

Mrs. J. (*occupying Miss M.'s previous chair. She has nodded to the ladies and seated herself comfortably, strong disapproval in her voice.*) Is Mr. Hoggins here for tea?

Miss MATTY. He is, Mrs. Jamieson . . .

Mrs. J. (*turning her chair away*). How strange.

LADY G. (*sitting D. L., taking chair offered by Mr. H.*). Now is this not a cosy circle . . .

(*Everybody is now seated and again there is an uncomfortable pause.*)

Miss B. (*making a superhuman effort*). I expect you will find

Cranford very quiet, ma'am, after the society of London . . .

LADY G. London? Why, I was only in London but twice in my life . . . and that was many a year ago . . .

Mrs. J. The late Earl was fond of a retired life . . .

LADY G. Why, as to that . . . we could never afford London . . . It was as much as we could do to visit Edinburgh now and again . . .

(*There is a pause of amazement while this sinks in . . . and Mrs. J. gets several nasty looks.*)

Ye'll have been in Edinburgh, maybe?

Mrs. F. Indeed . . . what a coincidence . . . I once had an uncle on my mother's side who visited Edinburgh . . . He declared it was a very pleasant city . . .

(*Another pause . . . for this topic is obviously dead.*)

LADY G. But I think Cranford very pleasant . . . and cheaper too, they tell me . . . Do you know that just before I left Scotland the price of sugar had risen beyond all belief?

(*They all feel happier now.*)

Miss MATTY. Now is that so?

LADY G. It was all but impossible to put up my preserves in the autumn . . .

Miss MATTY. I have a recipe for preserves that calls for remarkably little sugar, ma'am . . . I always use it myself . . .

LADY G. Then before I leave Cranford I shall beg you to give it me, ma'am . . . Is it for plums . . . ?

Miss B. It is indeed . . .

LADY G. Now I wonder if anybody here has a recipe for kedgerree . . . ?

Miss MATTY. How strange, ma'am, that you should mention kedgerree, for I have the most excellent recipe that was sent by a cousin all the way from India . . .

Mrs. J. I do not care for kedgerree.

LADY G. Then you have not had it properly made. I shall make you some this very week . . . Can one obtain good salted codfish here in Cranford . . . ?

Miss B. Oh, the very best, ma'am . . . I will speak to the fishmonger myself and have him lay aside a good piece for you . . .

LADY G. That is most kind . . . I shall remember . . .

Miss MATTY. Of course, the cod must lie in water overnight . . .

(*The doorbell rings. MARTHA enters from kitchen and we see her go across to the hall.*)

Mrs. F. I always say that the delicacy of the kedgerree lies in the quality of the rice . . .

Miss B. Ah . . . but it all depends on the cod.

(*We hear the door open and a few rather sharp words from Miss POLE off.*)

Miss POLE (*off*). Announce me, girl . . . don't just stand there . . .

(*With which the curtains are drawn back and MARTHA steps into the room . . . still showing no sign of Miss POLE.*)

MARTHA (*startled*). Miss Pole . . . (*She flees to the kitchen.*)

(*At this . . . like a galleon in full sail, Miss POLE sweeps grandly into the room. She describes a graceful curve and comes to a halt before the circle of ladies where she sinks in an elaborate curtsy. She is wearing the same dress, but it is bedecked with many small bows of ribbon and bits of lace . . . No less than seven brooches adorn her person . . . and . . . on her head is a sea-green satin turban.*)

Mr. H. Bless my soul . . . if it isn't Miss Pole . . . and she's changed her top-knot!

(*Miss POLE darts a lethal glance at him.*)

Miss MATTY. Sea-green . . . too . . . !

Miss POLE (*moving to C., playing the society lady*). La, ma'am! I am afraid I am a little late . . . but such a quantity of things