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**LUCY GRAHAM'S
 SECRET**

(Continued.)

If there were any selfish feelings displayed in such speeches as these, George Talboys had never discovered it. He had loved and believed in his wife from the first to the last hour of his brief married life. The love that is not blind is perhaps only a spurious divinity after all; for when Cupid takes the fillet from his eyes it is a fatally certain indication that he is preparing to spread his wings for a flight. George never forgot the hour in which he had first become bewitched by Lieutenant Maldon's pretty daughter, and how ever she might have changed, the image which had charmed him then, unchanged and unchanging, represented her in his heart.

Robert Audley left Southampton by a train which started before day-break, and reached Wareham station early in the day. He hired a vehicle at Wareham to take him over to Grange Heath.

The snow had hardened upon the ground, and the day was clear and frosty, every object in the landscape standing in sharp outline against the cold blue sky. The horses' hoofs clattered upon the ice-bound road, the iron shoes striking on the ground that was almost as iron as themselves. The wintry day bore some resemblance to the man to whom Robert was going. Like him, it was sharp, frigid, and uncompromising; like him, it was merciless to distress and impregnable to the softening power of sunshine.

It would accept no sunshine but such January radiance as would light up the bleak, bare country without brightening it; and thus resembled Harcourt Talboys, who took the sternest side of every truth, and declared loudly to the disbelieving world that there never had been and never could be any other side.

Robert Audley's heart sunk within him as the shabby hired vehicle stopped at a stern-looking barred fence, and the driver dismounted to open a broad iron gate which swung back with a clanking noise and was caught by a great iron tooth, planted in the ground, which snapped at the lowest bar of the gate as if it wanted to bite.

This iron gate opened into a scanty plantation of straight-limbed fir-trees, that grew in rows and shook their sturdy winter foliage defiantly in the very teeth of the frosty breeze. A straight, graveled carriage drive ran between these straight trees across a smoothly kept lawn to a square red-brick mansion, every window of which winked and glittered in the January sunlight as if it had been that moment cleaned by some indefatigable housemaid.

I don't know whether Junius Brutus was a nuisance in his own house, but among other of his Roman virtues, Mr. Talboys owned an extreme aversion to disorder, and was the terror of every domestic in his establishment.

The windows winked and the flight of stone steps glared in the sunlight, the prim garden walks were so freshly graveled that they gave a sandy, gingery aspect to the place, reminding

ing one unpleasantly of red hair. The lawn was chiefly ornamented with dark, wintry shrubs of a funeral aspect which grew in beds that looked like problems in algebra; and the flight of stone steps leading to the square half-glass door of the hall was adorned with dark-green wooden tubs containing the same sturdy evergreens.

"If the man is anything like his house," Robert thought, "I don't wonder that poor George and he parted."

At the end of a scanty avenue the carriage-drive turned a sharp corner (it would have been made to describe a curve in any other man's grounds) and ran before the liver windows of the house. The flyman dismounted at the steps, ascended them, and rang a brass-handled bell, which flew back to its socket, with an angry metallic snap, as if it had been insulted by the plebeian touch of the man's hand.

A man in black trousers and a striped linen jacket, which was evidently fresh from the hands of the laundress, opened the door. Mr. Talboys was at home. Would the gentleman send in his card?

Robert waited in the hall while his card was taken to the master of the house.

The hall was large and lofty, paved with stone. The panels of the oaken wainscot shone with the same uncompromising polish which was on every object within and without the red-bricked mansion.

Some people are so weak-minded as to affect pictures and statues. Mr. Harcourt Talboys was far too practical to indulge in any foolish fancies. A barometer and an umbrella-stand were the only adornments of his entrance-hall.

Robert Audley looked at these while his name was being submitted to George's father.

The linen-jacketed servant returned presently. He was a square, pale faced man of almost forty, and had the appearance of having outlived every emotion to which humanity is subject.

"If you will step this way, sir," he said, "Mr. Talboys will see you, although he is at breakfast. He begged me to state that everybody in Dorsetshire was acquainted with his breakfast hour."

This was intended as a stately reproof to Mr. Robert Audley. It had, however, very small effect upon the young barrister. He merely lifted his eyebrows in placid deprecation of himself and everybody else.

"I don't belong to Dorsetshire," he said. "Mr. Talboys might have known that, if he'd done me the honor to exercise his powers of ratiocination. Drive on, my friend."

The emotionless man looked at Robert Audley with a vacant stare of unmitigated horror, and opening one of the heavy oak doors, led the way into a large dining-room furnished with the severe simplicity of an apartment which is meant to be ate in, but never lived in; and at top of a table which would have accommodated eighteen persons Robert beheld Mr. Harcourt Talboys.

Mr. Talboys was robed in a dressing-gown of gray cloth, fastened about his waist with a girdle. It was a severe looking garment, and was perhaps the nearest approach to the toga to be obtained within the range of modern costume. He wore a buff waistcoat, a stiffly starched cambric cravat, and a fullness shirt collar. The cold gray of his dressing-gown was almost the same as the cold gray of his eyes, and the pale buff of his waistcoat was the pale buff of his complexion.

