

Jo's Last Scrape

by Louisa May Alcott from *Jo's Boys*

In this passage from Jo's Boys, Mrs. Jo Bhaer has become a famous author. Like famous singers and actors today, at that time famous authors were always surrounded by fans and reporters. Jo hates that strangers are always trying to see her and talk to her. A reporter has just rung the doorbell, and Jo's son Teddy goes to answer the door instead of Mary, the maid.

At that moment the bell rang and the sound of wheels was heard in the road.

'I'll go; Mary lets 'em in'; and Ted smoothed his hair as he made for the hall.

'Can't see anyone. Give me a chance to fly upstairs,' whispered Mrs. Jo, preparing to escape. But before she could do so, a man appeared at the door with a card in his hand. Ted met him with a stern air, and his mother dodged behind the window-curtains to bide her time for escape.

'I am doing a series of articles for the Saturday Tattler, and I called to see Mrs. Bhaer the first of all,' began the newcomer in the insinuating tone of his tribe, while his quick eyes were taking in all they could, experience having taught him to make the most of his time, as his visits were usually short ones.

'Mrs Bhaer never sees reporters, sir.'

'But a few moments will be all I ask,' said the man, edging his way farther in.

'You can't see her, for she is out,' replied Teddy, as a backward glance showed him that his unhappy parent had vanished—through the window, he supposed, as she sometimes did when hard bested.

'Very sorry. I'll call again. Is this her study? Charming room!' And the intruder fell back on the parlour, bound to see something and bag a fact if he died in the attempt. 'It is not,' said Teddy, gently but firmly backing him down the hall, devoutly hoping that his mother had escaped round the corner of the house.

'If you could tell me Mrs. Bhaer's age and birthplace, date of marriage, and number of children, I should be much obliged,' continued the unabashed visitor as he tripped over the door-mat.

'She is about sixty, born in Nova Zembla, married just forty years ago today, and has eleven daughters. Anything else, sir?' And Ted's sober face was such a funny contrast to his ridiculous reply that the reporter owned himself routed, and retired laughing just as a lady followed by three beaming girls came up the steps.

Questions

1. Where does Jo hide in the beginning?
2. How does Teddy think Jo gets out of the room?
3. How many children does Teddy say Jo has?
4. Why does Teddy give the reporter false information?