

"Then he is a poor man," sighed Carry gently. "A little while ago I heard that he was secretary to a London company, and the company failed. Some people are so unfortunate. But, Becky, it is certain that he has paid you a great deal of attention."

"I have never spoken of his attentions," Becky answered.

"No, dear; but other folks talk. And I saw him hovering round you yesterday evening. Of course he likes you—that goes without saying—but one can't tell how deep the liking is; his feeling may be only on the surface, you know."

There was a footstep in the passage outside the door, and a clink of cups and saucers. Martha, a middle-aged woman of grave aspect, came in with the tea-tray, and set it on the table. Becky was glad of the interruption; just then she did not want to talk any more.

"Give me a cup of tea, Becky," her friend said. "I have only a minute to spare; but your tea is always so delicious that I can't resist it. I'm off to the Willingtons' this evening; they have a lot of people coming to-night, and I shall stop with them till Monday."

The ancient Town of Oakenbury was but a short distance from London, and Londoners came down very frequently to spend a Sunday there. Carry's friends, the Willingtons, lived in a country house near the railway station, and were supposed to entertain a smart set. Rumor said that their guests were noisy as well as smart, and tales of their doings sometimes caused the steady old townsfolk to open their eyes. But Carry always explained that she met people at the Willingtons' who were likely to be useful—people who would talk about her as a rising singer, and spread abroad her fame. They were rich, too, and did not mind spending their money.

When the door had closed behind her, Becky drew a deep breath of relief. And then, looking round the room, her lips quivered, and she remembered that she had been very happy here only two months ago. Ever since Carry's return to Oakenbury she had been haunted by vague fears and fore-shadowings of sorrow to come. Only two months ago she had believed herself to be watched over and guided by a loving Father; but now she had lost herself in a maze of doubt. She was just what she had been before, a clever little governess, better off than most girls in her position—because a kind godmother had left her thirty pounds a year—and fond of her pupils and her work. Nothing had changed outwardly, but the interior peace was gone.

Until to-day she had not realized that Edmund Ardenne had become the chief interest in her life. She had never before looked steadily into the depths of her heart to see what was hidden there. But now that she knew her own secret, Carry's words had filled her with dismay. Suddenly her tears began to flow; she thought of her old childlike faith, and sank down on her knees to say a prayer.

When she rose, the feeling of trustfulness had come back again. There was the tea-pot, keeping hot under the pretty cosy which had been made by her own hands. She sat down thankfully to drink her tea, rejoicing in her solitude. Carry was a dear girl, of course, but she had a trick of upsetting people; and Becky was glad that her fair friend was not a fellow-lodger. Apartments were not expensive in the old grey house. The neighborhood was humble, but her landlady was a motherly soul, and Martha was always attentive and kind. She dried her tears, and resolved to run out of doors for a few minutes before settling down to study. Her pupils were advancing, and she had to keep ahead of them.