

'What do you think of that, doctor?' said Bob. 'Why, that girl has just come from a strenuous four years of hard study and hard work. I coaxed her down here for a rest, and got her to the ball to-night to see life as it goes here, and you come along with your story of sickness and poverty, and away she flies on a tangent.'

'Hold on, Bob. She is a woman in a thousand. We all know that when the Lord got the angels into Paradise he left a few of them floating around this old earth to keep it from falling to pieces. Your sister is one of these angels. Give her the right of way; she'll come out all right. God bless her.'

'Oh! it's your profession, old sawbones. Of course you think it's all right, but she's my sister. I'm proud of her, and want to keep her as long as I can with me.'

'You'll be prouder of her than ever when she puts these poor people on their feet. Don't say a word, Bob. Let her do as she said. By jove, I could worship such a woman!'

'Well, keep off, or I'll tell your wife,' said the younger man smiling, as the subject of the conversation tripped down the stairs in the fresh white linen uniform of a nurse, carrying a small satchel. Throwing a long light overcoat over his dress suit, her brother ran to call a taxi-cab, and the doctor, who had on no dress suit, held out his hand and looked at her admiringly.

'You're a queen, Miss Laura. The Lord will surely work miracles for you. Not one young woman in twenty would lay down her pleasure and take up this work as you are doing. But it will come back to you some day.'

'Nonsense, doctor. I'm not used to physicians bestowing flattery. If I give my first case to the Lord, as an offering, I know He will bless my life. God is never outdone in generosity.'

The physician turned his head away. He did not want this girl to see the impression she had made. Just then her brother came up.

'Well, Laura, I know there's no use arguing with you when you have made up your mind. I learned that when I was a youngster. Here's a taxi, and I'm going with you as far as the house to see if it is habitable.'

'You dear old Bob,' said his sister. 'You always rise to the occasion. Just see how soon we will cure them all. Won't we, doctor?'

The doctor shook his head, and they all started for the taxi, which was buzzing at the door.

They reached their destination, a small cottage on the outskirts of Jacksonville. The doctor told the chauffeur to wait, and ran up the little garden walk and opened the door. The feeble cries of a sick child fell on the ear, and a pale, slender woman stepped out into the vestibule, but drew back startled when she saw the uniformed nurse, the doctor, and another gentleman.

'I've brought you a nurse, Mrs. Stanton,' said the doctor cheerily.

Mrs. Stanton looked up helplessly from one to the other.

'But, doctor, you know we cannot pay a nurse,' she gasped.

'That will be all right,' said Laura in a sweet voice; 'the doctor will attend to that part of it, and I am his assistant. Where are the children?'

'But, miss,' stammered the poor woman, 'I don't understand.'

'It isn't necessary to understand anything just now, but the helping of those children. Do you want to lose them?' said the doctor gruffly.

'Oh, no, no!' sobbed the broken-down mother, looking from one to the other.

'Well, then, bring us to the bedroom. Bob, sit down here till we come back.'

Bob entered the door of a small room where a man was seated by a drop-light, reading the paper. He had heard the whole conversation in the vestibule, and the expression on his face was one of annoyance. His thin, drawn features and hollow eyes, his emaciated frame, and the dry, hacking cough evoked all the pity that was born in the athletic figure and fine physique of his visitor.

'Good evening, Mr. Stanton,' said Bob. 'The doctor is my friend, and the nurse is my sister, so I came along. My sister is half a doctor herself.'

'You are very welcome visitors,' said the consumptive, 'but we are not rich, and cannot afford to pay a nurse. I don't know why the doctor brought one.'

'Oh! don't trouble yourself about that,' said Bob, humoring the pride of the poor man, 'my sister is pleased when she can practise her profession. She and the doctor work for the love of work!'

Upstairs the wife led the way to a room with two little beds and a sofa upon which the small sufferers lay tossing and moaning. The mother went to the little girl, who was crying for her, and while she was across the room the doctor laid his hand on the pulse of the baby who was lying, motionless and white.

'You may as well get ready to draw the sheet over this poor baby,' he said in a low voice; 'he is almost gone!'

He went to the others, said a few words to the heartbroken mother, and then warmly shook hands with the nurse after giving her some directions. 'May the angels guard and bless you, Miss Laura; you are surely kind to them. Good night!'

The nurse smiled a farewell, and immediately gave her attention to her charge.

In a short time, with cooling medicine and careful sponging, they were quieted, and as the grateful mother looked on hopefully Nurse Laura said in a low, gentle voice:

'Now, Mrs. Stanton, you have confidence in me, I see; I want you to lie down and get some sleep. If anything occurs, any change in the condition of these poor little darlings, I will call you at once. If I don't take care of you I will have you on my hands, too,' she finished with a smile.

The poor mother took both of her hands in hers and wrung them silently. Then she left the room, and going to the room opposite, left the door a little open, but Nurse Laura softly closed it in a few minutes, wishing the weary woman to rest without hearing the children fretting.

Downstairs the doctor and her brother had departed, and she had waved good-bye from the window. The consumptive father, whose bed was on the first floor, had retired, and save for his dry, hacking cough all was still.

The nurse examined the baby, and although the doctor said he was almost gone, she worked with him as only a true woman and a skilful nurse can, and was rewarded by seeing the ghastliness of his face give way to a more life-like hue. From one bed to another she passed all night long, giving medicine, cooling their pillows, sponging their fevered heads and limbs, and when the dawn appeared it seemed to her that none of them would die, although the danger was by no means over. The mother slept the heavy sleep of tired nature, and no sound came from her room. The nurse scarcely sat down all night, but when the first pink glow of morning rose out of the east she lifted her heart to God and offered to Him 'her first case,' a labor of love and purest charity, and begged His blessing on it. Then the thought of the souls of this family came to her, for she had graduated from a Catholic hospital in Western Pennsylvania, one of the finest in the land, and here she had learned from the nun teacher who presided over the nurses' class that, together with care for the patient's body, came a care for his soul. A slight noise drew her attention. The mother stood in the doorway.

'They are all doing well, Mrs. Stanton,' she whispered. 'We will try to pull them through.'

'Oh! thank God!' murmured the mother.

'You are a Catholic, are you not?' said the nurse. A blush overspread the woman's face.

'I ought to be,' she said at last, 'but Mr. Stanton was a bitter Presbyterian, and after I was married a while he began to say such harsh, contemptuous things about my religion and the Church that for peace sake I dropped everything. I haven't been inside of a Catholic church for thirteen years.'

'Oh! you poor unfortunate!' said the nurse. 'And are not the children baptised?'