

The Haunted Forest

Anonymous

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On the borders of an extensive, dark, and almost trackless forest in Normandy, lived Antonio Fuseli. He had married, early in life, a beautiful woman, whose many amiable and estimable qualities ensured her the love and respect of all who knew her; they were blessed with three lovely children, two sons and a daughter, who were all that the fond parents could wish. The happiness of the whole was the ruling motive of each; and if complete enjoyment was ever bestowed on human beings, it certainly was the lot of this highly favored family. They were not, in the estimation of the world, rich; but they possessed an ample sufficiency of all the comforts of life; they were content with their lot, and envied not the state of the proudest monarch. The children were educated, beneath their parents' eye, in habits of virtue, industry, and economy, and as they grew into life, there seemed nothing left to wish.

Alphonso and Julien were the fellow laborers, the companions, and oftentimes the counsellors, of their venerated father; while the lovely Adela was ever the affectionate and cheerful attendant of her beloved mother, in whatever employment or recreation she was engaged. She was the idol of her brothers, and returned their affection with all the enthusiasm of a youthful, unsophisticated heart. Her beauty and amiable deportment had obtained for her the appellation of 'the Flower of the Forest,' through the whole neighborhood: yet so little conscious was she of any superiority she possessed over her young companions, and so condescending to all, that even envy could find no trait in her character on which to vent its malice.

Years rolled on, and saw them enjoying this sunshine of the soul:---But the experience of every day is sufficient to teach us, that a state of complete and lasting felicity is not designed to crown our earthly existence. Mutability and change are indelibly stamped on every enjoyment of life. The happiness of the family of Fuseli, which had continued hitherto without any apparent interruption, was destined to receive a severe check, in the declining health of the affectionate wife and mother. They saw her sinking under the pressure of a hopeless disease; and their saddened

hearts felt every pang she endured.

The patient victim alone seemed entirely reconciled to the inevitable result. Adela watched over her with the most untiring solicitude; and when the dread mandate arrived that deprived her of this adored parent, she felt such a sense of utter desolation, that the world appeared to present nothing worth living for. But her reason and judgement soon aroused her from this torpor of grief, and she was convinced that society had still claims on her exertions. She had a beloved father and dear brothers, whose kind and affectionate attentions demanded a return on her part, and a grateful heart prompted her to suppress her own sorrows, and endeavour to solace theirs.

Indeed the children began to feel that their united energies were required to draw their remaining parent from that state of fixed melancholy which seemed to have taken possession of his mind. He received their endearments with affectionate gratitude, and sometimes with cheerfulness; but he would leave his home for hours, and not unfrequently for whole days, and penetrate into the deep recesses of the gloomy forest, to indulge, without interruption, the sorrow that pressed so heavily on his heart. His children observed and deplored it; but regarding his solitude as sacred, they dared not intrude: and they unitedly resolved to contribute all in their power to increase the enjoyments of his home, by which means they hoped to effect the change so much desired.

One evening he was from home later than usual, and his sons were preparing to go in quest of him, when he entered the door of his dwelling, with a trembling step, and the paleness of death on his countenance. They were shocked and alarmed, and all gathered around him with anxious inquiries if he was ill, and proposed to call in medical advice. But he, in a faint and agitated voice, assured them he was not ill, but greatly fatigued from having extended his walk beyond the usual limits, and requested that he might be permitted to retire to rest without answering any more questions. Then affectionately bidding them good night, and solemnly commending them to the protection of Heaven, he went to his own room. His children felt that all was not right, and passed many hours together in vain conjectures on his altered appearance. At length they separated at a very late hour, but not to sleep — their fears for a beloved and only parent were too strong to admit of repose.

When the morning sun began to shed its cheerful influence around, they all arose from sleepless pillows, and met in the little parlor which had been the scene of so much domestic enjoyment; they looked around the room, and at each other with an expression of vague inquiry, as if to ask where those joys had flown. The father was the first to break the profound silence.

"My children," said he, "you need not be told that the great object of all my exertions and solicitude in life, has been the promotion of your happiness. I have endeavoured, both by precept and example, to lead you in the paths of virtue and honor. If I have erred, it was an error in judgment, and not a design to mislead you and I have been amply repaid in your dutiful and correct conduct. I know all your local attachments are centered in this pleasant spot, where you and I were born. It is, therefore, with pain I inform you that we must remove from this place, and that very speedily. I know you will be surprised and afflicted at this sudden resolution, for sudden I acknowledge it is. I had thought to die amid the scenes that gave me birth — but it must not be so."

(He went on without interruption, for no one of his auditors had power to speak.)

"I have from a boy been accustomed to hear tales of terror connected with the forest, to which I gave no credence; but the events of yesterday have convinced me we are in a dangerous neighborhood. I should feel that I had but ill performed the duty of a father should I die and leave you exposed to such influences. I cannot now be more explicit; but as you value your own happiness, and future peace of mind, I charge you never to attempt to penetrate the forest beyond the little fountain."

