

MISS MATTY. I am sure of that, m'am . . .

Mrs. J.. And, of course, while I have been a resident of Cranford, I have seen no harm in mixing to some extent with the small society of the place . . . in fact, I think I may claim to have behaved on all occasions in a truly democratic spirit . . . (*She is beginning to get slightly uncomfortable.*)

MISS MATTY (*uncompromising*). Indeed, m'am . . .

Mrs. J. In short . . . you must understand I could not expect Lady Glenmire to make the same condescension . . .

MISS MATTY (*rising and moving U. C.*). That will be very simple, Madam . . . if Lady Glenmire wishes to live a life of seclusion at Cranford I think I may promise you that nobody will break in upon her privacy . . .

Mrs. J. Of course I do not mean to say that . . .

MISS MATTY. Of course not. As I was saying, what lovely weather we are having for the season . . . though a trifle cold for your coachman to wait so long . . .

(*MISS MATTY crosses to window.*)

Mrs. J. (*risks and moves to fireplace*). Yes . . . yes . . . I must be going . . . my coachman is subject to the rheumatics. You understand, of course . . . about your little tea-party tomorrow . . . that owing to . . . I shall be forced to decline.

(*Mrs. J. crosses towards the front door.*)

MISS MATTY (*leading the way to the front door*). And be sure and tell the poor man to place red flannel on the afflicted spot . . . it is a sure preventive, I do assure you, m'am . . .

(*MISS MATTY "bobs".*)

Mrs. J. Thank you. Good day to you, Miss Jenkyns . . .

(*Exit Mrs. JAMIESON.*)

MISS MATTY (*off*). Good day to you . . . Mrs. Jamieson . . .

(*She closes the door and returns to the parlour. At once the ladies, Miss POLE, Miss BARBER and Mrs. FORRESTER come in a flood from D.R.*)

MISS POLE. Well . . . ! I never heard the like of it!

(*There is a chorus of cries of shocked horror and outrage.*)

MISS MATTY. And now we shall never know if she wears a turban!

CURTAIN.

ACT ONE

SCENE II

SET. *The same.*

TIME. *Late afternoon of the following day.*

AT RISE. *We see that preparations are well in hand for the tea party. A satin-wood card table has been set up for four players . . . Small vases of flowers give a slightly festive air and candle-sticks one on mantelpiece and one on small table D. L., each with two out of five candles lit. A small fire burns in the grate. At this moment MARY is checking over the arrangements and placing packs of cards and scoring pads on the card table. Enter MARTHA from the dining-room carrying two dining chairs to complete the set at the table . . . two being already in place.*

MARY. Thank you, Martha . . . that's right . . . just there.

(*She places the chairs formally round the table.*)

And remember, when Miss Matty rings the bell . . . bring in first the tea-tray . . . and place it on that table there. (*She indicates a side-table.*) Then I will start to pour the tea, and you will bring in the bread and butter and sponge fingers . . .

MARTHA. And what about the gentlemen? You aren't a going to give them tea . . . ?

MARY. There will be no gentlemen present, Martha.

MARTHA. That's a shame . . . myself, I like the lads best.

MARY. While we are on this subject, Martha, I think Miss Matty would like me to speak to you on the subject of followers . . .

MARTHA (*intensely interested*). Ah, now!

MARY. Because you must understand, Martha, that while you work in this house they must be absolutely forbidden . . . It need not ever be discussed again provided you understand completely . . . No followers . . .

MARTHA. Followers? But please, Miss . . . I never had more nor one at a time.

MARY. Martha!