

Hodgson
Cecily
Bruce
Ethel

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BRUCE. I was afraid you might be disappointed at not going abroad at once.

CECILY. No, I think it's a lovely idea going away when the summer's over.

BRUCE. Yes, that lane would be pretty impassable in the winter, I should think. Oh, my dear, the places I'll show you!

(He notices someone approaching the house.)

Oh, there's that old man the agent told us about - he's working today.

CECILY. Oh, yes, Hodgson. He's evidently got over his "rheumatics." Who's that girl with him, I wonder?

BRUCE. Do gardeners usually bring their girlfriends with them?

CECILY. I'm sure I don't know.

(She calls out of the window.)

Good morning, Hodgson!

HODGSON. *(Offstage.)* Good morning, mum!

(CECILY moves away from the window, speaking urgently.)

CECILY. He's coming in. Do you know anything about gardening?

BRUCE. Not much, do you?

CECILY. Not a thing, we shall have to pretend to be experts.

(HODGSON appears in the window. He is an elderly man, with a direct manner.)

HODGSON. Good morning, mum. Good morning, sir. Sorry to have been away when you've been here before, but my rheumatics have been that bad and old Doctor Gribble said I wasn't to do any work for a few days.

CECILY. Yes, the agent told us.

HODGSON. So I'll make up for lost time now, if you're agreeable. I've always looked after this garden.



Mr. Dunning, what was here before, kept me on even when the house was empty.

BRUCE. Yes, we've had very good accounts of you.

HODGSON. Then, I can stay on?

CECILY. Yes, please, Hodgson.

HODGSON. I was wondering if you'd be wanting someone to look after the house, like.

CECILY. Well, as a matter of fact, we haven't fixed anyone yet.

HODGSON. Because there's my niece - Ethel. She hasn't been in service before, but she's a good girl. I brought her along with me in case you would like to see her.

CECILY. Thank you very much, Hodgson, ask her to come in.

HODGSON. (*Calling.*) Ethel! Come 'ere!

(*He turns back to CECILY.*)

She's not very smart, mum, but she's had good schooling, piano lessons and all - and she's willing.

BRUCE. Well, you'd be able to - er - coach her.

CECILY. Train her, dear - yes, quite possibly.

(*ETHEL enters, she is not particularly bright and is very untidy, but she looks clean and grins a great deal.*)

Good morning, Ethel.

ETHEL. Good morning, miss - er - mum.

(*There is a pause.*)

CECILY. Your uncle tells me you might - er - that you want to go into service.

ETHEL. That's right. You see Mum doesn't want me at 'ome any more cos my sister Nellie's left school now and there's no need for the two of us.

CECILY. Well, would you like to come and work here?

ETHEL. Yes, please, mum, if you don't mind. I've always done lots of housework at 'ome like, so I'm used to it -

CECILY. Can you cook?

ETHEL. I can make nice milk puddin's and stews and dumplin's and things, but nothing fancy.

CECILY. Yes, well, I think we might get on very well. Now what wages would you - er -?

HODGSON. Well, we'll leave that to you, miss.

CECILY. When can you start?

(ETHEL promptly takes off her coat.)

ETHEL. Now! Only I 'aven't got an apron on.

HODGSON. 'Ere, you must tell the lady what yer mother said.

CECILY. What was that?

ETHEL. Well, if you please, mum, Mother said I wasn't to sleep in, because, you see, she's all -

HODGSON. On account of leaving her mum alone. But she could stay as late as you like, mum.

CECILY. Very well, then, that'll be all right. Perhaps you could start straightening up the kitchen.

ETHEL. Oh, yes, mum, I could do that.

(She makes a dive towards the kitchen.)

CECILY. Oh, these steps, we've finished with them.

(ETHEL dives back to steps and exits with them into the kitchen.)

BRUCE. Well, she's got energy, I'll say that for her.

HODGSON. Oh, she's not a bad girl. They've never 'ad a maid sleep in, not all the time I've been working 'ere - since Mr. Dunning converted the place before the war.

CECILY. Converted it from what?

HODGSON. Well, it used to be an inn about fifty years ago.

BRUCE. I thought so.

HODGSON. This 'ere grass track used to be a road, but when they built the new road it fell out of use, became overgrown like. I don't know, a little bit of grass wouldn't keep me away from no pub.