

CHAPTER THE THIRTY-FIFTH

Lucilla tries her Sight

SHE was sitting alone in the dim light, with the bandage over her eyes, with her pretty hands crossed patiently on her lap. My heart swelled in me as I looked at her, and felt the horrid discovery that I had made still present in my mind. "Forgive me for leaving you," I said in as steady a voice as I could command at the moment--and kissed her.

She instantly discovered my agitation, carefully as I thought I had concealed it.

"You are frightened too!" she exclaimed, taking my hands in hers.

"Frightened, my love?" I repeated. (I was perfectly stupefied; I really did not know what to say!)

"Yes. Now the time is so near, I feel my courage failing me. I forbode all sorts of horrible things. Oh! when will it be over? what will Oscar look like when I see him?"

I answered the first question. Who could answer the second?

"Herr Grosse comes to us by the morning train," I said. "It will soon be over."

"Where is Oscar?"

"On his way here, I have no doubt."

"Describe him to me once more," she said eagerly. "For the last time, before I see. His eyes, his hair, his complexion--everything!"

How I should have got through the painful task which she had innocently imposed on me, if I had attempted to perform it, I hardly like to think. To my infinite relief, I was interrupted at my first word by the opening of the door, and the sudden appearance of a family deputation in the room.

First, strutting with slow and solemn steps, with one hand laid pathetically on the breast of his clerical waistcoat, appeared Reverend Finch. After him, came his wife, shorn of all her proper accompaniments--except the baby.

Without her novel, without her jacket, petticoat, or shawl, without even the handkerchief which she was always losing--clothed, for the first time in my experience, in a complete gown--the metamorphosis of damp Mrs. Finch was complete. But for the baby, I believe I should have taken her, in the dim light, for a stranger! She stood (apparently doubtful of her reception) hesitating in the doorway, and so hiding a third member of the deputation--who appealed piteously to the general notice in a small voice which I knew well, and in a form of address familiar to me from past experience.

"Jicks wants to come in."

The rector took his hand from his waistcoat, and held it up in faint protest against the intrusion of the third member. Mrs. Finch moved mechanically into the room. Jicks appeared, hugging her disreputable doll, and showing signs of recent wandering in the white dust which dropped on the carpet from her frock and her shoes, as she advanced towards the place in which I was sitting. Arrived in front of me, she peered quaintly up at my face, through the obscurity of the room; lifted her doll by the legs; hit me a smart rap with the head of it on my knee; and said--

"Jicks will sit here."

I rubbed my knee, and enthroned Jicks as ordered. At the same time Mr. Finch solemnly stalked up to his daughter; laid his hands on her head; raised his eyes to the ceiling; and said in bass notes that rumbled with paternal emotion, "Bless you, my child!"

At the sound of her husband's magnificent voice, Mrs. Finch became herself again. She said meekly, "How d'ye do, Lucilla?"--and sat down in a corner, and suckled the baby.

Mr. Finch set in for one of his harangues.

"My advice has been neglected, Lucilla. My paternal influence has been repudiated. My Moral Weight has been, so to speak, set aside. I don't complain. Understand me--I simply state sad facts." (Here he became aware of my existence.) "Good morning, Madame Pratolungo; I hope I see you well?--There has been variance between us, Lucilla. I come, my child, with healing on my wings (healing being understood, for present purposes, as reconciliation)--I come, and bring Mrs. Finch with me--don't speak, Mrs. Finch!--to offer my heartfelt wishes, my fervent prayers, on this the most eventful day in my daughter's life. No vulgar curiosity has turned my steps this way. No hint shall escape my lips, touching any misgivings which I may

