

JEM (*moving c.*). It's like this, ma'am . . . Martha's taken me all of a sudden . . . and such quick work does flabbergast a man.

MARTHA. Don't mind him, ma'am, he'll come to . . .

JEM. It's not that I'm against it, ma'am . . . only Martha has such quick ways with her when once she takes a thing into her head; and marriage, ma'am, marriage nails a man, as one may say . . .

(MARTHA gives him such a nudge as almost to unbalance him.)

MARTHA. 'Twas only last night he was an-axing me and an-axing me . . . and now he's only taken aback with the suddenness of the joy . . . (*She gives him another great nudge.*)

JEM. I dare say I shan't mind it after it's once over . . .

MARTHA. And Jem, you are just as full as me about wanting a lodger . . . (*A nudge.*) You see we'd have to have a lodger to make the ends meet . . .

JEM. Ay! If Miss Matty would lodge with us . . . otherwise I've no mind to be cumbered with strange folk in the house . . .

(*This enrages MARTHA who gives him another poke with her elbow.*)

MISS MATTY. Marriage is a very solemn thing . . .

JEM (*eagerly*). It is, indeed, ma'am . . . (*He gets another jolt.*)

Not that I've no objections to Martha . . .

MARTHA (*getting very red in the face*). I like that, Jem Hearn . . . shaming me before my missus and all . . .

JEM. Nay, now! Martha, don't ee! Don't ee! Only a man likes to have breathing time . . .

(*He tries to take her hand, but she is really offended . . . and bounces out of the room. Exit MARTHA.*)

MARY. I think it is a wonderful plan, Jem . . . and I am sure Martha will make you a very good wife . . .

JEM. Ay . . . I always looked on her as to be my wife . . . sometime; and she has often and often spoke of you as the kindest lady that ever was, Miss Matty, and though the plain truth is, I would not like to be troubled with lodgers of the common run, yet if, ma'am, you'd honour us by

living with us, I'm sure Martha would do her best to make you comfortable.

MISS MATTY (*rather near tears*). I'm sure she would, Jem . . . I'm sure she would . . .

JEM. And I'd keep out of your way as much as I could, which I reckon would be the best kindness such an awkward chap as me could do.

(MARTHA's head appears round kitchen door.)

MARTHA. Go on . . . ask her about the house . . . you big fool . . .

(MARTHA's head is withdrawn.)

JEM. Well . . . we was a thinking . . . me and Martha, that is, Martha and me . . . we was thinking that as there isn't a house vacant hereabouts . . . and if Miss Matty here is going to give up this one . . . Well, if it'd be comfortable . . . we might take this one and Miss Matty could keep on in her own rooms seeing as how we'd only be needing one . . . one bedroom, and the kitchen . . .

MISS MATTY (*all but crying*). Jem . . . I . . . I cannot . . . I cannot . . . tell you how . . . how . . .

MARY. I think it is a perfect idea . . .

JEM (*backing awkwardly to the door but unable to make an exit*).

And I hope you'll excuse me, ma'am . . . for being a bit awkward, but I'm sure I mean kindly . . . and I'm a bit fluttered by being pushed straight ahead into matrimony . . . and I mayn't express myself conformable . . . but I, well . . . I . . .

MISS MATTY (*equally at a loss for words*). Oh, Jem . . . I . . . wish . . . I . . .

(*The conversation has reached a complete deadlock and JEM has backed up against the door where he stands mopping his forehead as if he had completed a day's work. Suddenly we hear MARTHA's voice off.*)

MARTHA. Come along out, you great oaf . . . you've said all you've got to say . . .

(*And with this, her brawny arm appears, takes his sleeve, and yanks him headlong into the kitchen. Exit JEM. Sounds of scuffling and buffeting follow his exit . . .*)