FICTION

Frances Hodgson Burnett

Seth

A PUBLIC DOMAIN BOOK

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"SETH"

By Frances Hodgson Burnett

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He came in one evening at sun set with the empty coal-train--his dull young face pale and heavy-eyed with weariness, his corduroy suit dusty and travel-stained, his worldly possessions tied up in the smallest of handkerchief bundles and slung upon the stick resting on his shoulder--and naturally his first appearance attracted some attention among the loungers about the shed dignified by the title of "depot." I say "naturally," because arrivals upon the trains to Black Creek were so scarce as to be regarded as curiosities; which again might be said to be natural. The line to the mines had been in existence two months, since the English company had taken them in hand and pushed the matter through with an energy startling to, and not exactly approved by, the majority of good East Tennesseeans. After the first week or so of arrivals--principally Welsh and English miners, with an occasional Irishman--the trains had returned daily to the Creek without a passenger; and accordingly this one created some trifling sensation.

Not that his outward appearance was particularly interesting or suggestive of approaching excitement. He was only a lad of nineteen or twenty, in working English-cut garb, and with a short, awkward figure, and a troubled, homely face--a face so homely and troubled, in fact, that its half-bewildered look was almost pathetic.

He advanced toward the shed hesitatingly, and touched his cap as if half in clumsy courtesy and half in timid appeal. "Mesters," he said, "good-day to yo'."

The company bestirred themselves with one accord, and to the roughest and most laconic gave him a brief "Good-day."

"You're English," said a good-natured Welshman, "ar'n't you, my lad?"

"Ay, mester," was the reply: "I'm fro' Lancashire."

He sat down on the edge of the rough platform, and laid his stick and bundle down in a slow, wearied fashion.

"Fro' Lancashire," he repeated in a voice as wearied as his action--"fro' th' Deepton coalmines theer. You'll know th' name on 'em, I ha' no doubt. Th' same company owns 'em as owns these."

"What!" said an outsider--"Langley an 'em?"

The boy turned himself round and nodded. "Ay," he answered--"them. That was why I comn here. I comn to get work fro'--fro' *him*."

He faltered in his speech oddly, and even reddened a little, at the same time rubbing his hands together with a nervousness which seemed habitual to him.

"Mester Ed'ard, I mean," he added--"th' young mester as is here. I heerd as he liked 'Merika, an'--an' I comn."

The loungers glanced at each other, and their glance did not mean high appreciation of the speaker's intellectual powers. There was a lack of practicalness in such faith in another man as expressed itself in the wistful, hesitant voice.

"Did he say he'd give you work?" asked the first man who had questioned him, the Welshman Evans.

"No. I dunnot think--I dunnot think he'd know me if he seed me. Theer wur so many on us."

Another exchange of glances, and then another question: "Where are you going to stay?"

The homely face reddened more deeply, and the lad's eyes--dull, soft, almost womanish eyes--raised themselves to the speaker's. "Do yo' knew anybody as would be loikely to tak' me in a bit" he said, "until I ha' toime to earn th' wage to pay? I wouldna wrong no mon a penny as had trusted me."

There was manifest hesitation, and then some one spoke: "Lancashire Jack might."

"Mester," said the lad to Evans, "would you moind speakin' a word fur me? I ha' had a long tramp, an' I'm fagged-loike, an'"--He stopped and rose from his seat with a hurried movement. "Who's that theer as is comin'?" he demanded. "Isna it th' young mester?"

The some one in question was a young man on horseback, who at that moment turned the corner and rode toward the shed with a loose rein, allowing his horse to choose his own pace.

"Ay," said the lad with an actual tremor in his excited voice--"it's him, sure enow," and sank back on his seat again as if he had found himself scarcely strong enough to stand. "I--I ha' not 'aten much fur two or three days," he said to Evans.

There was not a man on the platform who did not evince some degree of pleasure at the approach of the new-comer. The last warm rays of the sun, already sinking behind the mountains, seemed rather to take pride in showing what a

debonair young fellow he was, in glowing kindly upon his handsome face and strong, graceful figure, and touching up to greater brightness his bright hair.

The face was one to be remembered with a sentiment approaching gratitude for the mere existence of such genial and unspoiled good looks, but the voice that addressed the men was one to be loved, and loved without stint, it was so clear and light-hearted and frank.

"Boys," said he, "good-evening to you. Evans, if you could spare me a minute"--

Evans rose at once.

"I'll speak to *him*," he said to the lad at his side. "His word will go further with Lancashire Jack than mine would." He went to the horse's side, and stood there for a few minutes talking in an undertone, and then he turned to the stranger and beckoned. "Come here," he said.

The lad took up his bundle and obeyed the summons, advancing with an awkward almost stumbling step, suggestive of actual weakness as well as the extremity of shyness. Reaching the two men, he touched his cap humbly, and stood with timorous eyes upraised to the young man's face.

