

ANN RADCLIFFE



The ROMANCE
of the FOREST

A Gothic Novel

READER'S EDITION

Edited by Sandra K. Williams

IDLE SPIDER BOOKS
Sacramento, California

The Romance of the Forest: A Gothic Novel (Reader's Edition)
by Ann Radcliffe

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The Romance of the Forest was first published in 1791

This edition published in 2013 by
Idle Spider Books
www.idlespiderbooks.com

Design and typesetting by
Williams Writing, Editing & Design
Text set in Weiss BT

Idle Spider Books™ and the spider colophon are
trademarks of Williams Writing, Editing, & Design
www.williamswriting.com

ISBN 978-0-9797290-4-1

EDITOR'S NOTE

This edition has been copyedited to current American practice in respect to punctuation. Spelling has been standardized throughout using the author's preferred spelling when it could be determined. In some places words and phrases have been reordered—and in a very few cases altered or removed—to improve ease of comprehension. The interspersed poems have been eliminated. However, no scenes, no events, and no descriptions have been removed: the work stands as Ann Radcliffe wrote it, polished for today's readers.

If you need an exact reproduction of the original text or extensive footnotes, you may prefer one of the many other editions that are available. This is the *reader's* edition, intended for whiling away a solitary evening, when of course those hollow sighings and those shapes flitting past your curtains are merely the sounds and shadows of nearby branches twisting in the wind . . .

CHAPTER 1



And I another,
So weary with disasters, tugg'd with fortune,
That I would set my life on any chance,
To mend it, or be rid on't.

Shakespeare, *King John*

When once sordid interest seizes on the heart, it freezes up the source of every warm and liberal feeling; it is an enemy alike to virtue and to taste—this it perverts, and that it annihilates. The time may come, my friend, when death shall dissolve the sinews of avarice, and justice be permitted to resume her rights."

Such were the words of the advocate Nemours to Pierre de la Motte, as the latter stepped at midnight into the carriage which was to bear him far from Paris, from his creditors and the persecution of the laws. La Motte thanked him for this last instance of his kindness, the assistance he had given him in escape; and when the carriage drove away uttered a sad adieu! The gloom of the hour, and the peculiar emergency of his circumstances, sank him in silent reverie.

As Madame de la Motte leaned from the coach window and gave a last look to the walls of Paris—Paris, the scene of her former happiness, and the residence of many dear friends—the fortitude which had till now supported her yielded to the force

of grief. "Farewell all!" sighed she. "This last look and we are separated forever!"

Tears followed her words, and, sinking back, she resigned herself to the stillness of sorrow. The recollection of former times pressed heavily upon her heart; a few months before she was surrounded by friends, fortune, and consequence; now she was deprived of all, a miserable exile from her native place, without home, without comfort—almost without hope. It was not the least of her afflictions that she had been obliged to quit Paris without bidding adieu to her only son, who was now on duty with his regiment in Germany. Such had been the precipitancy of this removal that, had she even known where he was stationed, she had no time to inform him of it, or of the alteration in his father's circumstances.

Pierre de la Motte was a gentleman, descended from an ancient house of France. He was a man whose passions often overcame his reason and, for a time, silenced his conscience; but though the image of virtue which Nature had impressed upon his heart was sometimes obscured by the passing influence of vice, it was never wholly obliterated. With strength of mind sufficient to have withstood temptation, he would have been a good man; as it was, he was always a weak, and sometimes a vicious, member of society. Yet his mind was active and his imagination vivid, which, cooperating with the force of passion, often dazzled his judgement and subdued principle. Thus he was a man, infirm in purpose and visionary in virtue: in a word, his conduct was suggested by feeling, rather than principle; and his virtue, such as it was, could not stand the pressure of occasion.

Early in life he had married Constance Valentia, a beautiful and elegant woman, attached to her family and beloved by them. Her birth was equal, her fortune superior to his; and their nuptials had been celebrated under the auspices of an approving and flattering world. Her heart was devoted to La Motte, and for some time she found in him an affectionate husband; but, allured by the gaities of Paris, he was soon devoted to its luxuries, and in a few years his fortune and

affection were equally lost in dissipation. A false pride had still operated against his interest, and withheld him from honourable retreat while it was yet in his power; the habits which he had acquired enchained him to the scene of his former pleasure, and thus he had continued an expensive style of life till the means of prolonging it were exhausted. He at length awoke from this lethargy of security, but it was only to plunge into new error, and to attempt schemes for the reparation of his fortune which served to sink him deeper in destruction. The consequence of a transaction in which he thus engaged now drove him, with the small wreck of his property, into dangerous and ignominious exile.

It was his design to pass into one of the southern provinces and there seek, near the borders of the kingdom, an asylum in some obscure village. His family consisted of his wife, and two faithful domestics, the man Peter and the woman Annette, who followed the fortunes of their master.

The night was dark and tempestuous. About three leagues from Paris, after driving for some time over a wild heath where many ways crossed, the servant Peter, who now acted as postillion, stopped and acquainted La Motte with his perplexity. The sudden stopping of the carriage roused the latter from his reverie, and filled the whole party with the terror of pursuit; he was unable to supply the necessary direction, and the extreme darkness made it dangerous to proceed without one. During this period of distress, a light was perceived at some distance, and after much doubt and hesitation La Motte, in the hope of obtaining assistance, alighted and advanced toward it; he proceeded slowly, from the fear of unknown pits. The light issued from the window of a small and ancient house which stood alone on the heath, at the distance of half a mile.

Having reached the door, he stopped for some moments, listening in apprehensive anxiety—no sound was heard but that of the wind, which swept in hollow gusts over the waste. At length he ventured to knock, and after waiting some time, during which he indistinctly heard several voices in conversation, someone within inquired what he wanted. La Motte

answered that he was a traveler who had lost his way, and desired to be directed to the nearest town.

"That," said the person, "is seven miles off, and the road bad enough, even if you could see it. If you only want a bed, you may have it here, and had better stay."

The "pitiless pelting"¹ of the storm, which at this time beat with increasing fury upon La Motte, inclined him to give up the attempt of proceeding farther till daylight; but desirous of seeing the person with whom he conversed before he ventured to expose his family by calling up the carriage, he asked to be admitted. The door was now opened by a tall figure with a light, who invited La Motte to enter. He followed the man through a passage into a room almost unfurnished, in one corner of which a bed was spread upon the floor. The forlorn and desolate aspect of this apartment made La Motte shrink involuntarily, and he was turning to go out when the man suddenly pushed him back, and he heard the door locked upon him. His heart failed, yet he made a desperate though vain effort to force the door, and called loudly for release. No answer was returned; but he distinguished the voices of men in the room above, and not doubting but their intention was to rob and murder him, his agitation at first overcame his reason. By the light of some almost-expiring embers, he perceived a window, but the hope which this discovery revived was quickly lost when he found the aperture guarded by strong iron bars. Such preparation for security surprised him, and confirmed his worst apprehensions. Alone, unarmed, beyond the chance of assistance—he saw himself in the power of people, whose trade was apparently rapine!—murder their means! After revolving every possibility of escape, he endeavoured to await the event with fortitude; but La Motte could boast of no such virtue.

1. Poor naked wretches, whereso'er you are, / That bide the pelting of this pitiless storm, / How shall your houseless heads and unfed sides, / Your loop'd and window'd raggedness, defend you / From seasons such as these?—Shakespeare, *King Lear*.

The voices had ceased, and all remained still for a quarter of an hour when, between the pauses of the wind, he thought he distinguished the sobs and moaning of a female. He listened attentively and became confirmed in his conjecture; it was too evidently the accent of distress. The remains of his courage forsook him, and a terrible surmise darted with the rapidity of lightning cross his brain. It was probable that his carriage had been discovered by the people of the house, who, with a design of plunder, had secured his servant and brought hither Madame de la Motte. He was the more inclined to believe this by the stillness which had for sometime reigned in the house, previous to the sounds he now heard. Or it was possible that the inhabitants were not robbers, but persons to whom he had been betrayed by his friend or servant, and who were appointed to deliver him into the hands of justice. Yet he hardly dared to doubt the integrity of his friend, who had been entrusted with the secret of his flight and the plan of his route, and had procured him the carriage in which he had escaped. "Such depravity," exclaimed La Motte, "cannot surely exist in human nature, much less in the heart of Nemours!"

This ejaculation was interrupted by a noise in the passage leading to the room: it approached—the door was unlocked—and the man who had admitted La Motte into the house entered leading, or rather forcibly dragging along, a beautiful girl who appeared to be about eighteen. Her features were bathed in tears, and she seemed to suffer the utmost distress.

The man fastened the lock and put the key in his pocket. He then advanced to La Motte, who had before observed other persons in the passage, and pointed a pistol at his breast. "You are wholly in our power," said he. "No assistance can reach you. If you wish to save your life, swear that you will convey this girl where I may never see her more; or rather consent to take her with you, for your oath I would not believe, and I can take care you shall not find me again.—Answer quickly, you have no time to lose."

He now seized the trembling hand of the girl, who shrank aghast with terror, and hurried her toward La Motte, whom

surprise still kept silent. She sank at his feet and, with sup-
plicating eyes that streamed with tears, implored him to have
pity on her. Notwithstanding his present agitation, he found
it impossible to contemplate the beauty and distress of the
object before him with indifference. Her youth, her appar-
ent innocence—the artless energy of her manner forcibly
assailed his heart, and he was going to speak when the ruffian,
who mistook the silence of astonishment for that of hesitation,
prevented him.

