

CHAPTER THE FORTY-FIFTH

Lucilla's Journal, concluded

September 4th (continued).

ARRIVED in the drawing-room, Grosse placed me in a chair near the window. He leaned forward, and looked at me close; he drew back, and looked at me from a distance; he took out his magnifying glass, and had a long stare through it at my eyes; he felt my pulse; dropped my wrist as if it disgusted him; and, turning to the window, looked out in grim silence, without taking the slightest notice of any one in the room.

My aunt was the first person who spoke, under these discouraging circumstances.

"Mr. Grosse!" she said sharply. "Have you nothing to tell me about your patient to-day? Do you find Lucilla----"

He turned suddenly round from the window, and interrupted Miss Batchford without the slightest ceremony.

"I find her gone back, back, back!" he growled, getting louder and louder at each repetition of the word. "When I sent her here, I said--'Keep her comfortable-easy.' You have not kept her comfortable-easy. Something has turned her poor little mind topsy-turvy. What is it? Who is it?" He looked fiercely backwards and forwards between Oscar and my aunt--then turned my way, and putting his heavy hands on my shoulders, looked down at me with an odd angry kind of pity in his face. "My child is melancholic; my child is ill," he went on. "Where is our good-dear Pratulungo? What did you tell me about her, my little-love, when I last saw you? You said she had gone away to see her Papa. Send a telegrams--and say I want Pratulungo here."

At the repetition of Madame Pratulungo's name, Miss Batchford rose to her feet and stood (apparently) several inches higher than usual.

"Am I to understand, sir," inquired the old lady, "that your extraordinary language is intended to cast a reproach on my conduct towards my niece?"

"You are to understand this, madam. In the face of the good sea-air, Miss your niece is fretting herself ill. I sent her to this place, for to get a rosy face,

for to put on a firm flesh. How do I find her? She has got nothing, she has put on nothing--she is emphatically flabby-pale. In this fine airs, she can be flabby-pale but for one reason. She is fretting herself about something or anodder. Is fretting herself goot for her eyes? Ho-damn-damn! it is as bad for her eyes as bad can be. If you can do no better than this, take her aways back again. You are wasting your moneys in this lodgment here."

My aunt addressed herself to me in her grandest manner.

"You will understand, Lucilla, that it is impossible for me to notice such language as this in any other way than by leaving the room. If you can bring Mr. Grosse to his senses, inform him that I will receive his apologies and explanations in writing." Pronouncing these lofty words with her severest emphasis, Miss Batchford rose another inch, and sailed majestically out of the room.

Grosse took no notice of the offended lady: he only put his hands in his pockets, and looked out of window once more. As the door closed, Oscar left the corner in which he had seated himself, not over-graciously, when we entered the room.

"Am I wanted here?" he asked.

Grosse was on the point of answering the question even less amiably than it had been put--when I stopped him by a look. "I want to speak to you," I whispered in his ear. He nodded, and, turning sharply to Oscar, put this question to him:

"Are you living in the house?"

"I am staying at the hotel at the corner."

"Go to the hotel, and wait there till I come to you."

Greatly to my surprise, Oscar submitted to be treated in this peremptory manner. He took his leave of me silently, and left the room. Grosse drew a chair close to mine, and sat down by me in a comforting confidential fatherly way.

"Now my goot-girls," he said. "What have you been fretting yourself about since I was last in this house? Open it all, if you please, to Papa Grosse. Come begin-begin!"

I suppose he had exhausted his ill-temper on my aunt and Oscar. He said those words--more than kindly--almost tenderly. His fierce eyes seemed to soften behind his spectacles; he took my hand and patted it to encourage me.

There are some things written in these pages of mine which it was, of course, impossible for me to confide to him. With those necessary reservations--and without entering on the painful subject of my altered relations with Madame Pratolungo--I owned quite frankly how sadly changed I felt myself to be towards Oscar, and how much less happy I was with him, in consequence of the change. "I am not ill as you suppose," I explained. "I am only disappointed in myself, and a little downhearted when I think of the future." Having opened it to him in this way, I thought it time to put the question which I had determined to ask when I next saw him.

