

the dark brown chariot which rolled swiftly past, drawn by its well-matched bays.

Among the passers-by were two ladies, who walked leisurely down the shady side of the street. Both were young, for neither could have seen more than twenty summers, and both were attractive in appearance, and dressed with an unpretending elegance which contrasted favourably with the costumes of many gaudily attired females who mingled in the throng. One was dark-haired and bright-eyed, with brunette tint and rosy mouth; while her companion, smaller in stature, and slighter in form, possessed a complexion of dazzling purity, sunny, fair hair, which fell in heavy ringlets around her face, and a pair of laughing blue eyes.

"Lucy, I wish to have your opinion regarding those pearl ornaments of which I have spoken to you. I told the jeweller that I would probably call again to-day. So, as we are at the door, it is as well to decide at once about purchasing them."

"Certainly," replied her fairer companion, "I shall be most happy to assist you in your decision;" and the ladies entered the shop of a jeweller famed for the magnificence and good taste which distinguished the commodities in which he dealt.

The shop was crowded with purchasers, and the ladies had to wait some time before they were attended to. Meanwhile, they amused themselves with looking into the glass-cases which contained bijouterie of every description. The pearl ornaments were also there, exposed to view.

"O, Margaret, they are very beautiful indeed," exclaimed Lucy Ayton, and added in a lower tone of voice: "And so appropriate for a bride. Orange blossoms and pearls are inseparable."

"I trust I shall ere long have the pleasure of assisting you to select some of these pretty things to be worn on a similar occasion," replied her companion.

Lucy was about to make a laughing reply, when the rich, deep tones of a manly voice fell upon her ear, and she turned quickly round to get a glimpse of the speaker who was standing in their immediate vicinity. How is it that there is such thrilling magic in a voice we may have heard but once, which we may never hear again, but whose tones will linger in the memory for years to come? or such witchery in the expression of an eye whose glance we may have met but once in our lives, but which will haunt us at times henceforth, to be recalled again and again, when memory brings back her half-forgotten reminiscences of the past. This was such a voice, thus fraught with interest, at least to Lucy. The words were nothing in themselves. They merely referred to an article the speaker was purchasing; but the musical and impressive tones attracted Lucy's attention, and, startled, she looked hastily around. Her quick movement caught the stranger's notice, and, raising his head, his looks were rivetted upon the fair young face before him. No wonder the colour rose to Lucy's brow, and her soft blue eyes sank beneath their lids as she turned away, embarrassed, from the startled gaze of involuntary but respectful admiration which a pair of lustrous dark eyes sent back. If, the stranger's voice had arrested Lucy's attention, his personal appearance only tended to deepen that interest. There was that in his air and dress, difficult to describe but perceptible to the eye, which indicated that the individual was a stranger in the land, and the dark, bronzed hue of his complexion told of a home beneath sunnier skies than those of England. His age might be about twenty-five. He was tall in figure, and his features, though not faultlessly regular, were pleasing, and a pair of eyes, large, dark, and penetrating, yet with a shade of sadness in their expression, were comprehended in the hasty survey which Lucy made of the interesting stranger.

"Lucy, are you dreaming? I have addressed you twice without receiving a reply," exclaimed her companion, touching her lightly on the shoulder; for, intent upon the pearls, Lucy's embarrassment had passed unnoticed.

"Excuse me, Margaret, for my absence of mind," replied Lucy; "but now that you have

awakened me, I am all attention to your wishes."

The jeweller produced the pearls from the case, and, after being duly examined and admired, they were purchased, and ordered to be sent home.

"I have another set of ornaments here," remarked the jeweller, "which this young lady may wish to see. The style is *unique*, and distinguished for beauty of design and richness of workmanship."

"Do not tempt me by the display of any costly trinkets," replied Lucy, who, by this time, had completely regained her self-possession. "I cannot afford to purchase them, and the sight of them may only make me dissatisfied with those I possess," and the jeweller displayed to her view the ornaments, which well merited his praise, for they were uncommonly beautiful. They were of aquamarine, and the pale green gems looked like pellucid drops of ocean water congealed within the rich chased work which enclosed them. "They were ordered by a young countess, as capricious as she is fair, who afterwards changed her mind, and desired others instead."

"What is their value?" inquired Lucy, as she gazed upon the ornaments with the admiration so natural to a young and lovely girl.

"One hundred guineas."

"Then you may keep them till I am rich enough to be their purchaser," replied Lucy smiling; "though I fear they will become old-fashioned long before that time arrives. Till then, I shall endeavour to remain satisfied with the ornaments I already possess, simple as they are."

The ladies moved onwards to leave the shop, and Lucy, with a side-long glance, observed the stranger who had attracted her notice still standing in the same place. They were obliged to pass him on their way out, and, as he moved aside to give them more room, another look from those fascinating eyes caused Lucy's heart to beat quickly, and the colour to deepen momentarily on her face.

