

## CHAPTER THE FORTY-THIRD

Lucilla's Journal, continued

September 1st.

I AM composed enough to return to my Journal, and to let my mind dwell a little on all that I have thought and felt since Oscar has been here.

Now that I have lost Madame Pratolungo, I have no friend with whom I can talk over my little secrets. My aunt is all that is kind and good to me; but with a person so much older than I am--who has lived in such a different world from my world, and whose ideas seem to be so far away from mine--how can I talk about my follies and extravagances, and expect sympathy in return! My one confidential friend is my Journal--I can only talk about myself to myself, in these pages. My position feels sometimes like a very lonely one. I saw two girls telling all their secrets to each other on the sands to-day--and I am afraid I envied them.

Well, my dear Journal, how did I feel--after longing for Oscar--when Oscar came to me? It is dreadful to own it; but my book locks up, and my book can be trusted with the truth. I felt ready to cry--I was so unexpectedly, so horribly, disappointed.

No. "Disappointed" is not the word. I can't find the word. There was a moment--I hardly dare write it: it seems so atrociously wicked--there was a moment when I actually wished myself blind again.

He took me in his arms; he held my hand in his. In the time when I was blind, how I should have felt it! how the delicious tingle would have run through me when he touched me! Nothing of the kind happened now. He might have been Oscar's brother for all the effect he produced on me. I have myself taken his hand since, and shut my eyes to try and renew my blindness, and put myself back completely as I was in the old time. The same result still. Nothing, nothing, nothing!

Is it that he is a little restrained with me on his side? He certainly is! I felt it the moment he came into the room--I have felt it ever since.

No: it is not that. In the old time, when we were only beginning to love each other, he was restrained with me. But it made no difference then. I was not

the insensible creature in those days that I have become since.

I can only account for it in one way. The restoration of my sight has made a new creature of me. I have gained a sense--I am no longer the same woman. This great change must have had some influence over me that I never suspected until Oscar came here. Can the loss of my sense of feeling be the price that I have paid for the recovery of my sense of sight?

When Grosse comes next, I shall put that question to him.

In the meanwhile, I have had a second disappointment. He is not nearly so beautiful as I thought he was when I was blind.

On the day when my bandage was taken off for the first time, I could only see indistinctly. When I ran into the room at the rectory, I guessed it was Oscar rather than knew it was Oscar. My father's grey head, and Mrs. Finch's woman's dress, would no doubt have helped anybody in my place to fix as I did on the right man. But this is all different now. I can see his features in detail--and the result is (though I won't own it to any of them) that I find my idea of him in the days of my blindness--oh, so unlike the reality! The one thing that is not a disappointment to me, is his voice. When he cannot see me, I close my eyes, and let my ears feel the old charm again--so far.

And this is what I have gained, by submitting to the operation, and enduring my imprisonment in the darkened room!

What am I writing? I ought to be ashamed of myself! Is it nothing to have had all the beauty of land and sea, all the glory of cloud and sunshine, revealed to me? Is it nothing to be able to look at my fellow-creatures--to see the bright faces of children smile at me when I speak to them? Enough of myself! I am unhappy and ungrateful when I think of myself.

Let me write about Oscar.

My aunt approves of him. She thinks him handsome, and says he has the manners of a gentleman. This last is high praise from Miss Batchford. She despises the present generation of young men. "In my time," she said the other day, "I used to see young gentlemen. I only see young animals now; well-fed, well-washed, well-dressed; riding animals, rowing animals, betting animals--nothing more."

Oscar, on his side, seems to like Miss Batchford on better acquaintance.

When I first presented him to her, he rather surprised me by changing color and looking very uneasy. He is almost distressingly nervous, on certain occasions. I suppose my aunt's grand manner daunted him.

