

## *Lost, Stolen or Strayed*

### From the Notebook of a Medical Student

The following strange event was related to me when a student in — Hospital, by a household servant of the name of Anne Fairly. She came into the hospital to be cured of a disease to which her class are peculiarly liable—a white swelling of the knee. She was at that time about forty years of age. In her youth this person's first place was in the capacity of housemaid to a nobleman's family, the head of whom I shall call the Marquis of Cornberry, a personage of some celebrity, connected—and not remotely—with royalty. Perhaps it will be best if I tell the story in her own words, exactly as I put it down at the time she related it.

“My lady had an intimate friend, Lady Mosshill—a countess she was, and a very fair, beautiful woman to look at, pleasant spoken, too, and not on the least haughty.—The lady was often on a visit to Lady Cornberry, and her visits mostly lasted a very long time; for the earl, her husband, was employed a great deal in Parliament, and having no children Lady Mosshill felt dull. So she used to tell Therese, my lady's second maid, who attended Lady Mosshill when she visited at my lord's, to save her ladyship from bringing her own maid.

“After I had lived at my lord's for almost twelve months the housekeeper sent for us of the servant's hall, one morning, to come all together to her room. We wondered a good deal what could be the matter, but gradually we found ourselves all collected in the housekeeper's room. Mrs. Merry's speech was a sharp one, very much to the purpose, and not at all satisfactory—at least to the feelings of some of us.

“It is a very unpleasant business I have to speak about,’ said she; ‘but it worries me a good deal more than, I dare say, it will any of you. To speak plainly, and without any preamble, my lady has lost some of her diamonds, and of course suspicion falls on the servants.’”

“There was a general exclamation. At last someone requested to know if suspicion had fallen on any particular individual.

“‘Not as yet,’ Mrs. Merry answered.—Miss Dormer and Mlle Therese, my lady's own attendants had desired their drawers and boxes, even their pockets might be searched; and it had been done without any result affecting the characters of those two young persons.

“Everybody was vociferous in denying the guilt imputed.

“As for myself, I was excessively indignant, for I kept my lady's room clean, though only under housemaid; and knowing that I would have died sooner than have taken the diamonds, I was very vindictive.—I got severely rebuked by the housekeeper.

“‘No one is accused,’ she said, in reply to my angry defense ‘but someone has taken them; they couldn't go without hands, that is certain. They are very valuable, and my lady will feel annoyed at their disappearance.’”

“We all went to the drawing-room to my lady, and demanded that our boxes and our persons might be searched. She acceded to the request.

“‘No one need feel aggrieved,’ she observed, at this proceeding; ‘innocent persons, of course, will remain blameless, and the guilty only will be detected.’

“The search was made, but fruitlessly.— As Mrs. Merry observed, the house was well nigh turned out of windows; yet neither my lady’s diamonds nor the thief who took them were discovered.

“A detective officer was brought into the house, but even his sagacity failed to discover the truth; and so, for a time, the matter dropped; not, however, without leaving a soreness rankling in every dependent of that noble household.

“I believe now, that I had what is usually called too much spirit for my station in life—perhaps I ought rather to say, too much temper. I was no more individually suspected than any of my fellow servants; but I had a sturdy honestness of soul, and it galled me terribly to think my honesty should be suspected. I frequently declared that I should never rest till the real thief was discovered; and, to say the truth, my restless and suspicious vigilance rendered me as good a detective as if I had been trained to the business.

“My father, who was a shoemaker in the village where my lord’s principal country residence was situated, was a very violent rural politician, and a fierce upholder of what he called the ‘Peoples Rights.’ I used to hear him harangue his neighbors, hour after hour, on evenings when his work was done, and they met in the kitchen—which served our family for a ‘parlor, kitchen and hall’—over a pipe and a tankard; for, with all his violence of a party spirit, my father was no pot-house frequenter. He was like many Englishmen of his class, whom I have since observed, a fierce decrifier of the vices of our aristocracy—their pride, arrogance and extravagance—and yet, withal in his heart of hearts, a secret admirer of a lord. It must have been owing to the latter feeling, that when my lady expressed a gracious intention of taking me into her household, my father did not offer the violent opposition which might have been expected from one of his radical opinions. Some resistance on his part certainly occurred; but the shallowest observer might have seen it was assumed more for the sake of consistency than for any dislike to my living with ‘real nobility.’

“However, I had imbibed enough of his prejudices to set myself up as a talker against my superiors—a proceeding for which I was often scolded, and not unfrequently threatened with dismissal. On the occasion of my lady’s loss my irritable and chafed spirit vented its bitterness against the whole noble order to which my lord’s family belonged. It is a wonder to me now that I was not at once sent away for impertinence and sauciness, but Mrs. Merry, the housekeeper was somewhat inclined that way herself, so I suppose she had a fellow feeling.

