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Stories from the Diary of a Doctor

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FEW cases in their day interested me more than that of Beryl Temple, and this, not so much from the medical point of view as from the character of this strong-minded and brave girl.

It was on the occasion of her mother's death that I first became acquainted with Beryl. She suffered keenly at the time, but her courage and presence of mind and fine self-suppression aroused my interest, and when, a month afterwards, she came to me and told me in the simple manner which always characterized her that she was not only friendless but without means of support, I eagerly asked in what way I could help her.

She replied with a blush, and something like tears in her eyes.

"Of all things in the world," she said, "I should like best to be trained as a hospital nurse—do you think I am suited to the profession?"

"Admirably," I replied. "You have nerve and self-control; you have also good health and, although I am sure that you have plenty of heart, you would never be mawkishly sentimental."

"Oh, no," she answered; "I am glad you approve."

"I cordially approve," I replied. "In many cases the profession of nursing is best undertaken by women who are not too highly cultivated, and whose position is below that of the supposed lady–but you, Miss Temple, will make an admirable nurse. Your peculiar characteristics fit you for this calling.

I saw by the expression on her face that my words pleased her. I helped her to take the necessary steps to become a probationer at one of the large hospitals. She entered on her profession with enthusiasm—her time of training passed without hitch, and in due course I placed her on my own special staff of nurses.

I had been by no means mistaken in Miss Temple's qualifications—her nerve was wonderful, her tact perfect. Although slight and rather delicate looking, she had a great reserve of strength, and I never knew her to break down or fail in any way, even when the case she had to attend to was involved in serious difficulties.

For nervous cases in especial, I found Miss Temple invaluable, and it so happened that she was the first person I applied to in the case of a very peculiar patient, Lady Violet Dalrymple.

I was sent for to the country to see Lady Violet in the autumn of the year 1889.

I remember the night when the telegram came to me from her mother, the Countess of Erstfield. Lady Violet was the only child—a girl of seventeen. Lady Erstfield had once brought her to see me in town. I then considered her an overgrown, somewhat nervous girl, had ordered change, a quiet life, plenty of fresh air, plenty of nourishment, plenty of congenial occupation, and had felt assured that if these remedies were systematically followed out, the young girl would quickly recover from the nervous derangements which were just then interfering with her health and happiness.

By the tenor of Lady Erstfield's telegram, however, I feared that this was not the case.

"I am very anxious about Violet. Come without delay," she wired.

I replied by telegram that I would arrive at Beeches by a late train that evening. I did so. Lady Erstfield was up. I had a long interview with her, and got all possible information with regard to my patient's state of health I did not see Lady Violet herself, however, until the following morning.

At an early hour that day, I was taken into the pretty boudoir, where I found my patient lying on a sofa. It was a room furnished with all that taste, money, and love could suggest. Books, flowers, pictures, birds in cages, all that was gay and bright, surrounded the lovely girl who lay pale and languid on a sofa drawn close to the open window. This window commanded a perfect view of river, wood, and meadow, with a distant peep of lowlying hills against the horizon. To my eyes, accustomed to London bustle and noise, this view alone was restful and delightful.

Drawing a chair forward, I sat down by my patient and entered into a common-

place talk with her. I had purposely asked Lady Erstfield to leave us, for I knew by experience that in nervous cases the patient was far more inclined to be confidential and to reply truthfully to questions when alone with the physician.

Having carefully examined Lady Violet, and made certain that she was suffering from no organic disease, it only remained for me to conclude that she was a victim to one of those many ill-defined and misunderstood nervous disorders, which, by their variety and complexity, present the greatest difficulty in medical practice.

The treatment I saw at once must be moral, not medical.

“I don t find much the matter with you,” I said, cheerfully; “your disease is more fancy than reality—instead of lying here, you ought to be having a gallop across those moors yonder.”

Lady Violet gazed at me with a look of surprise and even faint displeasure in her large brown eyes.

“I love riding,” she said, in a gentle voice, “but it is long since I have had the pleasure of a canter over the moors or anywhere else.”

“You should not give up riding,” I said; “it is a most healthful exercise and a splendid tonic for the nerves.”

“I don’t think you can realize how very weak I am,” she answered, something like tears dimming her eyes. “Did not mother explain to you the strange symptoms from which I suffer?”

“The symptoms of which you complain are clearly due to an over-wrought imagination,” I replied. “You must try to curb it by every means in your power. I assure you I am only telling you the true state of the case when I say that there is nothing serious the matter with you.”

She sighed and looked away from me.

I took her slim hand in mine and felt her pulse. It was weak, fluttering, and uneven. I bent forward and looked into her eyes—the pupils were slightly dilated. Still I held firmly to my opinion that nervous derangement, that most convenient phrase, was at the bottom of all that was wrong.

“Now,” I said, rising as I spoke, “I will prescribe a drive for you this afternoon, and in a day or two, I have no doubt, you will be strong enough to get on horseback again. Take no medicines; eat plenty, and amuse yourself in every way in your power.”

Soon afterwards I left the room, and saw Lady Erstfield alone.

“Your daughter is an instance of that all too common condition which we call neurasthenia,” I said. “Although, unlike the name, the disease is not a coinage of the nineteenth century, still it has greatly increased of late, and claims for its victims those who have fallen out of the ranks of the marching army of women, in the advancing education and culture of their sex.”

“I don’t understand your placing Violet in that position,” said Lady Erstfield, with reddening cheeks.

“My dear madam,” I replied, “your daughter is the undoubted victim of over-culture and little to do. Were she a farmer’s daughter, or were she obliged in any other way to work for her living, she would be quite well. The treatment which I prescribe is simply this—healthy occupation of every muscle and every faculty. Do all in your power to turn her thoughts outwards, and to arouse an active interest in her mind for something or someone. I assure you that although I am not anxious about her present state, yet cases like hers, if allowed to drift, frequently end in impairment of intellect in some degree, either small or great.”