“I have a horse ready to take you from hence,” said he, “and
I will direct you over the heath. If you return within an hour,
you die. After then, you are at liberty to come here when you
please.”

La Motte without answering raised the lovely girl from the
floor, and was so much relieved from his own apprehensions
that he had leisure to attempt dissipating hers.

“Let us be gone,” said the ruffian, “and have no more of this
nonsense; you may think yourself well off it’s no worse. I’ll go
and get the horse ready.”

The last words roused La Motte and perplexed him with
new fears; he dreaded to discover² his carriage, lest its appear-
ance might tempt the banditti³ to plunder; and to depart on
horseback with this man might produce a consequence yet
more to be dreaded. Madame de la Motte, wearied with ap-
prehension, would probably send to the house for her husband.
All the former danger would be incurred, with the additional
evil of his being separated from his family, and the chance of
being detected by the emissaries of justice in endeavouring
to recover them. As these reflections passed over his mind in
tumultuous rapidity, a noise was again heard in the passage, an
uproar and scuffle ensued, and in the same moment he could
distinguish the voice of his servant, who had been sent by
Madame de la Motte in search of him. Being now determined
to disclose what could not long be concealed, he exclaimed

2. Expose; display.

3. Bandits.

aloud that a horse was unnecessary, that he had a carriage at some distance which would convey them from the heath, the man who was seized being his servant.

The ruffian, speaking through the door, bid him be patient awhile and he should hear more from him. La Motte now turned his eyes upon his unfortunate companion, who, pale and exhausted, leaned for support against the wall. Her features, which were delicately beautiful, had gained from distress an expression of captivating sweetness: she had

An eye
As when the blue sky trembles thro' a cloud
Of purest white.⁴

A habit of grey camlet⁵ with short flashed sleeves showed but did not adorn her figure; it was thrown open at the bosom, upon which part of her hair had fallen in disorder, while the light veil hastily thrown on had in her confusion been suffered to fall back. Every moment of further observation heightened the surprise of La Motte, and interested him more warmly in her favour. Such elegance and apparent refinement, contrasted with the desolation of the house and the savage manners of its inhabitants, seemed to him like a romance of imagination rather than an occurrence of real life. He endeavoured to comfort her, and his sense of compassion was too sincere to be misunderstood.

Her terror gradually subsided into gratitude and grief. "Ah, sir," said she, "Heaven has sent you to my relief, and will surely reward you for your protection. I have no friend in the world, if I do not find one in you."

La Motte was assuring her of his kindness when he was interrupted by the entrance of the ruffian, and he desired to be conducted to his family.

"All in good time," replied the ruffian. "I have taken care of one of them, and will of you, please St. Peter; so be comforted."

4. James Thomson, *The Tragedy of Sophonisba*.

5. An expensive fabric imported from the Orient.

These comfortable words renewed the terror of La Motte, who now earnestly begged to know if his family were safe.

"O! as for that matter they are safe enough, and you will be with them presently; but don't stand parleying here all night. Do you choose to go or stay? You know the conditions." He called in some companions, and they now bound the eyes of La Motte and of the young lady, whom terror had hitherto kept silent, and then placing them on two horses, a man mounted behind each, they immediately galloped off.

They had proceeded in this way near half an hour when La Motte entreated to know whither he was going. "You will know that by and by," said the ruffian, "so be at peace." Finding interrogatories useless, La Motte resumed silence till the horses stopped. His conductor then hallooed, and was answered by voices at some distance. In a few moments the sound of carriage wheels was heard and, presently after, the words of a man directing Peter which way to drive. As the carriage approached, La Motte called and, to his inexpressible joy, was answered by his wife.

"You are now beyond the borders of the heath, and may go which way you will," said the ruffian. "If you return within an hour, you will be welcomed by a brace of bullets."

This was a very unnecessary caution to La Motte, whom they now released. The young stranger sighed deeply as she entered the carriage; and the ruffian, having bestowed upon the servant Peter some directions and more threats, waited to see him drive off. They did not wait long.

La Motte immediately gave a short relation of what had passed at the house, including an account of the manner in which the young stranger, whom they now knew as Adeline, had been introduced to him. During this narrative, her deep convulsive sighs frequently drew the attention of Madame de la Motte, whose compassion became gradually interested on her behalf, and who now endeavoured to tranquillize her spirits. The unhappy girl answered her kindness in artless and simple expressions, and then relapsed into tears and silence. Madame forbore for the present to ask any questions that

might lead to a discovery of her connections, or seem to require an explanation of the late adventure, which now furnishing her with a new subject of reflection, the sense of her own misfortunes pressed less heavily upon her mind. The distress of La Motte was even for a while suspended; he ruminated on the late scene, and it appeared like a vision, or one of those improbable fictions that sometimes are exhibited in a romance: he could reduce it to no principles of probability, or render it comprehensible by any endeavour to analyse it. The present charge, and the chance of future trouble brought upon him by this adventure, occasioned some dissatisfaction; but the beauty and seeming innocence of Adeline united with the pleadings of humanity in her favour, and he determined to protect her.

The tumult of emotions which had passed in the bosom of Adeline began now to subside; terror was softened into anxiety, and despair into grief. The sympathy so evident in the manners of her companions, particularly in those of Madame de la Motte, soothed her heart and encouraged her to hope for better days.

Dismally and silently the night passed on, for the minds of the travelers were too much occupied by their several sufferings to admit of conversation. The dawn so anxiously watched for at length appeared, and introduced the strangers more fully to each other. Adeline derived comfort from the looks of Madame de la Motte, who gazed frequently and attentively at her. For her part, Madame de la Motte thought she had seldom seen a countenance so interesting, or a form so striking. The languor⁶ of sorrow threw a melancholy grace upon Adeline's features that appealed immediately to the heart; and there was a penetrating sweetness in her blue eyes which indicated an intelligent and amiable mind.

La Motte now looked anxiously from the coach window, that he might judge of their situation and observe whether he was followed. The obscurity of the dawn confined his views, but no person appeared. The sun at length tinted the eastern

6. Weakness, inertia.

clouds and the tops of the highest hills, and soon after burst in full splendour on the scene. The terrors of La Motte began to subside, and the griefs of Adeline to soften. They entered upon a lane confined by high banks and overarched by trees, on whose branches appeared the first green buds of spring glittering with dews. The fresh breeze of the morning animated the spirits of Adeline, whose mind was delicately sensible to the beauties of nature. As she viewed the flowery luxuriance of the turf and the tender green of the trees, or caught, between the opening banks, a glimpse of the varied landscape, rich with wood and fading into blue and distant mountains, her heart expanded in momentary joy. With Adeline the charms of external nature were heightened by those of novelty: she had seldom seen the grandeur of an extensive prospect, or the magnificence of a wide horizon—and not often the picturesque beauties of more confined scenery. Her mind had not lost by long oppression that elastic energy which resists calamity; else, however susceptible might have been her original taste, the beauties of nature would no longer have charmed her thus easily even to temporary repose.

The road at length wound down the side of a hill, and La Motte, again looking anxiously from the window, saw before him an open champaign⁷ country, through which the road, wholly unsheltered from observation, extended almost in a direct line. The danger of these circumstances alarmed him, for his flight might without difficulty be traced for many leagues from the hills he was now descending. Of the first peasant that passed, he inquired for a road among the hills, but heard of none. La Motte now sank into his former terrors. Madame, notwithstanding her own apprehensions, endeavoured to reassure him, but finding her efforts ineffectual, she also retired to the contemplation of her misfortunes. Often, as they went on, did La Motte look back upon the country they had passed, and often did imagination suggest to him the sounds of distant pursuits.

7. Level open country.

The travelers stopped to breakfast in a village where the road was obscured by woods, and La Motte's spirits again revived. Adeline appeared more tranquil than she had yet been, and La Motte now asked for an explanation of the scene he had witnessed on the preceding night. The inquiry renewed all her distress, and with tears she entreated for the present to be spared on the subject. La Motte pressed it no further, but he observed that for the greater part of the day she seemed to remember it in melancholy and dejection. They now traveled among the hills and were therefore in less danger of observation; but La Motte avoided the great towns, and stopped in obscure ones no longer than to refresh the horses. About two hours after noon, the road wound into a deep valley watered by a rivulet and overhung with wood. La Motte called to Peter, and ordered him to drive to a thickly embowered⁸ spot that appeared on the left. Here he alighted with his family, and Peter having spread the provisions on the turf, they seated themselves and partook of a repast which in other circumstances would have been thought delicious. Adeline endeavoured to smile, but the languor of grief was now heightened by indisposition. The violent agitation of mind and fatigue of body which she had suffered for the last twenty-four hours had overpowered her strength, and when La Motte led her back to the carriage, her whole frame trembled with illness. But she uttered no complaint, and having long observed the dejection of her companions, she made a feeble effort to enliven them.

They continued to travel throughout the day without any accident or interruption, and about three hours after sunset arrived at Monville, a small town where La Motte determined to pass the night. Repose was, indeed, necessary to the whole party, whose pale and haggard looks, as they alighted from the carriage, were but too obvious to pass unobserved by the people of the inn. As soon as beds could be prepared, Adeline withdrew to her chamber, accompanied by Madame de la Motte, whose concern for the fair stranger made her exert

8. Sheltered or enclosed.

every effort to soothe and console her. Adeline wept in silence, and taking the hand of Madame, pressed it to her bosom. These were not merely tears of grief—they were mingled with those which flow from the grateful heart when unexpectedly it meets with sympathy. Madame de la Motte understood them. After some momentary silence, she renewed her assurances of kindness, and entreated Adeline to confide in her friendship; but she carefully avoided any mention of the subject which had before so much affected her. Adeline at length found words to express her sense of this goodness, which she did in a manner so natural and sincere that Madame, finding herself much affected, took leave of her for the night.

