

all, won't it? Meeting your son's prospective in-laws for the first time.

**Sam** Well, hardly for the first time. I were at school with Reuben.

**Joe** Aye, well you know what I mean. It's the first time in your own home, isn't it? They've not been down here before?

**Sam** Never. Alice wouldn't have let 'em come within shouting distance let alone set foot in the place.

**Joe** There you are, then. What time are they arriving?

**Sam** Any time now.

**Joe** In that case I'd better be off. (*He finishes his tea off and rises*)

**Sam** Nay—don't go, Joe. Sit yourself down. I'll need a bit of moral support. You know what I'm like at meeting folks.

**Joe** Well—if you're sure.

**Sam** Aye—aye. Have another cup of tea. (*He takes hold of Joe's mug*)

**Mabel** (*off R*) Anybody in?

**Sam** (*calling*) NO!

*Joe reseats himself on the sofa*

*Mabel enters R*

**Mabel** Hello, Sam—feeling better, are you? I just thought I'd pop round and see how you . . . (*She spots the set table*) Oh. Expecting company, I see.

**Sam** Aye. (*He moves to the table to pour more tea for Joe*)

**Mabel** (*sweetly*) Anybody I know?

**Sam** Probably. (*He picks up the teapot*)

**Mabel** (*persisting*) Friends, like?

**Sam** (*pouring*) No, I wouldn't call 'em friends exactly.

**Mabel** Oh. Just "somebody special", like?

**Sam** That's right, Mabel.

**Mabel** I thought it must be. (*She beams at Sam and Joe*)

**Sam** Did you? (*He adds milk*)

**Mabel** I could *tell*, you see.

**Sam** Could you? (*He moves back to Joe with the tea*)

**Mabel** (*moving closer to the table*) Because of the tea things.

**Sam** Oh?

**Mabel** (*trying to be bright*) It were Alice's best one, you see.

**Sam** Were it?

**Mabel** (*knowingly*) Oh, yes. She only got that set out when she had somebody special in to tea.

**Joe** I bet she never had it out for you.

**Mabel** (*sniffing at Joe's remark*) So that's how I guessed, you see. Because of the tea service.

**Sam** Aye—well you guessed wrong then, didn't you? 'Cos it just happened to be the first one I came across in the cupboard.

**Mabel** Oh, I don't think Alice'd be very pleased about you doing that.

**Joe** That's all right, Mabel—she's not been invited.

**Mabel** (*to Sam*) Do you work him with your foot? (*To Joe*) I suppose

you'll be having your great plates of meat under the table, though, won't you? You'll not miss the chance of a free meal.

**Joe** (*cheerfully*) Not if I can help it, Mabel.

**Mabel** Well you needn't bother yourself coming round to our house for anything, Joe Gittings, 'cos you'll get nothing from *me*.

**Joe** That's all right, Mabel. I'm none so fond of salads, anyway.

**Mabel** (*taken aback*) Who said owt about salads?

**Joe** Nobody. Only I know you're having salad today, 'cos I saw you over the road this morning, pulling up dandelions.

**Mabel** Oh, very funny—I don't think. You ought to be on the stage, you did. *Scrubbing it!*

**Sam** (*moving back to the table*) Oh, knock it off, you two. They'll be here in a minute.

**Mabel** (*quickly*) Who will?

**Sam** (*smiling*) The company.

**Mabel** (*defeated*) Oh . . . Well—I suppose I'd better be going then—unless you'd like me to stop and give a hand, eh?

*Sam just looks at her silently*

'Course, I wouldn't like to intrude if it's going to be something—private.

**Joe** Wouldn't you?

**Mabel** (*snapping at him*) No, I wouldn't. I'm not like *some* folks I could mention. I believe in keeping my nose out of things what don't concern me.

**Joe** Aye, you might believe it, but it doesn't mean you *do* it.

**Mabel** Are you insinuating I'm nosey, Joe Gittings?

**Joe** Nosey? You've got a longer nose than Pinocchio.

**Mabel** (*stung*) Oh.

**Sam** (*tiredly*) Steady on, Joe. (*He sits at the table*)

**Mabel** I should think so as well. I'm not the least bit interested in other folks' business. Like I've always said—if you can't invite folks round to your own home without having to tell the whole neighbourhood about it, it's a bit of a bad job.

**Joe** Here, here.

*Mabel nods indignantly then turns to Sam*

**Mabel** So what time are you expecting them, Sam? These friends of yours?

**Sam** I've told you. Any time now.

**Mabel** You'll be able to see them coming down the front street then, won't you? That is, always assuming they'll come down the front street, eh?

**Sam** They will.

**Mabel** I'd better get off then. (*She smiles at them both, and backs to the door R*)

**Joe** You should just have time to position yourself behind the curtains.

*Mabel glares at him*