

errand . . . most urgent . . . the back door . . .

MARY. I wonder where Martha can be . . .

MISS MATTY. Martha . . . oh goodness me . . . where can she be?

(Enter MARTHA carrying a bucket and mop . . . she proceeds to door.)

Martha . . . ! Martha . . . ! Wait for the cough . . .

(MARTHA halts uncertainly and shoulders her broom.)

MISS POLE (moving R. and taking command). Ladies! I am sure we would not for the world leave Miss Matty alone at a time like this . . .

(They rally round her like soldiers round a leader . . . there is a chorus of "Not-for-the-world".)

MISS MATTY. I thank you, ladies.

MISS POLE. Nor would we embarrass Miss Matty by the lack of . . . er . . . elegance in our morning costumes . . .

MISS B. Beautifully expressed . . .

MISS POLE. I therefore suggest that we should wait for a short while in the dining-room where Miss Matty will have the benefit of our moral support . . . and will be at the same time saved from embarrassment . . .

MRS. F. Splendid idea . . .

(With which they abandon formality and scuttle for the

door in almost indecent haste. Miss P., Miss B., and

MRS. F. exeunt D.R.)

MISS MATTY (moving L.) Oh dear . . . they've gone . . . they've left me . . .

MARY. There, Miss Matty . . . it is nothing very serious . . .

(She leads her to a chair . . . and hands her the book.)

MISS MATTY. Thank you, my dear. I must try to remember that I am the Rector's daughter . . . that might help . . . (She is almost composed when she sees MARTHA and the bucket.) My goodness . . . look . . . she's got a bucket . . . !

MARY. Leave that to me.

(She crosses behind Miss M. to MARTHA, who is, or appears to be, paralysed, straightens her cap . . . takes the bucket, and the mop from her, and retreats to the kitchen door, where she pauses . . . dives back into the room and collects the papers . . . then—)

Now . . . !

(Exit MARY with bucket and mop. So Miss MATTY is left alone at this great moment . . . however, she coughs with considerable, though tremulous, dignity. Then, like an automaton, MARTHA opens the door and we hear the voice of the COACHEMAN . . . Off . . .)

MARTHA (repeating like a parrot). The Honourable Mrs. Jamieson . . .

(And in sweeps MRS. JAMIESON to C. below sofa. She is an elderly woman . . . much inflated by fat and by her own sense of importance . . . She is opulently dressed.)

MISS MATTY (laying down her book and rising). Why . . . Mrs. Jamieson . . . How kind of you to call . . . (She peers towards the hall.) Are you . . . are you alone?

MRS. J. Good morning, Miss Jenkyns . . . Certainly I am alone . . .

MISS MATTY (heaving a sigh of relief). That will be all, Martha.

(MARTHA closes the door and marches across the room like a robot and goes out to kitchen.)

MISS MATTY. Pray take a seat, Mrs. Jamieson. (Mrs. J. sits on sofa.) A lovely day . . . How lucky we are to enjoy such weather so late in the season . . .

MRS. J. (seating herself). I called upon you, Miss Jenkyns, with reference to a visitor I have in my home . . .

MISS MATTY. Is that so . . . ?

MRS. J. It is so. The visitor happens to be my sister-in-law . . . the widow of my late husband's brother . . . also defunct. You may perhaps be acquainted with the fact that my late husband's brother was the late Earl of Glenmire . . . ? (Miss MATTY inclines her head.) It follows then that my sister-in-law is the Dowager Countess of Glenmire . . .

MISS MATTY. Excessively interesting . . .

MRS. J. Lady Glenmire will be making a stay of some little time in Cranford . . .

MISS MATTY. I'm sure we shall all make her welcome, m'am . . .

MRS. J. Ah . . . ! That is what I wish to speak to you about. You understand, of course, that my sister-in-law is accustomed to mix with the highest society?