yourself frightened. Valerie—Miss Her-bert—will remain, and so will you. You can't turn coward when even the pit and sallery are keeping their places."

"Very well," said she, fluttering her fan a good deal. "Valerie, my dear, you see me a martyr to a soldier's will. Maz al-ways makes me do what he likes,"

"You seem to get on very well under the tyranny, Lady Elinor," observed Dallas,

"Because she requires it," said Besure-gard. "Don't you think so, Miss Herbert?" How she hated that "Miss Herbert?" and if she had regarded the man as a friend only, she would have reminded him that, having already omitted it, he would please her best by doing so in future; but she was

Lady Elinor came unexpectedly to the rescue, interposing before Valerie could

reply:
 "For shame, Max, trying to get Valerie on your side! And I am sure she doesn't want you to call her 'Miss Herbert' any longer. Do you, Valerie?'
 A light color crossed the man's bronzed face, his dark eyes flashed. He answered, and the state of the shade of the sh

"You take Miss Herbert at a disadvant-

age, Nellie!"

"Ah, but," said Valerie, in a low tone; she had colored a little, too, but laughed as she spoke, to hide deep feeling—"I would much rather you dropped my surname. I hate formalities, you know."

"And I am the last man to hold by them," he answered, in the same manner; "but, of course, in these things, the lady must be the arbiter."

It might seem a small thing, and yet it was much to both of them, this breaking down of a barrier which seemed to ignore friendship. It was generous, too, in Max, Valerie thought, with swelling heartmost generous, not to remind her, by even the inflection of a tone, that she had so acted as to imply that she scarcely cared to remember the past, and certainly not to encourage more than mere acquaintance-ship in the present. She had been cruel and unjust to him, and he had thrust the dagger into the sheath when she herself had put it naked into his hands.

Once more the curtain rose, and the play went on; and gradually Lady Elinor grew more tranquilized, though she hailed with satisfaction the fall of the green curtain. "You're glad it is all over, ch, Nellies" asked Colonel Beauregard, quizzically, as

he took up Valerio's mantle. Wicked fellow! Yes, I am; and I am glad Mr. Lawford wasn't in the house, for he would have been rushing round like a madman to make sure that Valerie was not reduced to ashes."

"He would have known, I hope," said Colonel Beauregard, quietly, though he was white with suppressed passion at the implied ownership of the girl, "that Valerie

And as he spoke he drew the mantle carefully about her; but there was no tenderness in his touch now, and Valerie felt as if turned to stone, her silence lending did not repudiate Aston Lawford's claim to take a special interest in her.

"Oh, yes, of course!" said Lady Elinor; "but then, you know—thanks, Mr. Dallas

"I know," interrupted Colonel Beauregard, rather shortly, "that if you are much longer Airs, I angley will imagine we have spirited Valurie away altogether between us. Are you rendy?"

"Yes, yes. You military men always want things to be done so quickly. That is right. Draw the bood well over my head, Mr. Dallas, or I shall get neuralgia. You neverbaye both an erie-fortunate girlf

And he is harm at length tripped out of the box, and Max followed with Valeries "leaney!" said Larly Elinor, when bidding adieu to Velerie in Upper Brook Street, "how time flie .! Henley next week, and the season nearly over! I hope the weather will be fine!"

"Yes, indeed, Good-night, and thanks so much for my pleasant evening. Goodnight, Colonel Beauregard,"

The door closed upon her, and as Mar-returned to the carriage, Lady Elinor saids "I suppose she will go to Henley with the Lawfords?"

"I suppose so."
"And there will be a splendid wedding in the autumn?" said Lady Elinor, leaning back among the luxurious cushions, and closing her eyes. "Well, I think Valerie is wise. Lawford will make a very good husband, as husbands go; and she will have every wish gratified. What more can a girl require?"

every wish gratified. What more can a girl require?"

"They don't seem to require more."

"Ah, you have romantic ideas, Man; you are a regular Bayard. What a pity! You might marry millions if you chose."

"What nonsense you talk, Nellie," he said, laughing. "If you must chatter, chatter about Henley."

But Lady Elinor yawned, and relapsed into silence. There would be no Henley for her this year, nor for Valerie; but neither of them dreamed of this now.

CHAPTER XXVIII.-MR. LAWFORD'S PERFLEX-

Four days before Henley Regatte, and Colonel Beauregard and his sister-in-law were alone together—a not very frequent condition of things.

