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Percy B. Shelley



A Vicissitude in Four Acts

.. By ..

John Franklyn Phillips



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Printed by the Author in an Edition of Fifty Copies

NEW YORK, 1908

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FOREWORD

In this delineation of the philosopher-poet's character, my chief aim has been to state intelligently his side of The Question which circumstances compelled him to decide. In doing this, I feel that I have paid him the highest tribute; for, although he has had many biographers, none were sufficiently akin to him in intellect and temperament to fully comprehend the *master morality* of his actions during the summer of 1814.

J. F. P.

PERSONS CONCERNED.

PERCY BYSSHE SHELLEY, age 22.

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN, age 16.

CLARA MARY JANE CLAIRMONT, age 16.

HARRIET SHELLEY, age 19.

THOMAS JEFFERSON HOGG, a few years older than
Shelley.

THOMAS LOVE PEACOCK, age 28.

WILLIAM GODWIN, age 58.

MRS. GODWIN, age unknown.

HOOHAM, a publisher.

CHILD.

DRIVER.

POSTBOY.

SERVANT.

TIME: 1814.

DESCRIPTION OF CHARACTERS.

Percy Bysshe Shelley: A tall, slender youth with a slight stoop which makes him appear of ordinary height. His brown curly hair, long and bushy and unkempt, his sensitive mouth and large blue eyes denote his poetic proclivities; while the expensive but untidy dress, with throat exposed, the small, irregular features and very small head, and the shrill and slightly discordant voice are suggestive of ideas which are not commonplace. Enthusiasm dominates all his actions.

Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin: A young girl just budding into womanhood. Her hazel eyes, pale face and well-proportioned figure, constitute an admirable combination of feminine loveliness. She wears a frock of tartan, somewhat out of date. Her piercing look is sufficient evidence of a strong mind. Her manner is unconventional, sometimes bold, and even on occasion imperious.

Clara Mary Jane Clairmont: Dark eyes, dark hair, olive cheeks, brilliant, ardent, witty, pleasure-loving, indolent and discontented. By nature romantic, with a taste for gaiety and sensual pleasures. She calls herself "Claire," which is more fashionable than Jane—the name her family insist upon calling her—and shows a fondness for aristocratic surroundings which the Godwins cannot afford. Egoism, which is only another name for naturalness, purity of self-respect and intelligent sincerity, is pre-eminently the motive power of her existence.

Harriet Shelley: A premature young woman, good-looking, and capable of strong feeling, but rather cold,

stoical and indifferent. She is just a trifle haughty, and her dress, although not ostentatious, shows an inclination to extravagance.

Thomas Jefferson Hogg: A typical young Londoner of some means and a taste for literature. He is a lawyer by profession, and an epicurean in the popular sense of the word by nature. The knowledge of life which he has gained has made him much more practical than Shelley. He is also cynical, although his cynicism is mitigated by a good-natured disposition.

Thomas Love Peacock: A tall, handsome young man of the conventional type. His dark blue eyes and bright brown hair, extravagant in its disarray, are symbols of keen ironic wit and the studied precision of a gentleman of *belles lettres*. He is an admirer of ancient art and literature, and a warm friend of Shelley's.

William Godwin: A short, stout, thick-set old gentleman with a fair complexion and a bald head of unusual size. Although he is in fairly comfortable circumstances, one would not think so by looking at his dark, plain and old-fashioned clothes. He is a non-resistant, an ancient Tolstoian in a state of mental decline. The large silver watch which he carries is continually consulted as if he were afraid of forgetting something.

Mrs. Godwin: An ordinary, middle-class English woman, probably fifty years of age. She is disagreeable whenever she can be so with impunity, especially to her step-daughter, Mary Godwin, whom she hates most cordially. She is also liable on the slightest provocation to give vent to a violent temper, which is seldom checked except by fear.

ACT I.

William Godwin's study, Skinner Street, London, on the morning of July 8th. In the back are two windows with shelves of old books between. In front, on the left, is a writing table and two chairs, over which hangs the picture of Mary Wollstonecraft. Farther back, on the left, is a door. In front, on the right, is another door, partly covered by a curtain. A tea table, with glasses and glass pitcher, is in front of the open window to the right, around which chairs are placed. Mrs. Godwin is peevishly dusting the book-shelves, while Claire is sitting at the writing table reading a book.

