

THE STORY OF A BRACELET.

CHAPTER I.

BECKY AND CARRY.

On a Saturday afternoon, in the middle of the month of May, the sunshine lay warm and bright on a very quaint corner of an ancient town. It was a short street of rather mean houses, terminating in one large grey house which must have been built more than a century ago, and had apparently undergone neither change nor decay. The place seemed quite deserted; now and again a breath of wind rustled the green fans of the chestnut trees which screened the old house from its poorer neighbors; but if it had not been for the sharp chirping of many birds the whole quarter would have seemed fast asleep.

All at once, in the midst of this drowsy silence, a clear young voice burst out gaily with a verse of an old song.

"O, Brignall banks are fresh and fair,
And Greta woods are green;
I'd rather rove with Edmund there
Than reign our English queen."

On the second floor of the grey house there was a window protected by a little balcony of wrought iron, which contained some pots of brightly-colored geraniums and a box of mignonette. In the room lighted by this window there were some wooden chairs with rush seats, a high-backed sofa with a bolster at each end, and a square table covered with an excellent imitation of old flowered tapestry. In the middle of the cloth stood a quaint majolica nitcher filled with sweet plumes of lilac, and a girl of twenty, resting her arms upon the table, brought her face near the flowers, and lovingly drank in their perfume.

It was a brown face; the hair was a russet brown; the eyes, brown, too, were as clear as a wood-stream. She was not tall, but her head was prettily poised on her slender throat, and a blouse of fawn-colored cambric did not disguise the outlines of a charming figure. A narrow scarf of soft scarlet silk was tied in a graceful bow at the neck; her waist-belt was fastened with a quaint old silver clasp, and she wore a black cashmere skirt. Everything about Becky Selwood was dainty and refined, and people always said that she understood the art of dressing well on small means.

She was not alone in the room, and her companion was the singer. She had sung with a cultivated voice and an abandon which betokened one who was accustomed to a concert-room. Miss Carry Lancaster's name had already appeared in newspaper advertisements and on posters, and at twenty-one she was talked of as rising rapidly in her profession. She had been studying abroad for two years, and had come back a resolute, up-to-date young woman, ready to front the world with unabashed gaze, and absolutely determined to succeed. A fine girl, above the average height, strong, well-built, with a healthy pink complexion, and an abundance of fair hair, she was always sure of attracting attention. Her small grey eyes were deeply set, and rather near together, and something in their expression contradicted the smile of the merry red mouth. These eyes, as sharp as needles, were watching her friend with the closest scrutiny.