It was just before afternoon tea, and she was reading a society paper—especially the items about the Mariborough House ball-two night ago, where Valerie Herbert had been the belle; and he was reading a letter from Mrs. Fanshawe,

"I getually heard from Valente Herbert had been the delication of the control of the c

from Mrs. Fanshawe.

"I actually heard from Valerie Herbert the other day," wrote the lady. "She rarely writes now. I suppose old friends don't count. Not a long letter, and what I should call superficial. I never was so disappointed in anyone. And it seems she is going to marry Aston Lawford—not that she says so, but others do. Perhaps she will be happy in her way. She same to

"A poem in satin and lace," concluded cauregard, gravely. "Rossetti in fabricay don't underrate!"

Pray don't underrate!"

"Be quiet Max! don't be sarcastic! Did
you see the dress, Mr. Lawford!"

"No," he replied, grimly; "but she was
at Lady Nonpareil's ball last night!"

"Indeed! And how many times did you
dance with her? Come—confess!" "I am not in a mood for jesting, Lady

"I am not in a mood for jesting, Lady
Elinor," said Lawford a little gruffly.
"What!" she said, startled. "You don't
mean that—"

"That Miss Herbert has refused me—no! I haven't asked her yet; but I shall do so,
and speedily. Her aunt preaches patience;
but mine is tired out. She has had tether
enough to flirt with all the world, and
bring men to her feet only to spurn them!"

"Take care!" said Lady Elinor, warningby; "she may deal the same with you, thinking to becken you back at her will."

"She is too wise for that!" said Lawford,
with the consciousness of possessing overwhelming advantages, "and she would
hardly dream of flying directly in Mrs.
Langley's face, with the alternative of being sent back to the country!"

"Not," he added, quickly, for he knew
how Colonel Beauregard would look upon
anything like coercion in such a case, and
dreaded some sarcasm; "not that I would
accept, on any terms, an unwilling bride;
but then I know she is not unwilling—she
is simply trying to stretch her power to its
utmost limits; and no man will be played
with too long!"

"If she not coing with your party to

"Is she not going with your party to Henley?" asked Lady Elinor, after a pause, gliding off, diplomatically, from the main 'She has given no definite answer yet,

though I know she has over a dozen invi-"Dear, dear! she plays the coquette to the top of her bent. But I don't think

there's much to fear; in fact, you know," said Lady Elinor, decidedly, "she could hardly draw back now—it is too late; everyone talks of the affair as settled. Her aunt says right and left that it is. She can't for a moment mean to throw you over finally; even if, out of sheer coquetry, she does so at first. But then, certainly, Mrs. Langley would interfere." "I shall make her understand," said As-

ton Lawford, with a heavy frown, "that I don't intend to be thrown off, and beekoned back at will."

This was more than Mex Beauregard could stand. He rose and walked across the room, and sat down, taking up a book.

"Max thinks he is de trop," said Lady Elinor, in a low voice, and with a smile.

"But pray don't let me drive him away, Lady Elinor!" directly. But, if I may be permitted to of-fer advice, Mr. Lawford, deal gently with Valerie; she has a very strong will, and has been so petted and spoiled, that I really don't think she realizes there is a point beyond which even a beauty may not go!"

"I am too fond of her," said he, "to be otherwise than gentle; but I am no boy to be a girl's sport—to be encouraged one minute, and snubbed the next!"

"Why, not you are quite right there."

"Why, no! you are quite right there. Shall you see her before Henley?" "I shall write to her, Lady Elinor." "I shall write to her, Lady Elinor."

"Ah! the best way, perhaps, under the circumstances. Here comes the tea!" said Lady Elinor, relieved in more ways than one. "Max, come here!"

Colonel Beauregard dropped his book and came forward, and conversation then

turned from Valerie.

By-and-by Lawford took his leave.

"I hope soon," he said, as he shook hands with Lady Elinor, "to have to ask you for your congratulations!"

"I hope so " said she "Remember we "I hope so," said she. "Remember me

"I hope so," said she. "Remember me to your sister."

The door closed on Valerie's suitor, and Lady Elinor subsided into her chair.
"Poor, dear man!" she said. "But really, Valerie treats him badly."
"He's an insufferable cad!" said Colonel Beauregard, shortly. "Forgive me, Neilie!"
"Certainly. It came out with all your heart, Max. You never liked Lawford, I know, but he is not a cad."
"Bab! A man may have better blood."

"Bah! A man may have better blood than he has, and be a cad to the core of his

than he has, and be a cad to the core of his soul. Heaven help the woman who marries him for his millions! She will be mated to a clown indeed!"

