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April 19, 23



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LUCY GRAHAM'S SECRET

(Cont. from p. 1)

He drew a long breath—a sigh of relief at his release. It was all over now.

The fly was crawling out of the gate of the plantation as he thought this, and he stood up in the vehicle to look back at the dreary fir-trees, the gravel paths, the smooth grass, and the great desolate-looking, red-brick mansion.

He was startled by the appearance of a woman running, almost flying along the carriage-drive by which he had come, and waving a handkerchief in her uplifted hand.

He stared at this singular apparition for some moments in silent wonder before he was able to reduce his stupefaction into words. 'Is it me the flying female wants?' he exclaimed, at last. 'You'd better stop perhaps,' he added to the flyman. 'It is an age of eccentricity an abnormal era of the world's history. She may want me. Very likely I left my pocket-handkerchief behind me, and Mr. Talboys has sent this person with it. Perhaps I'd better get out and go and meet her. It's civil to send my handkerchief.'

Mr. Robert Audley deliberately descended from the fly and walked slowly toward the hurrying female figure, which gained upon him rapidly.

He was rather short-sighted, and it was not until she came very near to him that he saw who she was. 'Good Heaven!' he exclaimed, 'it's Miss Talboys.'

It was Miss Talboys, flushed and breathless, with a woollen shawl thrown over her head.

Robert Audley now saw her face clearly for the first time, and he saw that she was very handsome. She had brown eyes, like George's, a pale complexion (she had been flushed when she approached him, but the color faded away as she recovered her breath), regular features with a mobility of expression which bore record of every change of feeling. He saw all this in a few moments, and he wondered only the more at the stoicism of her manner during his interview with Mr. Talboys. There were no tears in her eyes, but they were bright with a feverish luster—terribly bright and dry—and he could see that her lips trembled as she spoke to him.

'Miss Talboys,' he said, 'what can I—why—'

She interrupted him suddenly, catching at his wrist with her disengaged hand—she was holding her shawl in the other. 'Oh, let me speak to you,' she cried—'let me speak to you, or I shall go mad. I heard it all. I believe what you believe, and I shall go mad unless I can do something—something toward avenging his death.'

For a few moments Robert Audley was too much bewildered to answer her. Of all things possible upon earth he had least expected to behold her thus.

'Take my arm, Miss Talboys,' he said. 'Pray calm yourself. Let us walk a little way back toward the house, and talk quietly. I would not

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THE GUARDIAN OFFICE
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so? Yes or no?
 'What if I answer no?'
 'Then I will do it myself,' she exclaimed, looking at him with her bright brown eyes. 'I myself will follow up the clew to this mystery; I will find this woman—though you refuse to tell me in that part of England my brother disappeared. I will travel from one end of the world to the other to find the secret of his fate, if you refuse to find it for me. I am of age; my own mistress; rich; for I have money left me by one of my aunts; I shall be able to employ those who will help me in my search and I will make it to their interest to serve me well. Choose between the two alternatives, Mr. Audley. Shall you or I find my brother's murderer?'
 He looked in her face, and saw that her resolution was the fruit of no transient womanish enthusiasm which would give way under the iron hand of difficulty. Her beautiful features, naturally statuesque in their noble outlines, seemed transformed into marble by the rigidity of her expression. The face in which he looked was the face of a woman whom death only could turn from her purpose.

'I have grown up in an atmosphere of suppression,' she said, quietly; 'I have stifled and dwarfed the natural feelings of my heart, until they have become unnatural in their intensity; I have been allowed neither friends nor lovers. My mother died when I was very young. My father has always been to me what you saw him to-day. I have had no one but my mother. All the love that my heart can hold has been centred upon him. Do you wonder then, that when I hear that his young life has been ended by the hand of treachery that I wish to see vengeance done upon the traitor? Oh, my God,' she cried, suddenly clasping her hands, and looking up at the cold winter sky, 'lead me to the murderer of my brother, and let mine be the hand to avenge his untimely death.'

Robert Audley stood looking at her with awe-stricken admiration. Her beauty was elevated into sublimity by the intensity of her suppressed passion. She was different to all other women that he had ever seen. His cousin was pretty, his uncle's wife was lovely, but Clara Talboys was beautiful. Niobe's face, sublimated by sorrow, could scarcely have been more purely classical than hers. Even her dress, puritan in its gray simplicity, became her beauty better than a more beautiful dress would have become a less beautiful woman.

'Miss Talboys,' said Robert, after a pause, 'your brother shall not be avenged. He shall not be forgotten. I do not think that any professional aid which you could procure would lead you as surely to the secret of this mystery as I can lead you, if you are patient and trust me. I will trust you,' she answered, 'for I see that you will help me.' 'I believe that it is my destiny to do so,' he said solemnly.

In the whole course of his conversation with Harcourt Talboys, Robert Audley had carefully avoided making any deductions from the circumstances which he had submitted to George's father. He had simply told the story of the missing man's life, from the hour of his arriving in London to that of his disappearance; but he saw that Clara Talboys had arrived at the same conclusion as himself, and that it was tacitly understood between them. 'Have you any letters of your brother's Miss Talboys?' he asked. 'Two. One written soon after his marriage, the other written at Liverpool, the night before he sailed for Australia.'

'Will you let me see them?' 'Yes, I will send them to you if you will give me your address. You will write to me from time to time, will you not, to tell me whether you are approaching the truth. I shall be obliged to act secretly here, but I am going to leave home in two or three months, and I shall be perfectly free then to act as I please.'

'You are not going to leave England?' Robert asked. 'Oh no! I am only going to pay a long promised visit to some friends in Essex.' Robert started so violently as Clara Talboys said this, that she looked suddenly at his face. The agitation visible there, betrayed a part of his secret. 'My brother George disappeared in Essex,' she said. 'He could not contradict her. 'I am sorry you have discovered so much,' he replied. 'My position becomes every day more complicated—every day more painful. Good-bye.' (To be continued)

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To Owners and Masters of British Ships

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.
 At time of war it is necessary for every British Ship to hoist the colours and heave to if signalled by a British Warship; if a vessel hoists no colours and runs away, it is liable to be fired upon.
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