still feel as to this purely worldly interference with the ways of an inscrutable Providence. I am here as parent and peacemaker. My wife accompanies me--don't speak, Mrs. Finch!--as step-parent and step-peacemaker. (You understand the distinction, Madame Pratolungo? Thank you. Good creature.) Shall I preach forgiveness of injuries from the pulpit, and not practice that forgiveness at home? Can I remain, on this momentous occasion, at variance with my child? Lucilla! I forgive you. With full heart and tearful eyes, I forgive you. (You have never had any children, I believe, Madame Pratolungo? Ah! you cannot possibly understand this. Not your fault. Good creature. Not your fault.) The kiss of peace, my child; the kiss of peace." He solemnly bent his bristly head, and deposited the kiss of peace on Lucilla's forehead. He sighed superbly, and in a burst of magnanimity, held out his hand next to me. "My Hand, Madame Pratolungo. Compose yourself. Don't cry. God bless you. Mrs. Finch, deeply affected by her husband's noble conduct, began to sob hysterically. The baby, disarranged in his proceedings by the emotions of his mama, set up a sympathetic scream. Mr. Finch crossed the room to them, with domestic healing on his wings. "This does you credit, Mrs. Finch; but, under the circumstances, it must not be continued. Control yourself, in consideration of the infant. Mysterious mechanism of Nature!" cried the rector, raising his prodigious voice over the louder and louder screeching of the baby. "Marvelous and beautiful sympathy which makes the maternal sustenance the conducting medium, as it were, of disturbance between the mother and child. What problems confront us, what forces environ us, even in this mortal life! Nature! Maternity! Inscrutable Providence!"

"Inscrutable Providence" was the rector's fatal phrase--it always brought with it an interruption; and it brought one now. Before Mr. Finch (brimful of pathetic apostrophes) could burst into more exclamations, the door opened, and Oscar walked into the room.

Lucilla instantly recognized his footstep.

"Any signs, Oscar, of Herr Grosse?" she asked.

"Yes. His chaise has been seen on the road. He will be here directly."

Giving that answer, and passing by my chair to place himself on the other side of Lucilla, Oscar cast at me one imploring look--a look which said plainly, "Don't desert me when the time comes!" I nodded my head to show that I understood him and felt for him. He sat down in the vacant chair by Lucilla, and took her hand in silence. It was hard to say which of the two felt the position, at that trying moment, most painfully. I don't think I ever saw

any sight so simply and irresistibly touching as the sight of those two poor young creatures sitting hand in hand, waiting the event which was to make the happiness or the misery of their future lives.

"Have you seen anything of your brother?" I asked, putting the question in as careless a tone as my devouring anxiety would allow me to assume.

"Nugent has gone to meet Herr Grosse."

Oscar's eyes once more encountered mine, as he replied in those terms; I saw again the imploring look more marked in them than ever. It was plain to him, as it was plain to me, that Nugent had gone to meet the German, with the purpose of making Herr Grosse the innocent means of bringing him into the house.

Before I could speak again, Mr. Finch, recovering himself after the interruption which had silenced him, saw his opportunity of setting in for another harangue. Mrs. Finch had left off sobbing; the baby had left off screaming; the rest of us were silent and nervous. In a word, Mr. Finch's domestic congregation was entirely at Mr. Finch's mercy. He strutted up to Oscar's chair. Was he going to propose to read Hamlet? No! He was going to invoke a blessing on Oscar's head.

"On this interesting occasion," began the rector in his pulpit tones; "now that we are all united in the same room, all animated by the same hope--I could wish, as pastor and parent (God bless you, Oscar: I look on you as a son. Mrs. Finch, follow my example, look on him as a son!)--I could wish, as pastor and parent, to say a few pious and consoling words----"

The door--the friendly, admirable, judicious door--stopped the coming sermon, in the nick of time, by opening again. Herr Grosse's squat figure and owlsh spectacles appeared on the threshold. And behind him (exactly as I had anticipated) stood Nugent Dubourg.

Lucilla turned deadly pale: she had heard the door open, she knew by instinct that the surgeon had come. Oscar got up, stole behind my chair, and whispered to me, "For God's sake, get Nugent out of the room!" I gave him a reassuring squeeze of the hand, and, putting Jicks down on the floor, rose to welcome our good Grosse.

