

# **THE RED LADY**

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The red lady by Katharine Newlin Burt

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**KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT**

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By KATHARINE NEWLIN BURT



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# THE RED LADY

## CHAPTER I

### HOW I CAME TO THE PINES

**I**T is the discomfort of the thing which comes back upon me, I believe, most forcibly. Of course it was horrible, too, emphatically horrible, but the prolonged, sustained, baffling discomfort of my position is what has left the mark. The growing suspicion, the uncanny circumstances, my long knowledge of that presence: it is all extraordinary, not least, the part I somehow managed to play.

I was housekeeper at the time for little Mrs. Brane. How I had come to be her housekeeper might have served to forewarn me, if I had had the clue. None but an inexperienced, desperate girl would have taken the position after the fashion in which I was urged to take it. I remember the raw, colorless day, and how it made me shiver to face its bitter grayness as I came out of the dismal New York boarding-house to begin my dreary, mortifying search

## The Red Lady

for work. I remember the hollowness of purse and stomach, and the dullness of head. I even remember wondering that hair like mine, so conspicuously golden-red, could possibly keep its flame under such conditions. And halfway down the block, how very well I remember the decent-looking, black-clad woman who touched my arm, looked me hard in the face, and said, "A message for you, madam."

She got away so quickly that I had n't opened the blank envelope before she was round the corner and out of sight.

The envelope contained a slip of white paper on which was neatly printed in pen and ink: "Excellent position vacant at The Pines, Pine Cone, N.C. Mrs. Theodore Brane wants housekeeper. Apply at once."

This was not signed at all. I thought: "Some one is thinking kindly of me, after all. Some old-time friend of my father's, perhaps, has sent a servant to me with this message." I returned to my third-story back hall-bedroom and wrote at once, offering my services and sending my references to Mrs. Brane. Two days later, during which my other efforts to find a position entirely failed, there came a letter on good note-paper in a light, sloping hand.

*The Pines*

MY DEAR MISS GALE:

I shall be delighted to try you as housekeeper. I think you will find the place satisfactory. It is a small household, and your duties will be light, though I am very much out of health and must necessarily leave every detail of management to you. I want you to take your meals with me. I shall be glad of your companionship. The salary is forty dollars a month.

Sincerely yours

EDNA WORTHINGTON BRANE

And to my delight she enclosed the first month's salary in advance. I wonder if many such checks are blistered with tears. Mine was, when I cashed it at the bank at the corner, where my landlady, suddenly gracious, made me known.

Three days later, I was on my way to "The Pines."

The country, more and more flat and sandy, with stunted pines and negro huts, with shabby patches of corn and potatoes, was sad under a low, moist sky, but my heart was high with a sense of adventure at all times strong in me, and I read promise between the lines of Mrs. Brane's kind little note.