In the morning, La Motte rose at an early hour, impatient to be gone. Everything was prepared for his departure, and the breakfast had been waiting some time, but Adeline did not appear. Madame de la Motte went to her chamber, and found her sunk in a disturbed slumber. Her breathing was short and irregular—she frequently started, or sighed, and sometimes she muttered an incoherent sentence. While Madame gazed with concern upon her languid countenance, she awoke and, looking up, gave her hand to Madame de la Motte, who found it burning with fever. She had passed a restless night; as she now attempted to rise, her head, which beat with intense pain, grew giddy, her strength failed, and she sank back.

Madame was much alarmed, being at once convinced that it was impossible she could travel, and that a delay might prove fatal to her husband. She went to inform him of the truth, and his distress may be more easily imagined than described. He saw all the inconvenience and danger of delay, yet he could not so far divest himself of humanity as to abandon Adeline to the care, or rather to the neglect, of strangers. He sent immediately for a physician, who pronounced her to be in a high fever and said a removal in her present state must be fatal. La Motte now determined to wait the event, and endeavoured to calm the transports of terror which at times assailed him. In the meanwhile, he took such precautions as his situation admitted of, passing the greater part of the day out of the

village, in a spot from whence he had a view of the road for some distance, yet to be exposed to destruction by the illness of a girl whom he did not know, and who had actually been forced upon him, was a misfortune to which La Motte had not philosophy enough to submit with composure.

Adeline's fever continued to increase during the whole day, and at night, when the physician took his leave, he told La Motte the event would very soon be decided. La Motte received this intelligence with real concern. The beauty and innocence of Adeline had overcome the disadvantageous circumstances under which she had been introduced to him, and he now gave less consideration to the inconvenience she might hereafter occasion him than to the hope of her recovery.

Madame de la Motte watched over her with tender anxiety, and observed with admiration her patient sweetness and mild resignation. Adeline amply repaid her, though she thought she could not. "Young as I am," she would say, "and deserted by those upon whom I have a claim for protection, I can remember no connection to make me regret life so much, as that I hoped to form with you. If I live, my conduct will best express my sense of your goodness; words are but feeble testimonies."

The sweetness of her manners so much attracted Madame de la Motte that she watched the crisis of her disorder with a solicitude which precluded every other interest. Adeline passed a very disturbed night, and when the physician appeared in the morning, he gave orders that she should be indulged with whatever she liked, and answered the inquiries of La Motte with a frankness that left him nothing to hope.

In the meantime, his patient, after drinking profusely of some mild liquids, fell asleep, in which she continued for several hours, and so profound was her repose that her breath alone gave sign of existence. She awoke free from fever, and with no other disorder than weakness, which in a few days she overcame so well as to be able to set out with La Motte for B———, a village off the great road, which he thought it prudent to quit. There they passed the following night, and early the next morning commenced their journey upon a wild

and woody tract of country. They stopped about noon at a solitary village, where they took refreshments and obtained directions for passing the vast forest of Fontanville, upon the borders of which they now were. La Motte wished at first to take a guide, but he apprehended more evil from the discovery he might make of his route than he hoped for benefit from assistance in the wilds of this uncultivated tract.

La Motte now designed to pass on to Lyon, where he could either seek concealment in its neighbourhood, or embark on the Rhône for Geneva, should the emergency of his circumstances hereafter require him to leave France. It was about twelve o'clock at noon, and he was desirous to hasten forward, that he might pass the forest of Fontanville and reach the town on its opposite borders before nightfall. Having deposited a fresh stock of provisions in the carriage and received such directions as were necessary concerning the roads, they again set forward, and in a short time entered the forest. It was now the latter end of April, and the weather was remarkably temperate and fine. The balmy freshness of the air, which breathed the first pure essence of vegetation, and the gentle warmth of the sun, whose beams vivified every hue of nature and opened every floweret of spring, revived Adeline, and inspired her with life and health. As she inhaled the breeze, her strength seemed to return, and as her eyes wandered through the romantic glades that opened into the forest, her heart was gladdened with complacent delight. When from these objects she turned her regard upon Monsieur and Madame de la Motte, to whose tender attentions she owed her life and in whose looks she now read esteem and kindness, her bosom glowed with sweet affections, and she experienced a force of gratitude which might be called sublime.

For the remainder of the day they continued to travel without seeing a hut or meeting a human being. It was now near sunset, and the prospect being closed on all sides by the forest, La Motte began to have apprehensions that his servant had mistaken the way. The road, if a road it could be called which afforded only a slight track upon the grass, was sometimes

overrun by luxuriant vegetation, and sometimes obscured by the deep shades,⁹ and Peter at length stopped, uncertain of the way. La Motte, who dreaded being benighted in a scene so wild and solitary as this forest, and whose apprehensions of banditti were very sanguine, ordered him to proceed at any rate, and if he found no track, to endeavour to gain a more open part of the forest. With these orders, Peter again set forward, but having proceeded some way and his views being still confined by woody glades and forest walks, he began to despair of extricating himself, and stopped for further orders. The sun was now set, but as La Motte looked anxiously from the window, he observed upon the vivid glow of the western horizon some dark towers rising from among the trees at a little distance, and ordered Peter to drive toward them. "If they belong to a monastery," said he, "we may probably gain admittance for the night."

The carriage drove along under the shade of "melancholy boughs,"¹⁰ through which the evening twilight, which yet coloured the air, diffused a solemnity that vibrated in thrilling sensations upon the hearts of the travelers. Expectation kept them silent. The present scene recalled to Adeline a remembrance of the late terrific circumstances, and her mind responded but too easily to the apprehension of new misfortunes. La Motte alighted at the foot of a green knoll which, the trees again opening to light, permitted a nearer, though imperfect, view of the edifice.

9. Shadows that gather as the sun sets.

10. But whate'er you are / That in this desert inaccessible, / Under the shade of melancholy boughs, / Lose and neglect the creeping hours of time.—Shakespeare, *As You Like It*.

CHAPTER 2



How these antique towers
And vacant courts chill the suspended soul,
Till expectation wears the cast of fear;
And fear, half ready to become devotion,
Mumbles a kind of mental orison,
It knows not wherefore:
What a kind of being is circumstance!

Horace Walpole, *The Mysterious Mother*

He approached, and perceived the Gothic remains of an abbey: it stood on a kind of rude lawn, overshadowed by high and spreading trees, which seemed coeval with the building, and diffused a romantic gloom around. The greater part of the pile appeared to be sinking into ruins, and that which had withstood the ravages of time showed the remaining features of the fabric¹¹ more awful in decay. The lofty battlements, thickly entwined with ivy, were half demolished, and become the residence of birds of prey. Huge fragments of the eastern tower, which was almost demolished, lay scattered amid the high grass that waved slowly in the breeze.

11. Structure or building.

The thistle shook there its lonely head; the moss whistled to the wind.¹²

A Gothic gate, richly ornamented with fretwork, which opened into the main body of the edifice, but which was now obstructed with brushwood, remained entire. Above the vast and magnificent portal of this gate arose a window of the same order, whose pointed arches still exhibited fragments of stained glass, once the pride of monkish devotion. La Motte, thinking it possible it might yet shelter some human being, advanced to the gate and lifted a massy¹³ knocker. The hollow sounds rang through the emptiness of the place. After waiting a few minutes, he forced back the gate, which was heavy with iron work and creaked harshly on its hinges.

He entered what appeared to have been the chapel of the abbey, where the hymn of devotion had once been raised and the tear of penitence had once been shed—sounds which could now only be recalled by imagination, tears of penitence which had been long since fixed in fate. La Motte paused a moment, for he felt a sensation of sublimity rising into terror—a suspension of mingled astonishment and awe! He surveyed the vastness of the place, and as he contemplated its ruins, fancy bore him back to past ages. “And these walls,” said he, “where once superstition lurked and austerity anticipated an earthly purgatory, now tremble over the mortal remains of the beings who reared them!”

The deepening gloom now reminded La Motte that he had no time to lose, but curiosity prompted him to explore farther, and he obeyed the impulse. As he walked over the broken pavement, the sound of his steps ran in echoes through the place, and seemed like the mysterious accents of the dead, reproving the sacrilegious mortal who thus dared to disturb their precincts.

From this chapel he passed into the nave of the great church,

12. James Macpherson, *The Poems of Ossian*.

13. Massive.

of which one window, more perfect than the rest, opened upon a long vista of the forest, through which was seen the rich colouring of evening, melting by imperceptible gradations into the solemn grey of upper air. Dark hills, whose outline appeared distinct upon the vivid glow of the horizon, closed the perspective. Several of the pillars which had once supported the roof remained the proud effigies of sinking greatness, and seemed to nod at every murmur of the blast over the fragments of those that had fallen a little before them.

La Motte sighed. The comparison between himself and the gradation of decay which these columns exhibited was but too obvious and affecting. "A few years," said he, "and I shall become like the mortals on whose relics I now gaze, and like them too, I may be the subject of meditation to a succeeding generation, which shall totter but a little while over the object they contemplate, e'er they also sink into the dust."