Lady Erstfield looked intensely unhappy.

“Violet is our only child,” she said; “her father and I are wrapped up in her. Although you seem to apprehend no danger to her life–-”

“There is none,” I interrupted.

“Yet you allude to other troubles which fill me with terror. There is nothing Lord Erstfield and I would not do for our child. Will you kindly tell me how we are to provide her with the interests and occupations which are to restore her mind to a healthy condition?”

I thought for a moment.

“Lady Violet is very weak just now,” I said, “her whole constitution has been so

enfeebled with imaginary fears and nervous disorders that a little good nursing would not come amiss for her. I propose, therefore, to send a nurse to look after your daughter."

Lady Erstfield uttered an exclamation of dismay.

"A hospital nurse!" she exclaimed; "the mere word will terrify Violet into hysterics."

"Nothing of the kind," I answered. "The nurse I propose to send here is not an ordinary one. She is a lady—well born and well educated. She is extremely clever, and is remarkable both for her tact and gentleness. She thoroughly understands her duties—in this case they will consist mainly in amusing Lady Violet in the most strengthening and invigorating manner. Her name is Temple. I will ask you to call her Miss Temple, and never to speak of her or to her as nurse. She will soon win her own way with your daughter, and I shall be greatly surprised if she does not become more or less indispensable to her. She is just as healthy-minded, as bright, as strong as Lady Violet is the reverse."

After a little more conversation with Lady Erstfield, it was arranged that Miss Temple was to be telegraphed for at once.

I wrote her a long letter, giving her full directions with regard to the patient. This letter I left with Lady Erstfield, and asked her to deliver it to Miss Temple as soon as ever she arrived. I then went to bid Lady Violet good-bye.

She looked even more wan and exhausted than when I had seen her in the morning. I thought it well to let her know about Miss Temple's arrival.

"She is a thoroughly nice girl," I said. "She will nurse you when you want to be nursed, and amuse you when you wish to be amused, and let you alone when you want quiet, and you will find her so fresh and bright and entertaining that you will soon, I am persuaded, be unable to do without her. Good-bye, now—I hope you will soon be much better, both for your mother's sake and your own."

Lady Violet raised her brows.

"Is mother unhappy about me?" she asked.

"She loves you," I replied, steadily, "and is getting quite worn out with anxiety

about you. I wish her mind to be relieved as soon as possible, and I think it is your duty to do what you can towards this end."

"What can you mean?" asked Lady Violet.

"In your mother's presence," I answered, "you ought to endeavour as much as possible to overcome the melancholy which has taken such possession of you. Seem to be gay, even when you don't feel it. Try to appear well, even when you don't think you are. When you are alone with Miss Temple, you can do, of course, exactly as you please. But when with your father and mother, you ought to make a strenuous effort to overcome the morbid feelings, which are due entirely to the nervous weakness from which you are suffering."

Lady Violet looked at me intently.

"I love my father and mother," she exclaimed. "I would not willingly hurt the feelings of either. But, oh! how little you know what I suffer when you speak of my suppressing my trouble and terrible depression. Am I not always—always suppressing my fears? Oh, how hateful life is to me—how distasteful, how hollow. I should like to die beyond anything, and yet I am such a coward that the near approach of death would terrify me. Why was I born to be so miserable?"

"You were born to be happy," I answered, "or, at least, to be useful and contented. Your fear of death is perfectly natural, and I hope it will be many a long day before you are called upon to resign so precious a possession as life.

Remember, you have only one life—use it well—you will have to account for it some day; and now, good-bye."

I returned to London, and in about a week's time I received a letter from Miss Temple. It satisfied me thoroughly. Lady Violet was better. She went out for a little daily. She read to herself, and allowed Miss Temple to read to her. She was interested in a fancy fair which was to be held in the neighbourhood, and was helping Miss Temple to work for it. The nurse had also discovered that her patient had a love, almost a passion, for music. Miss Temple was an accomplished pianist before she took up her present profession, and she and Lady Violet spent a considerable portion of each day over the piano.

In short, Miss Temple was doing all that I expected her to do for the young girl whose life was so valuable. Lady Violet was undoubtedly already acquiring that

outward view which means health both of mind and body.

Miss Temple's first letter was followed in the course of time by another, which was even more hopeful than the first. Lady Violet was devotedly attached to her, and could scarcely bear her out of her presence. The girls rode together, walked together, sketched and played together. The colour of health was coming back to Lady Violet's pale cheeks; she would soon, in Miss Temple's opinion, be restored to perfect health.

Lady Erstfield also wrote to me about this time, and spoke in rapture of the companion whom I had secured for her daughter.

"I cannot tell you what Beryl Temple is to us," she said; "we owe Violet's recovery to her wonderful tact, her sympathy, her genius. She is like no girl I ever met before—she fascinates and subjugates us all—we do not want ever to part with her—as to Violet, it would almost kill her, I think, were Beryl Temple now to leave us."

About a month after receiving these two letters I was astonished and much pleased to see an announcement in the Morning Post to the effect that a matrimonial alliance was arranged between Lady Violet Dalrymple, only daughter of the Earl and Countess of Erstfield, and Captain Geoffrey Ponsonby, of the Coldstream Guards, and that the marriage was likely to take place in December.

On reading this short paragraph I turned to my case-book, and under Lady Violet's name made the following note:—

"A case of neuasthenia, in which environment with moral treatment caused recovery."

I then dismissed the subject from my mind, with the final reflection that I should not have much more to do with Lady Violet.

The following circumstances quickly proved my mistake.

On the evening of that same day I had a letter from Miss Temple, confirming the news of the approaching marriage; telling me that it had been contemplated for some time by the parents of the young people, but that a formal engagement had been deferred owing to the state of Lady Violet's health. Captain Ponsonby had

arrived at Beeches about a fortnight ago, had proposed for Lady Violet, who had accepted him not without a certain unwillingness, and the marriage was arranged to take place immediately after Christmas.