He ceased, and as they had never been in the habit of questioning the propriety of wisdom of their father's decisions, they did not now venture to remonstrate.

In a short time a purchaser was found, and the once happy family of Antonio Fuseli quit, forever, their paternal domain, and settled in a distant part of the country.

Change of scene seemed to produce a favorable effect, and they again enjoyed the calm serenity which ever attends the virtuous. This, however, was but an

evanescent joy. In less than two years, death again visited their habitation, and they were left orphans indeed — the eldest scarce twenty-two years of age.

A short time after the demise of the father, it was necessary to look over his papers, in order to make a settlement of his concerns. In a little private drawer in his escritoire, they found a manuscript, in his well known hand, which developed the mystery that had so long occupied their minds, but which they had never ventured to mention in their father's presence since the day it occurred.

The address began with an affectionate exhortation to avoid, carefully and resolutely, every temptation to which they may be exposed, none of which would be likely to assail the young more powerfully than the desire to possess riches.

"But know this, my children, that wealth procured by unlawful or unjustifiable means, or in any way but by honest industry, can bring no joy to the possessor; and all who endeavour to enrich themselves by supernatural agency, are planting on their temples a gilded crown of thorns — the greater the weight of jewels that adorn it, the sharper the pang it inflicts. I well know you feel a strong desire to be informed of the events of that ever memorable day which has made an entire change in the prospects of our family. You have never pained me by questions on that subject, and I feel the full value of your delicacy and forbearance; I am therefore giving you proof of the entire confidence I have in you, by gratifying your natural curiosity on a subject which I have never been able to bring my mind to converse.

"When our Heavenly Father saw fit to deprive me of what I held most dear and valuable in your ever lamented mother, I sought the solitude of the forest, as a place where I could indulge my sorrows without fear of interruption. I threw up a little moss seat on the brink of the fountain, whose plaintive murmur seemed so in unison with the tone of my feelings; and near it I erected a humble monument of stone, commemorative of the virtues of the dear departed one. Here it was my delight to sit whole hours, while my spirit seemed to hold communion with beings of another world; and I always returned, as you must have observed, calm, and often cheerful, to enjoy the comforts that yet remained to me in my dear children. It is true I sometimes heard strange noises, like whispering voices or a distant laugh; but I ever regarded them as the effect of imagination, or the wind in the tall trees, and felt no sensation of fear.

"But, on that never to be forgotten day, as I sat lost in soothing contemplation, I distinctly heard sounds of distress quite near me, and some one calling for assistance. It was an appeal that I thought I had no right to withstand. Prompted by feelings of humanity, I instantly arose and attempted to force a passage through the tangled underwood, beyond which I had never penetrated. It was a long time before I effected my purpose; but at length I found an opening through which I crept, and soon discovered the object of my search. It was a little decrepit old man, on the ground, struggling to free himself from the weight of a bag that was fastened to his shoulders. He had fallen beneath his burthen, and lay apparently unable to move.

"I offered him my assistance, and, after undoing the strap which bound his pack, helped him to rise on his feet. He expressed much gratitude, and requested, as an additional favor, that I would assist him to raise his burthen from the ground, and carry it a short distance, to a place where it was to be deposited. I took hold on one side; but what was my astonishment to find its weight as much as our united strength could raise! I told him I did not wonder he had fallen under it, but I was surprised to find that a man so aged and feeble could have taken a single step encumbered with such a load.

"'Alas! sir,' said he, 'I have borne it a weary way; but I serve a master who never thinks the weight of his gold can be a burthen to any one. Yet he is very liberal withall, and never grudges us a share of his treasures.'

"On hearing that it was gold we were bearing, my heart misgave me, — I supposed I had put myself in the power of a gang of robbers, who would not hesitate to take the life of any one who had thus accidentally discovered their haunts. While my mind was thus occupied, my ears were assailed by the most deafening shouts and hoarse peals of laughter, which so completely terrified me, that I refused to proceed another step. The old man urged me to go on, assuring me I had nothing to fear, and that he would request me to assist him no further than round a projecting point of rock that was just before us, promising me I should be amply rewarded for my trouble.

"I proceeded on, through fear, but gave myself up for lost. I felt that I was alone and unarmed, in the midst of a savage host, whom I expected to encounter at every turn. We reached the point, when my guide raising a small trap door which

opened into an immense cave, discovered such heaps of shining metal as almost bewildered my senses; and emptying his bag, he shook the contents into the vault, where instantly a man of majestic figure, but of a very stern aspect, appeared, and bestowed many commendations on him for his industry and fidelity. He then turned his dark piercing eyes on me, saying, 'You have brought me a new servant.' The old man gave a most significant nod.