The child, as it happened, was beforehand with me. She and the illustrious oculist had met in the garden at one of the German's professional visits to Lucilla, and had taken an amazing fancy to each other. Herr Grosse never

afterwards appeared at the rectory without some unwholesome eatable thing in his pocket for Jicks; who gave him in return as many kisses as he might ask for, and further distinguished him as the only living creature whom she permitted to nurse the disreputable doll. Grasping this same doll now, with both hands, and using it head-foremost, as a kind of battering-ram, Jicks plunged in front of me, and butted with all her might at the surgeon's bandy legs; insisting on a monopoly of his attention before he presumed to speak to any other person in the room. While he was lifting her to a level with his face, and talking to her in his wonderful broken English--while the rector and Mrs. Finch were making the necessary apologies for the child's conduct--Nugent came round from behind Herr Grosse, and drew me mysteriously into a corner of the room. As I followed him, I saw the silent torture of anxiety expressed in Oscar's face as he stood by Lucilla's chair. It did me good; it strung up my resolution to the right pitch; it made me feel myself a match, and more than a match, for Nugent Dubourg.

"I am afraid I behaved in a very odd manner, when we met in the village?" he said. "The fact is, I am not at all well. I have been in a strange feverish state lately. I don't think the air of this place suits me." There he stopped; keeping his eyes steadily fixed on mine, trying to read my mind in my face.

"I am not surprised to hear you say that," I answered. "I have noticed that you have not been looking well lately."

My tone and manner (otherwise perfectly composed) expressed polite sympathy--and nothing more. I saw I puzzled him. He tried again.

"I hope I didn't say or do anything rude?" he went on.

"Oh, no!"

"I was excited--painfully excited. You are too kind to admit it; I am sure I owe you my apologies?"

"No, indeed! you were certainly excited, as you say. But we are all in the same state to-day. The occasion, Mr. Nugent, is your sufficient apology."

Not the slightest sign in my face of any sort of suspicion of him rewarded the close and continued scrutiny with which he regarded me. I saw in his perplexed expression, the certain assurance that I was beating him at his own weapons. He made a last effort to entrap me into revealing that I suspected his secret--he attempted, by irritating my quick temper, to take me by surprise.

"You are no doubt astonished at seeing me here," he resumed. "I have not forgotten that I promised to remain at Browndown instead of coming to the rectory. Don't be angry with me: I am under medical orders which forbid me to keep my promise."

"I don't understand you," I said just as coolly as ever.

"I will explain myself," he rejoined. "You remember that we long since took Grosse into our confidence, on the subject of Oscar's position towards Lucilla?"

"I am not likely to have forgotten it," I answered, "considering that it was I who first warned your brother that Herr Grosse might do terrible mischief by innocently letting out the truth."

"Do you recollect how Grosse took the warning when we gave it to him?"

"Perfectly. He promised to be careful. But, at the same time, he gruffly forbade us to involve him in any more of our family troubles. He said he was determined to preserve his professional freedom of action, without being hampered by domestic difficulties which might concern us, but which did not concern him. Is my memory accurate enough to satisfy you?"

"Your memory is wonderful. You will now understand me when I tell you that Grosse asserts his professional freedom of action on this occasion. I had it from his own lips on our way here. He considers it very important that Lucilla should not be frightened at the moment when she tries her sight. Oscar's face is sure to startle her, if it is the first face she sees. Grosse has accordingly requested me to be present (as the only other young man in the room), and to place myself so that I shall be the first person who attracts her notice. Ask him yourself, Madame Pratolungo, if you don't believe me."

"Of course I believe you!" I answered. "It is useless to dispute the surgeon's orders at such a time as this."

With that, I left him; showing just as much annoyance as an unsuspecting woman, in my position, might have naturally betrayed--and no more. Knowing, as I did, what was going on under the surface, I understood only too plainly what had happened. Nugent had caught at the opportunity which the surgeon had innocently offered to him, as a means of misleading Lucilla at the moment, and (possibly) of taking some base advantage of her afterwards. I trembled inwardly with rage and fear, as I turned my back on

him. Our one chance was to make sure of his absence, at the critical moment--and, cudgel my brains as I might, how to reach that end successfully was more than I could see.