I took a particular spite against Lady Mosshill on the first occasion my lady had us all into the drawing-room, and Lady Mosshill was present. She wore, the whole time of my lady’s lecture and exhortation to confess the truth, a cold, sneering smile, that might have better sat on the features of a fiend than of a living woman.

“I was the more irritable, because, having to keep clean my lady’s suite of rooms and those appropriated to Lady Mosshill, which were her Lady —’s, I felt I was more particularly liable to be suspected than the servants who were more remotely employed.

“However, time wore on; Lady Mosshill returned home, and the diamonds were almost forgotten, and rarely talked about.— My hot impatience of blame, real or imputed, began to calm down. I gave satisfaction in my work, for I was determined always to do every duty well, and I wished to stay in my present service long enough to obtain a first-rate character.

“Things were thus coming round, when my Lady Mosshill came again to pay my lady a visit of some length. Mademoiselle Therese announced it some days before her ladyship’s arrival.

“‘Dat mauvaise sujet, mi ladi Mosshill, is coming Anne,’ said the French girl in her broken English. She hated my Lady Mosshill, as all lady’s maids hate those on whom—not being their real mistresses—they are forced to attend. ‘It must be dat you get her rooms ready, ah—bah! But I hate her so moosh—she is vat you call the beast in the sty—*cochon—ah—cochon—cochon!*’ and Therese stamped her little kid-shod foot, and ground her white teeth.

“‘She give to me an old robe vat I would not pick up from de street,’ she said, as she ran upstairs; and, to say truth, I was far from being ill-pleased at Therese’s spite, for I liked, as I before said, Lady Mosshill very little better than did my lady’s French *femme de chambre*.

“In a day or two Lady Mosshill arrived, and my lady and she were as intimate as ever. They were, indeed, the dearest of friends, and any one, to see them walking in the grounds together, their arms around each other’s waists, their hands clasped, would have taken them for two of the veriest boarding-school misses, brimful of sentiment and romance. It was in conversation always ‘my love,’ and ‘my dearest,’ and they could scarcely be a moment apart. We could hardly help laughing in the servants’ hall, when we talked of the sentimental friendship which existed between these ladies, neither of them much less than forty—one of them, my lady, the mother of grown up daughters.

“Lady Mosshill had been Lady Cornberry’s visitor about three weeks, when, one morning, my lady’s bell rang as if the house was on fire. Miss Dormer, who was chatting to me on the grand staircase, which it was part of my duty to hearthstone every morning, ran upstairs for her very life; and some of the men-servants came running from the different offices on the stairs.— Everybody believed something serious had occurred.

“Presently Miss Dormer came downstairs, as white as ashes; she went into the housekeeper’s room. I must tell the truth—we all followed to the door of Mrs. Merry’s apartment, in hopes of hearing something; and something we did hear, for Miss Dormer had left the door on jar, and was speaking in loud, excited tones.

“‘Where can they be? Who takes the things?’ said Mrs. Merry, in a vexed tone.

“‘That, heaven only knows,’ said Dormer, half crying; ‘but one thing I knew, innocent people, Mrs. Merry, are not to have their characters taken away every moment in this way; and I shall give my lady warning, that’s what I shall do. Some devil’s in this house,’ said the lady’s maid, stamping her foot violently, for she was by no means remarkable for mildness.

“‘Go, Mrs. Merry, pray, go,’ she continued, ‘to my lady; there’s her bell again.’

“The portly housekeeper bustled upstairs to my lady’s room, scolding, as she came out, because we were idling there, she said, listening to what was no business of ours.

“‘It was our business,’ James, second footman, said, ‘if anything was wrong again with my lady’s diamonds; we had been suspected once, and might be suspected again.’

“Mrs. Merry angrily bade us go about our work; but we did not rest till we questioned Dormer, and learned that my lady had lost more jewels.

“And again there was a fine commotion—searching, detective officers; and again, as before, suspicion fell on no one, and the lost jewels seemed as far off as ever.

“Many of their servants left their places. Such constant attacks of suspicion were too much; but they gained nothing by that only the remark that perhaps they dreaded discovery. As for me, though I spoke my mind freely enough, I stayed. I had been preferred by my lady, because I had been brought up in a model school of hers, where I had carried off the prizes for household work from all competitors. I had not been in my lord’s service two years, when the upper housemaid dying, I was promoted to her situation—a rare thing—for upper servants in a great house, must perfectly know their business. I had worked hard to learn my thoroughly; and, moreover, knew all the ways of the house, which a stranger might be slow in acquiring. So my pertness was reprimanded, and my services retained.