[Note.--I really must break in here. Her aunt's "grand manner" makes me sick. It is nothing (between ourselves) but a hook-nose and a stiff pair of stays. What daunted Nugent Dubourg, when he first found himself in the old lady's presence, was the fear of discovery. He would no doubt have learnt from his brother that Oscar and Miss Batchford had never met. You will see, if you look back, that it was, in the nature of things, impossible they should have met. But is it equally clear that Nugent could find out beforehand that Miss Batchford had been left in ignorance of what had happened at Dimchurch? He could do nothing of the sort--he could feel no assurance of his security from exposure, until he had tried the ground in his own proper person first. The risk here was certainly serious enough to make even Nugent Dubourg feel uneasy. And Lucilla talks of her aunt's "grand manner!" Poor innocent! I leave her to go on.--P.]

As soon as my aunt left us together, the first words I said to Oscar, referred (of course) to his letter about Madame Pratolungo.

He made a little sign of entreaty, and looked distressed.

"Why should we spoil the pleasure of our first meeting by talking of her?" he said. "It is so inexpressibly painful to you and to me. Let us return to it in a day or two. Not now, Lucilla--not now!"

His brother was the next subject in my mind. I was not at all sure how he would take my speaking about it. I risked a question however, for all that. He made another sign of entreaty, and looked distressed again.

"My brother and I understand each other, Lucilla. He will remain abroad for the present. Shall we drop that subject, too? Let me hear your own news--I want to know what is going on at the rectory. I have heard nothing since you wrote me word that you were here with your aunt, and that Madame Pratolungo had gone abroad to her father. Is Mr. Finch well? Is he coming to Ramsgate to see you?"

I was unwilling to tell him of the misunderstanding at home. "I have not heard from my father since I have been here," I said. "Now you have come back, I can write and announce your return, and get all the news from the rectory."

He looked at me rather strangely--in a way which led me to fear that he saw some objection to my writing to my father.

"I suppose you would like Mr. Finch to come here?" he said--and then stopped suddenly, and looked at me again.

"There is very little chance of his coming here," I answered.

Oscar seemed to be wonderfully interested about my father. "Very little chance!" he repeated. "Why?"

I was obliged to refer to the family quarrel--still, however, saying nothing of the unjust manner in which my father had spoken of my aunt.

"As long as I am with Miss Batchford," I said, "it is useless to hope that my father will come here. They are on bad terms; and I am afraid there is no prospect, at present, of their being friends again. Do you object to my writing home to say you have come to Ramsgate?" I asked.

"I?" he exclaimed, looking the picture of astonishment. "What could possibly make you think that? Write by all means--and leave a little space for me. I will add a few lines to your letter."

It is impossible to say how his answer relieved me. It was quite plain that I had stupidly misinterpreted him. Oh, my new eyes! my new eyes! shall I ever be able to depend on you as I could once depend on my touch?

[Note.--I must intrude myself again. I shall burst with indignation while I am copying the journal, if I don't relieve my mind at certain places in it. Remark, before you go any farther, how skillfully Nugent contrives to ascertain his exact position at Ramsgate--and see with what a fatal unanimity all the chances of his personating Oscar, without discovery, declare themselves in his favor! Miss Batchford, as you have seen, is entirely at his mercy. She not only knows nothing herself, but she operates as a check on Mr. Finch--who would otherwise have joined his daughter at Ramsgate, and have instantly exposed the conspiracy. On every side of him, Nugent is, to all appearance, safe. I am away in one direction. Oscar is away in another. Mrs. Finch is anchored immovably in her nursery. Zillah has been sent back from London to the rectory. The Dimchurch doctor (who attended Oscar, and who might have proved an awkward witness) is settled in India--as you will see, if you refer to the twenty-second chapter. The London doctor with whom he consulted has long since ceased to have any relations with his former patient. As for Herr Grosse, if he appears on the

scene, he can be trusted to shut his eyes professionally to all that is going on, and to let matters take their course in the only interest he recognizes--the interest of Lucilla's health. There is literally no obstacle in Nugent's way--and no sort of protection for Lucilla, except in the faithful instinct which persists in warning her that this is the wrong man--though it speaks in an unknown tongue. Will she end in understanding the warning before it is too late? My friend, this note is intended to relieve my mind--not yours. All you have to do is to read on. Here is the journal. I won't stand another moment in your way.--P.]

September 2nd.--A rainy day. Very little said that is worth recording between Oscar and me.