“Lady Violet is not as well as I could wish,” continued Miss Temple, towards the close of her letter. “At first she refused absolutely to engage herself to Captain Ponsonby, but yielded to the entreaties of both her parents, who are most desirous for the match. She is once more languid, and inclined to be uninterested in her surroundings. I am not satisfied about her state, and deeply regret Captain Ponsonby’s arrival—she was really in radiant health when he came to the house a fortnight ago. Lord and Lady Erstfield quite fail to observe their daughter’s state of depression—they are both in the highest spirits, and active preparations for the wedding are going forward.”

This letter caused me uneasiness—it was followed almost immediately by a second.

“DEAR DR. HALIFAX,” wrote Miss Temple, “I am in great, in dreadful, trouble—not alone about Lady Violet, whose condition alarms me much, but on my own account. In short, I am bewildered by the fearful calamity which has suddenly overtaken me. I have not a soul to confide in, and greatly long to see you. I know I must not expect you to come here, and yet it is impossible for me, under existing circumstances, to ask for a day off duty. God help me; I am the most unhappy girl in the world!

“Yours sincerely,

“BERYL TEMPLE.

I received this letter by the last post one night. It caused me some wakeful hours, for I was greatly puzzled how to act. By the morning I resolved to write a line to Lady Erstfield, telling her that I had heard from Miss Temple of Lady Violet’s altered condition, and offering to come to see her. That letter was not destined to be written however. As I was sitting at breakfast a telegram was put into my hand. It was from Lord Erstfield, requesting me to go to Beeches immediately.

I started off by an early train and arrived at my destination about noon. I was shown at once into a reception-room, where Lady Erstfield awaited me.

“It is good of you to respond so quickly to our telegram,” she said. “We are in

terrible trouble here. Violet is in the strangest condition. She is very feverish: her strength seems completely gone. She lies hour after hour moaning to herself, and takes little notice of anyone."

"How long has this state of things gone on?" I asked.

"The complete breakdown only took place yesterday, but Miss Temple assures me that Violet has been failing for some time. Her father and I noticed on one or two occasions that she seemed pale and languid, but as there was a good deal to excite her, we put her fatigue down to that source. Under your judicious treatment and the admirable care Miss Temple gave her we considered her perfectly recovered, and it did not enter into our minds that a recurrence of the old attack was possible."

"When you speak of Lady Violet having much to excite her, you doubtless allude to her engagement?" I said. "I saw it officially announced in the Morning Post. I judged from it that she had quite recovered."

Lady Erstfield coloured.

"We thought so," she said; "her father and I both thought so. We were much pleased at the contemplated marriage, and we imagined that our child was happy, too. Captain Ponsonby is all that anyone can desire."

"And you have reason not to be satisfied now?" I asked.

"The fact is this," said Lady Erstfield, shortly: "Violet is unhappy—she does not wish the engagement to go on. She told Miss Temple so this morning. I have seen my dear child on the subject an hour ago—we cannot account for her caprice in this matter."

"I will see Lady Violet now, if you will permit me," I said. "The engagement is, doubtless, the cause of this strange breakdown. Will you take me to her room?"

Lady Erstfield led the way without a word.

I found my patient even worse than her mother had given me to understand. In addition to much nervous trouble, she had unquestionably taken a chill of some sort, and symptoms of pneumonia were manifesting themselves. When I bent over her, I noticed the deep flush on her cheeks, her eyes were closed—her

breathing was short and hurried. Miss Temple was standing by the bedside–she gave me an earnest glance, her face was as pale as Lady Violet's was flushed. I noticed that Lady Erstfield avoided speaking to the nurse, who, on her part, moved slightly away as she approached. The despair, however, which must have filled the poor mother's heart as she watched her suffering child might in itself account for her manner. I was very anxious to see the nurse alone, and asked Lady Erstfield if I could do so.

"Certainly," she answered; "I will watch here until Miss Temple is able to resume her duties."

"I will not be long away," answered Beryl. She took me at once into Lady Violet's pretty little boudoir and shut the door.

"I must be very quick," she said, "my place is with Violet. You think her very ill?"

"I do," I answered. "Her life is in danger. She is threatened with pneumonia. If the symptoms grow worse, she will not have strength to bear up under the attack."

"Oh, then, I must not think of myself—even now I manage to soothe her as no one else can. Let me go back!"

"Sit down," I answered; "you will not be fit long to nurse anyone unless you look after yourself. What is the matter with you? You are greatly changed!"

"Did I not tell you in my letter that I am in great trouble?"

Miss Temple's words were interrupted by a knock at the door of the boudoir.

She said "Come in," and a manservant entered. He approached Lady Violet's little writing-table, disturbed a book or two, and finally retreated with an "A B C" in his hand, apologizing as he did so.

"Do you know who that man is?" asked Miss Temple.

"One of the servants," I replied; "never mind him—tell me your trouble as quickly as possible."

“He is connected with it, unfortunately. He is not one of the usual servants of the house, although he wears the livery. That man is a detective from Scotland Yard, and he came into the room just now to watch me. He, or his fellow detective, for there are two here, watch me wherever I go. On one excuse or another, they enter each room where I am found.”

“What do you mean?” I asked.

“I will tell you in as few words as possible—can you wonder that I am changed?”

“I am lost in conjecture as to what you can possibly mean,” I answered, looking at her anxiously.

In truth I had cause for my anxiety.

Her fine face looked absolutely aged and worn. Her eyes were almost too large—their expression was strained—they had heavy black lines under them. Her mouth showed extreme dejection. When I remembered the blooming, healthy girl who had gone to Beeches two months ago, I was appalled by the change.

“Speak,” I said; “I am deeply interested. You know that I will do everything in my power to help you.”

