

did not scruple to affirm, that the likeness was not merely accidental—that Grenard Pike was elder brother to the Squire, in the natural way, but whether this report were true or false, does not rest with me to determine. If unrelated by blood, he and his master possessed kindred spirits, and perfectly understood and appreciated each other. This man had neither wife nor child, and the whole business of his life was, how to get money, and, when got, how to turn it to the best advantage. The wretched Elinor, shut out from all society, and denied every domestic comfort, was limited to the awkward attendance of a parish girl, who, together with her mistress, Mark contrived to half starve; as he insisted on keeping the keys of the pantry, and only allowed them a coarse scanty meal, twice during the four and twenty hours, which, he said, was all sufficient to keep them in health—more was hurtful both to the mind and body.

After dragging on this miserable existence for twelve years, Elinor found that, in all probability, she was likely to become a mother. The prospect of this event served rather to increase than diminish her sorrows. It was some time before she dared to communicate this unwelcome intelligence to her sordid husband, whom, as she anticipated, received the promise of his paternal honours with a very bad grace.

“All the world,” he exclaimed, “are conspiring together to ruin me! I shall be ate out of house and home by doctors and nurses, and my rest will be constantly disturbed by squalling brats; for, I suppose, madam, that, like my mother, you will entail upon me the curse of two at a time. But I hope that it will please Him who sends to take away. He will find me perfectly resigned to His will. You need not weep, madam; if my conduct appears unnatural, let me tell you, that I consider those human beings alone fortunate, who perish in their infancy. They are in no fear of coming to the gallows. They are saved from the threatened torments of Hell!”

Elinor shrunk from the wild flash of his keen dark eyes with an involuntary shudder. “Happy had it been for me,” she replied, sorrowfully, “if I had died an infant on my mother’s breast.”

The words seemed to choke her. She turned weeping from him and left the room. She perceived that her husband already calculated with selfish horror the expense of the unborn infant’s food and raiment; and she began to entertain some fears lest the young child, if it were so unfortunate as to survive its birth, would be starved to death, as the miser now barely allowed her a sufficient sum of money to procure the common necessities of life. Of food, they had scarcely enough to satisfy the wants of nature; and though Elinor bore the system of starvation with the indifference which often springs from a long and hopeless continuation

of suffering, the parish girl was loud in her complaints; and she was constantly annoyed with her discontented murmurings, without having it in her power to silence them in the only effective way. The Squire told Ruth that she consumed more food in one day than would support him and her mistress for a week, and he thought that what was enough for them might satisfy a cormorant like her. But the poor girl could not measure her craving, healthy appetite, by the scanty wants of a heart-broken invalid and a miser. Her hunger remained unappeased, and she continued to complain.

At this period Mark was attacked, for the first time in his life, with a dangerous fit of sickness. Elinor nursed him with the greatest care; but, apprehending that the disorder might terminate fatally, unless he allowed himself proper food and medicines, she gently represented to him that these could not be procured without money; but, finding him on this point inexorable, she commenced one night, while he slept, a regular search for the key of his strong box. She carefully examined his pockets, his writing desk, and bureau, but to no purpose; looking carefully into every chest and drawer which had not been sold by public auction or private contract. Not a corner of the chamber was left unexplored, until, giving up the search as perfectly hopeless, she resumed her station at the bed-side, to watch, through the long winter night, without fire, and by the sickly gleam shed by a miserable rush-light, the restless slumbers of the miser, fatigued with her exertions, and out of spirits with her want of success.

The solitary light threw a ghastly livid hue on the strong features of the sleeper, rendered sharp and haggard by disease and his late penurious habits of living, and only chased away the shades of darkness from the interior of the high-canopied bed, of sad-coloured stuff, sufficiently to reveal, through the gloom, the spectre-like form of the invalid, and the long bony, attenuated hands, which grasped from time to time the curtains and bed-clothes, as he tossed from side to side in his feverish troubled slumber. Elinor continued to watch the dark and perturbed brow of the miser, until he became an object of fear, and she fancied that it was some demon who had for a time usurped the human shape, and not the brother of Algernon,—the man whom she had voluntarily attended to the altar, and there sworn, in the presence of Almighty God, to love, honour, and cherish. A crushing sense of all the deception which had been practised upon her, of her past wrongs and present misery, made her heart die within her, and her whole soul overflow with bitterness. She wrung her hands and smote her brow in an agony of despair; but in that dark hour no tear moistened her eyes. To those who have once been under the dominion of insanity, a trifle may recal the train of thought which annihilated