"The restoration of my sight," I said, "has made a new being of me. In gaining the sense of seeing, have I lost the sense of feeling which I had when I was blind? I want to know if it will come back when I have got used to the novelty of my position? I want to know if I shall ever enjoy Oscar's society again, as I used to enjoy it in the old days before you cured me--the happy days, Papa-Grosse, when I was an object of pity, and when all the people spoke of me as Poor Miss Finch?"

I had more to say--but at this place, Grosse (without meaning it, I am sure) suddenly stopped me. To my amazement, he let go of my hand, and turned his face away sharply, as if he resented my looking at him. His big head sank on his breast. He lifted his great hairy hands, shook them mournfully, and let them fall on his knees. This strange behavior and the still stranger silence which accompanied it, made me so uneasy that I insisted on his explaining himself. "What is the matter with you?" I said. "Why don't you answer me?"

He roused himself with a start, and put his arm round me, with a wonderful gentleness for a man who was so rough at other times.

"It is nothing, my pretty lofe," he said. "I am out of sort, as you call it. Your English climates sometimes gives your English blue devil to foreign mens like me. I have got him now--an English blue devil in a German inside. Soh! I shall go and walk him out, and come back empty-cheerful, and see you again." He rose, after this curious explanation, and attempted some sort of answer--a very odd one--to the question which I had asked of him. "As to that odder thing," he went on, "yes-indeed-yes. You have hit your nail on his head. It is, as you say, your seeings which has got in the way of your

feelings. When your seeings-feelings has got used to one anodder, your seeings will stay where he is, your feelings will come back to where they was; one will balance the odder; you will feel as you did; you will see as you didn't; all at the same times, all jolly-nice again as before. You have my opinions. Now let me walk out my blue devil. I swear to come back again with a new inside. By-bye-my-Feench-good-bye."

Saying all this in a violent hurry, as if he was eager to get away, he gave me a kiss on the forehead, snatched up his shabby hat, and ran out of the room.

What did it mean?

Does he persist in thinking me seriously ill? I am too weary to puzzle my brains in the effort to understand my dear old surgeon. It is one o'clock in the morning; and I have still to write the story of all that happened later in the day. My eyes are beginning to ache; and, strange to say, I have hardly been able to see the last two or three lines I have written. They look as if the ink was fading from them. If Grosse knew what I am about at this moment! His last words to me, when he went back to his patients in London, were:-- "No more readings! no more writings till I come again!" It is all very well to talk in that way. I have got so used to my Journal that I can't do without it. Nevertheless, I must stop now--for the best of reasons. Though I have got three lighted candles on my table, I really cannot see to write any more.

To bed! to bed!

[Note.--I have purposely abstained from interrupting Lucilla's Journal until my extracts from it had reached this place. Here the writer pauses, and gives me a chance; and here there are matters that must be mentioned, of which she had personally no knowledge at the time.

You have seen how her faithful instinct still tries to reveal to my poor darling the cruel deception that is being practiced on her--and still tries in vain. In spite of herself, she shrinks from the man who is tempting her to go away with him--though he pleads in the character of her betrothed husband. In spite of herself, she detects the weak places in the case which Nugent has made out against me--the absence of sufficient motive for the conduct of which he accuses me, and the utter improbability of my plotting and intriguing (without anything to gain by it) to make her marry the man who was not the man of her choice. She feels these hesitations and difficulties. But what they really signify it is morally impossible for her to guess.

Thus far, no doubt, her strange and touching position has been plainly revealed to you. But can I feel quite so sure that you understand how seriously she has been affected by the anxiety, disappointment, and suspense which have combined together to torture her at this critical interval in her life?

