

CONFESSIONS OF A TRAINED NURSE

The Singular Manner in Which the Nurse Reunited a Husband and Wife

WAS sent for in the dead of night. To be exact, it was a quarter past two in the morning when the telephone rang, crashing discordantly into my dreams. With difficulty I roused myself, for I had only that afternoon come in from a hard case over in Oakland and was in need of rest. Two of my class mates and I kept house co-operatively in a flat of four rooms, but I was alone this night and I was tempted to let the call go unanswered. This, however, would have been in violation of my business principles, so I threw my kimono around me and groped my way to the door and out into the hall. Still half asleep, I picked up the receiver and said in a pleasant tone of interrogation as could command:

"Yes?"

The voice, one unknown to me, at the other end of the line asked to speak to Miss Hardie.

"This is Miss Hardie. What is it?"

The voice wanted to know if I could come at once to a case.

"No," I said firmly; "I am sorry, but I am not on the register at present. Besides, I never take night calls."

I am sufficiently advanced in my profession to make it possible for me to choose my cases in large measure, and it is an inflexible rule of mine never to respond to a call coming from a stranger after nine o'clock in the evening. It is not only that I object to traveling alone through the city at night, but because I wish to educate the public that I have made this rule. I maintain that in four cases out of five if a patient requires the services of a nurse the family knows it in time to send for me at a reasonable hour, and anything between nine p. m. and six a. m. I consider unreasonable. There are too many instances of unsuspecting young nurses being snared into disreputable houses and there having revolting midnight experiences, and I do not care to expose myself to any such dangers. The physicians who most frequently employ me approve of this attitude of mine and give me their support by making a point of summoning me, if possible, before sunset.

I was about to ring off, and would most certainly have done so had this been merely a "house" call, but it was a personal one, and I had some curiosity to learn who it was that wanted me and who was talking. Before I could put the question, though, I caught the sound of a footfall, and then over the wire distinctly heard a second speaker say:

"What's the matter, doctor? Can't you get her? Oh, she won't come? Let me talk to her." There was a short pause, then:

"Hello, Miss Hardie. This is Doctor Heminway."

My heart sank. I was in no condition to take another case, but I liked to work for Doctor Heminway and I knew he would not let me off.

"Oh! Good evening, or, rather, morning, Dr. Heminway. What can I do for you?"

"Miss Hardie, we've a very ill baby here. Double pneumonia, spasm of the glottis. Just inserted an intubation tube—that, as you know, means gavage. Dr. Stryker is here helping me. We must have a good nurse and one that understands children. You'll come, of course?"

I expostulated. I told him how tired I was, that I could not do my patient justice. He replied that he would risk that. He was extremely sorry that I was tired, but he really had to have me. I felt myself weakening, but I made a last stand. I had been unfortunate lately with my cases. Three in succession had ended fatally, and they were all pneumonias. They had had a most depressing effect upon me, and I felt that I could not go to another hopeless case—especially not a pneumonia.

He came back at me with calm assurance.

"The baby has a fighting chance. How soon can you get here?"

I capitulated, as from the start I knew I would—and he knew I would. Anyway, a nurse is in honor bound not to refuse an emergency case.

"I'll get dressed at once. I'll be ready in 20 minutes."

"Good! I'll send a carriage for you. The name is Worthing."

I flew into my clothes. My valise was ready, even though I had not registered. I always unpack it and repack it as soon as I come in from a case, just in the event of such a hurry call. As the cab turned the corner and came clattering down the silent street, I ran down the stairs, bag in hand, and met it as it drew up before the door, jumped inside and we were off without loss of time.

As we drove along my thoughts busied themselves with imagining what was before me. Some of my friends dislike private nursing. They are seized with stage fright whenever they accept a call to a new case, and would give anything to decline it. But I don't feel that way. I go forth in the spirit of an adventurer. I am eager to reach my destination and am more interested in conjecturing what my surroundings are to be than in worrying as to whether or not they will prove congenial. The girls tell me that this is because my lines have almost invariably fallen in pleasant places. They warn me that some time I may meet with such treatment as will make me nervous about what is to befall me. Perhaps they are right, but I cross no bridges until I get to them. I have always been treated with consideration.