Retiring from this scene, he walked through the cloisters till a door which communicated with the lofty part of the building attracted his curiosity. He opened this and perceived, across the foot of the staircase, another door; but now, partly checked by fear and partly by the recollection of the surprise his family might feel in his absence, he returned with hasty steps to his carriage, having wasted some of the precious moments of twilight, and gained no information.

Some slight answer to Madame de la Motte's inquiries, and a general direction to Peter to drive carefully on and look for a road, was all that his anxiety would permit him to utter. The night shade fell thick around, which, deepened by the gloom of the forest, soon rendered it dangerous to proceed. Peter stopped, but La Motte, persisting in his first determination, ordered him to go on. Peter ventured to remonstrate, Madame de la Motte entreated, but La Motte reproved—commanded, and at length repented; for the hind wheel rising upon the stump of an old tree which the darkness had prevented Peter from observing, the carriage was in an instant overturned.

The party, as may be supposed, were much terrified, but no one was materially hurt, and having disengaged themselves

from their perilous situation, La Motte and Peter endeavoured to raise the carriage. The extent of this misfortune was now discovered, for they perceived that the wheel was broke. Their distress was reasonably great, for not only was the coach disabled from proceeding, but it could not even afford a shelter from the cold dews of the night, it being impossible to preserve it in an upright situation.

After a few moment's silence, La Motte proposed that they should return to the ruins which they had just quitted, which lay at a very short distance, and pass the night in the most habitable part of them; that when morning dawned, Peter should take one of the coach horses and endeavour to find a road and a town, from whence assistance could be procured for repairing the carriage. This proposal was opposed by Madame de la Motte, who shuddered at the idea of passing so many hours of darkness in a place so forlorn as the monastery. Terrors which she neither endeavoured to examine nor combat overcame her, and she told La Motte she had rather remain exposed to the unwholesome dews of night than encounter the desolation of the ruins. La Motte had at first felt an equal reluctance to return to this spot, but having subdued his own feelings, he resolved not to yield to those of his wife.

The horses being now disengaged from the carriage, the party moved toward the edifice. As they proceeded, Peter struck a light, and they entered the ruins by the flame of sticks, which he had collected. The partial gleams thrown across the fabric seemed to make its desolation more solemn, while the obscurity of the greater part of the pile heightened its sublimity and led fancy on to scenes of horror.

Adeline, who had hitherto remained in silence, now uttered an exclamation of mingled admiration and fear. A kind of pleasing dread thrilled her bosom and filled all her soul. Tears started into her eyes; she wished, yet feared, to go on; she hung upon the arm of La Motte, and looked at him with a sort of hesitating interrogation.

He opened the door of the great hall, and they entered; its extent was lost in gloom.

"Let us stay here," said Madame de la Motte, "I will go no farther."

La Motte pointed to the broken roof, and was proceeding when he was interrupted by an uncommon noise which passed along the hall. They were all silent—it was the silence of terror.

Madame de la Motte spoke first. "Let us quit this spot," said she. "Any evil is preferable to the feeling which now oppresses me. Let us retire instantly."

The stillness had for some time remained undisturbed, and La Motte, ashamed of the fear he had involuntarily betrayed, now thought it necessary to affect a boldness which he did not feel. He, therefore, opposed ridicule to the terror of Madame, and insisted upon proceeding. Thus compelled to acquiesce, she traversed the hall with trembling steps. They came to a narrow passage, and Peter's sticks being nearly exhausted, they awaited here while he went in search of more.

The almost-expiring light flashed faintly upon the walls of the passage, showing the recess more horrible. Across the hall, the greater part of which was concealed in shadow, the feeble ray spread a tremulous gleam, exhibiting the chasm in the roof, while many nameless objects were seen imperfectly through the dusk. Adeline with a smile inquired of La Motte if he believed in spirits. The question was ill-timed, for the present scene impressed its terrors upon La Motte, and in spite of endeavour, he felt a superstitious dread stealing upon him. He was now, perhaps, standing over the ashes of the dead. If spirits were ever permitted to revisit the earth, this seemed the hour and the place most suitable for their appearance.

La Motte remaining silent, Adeline said, "Were I inclined to superstition—"

She was interrupted by a return of the noise which had been lately heard. It sounded down the passage at whose entrance they stood, and sank gradually away. Every heart palpitated, and they remained listening in silence. A new subject of apprehension seized La Motte: the noise might proceed from banditti, and he hesitated whether it would be safe to proceed. Peter now came with the light. Madame refused to enter the

passage. La Motte was not much inclined to it, but Peter, in whom curiosity was more prevalent than fear, readily offered his services. La Motte, after some hesitation, suffered him to go while he awaited at the entrance the result of the inquiry. The extent of the passage soon concealed Peter from view, and the echoes of his footsteps were lost in a sound which rushed along the avenue, and became fainter and fainter till it sank into silence. La Motte now called aloud to Peter, but no answer was returned; at length they heard the sound of a distant footstep, and Peter soon after appeared, breathless and pale with fear.

When he came within hearing of La Motte, he called out, "An¹⁴ it please your honour, I've done for them, I believe, but I've had a hard bout. I thought I was fighting with the devil."

"What are you speaking of?" said La Motte.

"They were nothing but owls and rooks after all," continued Peter, "but the light brought them all about my ears, and they made such a confounded clapping with their wings that at first I thought I had been beset with a legion of devils. But I have drove them all out, master, and you have nothing to fear now."

The latter part of the sentence, intimating a suspicion of his courage, La Motte could have dispensed with, and to retrieve in some degree his reputation, he made a point of proceeding through the passage. They now moved on with alacrity, for, as Peter said, they had "nothing to fear."

The passage led into a large area, on one side of which, over a range of cloisters, appeared the west tower and a lofty part of the edifice; the other side was open to the woods. La Motte led the way to a door of the tower, which he now perceived was the same he had formerly entered; but he found some difficulty in advancing, for the area was overgrown with brambles and nettles, and the light which Peter carried afforded only an uncertain gleam. When he unclosed the door, the dismal aspect of the place revived the apprehensions of Madame de la Motte, and extorted from Adeline an inquiry whither they

14. If.

were going. Peter held up the light to show the narrow staircase that wound round the tower; but La Motte, observing a second door, drew back the rusty bolts and entered a spacious apartment which, from its style and condition, was evidently of a much later date than the other part of the structure. Though desolate and forlorn, it was very little impaired by time; the walls were damp but not decayed, and the glass was yet firm in the windows.

They passed on to a suite of apartments resembling the first they had seen, and expressed their surprise at the incongruous appearance of this part of the edifice with the mouldering walls they had left behind. These apartments conducted them to a winding passage that received light and air through narrow cavities placed high in the wall, and was at length closed by a door barred with iron. After with some difficulty opening it, they entered a vaulted room. La Motte surveyed it with a scrutinizing eye, and endeavoured to conjecture for what purpose it had been guarded by a door of such strength; but he saw little within to assist his curiosity. The room appeared to have been built in modern times upon a Gothic plan. Adeline approached a large window that formed a kind of recess raised by one step over the level of the floor; she observed to La Motte that the whole floor was inlaid with mosaic work; which drew from him a remark that the style of this apartment was not strictly Gothic. He passed on to a door which appeared on the opposite side of the apartment, and unlocking it, found himself in the great hall by which he had entered the fabric.

He now perceived what the gloom had before concealed, a spiral staircase which led to a gallery above; and which, from its present condition, seemed to have been built with the more modern part of the fabric, though this also affected the Gothic mode of architecture: La Motte had little doubt that these stairs led to apartments corresponding with those he had passed below, and hesitated whether to explore them; but the entreaties of Madame, who was much fatigued, prevailed with him to defer all further examination. After some deliberation regarding in which of the rooms they should pass

the night, they determined to return to that which opened from the tower.

A fire was kindled on a hearth, which it is probable had not for many years before afforded the warmth of hospitality. Peter and Annette having spread the provision he had brought from the coach, La Motte and his family, encircled round the fire, partook of a repast which hunger and fatigue made delicious. Apprehension gradually gave way to confidence, for they now found themselves in something like a human habitation, and they had leisure to laugh at their late terrors; but as the blast¹⁵ shook the doors, Adeline often started, and threw a fearful glance around. They continued to laugh and talk cheerfully for a time; yet their merriment was transient,¹⁶ if not affected; for a sense of their peculiar and distressed circumstances pressed upon their recollection, and sank each individual into languor and pensive silence. Adeline felt the forlornness of her condition with energy; she reflected upon the past with astonishment, and anticipated the future with fear. She found herself wholly dependent upon strangers, with no other claim than what distress demands from the common sympathy of kindred beings; sighs swelled her heart, and the frequent tear started to her eye; but she checked it, ere it betrayed on her cheek the sorrow which she thought it would be ungrateful to reveal.

La Motte broke this meditative silence by directing the fire to be renewed for the night, and the door to be secured: this seemed a necessary precaution, even in this solitude, and was effected by means of large stones piled against it, for other fastening there was none. It had frequently occurred to La Motte that this apparently forsaken edifice might be a place of refuge to banditti. Here was solitude to conceal them, and a wild and extensive forest to assist their schemes of rapine, and to perplex with its labyrinths those who might be bold enough to attempt pursuit. These apprehensions, however, he hid within his own bosom, saving his companions from a

15. A forceful gust of wind.

16. Of brief duration.

share of the uneasiness they occasioned. Peter was ordered to watch at the door, and having given the fire a rousing stir, our desolate party drew round it, and sought in sleep a short oblivion of care.