Langley met his glance with a somewhat puzzled look, which presently passed away in a light laugh. "I'm trying to remember who you are, my lad," he said, "but I shall be obliged to give it up. I know your face, I think, but I have no recollection of your name. I dare say I have seen you often enough. You came from Deepton, Evans tells me."

"Ay, mester, fro' Deepton."

"A long journey for a lad like you to take alone," with inward pity for the heavy face.

"Ay, mester."

"And now you want work?"

"If you please, mester."

"Well, well!" cheerily, "we will give it to you. There's work enough, though it isn't such as you had at Deepton. What is your name?"

"Seth, mester--Seth Raynor," shifting the stick and bundle in uneasy eagerness from one shoulder to another. "An' I'm used to hard work, mester. It wur na easy work we had at th' Deepton mine, an' I'm stronger than I look. It's th' faggedness as makes me trembly--an' hunger."

"Hunger?"

"I ha' not tasted sin' th' neet afore last," shamefacedly. "I hadna th' money to buy, an' it seemt loike I could howd out."

"Hold out!" echoed Langley in some excitement. "That's a poor business, my lad. Here, come with me. The other matter can wait, Evans."

The downcast face and ungainly figure troubled him in no slight degree as they moved off together, they seemed to express in some indescribable fashion so much of dull and patient pain, and they were so much at variance with the free grandeur of the scene surrounding them. It was as if a new element were introduced into the very air itself. Black Creek was too young yet to have known hunger or actual want of any kind. The wild things on the mountain sides had scarcely had time to learn to fear the invaders of their haunts or understand that they were to be driven backward. The warm wind was fragrant with the keen freshness of pine and cedar. Mountain and forest and sky were stronger than the human stragglers they closed around and shut out from the world.

"We don't see anything like that in Lancashire," said Langley. "That kind of thing is new to us, my lad, isn't it?" with a light gesture toward the mountain, in whose side the workers had burrowed.

"Ay, mester," raising troubled eyes to its grandeur--"iverything's new. I feel aw lost some-toimes, an' feared-loike."

Langley lifted his hat from his brow to meet a little passing breeze, and as it swept softly by he smiled in the enjoyment of its coolness. "Afraid?" he said. "I don't understand that."

"I dunnot see into it mysen', mester. Happen it's th' bigness, an' quiet, an' th' lonely look, an' happen it's summat wrong in mysen'. I've lived in th' cool an' smoke an/ crowd an' work so long as it troubles me in a manner to--to ha' to look so high."

"Does it?" said Langley, a few faint lines showing themselves on his forehead. "That's a queer fancy. So high!" turning his glance upward to where the tallest pine swayed its dark plume against the clear blue. "Well, so it is. But you will get used to it in time," shaking off a rather unpleasant sensation.

"Happen so, mester, in toime," was the simple answer; and then silence fell upon them again.

They had not very far to go. The houses of the miners--rough shanties hurriedly erected to supply immediate needs--were most of them congregated together, or at most stood at short distances from each other, the larger ones signifying the presence oPS feminine members in a family and perhaps two or three juvenile pioneers--the smaller ones being occupied by younger miners, who lived in couples, or sometimes even alone.

Before one of the larger shanties Langley reined in his horse. "A Lancashire man lives here," he said, "and I am going to leave you with him."

In answer to his summons a woman came to the door--a young woman whose rather unresponsive face wakened somewhat when she saw who waited.

"Feyther," she called out, "it's Mester Langley, an' he's getten a stranger wi' him."

"Feyther," approaching the door, showed himself a burly individual, with traces of coal-dust in all comers not to be reached by hurried and not too fastidious ablutions. Clouds of tobacco-smoke preceded and followed him, and much stale incense from the fragrant weed exhaled itself from his well-worn corduroys. "I ha' not nivver seed him afore," he remarked after a gruff by no means-ill-natured greeting, signifying the stranger by a duck of the head in his direction.

"A Lancashire lad, Janner," answered Langley, "I want a home for him."

Janner regarded him with evident interest, but shook his head dubiously. "Ax th' missus," he remarked succinctly: "dunnot ax me."

Langley's good-humored laugh had a touch of conscious power in it. If it depended upon "th' missus" he was safe enough. His bright good looks and gay grace of manner never failed with the women. The most practical and uncompromising melted, however unwillingly, before his sunshine, and the suggestion of chivalric deference which seemed a second nature with him. So it was easy enough to parley with "th' missus."

"A Lancashire lad, Mrs. Janner," he said, "and so I know you'll take care of him. Lancashire folk have a sort of fellow feeling for each other, you see; that was why I could not make up my mind to leave him until I saw him in good hands; and yours are good ones. Give him a square meal as soon as possible," he added in a lower voice: "I will be accountable for him myself."

When he lifted his hat and rode away, the group watched him until he was almost out of sight, the general sentiment expressing itself in every countenance.

