

"We can climb like kittens," said Ruth, entreatingly.

"I cannot allow it," said Martin, with decision.

"We are longing to see it," said Claudine, coloring as she spoke. "Mrs. Montford gave us permission to go where we pleased this wet morning."

"My mother has forgotten this dangerous staircase—I doubt even if she knows of its existence. She has probably told you that she dislikes the Grange as a residence, and keeps to her more cheerful apartments on the other wing."

"Oh!" cried Ruth, who had not been listening to Martin's words, but who, crouched at the foot of the narrow staircase, was peering into the darkness, "do take us up; we will just go one step at a time, and you will see no danger will be incurred." Martin was obliged to laugh at her eager manner, and of course knew that he had lost the day.

"If you will indeed be as careful as you promise," he said, "I may permit you to go."

But he still stood and looked at them as if he would much rather not let them pass him.

"You will go in front, will you not?" said Claudine, "and we will follow so carefully."

It was settled thus, and the three proceeded, the stairs creaking and groaning under their weight. Sometimes the steps were gone so that Martin had to give his girl companions a great deal of help. In the darkness it was not easy to find footing, and the stairs wound round and round, with here and there a loophole or slit in the wall, which was now so overgrown with ivy that little light came through it.

"Shall we return?" said Martin, gently, as he perceived by intuition that Claudine was not enjoying herself as much as she had imagined she would.

"Certainly not," gasped Ruth, who was half choked with the disturbed dust of years, which rose unbidden at every footstep.

"I have not been up these stairs for many years," said Martin; "I *had* intended not to go again. There is nothing to see when you are there. But here we are—another long step and you shall judge for yourselves."

"Why!" cried Claudine, in a tone of disappointment, as she looked round a small turret room, "what a small place!"

"Yes, it *is* small. I told you there was nothing to see. Yet when I was a lad I used to play here and think it quite a large play room."

"Nothing to see!" ejaculated Ruth, "where, then, is the secret chamber?"

"It opens from a panel in the dining-room," said Martin. "You did not undertake this journey to see that, did you?"

"Yes, of course, I did," said Ruth, in a determined tone. "Downstairs did you say?"

"Yes, a dreadfully musty, dark place, that one could not exist in for twenty-four hours," said Martin, laughing at Ruth's face of keen disappointment. Then he asked: "What made you think it here?"

"Molly told me," said Ruth, rousing herself to defence. "Molly knows all about the Grange, and told me ever so many stories about it, and she said there was a secret chamber in the turret room."

"She is mistaken, you see," said Martin, a little coldly.

"Miss Claudine, of what are you thinking so intently?"

"Oh! some dream, I fancy," said Ruth, with a laugh. "Claudine is so impractical."

"I cannot quite make out where I am," said Claudine, looking puzzled. "When I sketched the turret the other day from the bow window of the sitting-room in the west wing, I saw and drew a loop-hole like those we passed on our way up, only it seemed to be a little larger."

"I fancy you imagined one," smiled