The night passed on without disturbance. Adeline slept, but uneasy dreams fled¹⁷ before her fancy, and she awoke at an early hour. The recollection of her sorrows arose upon her mind, and yielding to their pressure, her tears flowed silently and fast. That she might indulge them without restraint, she went to a window that looked upon an open part of the forest; all was gloom and silence; she stood for some time viewing the shadowy scene.

The first tender tints of morning now appeared on the verge of the horizon, stealing upon the darkness—so pure, so fine, so ætherial! it seemed as if heaven was opening to the view. The dark mists were seen to roll off to the west as the tints of light grew stronger, deepening the obscurity of that part of the hemisphere, and involving the features of the country below; meanwhile, in the east, the hues became more vivid, darting a trembling lustre far around, till a ruddy glow which fired all that part of the heavens announced the rising sun. At first, a small line of inconceivable splendour emerged on the horizon, where, quickly expanding, the sun appeared in all its glory, unveiling the whole face of nature, vivifying every colour of the landscape, and sprinkling the dewy earth with glittering light. The low and gentle responses of birds awakened by the morning ray now broke the silence of the hour, their soft warbling rising by degrees till they swelled the chorus of universal gladness. Adeline's heart swelled too with gratitude and adoration. The scene before her soothed her mind, and exalted her thoughts to the great Author of Nature; she uttered an involuntary prayer: "Father of good, who made this glorious scene! I resign myself to thy hands: thou wilt support me under my present sorrows, and protect me from future evil."

Thus confiding in the benevolence of God, she wiped the

17. Drifted, flowed.

tears from her eyes while the sweet union of conscience and reflection rewarded her trust, and her mind, losing the feelings which had lately oppressed it, became tranquil and composed.

La Motte awoke soon after, and Peter prepared to set out on his expedition. As he mounted his horse, he said, "An it please you, master, I think we had as good look no farther for an habitation till better times turn up, for nobody will think of looking for us here. When one sees the place by daylight, it's none so bad but what a little patching up would make it comfortable enough."

La Motte made no reply, but he thought of Peter's words. During the intervals of the night when anxiety had kept him waking, the same idea had occurred to him; concealment was his only security, and this place afforded it. The desolation of the spot was repulsive to his wishes, but he had only a choice of evils—a forest with liberty was not a bad home for one who had too much reason to expect a prison. As he walked through the apartments and examined their condition more attentively, he perceived they might easily be made habitable; and now surveying them under the cheerfulness of morning, his design strengthened; and he mused upon the means of accomplishing it, which nothing seemed so much to obstruct as the apparent difficulty of procuring food.

He communicated his thoughts to Madame de la Motte, who felt repugnance to the scheme. La Motte, however, seldom consulted his wife till he had determined how to act; and he had already resolved to be guided in this affair by the report of Peter. If he could discover a town in the neighbourhood of the forest where provisions and other necessaries could be procured, he would seek no farther for a place of rest.

In the meantime, he spent the anxious interval of Peter's absence in examining the ruin and walking over the environs;¹⁸ they were sweetly romantic, and the luxuriant woods with which they abounded seemed to sequester this spot from the rest of the world. Frequently a natural vista would yield

18. Surroundings.

a view of the country terminated by hills which, retiring in distance, faded into the blue horizon. A stream, various and musical in its course, wound at the foot of the lawn on which stood the abbey; here it silently glided beneath the shades, feeding the flowers that bloomed on its banks, and diffusing dewy freshness around; there it spread in broad expanse today, reflecting the sylvan scene, and the wild deer that tasted its waves. La Motte observed everywhere a profusion of game; the pheasants scarcely flew from his approach, and the deer gazed mildly at him as he passed. They were strangers to man!

On his return to the abbey, La Motte ascended the stairs that led to the tower. About halfway up, a door appeared in the wall; it yielded without resistance to his hand, but a sudden noise within, accompanied by a cloud of dust, made him step back and close the door. After waiting a few minutes, he again opened it, and perceived a large room of the more modern building. The remains of tapestry hung in tatters upon the walls, which were become the residence of birds of prey, whose sudden flight on the opening of the door had brought down a quantity of dust and occasioned the noise. The windows were shattered, and almost without glass; but he was surprised to observe some remains of furniture: chairs, whose fashion and condition bore the date of their antiquity, a broken table, and an iron grate almost consumed by rust.

On the opposite side of the room was a door, which led to another apartment proportioned like the first but hung with arras¹⁹ somewhat less tattered. In one corner stood a small bedstead, and a few shattered chairs were placed round the walls. La Motte gazed with a mixture of wonder and curiosity. "Tis strange," said he, "that these rooms, and these alone, should bear the marks of inhabitation. Perhaps some wretched wanderer like myself may have here sought refuge from a persecuting world, and here perhaps laid down the load of existence; perhaps, too, I have followed his footsteps but to mingle my dust with his!"

19. A tapestry wall hanging.

He turned suddenly, and was about to quit the room when he perceived a small door near the bed; it opened into a closet²⁰ which was lighted by one small window, and was in the same condition as the apartments he had passed, except that it was destitute even of the remains of furniture. As he walked over the floor, he thought he felt one part of it shake beneath his steps and, examining, found a trapdoor. Curiosity prompted him to explore further, and with some difficulty he opened it. It disclosed a staircase which terminated in darkness. La Motte descended a few steps, but was unwilling to trust the abyss; and after wondering for what purpose it was so secretly constructed, he closed the trap, and quitted this suite of apartments.

The stairs in the tower above were so much decayed that he did not attempt to ascend them. He returned to the hall, and by the spiral staircase which he had observed the evening before reached the gallery, and found another suite of apartments entirely unfurnished, very much like those below.

He renewed with Madame de la Motte his former conversation respecting the abbey, and she exerted all her endeavours to dissuade him from his purpose, acknowledging the solitary security of the spot, but pleading that other places might be found equally well adapted for concealment and more for comfort. This La Motte doubted: besides, the forest abounded with game, which would at once afford him amusement and food, a circumstance, considering his small stock of money, by no means to be overlooked. He had suffered his mind to dwell so much upon the scheme that it was become a favourite one. Adeline listened in silent anxiety to the discourse, and waited the issue of Peter's report.

The morning passed, but Peter did not return. Our solitary party took their dinner of the provision they had fortunately brought with them, and afterward they walked forth into the woods. Adeline, who never suffered any good to pass unnoticed because it came attended with evil, forgot for a while the

20. A small room for privacy.

desolation of the abbey in the beauty of the adjacent scenery. The pleasantness of the shades soothed her heart, and the varied features of the landscape amused her fancy; she almost thought she could be contented to live here. Already she began to feel an interest in the concerns of her companions, and for Madame de la Motte she felt more; it was the warm emotion of gratitude and affection.

The afternoon wore away, and they returned to the abbey. Peter was still absent, and his absence now began to excite surprise and apprehension. The approach of darkness also threw a gloom upon the hopes of the wanderers: another night must be passed under the same forlorn circumstances as the preceding one; and what was still worse, with a very scanty stock of provisions. The fortitude of Madame de la Motte now entirely forsook her, and she wept bitterly. Adeline's heart was as mournful as Madame's, but she rallied her drooping spirits, and gave the first instance of her kindness by endeavouring to revive those of her friend.

La Motte was restless and uneasy, and leaving the abbey, he walked alone the way which Peter had taken. He had not gone far when he perceived him between the trees, leading his horse. "What news, Peter?" hallooed La Motte. Peter came on, panting for breath, and said not a word, till La Motte repeated the question in a tone of somewhat more authority.

"Ah, bless you, master!" said he, when he had taken breath to answer. "I am glad to see you. I thought I should never have got back again; I've met with a world of misfortunes."

"Well, you may relate them hereafter; let me hear whether you have discovered—"

"Discovered!" interrupted Peter. "Yes, I am discovered with a vengeance! If your honour will look at my arms, you'll see how I am discovered."

"Discoloured! I suppose you mean," said La Motte. "But how came you in this condition?"

"Why, I'll tell you how it was, sir; your honour knows I learned a smack of boxing of that Englishman that used to come with his master to our house."

"Well, well—tell me where you have been."

"I scarcely know myself, master; I've been where I got a sound drubbing, but then it was in your business, and so I don't mind. But if ever I meet with that rascal again—!"

"You seem to like your first drubbing so well that you want another, and unless you speak more to the purpose, you shall soon have one."

Peter was now frightened into method, and endeavoured to proceed. "When I left the old abbey," said he, "I followed the way you directed, and turning to the right of that grove of trees yonder, I looked this way and that to see if I could see a house, or a cottage, or even a man, but not a soul of them was to be seen, and so I jogged on, near the value of a league, I warrant, and then I came to a track. Oh! oh! says I, we have you now; this will do—paths can't be made without feet. However, I was out in my reckoning, for the devil a bit of a soul could I see, and after following the track this way and that way for the third of a league, I lost it, and had to find out another."

"Is it impossible for you to speak to the point?" said La Motte. "Omit these foolish particulars, and tell whether you have succeeded."

"Well, then, master, to be short, for that's the nearest way after all, I wandered a long while at random, I did not know where, all through a forest like this, and I took special care to note how the trees stood, that I might find my way back. At last I came to another path, and was sure I should find something now, though I had found nothing before, for I could not be mistaken twice; so, peeping between the trees, I spied a cottage, and I gave my horse a lash that sounded through the forest, and I was at the door in a minute. They told me there was a town about half a league off, and bade me follow the track and it would bring me there; so it did, and my horse, I believe, smelt the corn in the manger by the rate he went at. I inquired for a wheelwright, and was told there was but one in the place, and he could not be found. I waited and waited, for I knew it was in vain to think of returning without doing my

business. The man at last came home from the country, and I told him how long I had waited; for, says I, I knew it was in vain to return without my business."