MRS. GODWIN: The Lord only knows what is going to happen to us next! Godwin just got quieted down and stopped writing those awful books, when Shelley came to us with his infamous notoriety. I half expect to be murdered by some of their revolutionary admirers or arrested by the police.

CLAIRE: Oh, mama! Why be so cranky and old-fashioned? You know papa and Shelley are advanced thinkers and you ought to be proud of them.

MRS. GODWIN (*looking at her sharply*): One would almost think, sometimes, that you were Godwin's daughter to hear you talk. Your own father never entertained such crazy notions as you attribute to *advanced thinkers*. I consider them absolutely demoralizing! Just think of those tramps who came here this morning, looking for *Mr. Shelley*. They had the effrontery to ask me if I were his *mother* or his *wife*! (*Claire smiles.*)

CLAIRE: They complimented you.

MRS. GODWIN: Jane Clairmont! You dare to say that! Me, the mother of this fanatical friend of Godwin's—this boy who reads, and eats bread while walking the streets of London—this miserable person—this—that—why, his own wife can't even live with him!

CLAIRE (*sarcastically*): Goodness! He's a monster!

MRS. GODWIN: You are a very saucy girl. When I was a young woman I was taught to respect my mother.

CLAIRE (*wearily*): Oh, spare me that hackneyed, ridiculous reproach. We're living in England in 1814; not China, or any other back-world country, where parental tyranny is maintained. Heaven knows I have a hard enough time existing in our poverty without your adverse dissertations.

MRS. GODWIN: And Heaven knows you have been as expensive as five ordinary children. And now—you are up-holding Shelley's libertinism, radicalism, anarchy—oh! that I should ever live to see this day!

CLAIRE (*angrily*): Please look here, mother! I'm getting tired of your continual fault-finding. I'm not going to submit to your eternal caviling. Mr. Shelley is a friend of papa's and Mary's and mine, and you quit traducing him. You can't bully me like you try to everybody else.

MRS. GODWIN (*snapping like a whipped dog*): Insulted! insulted!! by my own flesh and blood! If your dead father— (*A knock.*)

CLAIRE: Come in. (*Hogg enters.*)

HOGG: Good-morning!

CLAIRE: Good-morning, Mr. Hogg! You called for your book, I presume?

HOGG: Yes; Shelley left it here last night, so I dropped around to get it. Your brother told me to come right up.

CLAIRE: It is on top of papa's writing table; but (*getting up*) won't you stay a little and join me in a glass of iced tea?

HOGG: Thank you; I will.

MRS. GODWIN: I am glad, Mr. Hogg, that Jane has found someone who is congenial to her. It seems her mother is a nuisance. (*She goes out. Hogg looks inquiringly at Claire, who is pouring the tea.*)

CLAIRE: Oh, don't pay any attention to mama. She has had another cranky spell because I defended Shelley when she ranted against him. Please be seated.

HOGG (*as they sit down at tea table*): I see; she objects to Shelley's radicalism. Does she have them often?

CLAIRE: Why, yes; mama is not as young as she was once—disagreeable, I mean.

HOGG (*drinking tea*): Yes, I know. It is a natural mental decline, although some people escape. This tea is excellent—won't you have some lemon?

CLAIRE (*taking a piece*): Thank you. I glanced through your book—"Voltaire's Letters on the Christian Religion"—but I couldn't discover much of his world-famous wit in it.

HOGG: No, there is not much wit in his "Letters," but he said somewhere that when a woman is no longer acceptable to man she turns to God. That's pretty keen, you know.

CLAIRE: Goodness! Mr. Hogg. Do you enjoy such cynical ideas?

HOGG: Well, probably he is a little over-estimated. Ridicule was the only thing in which he excelled, and that he used against Atheism. I presume that a step-daughter of the author of "Political Justice" is free from all theistic religions?

CLAIRE: Yes, indeed. Shelley has told us of the experience you and he had, when you were both ex-

pelled from Oxford for publishing the "Necessity of Atheism."

HOGG: True, I was expelled on account of the pamphlet, although I did not even help in writing it. Shelley was both author and publisher. By-the-bye, you have not told me what you think of "Queen Mab"?

