

herself than in her dwelling. She had had to contend with grief and penury; a grief not the less undermining in its effects from the circumstance of its being sometimes suspended by hope; a penury so extreme that every succeeding day seemed as if won by some providential interference from absolute want. And she was now, to all appearance, fast sinking in the struggle. The autumn was well-nigh over. She had been weak and ailing for months before, and had now become so feeble as to be confined for days together to her bed. But, happily, the poor solitary woman had at least one attached friend in the daughter of a farmer of the parish, a young and beautiful girl, who, though naturally of no melancholy temperament, seemed to derive almost all she enjoyed of pleasure from the society of the widow. Helen Henry was in her twenty-first year, but she seemed older in spirit than in years. She was thin and pale, though exquisitely formed. There was a drooping heaviness in her fine eyes, and a cast of pensive thought on her forehead, that spoke of a longer experience of grief than so brief a portion of life might be supposed to have furnished. She had once lovers, but they had gradually dropped away in the despair of moving her, and awed by a deep and settled pensiveness, which, in the gayest season of youth, her character had suddenly but permanently assumed. Besides, they all knew her affections were already engaged, and had come to learn, though late and unwillingly, that there are cases in which no rival can be more formidable than a dead one.

Autumn, I have said, was near its close. The weather had given indications of an early and severe winter; and the widow, whose worn-out and delicate frame was affected by every change of atmosphere, had for a few days been more than usually indisposed. It was now long past noon,