"Do be less tedious," said La Motte, "if it is in thy nature."

"It is in my nature," answered Peter, "and if it was more in my nature, your honour should have it all. Would you think it, sir, the fellow had the impudence to ask a louis d'or²¹ for mending the coach wheel! I believe in my conscience he saw I was in a hurry and could not do without him. A louis d'or! says I, my master shall give no such price, he sha'n't be imposed upon by no such rascal as you. Whereupon the fellow looked glum, and gave me a douse o' the chops.²² With this, I up with my fist and gave him another, and should have beat him presently, if another man had not come in, and then I was obliged to give up."

"And so you are returned as wise as you went?"

"Why, master, I hope I have too much spirit to submit to a rascal, or let you submit to one either. Besides, I have bought some nails to try if I can't mend the wheel myself—I had always a hand at carpentry."

"Well, I commend your zeal in my cause, but on this occasion it was rather ill-timed. And what have you got in that basket?"

"Why, master, I bethought me that we could not get away from this place till the carriage was ready to draw us, and in the meantime, says I, nobody can live without victuals, so I'll e'en lay out the little money I have and take a basket with me."

"That's the only wise thing you have done yet, and this, indeed, redeems your blunders."

"Why now, master, it does my heart good to hear you speak; I knew I was doing for the best all the while, but I've had a hard job to find my way back; and here's another piece of ill luck, for the horse has got a thorn in his foot."

21. A French gold coin.

22. Douse o' the chops: a blow in the jaw or mouth.

La Motte made inquiries concerning the town, and found it was capable of supplying him with provision, and what little furniture was necessary to render the abbey habitable. This intelligence almost settled his plans, and he ordered Peter to return on the following morning and make inquiries concerning the abbey. If the answers were favourable to his wishes, he commissioned him to buy a cart and load it with some furniture, and some materials necessary for repairing the modern apartments.

Peter stared. "What, does your honour mean to live here?"

"Why, suppose I do?"

"Why then your honour has made a wise determination, according to my hint; for your honour knows I said—"

"Well, Peter, it is not necessary to repeat what you said; perhaps I had determined on the subject before."

"Egad, master, you're in the right, and I'm glad of it, for I believe we shall not quickly be disturbed here, except by the rooks and owls. Yes, yes—I warrant I'll make it a place fit for a king; and as for the town, one may get anything, I'm sure of that, though they think no more about this place than they do about India or England, or any of those places."

They now reached the abbey, where Peter was received with great joy; but the hopes of his mistress and Adeline were repressed when they learned that he returned without having executed his commission and heard his account of the town. La Motte's orders to Peter were heard with almost equal concern by Madame and Adeline; but the latter concealed her uneasiness, and used all her efforts to overcome that of her friend. The sweetness of her behaviour and the air of satisfaction she assumed sensibly affected Madame, and discovered to her a source of comfort which she had hitherto overlooked. The affectionate attentions of her young friend promised to console her for the want of other society, and her conversation to enliven the hours which might otherwise be passed in painful regret.

The observations and general behaviour of Adeline already

bespoke a good understanding and an amiable heart, but she had yet more—she had genius.²³ She was now in her nineteenth year; her figure of the middling size, and turned to the most exquisite proportion; her hair was dark auburn, her eyes blue, and whether they sparkled with intelligence, or melted with tenderness, they were equally attractive. Her form had the airy lightness of a nymph, and when she smiled, her countenance might have been drawn for the younger sister of Hebe.²⁴ The captivations of her beauty were heightened by the grace and simplicity of her manners, and confirmed by the intrinsic value of a heart

That might be shrin'd in crystal,
And have all its movements scann'd.²⁵

The servant Annette now kindled the fire for the night; Peter's basket was opened, and supper prepared. Madame de la Motte was still pensive and silent.

"There is scarcely any condition so bad," said Adeline, "but we may one time or other wish we had not quitted it. Honest Peter, when he was bewildered in the forest, or had two enemies to encounter instead of one, confesses he wished himself at the abbey. And I am certain there is no situation so destitute but comfort may be extracted from it. The blaze of this fire shines yet more cheerfully from the contrasted dreariness of the place; and this plentiful repast is made yet more delicious from the temporary want we have suffered. Let us enjoy the good and forget the evil."

"You speak, my dear," replied Madame de la Motte, "like one whose spirits have not been often depressed by misfortune"—Adeline sighed—"and whose hopes are, therefore, vigorous."

"Long suffering," said La Motte, "has subdued in our minds that elastic energy which repels the pressure of evil and dances to the bound of joy. But I speak in rhapsody, though only from

23. Intellectual power.

24. The Greek goddess of youth.

25. Thomas Moore, *Alciphron*.

the remembrance of such a time. I once, like you, Adeline, could extract comfort from most situations."

"And may now, my dear sir," said Adeline. "Still believe it possible, and you will find it is so."

"The illusion is gone—I can no longer deceive myself."

"Pardon me, sir, if I say it is now only you deceive yourself, by suffering the cloud of sorrow to tinge every object you look upon."

"It may be so," said La Motte, "but let us leave the subject."

After supper, the doors were secured, as before, for the night, and the wanderers resigned themselves to repose.

On the following morning, Peter again set out for the little town of Auboine, and the hours of his absence were again spent by Madame de la Motte and Adeline in much anxiety and some hope, for the intelligence he might bring concerning the abbey might yet release them from the plans of La Motte. Toward the close of day he was descried coming slowly on, and the cart which accompanied him too certainly confirmed their fears. He brought materials for repairing the place, and some furniture.

Of the abbey he gave an account, of which the following is the substance: It belonged, together with a large part of the adjacent forest, to a nobleman, who now resided with his family on a remote estate. He inherited it, in right of his wife, from his father-in-law, who had caused the more modern apartments to be erected, and had resided in them some part of every year for the purpose of shooting and hunting. It was reported that some person was, soon after the property came to the present possessor, brought secretly to the abbey and confined in these apartments; who or what he was had never been conjectured, and what became of him nobody knew. The report died gradually away, and many persons entirely disbelieved the whole of it. But however this affair might be, certain it was, the present owner had visited the abbey only two summers since his succeeding to it; and the furniture, after some time, was removed.

This circumstance had at first excited surprise, and various

reports arose in consequence, but it was difficult to know what ought to be believed. Among the rest, it was said that strange appearances had been observed at the abbey, and uncommon noises heard; and though this report had been ridiculed by sensible persons as the idle superstition of ignorance, it had fastened so strongly upon the minds of the common people that for the last seventeen years none of the peasantry had ventured to approach the spot. The abbey was now, therefore, abandoned to decay.

La Motte ruminated upon this account. At first it called up unpleasant ideas, but they were soon dismissed, and considerations more interesting to his welfare took place: he congratulated himself that he had now found a spot where he was not likely to be either discovered or disturbed; yet it could not escape him that there was a strange coincidence between one part of Peter's narrative, and the condition of the chambers that opened from the tower above stairs. The remains of furniture, of which the other apartments were void—the solitary bed—the number and connection of the rooms, were circumstances that united to confirm his opinion. This, however, he concealed in his own breast, for he already perceived that Peter's account had not assisted in reconciling his family to the necessity of dwelling at the abbey.

But they had only to submit in silence, and whatever disagreeable apprehension might intrude upon them, they now appeared willing to suppress the expression of it. Peter, indeed, was exempt from any evil of this kind; he knew no fear, and his mind was now wholly occupied with his approaching business. Madame de la Motte, with a placid kind of despair, endeavoured to reconcile herself to that which no effort of understanding could teach her to avoid, and which an indulgence in lamentation could only make more intolerable. Indeed, though a sense of the immediate inconveniences to be endured at the abbey had made her oppose the scheme of living there, she did not really know how their situation could be improved by removal. Yet her thoughts often wandered toward Paris, and reflected the retrospect of past times with the images

of weeping friends left, perhaps, forever. The affectionate endearments of her only son, whom, from the danger of his situation and the obscurity of hers, she might reasonably fear never to see again, arose upon her memory and overcame her fortitude. "Why—why was I reserved for this hour?" she would say, "and what will be my years to come?"

Adeline had no retrospect of past delight to give emphasis to present calamity—no weeping friends—no dear regretted objects to point the edge of sorrow, and throw a sickly hue upon her future prospects. She knew not yet the pangs of disappointed hope, or the acuter sting of self-accusation; she had no misery but what patience could assuage or fortitude overcome.

At the dawn of the following day Peter arose to his labour. He proceeded with alacrity, and in a few days, two of the lower apartments were so much altered for the better that La Motte began to exult, and his family to perceive that their situation would not be so miserable as they had imagined. The furniture Peter had already brought was disposed in these rooms, one of which was the vaulted apartment. Madame de la Motte furnished this as a sitting room, preferring it for its large Gothic window that descended almost to the floor, admitting a prospect of the lawn and the picturesque scenery of the surrounding woods.

Peter having returned to Auboine for a further supply, all the lower apartments were in a few weeks not only habitable but comfortable. These, however, being insufficient for the accommodation of the family, a room above stairs was prepared for Adeline: it was the chamber that opened immediately from the tower, and she preferred it to those beyond because it was less distant from the family, and the windows fronting an avenue of the forest afforded a more extensive prospect. The tapestry that was decayed and hung loosely from the walls was now nailed up and made to look less desolate; and though the room had still a solemn aspect from its spaciousness and the narrowness of the windows, it was not uncomfortable.

