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Lucy Graham's Secret

Continued.

He grew restless and fidgety, some times so merry that the cabin, rung with his laughter; sometimes moody and thoughtful Favorite as he was among the sailors they were tired at last answering his perpetual questions about the probable time of touching land. Would it be in ten days, in eleven, in twelve, in thirteen? Was the wind favorable? How many knots an hour was the vessel doing? Then a sudden passion would seize him, and he would stamp upon the deck, crying out that she was a rickety old craft, and that her owners were swindlers to advertise her as the fast sailing Argus. She was not fit for passenger traffic; she was not fit to carry impatient living creatures, with hearts and souls; she was fit for nothing but to be laden with bales of stupid wool, that might rot on the sea and be none the worse for it.

The sun was dropping down behind the waves as George Talboys lighted his cigar upon this August evening. Only ten days more, the sailors had told him that afternoon, and they would see the English coast. "I will go ashore in the first boat that hails us," he cried; "I will go ashore in a cockle-shell. By Jove, if it comes to that, I will swim to land."

His friends in the aft-cabin, with the exception of the pale governess, laughed at his impatience; she sighed as she watched the young man, chafing at the slow hours, pushing away his untasted wine, flung himself restlessly about the cabin sofa, rushing up and down the companion ladder, and staring at the waves.

As the red rim of the sun dropped into the water the governess ascended the cabin stairs for a stroll on deck, while the passengers sat over their wine below. She stopped when she came up to George, and, standing by his side, watched the fading crimson in the western sky.

The lady was very quiet and reserved, seldom sharing in the after-cabin amusements, never laughing and speaking very little; but she and George Talboys had been excellent friends throughout the passage.

"Does my cigar annoy you, Miss Morley?" he said, taking it out of his mouth.

"Not at all; pray do not leave off smoking. I only came up to look at the sunset. What a lovely evening!"

"Yes, yes, I dare say," he answered, impatiently; "yet so long, so long! Ten more interminable days and ten more weary nights before we land."

"Yes," said Miss Morley, sighing "Do you wish the time shorter?"

"Do I?" cried George. "Indeed I do. Don't you?"

"Scarcely."

"But there is no one you love in England? Is there no one you love looking out for your arrival?"

"I hope so," she said gravely. They were silent for some time, he smoking his cigar with furious impatience, as if he could hasten the course of the vessel by his own restlessness; she looking out at the waning light with melancholy blue eyes—eyes that seemed to have faded with poring over closely-printed books and difficult needlework; eyes that had faded a little, perhaps, by reason of tears secretly shed in the lonely night.

"See!" said George, suddenly pointing in another direction from that toward which Miss Morley was looking, "there's the new moon!"

She looked up at the pale crescent, her own face almost as pale and wan.

"This is the first time we have seen it."

"We must wish!" said George. "I know what I wish."

"What?"

"That we may get home quickly."

"My wish is that we may find no disappointment when we get there," said the governess, sadly.

"Disappointment!"

He started as if he had been struck, and asked what she meant by talking of disappointment.

"I mean this," she said, speaking rapidly, and with a restless motion of her thin hands; "I mean that as the end of the voyage draws near, hope sinks in my heart; and a sick fear comes over me that at the last I may not be well. The person I go to meet may be changed in his feelings towards me; or he may retain all the old feeling until the moment of seeing me, and then lose it in a breath at the sight of my poor wan face, for I was called a pretty girl, Mr. Talboys, when I sailed for Sydney, fifteen years ago; or he may be so changed by the world as to have grown selfish and mercenary, and he may welcome for the sake of my fifteen years savings. And, again he may be dead. He may have been well, perhaps, up to within a week of our landing, and in that last week may have taken a fever, and died an hour before our vessel anchors in the Mersey. I think of all these things, Mr. Talboys, and act the scenes over in my mind, and feel the anguish of them twenty times a day. Twenty times a day," she repeated, "why I do it a thousand times a day."

George Talboys had stood motionless, with his cigar in his hand, listening to her so intently that, as she said the last words, his hold relaxed and the cigar dropped in the water.

"I wonder," she continued, more to herself than to him, "I wonder, looking back, to think how hopeful I was when the vessel sailed; I never thought then of disappointment, but I pictured the joy of meeting, imagining the very word that would be said, the very tones, the very looks; but for this last month of the voyage, day by day, and hour by hour my heart sinks and my hopeful fancies fade away, and I dread the end as much as if I knew that I was going to England to attend a funeral."

