

This was the very inopportune moment at which Cressy thought proper to unburden herself of a question which has been puzzling her little head ever since she and her father came to Kilsheelan, away from smoky, foggy London.

"Pa," she asked innocently, "why don't we visit at the Castle? Everyone else goes there—the Sackwells, the Thorntons, the Bingham, everybody. Why don't we?"

She stopped in dismay, seeing the evil scowl her idle query had called up to Mr. Artslade's face. It had rankled a wound deep down in his heart.

"Why do you ask, child?" he said, sourly.

"I—I didn't think 'twas any harm, pa—indeed I did not—only Gerald—"

"Well, well, what about him? He has not been annoying you, the whelp?"

"Oh! pa, is it Gerald. No, but he'd be so glad I went to the Castle like the rest of them—it's such a grand old place, and they have such fun! Why nobody ever comes here only the tithe-procter. Only for Gerald—"

"D—Gerald!" exclaimed Mr. Artslade, savagely. "Cressy, I forbid you to see that boy again. I hate him for a proud puppy."

"Oh, please don't talk of Gerald that way," cried Cressy earnestly, the tears starting to her bright eyes. "He is the only friend I have except yourself, papa. He plucks me flowers, and thrashes all the bad boys, and teaches me those horrid lessons, just as easy as if they were nice. Oh! pa, if you only knew Gerald! Why I should be dead if I hadn't him and stupid Charlie Sackwell, but he's nobody."

Mr. Artslade groaned, and turned to a deep bay-window to hide his agony—for to Cressy's eulogy there was no answer.

Suddenly a loud bugle-note sounded through the valley outside.

"The hounds, the hounds!" cried Cressy, rushing joyously to the window, as the pack with their merry huntsman and scarlet-coated retinue swept past on the road below, and mounted the acclivity on which the Castle of Kilsheelan stood.

Mr. Artslade turned from the sight as if it blinded him, and tore from the room in fury.

What can be the matter with papa, to-day! said Cressy, with a puzzled look. "He's crosser than usual, and—" this with a little shudder—"he's always cross enough. Poor papa! why can't he be like O'Dwyer Garv and all the rest of them—ride to hounds, have grand dinners, and

be happy? Isn't he as rich as they are? Ha! 'tis something in those nasty letters—"

She paused as her eye fell on the disordered pile of them that lay on the table. "Might I have one little look I wonder?" Only the unripe curiosity of a woman! The little culprit cast a guilty glance around, and peered into one of the open letters. Hardly had she read it through, when a silvery peal of laughter broke from her; but the giddy child soon changed to a graver mood as she reflected:

"Poor papa, he always does such queer things! Fancy his inviting people to dinner who never visited us at all! If he would only ask me what to do—"

And the little fairy sighed as though she were wisdom personified.

"Why doesn't papa like Gerald?" she went on in the same contemplative mood. "I'm sure everyone dotes on Gerald. But oh! dear, there 's ten o'clock, and I promised to meet him to go for primroses to the wood—the new bank he found out yesterday—every flower as yellow as gold! Mary, Mary, my hat! Do run, please, I'm in an awful hurry."

With her shining yellow hair streaming free to the wind, and her straw hat grasped carelessly in her hand, Cressy hurried through the lawn, up the little *borheen* that led to the wood, and almost into the arms of a tall, handsome boy who leaped out of the wood to meet her.

"Dear Gerald, am I late?" she cried, breathless with running. "Won't the day be lovely? Well have a grand time in the wood!"

"I can't go to-day, Cress," said Gerald.

"What! no primroses to-day! The boys will have every one in your bank before morning. You bold boy, why can't you come to-day?"

"I wish I could, Cress, but I must go to the hunt. You know we close the season to-day, and papa will have a grand rout at the Castle to-night. I'll be going to College to-morrow; so papa wouldn't hear of my leaving the hunt. We're to have a great day at the Mountain Cover."

"I wish I could go with you, Gerald," sighed Cressy, looking tenderly up into his clear, earnest face.

"You little fool! What would you do if you came to a stonewall?"

"Why you'd help me over, of course. Wouldn't you?" was the saucy reply.

And if Mr. Artslade saw the caress with which Gerald answered her, and if he saw the light hearted pair as they looked among the green trees this sunny April morning, the sight might