

"That's ma. She——"

"Sophiar, I say ! Who are you talking to ? Who *is* there ?" repeated the voice.

"Ma," answered the child, putting her head out at the door to speak, "it's one of the gentlemen, not yet gone."

Up raced Mrs. May, flurried and dubious. Mr. Jones recognized her as the lady he had seen on her hands and knees, cleaning the front door-step the first morning he came, when he had misunderstood the clerk's time, and had arrived an hour too early. She knew him as the young clerk recently entered, whose friends were intimate with the Lyvetts.

"Bless me, sir ! I should not have took upon myself to send Sophiar in here, but we thought everybody was gone, and was alarmed at the noise. Sophiar, miss"—changing her tone to a very angry one—"when you saw it was all right, why didn't you come away again directly ?"

"Don't put yourself out, Mrs. May ; she has done no harm. What time do you get this office open in the morning ?" he added, as if struck with some sudden thought.

"About half-past seven, sir, these dark mornings. I begin with this floor first. But I get all my sweeping over and the fires alight before I sit down to my breakfast."

"Then I'm blest if I won't knock off for to-night, if I can get in at that hour," ejaculated Mr. Jones. "I shall have time to finish this beastly thing before old Rowley comes. But he had best mind, again, how he gives me my day's writing to do over twice, for I won't stand it. Good-night to you, Dame May. Put out the gas."

"Sophy," said Mrs. May, when they returned to the kitchen, "did he hear the sound of the pianer ?"

Sophy nodded in the affirmative.

"What did he say ?"

"He asked if the piano was here ; and I told him it was, and it was ours."

"Then you were a little ape for your pains. You should have told him that it was a sound from the next house ; and stood to it that it was if he'd disputed it. Your father don't want the Mr. Lyvetts and Mr. Castlerosse to know of the pianer ; they'd make a fuss, perhaps. Never scruple to tell a fib, child, in a necessary cause."