

Letters About Literature Winner - Nebraska - Carrie Chen

Level III Winner Nebraska

Carrie Chen
7900 Casey Lane
Lincoln NE 68516

Dear Ms. Alcott,

The musty scent of dust and paper wafts through the air as I wander aimlessly through the stacks, tugging at the spines of books varying in color and size. I weave through the library's maze, seeking the one volume that will awaken my soul. The moment I pause to catch my breath, my eyes rest on a book that is unassuming in its simple floral print, yet radiates with warmth from its goldenrod background. My fingers itch to touch the frivolous script—I reach out and seize this curious book; in essence, seizing the moment.

Four young ladies are quilting, and the image on the cover pierces me like a needle. I was an only child at the time, with few friends in a land foreign to me. I wished that I could entertain the company of these ladies and share in their secrets. With this wish, I turned the cover and found myself transported to the realm of *Little Women*.

Forgive my lingering in nostalgia and tingeing my anecdote with hyperbole, but on that most magical day, I found shades of myself in each of the March girls. This journey that I embarked was most arduous, for I consider *Little Women* to be the first novel I ever read in English. After two years of “ESOL,” I prepared myself to read a challenging book that is worthy of the designation “classic.” I kept my dictionary at arm's length, and at the beginning I could barely read two sentences before stumbling upon a foreign word. But I was determined to meet Meg, Jo, Beth and Amy, and so I turned the stumbling blocks into stepping stones to pave my way to meet them.

Initially, I adored Meg above all. She was the embodiment of elegance and femininity; the true lady I so aspired to be. The older, sophisticated sister who would guide me through the trials of makeup and suitors, I turned to Meg. But even she is not a beacon of beauty; Meg is marred by her own set of flaws. I empathized with her struggles to overcome greed; my family was far from impoverished, but I couldn't resist coveting luxuries that in truth would spoil me soul awfully. We can either put on airs and facades, or we can charge on and confront our weaknesses. Meg's sacrifices inspired me to be more to choose more wisely. The decisions we face in life may tempt or threaten us, and between we may sway toward what is more convenient, or popular—but we must not stray from what is right and true.

Sweet Beth, as Jo would say; her purity and goodness illuminated the way. A soft pianoforte melody fills my head as I immersed myself into the Marches' world. I knew she was only a fiction character, but she was so real to me, that when she died, my hands

were cold. But despite the literal loss, I find solace in Beth's essence, still lingering, her goodness never leaving.

Through much of the novel, Amy was a thorn in the side. Petulant and self-centered, I was almost glad that Jo dropped her on her nose as a baby; her narcissism would be utterly intolerable if she was completely unblemished. Then I realized that perhaps I disliked Amy because she was so much like...me. I could be insensitive to others needs and obsessed with my own vanity on several occasions. The most terrible irony of all is that like Amy, my nose is my most insecure feature. Her growth from the beginning to the end of the book is simply remarkable and even I must respect her heart and her capacity to change.

Ahh...and then there is Josephine March—something else altogether. Jo, the protagonist who defies convention and stereotypes. My sister in literati, her ambition and passion for writing spurred my interest to read vicariously and exercise my creative outlet. My gratitude for her trailblazing is boundless, for she broke barriers and influenced me profoundly to define who I am. She refused to cave toward the pressures of peers, society, and even herself. Jo learned to harness her temper while still maintaining her convictions.

That *Little Women* has marked the passage of many ladies is not a surprise to me, but rather illustrated the integrity of the work. "What can there be in a simple little story like that, to make people praise it so?" Jo wonders about her success. Mr. March simple replied, "There is truth in it, Jo, that's the secret; humor and pathos make it alive." Your tapestry of youth—woven by threads of friendship, tattered through temper, mended with forgiveness, and finally, renewed with conviction—I shall cherish for however long I may live, to fulfill Marmee's wish as your novel has fulfilled mine.

Yours truly,
Carrie