

When the tea was brought, the old woman was quite ready for a chat. She had neither son, nor daughter, she said, but there was one who was as dear as a son. He had been her nursling, and he was providing for her in her old age. A gentleman, too, and ought to have been a baronet, that he ought! But he had been terribly worried lately, and had gone away to London, to find something to do. She was hoping every day to get a note, telling good news; times were bad, she supposed, and she didn't understand much about business herself.

"It's hard," she went on, "to see a good man suffer, while the wicked are prospering all round him. If ever my boy marries, he'll make just one of the best husbands in the world. Not a bit selfish! Why, what do you think he has done for his poor old nurse? Parted with a thing he prized greatly, a beautiful thing, too, which was a family treasure, hundreds of years old."

Becky, sitting in the opposite chair, felt the hot color rush over her face, and then die away, leaving her very still and cold. Presently she tried to speak, and the voice that she heard sounded curiously unlike her own.

"May I ask what the treasure was?" she said.

"A bracelet, my dear—a bracelet that a queen gave to a lady who married a forefather of his. And somebody stole the dear fellow's money, just when he wanted it most, and he sold the very thing that he wanted to keep. Oh, it's very hard," added the old dame, a spot of red coming into each wrinkled cheek. "He has his hope and his love, like other men, and he opened his heart to Nurse Grantley."

"Do you mind telling me something?" asked Becky in that queer new voice of hers. "Is it possible—I mean—can he be Mr. Edmund de Warrenne?"

Nurse Grantley gazed at her for a moment in silence; and then there came to her a sudden flash—a something that was almost inspiration.

"She has a sweet brown face and beautiful brown eyes," she repeated to herself. Aloud she said, "Yes, miss, his name is Edward de Warrenne."

"And he sold the bracelet because he wanted money; he did not give it to anyone as a—love gift?"

"No, miss, but there is a lady he meant to give it to. He was hoping for better days, when he could speak his mind."

"And the lady he thought of—do forgive me for asking questions—is she very tall, and very fair, with golden hair?"

"No, miss, she is a brown lady. He said so."

"Then someone has misrepresented him," remarked Becky, getting up. "A fair lady is wearing his bracelet. It is a mystery, but I suppose it will be cleared up one day. Now you have talked enough, and I must leave you."

"You'll come to see me again, my dear," said Nurse Grantley persuasively. "And you'll be so kind as to tell me your name."

"I am Becky Selwood, a little governess, all alone in the world. Mr. de Warrenne meets me sometimes at Mrs. Sanderson's house. Good-hye, Mrs. Grantley, I will come again on Saturday afternoon."

She went out of the cottage into the cool light of the May evening, and paused once more at the gate to see the buttercups and clover. What a wide expanse of amethyst and gold! How sweet the air was, and what a fair, flowery earth she lived on! Becky was ashamed of her depression, but she felt all at once that she was an ignorant little girl, unacquainted with the world's ways, and very easily deceived. Carry Lancaster had been amusing herself at her friend's expense; that was all. Her instinct led her to trust Nurse Grantley, and distrust Carry.

When she was gone, Nurse Grantley's cheery young landlady came to remove the tea-things, and see how she fared. She found the old woman with a blotter, a few sheets of notepaper, a pen, and a penny bottle of ink. She was beginning to write a letter.