The Curse

Anyone who was acquainted with the Greensboro couple knew they were very happy together. Although they were poor and owned almost nothing except the decrepit cottage they lived in, Allcott and Batilda were satisfied with their lives. Because they couldn't afford to feed another mouth, they decided not to have a child. This made them dependent on each other, which allowed their love to grow even stronger. Every morning after a peck on the cheek, Allcott would go cheerfully to work as a logger. Batilda's life centered around Allcott--she would look forward every evening to Allcott's return. Allcott was like her angel; he made her smile every day. After a hard day's work, he would come home with some bread and cheese and settle comfortably in his rocking chair. Batilda always had his hot ginger ale ready, and the two would talk beside the small fireplace in the living room. Allcott couldn't be any happier.

The same routine repeated itself every day. Allcott would go to work while Batilda waited for him to return. Whistling while on his way to work, Allcott said to himself, *Today is going to be different*, *because I am going to buy my sweet wife a gorgeous dress.* Allcott wanted to surprise Batilda with a wonderful birthday present. He noted that Batilda needed a new dress since she had mended her old one several times already.

As usual, Allcott entered the forest to cut down trees. But Allcott knew he would not be able to cut enough logs to buy Batilda her birthday present if he were only going to cut the trees in the woods as usual. He would have to enter what many people called the "enchanted" forest. However, Allcott had never believed any of the stories people rumored about the forest. Many had disappeared in the woods for mysterious reasons. Some said there were blood-thirsty monsters in the forest, while others said the trees strangled people with their roots. *They were just rumors*, thought Allcott. Without hesitating, Allcott trailed even farther into the woods to reach the "dark" forest. Immediately, Allcott spotted a tree that would make a handsome profit, and went straight to work. While waiting for the tree to fall, Allcott

looked around him. The sky was gray and the forest looked rotten and dead. Then something caught his eyes. Allcott couldn't believe his luck. He saw two gigantic trees, one slightly bigger than the other, that would surely yield handsome profits. The two towering vibrant trees stood out in stark contrast from the rest of the dying trees. Allcott quickly approached the trees with bursting excitement and discovered, however, that the big one was way too thick for him to chop down. Luckily, Allcott was confident he could chop down the smaller tree, so he began to work.

Allcott gathered all his strength to deliver harsh blows upon the tree. While wiping his sweat away, Allcott saw something really strange: the tree started bleeding.   Fresh, red blood oozed out of the tree trunk and came trickling down the bark, and slowly dripped onto the dry soil. Allcott stared right at the tree for a good long minute. Putting down his axe, Allcott got closer to examine the tree. Indeed, it was bleeding! *What a rather strange phenomenon*, thought Allcott. This reminded Allcott of all the horror stories that had taken place in this very forest, so Allcott glanced around suspiciously. The sun had set, and the woods were getting darker. The trees rattled in the growling wind, and Allcott saw huge, yellow eyes staring down at him. These owls were starting to make Allcott feel uneasy. *I better get out fast before this forest becomes all spooky.*   Allcott wanted to call it a day and head home, but he was just a few blows away from chopping down the tree. The lumber from this tree was certainly worth more than the money for a dress, and even a week's meal. Remembering, once again, his beautiful wife, and how happy she would be when she saw the new dress, Allcott decided to not give up just yet. He couldn't possibly disappoint her on this special day and kept on cutting the tree.

The five-hundred year old tree finally fell, and with the thought of his beautiful wife at home waiting, Allcott worked diligently and was able to clean the tree all up and load its logs onto a trailer in just a few hours. Pushing the trailer along, Allcott bore a very smug expression. With all the logs from this tree, he would buy the most extravagant dress in town

and even one of those cakes with melted skyblue white chocolate poured over the top to celebrate Batilda's birthday.

The birthday celebration went as planned--one of the best ones Batilda had ever had. She couldn't believe that the silky purple dress with delicate lace was for her, and Allcott was glad that Batilda loved her present, and most of all, loved him more than anything. Night soon fell, and Allcott and Batilda retired to their bedroom. Tired from cutting down the biggest tree he had ever cut, Allcott fell asleep almost instantly.