The slackening of the horse's pace brought me out of my reverie, and the animal had barely come to a halt when I was on the sidewalk, and a moment later was ushered by the hall boy into the elevator. Nursing in a small apartment is a bore, but this was a palatial one, as my first glance showed. Dr. Heminway himself let me in. He shook hands with me cordially.

"Thank you very much for coming." He greeted me in that hearty, appreciative way of his, which makes you feel willing to do anything in the world for him. He indicated a room that Mrs. Worthing had allotted me, and I got out of my street suit and into my uniform in short order. Dr. Heminway, who was waiting for me in the reception room, looked up with a pleased nod when I joined him.

"You're a regular lightning change artist," he commented, approvingly. Then in a few precise words he gave me all the details of the case and led the way to the nursery.

The baby lay in his crib. His respiration was labored and shallow and he was cyanosed. He looked as though he had had a long illness, but he had really been ill only since the previous morning, the sudden serious change having come just before midnight. Little Miss Hardie, who had been

was his mother. Doctor Heminway presented me to her and she bowed courteously, saying softly: "I am so glad you could come, Miss Hardie. I have heard of you and did not want a total stranger."

She was a little thing, young and slight, but my immediate impression of her was that she had enough concentrated dignity to satisfy a high dilutionist, and I have never had occasion to modify my first estimate. Here was a woman, I instinctively felt, that would never be off guard. She at once interested me. There was something intangible about her that defied my diagnosis, but which stimulated me to keep her under observation. There was a tenderness in the gaze that she bent on her suffering child, but her firm mouth and well molded chin indicated strength of character and commanded respect rather than pity.

"Miss Hardie will take charge now, Mrs. Worthing," suggested Dr. Heminway. "You have been up all night and must lie down. I'll take a nap

I glanced at her scrutinizingly. There was no doubt about it—she was in earnest.

"You, Mrs. Worthing? Yes, I am quite sure that you possess all the necessary qualifications," I said with conviction.

"If I should send in my application to a training school next month, how long would I have to wait before being summoned for my probationary period?"

"That depends. Possibly a year."

"A year! That would be too long! Is there no way of expediting matters?"

"I have once or twice induced my directress to call immediately friends of mine who were suddenly thrown on their own resources. A strong personal recommendation sometimes helps."

"Will you use your influence for me, Miss Hardie? Believe me, it would be of the utmost importance to me."

"Certainly, if you wish, Mrs. Worthing. But pardon me, what will become of the baby?"



I WAS SPARED THE NECESSITY OF COMMENT, FOR MRS. WORTHING CONTINUED QUIETLY

on the couch in the library and Miss Hardie will let us know if there is any change."

The baby turned great eyes toward me. I was glad to see that they were not dulled but were bright and shining, and I pointed this out to his mother as an encouraging sign. She looked her quiet gratitude.

"I don't like to leave him, doctor," she said. "He does not know Miss Hardie yet."

"But he soon will, Mrs. Worthing," I assured her. "I've been a spinster aunt for years, and we'll get along famously. You must save your strength. And we'll become acquainted sooner if you will leave him alone with me."

"You will call me if he seems unhappy?"

I promised and she went off to her own room. Then commenced the fight for a life. We don't avoid, because of the intubation tube, could not cry aloud, but the piteous droop of his lower lip told me when he was more than usually uncomfortable, and I did my best to keep him soothed. For a week it was nip and tuck with the little fellow. I had a second nurse to relieve me, and she was assigned the night shift while I took the day one. Mrs. Worthing could not content herself away from the sick room. She went out each morning after breakfast for a breath of air, but the rest of the day she spent with the baby and me. Knowing that it was a kindness to keep her occupied, I let her help me with my duties, and she proved an able assistant. She seemed to have no near relatives with whom to share her anxiety. Her husband was away on business, and though she received a daily telegram from him that could have been but small comfort.

