

"the rules are not of my making, and I have my orders to see that they are enforced."

Alice brushed by without a word of reply, her fair brow clouded over, her rosebud lips twisted into a pout.

"Cross old thing!" she muttered to Leila; "to spoil my evening so!"

"It's just what she likes to do," said Leila, full of sympathy; "but I'll tell you how you can manage, Alice. Cleora Field will do the exercises for you if you give her some of those cream chocolates you bought to-day, and you and I will play a lovely trick on old Barleycorn."

The cloud vanished from Alice Fortescue's forehead; the lips became a perfect Cupid's bow of coral once more.

"We'll write her a note," whispered Leila; "we'll make her think that her lover wants to see her again. Fancy old Barleycorn wending her way to the Chapel Pond by moonlight, to meet somebody who isn't there! Fancy her disappointment! And oh, Alice, only think what a capital story it will make for the girls!"

And the two malicious young conspirators giggled together in an ecstasy of glee.

It was a cruel plot, but Alice and Leila were very young, and had never known the envenomed pangs of hope deferred. That was their only excuse.

Miss Barley had finished her share of the daily treadmill of lessons, a day or so afterwards, and had gone out to get a breath of fresh air in the dreary poplar walk at the north end of the house, when a rough-looking little boy, with frost-nipped fingers and toes, and great black eyes, like those of a gipsy, sidled up to her and slipped a folded bit of paper into her hand.

"I was told to give it to you, miss," said he, and vanished like a human squirrel into the shrubberies.

Ruth Barley looked after him in surprise, and then she opened the note. In it were printed, in rude imitation of Roman letters, the words:

"In the old place beside the Chapel Pond at nine to-night. John Bates has returned."

Miss Barley grew very pale; then the blood rushed in a scalding torrent through every vein in her body.

John Bates! Was she dreaming? Or was the thread of that sweet old love-story to be taken up again at the old place, just where it had been broken off seven long years ago?

Ruth's heart beat, her breath came quickly, and a sense of wild exultation filled all her soul. For it never once occurred to her that all this might be only a hoax.

Chapel Pond was a deep glittering sheet of water lying in the heart of the woods about a quarter of a mile away, and deriving its name from the steep rocks which walled it in on three sides, which were supposed to bear some resemblance to the Gothic pillars of a chapel. On the fourth side the woods fringed the shore, and close by was a secluded dell where the violets blossomed earliest in the spring-time, and great clusters of maiden-hair fern grew in rich profusion.

How happy Ruth Barley had been then, in the old days, before her lover went away—how wretched afterwards!

She pressed the crumpled bit of paper to her lips again and again.

"Oh," she murmured to herself, "I am the happiest woman in the world! What right have I to expect a second blossoming time in my life? and yet it has come."

Half the girls at Applenook Seminary had been let into the secret of this "excellent joke," and were watching Miss Barley from one vantage point or another, as she threw a black Shetland shawl over her head, and slipped out of the house just when the hands of the clock in the hall were nearing a quarter to nine.

It was a still mild evening, with the moon at a full; one could almost hear the gurgling of the little brook outside.

Some laughed as the door closed softly behind the English governess, who fondly supposed herself to be unnoticed; some whispered, one or two looked grave.

Only the other teachers gossiping around the fire, and Madame Appleton herself, writing letters in her own sanctum, remained in ignorance of what was going on.

Little Louis Belville started to her feet.

"Girls," she cried, "it's too bad! It's cruel—that's what it is! It shall not go on! I'll run after her, and tell her that the whole thing is a deceit!"

But Leila Wharton pulled her back as she was springing to open the door.

"It's too late," she said. "You couldn't overtake her now. And it is such a splendid joke! Just wait until you see the expression of her face when she comes back. We shall be avenged for Barleycorn's viciousness now!"