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******** 1 THE

By Laura Jean Libbey.

******* life, and then hand you over to the police for this as well as the many other crimes laid at your door. By Heaven! I think I will thrash you to teach you a lesson!"

But before the gentleman could put his threat into execution, the bold stranger had sprung to his feet, and with one dash, and the fleetness of a deer, took himself off.

It was not worth while pursuing him, and the gentleman turned his attention to Aurelia, who had sprung from the carriage, screaming with "You have escaped the worst

scoundrel and blackleg that this country has ever produced, miss!" he exclaimed, adding severely. "When young girls are so careless of the law which governs good society as to make chance acquaintances, nine times out of ten they come to grief through them. You have escaped through little less than a miracle! I heard you say you were going to Deephurst; there stands your train; I am going there myself; there is no other depot.

He saw her hesitate and glance up at him fearfully.

"I would not direct you wrong, or take advantage of your foolish innocence," he said, frowning impatiently. "There is my card," he added; "everyone hereabouts knows me. You can inquire of the conductor yonder for yourself, if you prefer.") Aurelia took the card timidly and

glanced at it. Oh, horror! The name she read engraved upon it was Randolph Clavering!

CHAPTER XV.

Randolph Clavering! Great Heaven! could it be possible that this was he?

Aurelia looked in dismay from the bit of pasteboard she held in her hand to the face of the young man standing before her.

She saw in that one quick, startled glance that he was all and finely formed, and of commanding calculated her powers. presence-probably of some sevenand-twenty years-singularly hand- braiding of her dress, and the next some, with the dark beauty of a instant she felt herself whirling god; a haughty face it was, the dark, flashing, cold eyes to the struck the platform face downward curl of the scornful lip under the had not Mr. Clavering sprung quickthick, drooping moustache.

no lily-handed, curled woman's dar- bundles flying in all directions. ling. He was not the sort of man that women make game of and men abhor-in fact, those who knew him | tightly about her slim waist than best declared him a woman-hater, if the occasion really demanded-their

handsome face, the color coming and iment. going in great crimson waves over her cheek and brow.

"Mr .- Clavering," she said very faintly, "I-I am Aurelia Lancaster; I am on my way to your mother's place at Deepburst."

And she raised those wondrous wine-dark eyes entreatingly, eagerly to his face. He crushed back the imprecation

that trembled on his lips, and which this sudden intelligence had nearly surprised him into uttering, and bowed, remarking: "In that case, please consider your-

self in my charge, Miss Lancaster. I do. Those cold, calm black eyes This is our train to Deephurst. of his put my nerves fairly an edge.

Without ceremony he takes arm, and with swift, swinging me. strides hurries her along the platform with more haste than ele-

they are wniring on as swiftly steam can carry them toward Deep-

she steals another glance at her companion seated opposite her, and suffuses her cheek and brow.

What must he think of her? What a pity that he happened to be on that train, and saw from beginning to end that terrible flirtation that she thought no one would ever know What must he think of

After seeing her safely ensconced, Mr. Clavering had drawn a copy of a morning paper from his pocket, and was soon deeply absorbed in its columns; but for all that he was not entirely obvious to the that a pair of wistful dark eyes looking out from a rose-leaf face, were studying him intently.

An hour passes-two-still Mr. Clavering is deeply immersed in his Aurelia thinks he must have for-

gotten her entirely. "Mr. Clavering," she breaks at length, somewhat timidly.

He lays down his paper and looks at her, coldly, questioningly. "I hope you will not-not mention what happened to-day-to your mother," she says, with a little

scant politeness. "Do you think-even if she knewwould censure me so very

much?" breathed Aurelia, piteous-"I believe she would-most assurcomes forward one lady comes swiftedly," he answered, promptly. "She is got one to condone a fault."

"What an uncivil bear he is," thought the girl, darting him an angry look from her blazing eyes. "I hate Randolph Clavering. I'm sure I do not envy the girl he is going to marry. He might at least have said something kind or-or civil, to take the sting of my mortification away. I believe he enjoys my discomfiture over the unfortunate affair; but I am determined on one thing, and that is, that he shall

not see that I care." And she crested her curly head with all the pride of an angry princess, and looked resolutely out of mistakable resemblance to her dark, not. the window, staring into vacancy handsome son. until they reached Deephurst.

