

"I have not been in the rooms, sir. I don't generally go in till Monday morning."

"I must find it," he resumed, looking about. "I had put some prime cigars in it, ready for to-day; and the shops that keep anything worth smoking shut themselves up on a Sunday, and be hanged to them! You need not wait, Mrs. May. I can let myself out."

"Shall I look in the rooms up stairs, sir?"

"No, it's not there. It is here if it's anywhere."

Mrs. May retreated aloft; and the gentleman, after an unsuccessful search, marched up stairs himself, whistling some bars from the last night's opera. But his tune came to an abrupt close; for, on opening the door of his father's room, he found himself, to his extreme astonishment, face to face with a lady.

She had risen at his entrance. A handsome girl with confident manners, whose fair hair was braided round her head in elaborate twists and turnings. Young men are not very competent judges of attire: the eyes of this one only took in the general effect of the lady's dress, and that was splendid. It had once been an evening dress of Miss Foxaby's mistress. He hastily snatched off his hat and dropped his eye-glass.

Who in the world was she? As to her having any connection with Mrs. May, her dirty shawl and her black petticoat, such an incongruity never would have occurred to him. Though not usually wanting in fluency of speech, it rather failed him now, for he was at a loss how to address her.

"I beg your pardon," he was beginning, but she spoke at the same moment.

"Pardon, monsieur."

Oh, she was French, then! Had she crossed the Channel in a balloon, and been dropped into the offices of Lyvett, Castlerosse and Lyvett by mistake? How else had she come? and what did she want there? He began to recall his French, not a word of which had his tongue ever uttered since leaving school.

"Madame, voulez-vous excuser moi? Je suis—je trouve," and there he came to a stand-still—what the dickens was "cigar-case" in French? Fortunately she helped him out,