The first night that Adeline retired hither, she slept little.

The solitary air of the place affected her spirits, the more so, perhaps, because she had with friendly consideration endeavoured to support them in the presence of Madame de la Motte. She remembered the narrative of Peter, several circumstances of which had impressed her imagination in spite of her reason, and she found it difficult wholly to subdue apprehension. At one time, terror so strongly seized her mind that she had even opened the door with an intention of calling Madame de la Motte; but listening for a moment on the stairs of the tower, everything seemed still. At length, she heard the voice of La Motte speaking cheerfully, and the absurdity of her fears struck her forcibly; she blushed that she had for a moment submitted to them, and returned to her chamber wondering at herself.

CHAPTER 3



Are not these woods
More free from peril than the envious court?
Here feel we not the penalty of Adam,
The season's difference, as the icy fang
And churlish chiding of the winter's wind.

Shakespeare, *As You Like It*

La Motte arranged his little plan of living. His mornings were usually spent in shooting or fishing, and the dinner thus provided by his industry he relished with a keener appetite than had ever attended him at the luxurious tables of Paris. The afternoons he passed with his family, sometimes he would select a book from the few he had brought with him, and endeavour to fix his attention to the words his lips repeated, but his mind suffered little abstraction from its own cares, and the sentiment he pronounced left no trace behind it. Sometimes he conversed, but oftener sat in gloomy silence, musing upon the past or anticipating the future.

At these moments Adeline, with a sweetness almost irresistible, endeavoured to enliven his spirits and to withdraw him from himself. Seldom she succeeded, but when she did the grateful looks of Madame de la Motte and the benevolent feelings of her own bosom realized the cheerfulness she had at first only assumed. Adeline's mind had the happy art, or perhaps

it were more just to say the happy nature, of accommodating itself to her situation. Her present condition, though forlorn, was not devoid of comfort, and this comfort was confirmed by her virtues. So much she won upon the affections of her protectors that Madame de la Motte loved her as her child, and La Motte himself, though a man little susceptible of tenderness, could not be insensible to her solitudes. Whenever he relaxed from the sullenness of misery, it was at the influence of Adeline.

Peter brought a weekly supply of provisions from Auboine, and on those occasions always quitted the town by a route contrary to that leading to the abbey. Several weeks having passed without molestation, La Motte dismissed all apprehension of pursuit, and at length became tolerably reconciled to the complexion of his circumstances. As habit and effort strengthened the fortitude of Madame de la Motte, the features of misfortune appeared to soften. The forest, which at first seemed to her a frightful solitude, had lost its terrific aspect; and that edifice, whose half-demolished walls and gloomy desolation had struck her mind with the force of melancholy and dismay, was now beheld as a domestic asylum and a safe refuge from the storms of power.

She was a sensible and highly accomplished woman, and it became her chief delight to form the rising graces of Adeline, who had, as has been already shown, a sweetness of disposition which made her quick to repay instruction with improvement, and indulgence with love. Never was Adeline so pleased as when she anticipated Madame's wishes, and never so diligent as when she was employed in Madame's business. The little affairs of the household she overlooked and managed with such admirable exactness that Madame de la Motte had neither anxiety nor care concerning them. And Adeline formed for herself in this barren situation many amusements that occasionally banished the remembrance of her misfortunes. La Motte's books were her chief consolation. With one of these she would frequently ramble into the forest, where the river winding through a glade diffused coolness, and with its

murmuring accents invited repose; there she would seat herself and, resigned to the illusions of the page, pass many hours in oblivion of sorrow.

Madame de la Motte had frequently expressed curiosity concerning the events of Adeline's life, and by what circumstances she had been thrown into a situation so perilous and mysterious as that in which La Motte had found her. Adeline had given a brief account of the manner in which she had been brought thither, but had always with tears entreated to be spared for that time from a particular relation of her history. Her spirits were not then equal to retrospection, but now that they were soothed by quiet and strengthened by confidence, she one day gave Madame de la Motte the following narration.



I am the only child, said Adeline, of Louis de St. Pierre, a chevalier²⁶ of reputable family, but of small fortune, who for many years resided at Paris. Of my mother I have a faint remembrance; I lost her when I was only seven years old, and this was my first misfortune. At her death, my father gave up house-keeping, boarded me in a convent, and quitted Paris. Thus was I, at this early period of my life, abandoned to strangers. My father came sometimes to Paris; he then visited me, and I well remember the grief I used to feel when he bade me farewell. On these occasions, which wrung my heart with grief, he appeared unmoved, so that I often thought he had little tenderness for me. But he was my father, and the only person to whom I could look up for protection and love.

In this convent I continued till I was twelve years old. A thousand times I had entreated my father to take me home, but at first motives of prudence, and afterward of avarice, prevented him. I was now removed from this convent, and placed in another, where I learned my father intended I should take the veil. I will not attempt to express my surprise and grief

26. Knight.

on this occasion. Too long I had been immured in the walls of a cloister, and too much had I seen of the sullen misery of its votaries, not to feel horror and disgust at the prospect of being added to their number.

The lady abbess was a woman of rigid decorum and severe devotion, exact in the observance of every detail of form, and she never forgave an offence against ceremony. It was her method, when she wanted to make converts to her order, to denounce and terrify rather than to persuade and allure. Hers were the arts of cunning practised upon fear, not those of sophistication upon reason. She employed numberless stratagems to gain me to her purpose, and they all wore the complexion of her character. But in the life to which she would have devoted me, I saw too many forms of real terror to be overcome by the influence of her ideal host, and was resolute in rejecting the veil. Here I passed several years of miserable resistance against cruelty and superstition. My father I seldom saw; when I did, I entreated him to alter my destination, but he objected that his fortune was insufficient to support me in the world, and at length denounced vengeance on my head if I persisted in disobedience.

You, my dear Madame, can form little idea of the wretchedness of my situation, condemned to perpetual imprisonment, and imprisonment of the most dreadful kind, or to the vengeance of a father from whom I had no appeal. My resolution relaxed—for some time I paused upon the choice of evils—but at length the horrors of the monastic life rose so fully to my view that fortitude gave way before them. Excluded from the cheerful intercourse of society—from the pleasant view of nature—almost from the light of day—condemned to silence—rigid formality—abstinence and penance—condemned to forgo the delights of a world which imagination painted in the gayest and most alluring colours, and whose hues were, perhaps, not the less captivating because they were only ideal—such was the state to which I was destined. Again my resolution was invigorated: my father's cruelty subdued tenderness, and roused indignation. "Since he can forget," said

I, "the affection of a parent, and condemn his child without remorse to wretchedness and despair, the bond of filial and parental duty no longer subsists between us—he has himself dissolved it, and I will yet struggle for liberty and life."

Finding me unmoved by menace, the lady abbess had now recourse to more subtle measures. She condescended to smile, and even to flatter; but hers was the distorted smile of cunning, not the gracious emblem of kindness; it provoked disgust, instead of inspiring affection. She painted the character of a vestal²⁷ in the most beautiful tints of art—its holy innocence—its mild dignity—its sublime devotion. I sighed as she spoke. This she regarded as a favourable symptom, and proceeded on her picture with more animation. She described the serenity of a monastic life—its security from the seductive charms, restless passions, and sorrowful vicissitudes of the world—the rapturous delights of religion, and the sweet reciprocal affection of the sisterhood.

So highly she finished the piece, that the lurking lines of cunning would, to an inexperienced eye, have escaped detection. Mine was too sorrowfully informed. Too often had I witnessed the secret tear and bursting sigh of vain regret, the sullen pinings of discontent, and the mute anguish of despair. My silence and my manner assured her of my incredulity, and it was with difficulty that she preserved a decent composure.

My father, as may be imagined, was highly incensed at my perseverance, which he called obstinacy, but, what will not be so easily believed, he soon after relented and appointed a day to take me from the convent. O! judge of my feelings when I received this intelligence. The joy it occasioned awakened all my gratitude; I forgot the former cruelty of my father, and that the present indulgence was less the effect of his kindness than of my resolution. I wept that I could not indulge his every wish.

What days of blissful expectation were those that preceded my departure! The world, from which I had been hitherto secluded—the world, in which my fancy had been so often

27. A chaste woman; a nun.

delighted to roam—whose paths were strewn with fadeless roses—whose every scene smiled in beauty and invited to delight—where all the people were good, and all the good happy—Ah! then that world was bursting upon my view. Let me catch the rapturous remembrance before it vanish! It is like the passing lights of autumn, that gleam for a moment on a hill, and then leave it to darkness. I counted the days and hours that withheld me from this fairyland. It was in the convent only that people were deceitful and cruel; it was there only that misery dwelt. I was quitting it all! How I pitied the poor nuns that were to be left behind. I would have given half that world I prized so much, had it been mine, to have taken them out with me.

The long-wished-for day at last arrived. My father came, and for a moment my joy was lost in the sorrow of bidding farewell to my poor companions, for whom I had never felt such warmth of kindness as at this instant. I was soon beyond the gates of the convent. I looked around me, and viewed the vast vault of heaven no longer bounded by monastic walls, and the green earth extended in hill and dale to the round verge of the horizon! My heart danced with delight, tears swelled in my eyes, and for some moments I was unable to speak. My thoughts rose to Heaven in sentiments of gratitude to the Giver of all good!

