

Adapted from Chapter 4: "Burdens"
Little Women
By Louisa May Alcott

"I saw something I liked this morning. I meant to tell it at dinner, but I forgot," said Beth. "When I went to get some oysters, Mr. Laurence was in the fish shop, busy with Mr. Cutter the fish-man. A poor woman came in with a pail and a mop, and asked Mr. Cutter if he would let her do some scrubbing for a bit of fish. She didn't have any dinner for her children, and had been unable to find work. Mr. Cutter was in a hurry and said 'No' rather crossly. As she was going away, looking hungry and sorry, Mr. Laurence hooked up a big fish with the crooked end of his cane and held it out to her. She was so glad and surprised she took it right into her arms. She thanked him over and over. He told her to 'go along and cook it', and she hurried off, so happy! Wasn't it good of him? Oh, she did look so funny, hugging the big, slippery fish."

When they had laughed at Beth's story, they asked their mother for one. After a moment's thought, she said soberly, "As I sat cutting out blue flannel jackets today at the rooms, I felt very anxious about Father. I thought how lonely and helpless we would be if anything happened to him. I kept on worrying until an old man came in with an order for some clothes. He sat down near me, and I began to talk to him, for he looked poor and tired and anxious.

"Have you sons in the army?' I asked."

"Yes, ma'am. I had four, but two were killed. One is a prisoner, and I'm going to the other, who is very sick in a Washington hospital.' he answered quietly."

"You have done a great deal for your country, sir,' I said, feeling respect now, instead of pity."

"Not a mite more than I ought, ma'am. I'd go myself, if I was any use. As I ain't, I give my boys, and give 'em free."

"He spoke so cheerfully, looked so sincere, and seemed so glad to give his all. I was ashamed of myself. I'd given one man and thought it too much, while he gave four without complaining. I had all my girls to comfort me at home, and his last son was waiting, miles away, to say goodbye to him, perhaps! I felt so rich, so happy thinking of my blessings. So, I made him a nice bundle, gave him some money, and thanked him heartily for the lesson he had taught me."