My aunt, whose spirits are always affected by bad weather, kept me a long time in her sitting-room, amusing herself by making me exercise my sight. Oscar was present by special invitation, and assisted the old lady in setting this new seeing-sense of mine all sorts of tasks. He tried hard to prevail on me to let him see my writing. I refused. It is improving as fast as it can; but it is not good enough yet.

I notice here what a dreadfully difficult thing it is to get back--in such a case as mine--to the exercise of one's sight.

We have a cat and a dog in the house. Would it be credited, if I was telling it to the world instead of telling it to my Journal, that I actually mistook one for the other to-day?--after seeing so well, too, as I do now, and being able to write with so few false strokes in making my letters! It is nevertheless true that I did mistake the two animals; having trusted to nothing but my memory to inform my eyes which was which, instead of helping my memory by my touch. I have now set this right. I caught up puss, and shut my eyes (oh, that habit! when shall I get over it?) and felt her soft fur (so different from a dog's hair!) and opened my eyes again, and associated the feel of the fur for ever afterwards with the sight of a cat.

To-day's experience has also informed me that I make slow progress in teaching myself to judge correctly of distances.

In spite of this drawback, however, there is nothing I enjoy so much in using my sight as looking at a great wide prospect of any kind--provided I am not asked to judge how far or how near objects may be. It seems like escaping out of prison, to look (after having been shut up in my blindness) at the view over the town, and the bold promontory of the pier, and the grand sweep of the sea beyond--all visible from our windows.

The moment my aunt begins to question me about distances, she makes a toil of my pleasure. It is worse still when I am asked about the relative sizes of ships and boats. When I see nothing but a boat, I fancy it larger than it is. When I see the boat in comparison with a ship, and then look back at the boat, I instantly go to the other extreme, and fancy it smaller than it is. The setting this right still vexes me almost as keenly as my stupidity vexed me some time since, when I saw my first horse and cart from an upper window, and took it for a dog drawing a wheelbarrow! Let me add in my own defence that both horse and cart were figured at least five times their proper size in my blind fancy, which makes my mistake, I think, not so very stupid after all.

Well, I amused my aunt. And what effect did I produce on Oscar?

If I could trust my eyes, I should say I produced exactly the contrary effect on him--I made him melancholy. But I don't trust my eyes. They must be deceiving me when they tell me that he looked, in my company, a moping, anxious, miserable man.

Or is it, that he sees and feels something changed in Me? I could scream with vexation and rage against myself. Here is my Oscar--and yet he is not the Oscar I knew when I was blind. Contradictory as it seems, I used to understand how he looked at me, when I was unable to see it. Now that I can see it, I ask myself, Is this really love that is looking at me in his eyes? or is it something else? How should I know? I knew when I had only my own fancy to tell me. But now, try as I may, I cannot make the old fancy and the new sight serve me in harmony both together. I am afraid he sees that I don't understand him. Oh, dear! dear! why did I not meet my good old Grosse, and become the new creature that he has made me, before I met Oscar? I should have had no blind memories and prepossessions to get over then. I shall become used to my new self, I hope and believe, with time--and that will accustom me to my new impressions of Oscar--and so it may all come right in the end. It is all wrong enough now. He put his arm round me, and gave me a little tender squeeze, while we were following Miss Batchford down to the dining-room this afternoon. Nothing in me answered to it. I should have felt it all over me a few months since.

Here is a tear on the paper. What a fool I am! Why can't I write about something else?

I sent my second letter to my father to-day; telling him of Oscar's return from abroad, and taking no notice of his not having replied to my first letter.

The only way to manage my father is not to take notice, and to let him come right by himself. I showed Oscar my letter--with a space left at the end for his postscript. While he was writing it, he asked me to get something which happened to be up-stairs in my room. When I came back, he had sealed the envelope--forgetting to show me his postscript. It was not worth while to open the letter again; he told me what he had written, and that did just as well.

[Note.--I must trouble you with a copy of what Nugent really did write. It shows why he sent her out of the room, and closed the envelope before she could come back. The postscript is also worthy of notice, in this respect--that it plays a part in a page of my narrative which is still to come.