I doubt it, for the sufficient reason that you have only had her Journal to enlighten you, and that her Journal shows she does not understand it herself. As things are, it seems to be time for me to step on the stage, and to discover to you plainly what her surgeon really thought of her, by telling you what passed between Grosse and Nugent, when the German presented himself at the hotel.

I am writing now (as a matter of course) from information given to me, at an after-period, by the persons themselves. As to particulars, the accounts vary. As to results, they both agree.

The discovery that Nugent was at Ramsgate necessarily took Grosse by surprise. With his previous knowledge, however, of the situation of affairs at Dimchurch, he could be at no loss to understand in what character Nugent had presented himself to Lucilla; and he could certainly not fail to understand--after what he had seen and what she had herself told him--that the deception was, under present circumstances, producing the worst possible effect on her mind. Arriving at this conclusion, he was not a man to hesitate about the duty that lay before him. When he entered the room at the hotel in which Nugent was waiting, he announced the object of his visit in these four plain words, as follows:

"Pack up, and go!"

Nugent coolly offered him a chair, and asked what he meant.

Grosse refused the chair--but consented to explain himself in terms variously reported by the two parties. Combining the statements, and translating Grosse (in this grave matter) into plain English, I find that the German must have expressed himself in these, or nearly in these, words:

"As a professional man, Mr. Nugent, I invariably refuse to enter into domestic considerations connected with my patients with which I have nothing to do. In the case of Miss Finch, my business is not with your family complications. My business is to secure the recovery of the young lady's sight. If I find her health improving, I don't inquire how or why. No matter what private and personal frauds you may be practicing upon her, I have

nothing to say to them--more, I am ready to take advantage of them myself--so long as their influence is directly beneficial in keeping her morally and physically in the condition in which I wish her to be. But, the instant I discover that this domestic conspiracy of yours--this personation of your brother which once quieted and comforted her--is unfavorably affecting her health of body and her peace of mind, I interfere between you in the character of her medical attendant, and stop it on medical grounds. You are producing in my patient a conflict of feeling, which--in a nervous temperament like hers--cannot go on without serious injury to her health. And serious injury to her health means serious injury to her eyes. I won't have that--I tell you plainly to pack up and go. I meddle with nothing else. After what you have yourself seen, I leave you to decide whether you will restore your brother to Miss Finch, or not. All I say is, Go. Make any excuse you like, but go before you have done more mischief. You shake your head! Is that a sign that you refuse? Take a day to think, before you make up your mind. I have patients in London to whom I am obliged to go back. But the day after to-morrow, I shall return to Ramsgate. If I find you still here, I shall tell Miss Finch you are no more Oscar Dubourg than I am. In her present state, I see less danger in giving her even that serious shock than in leaving her to the slow torment of mind which you are inflicting by your continued presence in this place. My last word is said. I go back by the next train, in an hour's time. Good morning, Mr. Nugent. If you are a wise man, you will meet me at the station."

After this, the accounts vary. Nugent's statement asserts that he accompanied Grosse on his way back to Miss Batchford's lodging, arguing the matter with him, and only leaving him at the door of the house. Grosse's statement, on the other hand, makes no allusion to this. The disagreement between them is, however, of no consequence here. It is admitted, on either side, that the result of the interview was the same. When Grosse took the train for London, Nugent Dubourg was not at the station. The next entry in the Journal shows that he remained that day and night, at least, at Ramsgate.

You now know, from the narrative of the surgeon's own proceedings, how seriously he thought of his patient's case, and how firmly he did his duty as a professional man. Having given you this necessary information, I again retire, and leave Lucilla to take up the next link in the chain of events.--P.]

September 5th. Six o'clock in the morning.--A few hours of restless, broken sleep--disturbed by horrid dreams, and waking over and over again with startings that seemed to shake me from head to foot. I can bear it no longer. The sun is rising. I have got up--and here I am at the writing-table, trying to

finish the long story of yesterday still uncompleted in my Journal.