"Theer's summat noice about that theer young chap," Janner remarked with the slowness of a man who was rather mystified by the fascination under whose influence he found himself--"sum-mat as goes wi' th' grain loike."

"Ay," answered his wife, "so theer is; an' its natur' too. Coom along in, lad," to Seth, "an ha' summat to eat: yo' look faintish."

Black Creek found him a wonderfully quiet member of society, the lad Seth. He came and went to and from the mine with mechanical regularity, working with the rest, taking his meals with the Janners, and sleeping in a small shanty left vacant by the desertion of a young miner who had found life at the settlement too monotonous to suit his tastes. No new knowledge of his antecedents was arrived at. He had come "fro' Deepton," and that was the beginning and end of the matter. In fact, his seemed to be a peculiarly silent nature. He was fond of being alone, and spent most of his spare time in the desolate little shanty. Attempts at conversation appeared to trouble him, it was discovered, and accordingly he was left to himself as not worth the cultivating.

"Why does na' tha' talk more?" demanded Janner's daughter, who was a strong, brusque young woman, with a sharp tongue.

"I ha' not gotten nowt to say," was the meekly deprecating response.

Miss Janner, regarding the humble face with some impatience, remarkably enough, found nothing to deride in it, though, being neither a beauty nor in her first bloom, and sharp of tongue, as I have said, she was somewhat given to derision as a rule. In truth, the uncomplaining patience in the dull, soft eyes made her feel a little uncomfortable.

"I dunnot know what ails thee," she remarked with unceremonious candor, "but theer's summat as does."

"It's nowt as can be cured," said the lad, and turned his quiet face away.

In his silent fashion he evinced a certain degree of partially for his host's daughter. Occasionally, after his meals, he lingered for a few moments watching her at her work when she was alone, sitting by the fire or near the door, and regarding her business-like movements with a wistful air of wonder and admiration. And yet so unobtrusive were these mute attentions that Bess Janner was never roused to any form of resentment of them.

"Tha's goin' to ha' a sweetheart at last, my lass," was one of Janner's favorite witticisms, but Bess bore it with characteristic coolness. "I'm noan as big a foo' as I look," she would say, "an' I dunnot moind *him* no more nor if he wus a wench hissen'."

Small as was the element of female society at Black Creek, this young woman was scarcely popular. She was neither fair nor fond: a predominance of muscle and a certain rough deftness of hand were her chief charms. Ordinary sentiment would have been thrown away upon her; and, fortunately, she was spared it.

"She's noan hurt wi' good looks, our Bess," her father remarked with graceful chivalrousness on more than one occasion, "but hoo con heave a'most as much as I con, an' that's summat."

Consequently, it did not seem likely that the feeling she had evidently awakened in the breast of their lodger was

akin to the tender passion.

"Am I in yo're way?" he would ask apologetically; and the answer was invariably a gracious if curt one: "No--no more than th' cat. Stay wheer yo' are, lad, an' make yo'resen' comfortable."

There came a change, however, in the nature of their intercourse, but this did not occur until the lad had been with them some three months. For several days he had been ailing and unlike himself. He had been even more silent than usual; he had eaten little, and lagged on his way to and from his work; he looked thinner, and his step was slow and uncertain. There was so great an alteration in him, in fact, that Bess softened toward him visibly. She secretly bestowed the best morsels upon him, and even went so far as to attempt conversation. "Let yo're work go a bit," she advised: "yo're noan fit fur it."

But he did not give up until the third week of illness, and then one warm day at noon, Bess, at work in her kitchen among dishes and pans, was startled from her labors by his appearing at the door and staggering toward her. "What's up wi' yo'?" she demanded. "Yo' look loike death."

"I dunnot know," he faltered, and then, staggering again, caught at her dress with feeble hands "Dunnot yo'," he whispered, sinking forward-- "dunnot yo' let no one--come anigh me."

She flung a strong arm around him, and saved him from a heavy fall. His head dropped helplessly against her breast.

"He's fainted dead away," she said: "he mun ha' been worse than he thowt fur."

She laid him down, and, loosening his clothes at the throat, went for water; but a few minutes after she had bent over him for the second time an exclamation, which was almost a cry, broke from' her. "Lord ha' mercy!" she said, and fell back, losing something of color herself.

She had scarcely recovered herself even when, after prolonged efforts, she succeeded in restoring animation to the prostrate figure under her hands. The heavy eyes opening met hers in piteous appeal and protest.

"I--thowt it wur death comn," said the lad. "I wur hopin' as it wur death."

"What ha' yo' done as yo' need wish that?" said. Bess; and then, her voice shaking with excitement which got the better of her and forced her to reveal herself, she added, "I've fun' out that as yo've been hidin'."

