

Jo returns

Jo (*rummaging in her evening-bag*) Here you are, pets, I brought you some bon-bons as a little treat.

Meg (*dismayed at this revelation*) Jo! You didn't take them from the supper table?

Jo Yes, I don't think anybody saw me.

Meg How can you be sure? What would the Gardiners think if they saw you? Or Laurie! Or Mr Brooke?

Jo Laurie would just laugh, and what has it to do with Mr Brooke?

Meg (*confused*) Well, he would consider us very ill-mannered young ladies and . . .

Jo Oh, stuff!

Amy Tell us about the party, please! Tell about the party!

Jo We had a capital time. Meg danced nearly every dance, in spite of her shoes, until she hurt her ankle.

Beth Didn't you dance, Jo?

Jo Oh, I'm not so very fond of dancing and, anyway, I was trying to hide this burn on my skirt. I was sitting in a little alcove enjoying myself no end watching everyone else, when Laurie came up and asked if he might dance with me. He looked so disappointed and hurt when I refused, and, as I couldn't think of any other excuse on the spur of the moment, I told him the truth.

Meg (*shocked once more*) You told him about the burn?

Jo Yes, why not? He thought it was a great lark and laughed no end. So we sat and talked; and, then, just before supper Meg was dancing with a big, red-haired youth who . . .

Meg His hair is *auburn*, not red, and he's a very polite, well-mannered young gentleman.

Jo He looked like a grasshopper in a fit. Laurie and I couldn't help laughing, didn't you hear us?

Meg No, thank goodness; it was very rude of you! (*Taking up the story*) It was then that I turned my ankle. Laurie and Mr Brooke came to my aid . . .

Jo And I heard Mr Brooke call the *auburn*-haired gentleman a "careless fellow" for dancing too fast and not looking about him.

Meg (*with more than usual interest*) Did he? (*Pulling herself together*) Then we had supper during which Jo succeeded in spilling coffee all over her one good glove (*obviously, an incident that has bitten into Meg's soul*). And Laurie offered to drive us home.

Jo And home we came in a closed carriage feeling very festive and elegant.

Marmee (*laughing*) Well, my girls, I hope this taste of high life won't make you too discontented with your own lot.

Jo No, Marmee, I don't believe fine ladies enjoy themselves one bit more than we do. In spite of our burnt hair, old gowns, odd gloves, and tight slippers that sprain our ankles when we are silly enough to wear them.

Marmee (*rising, to Beth and Amy*) Now, off to bed at once you two—and no

more getting up, please! I shall be up in a minute to tuck you in—once again!

Beth and Amy exit upstairs

Meg dear, let us try your weight on that ankle and see if it is any better with the binding.

Meg rises, supported by her mother—her mind obviously elsewhere

Meg Yes, that's much better Marmee.

They progress towards the door

He's got very handsome brown eyes, hasn't he, Jo?

Jo is busily occupied collecting up their cloaks, etc.

Jo (*matter of factly*) Laurie's eyes are blue.

Meg No, I meant Mr Brooke.

Marmee and Meg exit upstairs

Jo (*as the truth slowly breaks in upon her*) Christopher Columbus!

The Lights fade to Black-out

SCENE 3

The same. New Year's Day. Afternoon

Winter sunshine smiles wanly through the window

When the Lights come up Marmee is seated on the sofa, her dress brightened by a pretty, silk shawl

Standing in front of the fire is the tall, distinguished figure of Mr Laurence. His white hair and craggy, aristocratic features might, at first sight, suggest a rather austere and distant character, but, as we shall discover, these conceal a dry sense of humour and a kindness which shows in many actions

Mr Laurence and Marmee both hold a teacup and saucer. On the table behind the sofa stands a large tray of tea things including dishes of homemade confectionery and "Hannah's fruit cake". The atmosphere is pleasant; the tea-party and reunion have obviously gone well

Marmee Another cup of tea, Mr Laurence?

Mr Laurence No, thank you, ma'am. I have had a pleasant sufficiency. What a delightful visit this has been! It was good of you to receive me.

Marmee rises to take his cup and saucer, and return it, with her own, to the fire

Marmee It has been a special pleasure for me to meet you again after so long a time. My father always spoke of you with great affection.