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fancy to go to Madrid, I suppose I may go. And if I can't go alone, I suppose I may take Mercy with me. At any rate, that's what I'm going to do. I take Mercy's part in this, and agree that it's horrid you should be packed off out of the country and away from her and all your friends in this way, and that it's only right and proper that you should have your sister out just to show people that you're not an Ishmaelite among your own kith and kin. And as she must have someone to look after her, I'm going too. I can't do less than that for my dearest friend."

"I'm sure Mercy is happy to have such a friend, Mrs. Curwen, but——"

I hesitated, and before I resumed, the door opened and Lascelles came in. This was genuinely unexpected by us all, and apparently none too agreeable to my brother, who stopped with a frown on his long, narrow face. But Mrs. Curwen was equal to the occasion.

"Here is another surprise. Do come in, Mr. Carbonnell, and hear all our plans."

"It's too bad of you, Mercy, to monopolise Mrs. Curwen in this way," said my brother, solemnly, smothering his mortification.

"It's not Mercy who arranged this, I assure you; I did. I'm dreadfully unconventional, and I just wanted to say good-bye to your brother quietly and cheer him up with the news that I mean to take Mercy out to see him in Madrid soon; as soon, say, as he has had time to really miss her and feel lonesome."

"That is news, indeed," said Lascelles, looking mightily uncomfortable at hearing it. "And what does Ferdinand say to that?"

"He's rather absurd over it, I think. He says