"Did you observe that foreign-looking individual who so politely stood aside to let us pass?" enquired Margaret, as they regained the street. "I have never seen a face more calculated to awaken interest in a passing stranger. He cannot, surely, belong to this town."

"Yes, he attracted my notice while you were looking at the jewels," replied Lucy; "and I fear he thought me very rude for the abrupt manner in which I turned round and looked at him. But, after all, it does not much signify what he may think of me, for we shall not likely meet again."

"It is not at all probable," said her friend, "for he evidently belongs to a warmer climate than ours. The sun of England has not lent that brown tint to his complexion, which, after all, is rather becoming to a manly face. And, now, Lucy, we must go and select the wreath of orange blossoms. I fear you will find the office of bridesmaid no sinecure, for I intend to take advantage of your superior taste in choosing my trousseau, so we must hurry our steps so as to beat home in time for dinner, and papa dislikes so much to sit down to a solitary meal. My dear, kind father, I fear he will greatly miss me when I leave him. This is the only regret which clouds my present happiness," and a tear dimmed the bright eyes of the young bride.

CHAPTER II.

When Lucy Ayton descended to breakfast next morning, her mother was already seated at the table, and held in her hand a small parcel.

"So you have been making purchases, my dear," said Mrs. Ayton; "I was just about to peep into this parcel."

"No, mamma, I did not buy anything yesterday," replied her daughter. "Are you certain that packet is intended for us? It may have been mis-sent."

"Read the address, Lucy, and you will find it quite correct," and Mrs. Ayton handed the parcel to Lucy, who read her name, inscribed in legible characters.

"This must be some of Margaret's bridal gear, which has been wrongly directed," said Lucy, untying the parcel; "but we shall soon set all

doubts at rest, by getting a sight of the mysterious contents."

The paper envelopes were laid aside, and a crimson morocco case met their view.

"Margaret's bridal pearls! how stupid!" exclaimed Lucy, and, touching the spring, the lid flew open and exposed to her astonished eyes, not the pearl ornaments, intended to adorn her friend, but the aquamarines which she had so much admired, and which the jeweller had wished her to purchase.

"How very beautiful," exclaimed Mrs. Ayton, and Lucy also uttered an ejaculation of admiration as well as surprise, when she beheld the glittering gems, to which the rays of the morning sun lent additional lustre. "But surely, Lucy, you cannot have been so thoughtless as to make such a costly purchase."

"Mamma, you do not think that I would do anything so extravagant," replied her daughter. To purchase ornaments so expensive as those would ill become our reduced fortunes," and Lucy related to her mother the circumstance of Mr. Ware having recommended the ornaments to her notice, and how she had declined to purchase them. Mrs. Ayton and Lucy looked within the case and shook the paper in which it had been wrapped, to discover whether any explanatory note or bill accompanied it. But the simple address "Miss Ayton," was all the explanation afforded.

"Never mind Lucy, do not give yourself any further uneasiness about this affair, but take your coffee—it is almost cold by this time—and immediately after breakfast you can carry the parcel back to Mr. Ware; for the contents are too valuable to be entrusted to the servant, and doubtless the mistake will soon be explained. He must have supposed that you wished to have a sight of them at home."

"I shall be more careful in future how I express my admiration," replied Lucy, "when it is thus misunderstood;" and closing the case, Lucy seated herself at the breakfast table.

Mrs. Ayton was the widow of a merchant, who had formerly been among the wealthiest and most respected in the large mercantile city in which she now dwelt, and she had been accustomed to live in a style of elegance suited to their different circumstances. Upon his death, however, which had happened about two years previous to the time at which we introduce them to the reader, his affairs had been found to be in a less prosperous condition than had been supposed. Owing to disasters by sea and other losses incident to mercantile pursuits, much had been lost, which a few years of successful industry might have regained. But life is uncertain, and Mr. Ayton, a man still in the prime of life, died suddenly. To his wife and daughter the loss was irreparable, and even the change of fortune which speedily followed was comparatively unfelt when compared to the greater grief already sustained: Disposing of her most valuable furniture and plate, Mrs. Ayton purchased a small suburban villa to which she retired with her only daughter, and denouncing the gay society in which she had always been accustomed to mingle, continued to receive only a few special friends, from whom no change of fortune could estrange her. Lucy had not felt the altered circumstances of her lot so severely as might have been anticipated, though at an age to enjoy the gaieties of life, and beautiful enough to attract admiration wherever she appeared. Educated with great care by a fond and sensible mother, she possessed many resources with which to replace those amusements which she now had to relinquish.

Breakfast over, Lucy hastily put on her bonnet and shawl, and tying up the morocco case proceeded to the jeweller's shop.

"Can I see Mr. Ware?" inquired Lucy of one of the assistants who came forward to ascertain her wishes.

"Certainly, Miss," please be seated, and I shall summon him," replied the young man. Mr. Ware presently appeared, to whom Lucy was well known, for Mrs. Ayton had dealt with him in more prosperous days.

"Good morning, Miss Ayton," he said; a peculiar smile appeared upon his face as he saluted her.