“This is my story,” she said: “Lady Violet got quite well—I was much attached to her, we were very happy—it seemed like the old life back again, when my mother was alive and I had a luxurious home. Lord and Lady Erstfield treated me more like a daughter than a nurse; Lady Violet was my dear sister. Then Captain Ponsonby came. He proposed, and was accepted. Immediately after the engagement Lady Violet drooped; she no longer gave me her confidence; she lost her appetite; she became constrained and silent. Once or twice I caught her crying—she turned away when I tried to question her. Lord and Lady Erstfield noticed no change, and Captain Ponsonby came and went as an honoured guest. No one seemed to notice the efforts Lady Violet made to seem at home in his society.

“One morning about ten days ago Lady Erstfield, accompanied by Captain Ponsonby, came into this room, where I was reading aloud to my dear little patient. I could not imagine why they did not observe her pale cheeks and her languor. I saw, however, at a glance that Lady Erstfield was in a high state of

excitement and delight. She held a jewel-case in her hand. She opened it and, bending down, showed its glittering contents to her daughter. I was startled at the effect on the Lady Violet. She clapped her hands in ecstasy and sat upright on the sofa. Her eyes had grown suddenly bright, and her cheeks rosy.

"'How I adore diamonds,' she said, 'and what beauties these are: oh, you lovely creatures! But, mother, why do you show them to me?'

"'They are my present to you, Violet,' said Captain Ponsonby. 'Those diamonds are heirlooms in the family, and are of great value. They will be yours when we are married.'

"'Come and look at them, Beryl," exclaimed Lady Violet. 'Are they not splendid?' As she spoke she lifted a diamond necklace of extraordinary brilliancy and quaint device out of the case. I knelt down by her and examined the gems with delight almost equal to her own. I have always had a great love for jewels, and for diamonds in particular, and these were quite the most magnificent I had ever seen. The necklace was accompanied by a tiara and earrings, and the gems were worth, Lady Erstfield said, from fifteen to twenty thousand pounds.

"We spent some time examining and criticising them. Violet sent for a looking-glass from one of the bedrooms in order to see the effect of the jewels round her throat. She insisted on my trying them on as well as herself. Lady Violet is fair, but, as you know, I am very dark. I could not help seeing for myself that the jewels suited me. Lady Violet uttered an exclamation when she saw them on me. 'You look beautiful, Beryl,' she said.

"I laughed, and was about to answer her, when I met Captain Ponsonby's eyes. There was something in his expression which I did not quite like. I unfastened the necklace quickly and laid it back in its velvet bed.

"'Thank you for letting me try it on,' I said. 'I feel as if for one brief moment I had imprisoned the rainbow.'

"I don't know why I said those words. They did me no good afterwards, but I was excited at the time. The magnificent diamonds had really cast a spell over me. Lady Erstfield suggested that Violet should go out for her usual ride.

"'No, mother; I am too tired,' she replied. 'I will drive instead, shall come with

me.’

“‘Run and get ready, then,’ Erstfield to me.

“I was leaving the room when she suddenly called me back.

“‘My dear,’ she said, giving me the case which held the diamonds as she spoke, ‘will you have the goodness to take these to my room, and lock them up in my jewel safe? Here is the key. You must turn the lock twice, and when the revolving shutter moves back, use this smaller key to unlock the inner compartment. Put the case in there, and bring me back the keys when you have changed your dress.’

“I promised to obey, and ran off with a light heart.

“The safe where Lady Erstfield kept her jewels was built into the wall, and was of a very ingenious device. Following her directions implicitly I opened it, placed the case within, and locked the safe carefully again. I then went and changed my dress and returned the keys to Lady Erstfield. Captain Ponsonby, Lady Violet, and I had a pleasant drive, and nothing more was said about the diamonds–I really think we all forgot them.

“The next morning Lady Violet came clown to breakfast, looking so ghastly pale and so depressed, that even her mother uttered an exclamation of surprise when she saw her.

“‘My darling, you look positively ill,’ she said, going up and kissing her.

“Lady Violet gave her a startled and queer look. She made some remark in a very low voice, and with a pettish movement. She then crossed the room to my side, and Lady Erstfield did not question her any further.

“Just as we were leaving the breakfast-table, Captain Ponsonby announced his intention of running up to town for the day, and suddenly suggested that he should take the diamonds with him in order to give the jeweller plenty of time to re-set them in the most thorough manner.

“‘That is a good thought, Geoffrey,’ said Lady Erstfield. Then she turned to me.

“‘You know where the jewels are, Beryl,’ she said—‘here are my keys—run,

dear, and fetch them. I don’t allow even my own maid to know the secret of my jewel safe,’ she continued, looking at Captain Ponsonby as she spoke.

“I ran away, reached Lady Erstfield’s room, unlocked the safe, and put in my hand to take out the case. It had vanished. I searched for it at first without any uneasiness, then in bewilderment, then in a sort of frantic terror. I here was the empty spot on the floor of the safe where I had placed the case—there were the other cases of jewels pushed aside in some little confusion, but the Ponsonby diamonds had absolutely vanished.

“The full horror of the situation had not yet burst upon me—I had not yet even begun to think that anyone would suspect me, but, nevertheless, I felt sick with a sort of nameless terror.

“I locked the safe and returned to the breakfast-room.

“Lord Erstfield was standing by the hearth, talking to Captain Ponsonby—Lady Erstfield was reading the Times, and Violet was kneeling on the floor playing with her favourite pug. Their peaceful faces added to my misery. I know I must have looked wild and frightened—I know when I spoke that my voice must have shaken.

“‘The diamonds are gone,’ I said; ‘they are not in the safe.’

“It was just as if I had flung a bomb into the midst of the cheerful party. Lord Erstfield drew himself up with a dazed expression. Captain Ponsonby turned white, and Lady Erstfield, with a sharp cry, rushed from the room, snatching the keys from my hand as she did so.

“‘There is no use in Lady Erstfield examining the safe,’ I said, ‘the diamonds are certainly not there—I have searched all the shelves. The spot where I placed them yesterday is empty; the case has vanished.’