When I returned to the other persons in the room, Oscar and Lucilla were still occupying the same positions. Mr. Finch had presented himself (at full length) to Herr Grosse. And Jicks was established on a stool in a corner: devouring a rampant horse, carved in bilious-yellow German gingerbread, with a voracious relish wonderful and terrible to see.

"Ah, my goot Madame Pratulungo!" said Herr Grosse, stopping on his way to Lucilla to shake hands with me. "Have you made anodder lofely Mayonnaise? I have come on purpose with an empty-stomachs, and a wolf's-appetite in fine order. Look at that little Imps," he went on, pointing to Jicks. "Ach Gott! I believe I am in lofe with her. I have sent all the ways to Germany for gingerbreads for Jick. Aha, you Jick! does it stick in your tooth? Is it nice-clammy-sweet?" He glared benevolently at the child through his spectacles; and tucked my hand sentimentally into the breast of his waistcoat. "Promise me a child like adorable Jick," he said solemnly, "I will marry the first wife you bring me--nice womans, nasty womans, I don't care which. Soh! there is my domestic sentiments laid bare before you. Enough of that. Now for my pretty-Feench! Come-begin-begin!"

He crossed the room to Lucilla, and called to Nugent to follow him.

"Open the shutters," he said. "Light-light-light, and plenty of him, for my lofely Feench!"

Nugent opened the shutters, beginning with the lower window, and ending with the window at which Lucilla was sitting. Acting on this plan, he had only to wait where he was, to place himself close by her--to be the first object she saw. He did it. The villain did it. I stepped forward, determined to interfere--and stopped, not knowing what to say or do. I could have beaten my own stupid brains out against the wall. There stood Nugent right before her, as the surgeon turned his patient towards the window. And not the ghost of an idea came to me!

The German stretched out his hairy hands, and took hold of the knot of the bandage to undo it.

Lucilla trembled from head to foot.

Herr Grosse hesitated--looked at her--let go of the bandage--and lifting one of

her hands, laid his fingers on her pulse.

In the moment of silence that followed, I had one of my inspirations. The missing idea turned up in my brains at last.

"Soh!" cried Grosse, dropping her hand with a sudden outbreak of annoyance and surprise. "Who has been frightening my pretty Feench? Why these cold trembles? these sinking pulses? Some of you tell me--what does it mean?"

Here was my opportunity! I tried my idea on the spot.

"It means," I said, "that there are too many people in this room. We confuse her, and frighten her. Take her into her bedroom, Herr Grosse; and only let the rest of us in, when you think right--one at a time."

Our excellent surgeon instantly seized on my idea, and made it his own.

"You are a phenix among womens," he said, paternally patting me on the shoulder. "Which is most perfectest, your advice or your Mayonnaise, I am at a loss to know." He turned to Lucilla, and raised her gently from her chair. "Come into your own rooms with me, my poor little Feench. I shall see if I dare take off your bandages to-day."

Lucilla clasped her hands entreatingly.

"You promised!" she said. "Oh, Herr Grosse, you promised to let me use my eyes to-day!"

"Answer me this!" retorted the German. "Did I know, when I promised, that I should find you all shaky-pale, as white as my shirts when he comes back from the wash?"

"I am quite myself again," she pleaded faintly. "I am quite fit to have the bandage taken off."

"What! you know better than I do? Which of us is surgeon-optic--you or me? No more of this. Come under my arms! Come into the odder rooms!"

He put her arm in his, and walked with her to the door. There, her variable humour suddenly changed. She rallied on the instant. Her face flushed; her courage came back. To my horror, she snatched her arm away from the surgeon, and refused to leave the room.

"No!" she said. "I am quite composed again; I claim your promise. Examine me here. I must and will have my first look at Oscar in this room."

(I was afraid--literally afraid--to turn my eyes Oscar's way. I glanced at Nugent instead. There was a devilish smile on his face that it nearly drove me mad to see.)

"You must and weel?" repeated Grosse. "Now, mind!" He took out his watch. "I give you one little minutes, to think in. If you don't come with me in that time, you shall find it is I who must and weel. Now!"