"Ah, Max," said Lady Elinor, with a genuine ring of pathos in her voice, "there are not many men like you. You have a standard too high for ordinary people to come up to. Most of us are made of poor elay after all, and worship the golden calf."

"A beggarly worship, Nellie; but I know I am wrong—according to the great unwritten canon. I am content to be right by the written one. Good-bye for the present, dear. I promised to meet Dallas and some other fellows at the Rag this evening."

ed her gently and went out-

CHAPTER XXIX.—TWO LETTERS AND A TELE It is not an easy thing to write an offer of marriage; at any rate Aston Lawford did not find it so. And then he had, in addition, the task of making Valerie Herbert understand clearly, without expressing it harshly, that the offer would not be renewed if she should think fit to play the coquette and refuse him. Of course it would be. Lawford was thoroughly infatuated. Had his love been of a nobler type he would scarcely have tolerated so long the girl's cavalier way of treating him; and this Valerie knew quite well. Where she made a mistake was in not even crediting him with as much affection for her as he really had. She thought her beauty pleased him, and he wanted to have a lovely woman at the head of his establishment, and to marry the belle of the season. And though she knew her power over the man, she certainly did not grasp its full extent.

seen it, for she had gone to luncheon with
a friend.
Valerie quickly changed her habit, and
then all four sat down to luncheon, and
there was much talking and laughing. If
there was one heavy heart there, there was
no outward sign of it.

"Have you decided yet whose party you
are going to join for Henley, Miss Herbert!" asked Lord Westbrook. "Only
three days now. Do tell me!"

"Why do you want to know!"

"Why do I want to know!"

"Why do I want to know!"

body? How you do tease!"
"Naturally. Well, I am going with Lady
stonend's people. I sent in my adhesion

"Won't Lawford cut up rough?" said Dallas, in an undertone to Amy; and Amy nodded a little vaguely, and glanced uneasily at Valerie. Was the girl growing a perfectly reckless coquette? Why this unmistakable snub to a man to whom she om are you going with, Mr. Dallas,"

or four others. I wish you were of the party," added Hal, lowering his tone.

Amy colored, and changed the subject.

and the girl was alone. With a sinking at heart she took her way to the boudoir, and, sitting down in a low fauteuil, drew out Lawford's letter.

"Asking to see me?" she said to herself, trembling. "I cannot see him! and yet how could I refuse? Have I been unfair to him? If I had only one true friend! Mrs. Fanshawe would have been; but I dare not be my natural self even to her. She writes to him—she might suggest to him that I cared for him. No, No!" she covered her face, "it is my own fault that



Valerie drew out Lawford's letter. I have made all my friends enemies."

Forcing back her tears resolutely, she slowly opened her letter. The very first words startled her. She flushed to her brow; then she read on steadily to the end, turned the page, and went back, and read through again. After that she sat for several moments perfectly still, the burning color in her face fading gradually away, and leaving her deadly white; but there was a dangerous quiver about the delicate nostril, a dangerous light in

And yet there was more feeling in the letter than she had given Aston Lawford credit for, and her heart smote her heavily. He asked her to be his wife; he told her he loved her deeply and sincerely, and would in everything study her happiness. That sounded conventional, but there was a true ring in it, too. Then he reminded her that she had treated him with some caprice; but he was sure she had not intended to wound him. He weighed somecaprice; but he was sure she had not intended to wound him. He weighed somewhat on her aunt's approval of his suit, and intimated delicately, but clearly, that he desired a sincere and decided answer, for which he trusted she would not keep him

which he trusted she would not keep him waiting long.
But from beginning to end there was a tone of security which stung the girl's pride; it was like making a merely formal offer of that which was certain of acceptation; no doubts, no fears, but a complacent sense of the honor he, Aston Lawford, was doing her, Valerie Herbert, in offering her his hand and heart, and millions.
Suddenly Valerie rose up, letting the letter fall to the floor, and clasping her hands above her head.
"Have I," she said, through her teeth, haif aloud, "given him the right to speak to me like this? He seems more to be claiming his property—as if I were so many

never supposed you did more than admire me, as others have done. For my fault in this I ask your pardon, making no excuse, though I might plead some; still I was wrong. You urge that aunt Constance favors your suit; but though I would please her in all things possible, I cannot in this. I know you would do your utmost to make me happy; but I do not love you, and without love all that the world could give me would not make me happy. You warn me, courteously but firmly, not to trifle with you further, and reject your offer to prove my power, while, in truth, I have no intensition of final rejection. Let me say, then-believe me or not, as you will—that I am writing this to you from my heart—that ne earthly power could make me, no temptation could induce me, to become your wife. I refuse your offer now and forever; and I am certainly not vain enough to believe that after this you will ever wish to renew it. "Ever yours faithfully, "VALERIE MAUDE HERBERT."