I have just been looking at the view from my window--and I notice one thing which has struck me. The mist this morning is the thickest mist I have yet seen here.

The sea-view is almost invisible, it is so dim and dull. Even the objects about me in my room are nothing like so plain as usual. The mist is stealing in no doubt through my open window. It gets between me and my paper, and obliges me to bend down close over the page to see what I am about. When the sun is higher, things will be clear again. In the meantime, I must do as well as I can.

Grosse came back after his walk as mysterious as ever.

He was quite peremptory in ordering me not to overtask my eyes--forbidding reading and writing, as I have already mentioned. But, when I asked for his reasons, he had, for the first time in my experience of him, no reasons to give. I have the less scruple about disobeying him, on that account. Still I am a little uneasy, I confess, when I think of his strange behavior yesterday. He looked at me, in the oddest way--as if he saw something in my face which he had never seen before. Twice he took his leave; and twice he returned, doubtful whether he would not remain at Ramsgate, and let his patients in London take care of themselves. His extraordinary indecision was put an end to at last by the arrival of a telegram which had followed him from London. An urgent message, I suppose, from one of the patients. He went away in a bad temper and a violent hurry; and told me, at the door, to expect him back on the sixth.

When Oscar came later, there was another surprise for me.

Like Grosse, he was not himself--he too behaved strangely! First, he was so cold and so silent, that I thought he was offended. Then he went straight to the other extreme, and became so loudly talkative, so obstreperously cheerful, that my aunt asked me privately whether I did not suspect (as she did) that he had been taking too much wine. It ended in his trying to sing to my accompaniment on the piano, and in his breaking down. He walked away to the other end of the room without explanation or apology. When I followed him there a little while after, he had a look that indescribably distressed me--a look as if he had been crying. Towards the end of the evening, my aunt fell asleep over her book, and gave us a chance of speaking to each other in a little second room which opens out of the drawing-room in this house. It was I who took the chance--not he. He was

so incomprehensibly unwilling to go into the room and speak to me, that I had to do a very unladylike thing. I mean that I had to take his arm, and lead him in myself, and entreat him (in a whisper) to tell me what was the matter with him.

"Only the old complaint," he answered.

I made him sit down by me on a little couch that just held two.

"What do you mean by the old complaint?" I asked.

"Oh! you know!"

"I don't know."

"You would know if you really loved me."

"Oscar! it is a shame to say that. It is a shame to doubt that I love you!"

"Is it? Ever since I have been here, I have doubted that you love me. It is getting to be an old complaint of mine now. I still suffer a little sometimes. Don't notice it!"

He was so cruel and so unjust, that I got up to leave him, without saying a word more. But, oh! he looked so forlorn and so submissive--sitting with his head down, and his hands crossed listlessly over his knees--that I could not find it in my heart to treat him harshly. Was I wrong? I don't know! I have no idea how to manage men--and no Madame Pratolungo now to teach me. Right or wrong, it ended in my sitting down by him again in the place which I had just left.

"You ought to beg my pardon," I said, "for thinking of me as you think, and talking to me as you talk."

"I do beg your pardon," he answered humbly. "I am sorry if I have offended you."

How could I resist that? I put my hand on his shoulder, and tried to make him lift up his head and look at me.

"You will always believe in me in the future?" I went on. "Promise me that."

"I can promise to try, Lucilla. As things are now I can promise no more."

"As things are now? You are speaking in riddles to-night. Explain yourself."

"I explained myself this morning on the pier."

Surely, this was hard on me--after he had promised to give me till the end of the week to consider his proposal? I took my hand off his shoulder. He--who never used to displease or disappoint me when I was blind--had displeased and disappointed me for the second time in a few minutes!

"Do you wish to force me?" I asked, "after telling me this morning that you would give me time to reflect?"

He rose, on his side--languidly and mechanically, like a man who neither knew nor cared what he was doing.

