

should meet, it will not be to make love. But you have not yet shown the connection between Miss Artslade and your midnight rambles."

"Well, you see, I can't bear it any longer—I must either tell Cressy my mind or do something desperate—so I determined for good or ill to make a clean breast of the thing to-morrow. But, though I've been puzzling my brain all day, and hunting all the poetry books in the library, I couldn't fix on anything that would say exactly what I want to say. I suppose I must have made a fool of myself, for the girls were quizzing me the whole day because they caught me on my knees in the library rowing love to the arm chair, and dad went so far as to say I had taken too much pot. At an early hour Snoozer and myself left them there, and rambled up the mountain. I suppose I made a fool of myself there again, for, after rehearsing the whole scene with Cressy fifty times at least, and always making more blunders than before, I fell fast asleep in sheer disgust, dreaming all sorts of queer dreams about Snoozer and Cressy and poetry, till I woke half an hour ago half-frozen with the cold. I had no notion it was so late, and I was strolling home leisurely through the wood, when poor Snoozer came upon one of your friends in the ditch yonder, and—you know the rest."

"Then it wasn't you gave that unearthly squeal we heard first of all?"

"I did not open my lips."

"I suppose it was some of our fellows loitering about there," said Gerald, reflectively. "Though I did not see a single one of them near this corner of the field at the time. Could anybody else have been there? Pooh, it's not likely. At all events 'tis too late to think of it now."

The reflection was not pleasant, but, dismissing it, he turned again to young Sackwell and impressed on him the necessity of keeping their meeting a strict secret. But there was little fear of impertinent curiosity, or disclosures of other people's business on Charlie Sackwell's part: he was too much occupied with his own weighty thoughts to think of Gerald's strange apparition for a moment, as requiring explanation, or to form theories of why he found him drilling a small army in Monard by moonlight. The head, front and feet of his troubles was "Cressy"—"Cressy"—"Cressy," and when the young man parted, with a cordial shake-hands, he might still be heard enchanting Snoozer and the spirits of the night with rhapsodic rehearsals of the morrow's ordeal.

CHAPTER XXIII.

CRESSY'S PAIR OF LOVERS.

"Dolph, you are a stupid boy."

It was the Marchioness of Babblington who thus summarily estimated the calibre of her son. Mother and son were together in the Marchioness' dressing-room—mother leisurely replenishing the peachy bloom of her cheeks out of a perfect artist's repository of pots and powders—son looking out the window in a sort of good-humoured inanition.

"Dolph, you are a stupid boy."

"I suppose I am," cheerfully assented 'Dolph, as if he found supreme delight in disavowing human capacity. "But you do the cleverness for me. You're so clever, mother!"

"'Clever' is not a nice word, my dear," smiled the Marchioness, viewing in the glass with mild pride, one cheek whose adornment was complete, and then turning in true workmanlike way to the other. "Only men ought to be 'clever.'"

"Ought to be—yes," said the Marquis, contemplatively, "but—"

"Pray don't get metaphysical, my dear, or you will be ridiculous, and forget what I want to impress on you—that my dear little friend Cressy is as love-sick as somebody I know, and only wants the invitation—"

"Mother, do you think so? I never thought any one would fall in love with me."

An unlovely sneer curled the Marchioness' lip, and an unlovely fire darted from her eyes, making revelation.

"Boy," she cried, almost fiercely, "remember you are the Marquis of Babblington, and she—" the Marchioness shrugged her pretty shoulders expressively. "But really, Adolphus, your silliness provokes one into rudeness, which I hate above all things. My sweet little friend only wants good birth to make her perfect, and even that she can have by allying herself with rank. If she could call herself Marchioness of Babblington, for instance, she would quite outshine Lady Clare in our set, she is so much more *natural*, you know."

"She is a perfect angel!" cried the Marquis, with unusual animation.

"Why don't you tell herself so?" innocently observed his amiable mother, effacing an unruly wrinkle with a last dexterous touch of violet powder. "Why don't you tell herself so, my dear?"

"I can't," blubbered the Marquis, disconsolately. "I always break down, and make a fool of myself. There was that fine thing about the