

As Madge finished speaking, Mr. Harcourt entered the room and took his seat at the table. This was a signal to drop the subject, and the usually silent meal-time recommenced. Indeed it seemed as if Jack had been gone for weeks, so strangely still was the house. Madge sat silent with an aching heart, longing to break away from the depressing atmosphere, yet fully conscious of the hopelessness of her desire, and of how little the afternoon would bring to cheer her. Not much certainly, only an errand in the village, a long practice, work, and a stolen hour with a book.

She was truly glad when she was at last in her own room for the night, and the gloomiest day in the whole year ended.

The next morning, Saturday, she rose in a happier mood; Jack's visit was now a thing of the past, and she was better prepared to face the old routine.

Also Saturday was her day for visiting Helen Liston, and this was a bright event in her week.

Helen Liston was her one little friend and charge, and she always enjoyed the time spent with the school-mistress's sick child. The school-house was some little distance from the Manor, and Madge started early in the afternoon and walked briskly, eager to make her visit as long as possible.

On reaching the cottage she hastened up the path, and after a slight knock, opened the door and walked in. The first room was empty, but she quickly passed through into the next, where an eager watching face was awaiting her, and a glad but weak voice exclaimed—

"Oh, Miss Harcourt, I am so glad to see you. I felt sure you would come, for mother told me your brother had gone."

"Yes, dear, he went yesterday," replied Madge in a gentle voice, very different from her usual tone. "I hope you are pretty well;" and taking the little thin hands in hers, she bent down and kissed her. Such a beautiful little face it was that rested on the pillow. A little thin pale face, sadly old for its years, but beautiful in spite of all, because of the big violet eyes, soft golden-brown hair and exquisite expression. Helen Liston was a mere child, only twelve, but she had been much hurt by a fall when a baby, and doomed to lie on her back all her life. Neither was this all, for consumption had set in, and the tired little wayfarer was nearing her rest.

Ever since Madge had known her she had loved this child and done all she could to brighten the sad little life. At first she had been attracted by her beauty, but she had soon learned to love her for herself, and, with her instinctive love of all that is noble and good, to bow down before the child's purity. Why the child suffered, on the other hand, was a sore stumbling-block to her, and an enigma she had to give up wearily, without any approach to satisfaction.

"Have you been very happy with your

brother?" asked Helen, holding her friend's hand fast. "I have thought of you so often."

"Yes, thank you, dear," answered Madge, in the same gentle voice, a soft light shining in her eyes. "We had some lovely times together, but tell me how you have been. See, I have a beautiful box of chocolates for you, Jack brought them from London."

The child's eyes brightened with pleasure, but she answered quickly: "Oh! thank you ever so much for thinking of me, but Mr. Harcourt meant them for you, you must not give them away."

"He wouldn't mind in the least, in fact he knew I was going to bring them to you. He brought me other things," and she laid the box down beside the bed.

"You have not told me how you are yet," she continued, "and somehow you look more tired than usual."

"I have not been very well," replied Helen with a quiet little smile; "the heat tries me, but please don't talk about me, I want to know what you have been doing. Did Mrs. Harcourt let you and your brother be alone a great deal?"

"Not more than she could help," replied Madge; "but I think we did pretty well as we liked."

"I am afraid she made you unhappy sometimes," continued Helen, stroking Madge's hand; she knew a great deal of what passed between the step-mother and step-daughter, and was often unhappy about her friend.

"What makes you think so," asked Madge smiling.

"Because you look tired, as if you had not slept well lately."

A shadow flitted across Madge's face, but she answered brightly—"Well, she did make me very cross sometimes, but we won't talk about anything unpleasant to-day, as I have plenty of bright things to tell you," and she proceeded to relate all her adventures during Jack's visit.

After remaining two hours, she rose to go, but Helen held her hand fast. "Please stay till mother comes," she pleaded, "I like to see you here."

"But I shall tire you so," answered Madge anxiously, "I have been talking so fast."

"Oh no! you won't—it is delightful to have you. Two weeks has seemed a long time."

"Poor little Helen," and Madge stroked the soft bright hair very tenderly. "It is so sweet of you to like to have me here."

"Oh! I love you," was the quick, warm answer. "It is good only to see you passing. You like to come, don't you?"

"Indeed I do. I feel more at home here than I do anywhere. I don't know what I should do without you. I believe you love me more than anyone else does," she added wistfully. "Jack has so many friends, and then he is so

light-hearted and thoughtless; still I believe he loves me very, very much."

"I don't believe he could help it," said Helen softly, "I'm sure I couldn't. I love you just as much as ever I can."

Madge's eyes grew dim and she looked away through the window sadly.

"Why do you look so sad?" Helen asked. "You like me to love you."

"Oh, yes, yes, but I was wondering if you knew me, Helen. If you knew what bad thoughts I have sometimes you wouldn't love me at all."

"Oh yes, I should, and I don't believe you have such bad thoughts as you say. You are full of kind thoughts when you come to see me."

"That is because you are my good angel and you drive away the bad thoughts."

"When I die and am a real angel," said Helen dreamily, "I should like to be able to watch over you and mother always."

"Oh! but you mustn't think about dying, Helen," and Madge spoke hurriedly, with a ring of pain in her voice, something in the child's face startled her.

"Why not, it would be very sweet to me, if it weren't for leaving you and mother."

"Oh, Helen, don't!" and Madge's eyes filled with tears. "Indeed I couldn't spare you, and what would your mother do?"

"I think you would be glad after a while," she answered softly. "You would know I had done with all pain, and then, oh, Miss Harcourt! I want so much to be with Jesus and to cast myself in love and adoration at His feet."

Madge pressed her hand, but did not speak.

"I should like to have you and mother with me at the last," continued Helen, "yours are my two dearest faces."

"I will come," Madge murmured, and just then the outer door opened and they heard Mrs. Liston's step. Madge rose at once and shook hands kindly with her, greeting her in a bright, pleasant manner that made her seem very winsome, and a little later she took her leave and walked slowly homeward.

She had enjoyed the afternoon, and was glad to think she had been able to give pleasure to little Helen; nevertheless her heart was sad, and her dark eyes wore the wistful look of pain, so often in them now, as she neared her home.

She could not forget the picture she had just seen of the gentle mother leaning over her child, and her heart ached for that young mother, who had leaned over her and loved her so long ago.

All the evening she was quiet and the sadness lingered.

Not the proud, indifferent quietude she often relapsed into, but with a weary, almost careworn look on her face, and that night her pillow was wet with tears.

(To be continued.)