Clavering alighted from the train and held out his hand to assist his companion, but Aurelia drew back with a haughty gesture. "I can help myself, thank you,"

she said, very ungraciously, and with what she considered a very insolent, supercilious smile.

His hand dropped to his side, and he waited very calmly for her to make her way down the three steep

steps, bundles and all. Alas! for Aurelia! She had mis-

Her high French heel caught in the from through space; and she would have ly forward and caught her in his Princely though he looked, he was arms; but this did not prevent the

As Mr. Clavering raised her to her feet-his arms just a trifle more eyes met, and, in his dark, flashing Aurelia looked into the dark, grim, eyes she reads suppressed amuse-

"Why don't you laugh right out at me if you want to?" she cries passionately, * struggling out of his arms. "Why don't you tell me that you are very glad of it, and that I richly deserve it, as I see you are longing to do.'

Mr. Clavering thinks it rude to disagree with her, so makes no reply to this vehement, childish out- sweet eyes were looking into hers,

"Oh dear, oh dear!" Aurelia almost sobs aloud, "I am always making myself ridiculous before Randolph Clavering. I hate him-yes, I could not help falling, I'm sure, knowing that he was staring

"There is the coach yonder which will take you to the villa," he said, indicating a splendid private equip-They have barely time to board age standing at some little disthe train ere it steams out from tance. "Will you take my arm as the depot: and in another moment | far as there?" he adds quietly- and

as a spur to her anger. "No, indeed," she replies. stiffly, brow. with an effort to look dignified, renders peculiarly unsuccessful. Clavering smothers a smile

and bows gravely, conducting her in the house silence to the vehicle.

This time she makes no remonstrance when he helps her into the coach, for, with a quick glance, she signated for her use. "I love to have sees that the step is high, and she is in imminent danger of another catastrophe unless she accepts the proffered assistance.

She supposes he is going to take the seat beside her, and draws aside

her skirts. After all, it is a pleasurable antielpation-riding through the warm glow of the sunlight in this splendic coach-even though she does have to submit to having grim, baughty Randolph Clavering for a compan-

But instead of following her into the vehicle, Mr. Clavering turns to the coachnan and says, in a voice slightly louder than he usually used, by which Aurelia understood that the sentence was meant for her quite as well as for the man:

"You need not mention at the villa that I came by this train, John; they expect me later," and with that he lifted his hat with careless, graceful bow to Aurelia, turned, and sauntered away.

Aurelia told herself that she was delighted at this unexpected verance from his company; but for all that the surrounding hills and vales and the roadsides, starred with wild blossoms, pink and white, thick as evening stars, did not seem half home." so enjoyable as she had anticipated -one cannot enjoy riding alone. Perhaps it was the sun shining hotly As Aurelia sinks back on her seat against the plate-glass windows that made her feel so uncomfortable possibly it may have been the joltagain a flush of deep mortification ing of the carriage over the rough stones of the country road, or-or her tumultuous thoughts might have had something to do with it. She was wondering what Mr. Ran-

dolph Clavering thought of her. How unfortunate that he has first seen her under such very unfavorable auspices! Not that she really cared-oh, no, certainly not; but then it is so awfully provoking to know that people form adverse opinions of

Aurelia's reflections came to sudden end by the coach turning abruptly into a grand park. There was a short drive up a winding paved road overarched with elm-trees. Then the villa, an imposing structure of gray stone, turrets, and gabled roof peeping out from a network of ivy-vines and clambering roses, loomed into sight. Aurelia

that there are two seated on the porch in willow rockers, but she cannot get a good view of the faces for the patchwork of shifting vine leaves; but she surmises in all probability that they are Mrs. Clavering, the mother of the much-hated Randolph, "No," he replies, with brusque, and Miss Erskine, which surmise

proved correct. While she is taking this survey, the coachman springs down from the box and throws open the door, and Aurelia alights. Both ladies rise, and as the girl