"Force you?" he repeated. "Did I say that? I don't know what I am talking about; I don't know what I am doing. You are right and I am wrong. I am a miserable wretch, Lucilla--I am utterly unworthy of you. It would be better for you if you never saw me again!" He paused; and taking me by both hands, looked earnestly and sadly into my face. "Good night, my dear!" he said--and suddenly dropped my hands, and turned away to go out.

I stopped him. "Going already?" I said. "It is not late yet."

"It is best for me to go."

"Why?"

"I am in wretched spirits. It is better for me to be by myself."

"Don't say that! It sounds like a reproach to me."

"On the contrary, it is all my fault. Good night!"

I refused to say good night--I refused to let him go. His wanting to go was in itself a reproach to me. He had never done it before. I asked him to sit down again.

He shook his head.

"For ten minutes!"

He shook his head again.

"For five minutes!"

Instead of answering, he gently lifted a long lock of my hair, which hung at the side of my neck. (My head, I should add, had been dressed that evening on the old-fashioned plan, by my aunt's maid--to please my aunt.)

"If I stay for five minutes longer," he said, "I shall ask for something."

"For what?"

"You have beautiful hair, Lucilla."

"You can't want a lock of my hair, surely?"

"Why not?"

"I gave you a keepsake of that sort--ages ago. Have you forgotten it?"

[Note.--The keepsake had of course been given to the true Oscar, and was then, as it is now, still in his possession. Notice, when he recovers himself, how quickly the false Oscar infers this, and how cleverly he finds his excuse upon it.--P.]

His face flushed deep; his eyes dropped before mine. I could see that he was ashamed of himself--I could only conclude that he had forgotten it! A morsel of his hair was, at that moment, in a locket which I wore round my neck. I had more I think, to doubt him than he had to doubt me. I was so mortified that I stepped aside, and made way for him to go out.

"You wish to go away," I said; "I won't keep you any longer."

It was his turn now to plead with me.

"Suppose I have been deprived of your keepsake?" he said. "Suppose somebody whom I would rather not mention, has taken it away from me?"

I instantly understood him. His miserable brother had taken it. My work-basket was close by. I cut off a lock of my hair, and tied it at each end with a morsel of my favorite light-blue ribbon.

"Are we friends again, Oscar?" was all I said as I put it into his hand.

He caught me in his arms in a kind of frenzy--holding me to him so violently that he hurt me; kissing me so fiercely that he frightened me. Before I had recovered breath enough to speak to him, he had released me, and had gone out in such headlong haste that he knocked down a little round table with books on it, and woke my aunt.

The old lady called for me in her most formidable voice, and showed me the family temper in its sourest aspect. Grosse had gone back to London without making any apology to her; and Oscar had knocked down her books. The indignation aroused by these two outrages called loudly for a victim--and (no one else being near at the moment) selected Me. Miss Batchford discovered for the first time that she had undertaken too much in assuming the sole charge of her niece at Ramsgate.

"I decline to accept the entire responsibility," said my aunt. "At my age, the entire responsibility is too much for me. I shall write to your father, Lucilla. I always did, and always shall, detest him, as you know. His views on politics and religion are (in a clergyman) simply detestable. Still he is your father; and it is a duty on my part, after what that rude foreigner has said about your health, to offer to restore you to your father's roof--or, at least, to obtain your father's sanction to your continuing to remain under my care. This course, in either case you will observe, relieves me from the entire responsibility. I am doing nothing to compromise my position. My position is quite plain to me. I should have formally accepted your father's hospitality on the occasion of your wedding--if I had been well enough and if the wedding had taken place. It follows as a matter of course that I may formally report to your father what the medical opinion is of your health. However brutally it may have been given, it is a medical opinion--and as such I am bound to communicate it."

Knowing but too well how bitterly my aunt's aversion to him is reciprocated by my father, I did my best to combat Miss Batchford's resolution--without making matters worse by telling her what my motives really were. With some difficulty I prevailed on her to defer the proposed report of me for a day or two--and we parted for the night (the old lady's fits of temper are soon over) as good friends as usual.