"I now felt that I was in the presence of the great banditt, and that the crisis of my fate was fast approaching; yet I assumed courage to inform him it was impossible for me to enter his service, as I had a family dependent on my care, whom I could not desert on any consideration. He told me he well knew I had a family; but I might serve him, and still reside with them. I had only to obligate myself to come to him, at a stated hour every day, and perform such offices as he should appoint me; in return for which I should be at full liberty to enter the vault whenever I pleased, and take from it as much gold as I chose. I assured him I possessed a sufficiency, and had no desire for more wealth — still thinking I was among free booters.

"He then took from his pocket a well filled purse, which he offered as a reward for what I had already done; but, under the same impression, I persisted in declining to receive any share of his unlawful gains. I saw the storm gathering in his countenance. He turned on me a look full of terror, which flashed conviction on my mind that I was not holding converse with a being of this world. That look bespoke the demon; and in a voice more appalling than the hoarsest thunder, he said,

"'Groveling wretch, if you are not to be tempted we will try other methods;' and stamping furiously with his foot on the ground, I was instantly surrounded by the most horrible shapes, and my ears were assailed by noises, such as none but demons could utter.

I turned, and fled with incredible speed, as if assisted by an invisible power, finding myself close pursued, until I came to the opening through which I had passed, and crossed the little brook that falls from the fountain, and which runs the whole length of the forest. I had now successfully escaped from their malice, as I well knew that no evil spirit has power to cross a running stream. My senses were nearly gone; and my strength entirely failing, I sunk on the earth, and distinctly

heard them, as they desisted from the chase, saying, 'If he had but touched a piece of our master's gold, he could not have foiled us thus. Had he yielded to one temptation, we might have found him an easy prey.'

I returned thanks, most fervently, that I had been thus preserved; and after recovering strength to rise on my feet, I returned home, firmly determined never again to enter that fatal place. When alone, I seriously revolved the probable consequences of leaving my dear children exposed to such dangerous influences, when they should no longer have the experience of a father to guide their youthful steps. And the result was a determination to tear myself from that endeared spot and sacrifice all my local attachments to their happiness. You are now in possession of all the motives by which I have been actuated, and I trust you will know how to appreciate them. May that Almighty Power, which has preserved me through life, guide and guard you, my children, and shed unnumbered blessings on you."

That this communication should differently affect those, to whom it was jointly addressed, will be no matter of surprise to any one who has studied the human heart, or has the slightest knowledge of the various feelings that arise from the same source, as the characters of the individuals most immediately concerned may vary.

Alphonso, who was of a bold, aspiring temper, perused it with attention, and felt really grateful for the kindness that had dictated the many cautions it contained; but he felt the sparks of avarice and ambition (which had hitherto lain nearly dormant under the mild counsels and virtuous example of his pious parents) now rising to an uncontrollable flame. The more placid, and regulated spirit of Julien, prompted him to return thanks that he had been timely forewarned of dangers, which made him shudder to think of, and would have proved destructive to his happiness had he fallen on them unawares. He saw in his present lot all that his ambition aspired to.

The gentle Adela, who had ever been the favorite companion of both brothers, began to feel that the eldest took less delight, than formerly, in conversing with her; she carefully retraced every part of her past conduct towards him, but could not discover in what she had offended him. It was in vain that she strove to amuse or please him. She would take her lute, and although she touched it with inimitable grace and skill, and accompanied it with the touching tones of her sweet voice, and sang his most favorite airs, yet she could not draw from him the slightest expression

of approbation. She could freely pour her complaints into the ear of the affectionate Julien, and they both joined in lamenting a change, for which they could not account. They mourned together, that one who had ever been so kind so cheerful and so happy, should now abandon society, and seem entirely lost to all the engagements of life; but they encouraged a hope that a little time would unfold the mystery.

The truth was, Alphonso's mind was wholly absorbed in golden dreams; new feelings and desires were awakened; and he delighted in nothing but devising plans, by which he might possess himself of some of the treasures of the cavern, without violating the injunction of his revered parent, which he had ever held sacred, or placing himself in the power of the demons. For this reason he avoided, as much as possible, the society of his brother and sister, from whom he was peculiarly solicitous to conceal all that was passing in his mind.

Things went on in this state for some weeks. At last he came to the desperate resolution to endure it no longer, but go to the place and see for himself.

"I could wish," he would often say to himself, "that my dear father had inquired what the services were that he would be expected to perform — perhaps they were not hard, or sinful — I may just find out what nature they are of, and perhaps enrich myself, and place my beloved brother and sister in a higher station than their unaspiring hearts ever dreamt of. The lovely Adela is too fair a flower to bloom in the shade of obscurity. How proud shall I be to place her in a situation equal to her merit. I must, at least, make the experiment. The motive will justify the means; and if I do not succeed, they shall never know I have attempted it."

After his resolution was taken, he seemed more cheerful, conversed through the day, as in former times, and returned the caresses of his sweet sister with increased tenderness. They were delighted with the change, and felt that domestic happiness would again be a resident in their little circle.

One evening, after much pleasant and interesting conversation, the eldest brother informed them that he had a short journey to perform, which would oblige him to be absent a week or more, and they must make themselves as happy as possible in his absence. They regretted the separation, and hoped his return would not be long delayed.

