

Martin, "for I do not really see anything of the kind, and never remember to have seen one either, outside or in."

"Indeed, indeed," said Claudine, earnestly, "I am quite sure that I saw a loop-hole in the turret; it is in my sketch, which I will show you when we go downstairs."

"Look well here before you go down," said Martin, with an amused twinkle in his eyes; "you see that the only window is in the roof—"

"Claudine said loop-hole," put in Ruth.

"I fail to see any loop-hole, either," said Martin, "and I have known this old room from childhood."

Claudine, as if not satisfied with the evidence of her senses, passed her hand round the walls of the room, as if she needs must soon be brought to a standstill from a sudden opening. But no, there was none, and she returned to Martin, holding up her grimy fingers for inspection.

"Are you quite satisfied?" he said, smiling at her kindly.

Claudine shook her head, and then after a few more remarks upon the desolate, dusty room, and its isolation from other parts of the house, they all went downstairs again.

It was again wet and very windy. Mrs. Montford had a cosy fire in her sitting-room, and in the twilight Claudine and Ruth gathered round it, and presently Martin came in. A glad light shone in Mrs. Montford's eyes as she saw him enter the room, and then she made a place for him by the fire-side.

"This is so cosy and pleasant," said Mrs. Montford. "Do you know I feel as if I could never spare you again, children. You have brought fresh life into the house."

"Oh!" cried Ruth, "but think what it is to us, to be living in a house old, old as the—"

"Hills," put in Claudine, mischievously.

"And where there really is a secret chamber, and where there are relics of the olden days, and portraits of beautiful ladies who graced the Elizabethan court. Ah! it is almost too charming to be true."

"Upon all these things," said Mrs. Montford, soberly, "you set too much value. Such things are, and ought to be, interesting to us, but their day is past. We live in the present, in a world where every man should make his own 'footprints in the sands of time.' It is morbid, sadly morbid, to give up all the freshness and brightness of present life to mouldy reminiscences of the past."

"Mother dislikes this old place. It is very good of her to live here at all," said Martin, exchanging a kind look with his mother. "She takes keen interest in the progress of the world in the present age, while I—" he paused, looked at the fire, and relapsed into silence.

"Claudine is disgusted with the secret chamber," laughed Ruth.

"Was it ever made use of?" enquired Claudine.

"Certainly. In the civil wars," replied Martin.

"I wonder why Molly said it was in the turret chamber," said Ruth.

"Molly seems to be a great authority," said Martin, quietly.

The subject was changed. Ruth and Claudine, cleverly drawn out by Mrs. Montford, began to tell stirring stories of their healthy, fresh life in the New World. The tea bell interrupted them.

"Why, Martin," said Mrs. Montford, as she rose, "these girls seem by their every speech and action to make this old, mouldering place appear asleep and dead. My dear son, is a dead life of any good to anyone?"

She said the last words to him alone, for Claudine and Ruth were discussing some topic of interest, and did not hear.