Usually when two women are thrown together as constantly as were we, and especially when the welfare of the child of one of them is their common thought, there springs up between them, almost as a matter of course, a degree of friendliness, not to say intimacy, but though Mrs. Worthing apparently had every confidence in me, I was no better acquainted with her at the end of ten days or so, except in the most superficial way, than when I was introduced to her. She still interested me and still baffled me. Inquisitiveness and good breeding are not running mates, so it never occurred to me to try to draw her out, and she was not the sort to volunteer information as to her private affairs. What was it that so distinguished her above other women? She had more than the New Englander's share of reserve—I had gathered that she was a Bostonian and had lived in San Francisco only since her marriage—and this chrysalid attribute made her impervious to criticism.

Donald, with the marvelous recuperative powers of infancy, once the crisis was passed, improved rapidly. I had expected that coincident with his convalescence I would see Mrs. Worthing relax a little, but as the days went on her manner grew more and more tense.

I was the more surprised, therefore, when one Friday morning she seemed to be in an expansive mood. When the baby had had his bath and was settling down for his nap I took my sewing into the alcove that opened out of the nursery and she followed me there. She sat down with her back to the window and pretended to read a novel she had brought with her, but she forgot to turn the pages, and when Donald's regular breathing indicated that he had dropped off to sleep she closed the book and asked me about hospital life. I briefly outlined its routine and she listened with attentive interest. When I had finished she inquired:

"Do you think I would make a good nurse?"

Her brows contracted.

"That is what hurts. For myself I don't care, but it is hard to have to give him up. I have a distant cousin, the wife of a poor clergyman, who will be glad of the extra money that I can pay her for Donald's board. I can trust him to her. She is conscientious, a devoted mother to her own children, and she will make room in her heart for my poor baby."

She sat erect, with no outward sign of emotion save for a swift intake of her breath, but I felt impelled to lay aside my work and put my arms around her. She placed her two hands on my shoulders and pushed me gently but firmly away, and I, not knowing what else to do, resumed my seat and became intent upon selecting the right shade of floss for my embroidery.

Perhaps it was because I had displayed no curiosity, or it may be that my caress, even though not acceptable, had given the impetus to her feelings; but, whatever the cause, presently she appeared less unapproachable, and when she spoke there was in her tone the warmth that we keep only for our friends.

"Miss Hardie," she said, "there are greater griefs in the world than those that death brings to us. We can see those we love go down into the grave, and yet not be altogether comfortless. But when we lose faith in our nearest and dearest, then indeed do we sorrow without hope."

She paused, and that interval of silence was more eloquent than any cry of distress. It lifted her from the plains thronged with ordinary mankind and set her up on a lonely peak of suffering. Only one who had drained her cup of pain could say the word that would soothe. What it was that tortured her I did not know, but there is a language of the soul, and it told me that I was face to face with a racked spirit. The moment passed, and she went on, steadily:

"I try to bear my own troubles without burdening others with them, but I have come to a stone wall and I need to be helped over it. I feel that I may count on you, Miss Hardie, and so, unless you stop me, I am going to tell you first, what soon all the world will know, that which is worrying me beyond endurance."

I expressed my sincere desire to be of use to her in any and every way, and she rewarded me with a faint smile.

"Before the subject becomes common property, Miss Hardie, I want to have my plans made, so that after the talk has died away I may drop completely out of sight. I suppose you have surmised what I have just broadly hinted at—my husband has deserted me!"

"Mrs. Worthing!"

"Yes, that is what it amounts to. For more than two weeks I have had no word from him, and so long a silence must be deliberate. In these modern times men are not swallowed up without their own volition. I have neither seen him nor heard from him since the night before Donald was taken ill."

"Why, Mrs. Worthing! You have had a telegram every morning!"

"I sent each one. I kept hoping that he would return and could make me a satisfactory explanation. My friends think him away on business. His partners think him south on a vacation. He was to go to Los Angeles the next day. He is due at the office on Monday, and then his firm and every one else will have to know the truth. I have tried to account for his disappearance, have given him the benefit of every doubt, but I am now convinced that his prolonged absence is entirely voluntary, and therefore inexorable."

