

6 SARITA, THE CARLIST

"No—and I'm afraid I'm not very interested in it, either. Next week I shall be in Madrid."

"Ah, but this is about Madrid, too," she cried, looking mysterious.

"What do you mean, Mercy?" asked Lascelles, who was of a very curious turn, and not quick. "What news is it?"

"It's about Mrs. Curwen, Lascelles. She is going to stay in Madrid;" and Mercy pointed the little shaft with a barbed glance that made him colour with vexation.

"Upon my word, Mercy, you ought to know better. You are abominably rude, and your manners are unpardonable," he cried, angrily. "I declare I won't allow it."

"Allow it? Why, she didn't tell me she had to ask your permission. But, of course, I'll tell her she mustn't go," returned Mercy, with such a fine assumption of innocent misunderstanding that I could not restrain my laughter.

"It will be a good thing when you are gone, Ferdinand," he turned on me, wrathfully. "You only encourage Mercy in these acts of rudeness."

"Don't be a prig, Cello," said I, good humouredly. "You are a good chap at bottom, and when you don't stick those airs on."

"I shall not stay here to be insulted," he exclaimed, and he retreated, leaving us in possession of the field.

"That was too bad, Mercy. You hit him below the belt," I said, when he had gone.

"But he's just insufferable in those moods, and he gets worse and worse every week. And it's horrid of him to drive you away like this. Positively horrid."