This little episode in my narrative of events diverted my mind for the time from Oscar's strange conduct yesterday evening. But once up here by myself in my own room, I have been thinking of it, or dreaming of it (such horrid dreams--I cannot write them down!) almost incessantly from that time to this. When we meet again to-day--how will he look? what will he say?

He was right yesterday. I am cold to him; there is some change in me towards him, which I don't understand myself. My conscience accuses me, now I am alone--and yet, God knows, it is not my fault. Poor Oscar! Poor me! I have never longed to see him--since we met at this place--as I long now. He sometimes comes to breakfast. Will he come to breakfast to-day? Oh, how my eyes ache! and how obstinately the mist stops in the room! Suppose I close the window, and go back to bed again for a little while?

Nine o'clock.--The maid came in half an hour since, and woke me. She went to open the window as usual. I stopped her.

"Is the mist gone?" I asked.

The girl stared, "What mist, Miss?"

"Haven't you seen it?"

"No, Miss."

"What time did you get up?"

"At seven, Miss."

At seven I was still writing in my Journal, and the mist was still over everything in the room. Persons in the lower ranks of life are curiously unobservant of the aspects of Nature. I never (in the days of my blindness) got any information from servants or laborers about the views round Dimchurch. They seemed to have no eyes for anything beyond the range of the kitchen, or the ploughed field. I got out of bed, and took the maid myself to the window, and opened it.

"There!" I said. "It is not quite so thick as it was some hours since. But there is the mist as plain as can be!"

The girl looked backwards and forwards in a state of bewilderment between me and the view.

"Mist?" she repeated. "Begging your pardon, Miss, it's a beautiful clear morning--as I see it."

"Clear?" I repeated on my side.

"Yes, Miss!"

"Do you mean to tell me it's clear over the sea?"

"The sea is a beautiful blue, Miss. Far and near, you can see the ships."

"Where are the ships?"

She pointed, out of the window, to a certain spot.

"There are two of them, Miss. A big ship, with three masts. And a little ship just behind, with one."

I looked along her finger, and strained my eyes to see. All I could make out was a dim greyish mist, with something like a little spot or blur on it, at the place which the maid's finger indicated as the position occupied by the two ships.

The idea struck me for the first time that the dimness which I had attributed to the mist, was, in plain truth, the dimness in my own eyes. For the moment I was a little startled. I left the window, and made the best excuse that I could to the girl. As soon as it was possible to dismiss her, I sent her away, and bathed my eyes with one of Grosse's lotions, and then tried them again in writing this entry. To my relief, I can see to write better than I did earlier in the morning. Still, I have had a warning to pay a little more attention to Grosse's directions than I have hitherto done. Is it possible that he saw something in the state of my eyes which he was afraid to tell me of? Nonsense! Grosse is not the sort of man who shrinks from speaking out. I have fatigued my eyes--that is all. Let me shut up my book, and go downstairs to breakfast.

Ten o'clock.--For a moment, I open my Journal again.

Something has happened which I must positively set down in the history of my life. I am so vexed and so angry! The maid, (wretched chattering fool!) has told my aunt what passed between us this morning at my window. Miss Batchford has taken the alarm, and has insisted on writing, not only to Grosse, but to my father. In the present embittered state of my father's feelings against my aunt, he will either leave her letter unanswered, or he will offend her by an angry reply. In either case, I shall be the sufferer: my aunt's sense of injury--which cannot address itself to my father--will find a convenient object to assail in me. I shall never hear the last of it. Being already nervous and dispirited, the prospect of finding myself involved in a

new family quarrel quite daunts me. I feel ungratefully inclined to run away from Miss Batchford, when I think of it!

No signs of Oscar; and no news of Oscar--yet.