CLAIRE: I think it is a wonderful and splendid piece of work, but I would hardly call it a poem.

HOGG: Why?

CLAIRE: It lacks in technique, for one thing. It seems to me more of a versified philosophic thesis, or a poetic essay. As poetry—it is far below Byron's "Childe Harold's Pilgrimage."

HOGG: I do not agree with you. Mere art without an underlying current of thought, in my estimation, is inferior to didactic art—artistic philosophy. I will admit that Byron is a finer poet than Shelley, but as a writer—Shelley, I think, excels. He is unquestionably the deeper thinker of the two.

CLAIRE: That may be so, or not—but we were speaking of poetry. The ease with which Byron handles the Spenserian stanza, the vividness of his imagination, the beauty of his word painting, and best of all, the clearness of his style—I consider, places him above all English poets—Shakespeare included.

HOGG: I am afraid our tastes in literature are somewhat different, and you seem to be a great admirer of Lord Byron. In fact, he has a reputation of being rather a profligate fellow, around whom many girl moths flutter.

CLAIRE: Do I understand that you believe me to be infatuated with Lord Byron?

HOGG: I do not know, but I do know you are a very attractive girl.

CLAIRE (*obviously pleased*): Please do not try to take advantage of my age, Mr. Hogg. You see, I

know of your unhappy episode with Harriet, although Shelley was not my informer.

HOGG: Claire, I—— (*Mrs. Godwin comes in.*)

MRS. GODWIN: Jane, are you ever——

CLAIRE: Mama, Mary said she was going to bake some pies. You had better stop her, or she will make a terrible mess in the kitchen.

MRS. GODWIN (*forgetting her intention to annoy Claire, indignantly*): She is going to bake some pies, is she? I most assuredly will stop her. (*She goes out, slams door. Slight embarrassment.*)

CLAIRE: One must lie occasionally to protect oneself from annoyances.

HOGG: Exactly; I have also found it necessary. Just as your mother interrupted us, I called you Claire for the first time—are you angry?

CLAIRE (*smiling*): No; why should I be, Mr. Hogg? I'm very young.

HOGG: Not too young to handle a woman's weapons, though. Why did you refer to my episode with Harriet?

CLAIRE: Because I believe that you began by complimenting her—possibly as you complimented me just now.

HOGG: Harriet was married and you are not. And besides, I thought you approved of Mary Wollstonecraft's and Shelley's liberal views on—on freedom in matrimony?

CLAIRE: So I do; but there is a difference in freedom in matrimony and—talking flippantly to a sixteen-year-old girl.

HOGG: Oh, don't dwell on your age, Claire. Harriet eloped when she was sixteen. Come, let us be good friends—call me Jefferson.

CLAIRE (*pleased, coquettishly*): Jefferson.

HOGG: Now we are getting along capitally. (*In a lowered tone of voice*) How about taking dinner with

me this evening? We can have a private dining-room, if you wish.

CLAIRE: No, Mr. Hogg, I will not; your last remark was not even a disguised compliment.

HOGG (*rising*): Possibly Lord Byron would be more fortunate. (*He gets book and hat.*)

CLAIRE: I am sorry you are going away angry, but you must not talk to me like that. I have never had the pleasure of meeting Lord Byron, but—

(*Shelley excitedly rushes in; a book is protruding from his right-hand coat pocket.*)

SHELLEY: What do you think! I met a friend of Godwin's at Cook's Hotel who not only attacked "The Rights of Women," but says Godwin agrees with him that the book has a degenerating tendency.

HOGG: Who?

SHELLEY: I did not stop to inquire his name. But what has happened to Godwin? Is he in his dotage? Has the greatest philosopher of England become a worshiper of modern social conditions?

CLAIRE: Mama thinks papa is very radical.

SHELLEY: Your mother does not think at all—she only thinks she thinks. (*Mrs. Godwin has come in unobserved by Shelley, and overheard his last remark.*)

MRS. GODWIN: Mr. Shelley, I must say you are a gentleman.

SHELLEY: Pardon me, Mrs. Godwin, but I am not. I would rather be an Egyptian mummy than an English gentleman. (*Mrs. Godwin goes out, slams door.*) This is an outrage! Is all philosophy worthy of the name to be digested into immorality? (*Passing his fingers through his hair.*) Am I forever to be— (*Godwin comes in. Shelley rushes at him.*) Did you ever say "The Rights of Women" had a degenerating tendency?