It was characteristic of Valerie that her first thought was to despatch the letter without even showing it to her aunt; but this, on second thought, seemed uncourteous, even undutiful. She would not keep Lawford in suspense until to-morrow.

Evening passed into night, and Mrs. Langley did not return home. At last, a little after ten o'clock, Valerie rang the bell and sent a footman with the letter to Mr. Lawford's house in Carlton House Terrace.

The messenger could not have been thirty

The messenger could not have been thirty ces from the house, when Valerie, who as in the drawing-room, heard the car-age stop, and the next moment her aunt's tep came up the stairs with unusual rapidity. Valerie, who had been musing, with no small apprehension, over the contest she expected, but in which she was fully prepared to conquer, sprang to her feet with a new fear. Had anything happened that Mrs. Langley was so hurried? The door was almost burst open before the girl was more than half way to it, and Mrs.
Langley, her face flushed and agitated, her
whole mien denoting great mental disturbance, entered, and dropped into a chair.
"Aunt Constance!" exclaimed Valerie,
springing to her side. "What is the mat-

"My dear," said Mrs. Langley, recover-ing herself a little, "I have been greatly startled and shocked. They kept me at the Seltons' to dinner, and then I went on and called at the Lawfords'. I wanted to see Aston, and they told me that Lettie had called in Whitehall Gardens this afterhad been summoned to Abbot's Leigh at have been blind indeed. two o'clock this morning. Gerald was dangerously ill." Valerie clasped her hands with a cry of dismay. "And a later telegram," continued Mrs. Langley, "said that it was violent inflammation of the lungs, from a chill, and there was great

"Oh, aunt Constance," exclaimed the

niece, who stood silent, too shocked for will say, 'You love someone else?" speech, "that he had written to you to-day."
Valerie started, flushing crimson.

"Yes," she said, confusedly, "he-I-oh. please never mind that now!"
"But I must mind it, child! You have

A ring, that resounded through the house mingled with her last words.

Valerie made a quick step toward the "Come here, child," said her aunt, a lit

tle sternly. "What did you say?" A hurried knock at the door, and its instant opening interrupted her.

A footman came in, and handed a tele

gram to Mrs. Langley.
She glanced at it and grew suddenly livid.
"Great Heaven!" she said. "Gerald Beau-

Valerie almost snatched the paper from her aunt's nerveless hand, and read, with

dazed eyes:

"From Colonel Beauregard, Abbot's
Leigh, to Mrs. Langley, —, Upper Brook
Street, London, W.

"My brother died at eight this evening,
of acute inflammation. I will write later.
Nellie greatly prostrated, but in no dan-

Gerald Beauregard dead!

"It can't be true!" Valerie whispered, hoarsely, with wide-open eyes of horror.

"It can't be true!"

But Mrs. Langley said, slowly: "It is only too true!" Then, after a pause, under her breath, to herself rather than to Valerie: "And Max Beauregard is lord of Abbat's Laigh?"

"And Max Beauregard is lord of Abbot's

Valerie heard the words, but not their sense. She was quite stunned, and stood staring blankly before her, with not yet even a definite thought of how Max would feel the loss of his brother. The blow was so sudden, so utterly unexpected, so entirely without warning. A man in the vigor of his manhood, scarcely even alling at the time, struck down within a few hours; in the morning dangerously ill—no more; in the evening—dead!

And Valerie was young; to the young sudden death is always appalling. Only experience can familiarize with these catastrophes which seem to shake and rift the fabric of human existence. The girl

and bowed her face in her hands, choking with sobs which she tried to keep back. Ah, how bitterly Max would suffer! He would have no thought of the vast change in worldly fortune this death made to him. Mrs. Langley did not speak. She waited until the girl had recovered herself somewhat, and then she said, gently:

The girl lifted her head and stretched out her hands with a passionate gesture.

"Oh, auntie," she cried, "you must not be angry with me to-night! I could not hear it!"

