

## THE BOOTBLACK.

Here's a—? Black your boots, boss?  
Do it for just five cents;  
Shine 'em up in a minute—  
That's 'nother's presents.

Set your foot right on there, sir;  
The mornin's kinder cold—  
Sorter rough on a feller's  
When his coat's a gettin' old.

Well, yes—call it coat, sir,  
Though 'tain't much more'n a coat;  
Can't get myself another—  
Aint got the stamps to spare.

Make as much as most on 'em—  
That's so; but then, yer see,  
They're only 'at us to do for;  
There's two on us, Jack and me.

Jim? Why—that little fellow,  
With a double-up sorter back,  
Statin' there on the grassin',  
Gunnin' himself—that's Jack.

Used to be round sellin' papers,  
The cars there was his lay,  
But he got shoved off the platform,  
Under the wheels, one day;

Yes, the conductor did it—  
Gave him a regular throw—  
He didn't care if he killed him;  
Some on 'em is just so.

He's never been all right since, sir,  
Sorter quiet and queer—  
Jim and me go together,  
He's what they call cashier.

Trouble—I guess not much, sir,  
Sometimes when his gets black,  
I don't know how I'd stand it  
If 'twasn't for little Jack.

Why, boss, you ought to hear him,  
He says a pair of laurs,  
How rough luck is down here, sir,  
If some day we get up there.

All done now—how's that, sir?  
Shine like a pair of laurs,  
Mornin'—give it to Jack, sir,  
He looks after the staps.

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## POOR MISS FINCH: A DOMESTIC STORY.

By WILKIE COLLINS.  
PART THE SECOND.

## CHAPTER XXXIX.

ONE LEARNS TO SEE.

With the new morning, certain reflections found their way into my mind which were not of the most welcome sort. There was one serious element of embarrassment in my position towards Lucilla, which had not discovered itself to me when Nugent and I parted at the rectory gate.

Brown-down was now empty. In the absence of both the brothers, what was I to say to Lucilla when the false Oscar failed to pay her his promised visit that day.

In what a labyrinth of lies had the first fatal suppression of the truth involved us all! One deception after another had been forced on us; one disaster after another had followed retributively as the result—and now that I was left to deal single-handed with the hard necessity of our position, no choice seemed left to me but to go on deceiving Lucilla still! I was weary of it and ashamed of it. At breakfast-time, I evaded all further discussion of the subject after I had first ascertained that Lucilla did not expect the visit of Oscar before the afternoon. For sometime after breakfast, I kept her at the piano. When she wearied of music, and began to talk of Oscar once more, I put on my hat, and set forth on a domestic errand (of the kind usually entrusted to Zillah), solely for the purpose of keeping out of the way, and putting off to the last moment the hateful necessity of telling more lies. The weather stood my friend. It threatened to rain; and Lucilla, on that account, refrained from proposing to accompany me.

My errand took me to a farm-house on the road which led to Brighton. After settling my business, I prolonged my walk, though the rain was already beginning to fall. I had nothing on me that would spoil; and in my present frame of mind, a wet gown was a preferable alternative to returning to the rectory.

After I had walked about a mile further on, the solitude of the road was enlivened by the appearance of an open carriage approaching me from the direction of Brighton. The hood was up to protect the person inside from the rain. The person looked out as I passed, and stopped the carriage in a voice which I instantly recognised as the voice of Grosse. "Our gallant oculist insisted (in the state of the weather) on my instantly taking shelter by his side, and returning with him to the house."

"This is an unexpected pleasure," I said. "I thought you had arranged not to see Lucilla again till the end of the week."

Grosse's eyes glared at me through his spectacles with a dignity and gravity worthy of Mr. Finch himself.