Early in the morning he took an affectionate leave of them, and set forward with his mind full of great plans for a future life of splendor. He travelled on, rapidly revolving in his mind the vast sums of money, and the honors that seemed to await his acceptance. But when he arrived in the neighborhood of his former residence, and every object that met his eye told a tale of by-gone days, his heart beat with a variety of contending emotions. The scene of all his early enjoyments, and the innocent sports of his infant days, brought a most vivid recollection of the pious lessons and amiable example of his departed parents, and his over-wrought feelings found timely vent in a copious shower of tears. His first resolution was to return instantly home, banish from his mind all aspiring thoughts, and live in the practice of the duties he had so early been taught. But he had travelled a long journey, and his weary horse as well as himself, required rest. After a night of unquiet repose, he rose at an early hour, and left the house to recruit his sunken spirits by a morning walk amid those familiar and still beloved scenes. With indescribable emotion he beheld the sun just rising above the tall trees of the forest; and his frame shuddered at the painful recollection of the imminent danger his beloved father had escaped, and to which he had been so nigh exposing himself. But he wished, as it might, and in all probability would, be the last time he should ever make the same journey, to visit the melancholy spot which his dear father had chosen for the indulgence of his grief. No harm could possibly arise from a visit to this hallowed sanctuary of sorrow. He accordingly walked forward with a hasty step, and he trembled in every limb as he entered beneath the shade of the dark forest.

"Yet, why should I be thus agitated?" said he, endeavouring to rally his spirits. "My father's prohibition did not extend to this side the fountain."

In a short time he arrived at a small opening, but the sight of the little moss seat which the hands, now cold and motionless, had reared, and the monumental stone, inscribed with the cherished name of Laretta Fuseli, which was that of his beloved mother, almost deprived him of sense and motion. He reclined on the seat, and covering his face with both hands, gave free vent to the feelings with which his heart was almost bursting. His tears proved a relief to his agonised mind, and, after passing some hours in retracing former scenes, he became more calm, and was endeavouring to summon fortitude to take a final leave of the interesting spot, when he was nearly petrified by the most piercing shrieks, uttered in a female voice, and distinctly heard the words, "Is there no kind heart near, to pity and protect me?"

This was an appeal he had not power to withstand. He instantly forgot his father's injunction, and flew to find an opening, through which he might pass. He sprang across the brook, and forcing a passage, as directed by the noise, arrived with much exertion at the scene of distress. A young lady of dazzling beauty, clad in the most costly habiliments, was in the bands of a fierce looking ruffian, who was in the act of unclasping a splendid chain of brilliants from her fair neck, with the other hand round her throat with the intention of strangling her. Her rich dress was soiled and torn, and it was evident she had struggled till her strength was nearly exhausted.

Alphonso was young, stout and athletic, and with one blow he laid the desperado at his feet; and raising the almost lifeless form of the beautiful female from the ground, he carried her in his arms to a spring, at a short distance, and sprinkling a little water in her face, she soon revived, and opened on him a pair of eyes which rivalled the diamonds that decorated her person.

He politely offered to conduct her to a place of safety, which she accepted with the most lively expressions of gratitude, informing him that her father's residence was about a mile distant — that, tempted by the freshness of the morning, she had walked out unattended, and penetrated the forest beyond her usual bounds, where she had met this disastrous adventure; and, she added, had you not appeared to rescue me from the villain, my life must have fallen a sacrifice to my temerity. She raised her bright eyes to his face, and he saw her beautiful countenance suffused with a blush that spoke volumes to his heart.

They soon arrived at the gate of a splendid mansion, and passed through throngs of servants to a saloon, where sat a man of stately appearance, who rose as they entered, and exclaimed, "My daughter!" She threw herself into his arms, overcome with emotion, and sobbing aloud on his breast, said, "My dear father, but for the courage and gallantry of this gentleman, you had been, at this moment, childless."

"Explain yourself, my child," said he, and pressing Alphonso affectionately by the hand, requested him to be seated; while his daughter related all that has been told above, interspersed with the most flattering encomiums on the generosity of her deliverer.

The father loaded him with professions of gratitude and friendship, and

insisted that he should be their guest for the present. This invitation, so congenial to his present feelings and wishes, was not to be declined. The young lady left the room, and after changing her disordered dress, returned in a garb more splendid and becoming than any thing he had ever beheld; and he thought he had never cast his eyes on a being so lovely. Our hero was then conducted to a chamber, where a great variety of superb dresses were spread before him, and he was requested to select what was most to his fancy, and array himself for dinner. There was company expected, and his travelling attire would not comport with the occasion, as he was to be introduced as the particular friend of the master of the mansion and his fair daughter. He was so dazzled that it was a long time ere he could decide; and when full dressed, he could hardly leave the large mirror that displayed his glittering figure from head to foot. A servant at length came to summon him to the table.