ly down the porch to meet her. "Miss Lancaster!" she exclaims, in a low, sweet voice, holding out her white, thin, jeweled hands. "I am pleased to see you, my dear!" and with an anxious glance at the slim she bends down and kisses Aurelia's white hand playing so indolently red cheek, looking admiringly into with the silk balls of the curtain, the dark, piquant beauty of the she noticed Miss Erskine wore no engirl's bright young face, adding with gagement ring to signify the fact a smile: "Why, you are not like that her future was signed your twin sister Margaret in a single | sealed. feature-how strange! I am Mrs.

Clavering.' Aurelia bit her lips to keep from answering hastily-that she had been fresh, becoming toilets for the occaquite sure of that fact from her un- sion, whether there were guests or

Maud, come here, my love, and wel- tropical fruits. come Miss Lancaster."

A tall girl, in a white mull dress, came indolently forward. Two rather cold lips met Aurelia's, and Maud whom Mrs. Clavering adored. Erskine murmured a polite fib about being delighted to welcome her to the

from each other's embrace and took fairly caught her breath when Miss mental stock of each other. "As beautiful as an houri, and im-

pertinent," concluded Miss Erskine. In one swift glance Aurelia took in every detail of the coiled yellow hair, the sea-blue eyes, and calm, proud face of her companion, and the thought that passed through her

this is the girl-the beauty and the heiress whom they wish Randolph Clavering to marry?"

CHAPTER XVI.

"My dear," says Mrs. Clavering, turning to her ward, "I think you had better take Miss Lancaster up to her room; she must be very tired, indeed, from her long journey, will want to rest and freshen up a bit before dinner."

The words were no sooner uttered than Mrs. Clavering felt two arms around her neck and a pair of dark, and a voice said, coaxingly:

"Won't you call me Aurelia, please? I hate to be called Miss Lancasterit sounds so formal, you know." "Certainly," returned Mrs. Clavering, smiling at the girl's charming frankness of manner; "I should pre | eyes

Miss Erskine's thin red lips curled scornfully, and a sudden gleam came into her sea-blue eyes, and the thought fluttered through her brain: "Will the little minx make

same request of Mr. Clavering, Sr., and-and Randolph, I wonder?" But when Aurelia turned toward

ner, not even the faintest shadow of genne she would had those ironically, she thinks, and this acts

"Come this way," she said sweetwhich her laughing style of beauty ly, purposely refraining from calling her by any name. And together the | in them. two young girls disappeared within

"Please do not go; do not leave me yet," entreated Aurelia, as they reached the pretty suite of rooms desome one to talk to while I brush out my hair and change my dress; hate being alone-really I do."

"Just as you like," responded Miss Erskine, seating herself languidly in the blue satin arm-chair by the win-"I cannot stay very long. though, for I must arrange my own tollet for dinner; we dine very punetually here six o'clock sharp.' "Are there to be guests?" asked

Aurelia, curiously, A pink flush crept up under the alabaster whiteness of Miss Erskine's

of the family," she an swered, 'carelessly, adding, hesitatingly, "we are expecting Randolphthat is, Mrs. Clavering's son-home to-day. He has been absent over a

Aurelia turned away, that her companion should not see the red wave of color that burned hotly in her cheeks-"not at the mention of that name," she told herself, "but at the recellection of the knowledge hidden in her breast, that Mr. Clavering had come already. He was evidently not consumed with overeagerness to see the loved ones at

"Have you always lived here?" asked Aurelia, suddenly, looking thoughtfully at the pretty blonde reclining so nonchalantly among the sky-blue cushions. "Since I was a child," responded

Miss Erskine, adding, "Mrs. Clavering seems just like a mother to "And I suppose her son seems just

like a brother to you?" remarked Aurelia, naively. "That does not necessarily low," laughed the blonde beauty,

"Does young Mr. Clavering spend much of his time here?" asked Aurelia eagerly, the question falling from her lips ere she was aware.