"Shall I tell you something?" he said. "You see sitting at your side a lost surgeon's wife. I shall die soon. Put on my tombs, if you please. The malady which killed this German man was—Lofely Feench. When I am away from her—will me your sympathies; I so much want it—I sweat with anxiousness for young Miss. Your damnable fix about those two brothers is a sort of perpetual blisters on my mind. Instead of snoring peacefully all night in my nice big English bed, I roll wide awake on my pillows, fidgeting for Feench. I am here to-day before my time. For what? For to try her eyes—you think? Good madam, you think wrong! It is not her eyes which troubles me. Her eyes will do it. It is You—and the orders at your rectory-place. You make me nervous-anxious, about my patients. I am afraid some of you will let the mess-fish of those brother-twins find its way to her pretty ears, and turn her poor little mind topsy-turvy when I am not near to see it in time. Will you let her be comfortable for two months more? Ach Gott! if I could only be certain-sure of that, I might leave those weak new eyes of hers to cure themselves and go my ways back to London again."

I had intended to remonstrate with him pretty sharply for taking Lucilla to Brown-down. After what he had now said, it was useless to attempt anything of that sort—and doubly useless to hope that he would let me extricate myself from my difficulties by letting me tell her the truth.

"Of course you are the best judge," I said. "But, you little know what these precautions

of yours cost the unfortunate people who are left to carry them out."

He took me up sharply at those words. "You shall see for your own self," he said. "If it is not worth the cost. If her eyes satisfy me—Feench shall try her sight to-day. You shall stand by, you obstinate woman, and judge if it is good to add shocks and agitations to the exhaustions and irritabilities and bedevilments of all sorts which our poor Miss must suffer in learning to see, after being blind for all her life. No more of it now, till we get to the rectory place." By way of changing the subject for the present, he put a question to me which I felt it necessary to answer with some caution. "How is my nice boy?—my bright clever Nugent?" he asked.

"Very well."

Then I stopped, not feeling at all sure of the ground I was treading on. "Mind this!" Grosse went on. "My bright-boy-Nugent keeps her comfortable-enough. My bright-boy-Nugent is worth all the rest of you together. I insist on his making his visits to young Miss at the rectory-place, in spite of that windy-talky-puff-bag-Feench-father of hers. I say positively—Nugent shall come into the house."

"There was no help for it now. I was obliged to tell him that Nugent had left Brown-down, and that I was the person who had sent him away."

For a moment, I was really in doubt whether the skilled hand of the great surgeon would not



"OH!" SHE EXCLAIMED, "DON'T SPEAK TO ME! DON'T TOUCH ME!"

be ignobly employed in boxing my ears. No perversion of spelling can possibly report the complicated German-English jargon in which his fury poured itself out on my devoted head. Let it be enough to say that he declared Nugent's abominable personation of his brother to be vitally important—so long as Oscar was absent—to his successful treatment and of the sensitive and excitable patient whom he had placed under his care. I vainly assured him that Nugent's object in leaving Dinchurch was to set matters right again by bringing his brother back. Grosse flatly declined to allow himself to be influenced by any speculative consideration of that sort. He said (and swore) that my meddling had raised a serious obstacle in his way, and that nothing but his own tender regard for Lucilla prevented him from "turning the coachman's back," and leaving us henceforth to shift for ourselves.

When we reached the rectory gate, he had cooled a little. As we crossed the garden, he reminded me that I stood pledged to be present when the bandage was taken off.

"Now mind!" he said. "You are going to see, if it is good or bad to tell her that she has had those nice white arms of hers round the wrong brother. You are going to tell me afterwards, if you dare say to her, in plain English words, 'Blue-Face is the man.'"

We found Lucilla in the sitting-room. Grosse briefly informed her that he had nothing particular to occupy him in London, and that he had advanced the date of his visit on that account. "You want something to do, my life on this rainy day. Show Papa-Grosse what you can do with your eyes, now you have got them back again." With these words, he unfasted the bandage, and, taking her by the chin, examined her eyes—first without his magnifying glass; then with it.

"Am I going on well?" she asked anxiously.

"Famous well! You go on (as my good friends say in America) first-class. Now use your eyes for yourself. Give one loving look to Grosse first. Then—see! see! see!"