I looked at Mrs. Worthing as she sat there in her proud young beauty. It did not seem possible that any man whom she had honored with her love could desert her so brutally as to run the risk of forfeiting it.

Women of her type are not won easily. It is only the cheap things of life that we can afford to discard.

"There must be some mistake, Mr. Worthing," I protested. "I do not want to presume, but if you feel that you can, won't you tell me all about it?"

She did not answer me at once, but tapped nervously with her foot, and I had begun to fear that I had offended her, when she said resolutely:

"Yes, I will tell you, and perhaps you can see more clearly than I. I have gone over the ground so often in my mind that it has become a maze, in which I am bewildered to find the exit. It was, as I have said, the night preceding the beginning of Donald's illness that I last saw Mr. Worthing. That evening we had a disagreement, the particulars of which are of no concern to any one but ourselves. Suffice it to say that we quarreled on a point that was not at all vital. It was just after dinner, and he had an appointment to meet a man at the club, so we could not argue it out and come to an understanding, as would have happened had there been time.

"We did not part in actual anger; for he kissed me goodby, but there was a coldness between us which was perfectly natural, under the circumstances. My resentment soon subsided, and I sat up waiting for him to come home. I looked for him before 12 o'clock, but he did not come.

"All night I watched for him. In the morning I told the servants that he had had to go out of town on business. I went out to a public telephone and made inquiries at police headquarters. I had thought it possible that he had been taken suddenly ill—though he was in perfect health—and as he was in evening dress he would have no papers with him by which he could be identified, but there was no record on the blotters of an accident happening to a man of his description. I even called up every hospital in the city, but could get no trace of him. That was 17 days ago. I am forced to the conclusion, humiliating though it is, that he has not returned because he is happier elsewhere."

"Of course, Mrs. Worthing, I don't know Mr. Worthing and so have no way of judging what kind of a man he is, but the fact that he is your husband is in his favor, and that photograph of him that stands on your bureau represents a man of more character than accords with my idea of one who would leave his family in a fit of pique. There must be some more potent reason than this for his losing his sense of responsibilities. Perhaps this is a case of lapse of memory. We occasionally read in the newspapers of a man wandering away from home and forgetting his personality for even months at a time. Why not engage a competent detective to make a thorough search for him?"

Mrs. Worthing shook her head wearily.

"I would gain nothing by that. But you are right—anger is not enough to make a man oblivious of his duty. It may serve as a pretext, but behind every pretext is a cause, and the one cause that can rob a woman of her husband is his devotion to another woman. When I came home that morning from my futile telephoning I did what I was never guilty of before—I went through my husband's pockets. I did not do this because my trust in him was shaken, but if a clew to his absence existed I wanted to know it. In the coat of the suit he had worn at the office the previous day I found this note."

She unclasped a small leather bag that hung from her belt, and using them as though they were tongs, she inserted her thumb and forefinger and picked out a folded scrap of paper, which she held toward me. I took it and read:

"My Precious One: I can scarcely wait for tonight to come. You will not fall me, I know. How happy we shall be together! Counting the hours till I shall see your dear face. Ever your own, DAISY DEAR."

I did not venture to look at Mrs. Worthing. How dare this man offer her the dregs of bitterness to drink? This man, whom she had admitted to her fullest confidence, to whom, undoubtedly, she had yielded herself with the sweet surrender that goes with the love of such a woman, and which she makes but once in her life—this man had treated her as though she were not virgin gold, but some base metal. I was spared the necessity of comment, for Mrs. Worthing continued quietly—all along her voice had retained its low modulation, so much more impressive than the hysterical pitch to which most women resort when overwrought:

"You see, the evidence is all in and there is, no chance of acquittal. As soon as the baby is well I must set about supporting myself. I have enough of my own money in the bank to pay the expenses of his illness and to carry me along here for a while, until my lease expires, but I must save enough to provide for him for a few years until I have earned my diploma and have established myself. I feel that it would be wiser for me to take up nursing than to attempt any other line of work."