"Why do you object to go into your room?" I asked.

"Because I want everybody to see me," she answered. "How many of you are there here?"

"There are five of us. Mr. and Mrs. Finch; Mr. Nugent Dubourg; Oscar, and myself."

"I wish there were five hundred of you, instead of five?" she burst out.

"Why?"

"Because you would see me pick out Oscar from all the rest, the instant the bandage was off my eyes!"

Still holding to her own fatal conviction that the image in her mind of Oscar was the right one! For the second time, though I felt the longing in me to look at him, I shrank from doing it.

Herr Grosse put his watch back in his pocket.

"The minutes is passed," he said. "Will you come into the odder rooms? Will you understand that I cannot properly examine you before all these peoples? Say, my lofely Feench--Yes? or No?"

"No!" she cried obstinately, with a childish stamp of her foot. "I insist on showing everybody that I can pick out Oscar, the moment I open my eyes."

Herr Grosse buttoned his coat, settled his owlsh spectacles firmly on his nose, and took up his hat. "Goot morning," he said. "I have nothing more to do with you or your eyes. Cure yourself, you little-spitfire-Feench. I am going

back to London."

He opened the door. Even Lucilla was obliged to yield, when the surgeon in attendance on her threatened to throw up the case.

"You brute!" she said indignantly--and took his arm again.

Grosse indulged himself in his diabolical grin. "Wait till you are able to use your eyes, my lofe. Then you will see what a brutes I am!" With those words he took her out.

We were left in the sitting-room, to wait until the surgeon had decided whether he would, or would not, let Lucilla try her sight on that day.

While the others were, in their various ways, all suffering the same uneasy sense of expectation, I was as quiet in my mind as the baby now sleeping in his mother's arms. Thanks to Grosse's resolution to act on the hint that I had given to him, I had now made it impossible--even if the bandage was removed on that day--for Nugent to catch Lucilla's first look when she opened her eyes. Her betrothed husband might certainly, on such a special occasion as this, be admitted into her bed-chamber, in company with her father or with me. But the commonest sense of propriety would dictate the closing of the door on Nugent. In the sitting-room he must wait (if he still persisted in remaining at the rectory) until she was allowed to join him there. I privately resolved, having the control of the matter in my own hands, that this should not happen until Lucilla knew which of the twins was Nugent, and which was Oscar. A delicious inward glow of triumph diffused itself all through me. I resisted the strong temptation that I felt to discover how Nugent bore his defeat. If I had yielded to it, he would have seen in my face that I gloried in having outwitted him. I sat down, the picture of innocence, in the nearest chair, and crossed my hands on my lap, a composed and ladylike person, edifying to see.

The slow minutes followed each other--and still we waited the event in silence. Even Mr. Finch's tongue was, on this solitary occasion, a tongue incapable of pronouncing a single word. He sat by his wife at one end of the room. Oscar and I were at the other. Nugent stood by himself at one of the windows, deep in his own thoughts, plotting how he could pay me out.

Oscar was the first of the party who broke the silence. After looking all round the room, he suddenly addressed himself to me.

"Madame Pratolungo!" he exclaimed. "What has become of Jicks?"

I had completely forgotten the child. I too looked round the room, and satisfied myself that she had really disappeared. Mrs. Finch, observing our astonishment, timidly enlightened us. The maternal eye had seen Jicks slip out cunningly at Herr Grosse's heels. The child's object was plain enough. While there was any probability of the presence of more gingerbread in the surgeon's pocket, the wandering Arab of the family (as stealthy and as quick as a cat) was certain to keep within reach of her friend. Nobody who knew her could doubt that she had stolen into Lucilla's bed-chamber, under cover of Herr Grosse's ample coat-tails.

We had just accounted in this way for the mysterious absence of Jicks, when we heard the bed-chamber door opened, and the surgeon's voice calling for Zillah. In a minute more the nurse appeared, the bearer of a message from the next room.

We all surrounded her, with one and the same question to ask. What had Herr Grosse decided to do? The answer informed us that he had decided on forbidding Lucilla to try her eyes that day.

