *shall* we do?

*So Beth* Beth: Don't be frightened, Jo—I guess I shan't have it. (*Indicates book on her lap.*) I looked in Mother's medicine book. It says it begins with headache, sore throat, and queer feelings like mine. I—I took some belladonna, and I—I think I feel better.

Jo: (*Runs her hand over BETH's forehead*) Your head's as hot as fire, Beth.

BETH: (*Closes her eyes and leans back*) Oooh! How cool your hand is!

Jo: (*Worried*) Oh, if Mother was only at home! You've been holding the baby every day for more than a week, and among the other children who are going to have it. I'm afraid you *are* going to have it, Beth.

BETH: Don't let Amy come near me! She's never had it—and I should hate to give it to her. (*Anxiously.*) Can't you and Meg have it over again?

Jo; I guess not! I don't care if I do—serve me right for being a selfish pig to let you go while I could have gone just as well as not. (*Rises.*) Now I'll tell you what we'll do! You get to bed. Then we'll have Dr. Bangs come over and look at you, dear. We'll send Amy off to Aunt March's for a spell, to keep her out of harm's way. I shall stay home and nurse you!

BETH: (*Rises and crosses to Jo at c.*) But, Jo ——