There was an air of finality about her, and I did not try to dispute her decision. I was afraid to trust myself to speak, and I was relieved when at this juncture Donald awoke and I had to go to him.

All that day my thoughts were of her and how best I might help her. It was on the 10th of the month that her husband had disappeared. Where was I on that date? Over in Oakland. My brain set to work, and memory, that most magical of developing fluids, brought out each detail of a mental negative which had lain unnoticed in the dark room of forgotten yesterdays and revealed to me a vivid picture. I was again in my late patient's room. A noise in the street attracted my attention, and I ran to the window to see a fire truck go dashing past. It made a sudden turn at the corner and the end of one of the ladders knocked down a man standing on the curb. A small crowd gathered, an ambulance came, and the prostrate form was lifted into it and was driven away. At the time I had been so absorbed in the care of my patient that this incident had made but a transitory impression upon me, but now it loomed large before me. Why these proportions? Could it be that this man was Mr. Worthing? It was a ridiculous notion for me to entertain, but try as I would I could not dismiss it from my mind. So persistently did it assail me that in sheer desperation I decided to investigate it.

I said nothing to Mrs. Worthing, but that afternoon I asked for three hours off duty, instead of my usual two, and hurried to Oakland. From the district in which the accident had happened I was quite sure that it was the city hospital which had responded to the emergency call, and I went directly there. Some people would have telephoned, rather than make the trip on speculation, but there is only one method to obtain definite information from an institution, and that is by demanding it in person. Arrived at my destination, I requested the clerk in the office to consult the books and

admitted to the men's surgical division on the 10th inst. He leisurely looked through the ledger till he came to the right page, and then with exasperating slowness let his pencil wander down it till finally it vacillated between two entries.

"Male or female?" he drawled.

"Are there any women in the men's division?" I asked, with asperity.

He ignored my irritation and chewed reflectively the end of a toothpick. He halted his pencil and read off:

"January 10, Ward L. Stretcher case admitted 11 p. m. Ward L's the male accident ward," he grudgingly added.

I went to the ward and introduced myself to the nurse in charge, explaining that I was in search of a friend who, I feared, was the victim either of foul play or an accident. When I mentioned his being in evening dress she exclaimed:

"I believe that very man is here. That patient just opposite us was brought in with a fractured skull a little more than a fortnight ago. He is recovering, but is unable to give an account of himself. He wore a dress suit and had no papers with him."

I was positive that my quest was successful, so I obtained the house surgeon's permission to make an experiment, and then walked to the bed and cheerily greeted the man. Having attracted his notice, I said quietly:

"Mr. Worthing, your wife sends her love and hopes you will soon be able to come home to her and to Donald."

A flash of intelligence lighted up his face.

"Now I remember!" he cried, relievedly. "I could not make connections before."

"You know that your name is Robert Worthing?"

"Of course! Robert Worthing of the law firm of Worthing & Morrell. I went to Oakland to see a friend, who, because of a cold, was unable to keep his appointment with me at my club. I was on my way home from his house when something struck me on my head. Since then my mind has been a blank. But it all comes back to me now. How did my wife learn my whereabouts? I don't know just where I am myself."

"You are in Oakland, in the city hospital. Your wife does not know what has become of you, but she soon shall."

"How long have I been here?"

"Seventeen days."

"So long! And has Mrs. Worthing been kept in suspense all this time?"

"Yes. The strain has been tremendous, but she has borne it bravely. Now you must not talk any more. I can not stay, for I must let Mrs. Worthing know about you."

When I got back and told Mrs. Worthing where I had been and what I had accomplished a light leaped into her tired eyes.

"He is ill! In a hospital! I am glad—glad—glad! Marie, quick! My hat! My coat! Mr. Worthing has met with an accident. Ring up Doctor Heminway and ask him to be ready to go with me to the city hospital in Oakland. Tell him I shall call for him at once with the closed motor—order it—and if it is advisable we shall bring Mr. Worthing home with us."