There was no mistaking the tone in which he spoke to her. He was not only satisfied about her eyes—he was triumphant. "Soh!" he grunted, turning to me. "Why is Mr. Sebrights not here to look at this?"

I eagerly approached Lucilla. There was still a little dimness left in her eyes. I noticed also that they moved to and fro restlessly, and (at times) wildly. But, oh, the bright chance in her! The new life of beauty which the new sense had bestowed on her already! Her smile, always charming, now caught light from her lips, and spread its gentle fascination over all her face. It was impossible not to long to kiss her. Grosse stepped forward, and checked me.

"No," he said. "Walk your ways to the other end of the room—and let us see if she can go to you."

Like all other people, knowing no more of the subject than I knew, I had no idea of the pitifully helpless manner in which the restored sense of sight struggles to assert itself, in persons who have been blind for life. In such cases, the effort of the eyes that are first learning to see, is like the efforts of the limbs when a child is first learning to walk. But for Grosse's odd way of taking it, the scene which I was now

to witness would have been painful in the last degree. My poor Lucilla—instead of filling me with joy, as I had anticipated—would I really believe have wrung my heart, and have made me burst of crying.

"Now!" said Grosse, laying one hand on Lucilla's arm, while he pointed to me the other. "There she stands. Can you go to her?"

"Of course I can!"

"I lay you a bet-wager, you can not! Ten thousand pounds to six pence. Done-done. Now, try!"

She answered by a little gesture of defiance, and took three hasty steps forward. It wavered and frightened she stopped suddenly at the third step—before she had advanced half the way from her end of the room to mine.

"I saw her here," she said, pointing down to the spot on which she was standing; and appealing piteously to Grosse. "I see her now—and I don't know where she is! She is so near, I feel as if she touched my eyes—and yet" (she advanced another step, and clutched with her hands at the empty air)—"and yet, I can't get near enough to take hold of her. Oh! what does it mean? what does it mean?"

"It means—pay me my six pence!" said Grosse. "The wager-bet is mine!"

She resented his laughing at her, with an obstinate shake of her head, and an angry knitting of her pretty eyebrows.

"Wait a little," she said. "You shan't win quite so easily as that. I will get to her yet!"

She came straight to me in a moment—just

She opened her eyes (very unwillingly), and looked once more at the pen-wiper and the paper.

"I see nothing as bright as my favourite colours here," she said.

Grosse held up the sheet of paper, and pressed the question without mercy.

"What is white, whiter than this?"

"Fifty thousand times whiter than that!"

"Good. Now mind! This paper is white" (he snatched her handkerchief out of her apron-pocket). "This handkerchief is white, too; whitest of white, both of them. First lesson, my love! Here in my hands is your favourite colours, in the time you were blind."

"That!" she exclaimed, pointing to the paper and the handkerchief, with a look of blank disappointment as he dropped them on the table. She turned over the pen-wiper and the hat, and looked round at me. Grosse, waiting to try another experiment, left it to me to answer. The result, in both cases, was the same as in the cases of the sheet of paper and the handkerchief. Scarlet was not half as red—black, not one hundredth part as black—as her imagination had figured them to her, in the days when she was blind. Still, as to this last colour—as to black—she could feel some little encouragement. It had affected her disagreeably (just as poor Oscar's face had affected her) though she had not actually known it for the colour that she disliked. She made an effort, poor child, to assert it herself, against her merciless surgeon-tenet. "I didn't know it was black," she said. "But I hated the sight of it, for all that."

She tried, as she spoke, to toss the hat on to a chair, standing close by her—and threw it instead, high above the back of the chair, against the wall, at least six feet away from the object at which she had aimed. "I am a helpless fool!" she burst out; her face flushing crimson with mortification. Don't let Oscar see me! I can't bear the thought of making myself ridiculous before him! He is coming here, she added, turning to me encouragingly. "Manage to make some excuse for his not seeing me till later in the day."

I promised to find the excuse—all the more readily, that I now saw an unexpected chance of reconciling her in some degree (so long as she was learning to see) to the blank produced in her life by Oscar's absence. She addressed herself again to Grosse.

