

## CHAPTER XXIX. A WEIRD TALE

On an early June evening Rainbow Valley was an entirely delightful place and the children felt it to be so, as they sat in the open glade where the bells rang elfishly on the Tree Lovers, and the White Lady shook her green tresses. The wind was laughing and whistling about them like a leal, glad-hearted comrade. The young ferns were spicy in the hollow. The wild cherry trees scattered over the valley, among the dark firs, were mistily white. The robins were whistling over in the maples behind Ingleside. Beyond, on the slopes of the Glen, were blossoming orchards, sweet and mystic and wonderful, veiled in dusk. It was spring, and young things MUST be glad in spring. Everybody was glad in Rainbow Valley that evening--until Mary Vance froze their blood with the story of Henry Warren's ghost.

Jem was not there. Jem spent his evenings now studying for his entrance examination in the Ingleside garret. Jerry was down near the pond, trouting. Walter had been reading Longfellow's sea poems to the others and they were steeped in the beauty and mystery of the ships. Then they talked of what they would do when they were grown up--where they would travel--the far, fair shores they would see. Nan and Di meant to go to Europe. Walter longed for the Nile moaning past its Egyptian sands, and a glimpse of the sphinx. Faith opined rather dismally that she supposed she would have to be a missionary--old Mrs. Taylor told

her she ought to be--and then she would at least see India or China, those mysterious lands of the Orient. Carl's heart was set on African jungles. Una said nothing. She thought she would just like to stay at home. It was prettier here than anywhere else. It would be dreadful when they were all grown up and had to scatter over the world. The very idea made Una feel lonesome and homesick. But the others dreamed on delightedly until Mary Vance arrived and vanished poesy and dreams at one fell swoop.

"Laws, but I'm out of puff," she exclaimed. "I've run down that hill like sixty. I got an awful scare up there at the old Bailey place."

"What frightened you?" asked Di.

"I dunno. I was poking about under them lilacs in the old garden, trying to see if there was any lilies-of-the-valley out yet. It was dark as a pocket there--and all at once I seen something stirring and rustling round at the other side of the garden, in those cherry bushes. It was WHITE. I tell you I didn't stop for a second look. I flew over the dyke quicker than quick. I was sure it was Henry Warren's ghost."

"Who was Henry Warren?" asked Di.

"And why should he have a ghost?" asked Nan.

"Laws, did you never hear the story? And you brought up in the Glen. Well, wait a minute till I get by breath all back and I'll tell you."

Walter shivered delightfully. He loved ghost stories. Their mystery, their dramatic climaxes, their eeriness gave him a fearful, exquisite pleasure. Longfellow instantly grew tame and commonplace. He threw the book aside and stretched himself out, propped upon his elbows to listen whole-heartedly, fixing his great luminous eyes on Mary's face. Mary wished he wouldn't look at her so. She felt she could make a better job of the ghost story if Walter were not looking at her. She could put on several frills and invent a few artistic details to enhance the horror. As it was, she had to stick to the bare truth--or what had been told her for the truth.

"Well," she began, "you know old Tom Bailey and his wife used to live in that house up there thirty years ago. He was an awful old rip, they say, and his wife wasn't much better. They'd no children of their own, but a sister of old Tom's died and left a little boy--this Henry Warren--and they took him. He was about twelve when he came to them, and kind of undersized and delicate. They say Tom and his wife used him awful from the start--whipped him and starved him. Folks said they wanted him to die so's they

could get the little bit of money his mother had left for him. Henry didn't die right off, but he begun having fits--epileps, they called 'em--and he grew up kind of simple, till he was about eighteen. His uncle used to thrash him in that garden up there 'cause it was back of the house where no one could see him. But folks could hear, and they say it was awful sometimes hearing poor Henry plead with his uncle not to kill him. But nobody dared interfere 'cause old Tom was such a reprobate he'd have been sure to get square with 'em some way. He burned the barns of a man at Harbour Head who offended him. At last Henry died and his uncle and aunt give out he died in one of his fits and that was all anybody ever knowed, but everybody said Tom had just up and killed him for keeps at last. And it wasn't long till it got around that Henry WALKED. That old garden was HA'NTED. He was heard there at nights, moaning and crying. Old Tom and his wife got out--went out West and never came back. The place got such a bad name nobody'd buy or rent it. That's why it's all gone to ruin. That was thirty years ago, but Henry Warren's ghost ha'nts it yet."

"Do you believe that?" asked Nan scornfully. "I don't."

"Well, GOOD people have seen him--and heard him." retorted Mary.

"They say he appears and grovels on the ground and holds you by the legs and gibbers and moans like he did when he was alive. I thought of that as soon as I seen that white thing in the bushes

and thought if it caught me like that and moaned I'd drop down dead on the spot. So I cut and run. It MIGHTN'T have been his ghost, but I wasn't going to take any chances with a ha'nt."

"It was likely old Mrs. Stimson's white calf," laughed Di. "It pastures in that garden--I've seen it."

"Maybe so. But I'M not going home through the Bailey garden any more. Here's Jerry with a big string of trout and it's my turn to cook them. Jem and Jerry both say I'm the best cook in the Glen. And Cornelia told me I could bring up this batch of cookies. I all but dropped them when I saw Henry's ghost."

Jerry hooted when he heard the ghost story--which Mary repeated as she fried the fish, touching it up a trifle or so, since Walter had gone to help Faith to set the table. It made no impression on Jerry, but Faith and Una and Carl had been secretly much frightened, though they would never have given in to it. It was all right as long as the others were with them in the valley: but when the feast was over and the shadows fell they quaked with remembrance. Jerry went up to Ingleside with the Blythes to see Jem about something, and Mary Vance went around that way home. So Faith and Una and Carl had to go back to the manse alone. They walked very close together and gave the old Bailey garden a wide berth. They did not believe that it was haunted, of course, but they would not go near it for all that.