"You are too sensitive, child. How do you know I am going to be angry?"
"You will be—you must be—but speak to

"I promise that I will not scold you for anything to-night, Valerie. But answer tion. What did you say to Aston

"I told him," said the girl, resolutely, "that I could not be his wife"—Mrs, Langley started, and drew a quick breath of re-lief—"because I did not love him," Valerie went on, fully believing that she was piling up for herself terrible wrath for the morrow. "Oh, aunt Constance, I know I have been wrong, but I did not think he really cared for me. I begged him to forgive me, but I could not marry him. I would die sooner! People will call me false—a jilt—then they must. I know I told you that the begged him to forgive me, but I could not marry him. I would die sooner! People will call me false—a jilt—then they must. I know I told you that Mr. Bonnett I loved the world, and couldn't marry Louis because he was poor;" it was the old terror of being charged with another love that made her say this—"but I didn't know what it would be to marry Aston Lawford."

Mrs. Langley, sitting in an arm-chair opposite, leaned her elbow on the arm, shad-charles McLean

Charles McLean

Charles McLean ing her face with her hand; and even when Valerie ceased speaking, the listener did

The girl rose and stood before her aunt, clasping her little hands together, and though she spoke falteringly, there was not a line of irresolution in her face. Fragile stripling though she was, her will was set like a vise; and the man or woman who noon and was told that Elinor and Max hoped to make her yield her ground would

"Aunt Constance," she said, "I know you will think me ungrateful, and you thought it would be a great thing for me to be Aston Lawford's wife; but I cannot obey you in this-whatever happens. I can go back again to the country-to uncle

"And marry Louis Charteris?" asked girl, her eyes blind with tears, "how terri-ble—how terrible for them all!"

Mrs. Langley, quietly, without looking up. Valerie's lips opened for a quick "No, no —not that!" But in the instant she checkre composedly. "He is not yet forty, ed herself, for the thought flashed through and has astrong constitution. Aston Law- her brain like lightning: "She thinks I ford told me," she added, looking at her love him. If she discovers I do not, she

> Then Mrs. Langley dropped her hand "Let us say no more about it to-night, Valerie," she said. "To-morrow, perhaps,

mot answered him yet?"

"Yes, I have. He asked me not to delay, and I kept the letter as long as I could for you to see. I only sent it just before you

"She kissed the girl affectionately, and Valerie went up to her room with a feeling of bewilderment. "What could it mean?" she asked her-

self. Mrs. Langley had promised not to be angry with her to-night; but she did not seem even much displeased, and she had so set her heart on this marriage. "Does she imagine," Valerie thought, "that I will But for a time her brain felt dizzy and

confused, and she could not think distinctly. She was, however, terribly excited, and felt that sleep would be an impossibility. So when Fanchon left her, she wrapped a dressing-gown about her, and sat down, leaning her throbbing temples

on her hands.

Her thoughts were growing clearer now, more defined. In the quiet of the night they traveled to Abbot's Leigh, and saw the death-chamber with its tall tapers, and the soldier, stern and calm, in his silent watch by the dead. Long time they dwelt there, and then they came back to the question that had perplexed her.

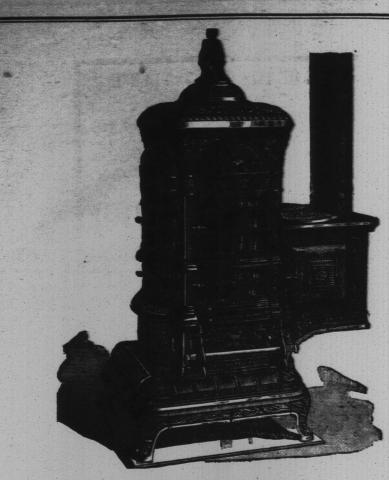
Had the shock of the terrible news from Abbot's Leigh softened Constance Lang-ley's heart—for a time at least? But that

connection of ideas was the flash of revel-ation. The news from Abbot's Leight Gerald's death made Max owner of all! With the smothered cry of a wounded are the girl fell on her kno her face from the light in shame and an-

to be cast aside for Max Beaurege

Yes, even in that dread moment, Constance Langley, almost in the presence of leath, thought of the gain of that death, and grasped the gold that fell from the stiff-

"And he will think that I, too, s "And he will think that I, too, schemed to win him, in the very hour that I knew he had wealth. Oh, Heaven! he will think even this of me!" Valerie moaned, the burning tears forcing themselves through her flugers. "Oh! how can I bear it? what shall I do? If I could only die! He will know that I refused Aston Lawford on the very day—in the very hour—I knew his brother died! What else can he think but that I am the base, wretched schemer I seem to be? Why should he believe better of me after what he knows already? Oht the shame burns into my soul—that she should want me to win him after all that



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