"Go on!" she said impatiently. "Teach me to be something better than an idiot—or put the bandage on, and blind me again. My eyes are of no use to me! Do you hear?" she cried furiously, taking him by his broad shoulders and shaking him with all her might—"my eyes are of no use to me!"

"Now I know I now!" cried Grosse. "If you don't keep your temper, you little spitfire, I will teach you nothing." He took up the sheet of paper and the pen-wiper; and, forcing her to sit down, placed them together before her, in her lap.

"Do you know one thing?" He went on. "Do you know what is meant by an object which is square? Do you know what is meant by an object which is round?"

Instead of answering him, she appealed indignantly to my opinion.

"Is it not monstrous," she asked, "to hear him put such a question to me as that? Do I know round from square? Oh, how cruelly humiliating! Don't tell Oscar I don't tell Oscar!"

"If you know," persisted Grosse, "you can tell me. Look at those two things in your lap. Are they both round? or both square? or is one round? and the other square? Look now, and tell me."

She looked—and said nothing.

"Well?" continued Grosse.

"You put me out standing there staring at me through your horrid spectacles!" she said irritably. "Don't look at me, and I will tell you directly."

Grosse turned his head my way, with his diabolical grin; and signed to me to keep watch on her, in his place.

The instant his back was turned, she shut her eyes, and ran over the paper and the pen-wiper with the tips of her fingers.

"One is round, and one is square," she answered, cunningly opening her eyes again, just in time to avoid critical inspection when Grosse turned round towards her once more.

He took the paper and the pen-wiper out of her hands; and (thoroughly understanding the trick she had played him) changed them for a brook-saucer and a book. "Which is round? and which is square of these?" he asked, holding them up before her.

She looked first at one, and then at the other—plainly unperplexed (with only her eyes to help her) of answering the question.

"I put you out—don't I?" said Grosse, "You can't shut your eyes, my lovely Feench, while I am looking—can you?"

She turned red—then pale again. I began to be afraid she would burst out crying. Grosse managed her to perfection. The tact of this rough, ugly, eccentric old man was the most perfect tact I have ever met with.

"Shut your eyes," he said soothingly. "It is the right way to learn. Shut your eyes, and take them in your hands, and tell me which is square in that way first."

She told him directly.

"Good now open your eyes, and see for yourself if it answers you have got in your right hand, and the books you have got in your left. You see? Good again. Put them back on the table now. What shall we do next?"

"May I try if I can write?" she asked eagerly. "I do so want to see if I can write with my eyes instead of my finger!"

"No! Ten thousand times no! I forbid reading; I forbid writing yet. Come with me to the window. How do these most troublesome eyes of yours do at a distance?"

While we had been trying our experiment with Lucilla, the weather had brightened again. The clouds were parting; the sun was coming out; the bright gaps of blue in the sky were widening every moment; the shadows were travelling grandly over the windy slopes of the hills. Lucilla lifted her hands in speechless admiration as the German threw open the window, and placed her face to face with the view.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "don't speak to me! don't touch me! let me enjoy it! There is no disappointment here. I have never thought, I have never dreamed, of anything half so beautiful as this!"

Grosse looked at me, and silently pointed to her. She had turned pale—she was trembling in every limb, overwhelmed by her own costal sense of the glory of the sky and the beauty of the earth, as they now met her view for the first time. I penetrated the surgeon's object in directing my attention to her—"See" (he meant to say), "what a delicately-organised creature we have to deal with! Is it possible to be too careful in handling such a sensitive temperament as that?" Understanding him only too well, I also trembled when I thought of the future. Everything now depended on Nugent. And Nugent's own lips had told me that he could not depend on himself!

It was a relief to me when Grosse interrupted her.

She pleaded hard to be allowed to stay at the window a little longer. He refused to allow it. Upon that she flew instantly into the opposite extreme—"I am in my own room, and I am my own mistress," she said angrily. "I insist on having my own way." Grosse was ready with his answer.