Abrupt and unprefaced as her speech was, it scarcely produced the effect she had expected it would. Her charge neither flinched nor reddened. He laid a weak, rough hand upon her dress with a feebly pleading touch. "Dunnot yo' turn agen me," he whispered: "yo' wouldna if yo' knew."

"But I dunnot know," Bess answered, a trifle doggedly, despite her inward relentings.

"I comn to yo'," persisted the lad, "because I thowt yo' wouldna turn agen me: yo' wouldna," patiently again, "if yo' knew."

Gradually the ponderous witticism in which Janner had indulged became an accepted joke in the settlement. Bess had fallen a victim to the tender sentiment at last. She had found an adorer, and had apparently succumbed to his importunities. Seth spent less time in his shanty and more in her society. He lingered in her vicinity on all possible occasions, and seemed to derive comfort from her mere presence. And Bess not only tolerated but encouraged him. Not that her manner was in the least degree effusive: she rather extended a rough protection to her admirer, and displayed a tendency to fight his battles and employ her sharper wit as a weapon in his behalf.

"Yo' may get th' best o' him," she said dryly once to the wit of the Creek, who had been jocular at his expense, "but yo' conna get th' best o' me. Try me a bit, lad. I'm better worth yo're mettle."

"What's takken yo', lass?" said her mother at another time. "Yo're that theer soft about th chap as theer's no makkin' yo' out. Yo' wur nivver loike to be soft afore," somewhat testily. "An' it's noan his good looks, neyther."

"No," said Bess--"it's noan his good looks."

"Happen it's his lack on 'em, then?"

"Happen it is." And there the discussion ended for want of material.

There was one person, however, who did not join in the jesting; and this was Langley. When he began to understand the matter he regarded the two with sympathetic curiosity and interest. Why should not their primitive and uncouth love develop and form a tie to bind the homely lives together, and warm and brighten them? It may have been that his own mental condition at this time was such as would tend to often his heart, for an innocent passion, long cherished in its bud, had burst into its full blooming during the months he had spent amid the novel beauty and loneliness, and perhaps his new bliss subdued him somewhat. Always ready with a kindly word, he was specially ready with it where Seth was concerned. He never passed him without one, and frequently reined in his horse to speak to him at greater length. Now and then, on his way home at night, he stopped at the shanty's door, and summoning the lad detained him for a few minutes chatting in the odorous evening air. It was thoroughly in accordance with the impulses of his frank and generous nature that he should endeavor to win upon him and gain his confidence. "We are both Deepton men," he would say, "and it is natural that we should be friends, We are both alone and a long way from

home."

But the lad was always timid and slow of speech.

His gratitude showed itself in ways enough, but it rarely took the form of words. Only, one night as the horse moved away, he laid his hand upon the bridle and held it a moment, some powerful emotion showing itself in his face, and lowering his voice until it was almost a whisper. "Mester," he said, "if theer's ivver owt to be done as is hard an' loike to bring pain an' danger, yo'll--yo'll not forget me?"

Langley looked down at him with a mingled feeling of warm pity and deep bewilderment. "Forget you?" he echoed.

The dullness seemed to have dropped away from the commonplace face as if it had been a veil; the eyes were burning with a hungry pathos and fire and passion; they were raised to his and held him with the power of an indescribable anguish. "Dunnot forget as I'm here," the voice growing sharp and intense, "ready an' eager an' waitin' fur th' toime to come. Let me do summat or brave summat or suffer summat, for God's sake!"

When the young man rode away it was with a sense of weight and pain upon him. He was mystified. People were often grateful to him, but their gratitude was not such as this; this oppressed and disturbed him. It was suggestive of a mental condition whose existence seemed almost impossible. What a life this poor fellow must have led since the simplest kindliness aroused within him such emotion as this! "It is hard to understand," he murmured; "it is even a little horrible. One fancies these duller natures do not reach our heights and depths of happiness and pain, and yet---- Cathie, Cathie, my dear," breaking off suddenly and turning his face upward to the broad free blue of the sky as he quickened his horse's pace, "let me think of *you*; this hurts me."

But he was drawn nearer to the boy, and did his best to cheer and help him. His interest in him grew as he saw him oftener, and there was not only the old interest, but a new one. Something in the lad's face--a something which had struck him as familiar even at first--began to haunt him constantly. He could not rid himself of the impression it left upon him, and yet he never found himself a shade nearer a solution of the mystery.

"Raynor," he said to him on one of the evenings when he had stopped before the shanty, "I wish I knew why your face troubles me so."

"Does it trouble yo', mester?"

"Yes," with a half laugh, "I think I may say it troubles me. I have tried to recollect every lad in Deepton, and I have no remembrance of you."

"Happen not, mester," meekly. "I nivver wur much noticed, yo' see: I'm one o' them as foak is more loike to pass by."