When he entered the dining room, he was introduced to each one of the party, who sat down to an elegant repast and quaffed the richest wines from cups of pure gold. When the subject of the Lady Lusette's deliverance was introduced, all the company were unanimous in the praises of her preserver.

"You are indeed a favorite of fortune," said a youth who sat next to him. "I cannot but envy you the honor of today's achievement."

"When I first saw the young lady in such danger," replied Alphonso, "I almost feared it would be out of my power to rescue her, as I thought she was in the hands of one of the infernal spirits which inhabit this forest."

At this moment a tremendous groan was uttered; and on looking up he saw the face of every guest, and even the fair countenance of the lovely Lusette, darkened by a terrific frown. He was silent — and after a few moments pause, the master of the feast proposed removing to another apartment, where music and dancing filled up the time till a very late hour; and the enchanted Alphonso had the felicity of receiving the fair hand of her he had saved from death in the morning, as a partner for the evening.

His senses were perfectly entranced; and for three successive days, he rode, he walked, he danced, he sung and feasted, without a thought of home, or of the future— every faculty of his mind was absorbed in the time being, for the object of his adoration was the sharer in all his joys. At length, a thought of the still dear

friends he had left behind, and a desire to make them acquainted with his fair prospects, gave him resolution to tear himself away; and he mentioned his intention to his kind entertainers. They tried, by every blandishment, to prevail on him to alter his plan; but consented to his departure, on condition of a promise to return soon, and pass a longer time with them. To this proposal he gladly assented, for the spell was close woven around him; and he took his leave, loaded with rich and valuable presents; Lurette bid him adieu with a sigh, which his unpractised heart feelingly responded. She took from her finger a ring of great value, which she placed on his, saying, with the most winning softness,

"Remember your promise."

Of this he needed not to be reminded. A beautiful horse, richly caparisoned, was presented him, and he was furnished with a guide, who soon extricated him from the forest, and took him, by a different route, to the place from which he entered it. He there disposed of the horse that had brought him from home, and set forward on his return in a much superior style to that in which he had commenced his journey.

He was most affectionately received on his arrival by his dear brother and sister, who had passed the time of his absence in anxious and fruitless conjectures as to the nature of the business that had called him from home, which he had not thought proper to intrust to them; for there had hitherto been no secrets in this family of love. They were so much delighted to see him return in safety, that they did not, that night, remark the alteration in his personal appearance. But the next day, when they had leisure to notice his costly attire, the diamond ring on his finger, the elegant horse he rode, and saw him ostentatiously display large sums of gold, they were lost in wonder and astonishment, and could not suppress fears which they dared not even hint to each other.

He, however, soon after his return, proposed to explain to them all the good fortune that had befallen him, which he did faithfully, concealing only the place where he had encountered this adventure; of which he knew they entertained the most dreadful suspicions. He told them the Baron was immensely rich and powerful; that he was a widower, with no child or heir to his vast possessions but the incomparable Lurette. He could not but acknowledge to himself, that the modest, unassuming Adela was equally beautiful; but their beauty was of a very

different character. There was a fascination about the Lady Lusette, that he naturally attributed to the influence of the different circles in which they had been educated. The heiress of wealth and splendor, with hundreds of admirers in her train, must have acquired an easy confidence, and a commanding air, that could not be found in the more humble walks of life. Yet he proudly looked forward to a day, when he should bring the two dearest objects of his heart acquainted with each other.

The haughty Baron had, it is true, conferred on him many marks of special favor; yet he dared not ask himself what were the nature of his expectations. His reason and judgment forbade the encouragement of a hope, that he would confer such a treasure as his only daughter, on one whose name had never been heard of twenty miles from home.

So completely was he enthralled, that he determined at all events to repeat his visit to the Castle. After representing to his brother and sister, the many advantages that would probably result from cultivating such an acquaintance, but which were far from convincing their unambitious minds, he presented them with a large purse of gold, and again set forward on his journey. The supernatural speed of his courser did not outstrip his impatience; and so entirely was the infatuated youth absorbed in the idea of the happiness that awaited him, that he felt no surprise or misgiving when, at the close of the first day, he found himself at the gate of the Baronial Castle, a distance of nearly two hundred miles.

He was received with acclamations of joy by all the domestics. The Baron smiled more graciously, and his daughter looked more enchanting than ever. The numerous guests all crowded round to welcome him; and he thought his cup of happiness was full: But how did it overflow when his host invited him, the next morning, to a private conference; and declared his intention of bestowing on him the hand of his fair daughter, who might grace the throne of a monarch; and with her, all his wealth. He began, in the most eloquent strains, to pour forth his gratitude, when his entertainer stopped him short, telling him there were conditions to be performed on his part, to which he might not accede: in which case he was at full liberty to reject the alliance.

"Although," added he, with a deep drawn sigh, "I should have much to fear from the effects of such a refusal on the health and spirits of a beloved daughter. The truth is, Alphonso, I have discovered that Lusette loves you."