"Take your own ways, fatigue those weak new eyes of yours—and to-morrow, when you try to look out of window, you will not be able to see at all." This reply terrified her into instant submission. She insisted on replacing the bandage with her own hands. "May I go away to my own room?" she asked, with the simplicity of a child. "I have seen such beautiful sights—and I do so want to think of them by myself."

The medical adviser instantly granted the patient's request. Any proceeding which tended to compound her, was a proceeding which he highly approved.

"If Oscar comes," she whispered, as she passed me on her way to the door, "mind I hear of it and mind you don't tell him of the mistakes I have made!" She paused for a moment, thinking. "I don't understand myself," she said. "I never was so happy in my life. And yet, I feel almost ready to cry!" She turned towards Grosse. "Come here, papa. You have been very good to me to-day. I will give you a kiss." She laid her hands lightly on his shoulders; kissed his forehead and wrinkled cheek; gave me a little squeeze round the waist—and left us. Grosse turned sharply to the window, and used his huge silk handkerchief for a purpose to which (I suspect) it had not been put for many a long year past.

## CHAPTER XL.

TRACES OF NUGENT.

"MADAME PHOTOLUNUS!"

"Herr Grosse?"

He put his handkerchief back into his pocket, and turned round to me again, from the window with his face composed again, and his tea-caddy snuff-box in his hand.

"Now you have seen for your own self," he said with an emphatic rap on the box, "do you dare tell that sweet girl which of them it is that has gone his ways and left her far over?"

It is not easy to find a limit to the obstinacy of women—when men expect them to acknowledge themselves to have been wrong. After what I had seen, I no more dared tell her than he did. I was only too obstinate to acknowledge it to him—just yet.

"Mind this!" he went on. "Whether you shake her with frights, or whether you heat her with rage, or whether you wound her with grief—it all goes straight the same to those weak new eyes of hers. They are so weak and so new, that I must ask once more for my belt here to-night, for to see to-morrow if I have not already tried them too much. Now, for the last time of asking, have you got the abominable courage in you to tell her the truth?"

He had found my limit at last. I was obliged to own (heavily as I disliked doing it) that there was for the present, no choice left but mercifully to conceal the truth. Having gone this length, I next attempted to console him as to the safest manner in which I could account to Lucilla for Oscar's absence. He refused (as a man) to recognise the slightest necessity for giving me (as a woman) any advice on question of evasions and excuses. "I have not lived all my years in the world, without learning something," he said. "When it comes to walking upon eggshells and telling lies, the women have nothing to learn from the men. Will you take a little stroll-walk with me in the garden? I have one odder thing to say to you; and I am hungry and thirsty both together—for this."

He produced "This," in the form of his pipe. We left the room at once for our stroll in the garden.

Having solved himself with his first mouthful of tobacco-smoke, he started me by announcing that he meant to remove Lucilla forthwith from Dinchurch to the seaside. In doing this, he was actuated by two motives—first, the medical motive of strengthening her constitution; second, the personal motive of preserving her from making painful discoveries by plotting her out of reach of the gossip of the rectory and the village. Grosse held the lowest opinion of Mr. Finch and his household. His dislike and distrust of the rector, in particular, knew no bounds; he characterised the Pope of Dinchurch as an Ape with a long tongue, and a man-and-monkey capacity for doing mischief. Rainsgate was the watering-place which he had fixed on. It was at a safe distance from Dinchurch; and it was near enough to London to enable him to visit Lucilla frequently. The one thing needed was my co-operation in the new plan. If I was at liberty to take charge of Lucilla, he would speak to the Ape with the long tongue; and we might start for Rainsgate before the end of the week.

Was there anything to prevent me from carrying out the arrangement proposed?

There was nothing to prevent me. My one other anxiety apart from Lucilla—anxiety about good Papa—had now, for some time, been happily set at rest. Letter after letter from my sisters in France, brought me always the same cheering news. My evergreen parent had at