“‘I don’t believe it,’ said Violet. ‘The diamonds must be there. You must be mistaken, Beryl.’

“I made no reply, but when the others left the room I followed.

“We all now went up in a body to Lady Erstfield’s room, and the safe was carefully examined by Lord Erstfield and Captain Ponsonby. The case containing

the diamonds was indeed missing, but not another jewel not even the smallest ring had been touched. There was no mark of the safe having been tampered with in any way, and as it was made on a perfectly unique pattern, and there was not supposed to be a key in the world to fit it, except the special ones made for it, the whole affair seemed buried in hopeless mystery. No one accused me in any way, and it never occurred to me, as I stood in that room, to accuse myself. We discussed the matter in all its bearings. We stood round the open safe and talked until we were tired. I described the exact position in which I had placed the case. Lady Erstfield was certain that from the moment I returned her the keys they had not been out of her possession until she had again placed them in my hands that morning.

“Finally we left the room in a state of hopeless bewilderment. Violet and I went away by ourselves, and, sitting down together, discussed the strange mystery from every point of view. The loss of the jewels had much excited her. She had regained her colour and her manner was quite animated.

“‘I thought, at least, I should have the diamonds,’ she said, with a queer sort of desolate echo in her voice, ‘and I love diamonds: they seem to comfort me in the strangest way. I feel akin to them. When they sparkle and leap and glitter, they appear to me to be alive; they tell me secrets of the strange things they have witnessed in the course of their long existence. Think, if the Ponsonby diamonds could speak, what stories they could tell of the queer, queer things they have seen and heard; eh, Beryl?’

“I tried to turn the conversation—Lady Violet was always worse after indulging in wild talk of this sort.

“‘We have now to consider how to get the Ponsonby diamonds back,’ I said. ‘Who can have stolen them?’

“We talked the matter threadbare, arriving, of course, at no conclusion.

“At lunch we were surprised to find that Captain Ponsonby had not gone to London. When the servants withdrew, we were told that the affair of the diamonds had been put not only into the hands of the local police, but that the authorities in Scotland Yard had been communicated with, and that in all probability a couple of detectives would be sent to Beeches that night.

“‘We have decided,’ said Lord Erstfield, ‘not to say anything of our loss to the

servants. The person who stole those diamonds is quite clever enough to hide them if the least alarm is raised. Our best chance of recovering the treasure is through detectives, who will come here, of course, in plain clothes. We are expecting several fresh guests to-morrow, and in consequence the servants have heard that two new men-servants from London are coming here to help them. We have communicated this fact to Scotland Yard, and the men will be provided with the house livery.'

"After making this statement, which he did very briefly, Lord Erstfield left the room.

"The early part of the afternoon passed listlessly. Lady Violet was once more pale, deadly tired, and too languid to care to do anything. I persuaded her to lie down, and offered to read her to sleep.

"'No,' she answered; 'I don't want anyone to read to me. I will shut my eyes and think of the diamonds. Go and take a walk, Beryl; you look pale and tired yourself.'

"I saw she did not want me, and putting on my hat, I went out for a stroll. I had gone a little way from the house when I heard footsteps behind me. I turned and saw, to my surprise, that Captain Ponsonby was following me.

"'I noticed that you had gone out,' he said, 'and took the liberty of coming after you.' He grew red as he spoke. 'I want to say something to you,' he said; 'something of importance. Can we go somewhere where we can be alone?'

"I told him that I was going to walk through the shrubbery, and that he might, if he pleased, accompany me there; 'but,' I added, 'I shall not be out long, for I am anxious about Lady Violet and want to return to her.'

"We entered the shrubbery as I spoke. He did not speak at all for a moment; then he said, with a sort of abruptness which surprised me:—

"'I will not keep you long. I am glad of this opportunity.' Here he paused, and, turning, looked me full in the face.

"'If you will give me back the diamonds,' he said, 'I will faithfully promise to arrange matters so that not a breath of suspicion shall rest upon you.'

“I felt as if I were shot. His words took me so completely by surprise that I could no: find either breath or speech for a moment.

“‘Do you really think,’ I said then, in a choking voice—‘is it possible that you think, really, that I—I have stolen the diamonds?’

“I suppose my agitation confirmed his suspicions.

“He looked at me with a queer sort of pity.

“‘I could see yesterday how struck you were with their beauty,’ he said. ‘Do you remember what you said about imprisoning the rainbow? The opportunity to take the diamonds was put into your hands. You could not resist the sudden temptation, but I am sure you are sorry now, and would return them if it were possible. I believe I can manage this for you, if you will confide in me.

“I turned quickly; my face was hot; my heart was beating so fast I thought it would burst.

“‘Come with me at once to Lady Erstfield,’ I said: ‘say those words again in her presence. She shall search all my possessions. Come, don’t delay a moment.’

“‘You must be mad,’ he said. ‘For Heaven’s sake don’t inculpate yourself in that manner. As far as I am aware, I am the only person who, at present, suspects you. It has never, I know, even entered into Violet’s head that you could have had anything to do with the robbery, and Lord and Lady Erstfield, I am sure, think you as innocent as themselves—they are the most loyal people in the world—they believe, and rightly, that they owe Violet’s life to you. I don’t think they could harbour an unkind thought of you. Lord Erstfield and I have talked over the loss for a couple of hours this morning, and your name has not once been mentioned in connection with it—I alone–-‘

“‘You alone,’ I interrupted, I entertain this horrible doubt against a defenceless girl?’

“‘I am very sorry,’ he replied, in a steady voice, ‘but it is not even a doubt.’ Here he looked full at me. ‘In my mind it takes the form of a certainty. It is absolutely impossible that anyone else could have taken the diamonds. They are gone—you were last seen with them—you put them into the safe. You returned the keys to Lady Erstfield, who did not let them out of her possession until she gave them to

you again this morning. You must see for yourself what the logical conclusion is —you are the culprit.'