At length, I returned to my father. "Dear sir," said I, "how I thank you for my deliverance, and how I wish I could do everything to oblige you."

"Return, then, to your convent," said he, in a harsh accent.

I shuddered; his look and manner jarred the tone of my feelings; they struck discord upon my heart, which had before responded only to harmony. The ardour of joy was in a moment repressed, and every object around me was saddened with the gloom of disappointment. It was not that I suspected my father would take me back to the convent, but that his feelings seemed so very dissonant to the joy and gratitude which I had but a moment before felt and expressed to him.



"Pardon, Madame, a relation of these trivial circumstances; the strong vicissitudes of feeling which they impressed upon my heart make me think them important, when they are, perhaps, only disgusting."

"No, my dear," said Madame de la Motte, "they are interesting to me; they illustrate little traits of character, which I love to observe. You are worthy of all my regard, and from this moment I give my tenderest pity to your misfortunes, and my affection to your goodness."

These words melted the heart of Adeline; she kissed the hand which Madame held out, and remained a few minutes silent. At length she said, "May I deserve this goodness! and may I ever be thankful to God, who, in giving me such a friend, has raised me to comfort and hope!"



My father's house was situated a few leagues on the other side of Paris, and on our way to it, we passed through that city. What a novel scene! Where were now the solemn faces, the demure manners I had been accustomed to see in the convent? Every countenance was here animated, either by business or pleasure; every step was airy, and every smile was gay. All the people appeared like friends; they looked and smiled at me; I smiled again, and wished to have told them how pleased I was. *How delightful, thought I, to live surrounded by friends!*

What crowded streets! What magnificent hotels! What splendid equipages! I scarcely observed that the streets were narrow, or the way dangerous. What bustle, what tumult, what delight! I could never be sufficiently thankful that I was removed from the convent. Again, I was going to express my gratitude to my father, but his looks forbade me, and I was silent. I am too diffuse; even the faint forms which memory reflects of passed delight are grateful to the heart. The shadow

of pleasure is still gazed upon with a melancholy enjoyment, though the substance is fled beyond our reach.

Having quitted Paris, which I left with many sighs, and gazed upon till the towers of every church dissolved in distance from my view, we entered upon a gloomy and unfrequented road. It was evening when we reached a wild heath; I looked round in search of a human dwelling, but could find none; and not a human being was to be seen. I experienced something of what I used to feel in the convent; my heart had not been so sad since I left it. Of my father, who still sat in silence, I inquired if we were near home; he answered in the affirmative. Night came on, however, before we reached the place of our destination; it was a lone house on the waste; but I need not describe it to you, Madame. When the carriage stopped, two men appeared at the door and assisted us to alight; so gloomy were their countenances, and so few their words, I almost fancied myself again in the convent. Certain it is, I had not seen such melancholy faces since I quitted it. *Is this a part of the world I have so fondly contemplated?* thought I.

The interior appearance of the house was desolate and mean; I was surprised that my father had chosen such a place for his habitation, and also that no woman was to be seen; but I knew that inquiry would only produce a reproof, and was therefore silent. At supper, the two men I had before seen sat down with us; they said little, but seemed to observe me much. I was confused and displeased, which my father noticing, he frowned at them with a look which convinced me he meant more than I comprehended. When the cloth was drawn, my father took my hand and conducted me to the door of my chamber; having sat down the candle and wished me good night, he left me to my own solitary thoughts.

How different were they from those I had indulged a few hours before! Then expectation, hope, delight, danced before me; now melancholy and disappointment chilled the ardour of my mind, and discoloured my future prospect. The appear-

ance of everything around conduced²⁸ to depress me. On the floor lay a small bed without curtains or hangings; two old chairs and a table were all the remaining furniture in the room. I went to the window, with an intention of looking out upon the surrounding scene, and found it was grated. I was shocked at this circumstance, and comparing it with the lonely situation and the strange appearance of the house, together with the countenances and behaviour of the men who had supped with us, I was lost in a labyrinth of conjecture.

At length I lay down to sleep, but the anxiety of my mind prevented repose; gloomy unpleasing images flitted before my fancy, and I fell into a sort of waking dream: I thought that I was in a lonely forest with my father; his looks were severe, and his gestures menacing: he upbraided me for leaving the convent, and while he spoke drew from his pocket a mirror, which he held before my face; I looked in it and saw—my blood now thrills as I repeat it—I saw myself wounded, and bleeding profusely. Then I thought myself in the house again; and suddenly heard these words, in accents so distinct, that for some time after I awoke, I could scarcely believe them ideal,²⁹ “Depart this house, destruction hovers here.”

I was awakened by a footstep on the stairs; it was my father retiring to his chamber; the lateness of the hour surprised me, for it was past midnight.

On the following morning, the party of the preceding evening assembled at breakfast, and were as gloomy and silent as before. The table was spread by a boy of my father’s, but the cook and the housemaid, whatever they might be, were invisible.

The next morning I was surprised, on attempting to leave my chamber, to find the door locked; I waited a considerable time before I ventured to call; when I did, no answer was

28. Lead to a result; contributed.

29. Existing in imagination only.

returned; I then went to the window and called more loudly, but my own voice was still the only sound I heard. Near an hour I passed in a state of surprise and terror not to be described. At length, I heard a person coming upstairs, and I renewed the call; I was answered that my father had that morning set off for Paris, whence he would return in a few days; in the meanwhile he had ordered me to be confined in my chamber. On my expressing surprise and apprehension at this circumstance, I was assured I had nothing to fear, and that I should live as well as if I were at liberty.

The latter part of this speech seemed to contain an odd kind of comfort; I made little reply, but submitted to necessity. Once more I was abandoned to sorrowful reflection; what a day was the one I now passed! alone, and agitated with grief and apprehension. I endeavoured to conjecture the cause of this harsh treatment, and at length concluded it was designed by my father as a punishment for my former disobedience. But why abandon me to the power of strangers, to men whose countenances bore the stamp of villainy so strongly as to impress even my inexperienced mind with terror! Surmise involved me only deeper in perplexity, yet I found it impossible to forbear pursuing the subject; and the day was divided between lamentation and conjecture. Night at length came, and such a night! Darkness brought new terrors: I looked round the chamber for some means of fastening my door on the inside, but could perceive none; at last I contrived to place the back of a chair in an oblique direction, so as to render it secure.

I had scarcely done this, and lay down upon my bed in my clothes, not to sleep, but to watch, when I heard a rap at the door of the house, which was opened and shut so quickly that the person who had knocked seemed only to deliver a letter or message. Soon after, I heard voices at intervals in a room below stairs, sometimes speaking very low, and sometimes rising, all together, as if in dispute. Something more excusable than curiosity made me endeavour to distinguish what was said, but in vain; now and then a word or two reached me, and once I heard my name repeated, but no more.

Thus passed the hours till midnight, when all became still. I had lain for some time in a state between fear and hope when I heard the lock of my door gently moved backward and forward; I started up, and listened; for a moment it was still, then the noise returned, and I heard a whispering without; my spirits died away, but I was yet sensible. Presently an effort was made at the door, as if to force it; I shrieked aloud, and immediately heard the voices of the men I had seen at my father's table: they called loudly for the door to be opened, and on my returning no answer, uttered dreadful execrations. I had just strength sufficient to move to the window, in the desperate hope of escaping thence, but my feeble efforts could not even shake the bars. O! how can I recollect these moments of horror, and be sufficiently thankful that I am now in safety and comfort!

They remained some time at the door, then they quitted it, and went downstairs. How my heart revived at every step of their departure; I fell upon my knees, thanked God that he had preserved me this time, and implored his further protection. I was rising from this short prayer when suddenly I heard a noise in a different part of the room, and on looking round, I perceived the door of a small closet open, and two men enter the chamber.

They seized me, and I sank senseless in their arms; how long I remained in this condition I know not, but on reviving, I perceived myself again alone, and heard several voices from below stairs. I had presence of mind to run to the door of the closet, my only chance of escape; but it was locked! I then recollected it was possible that the ruffians might have forgot to turn the key of the chamber door, which was held by the chair; but here, also, I was disappointed. I clasped my hands in an agony of despair, and stood for some time immoveable.

A violent noise from below roused me, and soon after I heard people ascending the stairs: I now gave myself up for lost. The steps approached, the door of the closet was again unlocked. I stood calmly, and again saw the men enter the chamber. I neither spoke, nor resisted: the faculties of my soul

were wrought up beyond the power of feeling, as a violent blow on the body stuns for a while the sense of pain. They led me downstairs; the door of a room below was thrown open, and I beheld a stranger. It was then that my senses returned; I shrieked and resisted, but was forced along. It is unnecessary to say that this stranger was Monsieur La Motte, or to add that I shall forever bless him as my deliverer.



Adeline ceased to speak; Madame de la Motte remained silent. There were some circumstances in Adeline's narrative which raised all her curiosity. She asked if Adeline believed her father to be a party in this mysterious affair. Adeline, though it was impossible to doubt that he had been principally and materially concerned in some part of it, thought, or said she thought, he was innocent of any intention against her life.

"Yet what motive," said Madame de la Motte, "could there be for a degree of cruelty so apparently unprofitable?"

Here the inquiry ended; and Adeline confessed she had pursued it till her mind shrank from all further research.

Madame de la Motte now expressed without reserve the sympathy which such uncommon misfortune excited, and this expression of it strengthened the tie of mutual friendship. Adeline felt her spirits relieved by the disclosure she had made to Madame de la Motte; and the latter acknowledged the value of the confidence by an increase of affectionate attentions.