Allcott found himself in the enchanted forest again, but this time, there weren't any trees, just the bare soil underneath him. As he was ready to leave, he saw an emaciated old woman in a white dress and long, silver hair. She sat still on a stool with her back slouched. As Allcott slowly approached her, he saw the wrinkly skin on the old woman's face and was puzzled to see that it was mixed with an expression of anger and bitterness. The old woman stood up, with a hunch on her back, and pointed her finger at Allcott. With a crackly voice, she said: "I am the tree spirit. The two trees you saw back there were my son and I. We have lived many, many years, long before the village was even inhabited. My son was my sunshine; he brought me happiness. We have lived peacefully in the forest, until this very day you murdered my son, and now you shall pay for it." Allcott was speechless and before he could defend himself, the old woman said to Allcott: "I shall curse the very day you were born, and you shall suffer the pain you have inflicted upon me. You have made me miserable by killing my loved one, and I shall, in return, make the person you love suffer. Your wife, Batilda will soon wake up with a disease that nothing but the eating of human hearts could cure." With a contemptuous smile, the woman continued, "She will suffer through extreme pain, and die painfully unless she eats a human heart, every month." She added emphatically. Allcott was too shocked to respond to what he had just heard. The woman then hobbled along the uneven ground with a wooden stick. She was about to leave when she seemed to have remembered something and chuckled, "Oh, and remember, the heart has to be fresh. It would only

alleviate Batilda's pain if it were a day's old heart at most." A second later, the woman disappeared and everything went pitch black.

Allcott was terrified, and woke up panting with cold sweat all over his forehead. Allcott was relieved that it was just a dream, a bad dream. But it wasn't.

Allcott tried really hard to forget about the woman who claimed to be the tree spirit, but in vain. Allcott couldn't stop thinking about it. The next evening when Allcott came back from work, Batilda was not in the kitchen waiting for him with his favorite ginger ale. Pieces of broken dishes scattered on the floor, and Allcott dashed up to the living room to find Batilda lying in bed. Batilda's face was pale and she was only able to weakly tell Allcott that she was in agony. Allcott's jaw tightened. He shook his head violently. *This couldn't possibly be happening. No, I don't believe it.* It was indeed that horrible nightmare, and it was back to haunt him.

As the days went on, things only grew worse for Batilda. At first she was able to walk around without trouble and prepare simple meals here and there, but soon she fell so ill that she lay in bed most of the time. Allcott was heart stricken and went to the most experienced doctor in the small village. The doctor came every day for the first week, but was convinced that there wasn't anything he could do to help. Allcott wanted to pull his hair out. He was deeply frustrated by the impotency of the doctor. He begged, and begged the doctor to save his wife. But deep in Allcott's heart, he knew what he had to do: Find a victim for his beloved wife.

It was one, chilly night. Allcott ventured into the graveyard far out in the outskirt of the village, and set his mind to do what he came to do--find a heart for Batilda. It was full moon, but Allcott could barely see where the tombstones were placed. He tripped and fell flat on his face. Allcott stood up unsteadily and tried to brush off the dirt from his face and eyes. Allcott prayed to God and began his work. He took out an old shovel and dug out a body. The repugnant smell of the dead body made Allcott want to puke, but in order to save his wife, he

mustered up his courage and took out the black heart and went home. He washed it with clean water and tried to make it as palatable as possible. He served the heart to his wife. The bowl of meat surprised Batilda, who was used to the simple meals of bread and cheese. Because Batilda was suffering so much beyond her control, she ate it cheerfully, thinking that Allcott had prepared the meat to make her feel stronger. The taste of meat was a pleasant shock to Batilda; she savored the salty and juicy flavor in every bite. However, to Allcott's despair, it didn't work. Batilda felt even worse the next day.

Allcott was desperate. His beloved wife was dying and he wasn't just going to stand by and let her die. Allcott was confounded. He did exactly what the old woman said. He searched through his memory trying to remember what the old woman had said, and realized that he missed out on probably the most important detail. A fresh bloody heart. Yes, a heart of a person who hadn't been dead for more than a day. It was a terrifying thought but Allcott had to stick with it. He would kill a person tonight at midnight and dig the heart out.

The old shoemaker came to Allcott's mind. Bill was a kind and cheerful old man. He lived happily with his wife, Eva, in their cozy home down the street. Bill had just had his eightieth birthday, and the years of working as a shoemaker had exhausted him. Allcott came to realize that he needed to find a vulnerable victim, whom he could kill easily. Bill seemed to fit the category. Allcott was torn, however. Bill had been a benevolent man, and never hesitated to help anyone in the village. Allcott didn't want to kill Bill, but he needed to save his beautiful wife before it was too late.

The night finally came.

Allcott shivered in the cold night air. He had been waiting for Bill for some time now. Bill, as Allcott discovered one day, would take a stroll alone in the woods after dinner. The wind howled and it was quiet, almost tranquil. Except Allcott couldn't feel peace as blood raced through his body; he knew he would become a murderer tonight. Then he heard a noise. Allcott strained to see under the half covered moon and suddenly, he heard steady footsteps.

This is it, thought Allcott. Allcott could hear his own heart beating furiously, and he held onto his axe even tighter with his sweaty palms. He could almost see a human shadow now, only a few feet away.

It all happened so quickly. With a huge blow to the back of his head, Bill fell and the scream echoed itself in the woods.   Peering rapidly all around himself, Allcott struggled to dig out the heart. Blood smeared all over his shirt and hand as it flowed interminably. Allcott tried to stand up, but his legs failed to carry him through the woods. Holding the warm and slippery heart still dripping blood in his palm, Allcott slumped down next to the bloody body he had killed with repeated blows, gasping for air. At the thought of his wife, Allcott plodded home through the bloody soil.