"'No one else has come to that logical conclusion,' I answered.

"'I am a man of the world,' he replied.

"I stood perfectly still for a moment. His cool assurance seemed to deprive me almost of the power of thought. I turned to walk towards the house, but he barred my path.

"'What can I do to induce you to be guided by my common-sense?' he said. 'I can understand the sudden temptation—if you return the jewels to me, not a shadow of suspicion shall ever rest upon you from any other quarter.'

"'I think,' I said, in a trembling voice, 'that the only thing for me to do will be to adhere to my first resolution, to see Lady Erstfield in your presence—to ask you to accuse me of the theft before her–to insist upon having all my possessions searched, and then to leave Beeches immediately.'

"'You won't screen yourself by any such plan,' said Captain Ponsonby—'nay, your wish to leave Beeches will seem to all interested as a certain proof of your guilt. I wish I could get you to understand that I do not feel unkindly to you—that I am sincerely anxious to be your friend in this matter. I know you to be guilty. If you protested from now until Doomsday, the firm conviction in my mind would still be unshaken. May I state the case very briefly to you? Will you try and listen as if I were telling you about some other girl? You took the diamonds in a moment of acute temptation. You are, I presume, a penniless girl. You admired the gems, not only for themselves but also for the effect they produced when they shone like so many suns round your warm, white throat. The price of these jewels was named in your presence. If you could sell them, you would be rich—if you could keep them and wear them, you would be beautiful enough to turn any man's bead. Yes, I understand—I pity, and I am most anxious to screen you. No one else suspects you at present at Beeches, but that state of things will not continue there much longer. As soon as the detectives from London arrive, their suspicions will naturally be fastened on you. Your youth and apparent innocence will in no way deceive them. They will whisper doubts into the minds of Lord and Lady Erstfield, and into the mind also of Lady Violet. The Ponsonby diamonds are of immense historical importance—they

have been mixed up with the fortunes of the family for a couple of centuries, and it is absolutely impossible that a girl like you can hide them successfully. Go where you will, you will never be able to sell that necklace and pendant. Each diamond has a story, and can be traced by experts into whatever hands it falls. You can never sell the necklace, nor would you ever dare to wear it, except in the privacy of your own room. I beg of you, therefore; to let me have it back, and I solemnly swear that the secret shall never pass my lips.'

"I listened to Captain Ponsonby's speech with great attention. The buzzing m my ears and the great tumult round my heart had now to a considerable extent subsided. I was able to bring my common-sense to bear upon the matter, and to absolutely force myself to look the facts in the face as they were presented to me from Captain Ponsonby's point of view. Strange as it may seem, my whole nature became subjected to a sort of revulsion, and far now from being angry with Captain Ponsonby for his accusations, I could not but admire something chivalrous in him which made him come as he thought to my assistance. My only wonder now was, that the Erstfields and Lady Violet were not also convinced of my guilt.

"I remained silent, therefore, for a couple of minutes before I replied.

"'I understand,' I said then, slowly, 'you have explained the position of affairs. I see plainly how very black the circumstantial evidence is against me. I am not surprised at your suspicions, and my wonder is that they are not shared by the rest of the family. As it happens, I am not the thief you imagine me.'

"When I said this, he sighed heavily, shook his head, and, turning, began to walk slowly back with me towards the house.

"'I am not a thief,' I continued, 'for the simple reason that the temptation you spoke about did not exist. The beauty of the gems attracted me yesterday, and I looked at them with pleasure, as I like to look at all lovely things, but I never coveted them the thought never even occurred to me to wish to possess them. I am not as other girls—my life is consecrated—consecrated to the cause of suffering and pain. I live to help people who are obliged to keep on the shady side of life. My whole mind and heart are occupied with these people and their concerns. I do not want money, for my profession supplies me with plenty, and if I had diamonds ten times as beautiful, when as a professional nurse, could I wear them? I have listened to your side of the affair—I must beg of you to listen to

mine. You must see for yourself that, the temptation not existing, it could not be acted upon. I believe you mean kindly by all that you have said, and I thank you for the kindness. Now I will go indoors.'

"I left him—he did not say another word, but I saw by the expression of his face that I had only puzzled without convincing him.

"I went straight up to my own room, and sitting down, thought over the queer turn of events. The horror of the thing grew greater and greater the more I thought it over. I felt torn in two—longing one moment to rush to Lady Erstfield and tell her everything, and the next being kept back by the thought that by so doing I might only put a suspicion into her head which did not exist.

"I was presently sent for to attend to Violet. She had awakened after a bad dream and was in a very uncomfortable and depressed condition. Notwithstanding my own great unhappiness, I could see that she had something on her mind, but although I did all in my power to break the ice, I could not get her to talk to me in a free and natural manner.

"That evening the detectives arrived from London, and the next day several visitors came to the house. Everything went on with outward smoothness, and the subject of the diamonds was by mutual consent never alluded to. Lady Violet grew worse, and the gay house party dispersed sooner than was intended. Captain Ponsonby stayed on, however. I met him occasionally, but we scarcely exchanged a word. I could see that he was anxious and haggard, but I set this down to his fears with regard to Lady Violet who steadily refused to see him, and never left her bedroom and boudoir. I spent almost all my time with her, but as the days wore on I could not but feel the horror of my position more and more. I saw plainly that the suspicion which Captain Ponsonby harboured was shared by the two detectives, and also, in process of time, the poisonous thought was communicated to Lord and Lady Erstfield. Lady Erstfield's manner to me completely altered Instead of treating me with almost the affection of a mother, she was cold and distant; she avoided meeting my eyes, and never spoke to me on any subject except what related to Violet's health. That is the position of affairs to-day, Dr. Halifax. I am suspected of the most horrible theft, and have not a chance of clearing myself. Lady Violet alone loves me as of old. She is my dear sister, and for her sake I–-"

Here the poor girl completely broke down, and, covering her face with her

hands, sobbed aloud.