GODWIN (*slowly*): Good-morning, Mr. Shelley. You have evidently been talking to Mr. Drake.

SHELLEY: I do not know who it was. However, I never thought you would become a Royalist.

GODWIN (*sitting down at writing table*): You are excited, my dear young man. Collect yourself, and I will explain my position. (*Hogg sits down.*)

SHELLEY: Yes, yes, what is it?

GODWIN: When I was your age, I also was enthused by revolutionary doctrines. Permit me to say, Mr. Shelley, that you are a very young man at this period of your development; and I believe you will become less violent as you advance in years.

HOGG: That is usually the way.

GODWIN (*to Shelley, continuing*): I grant you, sir, that my former wife was right in many of her views; nevertheless, we must endure the present system of society until it can be gradually changed. To revolutionize society would be the greatest catastrophe that could possibly happen. My conversation with Mr. Drake, to which you referred, was to the effect that "The Rights of Women" has a tendency to incite the people to anarchy; and the same indictment, I am sorry to say, stands against my "Inquiry Concerning Political Justice."

SHELLEY: What do you recommend, then?

GODWIN: Universal education and non-resistance. If revolutionary radicals did not continually challenge those who cause evil—evil would gradually subside for the want of stimulus. I believe that violence begets violence, and that resisting neither good nor evil is the only way to bring about harmony and peace.

SHELLEY (*walking about*): Of course, you are older than I, Godwin; and I respect your greater experience, but as a matter of principle I must defend your former point of view against your present theories of peace—peace secured by oppression, starvation and misery. If force begets force, force also stops force,

as physics demonstrates—and that is what we Revolutionists are trying to do.

GODWIN: Yes, I know.

SHELLEY: And you also know very well that government and its representatives assassinate liberty at every step: it taxes people against their will and compels unwilling labor. You admit all this, Godwin, and in the name of all that is sacred, how can two forces invade each other at the same time?

GODWIN: Of course they cannot, Mr. Shelley, but the revolutionists merely aggravate the invasion.

SHELLEY: Goethe and Lamarck believe on fairly substantial evidence that the human race has evolved from lower forms of animals; that is, life is a struggle for existence, and he or they who cease to struggle are quickly eliminated. I think the simile of a drifting log, and a well-built ship under full sail, illustrates my meaning. Which of the two has the better chance to reach the desired port?

GODWIN: Well, well, time alone will reveal the truth.

SHELLEY (*sitting on the edge of a chair*): Your friend Drake laid particular stress on Mary Wollstonecraft's objection to existing political economy.

HOGG (*rising*): And I most emphatically agree with him. Take the United States for an example of monetary disruption. The new Republic came very nearly being ruined by the lack of revenue.

SHELLEY (*also getting up*): That is just it—the pecuniary system was merely disturbed. It was not destroyed—only its food supply, the slave labor of the landless, was cut off.

HOGG (*to Godwin*): That is one subject on which Shelley and I will probably always differ. Why he advocates taking care of an army of lazy, worthless tramps, I cannot understand.

CLAIRE: I'm sorry, Shelley, but I also must dis-

agree on taking care of tramps. If some people have more brains than others, I do not believe in preventing them from forging ahead of the rabble.

SHELLEY (*sitting down again*): If you will allow me, I will try to make you understand Mary Wollstonecraft's economic thesis, as I understand it.

HOGG: Proceed.

SHELLEY: She has propounded the expression that man is a land animal.

HOGG: But you want to take the land away from those who have earned it by their brains and give it to people who are too indolent to work for it.

SHELLEY: Let us see how it was got by those who have earned it by their brains.

CLAIRE: By superior ability, of course.

SHELLEY: On the contrary, in many instances large tracts have been given by kings to nobles for services *rendered by their peasants* in war. That was the original way in which land was *earned*—by the price of forcing others to shed blood. And afterwards it was bequeathed from father to son; that is, children receive wealth and power without personal exertion.

HOGG: Well, granting that that was wrong: every man to-day is free to acquire, by his labor and thrift, whatever he is able to, and all are protected by law.

CLAIRE: That's right, Mr. Hogg, stand up for your profession.

