

CHAPTER 10

Camp Laurence



One July day Beth came into the house with her arms full of parcels. She was appointed mistress of the post office the two houses had set up for fun because she spent the most time at home.

One was a peculiar package that, after Meg opened it, revealed one letter and one glove.

“Why, where’s the other one?” Meg remembered leaving a pair at Laurie’s. Beth said she’d only found one in the post office.

“Oh, I hate odd gloves.” Meg put down her

sewing and opened the letter. It was a translation of a German song. She said, “Mr. Brooke must have done this. It isn’t Laurie’s handwriting.”

Marmee glanced at her pretty daughter. She had a brief thought about a brewing romance between Meg and Mr. Brooke. Meg had no idea what her mother was thinking. She was quite happy to sit sewing and singing.

Jo also had “mail.” She laughed when Beth handed her a big, floppy hat. “I told Laurie the other day that I wished big hats were the fashion because I was always getting sunburned,” Jo explained. “He said, ‘Why care about fashion? Wear a big hat and be comfortable.’”

Jo also received a note from her mother, who was proud of how well she was controlling her temper. Another letter was from Laurie inviting everyone to a picnic: his friends, the Vaughns, were visiting from England.

Jo was excited. "Can we go, Marmee?" she asked. "Meg and I will be a great help and it'll be fun for Beth and Amy."

Meg asked, "Do you know anything about the Vaughns?"

Jo replied, "They're friends of Laurie's from abroad. Kate's older than you; the twins, Fred and Frank, are my age; and Grace is about nine."

"I'm so glad my French print is pressed!" Meg said, ever mindful of her fashion. "Jo, do you have something decent?"

Jo rolled her eyes and stated that her gray boating suit would do just fine. After all, she would be spending the day rowing and eating outdoors.

Beth said she was a bit afraid of the new boys, but she would love to go anyway. Jo encouraged her sisters to get their chores done so they could spend the holiday without a care in the world.

When Jo woke up the next morning, she noticed

with a laugh that Amy had a clothespin on her nose to uplift its shape no matter how much it hurt! The day was bright and beautiful, perfect for a picnic. All four girls got dressed. Beth finished first and went to the window to watch the bustling scene next door. "Oh, Laurie's dressed like a sailor," she reported to her sisters. "And Ned Moffat and Sallie Gardiner and Mr. Brooke are there, too. What fun, girls! What fun!"

Soon, all four were ready. Meg was mortified that Jo was wearing her big, floppy hat. They headed next door to meet Laurie's friends. He made polite introductions. Jo noticed that Kate was standoffish. "Perhaps that's why Laurie clams up when he's speaking of her," she thought.

Beth came out of her shell a little when she noticed that Frank walked with a cane. He was both kind and gentle. Soon, Amy was chumming around with little Grace as if they had known each other all their lives.

Mischief was underfoot within the two boats. Fred did his best to overturn them. Everyone had a good laugh at Jo's funny hat. Kate was amazed at Jo, who forgot herself and cried "Christopher Columbus!" when she lost her oar.

The big tent was set up by the time the party arrived at the picnic area. Laurie jumped out and announced in his jolly voice, "Welcome to Camp Laurence!" He then suggested they have a game of croquet before lunch. They divided into two teams. Jo had to control her temper when she

caught Fred Vaughn cheating. In the end it didn't matter, because they all had a good time playing the game.

Next, it was time for lunch. Everyone helped. The younger campers gathered sticks for the fire. The older girls set the table. The boys got the fire going. The meal was lovely. They ate and ate. Laurie and Jo had to share a plate because one was missing.

“There’s salt over there,” Laurie said, “if you want it for your berries.”

Jo laughed, “How dare you remind me of that awful lunch when everything here is so perfect.”

“It had nothing to do with me. You, Meg, and Mr. Brooke have done all the work.” He paused for a minute. “What shall we do after lunch?”

Jo answered, “We’ll play games in the tent until it’s cooler. I’ve brought Authors, and I bet Kate knows some new games. You should really be paying more attention to her. She is your guest.”

Laurie protested. He said Jo was also his guest. Plus, he thought Kate and Mr. Brooke would spend the afternoon together, but Mr. Brooke kept talking to Meg.

Jo gave him one of her looks. Finally, Laurie sighed, “Okay, I’m going.”

The entire group settled into the tent to wait for the heat to pass. Jo was right: Kate did know some fun parlor games. They played Truth, Rigmarole,

and then Authors. Afterward Kate, Meg, and Mr. Brooke left the younger children to play in the tent. Sitting on the grass, Kate began to sketch. Meg said longingly, “How beautiful! I wish I could draw.”

Kate asked, “Why don’t you learn?”

“I haven’t the time.”

“Why?” Kate asked in her British accent. “Is it because of school?”

Meg said, “Oh, I don’t go. I’m a governess myself.”

Kate’s disapproving expression made Meg blush. Mr. Brooke explained, “American girls are very independent. They are admired for supporting themselves.”

Kate didn’t seem impressed, which made Meg feel even worse. Mr. Brooke turned to Meg and asked if she enjoyed the German song he translated for her.

Her face brightened. "Oh, yes, very much. Thank you."