An early train arriving next morning brought visitors to the Creek--a business-like elderly gentleman and his daughter, a pretty girl, with large bright eyes and an innocent rosy face, which became rosier and prettier than ever when Mr. Ed ward Langley advanced from the depot shed with uncovered head and extended hand. "Cathie!" he said, when the first greetings had been interchanged, "what a delight this is to me! I did not hope for such happiness as this."

"Father wanted to see the mines," answered Cathie, sweetly demure, "and I--I wanted to see Black Creek; your letters were so enthusiastic."

"A day will suffice, I suppose?" her paternal parent was wandering on amiably. "A man should always investigate such matters for himself. I can see enough to satisfy me between now and the time for the return train."

"I cannot," whispered Langley to Cathie: "a century would not suffice. If the sun would but stand still!"

The lad Seth was late for dinner that day, and when he entered the house Bess turned from her dish-washing to give him a sharp, troubled look, "Art tha' ill again?" she asked.

"Nay," he answered, "nobbut a bit tired an heavy-loike."

He sat down upon the door-step with wearily-clasped hands, and eyes wandering toward the mountain, whose pine-crowned summit towered above him. He had not even yet outlived the awe of its majesty, but he had learned to love it and draw comfort from its beauty and strength.

"Does tha' want thy dinner?" asked Bess.

"No, thank yo'," he said; "I couldna eat."

The dish-washing was deserted incontinently, and Bess came to the door, towel in hand, her expression at once softened and shaded with discontent. "Summat's hurt yo'," she said. "What is it? Summat's hurt yo' sore."

The labor-roughened hands moved with their old nervous habit, and the answer came in an odd, jerky, half-connected way: "I dunnot know why it should ha' done. I mun be mad, or summat. I nivver had no hope nor nothin': theer nivver wur no reason why I should ha' had. Ay, I mun be wrong somehow, or it wouldna stick to me i' this road. I conna get rid on it, an' I conna feel as if I want to. What's up wi' me? What's takken howd on me?" his voice breaking and the words ending in a sharp hysterical gasp like a sob.

Bess wrung her towel with a desperate strength which spoke of no small degree of tempestuous feeling. Her brow

knit itself and her lips were compressed. "What's happened?" she demanded after a pause. "I conna mak' thee out."

The look that fell upon her companion's face had something of shame in it. His eyes left the mountain side and drooped upon his clasped hands. "Theer wur a lass coom to look at 'th place today," he said--"a lady lass, wi' her feyther--an' him. She wur aw rosy red an' fair white, an' it seemt as if she wur that happy as her laughin' made th' birds mock back at her. He took her up th' mountain, an' we heard 'em both even high up among th' laurels. Th' sound o' their joy a-floatin' down from the height, so nigh th' blue sky, made me sick an' weak-loike. They wur na so gay when they comn back, but her eyes wur shinin', an' so wur his, an' I heerd him say to her as 'Foak didna know how nigh heaven th' top o' th' mountain wur.'"

Bess wrung her towel again, and regarded the mountain with manifest impatience and trouble. "Happen it'll coom reet some day," she said.

"Reet!" repeated the lad, as if mechanically. "I hadna towd mysen' as owt wur exactly wrong; on'y I conna see things clear. I niwer could, an' th' more I ax mysen' questions th' worse it gets. Wheer--wheer could I lay th' blame?"

"Th' blame!" said Bess. "Coom tha' an' get a bite to eat;" and she shook out the towel with a snap and turned away. "Coom tha," she repeated; "I mun get my work done."

That night, as Seth lay upon his pallet in the shanty, the sound of Langley's horse's hoofs reached him with an accompaniment of a clear, young masculine voice singing a verse of some sentimental modern carol--a tender song ephemeral and sweet. As the sounds neared the cabin the lad sprang up restlessly, and so was standing at the open door when the singer passed. "Good-neet, mester," he said.

The singer slackened his pace and turned his bright face toward him in the moonlight, waving his hand. "Good-night," he said, "and pleasant dreams! Mine will be pleasant ones, I know. This has been a happy day for me, Raynor. Goodnight."

When the two met again the brighter face had sadly changed; its beauty was marred with pain, and the shadow of death lay upon it.

Entering Janner's shanty the following morning, Seth found the family sitting around the breakfast-table in ominous silence. The meal stood untouched, and even Bess looked pale and anxious. All three glanced toward him questioningly as he approached, and when he sat down Janner spoke: "Hasna tha' heerd th' news?" he asked.

"Nay," Seth answered, "I ha' heerd nowt."

Bess interposed hurriedly: "Dunnot yo' fear him, feyther," she said. "Happen it isna so bad, after aw. Four or live foak wur takken down ill last neet, Seth, an' th' young mester wur among 'em; an' theer's them as says it's cholera."

It seemed as if he had not caught the full meaning of her words; he only stared at her in a startled, bewildered fashion. "Cholera!" he repeated dully.