HOGG: Yes, without law do you suppose any woman would dare to leave the house? and even in-doors no woman would be safe.

SHELLEY: No, nor will she ever be without order, and the existence of law is an acknowledgement of disorder. Can you not see that the two terms are contrary to each other?

GODWIN: Mr. Hogg said that every man to-day is free to earn what he can.

HOGG: Thank you, Mr. Godwin; I almost forgot

that point. Well, Bysse, what have you to say in reply?

SHELLEY (*excitedly running his fingers through his hair*): How can one get what is already owned, taken, protected by a police force?

HOGG: By giving a just equivalent for it in service.

SHELLEY: This is the way he *gets it*, whatever you mean by *it*. Imagine an armed soldier over here; (*points to right*) and an unarmed slave over there (*points to left*).

HOGG: Well?

SHELLEY: The soldier points his musket at the slave and says: Do so-and-so or I will take your life.

CLAIRE: I don't follow you.

SHELLEY: Land, which is indispensable to man, has been monopolized by force and is owned by a certain class. That class, through its ownership of the land, controls the money—the necessities of existence. It says to the landless: Do so-and-so or we will not permit you to get the products of our soil and you shall starve to death. This condition is maintained by *law*, Jefferson, which you said protected *all*.

HOGG: Admitting for the sake of argument that what you say is not greatly exaggerated—do you not advocate robbing the robber?

SHELLEY: We are arguing in a circle. I just fully explained that to Godwin. If no resistance were made, the workers would be worked beyond all limits of endurance. At present life is a battle: the rich fight to oppress the poor and the poor fight to live. It is a struggle between the many and the few—and, if the many ceased to struggle, and placed themselves at the mercy of the few—the Spanish Inquisition would be insignificant compared with the Horror which would follow. I am surprised, Jefferson, at such a paradox as robbing the robber.

GODWIN: Allow me to suggest that you were discussing political economy.

CLAIRE: Why, yes, so we were; and Shelley objected to people accumulating wealth.

SHELLEY: There is no wealth but the labor of man. Were the mountains of gold and the valleys of silver, the world would not be one grain of corn the richer; no one comfort would be added to the human race. In consequence of—— (*A faint knock.*)

GODWIN: Did some one knock? (*Claire opens the door. A child of seven or eight years old, pale and emaciated, barefooted and dressed in rags, stands there.*)

CLAIRE: Well, little boy?

CHILD: Please, ma'am; mother is very sick, an' sent me to find Mr. Shelley, an' the loidy down stairs sent me hup 'ere.

SHELLEY (*going to him*): Come in, Tommy. What is the matter with mother?

CHILD: Please, sir; she's 'ot all over, an' drinks the hawfulest lot o' water, an' she haint got no money to pay the rent, an' the landlord says as 'ow we must go hout to-morrow, an' sister is gettin' 'ot too, an' we haint 'ad nothin' to eat, sir, and I'm so 'ungry.

SHELLEY (*to the rest*): Here is one example of the result of economic conditions; yes, the fruit of non-resistance; the by-product of our semi-civilization.

HOGG: Do you know him?

SHELLEY: Yes, I know him. I saved his mother from being turned out to die once before. Mrs. Robinson is a widow with two children, and I have known her to work at the washtub fifteen hours a day—for what? for what?

CLAIRE (*sarcastically*): To supply you with an object for your philanthropic work.

SHELLEY (*continuing, as if he had not heard Claire*): To die when her ability to slave is exhausted.

GODWIN: She evidently has some fever.

SHELLEY (*to the child*): Come along, Tommy; I will go with you to mother.

HOGG (*looking at watch*): I must go, too.

SHELLEY: You had better not come with me—the fever may be contagious.

HOGG: I have not the time, or I would. However, I will be around early to-night to continue translating "Horace."

SHELLEY: Come as early as you please, Jefferson, I will be waiting. (*To Godwin*) I will be right back. Mary and I are going to catalogue some books.

CLAIRE: Good-day, Mr. Hogg. I hope you will call again—we're very informal here, as Shelley will testify.

HOGG: Thank you.

GODWIN (*getting up*): And you must come to dinner with Mr. Shelley, sometime.

HOGG: Thanks; I shall be delighted.