The rest of the afternoon found Meg and Mr. Brooke engaged in a lovely conversation. A friendly game of croquet finished the day for the

rest of the gang. At sunset, they took down the tent. They packed the gear, loaded the boats, and made their way home. Everyone proclaimed Camp Laurence a magnificent success!

CHAPTER 11

Castles in the Air



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Laurie was swinging in his hammock on a warm September day. He wondered what his neighbors were doing, but he was too lazy to find out. He hadn't finished his studies, frustrating Mr. Brooke. Instead, he had practiced the piano, upsetting his grandfather. Then Laurie had played a practical joke on one of the maids and got into an argument with the stableman. Everyone in the house now seemed angry with him. Thankfully, he fell asleep, and a good nap improved his mood. The sound of voices woke him from a dream where he was

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having an adventure at sea. He opened his eyes to see the March sisters coming out of their house.

They looked odd. Each wore a large hat and carried a shoulder pouch and a tall walking stick. They marched through the garden and up the hill toward the river. Laurie felt slighted that they hadn't invited him. He decided to follow them.

He found the girls sitting in a shady nook. Meg was sewing, Amy was drawing pictures, Jo was knitting and reading aloud, and Beth was sorting pinecones. Laurie felt bad about spying, but he was so lonely that he approached them.

"May I come in?" he asked. "Or will I bother you?" Meg lifted her eyebrows.

Jo said, "Of course you can join us. I should have asked you to come, but I didn't know if you'd want to play our girls' games."

"I'm sure it'll be fun, but if Meg wants me to go, I will."

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Meg said, "You may stay as long as you do something. This is our Busy Bee Society. It's against the rules to be idle here."

"What should I do?"

Jo handed him a book to read aloud while she knit the heel of her sock. When he finished, he asked, "What game are we playing?"

Meg asked her sisters, "Should we tell him?"

Amy warned, "He'll laugh!"

Laurie said, "No, I won't. I promise."

Jo explained how they had been trying all year to be good, productive girls. They'd bring their work to this spot, where they felt inspired by the view of the wide, blue river, the green hills, and the silvery white clouds shining like the steeples of a city in the sky. For fun, they'd wear old hats and play pilgrims on the way.

Jo sighed, "Wouldn't it be fun if all our 'castles in the air' came true?"

Laurie said it would be hard for him to follow just one dream because he had so many different ones.

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"Which one is your favorite?" Jo asked.

"I'll tell you mine if you all tell me yours!"

They all agreed.

Laurie said emphatically, "I'd live in Germany and become a famous musician. That's my 'castle.'" He turned to Meg. "Your turn."

She stated, "I'd like to be mistress of a beautiful house and manage it very well."

Laurie teased, "With a wonderful husband?"

Meg blushed. Jo said bluntly, "Your castle wouldn't be perfect without a good husband and little angels for children, and you know it!"

Meg retorted, "Well, you'd have nothing but horses, pens and ink, and novels in yours!"

Page 98 Jo smiled. "Exactly! I'd write and become as famous from my stories as Laurie would be from his music."

Beth quietly noted, "My dream is to stay home with Mother and Father and help take care of the family." ^{Page 99}

Laurie asked, "Is that all?"

"Yes," Beth said, "now that I've got my little piano, that's all I need."

Amy piped up, "My dream is to move to Rome and become a great artist."

Laurie said thoughtfully, "We're an ambitious group. Each wants to be rich and famous, except for Beth. I wonder if we'll all succeed."

Jo said, "I've got the key to my castle, but whether I can unlock it is another story."

"Me too," Laurie sighed.

Amy held up her pencil. "And here's my key!"

Meg said softly, "I haven't got any."

Laurie responded, "Oh, yes you do. You have your pretty face." This caused Meg to blush again. "Wait and see," he said, "if it doesn't bring you something worthwhile."

Jo suggested, "Let's meet here in ten years and see how well we've done." Everyone said this was indeed a fine plan. ^{Page 100}

Laurie remarked thoughtfully, "I hope I've done something to be proud of by then, but I'm so lazy."

Jo said soothingly, "All you need is some inspiration."

Laurie said, "I should be happy to please my grandfather. He wants me in the family business, but I want to be a musician. And I really want to see the world."

Jo suggested, "You should sail away and only come back after you've tried your own way."

Meg scolded, "That's not right. Laurie, you should do as your grandfather wants. Once he sees that you're doing your best in college, he'll

be sure to grant your wishes.” She continued, “Do your duty and you’ll be respected and admired like Mr. Brooke.”

Laurie asked what Meg knew about him.

“That he took care of his mother until she died and now provides for his mother’s old nurse.”

Laurie agreed that Mr. Brooke was a fine man. Meg went on to tell Laurie that he should also listen to his tutor and do well in his studies. Laurie was offended for a minute, but regained his good humor.

The Busy Bee Society got back to work. Laurie tried twice as hard to be good to ensure his membership.

That night, while Beth played the piano for his grandfather, Laurie watched quietly from the doorway. He thought hard about what Meg had said, and vowed to himself, “I’ll let my castle go for now—and stay with my dear grandfather while he needs me, for I am all he has.”