

*THE DUCHESS OF PENDLETON* 17

My mother looked round dazedly, for I had retired into the adjoining room. She came unsteadily to me. I could understand little of what I had heard, and my brain was in a whirl.

"Come, dearie," my mother said. "She wants you."

"What is the matter?" I asked. "Is she angry?"

"Be a good boy," my mother whispered in my ear as she arranged my hair with deft fingers. "And you must love her very much."

My jaw dropped. Fancy loving the Duchess!

We went into the room together. To my astonishment, the great lady was kneeling on the floor, picking up the scattered letters. My mother ran to her with a cry.

"There, there," said the Duchess, getting up with more agility than I could have imagined possible. "Take 'em and put 'em away. Best burn them, I should say."

My mother uttered a little inarticulate cry of protest, and the Duchess regarded her more sympathetically.

"We're silly creatures, we women," she said softly. "And this is Oswald's son? God bless me!" She drew me towards her, and putting a hand on either side of my