OUR FIRST CASE.

We were sitting in our little room looking at each other. A week or two ago we had met by appointment. We had come here to make our fortunes, but private nurses did not seem to be in much request in this benighted place. All the doctors knew of us, and had well treated us available. With one consent they had said that we were just what was wanted here.

"Do you think we can afford to stay another week?" asked Kathleen.

"Perhaps, can we not," I answered.

"It's a most interesting experience," she said.

"And will end in quite an exciting finale," I added. "The wonder is to the return home and the joys of old friends, who are expecting to any day."

Kathleen shuddered.

"We may get a case in the next few days," I said. "Such things occasionally happen."

"Give me another cup of tea, Amy," said Kathleen. "It is ridiculous to be nervous, but I must have it. If one is my patient drink half, as much as I can, I should read them a lecture they would see fingers, but!—"

Our landlady flung open the door, and Dr. Pickle came in upon us.

"Ah! I was so afraid I should find you out," he said. "Let me drink."

"We happen to have a holiday," said Kathleen. "At least we have no very urgent case on hand at present."

"Allow me to give you a cup of tea," said I.

"Tea! Yes at this time of day!" He drank his bowl at us. "I should have thought you were tired, nurse. Never drink tea at 11 o'clock. No sugar, thank you.

He settled himself comfortably before the fire, and stirred his tea, while delicately blown it as threatened the bowl. Kathleen and I commenced every word he said.

"Still, not to business," said Dr. Pickle. "I must look you to comfortable a case, a very painful case. It's old Jacob Hartland. Ever heard of him?"

"No," I answered.

"That man would have been dead a year ago if he hadn't happened to live. This time he'll go. Remember I said get a supply of mines for him, by hook or by crook. Will you undertake his case?"

"Tell us some more about him, doctor."

"He lives in Hartland's Hollow. I suppose you know that place?"

"No," said Kathleen, and Dr. Pickle looked relieved.

"It's a wild place, but I suppose you don't mind that?"

"Not in the least," said I. "We are neither of us troubled with nerves—in spite of the job."

"You'll find no one there but the servants and his wife, who will couple. You'll have to do everything yourselves. I'm afraid. Then can you be ready? The case is urgent."

We promised to go that afternoon and when Dr. Pickle left us, Kathleen and I held a little celebration in honor of our first case.

We found ourselves before a low, rambling building, at 4 o'clock that afternoon. The walls were thickly covered with ivy and creepers, and trees surrounded it, which lent an air of mystery to the place. A serious look was on it, and the chilly afternoon fog was rising.

"I hope we're a good job," whispered Kathleen, shivering.

The sound of the bell was muffled and seemed to come from underground regions. We had to ring three times before any one thought of answering our summons. Then the door was opened suspiciously, and an old woman peered at us out of her corners.

"Oh, be you the nurses?" she murmured. "You kin come in."

"How kind!" said Kathleen in my ear. "Don't you feel gratified, Amy, to be so generally welcomed?"

She walked till one room were deposited in the hall, then shut and locked the door.

"No never knows what may happen," she muttered, speaking to herself. Her coldness and suspicion shadowed round the low, dark hall. We could scarcely see the old, ugly, as we followed the housekeeper up stairs. She told us in passing the different rooms and informed us that some of them were haunted, but she didn't rightly know which.

"What a delightful house!" said Kathleen aloud, and her voice echoed far away and disturbed the brooding silence. I trembled to think how, for I kept feeling as if I were in church. "So cheerful! sing out for voice."

"That's your room," said our guide, stopping at the top of the stairs to breathe, "and that's the master's." With that she turned and went into the dark regions we had left behind, and we found ourselves standing in a pleasant lighted by a single small lamp, with our traps in a heap on floor, and our hearts beating rather rapidly.

"I thought there must be something queer about it," said Kathleen. "Dr. Pickle was so very reserved."

"It is charming," I affirmed. "Now, shall we introduce ourselves to our patient or to our room?"

"Our room, nor," said Kathleen. "Let us keep the best treat till the end."

It was not an ideal room which had been prepared for us, as we discovered, as Kathleen said, we were both able to sleep a floor after our hospital training. The three open fires, lighted with the candles on the dressing table and then defiance this it was fit for the queen.

"Not horrible!" I exclaimed.

"Well, up close, wait till it's aired before you close the window. When that old lady's lighted up fire, it won't be bad bad."

"Let us go," said I. "Then we may as well light it ourselves if we must eat at all."

"There must be unprofitable of labors and cooking utensils," said Kathleen, examining the contents of the room. "I'm rather fond of modern. Are you?"

"On the whole," I answered, "I prefer to have the use of them."

"That is a pity," said Kathleen.

"Let us now go and make the acquaintance of our patient," I suggested.

Our guide took us to a room at the end of the long hall.

Jacob Hartland was lying in bed looking quietly at the door. He was an old man. He reminded us rather of a Jewish face, and the silky silver hair and beard were brown that at first sight he seemed to have none. The room was comfortable in the extreme. The fire was nearly out, and an antique lamp stood upon the table by his bed. He roused and stared at us.

"Proof you?" he cried in a clear, rich voice, startling us. "Proof I don't want you. One's quite enough. I've not going to pay you to be the work for me."

"But one of us has to sit up with you at night," said I in a cheerful, soothing tone.

"What do you want with sleep?" he growled. "A great, swinging and fine you could to be able to do without it. Hey? Answer me!"

"Well, I do sometimes," said I.

"Sometimes! Sometimes! Why, I've not slept a night for years!"

"Well, I can't help it," said I. "I have had a delicate night."

"Who could I get better?" asked our patient. "Who's the good of paying a pound of money and a shilling a day and you're not the quality of a man? Why can't you be like Dr. Pickle? Answer me!"

"Because I am not a man, and I am well for another week. You cannot get better."

"I tell you I can! I can good man if money is not lower than ought to be. Today I shall have Jacob Hartland's fortune. Jacob Hartland's fortune! Do you hear? Jacob Hartland's fortune! Jacob Hartland's fortune! Jacob Hartland's fortune!