Enraptured, as he was, he readily promised to comply with the terms, be they what they might; feeling that the services required would fall far short of the value of the reward, and that his highest felicity would consist in devoting his life to her gratification. He was then left to seek the object of his adoration, and hear, from her lips, a confirmation of his happiness. A reciprocation of vows succeeded, and the overjoyed lover now felt that his lot was truly enviable.

The evening passed in revelry and mirth. At the stroke of midnight, a servant came to the happy Alphonso, and told him the Baron desired to speak with him in private. He instantly left the room, and found his host in an adjoining apartment, prepared with a glimmering lamp: he spoke only the words, "*Follow me;*" and opening a door, began to descend a long flight of stone steps, which terminated in a large vault, connected with an immense subterranean passage, so damp and gloomy, that he shuddered as he advanced, the lamp scarcely affording light to direct their footsteps. At the end of this, they entered a spacious apartment, in the center of which was a large caldron, throwing up a glaring blue flame, which quivered round the walls, and presented such a scene of horror, as almost chilled his blood.

The entire walls were draped with skeletons; huge heaps of skulls and human bones were scattered on the floor, and hideous shapes flitted around in every direction. Terrified and amazed, he fearfully inquired for what purpose he had been brought into this charnel-house? His guide, assuming an authoritative tone, commanded him to dispense with questions, and attend to his instructions. He was then required to bind himself, by the most tremendous oaths, to be eternally the slave of the adorable Lurette; and never to think of any other woman a wife.

To all that was proposed he acceded. His passion for the lady on one hand, and his fears on the other, would not suffer him to offer any resistance. All around him he heard a continual whispering and suppressed laughter, and his hair rose on his head with terror. He was then informed that the extra service required of him was merely to gratify a whim of his betrothed, to suffer himself to be harnessed, with a number of her discarded lovers, to a car, and draw her through the forest, at a certain hour, every night. Degrading as this proposition seemed to him, and however inconsistent with all her professions of tenderness and affection, he found he had no power to retract; and he promised compliance, though his heart revolted

at so disgraceful a requisition. A bloody scroll was then presented him, to which he affixed his name; he was then informed, in presence of all the attending ministers of darkness, that the marriage ceremony was now considered as ratified, and he was at liberty to go in quest of his bride.

It is true his youthful ardor was somewhat damped by the chilling scenes he had witnessed; yet he hastily retraced his steps to the room which he had left filled with gay company; among whom the idol of his heart shone unrivalled. But who can imagine his astonishment, on entering, to find the room deserted by every one but a hideous hag, of gigantic figure, and features the most distorted and disgusting; she sprang forward to meet him, throwing her long sinewy arms around him, and calling him, in a voice grating as thunder, her beloved husband; chiding his long absence, which he knew she could ill support, and repeating all the protestations of love and fidelity he had uttered to the Lady Lurette.

He strove to extricate himself from her hateful grasp, and exerting all his strength, pushed her from him, with such violence, that she fell on the floor with a most terrible crash, which brought the master of the mansion, and many of his attendants, into the room.

He cast a withering glance on the half distracted Alphonso, and angrily demanded the reason of this disturbance. Before the wretched culprit could find utterance, she arose, and with the most frightful grimaces and terrific gestures, accused him of returning her caresses with the most unfeeling abuse.

"Is this the return," demanded the stern Baron, "that I am to expect for my condescension, in bestowing my only child on you — a mere mushroom? and is all your promised gratitude come to this?"

It was in vain he remonstrated, and entreated to be admitted to the presence of the Lady Lurette, and pleaded his claim to such an indulgence. He was told this was all the daughter he ever had, and it was to the lady now before him, he had sworn eternal fidelity; he must therefore prepare himself to obey her commands, which were peremptory.

A heavy car was now driven to the door, and the wretched Alphonso was compelled to assume the harness, with a large number of other deluded victims; and the hag, armed with a scourge of enormous weight, seated herself, took the

reins, and drove them through the forest at a furious rate; not regarding any obstructions in their way, but lashing and goring them incessantly, till their sides and backs were covered with wounds. At daybreak they were unharnessed and suffered to go to rest, if rest they could.

Thus passed every night; and the days were spent in the most disgraceful scenes of riot. Alphonso dared not reflect he felt that he was lost, in his present state; but he knew not how to extricate himself, and he could look for no end to his misery. To enhance his sufferings, an accusing conscience lent its stings, a thousand times more intolerable than his bodily torture. He knew he had voluntarily sought temptation, and that in defiance of the dying injunction of a father, whose many virtues, cultivated understanding, and long experience, gave him an unequivocal claim to the utmost deference. The intervals for thought were short; he was dragged from scenes of labor and suffering, to scenes of riot and excess, with little time for rest; and the creature to whom he had bound himself, and who had now become as loathsome and hideous as she had once been lovely, never quit his side for an instant.

