

and I have been here a long time. Good-bye, dear."

"Good-bye," whispered Helen, clinging round her neck, and her eyes grew dim with tears as she watched her pass out. She felt very ill, and knew that she should not see her many more times.

When Helen's mother came to her she was crying quietly.

"What is the matter, darling?" she asked anxiously.

"Nothing, mother; it is very foolish of me, but I feel so ill to-night," and again her cough became very troublesome. "Is it snowing?" she asked presently.

"A little, darling."

"If I get worse, mother, will you send for Miss Harcourt?"

"Yes, darling, I will send. What makes you so tired to-night? I think I had better send for the doctor," she continued, seeing the deadly pallor that had spread over the child's face.

"No, not yet, I am only tired. What time is it?"

"About half-past eight."

For another hour the mother watched anxiously beside her, and then rising, she slipped out for a minute and sent a boy quickly for the doctor.

Two long hours passed before he arrived, and meanwhile the little sufferer had grown rapidly worse.

When at last he stood beside her, the mother knew by his face that the worst had come.

"Is there no hope?" she asked in despairing tones.

"Very little," he answered gently, "but I can do no more for her. She may live until to-morrow."

"Then I must send for Miss Harcourt," she said, in a choking voice, and went to despatch a messenger.

"Say that Helen is worse and would like to see her," she said, and then returned to watch by the dying child.

It was about eleven o'clock when Mrs. Harcourt was startled by a foot-step outside the dining-room window. Her husband was in his study and she was waiting up for him, everyone else having retired. Thinking it unnecessary to disturb anyone, she went quickly to the door and opened it, just as Mrs. Liston's messenger was about to ring.

"What do you want?" she asked quickly.

"Mrs. Liston sent me to tell Miss Harcourt that Helen is worse," replied the boy.

"Surely Mrs. Liston doesn't expect Miss Harcourt to come out at this time of night, in all this snow, too! I never heard of such a thing; why did she send you?"

"She told me to tell Miss Harcourt that, and to say Helen wanted her."

"Is the child much worse?"

"Yes, I think so, the doctor is there."

Mrs. Harcourt hesitated a moment and then said, "Miss Harcourt has gone to bed, and her father would not think of allowing her out such a night at this hour. You run back to your home and I will send Miss Harcourt the first thing in the morning;" and so saying she

quietly closed the door and went upstairs to bed.

When Madge awoke next morning, she had a strange restless feeling that she could not shake off. She rose before her usual hour, and was first down at the breakfast-table.

When her step-mother entered she noticed a rather uneasy expression on her face, and she watched her closely, feeling sure that something was amiss.

"I thought I heard someone outside, late last night," she said, presently, finding she could not take her breakfast calmly, as usual. "Did anyone come?"

"Yes," replied Mrs. Harcourt, with an attempt at carelessness. "Mrs. Liston sent a boy about eleven to say that Helen was rather worse. I don't know what was the good of sending the poor child out that time of night with such an ambiguous message," she continued hurriedly, half-startled at the sudden flash of Madge's eyes. "I think you had better go and see if she wants anything, when you have finished your breakfast."

"Did he say he was to tell me?" asked Madge, in a quick, stern voice.

"Yes; but I didn't think it wise to disturb you, as it was so late and such a bad night. I knew you would go early this morning."

"You were indeed considerate," she replied in hard dry tones, that flash still in her eyes. "If anything has happened to Helen during the night, I shall never forgive you." And without another word she left her untasted breakfast, hurried on her things and left the house.

A nameless dread was in her heart which stifled hope, and she hurried recklessly through the snow.

When she reached the cottage, one glance at the lowered blinds told her the truth. Without pausing, she passed swiftly up the little path, opened the door and entered.

Mrs. Liston was in the first room alone, weeping quietly over the fire. She started on seeing Madge, then rose and came towards her, holding out both hands.

She did not know her as Helen had done, but she knew that her child had loved her more than anyone in the world except herself, and so she turned to her for sympathy.

Madge took her hands without a word.

She tried to speak, but a great lump rose in her throat and prevented her.

"Oh, Miss Harcourt, Miss Harcourt!" sobbed the woman, "she asked for you several times. Why didn't you come?"

"I never knew," replied Madge hoarsely. "They did not tell me until this morning. Had I had your message, nothing on earth should have kept me away. When did she die?"

"This morning at three o'clock. The doctor came last night, but there was nothing he could do. I told the boy to say she was much worse."

Again that choking sensation came over Madge, but she forced it down and managed to say calmly, "I will go to her."

Then she crossed the room and

entered the chamber of death, where the child lay like a beautiful statue, with a look of perfect rest and peace on the little worn face. For a few minutes Madge stood and looked at her in awe, and then, with a sudden rush, her loss came home to her, and dropping on her knees by the bedside, she buried her face in her hands.

Presently she looked up and the tears had left her eyes, while a cold, calm expression crept over her face, more pitiful to behold than bitter weeping.

"Oh, Helen, Helen!" she murmured, "You were all I had to help me; without you I shall grow bad altogether. Speak to me, Helen, just one word," and she laid her face beside the dead child's. "Say you know why I didn't keep my promise. Helen, my little Helen, they kept me from you, and I would have done anything to help you, and now you are gone and I shall never see you again, never—never."

She clutched convulsively at the bed-clothes, and her face became almost as white as the little sleeper's.

"I shall never see you," she continued, "because all the evil in me is roused and strengthened. She broke for me my promise to you; I cannot forget—I cannot forget."

When at last she rose, the cold hard expression had deepened on her face. She bent down calmly and kissed the white brow and the cold lips, then, without a parting glance, left the room.

"You are ill, Miss Harcourt," exclaimed Mrs. Liston in a startled voice on seeing her. "What is it? Do you feel faint?"

"No, I am quite well, thank you," replied Madge, in a voice she hardly recognised as her own. "I should like to say something to comfort you, but I can't; I don't know why these things are; I should only increase your grief if I attempted to speak of it. She was all you had; it is so fearfully hard. Forgive me if I seem heartless, I don't know how to bear it all; I will see you again in a day or two."

Mrs. Liston took her hand and held it fast.

"God bless you," she said, "for all you did for her, and oh, don't let those cruel doubts take hold of you, it grieved her so. Indeed, though His ways are not as our ways, they are best."

"Yes, yes, I will think about it," replied Madge hastily, and then she hurried away.

Out over the snow she went, her breath coming short and fast from the tumult in her breast. A crisis had come. She felt this day would change her future.

On she went along the lonely road, oblivious of all except the strife within her, when her good and her evil nature wrestled in fierce conflict.

At last she turned homewards.

The dark look was still on her face as she entered the house; it was not difficult to name the victor.

"She did it on purpose, I will never forgive her," she muttered, and then throwing open the dining-room door, she confronted her step-mother.

(To be continued.)