Thus Nugent writes, in Oscar's name and character, to the rector of Dimchurch. (I have already mentioned, as you will see in the twenty-second chapter, that a close similarity of handwriting was one among the other striking points of resemblance between the twins.)

"DEAR MR. FINCH,

"Lucilla's letter will have told you that I have come to my senses, and that I am again paying my addresses to her as her affianced husband. My principal object in adding these lines is to propose that we should forget the past, and go on again as if nothing had happened.

"Nugent has behaved nobly. He absolves me from the engagements towards him into which I so rashly entered, at our last interview before I left Browndown. Most generously and amply he has redeemed his pledge to Madame Pratolungo to discover the place of my retreat and to restore me to Lucilla. For the present he remains abroad.

"If you favor me with a reply to this, I must warn you to be careful how you write; for Lucilla is sure to ask to see your letter. Remember that she only supposes me to have returned to her after a brief absence from England, caused by a necessity for joining my brother on the Continent. It will be also desirable to say nothing on the subject of my unfortunate peculiarity of complexion. I have made it all right with Lucilla, and she is getting accustomed to me. Still, the subject is a sore one; and the less it is referred to the better.

Truly yours,

"OSCAR."

Unless I add a word of explanation here, you will hardly appreciate the extraordinary skillfulness with which the deception is continued by means of this postscript.

Written in Oscar's character (and representing Nugent as having done all that he had promised me to do) it designedly omits the customary courtesy of Oscar's style. The object of this is to offend Mr. Finch--with what end in view you will presently see. The rector was the last man in existence to dispense with the necessary apologies and expressions of regret from a man engaged to his daughter, who had left her as Oscar had left her--no matter how the circumstances might appear to excuse him. The curt, off-hand postscript signed "Oscar" was the very thing to exasperate the wound already inflicted on Mr. Finch's self-esteem, and to render it at least probable that he would reconsider his intention of himself performing the marriage ceremony. In the event of his refusal, what would happen? A stranger, entirely ignorant of which was Nugent and which was Oscar, would officiate in his place. Do you see it now?

But even the cleverest people are not always capable of providing for every emergency. The completest plot generally has its weak place.

The postscript, as you have seen, was a little masterpiece. But it nevertheless exposed the writer to a danger which (as the Journal will tell you) he only appreciated at its true value when it was too late to alter his mind. Finding himself forced, for the sake of appearances, to permit Lucilla to inform her father of his arrival at Ramsgate, he was now obliged to run the risk of having that important piece of domestic news communicated--either by Mr. Finch or by his wife--to no less a person than myself. You will remember that worthy Mrs. Finch, when we parted at the rectory, had asked me to write to her while I was abroad--and you will see, after the hint I have given you, that clever Mr. Nugent is beginning already to walk upon delicate ground. I say no more: Lucilla's turn now.--P.]

September 3rd.--Oscar has (I suppose) forgotten something which he ought to have included in his postscript to my letter.

More than two hours after I had sent it to the post, he asked if the letter had gone. For the moment, he looked annoyed when I said, Yes. But he soon recovered himself. It mattered nothing (he said); he could easily write again. "Talking of letters," he added, "do you expect Madame Pratolungo to write to you?" (This time it was he who referred to her!) I told him that there was not much chance, after what had passed on her side and on mine, of her writing



to me--and then tried to put some of those questions about her which he had once already requested me not to press yet. For the second time, he entreated me to defer the discussion of that unpleasant subject for the present--and yet, with a curious inconsistency, he made another inquiry relating to the subject in the same breath.

"Do you think she is likely to be in correspondence with your father, or your stepmother, while she is out of England?" he asked.

"I should doubt her writing to my father," I said. "But she might correspond with Mrs. Finch."

He considered a little--and then turned the talk to the topic of our residence at Ramsgate next.

"How long do you stay here?" he inquired.

"It depends on Herr Grosse," I answered. "I will ask him when he comes next."

He turned away to the window--suddenly, as if he was a little put out.

"Are you tired of Ramsgate already?" I asked.