The maid left the room, and I helped her mistress get into her wraps. Her slight frame trembled with excitement and her cheeks were flaming. But all of a sudden her rapture forsook her and she sank limp into a chair. Her lips, which had been soft and curving with tender anticipation, straightened and compressed, and through them as though wrung from the very depths of her being came like a condemnation:

"That note!"

She covered her face with her hands and crouched motionless. I turned away. I could not lighten her load, and I could not contemplate it crushing her to earth. A knock, and Marie announced that the car was waiting. Mrs. Worthing pulled herself together by a supreme effort. She resumed to some extent her usual composure, and started for the door. With her hand on the knob, she stopped in momentary indecision. Then swiftly she tossed the room, opened the wardrobe, singled out a man's coat, and drawing from her bag the incriminating letter, replaced it in the pocket in which she had found it.

She held her head high and glanced at me challengingly.

"We shall forget that we have seen this," she said coldly and evenly. "He shall of his own accord tell me about this woman and then I shall decide what course of action to pursue. For the present Mr. Worthing is ill, and the place for his lawful wife is at his side."

"Without another word she swept by me. I secretly rejoice that she had left me like this. It was because of her rare intuition that she had not asked me to respect her confidence. Now I knew that she understood me and valued me, and that she realized that though the Hippocratic oath is not administered to nurses, their code of honor is none the less binding because unwritten."

Mr. Worthing was brought home that evening by his wife and the doctor, and for a week I divided my time between him and Donald, who was now well enough to be left almost entirely to the care of his nursery maid. I marveled at the dominant will with which Mrs. Worthing controlled her outraged feelings when with her husband, appearing as devoted to him and as solicitous for his comfort as though there were no cloud between them. That the hurt still rankled I knew, for she had let me have a glimpse behind the veil, and I could read as in a crystal the gnawing grief that was attacking the roots of her happiness.

For a time we kept Mr. Worthing absolutely quiet, but on the second Sunday after his return he was so much better that we gratified him by taking Donald in to see him. The little fellow, in his fresh white dress, was very lovable and dear, and I gave him a final hug as I put him into his father's arms, exclaiming enthusiastically:

"There! Isn't he a daisy?"

I could have bitten my tongue off directly, as I saw his mother wince at my thoughtless comparison. Why couldn't I have likened him to a rose, or any other flower than this?

But his father, while he fondled him, repeated after me as though the phrase were of talismanic import: "That's what he is; a regular daisy! Just a daisy! A daisy!"

I was covered with confusion at this embarrassing situation and was relieved when Mrs. Worthing started to her feet and by her abrupt movement interrupted his monologue.

"Don't go, my dear," he urged, with more animation than I had seen him show. "What was I saying? Oh, daisies! That's the cue for which I've been groping among my befuddled wits. I knew there was something I should attend to, but I couldn't think what it was. Now I have it. Just let me have the coat of my business suit, please."

Mrs. Worthing complied, but with obvious reluctance. He laughed reassuringly.

"Don't look as if I had asked you for a stick of dynamite, little girl. I'm not going to stir up my gray matter and make more work for you and the doctor. Never fear! But I must begin to brush away the cobwebs. You won't let me talk shop, but there's an important bit of evidence here in my pocket that should be in my safe, and not lying around loose. This note," holding it up for her to see, "was given to me by one of my clients, who met me, as I was heading for the subway after business hours on the day of my accident, and instead of going back with it to the office I brought it along, intending to mail it to Morrell before I went south. Will you send it to him, darling? I don't like even a suggestion of the unsavory to be harbored where you are. My client, poor woman, never suspected her husband of wrongdoing until she stumbled upon this, and now she is getting a divorce from him."

He waited for Mrs. Worthing to take it from him, but she was staring before her with unseeing eyes, and I intercepted it.

"Let me mail it for you, Mr. Worthing. I know the address and I am going for a walk now."

I made my escape, but had barely crossed the threshold when his wife was at his side clasping him and the baby in one embrace.

"My dear, my dear, my dear!" I heard her cry, as I shut the door behind me. "I nearly lost both of you, and now you have been given back to me."