

**A FIRST APPEARANCE.
IN THREE VOLUMES.
VOL. I**

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A first appearance. In three volumes. Vol. I by Mrs. Evans Bell

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1872.

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A FIRST APPEARANCE.

CHAPTER I.

“YOU really must excuse me. The other room is too dark. There’s *Punch*—and there’s the *Pall Mall*.”

“Pray allow me to assist you.”

“I’ll only allow you to mind your own business until my hair is done.”

Mr. Haynes, a puffy little man, with large head, fat cheeks, twinkling little grey eyes, and an up-turned nose that made him irresistible whenever he attempted low comedy, obeyed, so far as to seat himself silently.

Esther then placed the looking-glass on the dusty window sill. Window blinds, window curtains, and window panes were as dingy as the dingiest of Chancery Lane, though this was not Chancery Lane. This was number 190, Cecil Street, Strand. The morning atmosphere, too, was dingy. It always seemed dingy in Cecil Street, where fog and Thames vapour formed the circumambient air. A close, damp, mouldy smell pervaded the whole house. The walls of the room were of dubious tint, well serving as ground for grease and dirt to paint fantastic figures on. Near the door stood a dilapidated sideboard, garnished with two riveted decanters and an imperfect set of old china tea-cups. On either side it was balanced by chairs,—their mahogany backs, dimmed by smudgy finger-marks, their well-

worn horse-hair seats vainly attempting to conceal the dusty flock protruding from each corner. The carpet was an "imitation Turkey," the cotton introduced everywhere visible. The curtains—drab damask—smelt, as they looked, full of dust. An arm-chair and sofa were by the fireplace, but both seemed so shaky and hatefully grimy that Esther invariably sat in the cane-chair near the table. Old cracked lustres and an ormolu clock, permanently out of repair, ornamented the chimney-piece. Everything looked as if just extracted from the underground warehouse of some marine-store dealer, and told of the shabby London lodging-house—dark, dirty, greasy. But what matter? The radiance of the gayest Parisian salon, the freshness of the freshest May morn, could scarcely have added brilliancy to the girl

before the looking-glass. Almost unconscious of her visitor's presence, she stood, running a tortoise-shell comb down the whole length of her waving dark hair, raising it now and then to watch its more golden shades as each lock fell separately and lightly, and finally arranging it as fantastically as a Sibyl's. For a moment, too, she glanced with evident satisfaction at the rich colouring of her complexion and the delicate form of her rosy little hand. She was scarcely nineteen, slim and supple as an antelope, with grace as sudden and natural, eyes as soft and gleaming. Their lashes were so long and jetty, and when lowered threw such deepening shadow that the flash of their uprising came across you like lightning, and a peculiarly sad, yet sparkling smile added almost Oriental mysteriousness