"No; but why do you ask?" said Miss Erskine, raising her blonde eyebrows in well-bred surprise. "I should think it would make it much pleasanter for you if he did,"

responded Aurelia. "Yes," admitted Miss Erskine, "it does make it pleasanter, of course, when Randolph is here. Still, where one has seen one all of one's past life, and must see one during all the years to come, why, these short absences of a month or two's duration now and then should not

Miss Erskine uttered this parting shot with the utmost sang froid, darting a quick glance at Aurelia to see if any expression of her face indicated that she had taken in the subtle meaning meant to be conveyed in those well-chosen words. "So it is really settled then- be-

yond a doubt-that you are marry Randolph Clavering," the thought that burned its way like the sharp cut of a knife through Aurelia's brain. But she made no answer.

Of course they must be betrothed, according to that remark, and yet,

Dinner was a very ceremonious affair at Clavering villa. The ladies always appeared

All of the family plate and rare "My dear," continued Mrs. Claver- old china was brought into requiing, "allow me to present to you sition, and the table was dressed Miss Erskine, my husband's ward. with the choicest cut flowers and

There was an extra amount of decorations on the table to-night in honor of the return of the

Aurelia chose from her wardrobe a pink mull dress with loopings of silver ribbon on her breast, Then both girls drew quickly back tying back her dark curls; but she Erskine came to her to show her the way down to the dining-room, saying that the bell had already rung, and Mr. Clavering, Sr., always insisted upon punctuality at meals. "The gentlemen and Mrs. Clavering have already preceeded us to the

table. Come, Aurelia," she added. "Why, she looks quite as pretty as I do," thought vain Aurelia, glancing from her own exquisite face, which the mirror reflected, to the tall, graceful, trim figure draped in a cloud of pale-blue surah and white buds standing in the door-

They descended to the dining-room together, and the first face Aurelia saw looking at her from over the vase of crimson roses at one of the table, was Randolph vering's.

Mrs. Clavering presented her son to Aurelia, and the black eyes seemed to say, as they met and held her own for an instant: "Never mind mentioning that we

have met before!" Aurelia never remembered she acknowledged the introduction. She had the uncomfortable knowledge that she was blushing furiously, and that Miss Erskine looking at her with cold, surprised

She knew too that Randolph Clavering must have noticed her confusion, for, with tact for which she could almost have blessed him, he drew their attention away from her at once, and centered it upon him- through her toilet. Shall she run self, riveting it there.

he liked; but it was seldom Randolph Clavering exerted himself | that she does not care one snap of to interest and please.

quite a traveler, and this, added to tainly mutual. the natural polish and refinement a cinating in the girl's eves. The conversation was general; he did not direct one question to Aurelia; but more than once in raising

her eyes suddenly-impelled by some

magnetic influence she could scarcely

a frown ruffled Miss Erskine's white fathomless, blood-stirring, flashing eyes bent full upon her face-and the look in them puzzled her-it was certainly not admiration that she read

There was a different light in his eyes when he looked at Miss Ers-

kine or addressed her. sought the parlor, and the Clavering would join them but he did not come, and awhile it grew a trifle tedious to these two young girls trying amuse each other when the heart of neither one was in the work.

Mrs. Clavering joined them, but, as she always fell into a doze over her magazine when she attempted to read by the mellow glow of the gas lamp, she was soon in that land of bliss from whence the mortal spirit returns all too soon-happy dream-

Aurelia suppressed a yawn, and inwardly hopes that all evenings at Clavering villa will not be spent in this fashion; if they were, would certainly die of ennui.

Miss Erskine notices the suppressed yawn, and says, quickly; "Tell me when you are tired and wish to go to your room."