Batilda was deep in sleep when Allcott got home. He tiptoed and washed the fresh heart with clean water, sliced it up and put them into the boiling water. With some dressing, Batilda ate it without protest and the next morning, she was feeling much better. It was a miracle. Batilda was in the kitchen preparing breakfast in the morning. Allcott wasn't able to sleep the next few days and was convinced that he would never be able to sleep again. He kept the secret to himself though, fearing that his wife would refuse to eat the meat if she knew just what it really was.

The next day, news that Bill the shoemaker died in the forest spread like wild fire. Villagers were alarmed, and were in disbelief upon hearing the news of the now heartless man. Things resumed to normal soon after, and Batilda was getting better and better. She no longer felt the aching pain in the heart, and smiled as sweetly as before. Allcott was happy, and he had decided to live with this horrible secret for the rest of his life. However, his conscience was eating his heart away, and he felt miserable. Seeing all the people dying before his hands, Allcott found himself more and more like a monster. It became a routine, and soon Allcott became callous to the murders. Allcott decided to murder people he wasn't

acquainted with, to make life easier and more bearable. Young children, adults, teenagers, anyone who haplessly walked on the street on that very day of the month, were murdered.

Allcott had gotten more adroit at taking care of the dead bodies, and prepared even tastier meals of the heart. However, the peaceful days didn't last long when Batilda found out. One night, Batilda woke up from a terrible nightmare and found Allcott gone. She was bewildered and got up instantly to see in the dim room where Allcott went. As she looked out the window, she almost fainted. Batilda could not conceive what she saw that night. Allcott killed what seemed to be a young girl, and ripped her heart out.

Batilda staggered listlessly back to bed and was shocked by what she had witnessed. It was the most horrible thing she had ever seen. Batilda pretended to sleep as she heard footsteps on the staircase, and it was Allcott carrying a plate of tasty meat again. She looked closely, and sure enough, it was made of the heart. Batilda felt sick and wanted to throw up. *All these months*, she thought. *All the hearts that I have eaten...*Batilda couldn't continue. It was too much to even think about. She couldn't hold herself back anymore, and screamed. Allcott easily guessed what had happened, and begged Batilda to eat the heart for him. To Allcott's surprise, Batilda resisted fiercely. She kept shaking her head and tears ran down her cheek. Allcott was ashamed and pained to hear that his beloved wife had learned the burdensome truth. But what needed to be done had to be done--Allcott forced the meat down her throat. Batilda struggled to fight back.

"Please," said Batilda, "just let me die. "

"No," said Allcott firmly, "I couldn't possibly live without you."

Batilda loved Allcott and she knew he loved her with all his heart. He would even risk being sentenced to death and hanged just to save her.

"I can't live without you," he whispered next to Batilda.

Allcott knew he couldn't let Batilda leave this world without him.

After that, Allcott decided to let Batilda rest for a few days, until the next month when the nightmare would repeat itself again. Batilda had been depressed since the last time Allcott forced the meat upon her. She had never seen Allcott so brutal before. Batilda began to feel the mistrust in Allcott; that after all, he didn't care how she felt. Observing that Batilda was depressed and became indifferent to him, Allcott was distraught. Fearing that Batilda would again lie to him and throw away the meat that was no longer desirable to her, Allcott made sure next time he would see her swallow the whole thing. But then, a dreadful thought entered his mind. *What if she ran away because she was so miserable?* Allcott fixed the doorknob and inserted a lock. With only one key, there was no way Batilda could do anything during the day while he was gone to harm herself. Every day before Allcott left for work, he would make sure to prepare all her meals and locked the door.

Days followed**,** and Batilda sank into a serious depression. She no longer knew if Allcott loved her, to a point of locking her in a bedroom. *How awful,* thought Batilda. She lived in constant fear that Allcott would force her to eat the heart. Batilda knew this nightmare was never going away, that she would either have to eat human hearts or suffer her illness. She hated her life. She hated herself. Batilda couldn't bear this any longer, and begged once more for Allcott to let her die. But Allcott was stubborn and instead tied her up, so he could force feed her.

Batilda barely felt alive. She wanted to be dead. Under a sudden impulse, Batilda ran herself really hard into the wall. She crushed her skull, and blood poured onto the floor. When Allcott came home and saw Batilda lying in a pool of blood, he was bewildered. All the things he had done to keep her by his side and all the struggle he had been through were only in vain. Batilda was dead. Allcott suddenly realized that all he had done only made him a monster: to the point of forcing Batilda to eat human's hearts and locking her in a room. Without a second thought, Allcott took a candle and lit everything on fire, including himself.