"Is she very much disappointed?" Oscar inquired anxiously.

"I can hardly say, sir. She isn't like herself. I never knew Miss Lucilla so quiet when she was crossed in her wishes, before. When the doctor called me into the room, she said: 'Go in, Zillah, and tell them.' Those words, sir, and no more."

"Did she express no wish to see me?" I inquired.

"No, ma'am. I took the liberty of asking her if she wished to see you. Miss Lucilla shook her head, and sat herself down on the sofa, and made the doctor sit by her. 'Leave us by ourselves.' Those were the last words she said to me, before I came in here."

Reverend Finch put the next question. The Pope of Dimchurch was himself again: the man of many words saw his chance of speaking once more.

"Good woman," said the rector with ponderous politeness, "step this way. I wish to address an inquiry to you. Did Miss Finch make any remark, in your hearing, indicating a desire to be comforted by My Ministrations--as one bearing the double relation towards her of pastor and parent?"

"I didn't hear Miss Lucilla say anything to that effect, sir."

Mr. Finch waved his hand with a look of disgust, intimating that Zillah's audience was over. Nugent, upon that, came forward, and stopped her as she was leaving the room.

"Have you nothing more to tell us?" he asked.

"No, sir."

"Why don't they come back here? What are they doing in the other room?"

"They were doing what I mentioned just now, sir--they were sitting side by side on the sofa. Miss Lucilla was talking, and the doctor was listening to her. And Jicks," added Zillah, addressing herself confidentially to me, "was behind them, picking the doctor's pocket."

Oscar put in a word there--by no means in his most gracious manner.

"What was Miss Lucilla saying to the doctor?"

"I don't know, sir."

"You don't know?"

"I couldn't hear, sir. Miss Lucilla was speaking to him in a whisper."

After that, there was no more to be said. Zillah--disturbed over her domestic occupations and eager to get back to her kitchen--seized the first chance of leaving the room; going out in such a hurry that she forgot to close the door after her. We all looked at each other. To what conclusion did the nurse's strange answers point? It was plainly impossible for Oscar (no matter how quick his temper might be) to feel jealous of a man of Grosse's age and personal appearance. Still, the prolonged interview between patient and surgeon--after the decision had been pronounced and the trial of the eyes definitely deferred to a future day--had a strange appearance, to say the least of it.

Nugent returned to his place at the window--puzzled, suspicious, deep in his own thoughts. Reverend Finch, swelling with unspoken words, rose portentously from his chair by his wife's side. Had he discovered another chance of inflicting his eloquence on us? It was only too evident that he had! He looked at us with his ominous smile. He addressed us in his biggest voice.

"My Christian friends----"

Nugent, unassailable by eloquence, persisted in looking out of the window. Oscar, insensible to every earthly consideration except the one consideration of Lucilla, drew me aside unceremoniously out of the rector's hearing. Mr. Finch resumed.

"My Christian friends, I could wish to say a few appropriate words."

"Go to Lucilla!" whispered Oscar, taking me entreatingly by both hands. "You needn't stand on ceremony with her. Do, do see what is going on in the next room!"

Mr. Finch resumed.

"The occasion seems to call upon one in my position for a little sustaining advice on Christian duty--I would say, the duty of being cheerful under disappointment."

Oscar persisted.

"Do me the greatest of all favors! Pray find out what is keeping Lucilla with that man!"

Mr. Finch cleared his throat, and lifted his right hand persuasively by way of introduction to his next sentence.

I answered Oscar in a whisper.

"I don't like intruding on them. Lucilla told the nurse they were to be left by themselves."

Just as I said the words, I became aware of a sudden bump against me from behind. I turned, and discovered Jicks with the battering-ram-doll, preparing for a second plunge at me. She stopped, when she found that she had attracted my attention; and, taking hold of my dress, tried to pull me out of the room.

"Remove that child!" cried the rector, exasperated by this new interruption.

The child pulled harder and harder at my dress. Something had apparently happened outside the sitting-room which had produced a strong impression

on her. Her little round face was flushed; her bright blue eyes were wide open and staring. "Jicks wants to speak to you," she said--and pulled at me impatiently harder than ever.

