

She turns to the others, and, with a great flourish, leads them into a spirited version of "The Twelve Days of Christmas". Once the singing has started, they join hands to dance in an uncompleted ring around the sofa. Marmee and Mr Laurence draw to one side to allow the dancers freedom, but enter into the spirit of it all by joining in the singing—as does Hannah, though she is unprepared when she is suddenly grabbed by Jo and Laurie and drawn, protestingly, into the dance on the second verse. The volume and activity increase. Beth sits up delightedly, clapping her hands in time with the song

The third verse has just commenced with enormous vigour when a figure in a long cloak and muffler appears in the archway. It is John Brooke

The singing and dancing stop suddenly. There is a silence as everyone's eyes turn towards him. For a moment longer no one speaks

Meg (involuntarily, her voice breaking the silence) Why, John! (Confused) I mean . . . Mr Brooke!

Mr Laurence Bless my soul! It's Brooke! What are you doing here, man?

Brooke is a little embarrassed at being the subject of quite so much attention

Brooke (with an air of suppressed excitement and a smile on his lips) I . . . I'm sorry to interrupt, but I . . . I've got a special Christmas present for the March family! (He steps back)

A second figure appears in the archway. It is that of a man of middle years whose strength of character and kindly disposition show clearly in a face that has recently known ill-health. He has about him the tired air of one who has made a long journey, but his face lights up at the scene before him. He has loosened his long cloak and muffler to reveal the dark clothes of a minister of religion. Mr March has come home. There is another brief silence—this time of disbelief—before he speaks

Mr March (with a smile) Am I in time for Christmas dinner?

From silence the room erupts into an uproar of welcome. Everyone speaks at once

Jo rushes forward with Marmee to embrace him and draw him into the parlour

Jo Father! Father! You're home! Christopher Columbus! What a marvelous present!

There is a general confusion of greeting and exclamations of surprise and delight as Mr March is enveloped in three pairs of loving arms by his daughters. The air is full of: "I just can't believe it!" "How did you get here?", "When did you arrive?", "How are you feeling, Father?", "What a lovely surprise!", "This makes it just the happiest Christmas ever!", etc.

Meanwhile, Mr Laurence and Laurie are greeting Brooke and welcoming him home. He has now removed his cloak and muffler, and is seen to be wearing army lieutenant's uniform. Mr March, divested of his cloak and muffler by Marmee and the girls, now breaks away from the others to go to the little

more 2
toward
Laurie
& more just
down to
talk to
Mr L

Put cloak & muffler on
back of sofa

figure on the sofa who sits up holding out her arms to him imploringly. He sits on the sofa, holding her in his arms

Mr March I can hardly believe that I am really home again! I've often thought how much I should like to arrive and surprise you all on Christmas day, but it seemed a very remote possibility. When the weather turned finer a few days ago, the doctor thought I may take advantage of it and make the journey. So, we made some hurried arrangements, and here we are!

Marmee It makes it just the happiest Christmas we could hope for, doesn't it girls?

There is loud and lively agreement from the girls

Mr March Well, you may thank John for really bringing it about.

Brooke Oh, I don't know, sir, I did . . .

Mr March Oh, yes, John. I could never have made the journey alone. It is due entirely to your efforts that we are here now. (To the others) I don't know what I would have done without him in these last few months for he has been devoted to me. (Turning again to Brooke) You won't like hearing me say it, I know, but you are altogether a most estimable young man.

This glowing tribute embarrasses the recipient, who hardly knows where to look, and is received with totally contrasting reactions by Meg and Jo

Marmee That is true indeed! We owe you a great debt of gratitude, John.

Conscious of Brooke's embarrassment, Marmee changes the subject to more practical matters

Well now, you must both be famished after your journey. Dinner is nearly ready and I . . .

Hannah, who has taken her part, alternating between tears and laughter, in the general rejoicing at the return of Mr March, is suddenly brought back to reality by the word "dinner". She lets out a loud cry

Hannah Land sakes, mum! The turkey! I must get back and baste him before he dies of thirst in the oven!

Hannah exits speedily to the kitchen

The others laugh

Beth Marmee, please, I always help to baste the turkey, and this is such a special Christmas that I'd hate to miss doing it.

Marmee (uncertainly) Well, I don't know . . . you must take things quietly for a little while, and let us wait on you . . .

Mr March (seeing the disappointment on Beth's face) Oh, I don't suppose that small task will be too exhausting! (He takes Beth in his arms and rises) We'll all go! Beth can sit in Hannah's rocking-chair by the fire and superintend everything. (Rallying the others he moves upstage with Beth)