Robert Audley had not expected to find Harcourt Talboys at all like George in his manners or disposition, but he had expected to see some family likeness between the father and the son. There was none. It would have been impossible to imagine any one more unlike George than the author of his existence. Robert scarcely wondered at the cruel letter he received from Mr. Talboys when he saw the writer of it. Such a man could scarcely have written otherwise.

There was a second person in the large room, toward whom Robert glanced after saluting Harcourt Talboys, doubtful how to proceed. This second person was a lady, who sat at the last of a range of four windows, employed with some needlework, the kind of which is generally called plain work, and with a large wicker basket filled with calicoes and flannels, standing by her.

The whole length of the room divided this lady from Robert, but he could see that she was young, and that she was like George Talboys.

"His sister!" he thought in that one moment, during which he ventured

to glance away from the master of the house toward the female figure at the window. "His sister, no doubt. He was fond of her, I know. Surely, she is not utterly indifferent as to his fate?"

The lady half rose from her seat, letting her work, which was large and awkward, fall from her lap as she did so, and dropping a reel of cotton, which rolled away upon the polished oaken flooring beyond the margin of the Turkey carpet.

"Sit down, Clara," said the hard voice of Mr. Talboys.

That gentleman did not appear to address his daughter, nor had his face been turned toward her when she rose. It seemed as if he had known it by some social magnetism peculiar to himself; it seemed, as his servants were apt disrespectfully to observe, as if he had eyes in the back of his head.

"Sit down, Clara," he repeated, "and keep the cotton in your workbox."

The lady blushed at this reproof, and stooped to look for the cotton. Mr. Robert Audley, who was unshaken by the stern presence of the master of the house, knelt on the carpet, found the reel, and restored it to its owner; Harcourt Talboys staring at the proceeding with an expression of unmitigated astonishment.

"Perhaps, Mr.—, Mr. Robert Audley!" he said, looking at the card which he held between his finger and thumb, "perhaps when you have finished looking for reels of cotton, you will be good enough to tell me to what I owe the honor of this visit?"

He waved his well-shaped hand with a gesture which might have been admired in the stately John Kemble; and the servant, understanding the gesture, brought forward a ponderous red-morocco chair.

The proceeding was so slow and solemn, that Robert had at first thought that something extraordinary was about to be done; but the truth dawned upon him at last, and he dropped into the massive chair.

"You may remain, Wilson," said Mr. Talboys, as the servant was about to withdraw; "Mr. Audley would perhaps like coffee."

Robert had eaten nothing that morning, but he glanced at the long expanse of dreary table-cloth, the silver tea and coffee equipage, the stiff splendor, and the very little appearance of any substantial entertainment, and he declined Mr. Talboys' invitation.

"Mr. Audley will not take coffee, Wilson," said the master of the house. "You may go."

The man bowed and retired, opening and shutting the door as cautiously as if he were taking a liberty in doing it at all, or as if the respect due to Mr. Talboys demanded his walking straight through the oaken panel like a ghost in a German story.

Mr. Harcourt Talboys sat with his gray eyes fixed severely on his visitor, his elbows on the red-morocco arms of his chair, and his finger tips joined. It was the attitude in which, had he been Junius Brutus, he would have sat at the trial of his son. Had Robert Audley been easily embarrassed, Mr. Talboys might have succeeded in making him feel so; as he would have sat with perfect tranquillity upon an open gunpowder barrel lighting his cigar, he was not at all disturbed upon this occasion.

The father's dignity seemed a very small thing to him when he thought of the possible causes of the son's disappearance.

"I wrote to you some time since, Mr. Talboys," he said quietly, when he saw that he was expected to open the conversation.

Harcourt Talboys bowed. He knew that it was of his lost son that Robert came to speak. Heaven grant that his icy stoicism was the paltry affection of a vain man, rather than the utter heartlessness which Robert thought it. He bowed across his finger-tips at his visitor. The trial had begun, and Junius Brutus was enjoying himself.

"I received your communication, Mr. Audley," he said. "It is among other business letters: it was duly answered."

"That letter concerned your son." There was a little rustling noise at the window where the lady sat, as Robert said this; he looked at her almost instantaneously, but she did not seem to have stirred. She was not working, but she was perfectly quiet.

"She's as heartless as her father, I expect, though she is like George," thought Mr. Audley.

(To be continued.)

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The attention of Owners and Masters of British Ships is called to the 74th Section of the "Merchant Shipping Act, 1894."

75.—(1) A Ship belonging to a British Subject shall hoist the proper national colors—
 (a) on a signal made to her by one of His Majesty's ships, including any vessel under the command of an officer of His Majesty's navy or full pay, and
 (b) on entering or leaving any foreign port and
 (c) if of fifty tons gross tonnage or upwards, on entering or leaving any British Port.

(2) If default is made on board any ship in complying with this section the master of the ship shall for each offence be liable to a fine not exceeding one hundred pounds.

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