“Take courage,” I said to her. “I have, at least, one bit of comfort for you: I also fully believe in you. You no more stole the diamonds than I did.”

“Oh, thank you—that is like you,” she said. “God bless you for those words.”

“I am glad I have come here, for every reason,” I continued. “My presence here is necessary not only on account of Lady Violet, but also on your account. I introduced you to this house, and am responsible for your conduct; I shall therefore not leave a stone unturned to clear you, and now you must go back to your work with as brave a heart as you can.”

She rose at once, wiping her eyes and trying to look cheerful.

“One word before you return to Lady Violet,” I said. “Is it true that she has broken off her engagement?”

“Yes.”

“Lady Erstfield told me that she gave you her confidence in this matter.”

“Yes, she spoke to me this morning.”

“Do you mind telling me what she said?”

“She was very weak and had a difficulty in using her voice, but she whispered to me. Her words were something like these:—

“‘Tell my father and mother that I do not love Captain Ponsonby, and will never marry him. From the first he never attracted me, and now there is no inducement —not even the diamonds!’”

“Did she really say ‘not even the diamonds’?”

“Yes, she certainly did. I thought it strange at the time.”

“It was undoubtedly strange. Now go back to your patient and keep up all the courage you can. I shall remain at Beeches until to-morrow, and even longer if necessary. I wish to take care of Lady Violet myself to-night, in order to give you

rest.”

Miss Temple left the room, and after thinking matters over I went downstairs. Captain Ponsonby was still in the house. When I abruptly entered one of the drawing-rooms, I found him talking with Lady Erstfield.

“Can I speak to you?” I said to the lady.

“Certainly,” she replied, starting up. “Is Violet worse? What is the matter?”

“There is no change in Lady Violet’s condition,” I replied. “What I have to speak about refers to Miss Temple.”

Captain Ponsonby rose when I said this and prepared to leave the room.

I interrupted this movement.

“I beg of you not to go,” I said. “I particularly want you to hear what I have come to say.”

He turned and walked slowly back to one of the windows. I could see by the expression of his face that he was a good deal annoyed. He was a handsome, soldierly looking man at least five-and-thirty years of age, with a somewhat overbearing manner. I could understand a child like Lady Violet shrinking from him in possible fear, and yet there was nothing, underhand about him. I could see that he was scrupulously honourable, although his tact would probably not be of the finest.

“I should like you to hear what I have got to say,” I continued, “for you seem to be mixed up in the matter. I refer to the loss of the diamonds.”

“Oh, the diamonds!” exclaimed Lady Erstfield. “Do you suppose we, any of us care about them in an hour of terrible sorrow like this?”

“Pardon me,” I continued, “there is one person who cares a great deal about them. A young girl, who came here at my recommendation—I allude to Miss Temple. It seems that you, sir,”—here I turned to Captain Ponsonby—“have accused Miss Temple in the most unmistakable manner of having stolen the diamonds. You accused her of the theft nearly ten days ago, and since then she has reason to believe that you, Lady Erstfield, share the suspicion.”

Lady Erstfield's face grew pale and troubled.

"Beryl has told you," she exclaimed. "Poor child, I feared that she would not fail to see the alteration in my manner. Try hard as I would to hide my feelings, I could not treat her as I did before.

"Well," she continued, "I am sorry, deeply sorry, to say that we all, with the exception of Violet, suspect her now. She alone had access to the safe–not a breath of suspicion falls on anyone else. Miss Temple has managed to hide the diamonds with wonderful skill for the time being—but in the end she must betray herself. We wish if possible to avoid having her arrested; she is closely watched, however, for there can be little doubt of her guilt."

"And believing this," I said, in a stern voice, "you allow this girl to continue to nurse your daughter?"

"Certainly," replied Lady Erstfield; "in Violet's present condition it would kill her to part with Miss Temple."

I had some difficulty in controlling my anger.

"I am glad I have come," I said, after a pause, "and that not only on Lady Violet's account. I cannot leave Beeches until this matter is satisfactorily cleared up. It is my firm conviction that Miss Temple no more stole the diamonds than you did, Lady Erstfield."

Lady Erstfield murmured something which I could not quite hear.

"I can say with the utmost truth that we are all only too anxious to clear Miss Temple from this horrible suspicion if it can be done," remarked Captain Ponsonby.

"Oh, certainly—most certainly," added Lady Erstfield. "Anything you can suggest, Dr. Halifax–-"

Her words were interrupted—there came a hurried message from the sick room. Lady Violet had awakened in a high state of delirium. Lady Erstfield and I both hurried to her side. I saw that the case was truly one of life or death, and nothing further was said about the diamonds for the present.

Towards evening the sick girl seemed to grow a little easier; she sank into another heavy slumber, and I saw, with satisfaction, that the remedies I had employed were already getting the pneumonia under.<— sic; do they mean under control? —> I now arranged that Miss Temple was to have a night's rest, and that Lady Erstfield and I should watch by the patient for the night.

Lady Erstfield lay down on a sofa at the far end of the spacious bedroom, and I sat by Lady Violet. Her sleep was frequently broken by sharp cries of pain and distress, but I generally managed by a firm word or touch to control her wild fits of delirium. She did not know me, however, although she submitted immediately when I spoke to her. I had many anxious thoughts to occupy me during the night watches. These were chiefly centred round Beryl Temple. I could not help seeing that there was abundant ground for the suspicion which attached to her. She was, I knew well, innocent; but unless the diamonds were discovered, grave doubts would always arise when her name was mentioned. I did not think the Erstfields would prosecute her, but I almost wished them to do so, in order to bring the matter to an issue.

As the night wore on, I fell for a few moments into an uneasy sleep. In my sleep I dreamt of the diamonds. I saw them sparkling round the neck of Lady Violet, whose eyes shone with a strange, fierce fire which made them look almost as bright as the glittering gems. I awoke with certain words on my lips. Lady Violet had said to Miss Temple: "Now there is no inducement to my marriage—not even the diamonds." I thought the words queer at the time—I pondered over them now.

