

"Hurriedly, we scribbled down the library call number and submitted our request to the attendants. Then we walked outside to the steps of the Houghton Library so our discussion of this possible find would not disturb other researchers. In the glare of the hot July sunlight, we rapidly asked each other questions. Did this work actually exist? Was it complete?"

Wanting to temper our excitement, we recalled that just a few days earlier we had requested a collection of family letters only to receive an empty ledger with the notation that the letters had been destroyed by Louisa. We hoped this work had not suffered a similar fate."

This time the outcome was happier: "When we returned to our table, there among the Alcott letters we had been reviewing was a red notebook, about the size of a student's journal. The handwriting on the flue pages was unmistakable; it clearly matched the letters written by Louisa during her teenage years. We eagerly turned the pages and began to read to story of young, orphaned Edith Adelon, knowing that Alcott herself had once held this very manuscript in her hands."

Apparently Alcott never submitted *The Inheritance* to a publisher. It must have been important to her, however, for she tucked it away, in later years pasting in the red notebook a slip of paper that

read, "My first novel written at seventeen High St. Boston."

"At the time Alcott wrote the novel, in 1849, her family had fragmented and was moving from place to place, from one part of New England to another. Her journals from this period are missing, and the letters and journals of family members don't mention the novel."

Discussion Questions courtesy of  
Penguin Group via [www.teachervision.fen.com](http://www.teachervision.fen.com)

Discussion Guide designed by  
Sandy Smith, Lodi Public Library

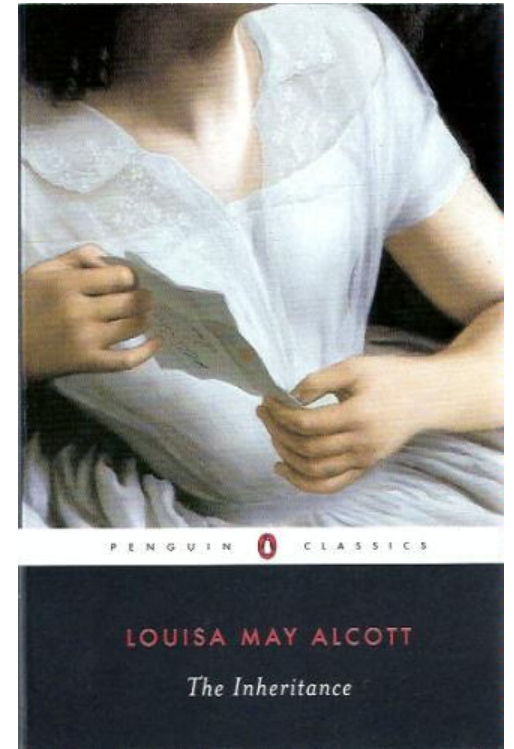
Books courtesy of  
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## Brown Bag Book Club

DISCUSSES

Louisa May Alcott



10-29-11

12-2pm

Community Room

Lodi Public Library

201 W. Locust

Call 333-5503 for details

## DISCUSSION QUESTIONS

1) Louisa May Alcott is known for her stories that focus on relationships among groups of women. Discuss such relationships in *The Inheritance*: those of Edith, Amy, Lady Ida, Lady Hamilton, and Theresa. Do these relationships form the heart of the story? What roles do the male characters in the story play? Are they secondary to the female characters?

2) During their boat ride on the moonlit lake, Lord Percy offers Edith a place in his home as companion to his mother. Why does he not ask her to marry him? Is he not yet in love with her? Does he sense (and she later confirms) that, as a woman of humble birth, she could never wed a nobleman?

3) When the others suggest acting out the tableaux, Edith does not wish to participate and cuts a lock of her own hair to free herself from Amy's grasp. Is this a turning point for Edith, as she defies Amy's wishes and refuses to participate in the game? Were you surprised at her display of anger? Is it the most emotion Edith displays throughout the story?

4) When Lord Arlington confronts Edith in the forest with his passion for her, she says, "My lord, I thank you, but I have no heart to give." What does she mean by this?

5) At various moments throughout *The Inheritance*, Lady Ida feels remorse for her cruel behavior towards Edith. Is Lady Ida truly a wicked character? Does she win your sympathy at all, or does she receive her just desserts? Is there a reversal of roles between Lady Ida and Edith at the end of the story?

6) When Lady Hamilton suspects Edith of stealing the money, why does she refuse to believe in the girl's innocence? And why is she then so willing to forgive Louis of the theft, even before she has heard his reason for stealing the money?

7) Discuss the importance of family in *The Inheritance*. Edith destroys her father's will, knowing this would prove her noble birth and free her to wed Lord Percy or someone of his class. Does she value the family ties and the love of the Hamiltons more than the romantic love she shares with Lord Percy?

8) Did you have any preconceived ideas about *The Inheritance*, knowing that it was Alcott's first novel and that she wrote it at the young age of seventeen? Were these expectations realized? Did anything about the story surprise you?

## Louisa May Alcott's Long-Lost Novel

By Ellen Marsh  
*Humanities*, July/August 1997

A long-lost novel of Alcott's, *The Inheritance*, written when she was seventeen, has now resurfaced and been published for the first time. In many ways, with its romanticized plot and extravagant flourishes, it underscores the autobiographical nature of the character Jo.

The manuscript had been lent in the 1930s by the Alcott heirs to Orchard House, the Alcott home and museum in Concord, Massachusetts. There it remained until 1974, when it was given to Harvard. The manuscript was cataloged and forgotten until 1988, when Joel Myerson and Daniel Shealy rediscovered it in the course of working on *The Selected Letters of Louisa May Alcott*.

"We were looking through the card catalog for anything pertaining to the Alcotts," says Myerson of the University of South Carolina, "and there, on a three-by-five card, was a reference: 'Alcott, Louisa May. *The Inheritance*. A.M.S.; Boston, 1849. 166p. Unpublished; her first novel.'" (A.M.S. means "autograph manuscript," a handwritten manuscript.)