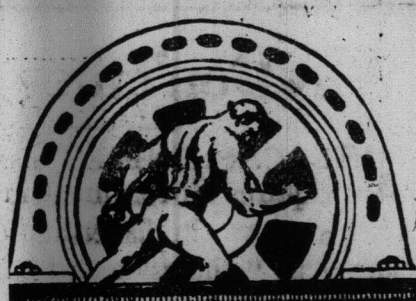
The young man suddenly changed his attitude, and turned his face full upon his companion with a look of alarm.

She saw in the pale light that the color had faded in his cheeks.

"What a fool!" he cried striking his clinched fist upon the side of the vessel, "what a fool I am to be frightened at this. Why do you come and say these things to me? Why do you come and terrify me out of my senses when I am going straight home to the woman I love; to a girl whose heart is as through as the light of Heaven; and in whom I no more expect to find any change than I do to see another sun rise in tomorrow's sky! Why do you come to try to put such fancies in my head when I am going home to my darling wife?"

"Your wife," she said; "that is different. There is no reason why that my terrors should terrify you. I am going to England to rejoin a man to whom I was engaged to be married fifteen years ago. He was too poor to marry then, and when I was offered a situation as a governess in a rich Australian family, I persuaded him to let me accept it, so that I might leave him free and unfettered to win his way in the world, while I saved a little money to help us when we began life together. I never meant to stay away so long, but things have gone badly with him in England. That is my story, and you can understand my fears. They need not influence you. Mine is an exceptional case."

"So is mine," said George, impatiently. "I tell you that mine is an exceptional case; although I swear to you that until this moment, I have never known a fear as to the result of my voyage home. But you are right; your terrors have nothing to do with me. You have been away fifteen years;



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George Hierlihy

all kind of things may happen in fifteen years. Now it is only three years and a half this month since I left England. What can have happened in such a short time as that?"

Miss Morley looked at him with a mournful smile, but did not speak. His feverish ardor, and freshness and impatience of his nature were so strange and new to her, that she looked at him half in admiration, half in pity.

"My pretty little wife! My gentle, innocent, loving little wife! Do you know, Miss Morley," he said, with all his old hopefulness of manner, "that I left my little girl asleep, with her baby in her arms, and with a few blot lines to tell her why her faithful husband had deserted her?"

"Deserted her!" exclaimed the governess.

"Yes, I was an ensign in a cavalry regiment when I first met my little darling. We were quartered at a stupid seaport town, where my pet lived with her shabby old father, a half pay naval officer, a regular old humbug, as poor as Job, and with a love for nothing but the main chance. I saw through all his shallow tricks to catch one of us for his pretty daughter. I saw all the pitiable, contemptible, palpable traps he set for us dragons to walk into. I saw through his shabby-genteel dinners and public-house port; his fine talk of the grandeur of his family; his sham pride and independence, and the sham tears of his bleared old eyes when he talked of his only child. He was a drunken old hypocrite, and he was ready to sell my poor little girl to the highest bidder. Luckily for me, I happened just then to be the highest bidder; for my father is a rich man, Miss Morley, and it was love at first sight on both sides, my darling and I made a match of it. No sooner however, did my father hear that I had married a penniless little girl, the daughter of a tipsy old half-pay lieutenant, than he wrote me a furious letter, telling me he would never again hold any communication with me, and that my yearly allowance would stop from my wedding day.

"As there was no remaining in such a regiment as mine, with nothing but my pay to live on, and my pretty little wife to keep, I sold out, thinking that before the money was exhausted, I should be sure to drop into something. I took my darling to Italy, and we lived there in splendid style as long as my two thousand pounds lasted; but when that began to dwindle down to a couple of hundred or so, we came back to England, and as my darling had a fancy for being near that tiresome old father of hers, we settled at the watering-place where he lived. Well, as soon as the old man heard that I had a couple of hundred pounds left, he expressed a wonderful degree of affection for us, and insisted on our board in his house. We consented, still to please my darling, who had just then a peculiar right to have every whim and fancy of her innocent heart indulged.

We did board with him, and finally he flattered us, but when I spoke of it to my little wife she ignored it and only shrugged her shoulders, and said she did not like to be unkind to her poor papa. So poor papa made away with our little stock of money in no time; and as I felt that it was now becoming necessary to look out for something, I ran up to London and tried to get a situation as a clerk in a merchant's office, or as accountant, or book-keeper, or something of that kind. But I suppose there was the stamp of a heavy dragon about me, for do what I would I could not get anybody to believe in my capacity; and tired out, and downhearted, I returned to my darling, to find her nursing a son and heir to his father's poverty.

(To be continued.)

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