

Jo Dashwood

Scene 5

Her red book in hand, Jo enters the publisher's office, humming—a dark, smoky den. A few gentlemen sit outside. It's pretty seedy. Jo has put on a maroon silk cravat for the occasion, carefully tied. She walks up to the publisher's door, knocks. Note: This is the first time we have ever really seen Jo out in the "real world." Jo knocks again.

MR. DASHWOOD. (A very thick voice.) Enter.

Jo hesitates.

ENTER.

Jo enters.

Whosat?

He's a bit drunk.

JO. It's Jo. Jo March.

She holds her hand out to shake in a businesslike fashion. He doesn't move.

MR. DASHWOOD. Who?

JO. We met last year? You published my short story in your paper? ... "The Spell of Rodrigo"?

MR. DASHWOOD. I buy a lot of stories.

Pause.

You bring another?

He lights a cigar as she talks.

JO. —I brought something better! My very first, WORLD PREMIERE novel!

MR. DASHWOOD. ...Novel?

JO. A whole work about Rodrigo. An epic! It has everything: love, tragedy, swordfights—pirates, mermaids, dragons, and, and death and birth, and—heavy themes. And it's set—all over Europe!
So.

He picks up the book. Pause.

MR. DASHWOOD. I'm not in the market for ladies' novels.

JO. But—you have a press downstairs, with books in the window—

MR. DASHWOOD. Those are works of literature. Not sentimental pieces.

JO. This is—serious. I've worked on it for years.

As he speaks, he casually taps the novel with his cigar—getting ash on it. He eyes her outfit.

MR. DASHWOOD. I assume you're a woman?

She doesn't answer.

Then this is a ladies' novel. Doesn't matter how you dress it up.

He pokes an exploratory finger at her outfit—Jo shies away.

Listen, Miss March—there's a legitimate place for women's voices—bring me another sweet little story, it helps sell powder if I run it next to the ads.

JO. This is a whole book—

MR. DASHWOOD. Fifteen for a story. Put some heaving bosoms in it.

JO. Fifteen?

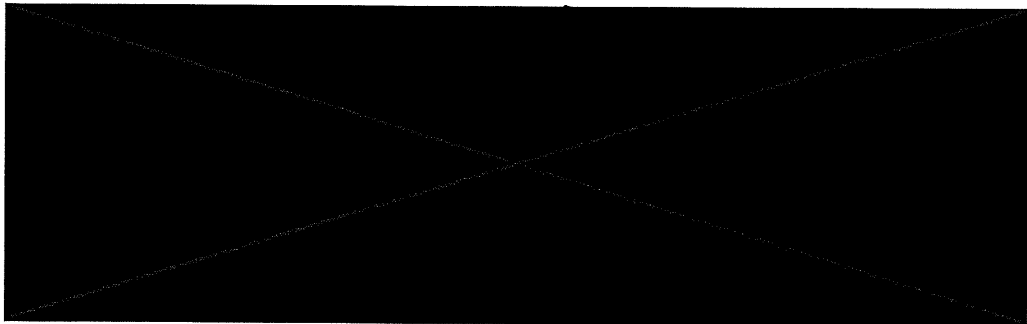
Last time you paid me thirty.

MR. DASHWOOD. Meow.

He looks her up and down.

—Seems to me that last time, you had a cooler head negotiating for you. Where's your "agent"?

Jo, humiliated, reaches for her book—he pulls it out of her reach. [REDACTED]



JO. Oh!—please excuse me!

She prepares to back out as speedily as she bounced in. They're very awkward.

LAURIE. No! Stay.—and I'll go.

He starts to leave.

JO. —if I disturbed you, I'm sorry—

LAURIE. I only ducked in here to—to. You know.

JO. Escape?

LAURIE. A fellow refugee, then.

Pause.

JO. Don't go away.

—Unless you'd rather.

Neither of them is sure what to do.

LAURIE. I think I've had the pleasure of seeing you before, madame.

JO. I believe you live next door. "Sirrah."

They both almost laugh a little.