The ormolu clock on the marble mantel points its gilded hand to nine. Of course Mr. Randolph Clavering will not come into the parlor now, so Aurelia seizes the opportunity of breaking away from Miss Erskine's company with as much alacrity as good breeding will per-

The girls exchange "good-night" very sweetly, and kiss each other was there ever such a sham in this world as the kisses of women, anyhow? and Aurelia flits down the corridor, and up the stairs to her room. Nine, rings out some deep-throat-

ed clock in a far-off belfry. lia flings herself down in a by the window and wonders what she will do with herself for next hour; only nine o'clock-it is but the edge of the evening- she can never sleep before ten. A lucky thought comes to her; why not go down to the library, get some good novel-if the shelves of this stately house contain such a rarety-and come back and read herself to sleep. Aurelia is a creature of impulse, she acts on the thought at once; she gains the library, and is just about to push open the door which is slightly adjar, when the sound of her own name on the lips of some one within the room causes her to

pause involuntarily an instant and peer curiously in; and this is what she sees; Randolph Clavering seated in an arm-chair by the library table, one hand resting on his chair, his dark, handsome head thrown back, and Miss Erskine kneeling on a low hassock at his side.

CHAPTER XVII.

"Really, Randolph," Miss kine was saying in her sweet, smooth voice, "do you not Aurelia Lancaster pretty? seem to avoid the question. "If you insist upon an answer -

I must say no," returns Mr. Clavering, sharply and impatiently. "She has just the style of facedark, sparkling-with that piquant, tip-tilted nose that most men would admire," says Miss Erskine softly, watching her companion's face keenly as she speaks. Adding, more softly: "Why do you not admire

her, Randolph?" "Possibly because the young lady is not my style," he says carelessly. "What is your style, as you phrase

it?" she asks eagerly. "A quiet, reserved girl, and, above all, a sensible, refined one," he replies; "and then, dark men- like myself-prefer fair, very fair women: even in the verdant days of callow youth my heart never throbbed the faster for the glance of dark-eyed girl."

"You believe there is a natural attraction only in opposites of complexion?" she says, in a pleased

"That is the way it should be," he admits. Aurelia wants to hear no more. She realizes the truth very bitterly

of the old adage, that listeners never hear any good of themselves. She wheels suddenly about and flies noiselessly back to her own room. Her face is one burning flush from throat to forehead, and angry tears

stand on her long lashes. "Not his style, indeed!" she cries, clinching her little hands angrily together and striding up and down the room very much like a ruffled

"He likes refined, guiet, sensible girls, does he? Evidently I am not one of those in his mind's eye; of course he was thinking of that-that provoking episode that happened on the train. Oh, dear, how I hate him! How unfortunate that he was on that train," she mutters, between her-angry sobs.

She resolves to go back to Romaine Farm the very next day, and not stay a moment longer than is necessary beneath the roof where the grim, hateful son dislikes her so.

And full of this determination, the discomfited beauty creeps into bed, draws the lavender-scented sheets tightly up around her curly head her face downward buried deep the eider-down pillow-drifts into a deep sleep, and dreams of the dark, handsome, haughty face of Randolph Clavering. Morning dawns, bright and golden;

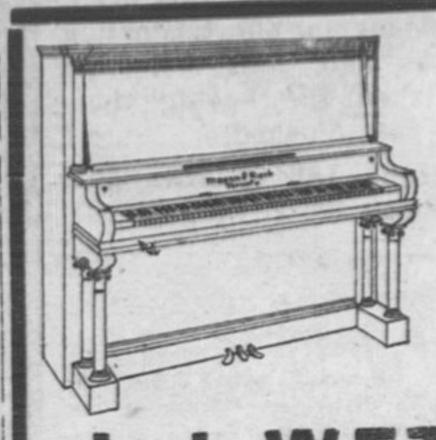
and the moment Aurelia opens her heavy-lidded eyes the events tha" transpired on the previous evening come back to her. Shall she go directly home or not?

is the question that agitates her to no little extent, as she hurried away like a little coward, or shall He could be very entertaining when she stay, and vanguish this foe on his own battle-ground - let him see her white fingers whether he likes her As he talked, Aurelia gleaned from or detests her? She is sure of one his conversation that he had been thing-the feeling of dislike is cer-

She takes extra pains, though, in finished course at Yale gives, made choosing her dress. She selects the tish Union and National Insurance this well-bred young man rather fas- one with the soft, crimson silk bows that Gerald Romaine liked best to see her in.

How much Gerald admired it; ten to one Randolph Clavering would (To be Continued.)





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