

After the departure of Willie, Helen felt dreary loneliness she had never felt before. The *Eldrich Stone* used to be her favourite resort; but she was now much dedicated to Elizabeth, who, being left alone, became good of her company, passing the greater part of the day in the farmer's house, but continuing as reserved and taciturn as she had always been. In vain Grizzel endeavoured to know from her who Willie's father was, or his name: all she ever would communicate was, that his was a gallant name; and the time she hoped, was now come, when he might pronounce it with the best of the land. Thus time passed on, and Willie was almost forgot by every one save Elizabeth and Helen—the one dwelling on the loved theme with all the fondness of a parent, the other with that of a beloved brother; but no news of him had as yet reached the Cottage of Elizabeth, who was now become very frail, while Helen paid her every attention in her power.

The seasons had for the last three years, been most unpropitious: the poor were suffering from famine, and the more wealthy were much straightened in their circumstances, and impoverished by the death of their cattle from want of fodder. In summer—if it could be called summer—when the sun was not seen for weeks together, when the whole atmosphere was surcharged with fogs, when the ground was deluged by rain, and the wind blew piercing cold, the grain that was sown did not ripen sufficiently either for food to man or seed to sow; while the cattle seized by unknown diseases, languished and died. Money in those distant parts, was of small avail; for none had grain to dispose of, or help to bestow, upon the numerous applicants who thronged the doors of the larger farmers. Nettles, marsh mallows, and every weed that was not immediately hurtful, were eagerly sought after and devoured by the famished people.

Among all this suffering, William Kerr did not escape. The lengthened and unprecedented deep snow-storms were fatal to his stocks, and before the fourth winter, he had not one left to take care of. His black cattle died, until he was equally bereft of all; and that house where plenty had always been, and from whence the beggar was never sent away hungry, was now the abode of want and ordering on famine. Yet despondency

never clouded his brow, and his heart was strong to Christian faith, and resigned to the will of God. Evening and morning his simple sacrifice was offered up to the throne of grace with as fervent love and adoration as in the days of his greatest prosperity; while the assiduous and gentle Helen mingled her tears with those of Grizzel, as much for the misery that was around them as their own. The winter of the fifth year had set in with unusual severity, long before its usual time, and all that William had secured of his crop was a few bushels of oats, so black and bitter that nothing but the extreme of hunger would have compelled a human being to have tasted the flour they produced. Their only cow—the last of six which had in former years abundantly supplied their dairy—now lean and shrunk, had long since withheld her nourishing stream. It was a beautiful animal, the pride of Helen and Grizzel, was reared upon the farm, and obeyed Helen's voice like a dog. With great exertion and assiduity she had procured for it support; but the grass did not give its wonted nourishment, being stinted and sour, and in vain was now all her care. The snow lay deep on the ground, and the animal was pining with hunger, and must inevitably die from want.

Great was the struggle, and bitter the tears they shed, before they gave consent to have their favourite put to death. Yet it was reasonable; for the carcass was requisite to sustain their own existence and that of Elizabeth, whom the good farmer had removed to his own home, lest she had died for want, or been plundered in those times of suffering and distress—when even the bonds of natural affection were rent asunder by famine, and children were devouring in secret any little eatable they found, without giving a share to their more famished parents, while parents grudged a morsel to their expiring children. Thus passed another miserable winter, and death was now busy around them; numbers died from want and unwholesome food, and, among the rest, old Elizabeth sickened and paid the debt of nature; but, to her last moment, she never divulged to Helen, much as she loved her, any circumstance regarding Willie. Helen, indeed, in the present distress, thought not of him; and when Elizabeth used to regret his neglect of her, she only