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cup of tea and a chat on the day before that of my departure, Mrs. Curwen was there chatting unconcernedly with Mercy, whose face was guiltily tell-tale in expression.

"What an unexpected pleasure, Mr. Ferdinand," exclaimed the widow, laughing.

"By whom?" said I, as we shook hands.

"What a thing it is to be a diplomatist, and to be able to say so much in just two words. But I can be frank. I mean unexpected to you, of course. Mercy told me you were actually going away on your wanderings without saying good-bye to me—and I wasn't going to stand that. When some stupid mountain or other wouldn't go to Mahomet, Mahomet went to the mountain—like the very sensible person he was. And it was all the same in the end."

"That 'stupid mountain' had no sister to give it away, Mrs. Curwen."

"Mercy's just the dearest friend I have in the world. And now sit down and don't be disagreeable, and we'll have a jolly cosy little chat together, and you shall hear the news and advise us. What's the good of being an ambassador if you can't advise us?"

"Here's your tea, Nand;" and Mercy handed it me with a glance, asking for forgiveness. I accepted the tea and the situation, as I do most good things in this world, complacently.

"What advice do you want?"

"I want to know whether you think it would be quite a safe thing for Mercy to go to Madrid for a time, say—a month or two hence?"

Mercy looked down at the tea cups and laughed, I appeared to consider,