

It would hurt her a deal more if she married me and then found that I didn't come up to—the family ideas!... Mind, I've nothing to say against them. They've been good to me; and I like them. They're puritans; but they're honest puritans. They're not my sort, and I'm not their sort. That's what it comes to—It must be broken off, if I have to do it on my own; but I'd almost as soon shoot myself as insult her by crying off.... I thought you'd help me."

"Very well," I said. The ass has fallen into the pit again, and I'll have to dig him out.... It's sickening work, digging asses out of pits, Charlie. I wish you'd give a thought to the man who comes after the ass! You'd be such a good chap, if you were a trifle steadier."

I put my hand on the boy's shoulder. When a lad is handsome and affectionate, and you're always pulling him out of pits, you get fond of him; especially if you've no child of your own.

"I'm an infernal rotter," he said, looking away from me. You've been a second father to me; and I've been worry enough for a son.... I'll pull up a bit.... I've been all right since I knew Mary."

"Yes. Have you thought of going and telling her frankly what you've told me? Perhaps if she knew that a little more 'demonstration' would help you, she'd—demonstrate!"

"Poor girl, yes! If I only told her that, she'd worry her good little soul out trying to be nice and comforting; but if she knew the—little escapades—! If she didn't, it would be marrying her under false pretenses; and I won't."

"If there were no pretenses there would be fewer marriages.... Still, I don't know that it isn't wiser to have it out. Something would be bound to come to her ears some day.... You're sure she wouldn't forgive you?"

"Sure as fate!"

"Very well. Her father shall hear of your past—enough of it."

Charlie laughed uncomfortably.

"A selection will do! I've been a fool; an ungrateful fool.... Look here, Mr. Newland. I'm going to pay you back this time. I'll give up gambling. Word of honor." He held out his hand.

"Word of honor, Charlie," I said.

We shook hands on it.

"How are you going to do it?" he asked.

"Anonymous letter," I said briefly.

"You won't like doing that."

"No."

"Besides, he isn't the sort to go by anonymous letters. He'd put it on the fire."

"Oh, no! I shall make perfectly specific statements, and give him the opportunity of verifying them. We don't want to drag in a lot of outsiders and stir up mud. I shall name myself as the best person to question about the facts."

Charlie put his hand on my arm.

"Digging out the ass is an unpleasant business," he owned, "and—I've had a second father in—in the man who comes after the ass.... I know you'll hate the anonymous business, and I shouldn't let you do it for me; but it isn't only the ass. You're digging out a—a good girl."

He choked down something; and went.

The Anonymous Letter

I typed the anonymous letter myself, after the clerks had gone. I am no typist, and my mistakes gave the document a satisfactory appearance of illiterateness. I instanced a sufficient number of Charlie's escapades, and mentioned "Mr. Newland, the senior partner of Newland, Evans, & Green, Solicitors," as "a gentleman of standing," who could not deny the facts, if questioned. I could have described him as a gentleman of unquestionable uprightness, if he hadn't written the letter!... Well, Charlie is my old friend's son, and I've none of my own; and the girl was bound to find out some day, and better before marriage than after. I excused myself so; but I was ashamed of the business.

Charlie brought the anonymous letter to me the day after. It had come to him inclosed with a note from Lady Mary's father.

My Dear Tarne:

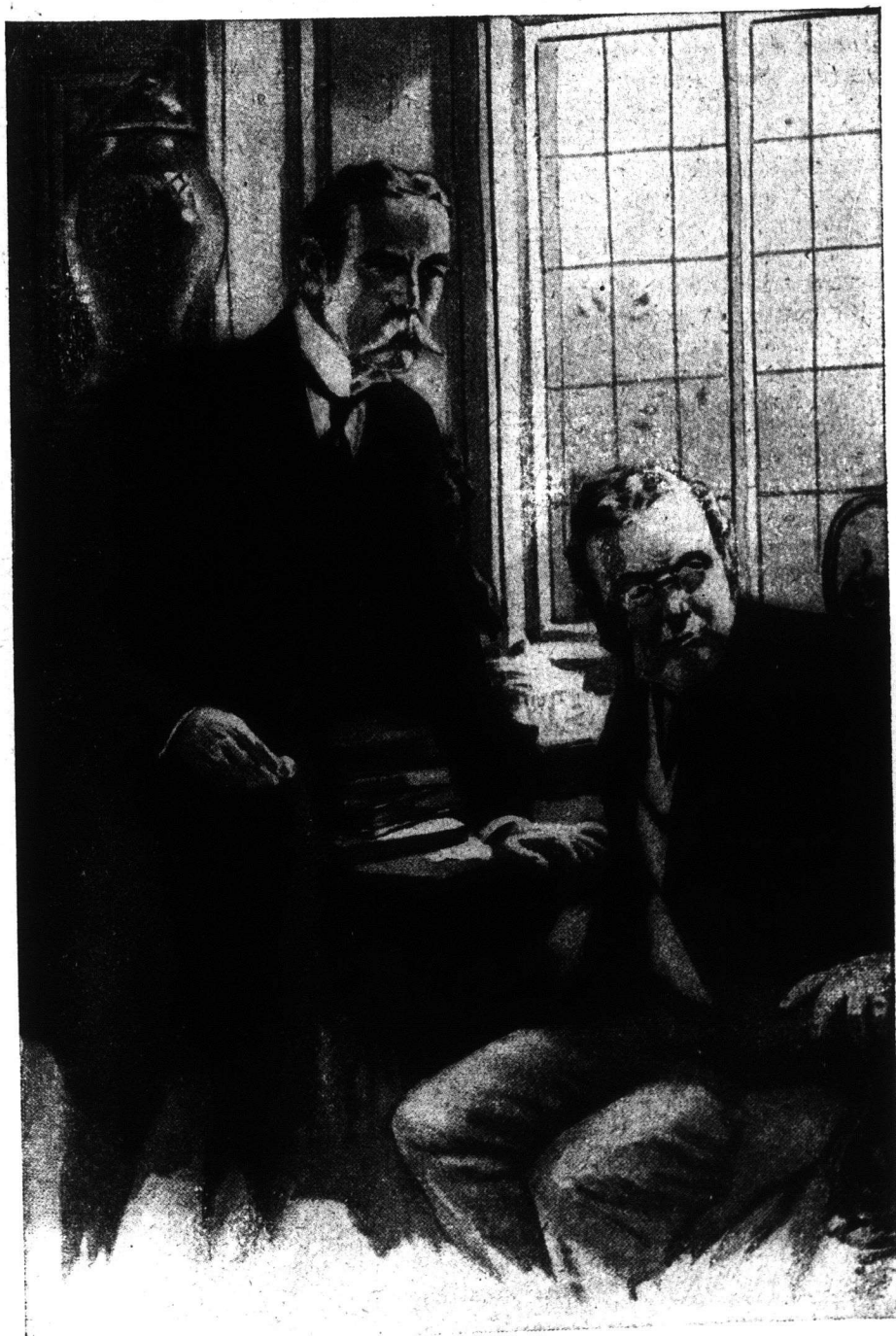
"I have received the enclosed.

"I trust that the accusations are unfounded, or so grossly exaggerated that I can advise my daughter that they may be over-looked. In that case you will be glad to have the opportunity of denying them. In any case you will not blame me for thinking inquiry necessary.

"I do not wish to communicate with Mr. Newland, or with anybody, behind your back. He was your guardian, I believe, and is now your solicitor; and I know of him simply as being a gentleman in whom a gentleman may trust. I think the best thing would be for you to see him and induce him to come with you to discuss the matter with us this afternoon.

"I say 'us.' Mary is a grown woman, and one of character. I

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"The boy's all right" I said. "And—God bless her!—and the girl! He'll never pull her down. The boy's all right!"