He came back to me, and took my hand--my cold insensible hand that won't feel his touch as it ought!

"Let me be your husband, Lucilla," he whispered; "and I will live at Ramsgate if you like--for your sake."

Although there was everything to please me in those words, there was something that startled me--I cannot describe it--in his look and manner when he said them. I made no answer at the moment. He went on.

"Why should we not be married at once?" he asked. "We are both of age. We have only ourselves to think of."

[Note.--Alter his words as follows: "Why should we not be married before Madame Pratolungo can hear of my arrival at Ramsgate?"--and you will rightly interpret his motives. The situation is now fast reaching its climax of peril. Nugent's one chance is to persuade Lucilla to marry him before any discoveries can reach my ears, and before Grosse considers her sufficiently recovered to leave Ramsgate.--P.]

"You forget," I answered, more surprised than ever; "we have my father to think of. It was always arranged that he was to marry us at Dimchurch."

Oscar smiled--not at all the charming smile I used to imagine, when I was blind!

"We shall wait a long time, I am afraid," he said, "if we wait until your father marries us."

"What do you mean?" I asked.

"When we enter on the painful subject of Madame Pratolungo," he replied, "I will tell you. In the meantime, do you think Mr. Finch will answer your letter?"

"I hope so."

"Do you think he will answer my postscript?"

"I am sure he will!"

The same unpleasant smile showed itself again in his face. He abruptly dropped the conversation, and went to play piquet with my aunt.

All this happened yesterday evening. I went to bed, sadly dissatisfied with somebody. Was it with Oscar? or with myself? or with both? I fancy with both.

To-day, we went out together for a walk on the cliffs. What a delight it was to move through the fresh briny air, and see the lovely sights on every side of me! Oscar enjoyed it too. All through the first part of our walk, he was charming, and I was more in love with him than ever. On our return, a little incident occurred which altered him for the worse, and which made my spirits sink again.

It happened in this manner.

I proposed returning by the sands. Ramsgate is still crowded with visitors; and the animated scene on the beach in the later part of the day has attractions for me, after my blind life, which it does not (I dare say) possess for people who have always enjoyed the use of their eyes. Oscar, who has a nervous horror of crowds, and who shrinks from contact with people not so

refined as himself, was surprised at my wishing to mix with what he called "the mob on the sands." However, he said he would go, if I particularly wished it. I did particularly wish it. So we went.

There were chairs on the beach. We hired two, and sat down to look about us.

All sorts of diversions were going on. Monkeys, organs, girls on stilts, a conjurer, and a troop of negro minstrels, were all at work to amuse the visitors. I thought the varied color and bustling enjoyment of the crowd, with the bright blue sea beyond, and the glorious sunshine overhead, quite delightful--I declare I felt as if two eyes were not half enough to see with! A nice old lady, sitting near, entered into conversation with me; hospitably offering me biscuits and sherry out of her own bag. Oscar, to my disappointment, looked quite disgusted with all of us. He thought my nice old lady vulgar; and he called the company on the beach "a herd of snobs." While he was still muttering under his breath about the "mixture of low people," he suddenly cast a side-look at some person or thing--I could not at the moment tell which--and, rising, placed himself so as to intercept my view of the promenade on the sands immediately before me. I happened to have noticed, at the same moment, a lady approaching us in a dress of a peculiar color; and I pulled Oscar on one side, to look at her as she passed in front of me. "Why do you get in my way?" I asked. Before he could answer the question the lady passed, with two lovely children, and with a tall man at her side. My eyes, looking first at the lady and the children, found their way next to the gentleman--and saw repeated in his face, the same black-blue complexion which had startled me in the face of Oscar's brother, when I first opened my eyes at the rectory! For the moment I felt startled again--more, as I believe, by the unexpected repetition of the blue face in the face of a stranger, than by the ugliness of the complexion itself. At any rate, I was composed enough to admire the lady's dress, and the beauty of the children, before they had passed beyond my range of view. Oscar spoke to me, while I was looking at them, in a tone of reproach for which, as I thought, there was no occasion and no excuse.

"I tried to spare you," he said. "You have yourself to thank, if that man has frightened you."

