

sitting down began to read the letter which she still held in her hand.

"I don't believe it!" she cried, as she turned the page. "Nothing will induce me to believe it." But her face had aged suddenly.

"No one knew," sobbed my mother; "not even father."

"You went up to London to take a situation," said the Duchess scornfully. "There was no situation."

"N—no, your Grace."

"You went to——" she gulped something down—"to my son, Oswald?"

"Yes."

"How long did you live with him?"

My mother sobbed with renewed violence.

"Only a few months."

"And then——?"

"He died."

Both women were silent, and I imagine a slight feeling of pity stirred in the Duchess's heart.

"How could he?" she murmured. "How could you?" she added, with much greater sternness.

"I loved him," said my mother, almost defiantly.

The Duchess rose hastily. "The boy!" she said quickly. "Where is the boy?"