"Theer's them as knows it's cholera," said Janner, with gloomy significance. "An' if it's cholera, it's death;" and he let his hand fall heavily upon the table.

"Ay," put in Mrs. Janner in a fretful wail, "fur they say as it's worse i' these parts than it is i' England--th' heat mak's it worse--an' here we are i' th' midst o' th' summer-toime, an' theer's no knowin' wheer it'll end. I wish tha'd takken my advice, Janner, an' stayed i' Lancashire. Ay, I wish we wur safe at home. Better less wage an' more safety. Yo'd niwer ha' coom if yo'd listened to me."

"Howd thy tongue, mother," said Bess, but the words were not ungently spoken, notwithstanding their bluntness. "Dunnot let us mak' it worse than it need be. Seth, lad, eat thy breakfast."

But there was little breakfast eaten. The fact was, that at the first spreading of the report a panic had seized upon the settlement, and Janner and his wife were by no means the least influenced by it A stolidly stubborn courage upheld Bess, but even she was subdued and somewhat awed.

"I niwer heerd much about th' cholera," Seth said to her after breakfast. "Is this here true, this as thy feyther says?"

"I dunnot know fur sure," Bess answered gravely, "but it's bad enow."

"Coom out wi' me into th' fresh air," said the lad, laying his hand upon her sleeve: "I mun say a word or so to thee." And they went out together.

There was no work done in the mine that day. Two of three new cases broke out, and the terror spread itself and grew stronger. In fact, Black Creek scarcely comported itself as stoically as might have been expected. A messenger was dispatched to the nearest town for a doctor, and his arrival by the night train was awaited with excited impatience.

When he came, however, the matter became worse. He had bad news to tell himself. The epidemic had broken out in the town he had left, and great fears were entertained by its inhabitants. "If you had not been so entirely thrown on your own resources," he said, "I could not have come."

A heavy enough responsibility rested upon his shoulders during the next few weeks. He had little help from the settlement. Those who were un-stricken looked on at the progress of the disease with helpless fear: few indeed

escaped a slight attack, and those who did were scarcely more useful than his patients. In the whole place he found only two reliable and unterrified assistants.

His first visit was to a small farm-house round the foot of the mountain and a short distance from the mine. There he found the family huddled in a back room like a flock of frightened sheep, and in the only chamber a handsome, bright-haired young fellow lying, upon the bed with a pinched and ominous look upon his comely face. The only person with him was a lad roughly clad in miner's clothes--a lad who stood by chafing his hands, and who turned desperate eyes to the door when it opened. "Yo're too late, mester," he said--"yo're too late."

But young as he was--and he was a very young man--the doctor had presence of mind and energy, and he flung his whole soul and strength into the case. The beauty and solitariness of his patient roused his sympathy almost as if it had been the beauty of a woman; he felt drawn toward the stalwart, helpless young figure lying upon the humble couch in such apparent utter loneliness. He did not count much upon the lad at first--he seemed too much bewildered and shaken--but it was not long before he changed his mind. "You are getting over your fear," he said.

"It wasna fear, mester," was the answer he received; "or at least it wasna fear for mysen'."

"What is your name?"

"Seth Ray nor, mester. Him an' me," with a gesture toward the bed, "comn from th' same place. Th' cholera couldna fear me fro' *him*--nor nowt else if he wur i' need."

So it was Seth Raynor who watched by the bedside, and labored with loving care and a patience which knew no weariness, until the worst was over and Langley was among the convalescent.

"The poor fellow and Bess Janner were my only stay," the young doctor was wont to say. "Only such care as his would have saved you, and you had a close race of it as it was."

During the convalescence nurse and invalid were drawn together with a stronger tie through every hour. Wearied and weak, Langley's old interest in the lad became a warm affection. He could scarcely bear to lose sight of the awkward boyish figure, and never rested so completely as when it was by his bedside.

"Give me your hand, dear fellow," he would say, "and let me hold it. I shall sleep better for knowing you are near me."

He fell asleep thus one morning, and awakened suddenly to a consciousness of some new presence in the room. Seth no longer sat in the chair near his pillow, but stood a little apart; and surely he would have been no lover if the feeble blood had not leaped in his veins at the sight of the face bending over him--the innocent, fair young face which had so haunted his pained and troubled dreams. "Cathie!" he cried out aloud.

The-girl fell upon her knees and caught his extended hand with a passionate little gesture of love and pity. "I did not know," she poured forth in hurried, broken tones. "I have been away ever since the sickness broke out at home. They sent me away, and I only heard yesterday--Father, tell him, for I cannot."

He scarcely heard the more definite explanation, he was at once so happy and so fearful.

"Sweetheart," he said, "I can scarcely bear to think of what may come of this; and yet how blessed it is to have you near me again! The danger for me is all over: even your dear self could not have cared for me more faithfully than I have been cared for. Raynor there has saved my life."