"He has not frightened me," I answered--sharply enough.

Oscar looked at me very attentively; and sat down again, without saying a word more.

The good-humoured old woman, on my other side, who had seen and heard all that had passed, began to talk of the gentleman with the discolored face, and of the lady and the children who accompanied him. He was a retired Indian officer, she said. The lady was his wife, and the two beautiful children were his own children. "It seems a pity that such a handsome man should be disfigured in that way," my new acquaintance remarked. "But still, it don't matter much, after all. There he is, as you see, with a fine woman for a wife, and with two lovely children. I know the landlady of the house where they lodge--and a happier family you couldn't lay your hand on in all England. That is my friend's account of them. Even a blue face don't seem such a dreadful misfortune, when you look at it in that light--does it, Miss?"

I entirely agreed with the old lady. Our talk seemed, for some incomprehensible reason, to irritate Oscar. He got up again impatiently, and looked at his watch.

"Your aunt will be wondering what has become of us," he said. "Surely you have had enough of the mob on the sands, by this time?"

I had not had enough of it, and I should have been quite content to have made one of the mob for some time longer. But I saw that Oscar would be seriously vexed if I persisted in keeping my place. So I took leave of my nice old lady, and left the pleasant sands--not very willingly.

He said nothing more, until we had threaded our way out of the crowd. Then he returned, without any reason for it that I could discover, to the subject of the Indian officer, and to the remembrance which the stranger's complexion must have awakened in me of his brother's face.

"I don't understand your telling me you were not frightened when you saw that man," he said. "You were terribly frightened by my brother, when you saw him."

"I was terribly frightened by my own imagination, before I saw him," I answered. "After I saw him, I soon got over it."

"So you say!" he rejoined.

There is something excessively provoking--at least to me--in being told to my face that I have said something which is not worthy of belief. It was not a very becoming act on my part (after what he had told me in his letter about his brother's infatuation) to mention his brother. I ought not to have done it.

I did it, for all that.

"I say what I mean," I replied. "Before I knew what you told me about your brother, I was going to propose to you, for your sake and for his, that he should live with us after we were married."

Oscar suddenly stopped. He had given me his arm to lead me through the crowd--he dropped it now.

"You say that, because you are angry with me!" he said.

I denied being angry with him; I declared, once more, that I was only speaking the truth.

"You really mean," he went on, "that you could have lived comfortably with my brother's blue face before you every hour of the day?"

"Quite comfortably--if he would have been my brother too." Oscar pointed to the house in which my aunt and I are living--within a few yards of the place on which we stood.

"You are close at home," he said, speaking in an odd muffled voice, with his eyes on the ground. "I want a longer walk. We shall meet at dinner-time."

He left me--without looking up, and without saying a word more.

Jealous of his brother! There is something unnatural, something degrading in such jealousy as that. I am ashamed of myself for thinking it of him. And yet what else could his conduct mean?

[Note.--It is for me to answer that question. Give the miserable wretch his due. His conduct meant, in one plain word--remorse. The only excuse left that he could make to his own conscience for the infamous part which he was playing, was this--that his brother's personal disfigurement presented a fatal obstacle in the way of his brother's marriage. And now Lucilla's own words, Lucilla's own actions, had told him that Oscar's face was no obstacle to her seeing Oscar perpetually in the familiar intercourse of domestic life. The torture of self-reproach which this discovery inflicted on him, drove him out of her presence. His own lips would have betrayed him, if he had spoken a word more to her at that moment. This is no speculation of mine. I know what I am now writing to be the truth.--P.]

It is night again. I am in my bed-room--too nervous and too anxious to go to

rest yet. Let me employ myself in finishing this private record of the events of the day.

Oscar came a little before dinner-time; haggard and pale, and so absent in mind that he hardly seemed to know what he was talking about. No explanations passed between us. He asked my pardon for the hard things he had said, and the ill-temper he had shown, earlier in the day. I readily accepted his excuses--and did my best to conceal the uneasiness which his vacant, pre-occupied manner caused me. All the time he was speaking to me, he was plainly thinking of something else--he was more unlike the Oscar of my blind remembrances than ever. It was the old voice talking in a new way: I can only describe it to myself in those terms.

