

MISS B. Several cases of burglary of late . . .

(*By this time they are crowding for the door . . . deaf to*

MISS MATTY'S little cries of distress . . .)

MISS MATTY. Ladies . . . please . . . ! I pray you . . . !

(*The doorbell rings again, the ladies are again rooted to the spot.*)

MISS B. (*breathlessly*). It's them . . . I mean, they . . .

MRS. F. Too late . . . !

(*Enter MARTHA, followed by MARY. The ladies come down centre . . . MARY joins MISS MATTY and takes her hand . . . MARTHA proceeds to the door . . .*)

MISS MATTY. Wait a minute, Martha . . .

(*MARTHA pauses at the door.*)

Pray seat yourselves, ladies . . .

(*Everybody, with the exception of MR. HOGGINS, sits down . . . and there they perch like so many ramrods.*)
Martha . . . !

(*MISS MATTY sits at top of card table.*)

You may open the door.

(*MARTHA disappears and we hear the door opening and the sound of voices. Also the words (off) "Mrs. Jamieson and Lady Glenmire". There is a deathly silence on stage until*

MISS MATTY rallies and starts another forced conversation.)

MR. HOGGINS, I believe you were making an interesting observation on the subject of our colonies . . . ?

MR. H. Was I now, madam . . . ?

MISS MATTY. Ah . . . the colonies . . . a great source of satisfaction to the dear King . . .

MRS. F. And to the dear Queen . . . I am sure . . .

MISS B. And may I inquire, Miss Jenkyns, what is your latest news from Court?

MISS MATTY. Oh dear . . . I think the colonies are safer . . .

MR. H. Interesting things, colonies . . .

(*There is another deep silence while they all strain their ears desperately toward the curtain. Presently we hear them advancing along the hall . . . and there is another desperate effort at casual chat.*)

(*MARTHA draws aside the curtain.*)

MARTHA. Here they are, ma'am . . .

(*MISS MATTY rises with dignity and advances to meet them. Enter MRS. JAMIESON and LADY GLENMIRE. MRS. J. is much the same as before, except that she wears, like the others, a lace cap. LADY GLENMIRE . . . is a quick-moving personage . . . very plainly dressed in black silk . . . and also wearing a lace cap. She is bright, cheerful and smiling—very attractive for her age, which is also "over thirty-five".*)

MISS MATTY (*with a dignity that never deserts her at times of need*).

How do you do, ma'am . . . and is this your sister-in-law . . . ?

MRS. J. May I present Miss Jenkyns . . . Lady Glenmire . . .

MISS MATTY. A pleasure, ma'am . . . And let me introduce my friends?

LADY G. (*a very faint Scotch accent*). Indeed it's a pleasure for me, Miss Jenkyns . . . to meet yourself and all the ladies of Cranford . . . I would give Mrs. Jamieson, here, no rest till I could meet you . . .

MISS MATTY. You are very kind, madam. Now here is Mrs.

Forrester . . . Lady Glenmire . . .

MRS. F. (*bobs up and down like a jack-in-the-box*). Your servant, ma'am . . .

MISS MATTY. And Miss Betty Barker . . . Lady Glenmire . . .

MISS B. (*rising and giving a half-curtsey*). An honour, your ladyship . . . (*Having been the first to get it out . . . she glances in triumph at Mrs. F.*)

MISS MATTY. And my young friend, Miss Mary Smith . . . though we all call her just "Mary" . . . Lady Glenmire . . .

LADY G. How are you, my dear . . . How nice and young and bonny you look . . .

MISS MATTY (*approaching Mr. HOGGINS*). And this is . . . this is Mr. . . . (*She looks wildly for help.*)

MR. H. Hoggins, madam . . . Hoggins with an aitch and two gees . . . at your service, ma'am . . .

LADY G. (*crossing to HOGGINS*). How do you do, Mr. Hoggins? I used to know some Hoggins back in Edinburgh a while ago . . .

MR. H. Did you, now?