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CLAUDINE'S STORY.

BY FESTINA LENTE, AUTHOR OF "THE HOLY GRAIL," "HIC JACET," "MAY-DAY," ETC.

"Beginning to rain, Ruth?"

"Of course—to rain, *rain, rain.*" Ruth made a long pause, then added. "But I do not mean to be baulked of my pleasure."

I looked up in surprise. Ruth looked at me with an expression which I knew of old veiled some deep purpose. I began to feel happy. Ruth had energy.

Realize our position. Our father owned land in America, and ever since our mother died we had kept his house for him. We had gained instruction as we could, and with father's help had become very well read, and had received a thorough grounding in all the studies we had taken up. Father had intended to become a doctor, when he was a young man, but his health had failed, and he had been obliged to live a farmer's life.

We were well satisfied with our own attainments. Father, however, was not, and he sent us to England for two years, to a school in Hampstead, near London. A relative of my mother's, who lived in the west of England, had asked us to stay a few weeks with him before our father came to take us back to America, and was it not too provoking that every day should be rainy? Was it not too

much for human patience to bear, that every morning brought autumn fogs, rains, and windy weather.

"It is dreadfully dull here," I said, tapping the window-pane, as the rain-drops pattered upon it.

"Intolerably," ejaculated Ruth with a gravity that had its absurd side, even to my sympathizing ears.

"But I have a plan," she continued. "Let me see. We came here a fortnight ago, and unless we except the rustics, and the Squire whom we saw in church, we have seen no new faces since we came. Uncle Joseph goes to work early and returns at six in the evening. Mrs. Merton (the house-keeper) has two ideas, which are quite enough to occupy her brain. The first is that, being Americans, she must ply us with pastry and hot cakes, which, as you know, we never eat; the second is that we are children, to be told what to do every day."

"Yes," I chimed in, "we must not go here, or there, or talk to this person or that, because it is not *proper.*"

"*Proper!* I hate the very word," cried Ruth. "I *do* think this farmhouse the very dullest place I was ever in. We must not help with the housework, be-