

Jo (*passing the glasses around*) Besides, we are neighbours, and you needn't think you'd be a bother. We want to get to know you and I've been trying to do it this ever so long!

There is a good-natured laugh from everyone as John Brooke raises his glass to Meg

Brooke To your speedy recovery, Miss March!

Meg Thank you, Mr Brooke, my ankle feels easier already.

Jo (*brushing aside such pleasantries*) Now, tell me, are you really called Laurie Laurence? It's an odd mouthful of a name.

Laurie (*laughing*) No, my first name is Theodore, but I don't like it for the fellows called me Dora—so I made them call me Laurie instead.

Jo I hate my name too. Josephine is so sentimental! I wish everyone would call me Jo instead. My Aunt March, who I am with every day, will call me "Josy-Phine". Tell me, how did you stop the boys calling you Dora?

Laurie I thrashed 'em.

Jo (*reflectively and with some disappointment*) Well, I suppose I can't very well thrash Aunt March so I shall have to bear it.

Laurie (*catching sight of a picture on the mantelpiece*) Is this your father?

Jo Yes, that's father. Oh, we do miss him so much, he's so far away and . . .

As they turn to examine the picture, talking quietly to each other, Meg and Brooke, who have been listening in quiet amusement, pick up a conversation of their own

Meg Is Laurie always a good pupil, Mr Brooke?

Brooke (*with a smile*) Perhaps not always, Miss March, for he does not always apply himself as he should, but it is very rewarding when he does, and one begins to see the fruit of one's work.

Meg I teach, also, but I must confess that I don't really enjoy it. I only wish that I liked it as much as you obviously do.

Brooke I think you would if you had Laurie as a pupil. He is particularly good at languages. His French is quite fluent and we are now working hard at his German. In a few months, I think . . .

Meg (*interrupting*) German! You are teaching him German?

Brooke Why, yes, do you speak it?

Meg No—that is, my father was teaching me before he went away, and although I try to practise myself I am afraid I don't get on very fast alone, for I have no-one to correct my pronunciation.

Brooke Then, perhaps, you will allow me . . . ?

Meg (*confused*) Oh, no, I . . . I couldn't bother you to . . . I . . . I didn't mean that when I said . . .

Brooke (*with a smile*) No, of course not, I quite understand; but, if you will allow me, I will have a word with your mother and see what can be arranged.

Meg That is very kind of you, Mr Brooke, I . . .

Brooke Not at all, it would give me great pleasure to be of some assistance.

*grobelt
aufwand*

Something in the way Brooke looks at Meg makes her change the subject rather abruptly

Meg You are very happy with Laurie and old Mr Laurence?

Brooke Indeed, yes; I shall be very sorry to leave them when Laurie goes to college in a year or so.

Meg And what will become of you then?

Brooke (*without self-pity*) Well, I have no family now, and few friends, so I think if the war is still on I shall turn soldier.

Meg I am sure that Mr Laurence and Laurie will regret the parting as much as you do.

Brooke Mine will be the greater loss, I feel, for I am beginning to realize what a very charming neighbourhood this is. (*The look in his eyes is a steady one with no trace of boldness or flirtation*)

Before Meg can find breath for reply, Marmee enters with a small tray of bandages, lint, etc.

- Spring back

Marmee (*as she enters*) I have been longer than I expected. We've been looking everywhere for this bottle of arnica which is so good for sprains.

For some reason best known to itself, it was in the larder among the jars of pickles! (*She sets down the tray*)

Brooke (*rising*) We must bid you good-night, Mrs March. You have much to do I am sure. Thank you again for your hospitality. Are you ready, Laurie?

Marmee Good-night, Mr Brooke; good-night, Laurie—we are looking forward to you and your grandfather taking tea with us tomorrow. I was so pleased when he replied to my note and said he would come. Thank you again for bringing Meg home, will you excuse me if I don't see you to the door? I must bind this ankle without any more delay. Jo will see you out.

Brooke and Laurie exit with Jo amid general "Good-nights" etc.

Marmee sets to work to bind the ankle as the front door closes behind the guests

But she is to be disturbed still further, for two figures in night attire appear on the stairs. Amy is aiding nature by wearing curl papers and has a peg on her nose

Amy Marmee, please may we come down and hear about the party?

Marmee Amy! Beth! I thought you were asleep hours ago.

Beth We were so excited we just lay awake talking, and then we heard the carriage arriving . . .

Amy . . . and we crept out onto the landing, but didn't dare to come down—though we heard everything.

Marmee You are very naughty, eavesdropping, and, Amy dear, do take that clothes peg off your nose.

Amy But, Marmee, you know that I always sleep with it on—to improve the shape of my nose—it really is my worst feature. (*She removes the peg*)