“And the commotion died away again, and six weeks passed away in peace and quietness. Lady Mosshill, on leaving Lady Cornberry’s house, went to Paris for the winter.

“We saw nothing of her ladyship who had been loud in her remarks about the missing jewels, till the ensuing spring, when she arrived on another visit, intended to be a lengthened one.

“She remained about a month; and, at length, to the great joy of the servants, who hated her, gave notice that she would depart next day. On this one, she kept her own room all morning; superintended the packing by Madlle. Therese; and finally, with her own hands, packed a small valise with a few necessaries, for she was to spend a day on her way home with some peer, whose name I forget now. All this Therese told us, when she came to take up hot water for Lady Mosshill’s toilette.

“‘I wish she would leave her room,’ said I, not in a very good humor; ‘all my work is thrown back by these ladies keeping their rooms so late.’

“‘Nevare you mind, Anne,’ said Therese; ‘my ledi, she vill dress herself directly. She is going to my Lor’ Varden’s for dinner, and you shall go to her room den.’

“I grumbled a good deal; but I had to wait Lady Mosshill’s pleasure, for all that; it was six o’clock that evening before I got into the room to clean it.

“Therese was gone down to tea; I looked round; Lady Mosshill’s things were all cleared away, and packed ready for departure. The valise stood on a chair close to the toilette; and I noticed that though the key was in the padlock, yet it was not locked. I stood, broom in hand; and strange thoughts, for which I could never account came over me. To this day I can hardly tell what prompted me so powerfully that I could not resist the temptation. I placed my hand on the top—Lady Mosshill’s night robe came first; then a small basket; and further down, a case of Morocco. How my heart beat as I took it in my hand; how stealthily I looked round the room, as if I were about to become a thief instead of to detect one.

“I opened that case, which I had found in Lady Mosshill’s valise; and there, on a bed of snowy quilted satin, reposed two of my own lady’s most valued jewels—a brooch of diamonds, and a bracelet of emeralds and diamonds mixed. I had seen them on Lady Cornberry’s toilette but the day previously; and Miss Dormer herself had pointed them out to me as unmatched for beauty and value. They had been presented to my lady by her own father, the Marquis of —.

“If a doubt for a moment disturbed my mind it was soon dispelled; I knew those jewels again too well to be deceived; I did not doubt long. Now, after the lapse of years, perhaps the wish that I had acted otherwise comes across me now and then; but at that time I was young, somewhat vindictive, and fiercely sensitive about the honesty of the poor. I threw down my broom, and replacing the jewel case where I had found it, I went out of the room, locked the door, and flew down the great staircase, regardless of the servants who were passing to and fro. The family were all assembled in the drawing room for the half-hour previous to dinner; not knowing or heeding if visitors were present, I opened the door and walked boldly in. It is more than possible that such a breach of duty would have been punished with instant dismissal, had it not been for my pale face, wild looks and excited manner. There were present my lord and lady, my lady’s two brothers, and two or three strange visitors.

“My lady rose up from her chair.

“‘What does this mean, Anne?’ she said.

“I was too eager to exonerate myself and my fellow servants at that minute, to have much regard for the noble presence I had intruded on, not being indeed at any time overawed by contact with great folks, from whom I had seen a good many little actions; therefore I said:

“‘Please, my lady, will you listen to what I have to say?’

“‘Good Heaven!’ said her ladyship, holding her scent bottle to her nose, and turning to my lord, who stood on the hearth, ‘is she deranged, do you think?’

“‘No, my lady,’ said I, ‘I am not mad, if you mean that; but you accused us, my lady, in the servants’ hall, of stealing your diamonds. I said then, my lady, as I say now, it isn’t always *poor* folks who steal.—If you, my lady, or my lord, or any lady or gentleman, will please come with me to Lady Mosshill’s room, I’ll show you, my lady, who’s the real thief, and the true cause of your servants, my lady, being wronged.’

“When I said diamonds, my lady jumped up quite alert, though she had been fainting a few minutes before, in the fear that I was a lunatic.

“‘My diamonds?’ said she. ‘Lead on, girl; I’ll follow you!’

“I wanted no more. Turning round, I ran upstairs, followed by my lord, my lady, my lady’s brothers, and even one or two of the visitors. Curiosity is as great in fine people as in poor servants. We never stopped till we got to Lady Mosshill’s apartments. I unlocked the bedroom door, brought my lady to the valise, took the case out (acknowledging I had broke into it,) opened it and asked my lady if these were her jewels. She was silent for a moment from amazement, and I believe horror, for though Lady Cornberry never scrupled to believe ill of a poor servant, she was dreadfully shocked to find a countess could be a thief. When everyone had become quite convinced, that Lady Mosshill was the culprit, I was dismissed, and my lord and my lady, with their guests, descended to the drawing room. Dinner had been waiting some time, and after some talk, they all went to the dining room, with the exception of my lord, Lord John, my lady’s eldest brother; those gentlemen retired into the library, and had a tray taken there to them.