I stooped down with the double purpose of obeying Mr. Finch's commands and of humouring the child's whim, by carrying Jicks out of the room, when I was startled by a sound from the bed-chamber--the sound, loud and peremptory, of Lucilla's voice.

"Let go of me!" she cried. "I am a woman--I won't be treated like a child."

There was a moment of silence--followed by the rustling sound of her dress, approaching us along the corridor.

Grosse's voice--unmistakably angry and excited--became audible at the same time. "No! Come back! come back!"

The rustling sound of the dress came nearer.

Nugent and Mr. Finch moved together closer to the door. Oscar caught me by the arm. He and I were on the left-hand side of the door: Nugent and the rector were on the right-hand side. It all happened with the suddenness of a flash of lightning. My heart stood still. I couldn't speak. I couldn't move.

The half-closed door of the sitting-room was burst wide open--roughly, violently, as if a man, not a woman, had been on the other side. (The rector drew back; Nugent remained where he was.) Wildly groping her way with outstretched arms, as I had never seen her grope it in the time of her blindness, Lucilla staggered into the room. Merciful God! the bandage was off. The life, the new life of sight, was in her eyes. It transfigured her face: it irradiated her beauty with an awful and unearthly light. She saw! she saw!

For an instant she stopped at the door, swaying to and fro; giddy under the broad stare of daylight.

She looked at the rector--then at Mrs. Finch, who had followed her husband. She paused bewildered, and put her hands over her eyes. She slightly changed her position; turned her head, as if to look at me; turned it back sharply towards the right-hand side of the door again; and threw up her arms in the air, with a burst of hysterical laughter. The laughter ended in a scream of triumph, which rang through the house. She rushed at Nugent Dubourg, so blindly incapable of measuring her distance that she struck against him violently, and nearly threw him down. "I know him! I

know him!" she cried--and flung her arms round his neck. "Oh, Oscar! Oscar!" She clasped him to her with all her strength as the name passed her lips, and dropped her head on his bosom in an ecstasy of joy.

It was done before any of us had recovered the use of our senses. The whole horrible scene must have begun and ended in less than half a minute of time. The surgeon, who had run into the room after her, empty-handed, turned suddenly, and left it again; coming back with the bandage, left forgotten in the bed-room. Grosse was the first among us to recover his presence of mind. He approached her in silence.

She heard him, before he could take her by surprise, and slip the bandage over her eyes. The moment when I turned, horror-struck, to look at Oscar, was also the moment when she lifted her head from Nugent's bosom to look for the surgeon. Her eyes followed the direction taken by mine. They encountered Oscar's face. She saw the blue-black hue of it in full light.

A cry of terror escaped her: she started back, shuddering, and caught hold of Nugent's arm. Grosse motioned sternly to him to turn her face from the window; and lifted the bandage. She clutched at it with feverish eagerness as he held it up. "Put it on again!" she said, holding by Nugent with one hand, and lifting the other to point towards Oscar with a gesture of disgust. "Put it on again. I have seen too much already."

Grosse fastened the bandage over her eyes, and waited a little. She still held Nugent's arm. The sting of my indignation as I saw it, roused me into doing something. I stepped forward to part them. Grosse stopped me. "No!" he said. "Don't make bad worse." I looked at Oscar for the second time. There he stood, as he had stood from the first moment when she appeared at the door--his eyes staring wildly straight before him; his limbs set and fixed. I went to him, and touched him. He seemed not to feel it. I spoke to him. I might as well have spoken to a man of stone.

Grosse's voice drew my attention, for a moment, the other way.

"Come!" he said, trying to take Lucilla back into her own room.

She shook her head, and tightened her hold on Nugent's arm.

"You take me," she whispered. "As far as the door."

I again attempted to stop it; and again the German put me back.

"Not to-day!" he said sternly. With that, he made a sign to Nugent, and placed himself on Lucilla's other side. In silence, the two men led her out of the room. The door closed on them. It was over.