LAURIE. Funny how stiff one gets in these situations. Drag me to a social and I'm a cat on a leash.

JO. *(Points to herself.)* Dead cat on a leash.

LAURIE. How is your little sister, Miss March?

JO. She's fine, Mr. Laurence. But I'm not "Miss March."—I'm Jo.

She sticks out her hand in a businesslike manner. Laurie, taken aback, takes it.

LAURIE. I'm not Mr. Laurence. I'm Laurie.

She shakes his hand with great vigor; it is a very new experience for him.

JO. Laurie Laurence. That's terr...ific.

LAURIE. My real name is Theodore, but the boys called me Dora, so I thrashed 'em into saying Laurie instead. (*That's not true.*)

JO. (*Impressed.*) Really?

LAURIE. —No.

I've never, um, thrashed anybody. (*Trying to be impressive.*) Yet.

JO. Tell you a secret? —I hate Josephine too.

Do sit?

LAURIE. Thanks awfully. These pumps hurt like the devil.

JO. These boots are dainty little tortures—but as Aunt March says, Let Us Be Elegant Or Die.

They sit.

LAURIE. ...who's Aunt March?

JO. I'm a businessman—lady, I mean, so I wait on my great-aunt for wages, and she's a nasty old cat. But she's taking me to Europe in the new year! Wouldn't bring me along 'til I could pay for my own board, but I've finally saved up enough to go.

And who knows what I can become in Europe?

LAURIE. ...I know something about doing the bidding of cross old people.

JO. D'you work?

LAURIE. No, I get tutored. My grandfather has great plans for me, and bought me out of the draft. I am someday to be a tedious titan of industry! So I must grind away 'til college, where I will learn how to do what I don't wish to do, in order that I may do MORE of what I don't like in the future.

JO. Lucky!

LAURIE. What?

JO. —lucky to go to college! How can you complain of that?

He looks at her.

—I'm sorry, I'm being—I'm so awkward, I always talk too openly. If Meg was here she'd cough herself into a fit over me being boyish.

LAURIE. No, I... I like it.

JO. I'm not very good at being a, you know, a "lady."

LAURIE. I'm not very good at being a "gentleman."

Jo Meg

..... plays as time passes.

Scene 4

Months later. A knock.

JO. I said, I have to—

Meg comes in—something red is on her dress. She's very tired. Jo starts up. It's all very The Seagull.

Meg!

MEG. Hello, Jo.

Jo ~~XXXXXX~~ puts down the notebook.

JO. Meg! It's been months since you've visited!—what are you doing here?

Pause.

MEG. The stage is still set up, I see.

JO. I knew you'd be back!

MEG. Am I too late for rehearsal?

She laughs. She's very frazzled.

JO. Meg. Are the babies all right?

MEG. What?

JO. Is—that—is that blood?

MEG. It's—it's jam.

She suddenly bursts into noisy tears.

JO. Jam!

MEG. Blood, Jo, you've been writing too many stories! Don't be so dramatic!

She cries much harder.

JO. —why are you crying?

MEG. Where is Marmee—

JO. She's changing Papa's bandages.

MEG. I'll come back another time—

JO. You could talk to me—

MEG. I need a grown woman's perspective.

JO. I—well—I'm here, Meg.

Meg assumes a scrap of dignity.

MEG. I can't say, it's too shameful.

JO. Try.

MEG. Well—I'm home with the babies all day, you know, and Demi is starting to crawl. I can't leave him alone for a moment but I find him headed toward the fire—

JO. Yes—

MEG. And Daisy has the colic, she won't stop crying—and they're both teething—

JO. Yes—

MEG. And I never realized what an angel Hannah is here, with all the chores, they just never end—and we can't afford any help, John works hard enough just to keep a roof over our head—I'm so tired of being poor—it's not fun at all being mistress of the house, really. So I'm home alone with the twins, Jo—alone, all day. And all day of every day I'm fighting—I'm fighting a battle against all the nappies and bottles and swaddling clothes in the world, and I'm always losing.

JO. Oh, Meg—