

Like Becky, she knew how to dress, and wore the colors that became her best. She had a well-fitting skirt of grey tweed, a fresh blue and white shirt, and a blue belt, and neck tie. A jewelled watch was tucked into the belt, and from it depended a bit of rich gold chain, and a heart-shaped locket, studded with pink coral and pearls, an ornament which Becky candidly admired.

She finished the verse of the song, laughed, and then clapped her hands to applaud herself.

"Eneore, eneore!" cried she gaily.

"No, no," Becky entreated. "Carry, you are too loud. We shall leave a crowd under the window."

"Where will the crowd come from? Look out, my child—there isn't a soul to be seen. May I not sing to the dickey-birds about Edmund?" demanded Miss Lancaster in an innocent voice.

"They don't want to hear you," Becky replied. "In a few minutes Martha will bring up tea. I wish you would sit down and be quiet."

"Anything to please you! I'll sit down at once, like Thackeray's Fanny, and 'bloom like a rose in the cane-bottomed chair.' It's a rush-bottomed chair, fortunately, and will bear any weight. I am not a sylph like yourself."

She sat down on the other side of the table, and Becky screened her face behind the lilac.

"Now don't preserve an obstinate silence," went on Carry, after a brief pause. "Let me, just for once, have a glimpse of your inner self. The outer self I know very well, and it is quite pretty enough to—"

"Do be quiet," Becky implored. "I hate to be questioned when I have nothing to tell."

"Then Edmund de Warrenne has not said anything worth remembering, I suppose. Becky dear, you mustn't forget that we are old friends; at school you always confided in me, you know. If I seem inquisitive now, it is only because I'm really fond of you."

Carry had suddenly dropped her light jesting tone, and spoke earnestly. She had shifted her seat so that she could see her companion's face.

"I've been knocking about in the world, Becky, and I know more of men and women than you do. I couldn't help noticing you, dear, and I thought I saw that you liked Edmund Warrenne. And then I said to myself—if Becky would trust me, I could help her, perhaps, to understand him."

There was another pause; a bird, perching on the edge of a flower-pot in the balcony, sent a shrill chirp into the room. Becky drew the pitcher nearer, and laid her hot cheek on the cool blossoms. When she spoke it was in a reluctant voice.

"I don't quite understand him," she owned at last. "We met first at Mrs. Saunderson's a year ago, and somehow we seemed to get on. He told me about his early life in an old hall in Blankshire—a house with a haunted room and a long picture gallery. In those days it was believed that he would succeed to the estate; he was the rightful heir, you see, and the title would have been his if his uncle had not married again."

"I think I've heard something about his story," Carry remarked thoughtfully. "Old Sir John de Warrenne left two sons, and Edmund is the son of the younger. His father died, leaving him to the care of his uncle, Sir Luke de Warrenne, the present baronet. And Sir Luke petted the boy, and made much of him, as a bachelor uncle would be sure to do. But when Edmund was one or two-and-twenty, Sir Luke astonished everyone by marrying a young lady, and he has now a son of his own."

"Yes; Mrs. Saunderson was acquainted with the family," said Becky. "She was very sorry for Edmund; Lady Warrenne is extravagant, and Sir Luke doesn't allow him anything. He turned against his nephew after his marriage; and Edmund has only a small income derived from some property which came to him from his mother."