Rising from my chair, I went over to the bed and looked at the sick girl. She was breathing more quietly. I laid my hand on her forehead, and knew at once that her temperature was less high.

I went across the room to Lady Erstfield. She had been asleep, but woke when I approached her.

"I think' my patient is a shade easier," I said. The poor mother uttered a thankful exclamation.

"I will go and sit by her now for an hour or two," she answered. "I have had a long sleep and am refreshed. Won't you lie down, Dr. Halifax? I will call you if Violet requires anything."

I told her that I would go into the outer room and lie on the sofa. I was by habit a light sleeper, and the least word from Lady Erstfield would bring me back to my patient. I lay down, and in a moment was asleep.

I had not slept long when the sound of conversation in the sick room aroused me.

I sprang to my feet, and went back there at once. Lady Erstfield did not hear me. She was standing, facing the bed. Lady Violet was sitting up and speaking in an eager voice.

“I am better,” she said; “mother, I want the diamonds—mother, get them for me—I want to feel them and to look at them—they will comfort me—mother, do get them for me at once—the Ponsonby diamonds, you know what I mean—do, mother, dear, fetch me the Ponsonby diamonds.”

“You must lie down,” I said, going to the other side of the bed; “here, let me cover you up.”

She turned to look at me. I forced her back on her pillow and put the bedclothes over her.

“Who are you?” she inquired, gazing at me with her bright, too bright, eyes.

“Your friend and doctor—my name is Halifax.”

“Oh, have you come back again, Dr. Halifax? I like you very much. Thank you for sending me Beryl. I love Beryl. Where is she now?”

“Lying down, tired out; you must not disturb her: your mother and I will do anything for you that you want. Now you must not talk any more. Let me give you this drink.”

She allowed me to put my hand under her head to raise her, and drank a little milk and soda-water, with a sigh of relief.

“That is nice,” she said; “I am so thirsty.”

“Turn on your side now and go to sleep,” I said.

“I cannot; I cannot. Are you there, mother? Mother, don’t leave me. Mother,

won’t you give me the diamonds? I shall sleep sound, very sound if I may wear them round my neck! Do, mother, dear, give me the Ponsonby diamonds—you don’t know how I long for them.”

“My darling,” said Lady Erstfield, falling suddenly on her knees by the bedside, and bursting into tears, “I would give them to you if I could; but they are lost, Violet, dear—the Ponsonby diamonds are lost.”

“Oh! no, they aren’t, mother,” replied the girl, in a voice of astonishment; “they are in my jewel-case—in the lower drawer. The case which holds the diamonds just fits into the lower drawer of my jewel-case. You will find my keys on the dressing-table. Do, do fetch the diamonds, mother.”

Lady Erstfield sprang to her feet and looked with a kind of horrified consternation at her child.

“No, my love,” she said then, in a soothing voice, “you are dreaming—you are not well and have had a bad dream. Go to sleep, my sweet darling, go to sleep.”

“But I am not dreaming,,” said Lady Violet—“the Ponsonby diamonds are in my dressing-case. I remember putting them there quite well—I had forgotten, but remember now quite well. Dr. Halifax, won’t you fetch them?”

“Certainly,” I replied. “Lady Erstfield, will you direct me to Lady Violet’s jewel-case?”

“Yes,” replied Lady Erstfield.

The poor woman staggered rather than walked across the room. She gave me the key of the jewel-case. I opened it and lifted out the several compartments until I came to the bottom drawer. There lay an old-fashioned morocco case. I opened it, and the Ponsonby jewels in all their magnificence lay before me.

“My God, what does this mean?” gasped Lady Erstfield.

“Hush,” I said, “don’t say anything—take them to her.”

“You must do it, I cannot,” she moaned.

I took the case up to the bedside. Lady Violet gave a little cry of rapture when

she saw it. In a twinkling, she had lifted the necklace from its bed of ruby velvet and had clasped it round her white throat.

“Oh, my beautiful, sparkling treasures ” she exclaimed; “how I love you—how you comfort me!”

She lay down at once and closed her eyes. In a moment she was in sound and dreamless sleep.

The case was one, without any doubt, of sudden and acute kleptomania. This strange nervous disorder had in all probability been developed in Lady Violet by the depression caused by her uncongenial engagement to Captain Ponsonby. The whole thing was now clear as daylight—poor Lady Violet was the unconscious thief. She had stolen the diamonds and then forgotten all about her theft. In her delirium memory returned to her, and in her desire to possess the gems she recalled where she had placed them. How she secured the keys of the safe was an unsolved mystery for some time, but Lady Erstfield, in thinking matters over, remembered how close Violet had sat by her sidc on the sofa in one of the drawing-rooms the evening before the loss was discovered.

“She was often fond of putting her hand into my pocket in play,” said the lady; “it was a trick of hers as a child, and I used to be quite cross about it, sometimes. She must have transferred the keys from my pocket to her own on that occasion, gone upstairs and removed the diamonds from my jewel safe to her own jewel-case, and then once more slipped the keys back into my pocket.”

This explanation seemed sufficiently likely to satisfy people; anyhow, no other was ever forthcoming. Poor Beryl was, of course, restored to higher favour than ever; indeed, Lord and Lady Erstfield felt that they could not possibly make enough of her. The finding of the diamonds was the turning-point in Lady Violet’s illness. She slept for many hours with the sparkling gems round her neck, and when she awoke it was to consciousness and recovery.

The diamonds were returned to Captain Ponsonby on the following day, and the engagement between him and Lady Violet was at an end. There is only one strange thing to add to this strange story. Lady Violet has never, from the moment of her awakening to now, alluded to the Ponsonby diamonds. It is my belief that she has forgotten all about them, and, as far as I can tell, I do not think she will ever be visited by another attack of kleptomania.