

CHAPTER II.

THE BRACELET.

Becky opened the hall door, ran down the steps, and went out through the old iron gate which protected the front garden. Under the great chestnut trees the air was cool and sweet; a little group of children had gathered beneath their shade, and one toddler held up a headless wooden horse as an object of admiration. She paused to express pleasure at the sight of this interesting creature, and the child pointed out its charms with a fat finger. A lady, walking up the quiet street, smiled to herself at the girl and the tiny hoy, and thought that they made a pretty picture. She was close to the chestnuts before Becky looked up and recognized her.

"Oh, Mrs. Saunderson, are you coming to call on me?" she said.

"Yes, dear; but we need not go indoors. I've just a few words to say. No, don't make me come in; I've been up to my eyes in business all day long. And you are rather pale; the fresh air will do you good."

"But I am quite well," protested Becky.

"I am sure that you are, so sure that I feel you will look your best on Wednesday at seven. We have asked two or three to dinner; Edmund Warrenie is coming—my husband likes him so much, you know. And I have written to your friend Miss Lancaster."

Becky's cheeks grew warm. "I shall be glad to come," she said. "You are always kind to me."

"I wish I could be kinder; sometimes I feel that mine is merely a life of good intentions, and very few of them are carried out. Why are we all so fearfully busy nowadays?"

"I don't know," Becky answered. "But I think our mothers and grandmothers used up all the leisure, and there is none left for us."

"Exactly my view," Mrs. Saunderson laughed, and turned away. "At seven, dear; don't forget! I told Burgess to call for me. I think I see him coming. Au revoir!"

Becky caught sight of a victoria crawling up the street; the coachman had been waiting at a shop door for parcels, while his mistress walked on. She knew all Mrs. Saunderson's ways very well, and admired the graceful carriage of the receding figure, dressed soberly in the latest style. How nice it must be to have plenty of money! Yes, but there was something in the other scale something which kept the balance even; the kind woman had sorrows which wealth could never make her forget. Becky had caught a glimpse of them once or twice, and felt thankful for her own humble lot.

She stayed out of doors for fifteen minutes; went to the nearest post office, and then returned to her quiet sitting-room. Mrs. Saunderson had always liked that room; Becky had adorned it in a quaint fashion, and the prevailing tint was a soft olive green, which rested the eyes and reminded one of an autumn wood. Ferns were always there, flowers were seldom wanting, but there was nothing costly to be found. The plain book-case held rows of students' books, and Becky's favorite poets took a conspicuous place; it was the home of a thoughtful woman, intent upon her work, and happy in doing it well.

She hoped that Carry would not come in before Wednesday. She did not want any of those suggestions, uttered of course in the kindest way, which were sure to upset a sensitive mind. Well, to-morrow was Sunday, and there would be time for reflection and repose.