But Cathie could only answer with a piteous, remorseful jealousy: "Why was it not I who saved it? why was it not I?"

And the place where Seth had stood waiting was vacant, for he had left it at the sound of Langley's first joyous cry. When he returned an hour or so later, the more restful look Langley had fancied he had seen on his face of late had faded out: the old unawakened heaviness had returned. He was nervous and ill at ease, shrinking and conscious.

"I've comn to say good-neet to yo'," he said hesitatingly to the invalid. "Th' young lady says as she an' her feyther will tak' my place a bit. I'll coom i' th' mornin'."

"You want rest," said Langley; "you are tired, poor fellow!"

"Ay," quietly, "I'm tired; an' th' worst is over, yo' see, an' she's here," with a patient smile. "Yo' wunnot need me, and theer's them as does."

From that hour his work at this one place seemed done. For several days he made his appearance regularly to see if he was needed, and then his visits gradually ended. He had found a fresh field of labor among the sufferers in the settlement itself. He was as faithful to them as he had been to his first charge. The same unflagging patience showed itself, the same silent constancy and self-sacrifice. Scarcely a man or woman had not some cause to remember him with gratitude, and there was not one of those who had jested at and neglected him but thought of their jests and neglect with secret shame.

There came a day, however, when they missed him from among them. If he was not at one house he was surely at another, it appeared for some time; but when, after making his round of visits, the doctor did not find him, he became anxious. He might be at Janner's; but he was not there, nor among the miners, who had gradually resumed their work as the epidemic weakened its strength and their spirits lightened. Making these discoveries at nightfall, the doctor

touched up his horse in some secret dread. He had learned earlier than the rest to feel warmly toward this simple co-laborer. "Perhaps he's gone out to pay Langley a visit," he said: "I'll call and see. He may have stopped to have a rest."

But before he had passed the last group of cabins he met Langley himself, who by this time was well enough to resume his place in the small world, and, hearing his story, Langley's anxiety was greater than his own. "I saw him last night on my way home," he said. "About this time, too, for I remember he was sitting in the moonlight at the door of his shanty. We exchanged a few words, as we always do, and he said he was there because he was not needed, and thought a quiet night would do him good. Is it possible no one has seen him since?" in sudden alarm.

"Come with me," said his companion.

Overwhelmed by a mutual dread, neither spoke until they reached the shanty itself. There was no sign of human life about it: the door stood open, and the only sound to be heard was the rustle of the wind whispering among the pines upon the mountain side. Both men flung themselves from their horses with loudly-beating hearts.

"God grant he is not here!" uttered Langley. "God grant he is anywhere else! The place is so drearily desolate."

Desolate indeed! The moonbeams streaming through the door threw their fair light upon the rough boards and upon the walls, and upon the quiet figure lying on the pallet in one of the corners, touching with pitying whiteness the homely face upon the pillow and the hand that rested motionless upon the floor.

The doctor went down on his knees at the pallet's side, and thrust his hand into the breast of the coarse garments with a half-checked groan.

"Asleep?" broke from Langley's white lips in a desperate whisper. "Not--not"--

"Dead!" said the doctor--"dead for hours!" There was actual anguish in his voice as he uttered the words, but another element predominated in the exclamation which burst from him scarcely a second later. "Good God!" he cried--"good God!"

Langley bent down and caught him almost fiercely by the arm: the exclamation jarred upon him. "What is it?" he demanded, "What do you mean?"

"It is--a woman!"

Even as they gazed at each other in speechless questioning the silence was broken in upon. Swift, heavy footsteps neared the door, crossed the threshold, and Janner's daughter stood before them.

There was no need for questioning. One glance told her all. She made her way to the moonlit corner, pushed both aside with rough strength, and knelt down. "I might ha' knowed," she said with helpless bitterness--"I might ha' knowed;" and she laid her face against the dead hand in a sudden passion of weeping. "I might ha' knowed, Jinny lass," she cried, "but I didna. It was loike aw th' rest as tha' should lay thee down an' die loike this. Tha' wast alone aw along, an' tha" wast alone at th' last. But dunnot blame me, poor lass. Nay, I know tha' wiltna."

The two men stood apart, stirred by an emotion too deep for any spoken attempt at sympathy. She scarcely seemed to see them: she seemed to recognize no presence but that of the unresponsive figure upon its lowly couch. She spoke to it as if it had been a living thing, her voice broken and tender, stroking the hair now and then with a touch all womanly and loving. "Yo' were nigher to me than most foak, Jinny," she said; "an' tha' trusted me, I know."

They left her to her grief until at last she grew calmer and her sobs died away into silence. Then she rose and approaching Langley, who stood at the door, spoke to him, scarcely raising her tear-stained eyes. "I ha' summat to tell yo' an' sum-mat to ax yo'," she said, "an' I mun tell it to yo' alone. Will yo' coom out here?"