In the mean time, the quiet and happy residence of his affectionate friends had become the abode of sorrow and anxiety. The minds of Julien and Adela were constantly agitated with melancholy forebodings of his fate. Six weary months had passed, and the torture of suspense was no longer to be endured. Not a word had they heard since his departure; they knew not how, or where, to direct a line to him; nor could they hope to gain information from any human being, on the subject most interesting to them. They held frequent and long consultations on the subject, but seemed no nearer to the attainment of their desires.

At length their deliberations terminated in Julien's determination to set out in quest of the lost one; though he was wholly ignorant what route to take. He felt a confidence that he should be Heaven-directed, as he was animated by a consciousness that his motives for the journey were of the purest nature. Adela insisted on being the companion and sharer of his fatigues and perils, as she could not consent to relinquish the protection of both her brothers; and she felt she had fortitude to meet any trial they might have to encounter. It was in vain he urged all the arguments his affection suggested, to dissuade her from an undertaking, for which her youth, her sex, her native delicacy, and shrinking timidity, all combined to render her totally unfit.

"You will find," said she, "dear Julien, that I have qualities which have never been called into action. Depend on it, I shall show more firmness in this enterprise than you ever thought I possessed; and to convince you of it, in the outset, my resolution is taken, to accompany or follow you.

"Well, be it so," said her kind hearted brother. "Your society will lighten the fatigues of my uncertain path; but for your own sake I could wish it otherwise."

The plan being adjusted, and confiding the house to the care of a few faithful domestics, they set forward, not knowing which way to bend their course.

After traveling three or four days, without obtaining any clue to his route, they entered a pleasant road, which led through a delightfully romantic, but unfrequented tract of country; and proceeded on without seeing any thing like a human habitation, until the shadows of evening began to close around them. As night-fall approached, the heart of Julien beat with anxious fears for his beloved sister, who had never been accustomed to exposure; and he feared they should be under the necessity of passing the night unsheltered in the open air. At this crisis they saw a venerable man approaching, in the dress of a hermit. His form was somewhat bowed, and his snowy locks, and long silvery beard, plainly indicated that the frosts of many winters had passed over him. He carried a staff in his hand; yet he walked with a firm step; and as he advanced to meet them, the benevolent expression of his countenance inspired them with confidence and respect. They reined in their horses, and inquired of him the distance to the nearest habitation.

"My children," said the old man, "you are far from the haunts of men. A journey of many hours will scarcely bring you to a convenient shelter. But I have a cell at hand, where you shall be welcome to all the accommodations it affords."

There was so much of genuine courtesy in the manner of the speaker, that they felt no hesitation in accepting the invitation; and with many expressions of gratitude, they entered the humble cell, where they were simply, but most hospitably entertained. After supper they entered freely into conversation, and informed their friendly entertainer of the object of their present journey, and the ill success which had hitherto attended all their inquiries.

He listened attentively to a recital of every circumstance of their brother's departure, and all they knew of his adventures; and he replied, with a deep drawn

sigh, "Your narrative too plainly discovers to me the fate of your deluded brother. He is, undoubtedly, one among the wretched beings who have been drawn, by various temptations, into the power of the malicious fiends in the haunted forest."

At the mention of this terrible name, a cold shuddering seized them; conviction flashed on their minds, and Adela was near fainting; but by the timely application of some restoratives, which the good hermit had at hand, she soon recovered, and their kind host went on:

"I feel, my children, that you have been providentially directed to me, as I have long been in possession of a talisman, which is destined to destroy the glamour of that ill fated forest, when in the hands of unsullied innocence."

He then drew from his bosom a small pearl case, from which he took a brilliant gem, inscribed with the words, "*Virtue and Integrity*;" and suspending it to a chain of the purest gold, the old man hung it on the neck of the lovely Adela; telling her, if she attended strictly to his instructions, she had it now in her power to release her unhappy brother from the most intolerable slavery.

"But be sure you never suffer the brightness of this inestimable jewel to contract the slightest tarnish. Keep it ever bright, as it is now; for on its unsullied brilliancy depends its influence, which will infallibly diminish if it is suffered to corrode."

He spent some time in giving them particular directions how to proceed on their great undertaking, and bestowing on them his truly parental advice; and then, preparing them beds of dried leaves, and fervently invoking the blessing and protection of Heaven on them, invited them to repose themselves.

They slept soundly until the old man awoke them, at the dawn of the morning, to join in his early devotions. After which they partook of his humble breakfast, and took their leave, attended by the blessing and benediction of their kind and pious friend.

