

cause it is not proper ; we must not go in and out of the dairy—but, Claudine, I am determined to do *something* or—*die*."

She spoke in a tragic tone, and I laughed ; but on seeing her take out her waterproof and rubbers, I became grave.

"I scandalized Mrs. Merton's ideas of what is *proper*," continued Ruth, "by talking for one hour to Molly, that pretty little kitchen-maid. And, oh! Claudine, that child is a curiosity. Her mind is stored full of ghost stories, beliefs in supernatural tokens, and of awe and reverence for the Squire who lives in that rambling old mansion beyond the wood yonder."

"What of that, Ruth?" said I sharply.

"Oh! I forgot the point of my story. Molly says (and she declares she has her information from some ancestry as remote as Adam) that there is a secret room in the turret chamber, and that there are beautiful pictures and cabinets of china at the Grange."

"Pictures and china! Oh, Ruth, for shame!" I cried.

"Well, I hate pictures, and that you know well. Now, Claudine, are you ready?"

"Ready! No indeed! Not until I know what you are going to do."

"The Squire, that melancholy-looking man we saw at church two Sundays ago, is gone up to London. In his absence the housekeeper has permission to show the house."

"And we are going to see it?" I asked.

"Yes."

"Well," I said, eagerly donning my cloak, "the intolerable dullness of this house passes all belief; it must excuse us for outraging Mrs. Merton's proprieties."

"Yes," said Ruth; then added in a reflective tone, "I think the way these rustics look up to the Squire most absurd and ridiculous. They believe him to be made of better clay than ordinary mortals."

"I wonder if they ever think at all," said I. "Such sluggish bodies and minds want something volcanic to stir them. Did you see that man breaking stones the other day?"

"Yes; he was sitting on a little stool, and it seemed to me that he was dozing between the strokes of the hammer."

By this time I had donned waterproof and rubbers, and was ready for the walk.

"Mrs. Merton is taking her afternoon nap," whispered Ruth, as we creaked down the stairs—those wide, low stairs that bend under your feet, and creak at every movement. We hurried through the hall and into the garden, opened the wicket gate, and passed out into the fields that led to the woods. It was pouring with rain, and a mist hung over the woods. Under foot the heavy clay soil made walking very tiresome work, yet Ruth skipped along in very high spirits.

"I don't dislike a walk in the rain," she began; "really, I am getting so used to it that sunlight would be oppressive. I am sure the damp agrees with my complexion," she added; "I am as rosy as these rustics."

Two children passed us, carrying bundles of faggots on their heads. They stood aside and made little dips of curtsies as we passed, and stared after us as long as we were in sight.

"Molly says," continued Ruth, "that there is a ghost which haunts this wood by day and by night. It appears in the shape of a man with a large hat and long cloak. He committed some crime which caused him to rest unquiet in his grave."

"I wish you would not tell me such things," I said; "at any rate wait till we are at home again. You know what a coward I am."

Ruth made a laughing answer, and we plunged deeper into the woods. Suddenly we came to a wide, open spot where cross roads traversed the way.

"He was buried here," began Ruth,