“The fruit of their resolves was soon known; James was summoned, and he came down to tell us that one of the grooms was to take a horse and ride directly to Milberry Castle—the place to which Lady Mosshill had gone on a visit. This groom we found, was bearer of a letter to Lady Mosshill; and the English lady’s maid informed us that my lady told her the letter was from my lord, forbidding the noble culprit to return to his house. Certain, it is, she never came back; and my lord himself searched Lady Mosshill’s trunks, before her things were sent to Milberry after her. Then we heard my lord at the same time had written an account of the whole affair to Lord Mosshill, who did not write a reply, but came himself to my lord; and there was a terrible scene.

“Lord Mosshill refused, at first, to believe his wife’s guilt; and I was sent for to the library, where my lord and he were to hear my testimony. I had rejoiced in my deed till that moment, when I saw that strong man, the noble gentleman, the great statesman, the loving husband,—for even Lord Mosshill’s enemies gave him that credit—bowed with that great grief; my heart relented, and I burst into a fit of violent tears.

“Lord Cornberry desired I would tell Lord Mosshill all I knew. For some minutes I could not speak for my sobs; but Lord Mosshill came to me, and, poor servant girl though I was, and the cause of great sorrow to him, and abjured me solemnly, as I cared for peace here or hereafter, to tell the truth. I felt as if I were on my trial for life or death. Somehow, all my scorn for rank deserted me, and I told the whole from first to last, concealing nothing, not even my curiosity and wrong behavior in looking into Lady Mosshill’s valise. When I had concluded, my Lord swore me to the truth of my statement on the Holy Bible. And I was dismissed, sorrowful and

repentant enough. I do not mean that I should have concealed the truth out of regard for Lady Mosshill's rank and station, but I certainly was overstepping and only gratifying my revenge, to expose the lady to strangers by the violent manner in which I stated the truth.

“What happened afterwards Mdlle. Therese and Miss Dormer told me. Lord Mosshill when, indeed convinced of the truth, implored my lord to hush the matter up. His family was one of the oldest in England, and I have always heard one of the proudest. The blow of such a discovery went nigh to break Lord Mosshill's heart. He, however, firmly did his duty. He broke open the drawers, jewel-cases, and private repositories of his Countess, and found all Lady Cornberry's missing jewels. They were returned with an epistle to my lady herself, that Miss Dormer said would have touched the heart of a tigress to show mercy. But for her bosom-friend my lady had none; she said matters had gone too far to be concealed—that my lord, in his first wrath, had sent for his solicitor, and revealed all! At the same time Lord Mosshill received my lord's letter, he received one also from the lawyer, demanding restitution of the stolen jewels,

“Whoever set the matter afloat, this is certain; the day after the discovery, the whole affair was in the newspapers; and it cost Lord Mosshill large sums to suppress all further appearance of the matter in the journals of the day. But by that time the matter was quite notorious enough in high circles: and Lord Mosshill received an intimation from the very highest quarter that his lady had better travel. That is the polite mode of banishment now-a-days, I believe; and to travel, Lord and Lady Mosshill were forced.

“I lived long enough in my lady's service to know the end of this strange story; and when the end came, considering the share I had taken in it, I was, I assure you, by no means a happier woman for the knowledge. About five years after her banishment from the British Court, Lady Mosshill returned. My lady and her daughters one night were proceeding in their carriage to a splendid *fete* at — Palace. Some stoppage occurred in Piccadilly, and my lady, to beguile the time was looking about her. Suddenly her eyes fell on a lady, who sitting on a balcony, half concealed by flowering plants, was watching the gay cavalcade of splendid equipages. The eyes of the ladies met. My lady uttered a slight shriek, and sank back in her carriage; the lady in the balcony fainted dead away. She was taken thence to her bed, from which she never more rose.

“Shame—remorse—humiliation—death itself punished the crime of Lady Mosshill; a crime aggravated by her attempt to cast it on poor servants. For her, pity, I think, would be useless and foolish; though as I have said, my share in her detection gave me trouble enough—especially when I heard of her death. But for the disgrace inflicted on those who never before knew shame—for the injuries inflicted on innocent sufferers—I can only say she scarce deserves forgiveness; but I find it hard still (especially now years have made me a sadder, wiser woman) to forgive myself!”

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