They proceeded on their eventful journey, much relieved by the information they had gained, yet saddened by the idea of the shocking situation to which the unhappy Alphonso had reduced himself by his deplorable infatuation. Ere night they came in view of well remembered scenes, the familiarity of which brought such a crowd of painful recollections, as almost overpowered them. They rested, for

the night, in the vicinity of their earliest home; and they proceeded, at an early hour in the morning, to an entrance into the dreaded forest, which their good friend, the hermit, had pointed out; expressing, at the same time, his unqualified approbation of their scrupulous observance of the prohibition their beloved parent had enjoined in regard to crossing the brook. They walked on, hardly able to find a path through which they could proceed. They penetrated far into the gloomy recesses of the tangled wood; and seeing night approaching, endeavoured to fortify their minds against the horrors they expected to encounter in passing it in such a spot. As yet, they had heard or seen nothing to alarm or terrify them; but every rustling leaf, in such a place, was enough to startle these youthful adventurers. They, however, by mutual encouragement, rallied their spirits to proceed, having been informed that nothing could be effected unless they could summon courage to pass a night in the forest.

An old dilapidated castle appeared at a distance; and in this they resolved to take shelter from the chill air, as the gathering clouds and distant thunder threatened a coming tempest. They entered, beneath a ruined gateway, and, climbing with difficulty over heaps of rubbish, came to the interior, in which they thought they might make a shift to remain. In a short time they found themselves involved in thick and impenetrable darkness, and heard such terrific sounds, as almost curdled the blood in their veins. Deep and dismal groans, hissing, and clanking of chains, shrieks of despair, and horrible execrations, mingled with the raging tempest. Hoarse peals of thunder shook the tottering edifice to its foundation, and threatened, every instant, to bury them in its ruins. The vivid flashes of lightning served but to show them the horrors of their situation. They dared not speak; but the hitherto timid girl seemed supported by a superhuman energy. She clung to the supporting arm of her brother, and ceased not to rub and polish her talisman, which emitted a dazzling lustre when the blue flame of the lightning glanced on its surface.

About midnight the fury of the storm abated, and their ears were now assailed by sounds of a different, but not less terrific nature. The most disgusting shouts of revelry, and shrieks of tortured wretches, with the furious driving of a carriage, now approached, and stopped directly in front of the old castle, where they had a full view of the scene. They were almost blinded by the glare of torches: But who can conceive of their grief and horror, on seeing the dear brother of their affections,

harnessed in the train that drew this ponderous vehicle; and a figure, more terrific than any thing they had ever imagined, seated in it, and incessantly applying a huge whip, composed of fiery serpents, to their lacerated shoulders, from which the blood issued at every stroke.

This was more than their fortitude was equal to. They stood a moment in speechless agony; but Adela, as if by sudden inspiration, uttered a piercing shriek, sprang forward, and in a moment stood by the side of her miserable and haggard looking brother, who now lost all sense of personal suffering, in fears for her safety. He thought she had fallen into the power of the infernals, and he had the additional torture of believing it was through his means. But when he saw the scourge fall powerless, and the hand that wielded it paralysed, the numerous attending imps draw back at her approach, and vent their malice in hissing, and blowing blue sulphurous flames from their mouth and nostrils, and assuming the most terrific attitudes, and felt the soft hand of his own sweet sister kindly grasp his, and lead him from his galling chains, he was completely overpowered by feelings too powerful for his exhausted frame to support; he sunk apparently lifeless at her feet. He was raised by his affectionate brother, and conveyed to a little distance, where he soon recovered his senses; but to deplore his fall, and the trouble and danger into which he had brought them.

Adela then turned the bright beams of her talisman on the whole group of deluded wretches who had been associated with Alphonso. In an instant their shackles dropped off, and most of them crowded around her, viewing her as a guardian angel; for but few of the number had become so degraded as to prefer the vile servitude in which they were plunged.

They rallied around the car of the enchantress. The arch demon then appeared in a form too terrible to be described; and in the most stunning voice announced his intention of quitting the forest forever.

"Since my power and dominion have been set at defiance by a girl and a paultry pebble, the seat of my kingdom is henceforth removed."

So saying, he stamped with his foot — the earth cleft asunder — and the whole demoniac crew, castle and all, sunk with a deafening crash, and left the little group to thank their kind deliverer, and rejoice in their escape from their disgraceful thralldom.

The dawn of morning rose on this astonished and rejoicing party; they hastened to extricate themselves from the snares of the forest, and the family of Fuseli again sought their peaceful home, where they were welcomed with many testimonials of real joy by their household and friends, among whom much anxiety had been experienced for their safety.

Alphonso felt that he had forever lost that sunshine of the mind which is the attendant of unsullied innocence; and conscientiously believing that his vows, though given to a demon, precluded his entering into a matrimonial engagement. No entreaties could dissuade him from a resolution he had formed to enter a convent, and pass the remainder of his life in acts of penitence.

Julien soon after married a young lady of the most amiable character; and the lovely Adela attracted the affections of a gentleman of shining merit, whose wealth and influence placed her in a station she was well qualified to adorn; and the talisman of *Virtue and Integrity* was never suffered to diminish in brilliancy in her happy family.

There are now roads cut through the once dreaded forest. Postillions often entertain travellers with stories of the deeds of darkness that have been perpetrated on some particular part of their route; and a large chasm, not far from the road side, is still shown as the one through which the pandemonium vanished.