As for his manner, I know it used to be always more or less quiet and retiring in the old days: but was it ever so hopelessly subdued and depressed, as I have seen it to-day? Useless to ask! In the by-gone time, I was not able to see it. My past judgment of him and my present judgment of him have been arrived at by such totally different means, that it seems useless to compare them. Oh, how I miss Madame Pratolungo! What a relief, what a consolation it would have been, to have said all this to her, and to have heard what she thought of it in return!

There is, however, a chance of my finding my way out of some of my perplexities, at any rate--if I can only wait till tomorrow.

Oscar seems to have made up his mind at last to enter into the explanations which he has hitherto withheld from me. He has asked me to give him a private interview in the morning. The circumstances which led to his making this request have highly excited my curiosity. Something is evidently going on under the surface, in which my interests are concerned--and, possibly, Oscar's interests too.

It all came about in this way.

On returning to the house, after Oscar had left me, I found that a letter from Grosse had arrived by the afternoon post. My dear old surgeon wrote to say that he was coming to see me--and added in a postscript that he would arrive the next day at luncheon-time. Past experience told me that this meant a demand on my aunt's housekeeping for all the good things that it could produce. (Ah, dear! I thought of Madame Pratolungo and the Mayonnaise. Will those times never come again?) Well--at dinner, I announced Grosse's visit; adding significantly, "at luncheon-time."

My aunt looked up from her plate with a little start--not interested, as I was prepared to hear, in the serious question of luncheon, but in the opinion which my medical adviser was likely to give of the state of my health.

"I am anxious to hear what Mr. Grosse says about you to-morrow," the old lady began. "I shall insist on his giving me a far more complete report of you than he gave last time. The recovery of your sight appears to me, my dear, to be quite complete."

"Do you want me to be cured, aunt, because you want to get away?" I asked. "Are you weary of Ramsgate?"

Miss Batchford's quick temper flashed at me out of Miss Batchford's bright old eyes.

"I am weary of keeping a letter of yours," she answered, with a look of disgust.

"A letter of mine!" I exclaimed.

"Yes. A letter which is only to be given to you, when Mr. Grosse pronounces that you are quite yourself again."

Oscar--who had not taken the slightest interest in the conversation thus far--suddenly stopped, with his fork half way to his mouth; changed color; and looked eagerly at my aunt.

"What letter?" I asked. "Who gave it to you? Why am I not to see it until I am quite myself again?"

Miss Batchford obstinately shook her head three times, in answer to those three questions.

"I hate secrets and mysteries," she said impatiently. "This is a secret and a mystery--and I long to have done with it. That is all. I have said too much already. I shall say no more."

All my entreaties were of no avail. My aunt's quick temper had evidently led her into committing an imprudence of some sort. Having done that, she was now provokingly determined not to make bad worse. Nothing that I could say would induce her to open her lips on the subject of the mysterious letter. "Wait till Mr. Grosse comes to-morrow." That was the only reply I could get.

As for Oscar, this little incident appeared to have an effect on him which added immensely to the curiosity that my aunt had roused in me.

He listened with breathless attention while I was trying to induce Miss Batchford to answer my questions. When I gave it up, he pushed away his plate, and ate no more. On the other hand (though generally the most temperate of men) he drank a great deal of wine, both at dinner and after. In the evening, he made so many mistakes in playing cards with my aunt, that she dismissed him from the game in disgrace. He sat in a corner for the rest of the time, pretending to listen while I was playing the piano--really lost to me and my music; buried, fathoms deep, in some uneasy thoughts of his own.

When he took his leave, he whispered these words in my ear; anxiously pressing my hand while he spoke:

"I must see you alone to-morrow, before Grosse comes. Can you manage it?"

"Yes."

"When?"

"At the stairs on the cliff, at eleven o'clock."

On that, he left me. But one question has pursued me ever since. Does Oscar know the writer of the mysterious letter? I firmly believe he does. To-morrow will prove whether I am right or wrong. How I long for to-morrow to come!