He followed her, wondering and sad. His heart was heavy with the pain and mystery the narrow walls inclosed. When they paused a few yards from the house, the one face was scarcely more full of sorrow than the other, only that the woman's was wet with tears. She was not given to many words, Bess Janner, and she wasted few in the story she had to tell. "Yo' know th' secret as she carried," she said, "or I wouldna tell yo' even now; an' now I tell it yo' that she may carry the secret to her grave, an' ha' no gossiping tongue to threep at her. I dunnot want foak starin' an' wonderin' an' makkin' talk. She's borne enow."

"It shall be as you wish, whether you tell me the story or not," said Langley. "We will keep it as sacred as you have done."

She hesitated a moment, seemingly pondering with herself before she answered him. "Ay," she said, "but I ha' another reason behind. I want summat fro' yo': I want yo're pity. Happen it moight do her good even now." She did not look at him as she proceeded, but stood with her face a little turned away and her eyes resting upon the shadow on the mountain. "Theer wur a lass as worked at th' Deepton mines," she said--"a lass as had a weakly brother as worked an' lodged wi' her. Her name wur Jinny, an' she wur quiet and plain-favored. Theer wur other wenches as wur well-lookin', but she wasna; theer wur others as had homes, and she hadna one; theer wur plenty as had wit an' sharpness, but she hadna them neyther. She wur nowt but a desolate, homely lass, as seemt to ha' no place i' th' world, an' yet wur tender and weak-hearted to th' core. She wur allus longin' fur summat as she wur na loike to get; an' she nivver did get it, fur her brother wasna one as cared fur owt but his own doin's. But theer were one among aw th' rest as nivver passed her

by, an' he wur th' mester's son. He wur a bright, handsome chap, as won his way ivverywheer, an' had a koind word or a laugh fur aw. So he gave th' lass a smile, an' did her a favor now and then--loike as not without givin' it more than a thowt--until she learned to live on th' hope o' seein' him. An', bein' weak an' tender, it grew on her fro' day to day, until it seemt to give th' strength to her an' tak' it both i' one."

She stopped and looked at Langley here. "Does tha' see owt now, as I'm getten this fur?" she asked.

"Yes," he answered, his agitation almost master ing him. "And now I have found the lost face that haunted me so."

"Ay," said Bess, "it was hers;" and she hurried on huskily: "When you went away she couldna abide th' lonesomeness, an' so one day she said to her brother, 'Dave, let us go to th' new mine wheer Mester Ed'ard is;' an' him bein' allus ready fur a move, they started out together. But on th' way th' lad took sick and died sudden, an' Jinny wur left to hersen'. An' then she seed new trouble. She wur beset wi' danger as she'd niwer thowt on, an' before long she foun' out as women didna work o' this side o' the sea as they did o' ours. So at last she wur driv' upon a strange-loike plan. It sounds wild, happen, but it wasna so wild after aw. Her bits of clothes giv' out an' she had no money; an' theer wur Dave's things. She'd wore th' loike at her work i' Deepton, an' she made up her moind to wear 'em agen. Yo' didna know her when she coom here, an' no one else guessed at th' truth. She didna expect nowt, yo' see; she on'y wanted th' comfort o' hearin' th' voice she'd longed an' hungered fur; an' here wur wheer she could hear it. When I fun' her out by accident, she towd me, an' sin' then we 've kept th' secret together. Do yo' guess what else theer's been betwixt us, mester?"

"I think I do," he answered. "God forgive me for my share in her pain!"

"Nay," she returned, "it was no fault o' thine. She niwer had a thowt o' that. She had a patient way wi' her, had Jinny, an' she bore her trouble better than them as hopes. She didna ax nor hope neyther; an' when theer coom fresh hurt to her she wur ready an' waiting knowin' as it moight comn ony day. Happen th' Lord knows what life wur give her fur--I dunnot, but it's ower now--an' happen she knows hersen'. I hurried here to-neet," she added, battling with a sob, "as soon as I heerd as she was missin', th' truth struck to my heart, an' I thowt as I should be here first, but I wasna I ha' not gotten no more to say."

They went back to the shanty, and with her own hands she did for the poor clay the last service it would need, Langley and his companion waiting the while outside. When her task was at an end she came to them, and this time it was Langley who addressed himself to her. "May I go in?" he asked.

She bent her head in assent, and without speaking he left them and entered the shanty alone. The moonlight, streaming in as before, fell upon the closed eyes, and hands folded in the old, old fashion upon the fustian jacket: the low whisper of the pines crept downward like a sigh. Kneeling beside the pallet, the young man bent his head and touched the pale forehead with reverent lips. "God bless you for your love and faith," he said, "and give you rest!"

And when he rose a few minutes later, and saw that the little dead flower he had worn had dropped from its place and lay upon the pulseless breast, he did not move it, but turned away and left it resting; there.