

Louisa May Alcott: Work, Eight Cousins, Rose in Bloom, Stories & Other Writings: (Library of America #256)

Louisa May Alcott

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Pioneering feminist novels and rare stories from the author of Little Women: After the success of her beloved masterpiece Little Women, Louisa May Alcott brought her genius for characterization and eye for detail to a series of revolutionary novels and stories that are remarkable in their forthright assertion of women's rights. This second volume of The Library of America's Alcott edition gathers these works for the first time, revealing a fascinating and inspiring dimension of a classic American writer. The first of a trio of novels written over a fruitful three-year period, Work: A Story of Experience (1873) has been called the adult Little Women. It follows the semi-autobiographical story of an orphan named Christie Devon, who, having turned twenty-one, announces "a new Declaration of Independence" and leaves her uncle's house in order to pursue economic self-sufficiency and to find fulfillment in her profession. Against the backdrop of the Civil War years, Christie works as a servant, actress, governess, companion, seamstress, and army nurse—all jobs that Alcott knew from personal experience—exposing the often insidious ways in which the employments conventionally available to women constrain their selfdetermination. Alcott's most overtly feminist novel, Work breaks new ground in the literary representation of women, as its heroine pushes at the boundaries of nineteenth-century expectations and assumptions. Eight Cousins (1875) concerns the education of Rose Campbell, another orphan who, in her delicate nature and frail health, seems to embody many of the stereotypes of girlhood that shaped Alcott's world. But with the benefit of an unorthodox, progressive education (one informed by the theories of Alcott's transcendentalist father Bronson Alcott) and the good and bad examples of her many crisply drawn relations— especially her seven boy cousins—Rose regains her health and envisions a career both as a wife and mother and as a philanthropist. Further advancing Alcott's passionate advocacy of women's rights, Rose insists that she will manage her own fortune rather than find a husband to do it for her. This Library of America edition includes several noteworthy features. All three novels are presented with beautifully restored line art from the original editions and are supplemented by seven hard-to-find stories and public letters (two restored to print for the first time in more than a century), an authoritative chronology of Alcott's life, and notes identifying her allusions, quotations, and the autobiographical episodes in her fiction.

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