Twelve o'clock.--But one trial more was wanted to make my life here quite unendurable. The trial has come.

A letter from Oscar (sent by a messenger from his hotel) has just been placed in my hands. It informs me that he has decided on leaving Ramsgate by the next train. The next train starts in forty minutes. Good God! what am I to do?

My eyes are burning. I know it does them harm to cry. How can I help crying? It is all over between us, if I let Oscar go away alone--his letter as good as tells me so. Oh, why have I behaved so coldly to him? I ought to make any sacrifice of my own feelings to atone for it. And yet, there is an obstinate something in me that shrinks--What am I to do? what am I to do?

I must drop the pen, and try if I can think. My eyes completely fail me. I can write no more.

[Note.--I copy the letter to which Lucilla refers.

Nugent's own assertion is, that he wrote it in a moment of remorse, to give her an opportunity of breaking the engagement by which she innocently supposed herself to be held to him. He declares that he honestly believed the letter would offend her, when he wrote it. The other interpretation of the document is, that finding himself obliged to leave Ramsgate--under penalty (if he remained) of being exposed by Grosse as an impostor, when the surgeon visited his patient on the next day--Nugent seized the opportunity of making his absence the means of working on Lucilla's feelings, so as to persuade her to accompany him to London. Don't ask me which of these two conclusions I favor. For reasons which you will understand when you have come to the end of my narrative, I would rather not express my opinion, either one way or the other.

Read the letter--and determine for yourselves:

"MY DARLING,--After a sleepless night, I have decided on leaving Ramsgate, by the next train that starts after you receive these lines. Last night's experience has satisfied me that my presence here (after what I said to you on the pier) only distresses you. Some influence that is too strong for you to

resist has changed your heart towards me. When the time comes for you to determine whether you will be my wife on the conditions that I have proposed, I see but too plainly that you will say No. Let me make it less hard for you, my love, to do that, by leaving you to write the word--instead of saying it to me. If you wish for your freedom, cost me what it may, I will absolve you from your engagement. I love you too dearly to blame you. My address in London is on the other leaf. Farewell!

"OSCAR."

The address given on the blank leaf is at an hotel.

A few lines more in the Journal follow the lines last quoted in this place. Except a word or two, here and there, it is impossible any longer to decipher the writing. The mischief done to her eyes by her reckless use of them, by her fits of crying, by her disturbed nights, by the long-continued strain on her of agitation and suspense, has evidently justified the worst of those unacknowledged forebodings which Grosse felt when he saw her. The last lines of the Journal are, as writing, actually inferior to her worst penmanship when she was blind.

However, the course which she ended in taking on receipt of the letter which you have just read, is sufficiently indicated by a note of Nugent's writing, left at Miss Batchford's residence at Ramsgate by a porter from the railway. After-events make it necessary to preserve this note also. It runs thus:--

"MADAM,--I write, by Lucilla's wish, to beg that you will not be anxious on discovering that your niece has left Ramsgate. She accompanies me, at my express request, to the house of a married lady who is a relative of mine, and under whose care she will remain, until the time arrives for our marriage. The reasons which have led to her taking this step, and which oblige her to keep her new place of residence concealed for the present, will be frankly stated to you and to her father on the day when we are man and wife. In the meantime, Lucilla begs that you will excuse her abrupt departure, and that you will be so good as to send this letter on to her father. Both you and he will, I hope, remember that she is of an age to act for herself, and that she is only hastening her marriage with a man to whom she has been long engaged, with the sanction and approval of her family-- Believe me, Madam, your faithful Servant,

"OSCAR DUBOURG."

This letter was delivered at luncheon-time--almost at the moment when the

servant had announced to her mistress that Miss Finch was nowhere to be found, and that her traveling-bag had disappeared from her room. The London train had then started. Miss Batchford, having no right to interfere, decided--after consultation with a friend--on at once traveling to Dimchurch, and placing the matter in Mr. Finch's hands.--P.]