

"Well, now, Maudie dear," continued Mrs. Lovell, "there's another thing I should like to ask. I should like to know the general nature of each letter, so as to see if there was anything in either of them which might show the recipient that it was a mistake. A great deal depends on that, you know. Tell me now — I don't want to get your secrets, you know, I only want to help you. Let us begin with the one you wrote first, what did you say to the Count?"

"Well, Georgie, it was a very cool and civil rejection, that was all. At first I thought of writing in the third person, but I concluded that it was better to do so in the first; so I told him that I regretted that he had written to me in that way, and hinted that there had been nothing in our mutual relations to warrant his sending such a proposal to me; and I very civilly hoped that he would not feel disappointed."

"And there was nothing more?"

"No."

"Nothing which might show that it was not for Mr. Carrol; no allusions to his being a foreigner, for example?"

"Certainly not. It was so very general in its terms that it would have done to insert in a Complete Letter-Writer. But then, Georgie darling, that is the very thing that should have excited Mr. Carrol's suspicions, and made him sure that such a letter could not have been intended for him."

"Well, Maudie, men are such odd, unreasonable creatures, you know, that there's no knowing how they will act, particularly in love affairs. I'm afraid he must have accepted the letter as your own actual answer to his, or else how could he have written in such a very shocking way? But now tell me about the other."

"Well, I wrote to Mr. Carrol the very kindest, kindest letter that I could compose. I'm sure I said everything that he could expect, and I even expressed a wish to see him soon."

"Did you make any very particular allusions to any particular incidents?"

"O no; it was only a general expression of — well, you know what, and all that sort of thing."

"How did you begin it? Not with 'Dear Sir'?"

"No. I said, 'My dear Mr. Carrol.'"

"And how did you begin the Count's?"

"Simply with 'Dear Sir.'"

"Not 'Dear Monsieur le Comte,' or 'Dear Count'?"

"Certainly not. The first was French, which would be out of place in an English letter, and the other seemed a little familiar, so I took refuge in the simple formula of 'Dear Sir.'"

"Well, the Count got the letter which began, 'My dear Mr. Carrol.'"

"He must have, if I did make the mistake."

"You are sure that you began it in that way?"

"O yes."

"Well, if you did, I don't see what the Count could make out of it. He must have seen that it was not for himself. He's acquainted with Mr. Carrol, too, and must have understood that it was for him. But then again he must have believed that it was for himself. Even French assurance could not make him appropriate a letter which he could see so plainly was addressed to another man."

"There is only one thing that I can think of," said Maud, dolefully, "and I've thought of it frequently; for all this was on my mind before you came in."

"What is that?"

"Well, it is this. I have thought that it is just possible for my writing to be a little illegible; my hand is very angular, you know, and the o's are open, and I don't cross my t's, and all that sort of thing. I find now that in writing the name of Carrol rapidly, it does bear a remote resemblance to the word 'Count.' I dare say you would show the same resemblance if