SHELLEY (*taking child's hand*): Come on, Tommy. We will get mother up in no time.

HOGG: Good-bye.

GODWIN: Good-morning, Mr. Hogg. (*They go out.*)

CLAIRE (*arranging tea things*): Some drunken woman wants more brandy, I suppose. Shelley really ought to have a guardian; he is imposed upon by every beggar he meets.

GODWIN: It is unworthy of you to say that, Jane. Mr. Shelley has relieved a great deal of suffering by his liberality. (*Resumes his seat at desk, looks over papers.*)

CLAIRE: Yes, and he can relieve as long as he has a farthing left. He saves them from starvation only to have them get into the same condition again—and then more charity is needed. (*Silence.*) I think it better to let them die and get over their misery at once, than

to prolong their suffering—only to starve in the end.
(*Mrs. Godwin comes in.*)

MRS. GODWIN: Mr. Hookham wants to see you.

GODWIN: I saw him yesterday; I wonder what he can want?

MRS. GODWIN: Shall I say you're busy?

GODWIN: No; please ask him to come up. (*She goes out.*) Will you copy this for me, Jane?

CLAIRE (*taking a paper he gives her*): Certainly, papa. (*She goes out.*)

MRS. GODWIN (*outside*): The weather is uncommonly warm, even for July.

HOOKEHAM (*also outside*): Yes; it is very warm, indeed.

MRS. GODWIN: To your right, Mr. Hookham. (*He comes in.*)

HOOKEHAM: I trust I'm not disturbing you, Mr. Godwin?

GODWIN (*rising, offering a chair*): No, sir; won't you be seated?

HOOKEHAM (*sitting down*): Thank you, sir.

GODWIN: You called to see me about some publication, I presume?

HOOKEHAM: No. Not this time, Mr. Godwin.

GODWIN: No?

HOOKEHAM: No, sir; I have called to see you on a very delicate matter; the communication of which I would be very happy to spare you, as well as myself, did not my conscience compel me to do what I consider my duty—my duty, sir, to inform you; and your right, sir, to know.

GODWIN: You mystify me, Mr. Hookham.

HOOKEHAM: I am speaking, sir, of the significant attentions that Shelley is paying to your daughter, Miss Mary.

GODWIN: Is that so! You astound me!

HOOKEHAM: Yes, sir, just so; if he were a single

man I should think nothing of it—just the congenial companionship of a young gentleman and a young lady—but, as Shelley is a married man who is separated from his wife, and, sir, a man who holds very queer opinions of marriage—I consider it my duty to inform you that they are almost constantly together. That is why I called his attentions significant.

GODWIN: I am greatly indebted to you for this information. May I ask for all the details of their relations with which you think I am unfamiliar?

HOOKHAM: Certainly. They take lonely walks together; frequent St. Pancras Churchyard at night; and I have seen some recent poems of Shelley's which leave little doubt about his intentions.

GODWIN: You do not mean to say, sir, that Mr. Shelley deliberately submitted such a manuscript for publication?

HOOKHAM: No, Mr. Godwin; he accidentally dropped it in the store the other day.

GODWIN: And, Mr. Hookham, do you know if my daughter consciously encourages these attentions that Mr. Shelley pays her?

HOOKHAM: No, sir; I do not.

GODWIN: Again I thank you for admonishing me. As a father, I am naturally anxious to guard my daughter from any folly into which her youthful impulses might lead her.

HOOKHAM (*rising*): As I said before, sir, I have only done what I considered my duty.

GODWIN (*also rising*): Which I consider a personal kindness. I shall look into the affair at once. By-the-bye, how is the publishing business prospering?

HOOKHAM: Fairly well, Mr. Godwin.

GODWIN: And Mr. Shelley's "Queen Mab"?

HOOKHAM: The poem is not attracting as much attention as we expected.

GODWIN: That is too bad. It is an excellent work

and deserves recognition as such; however, I still believe Mr. Shelley has very promising prospects as an author.

HOOKHAM (*as Godwin opens the door for him*): If I can be of further service, sir, command me. (*They go out. Claire comes in from behind the curtain; runs on tip-toe to the other door; listens; runs back again. Godwin returns; sits down for a moment in meditation.*)

GODWIN (*rising, going to door*): My dear!

MRS. GODWIN (*outside*): What is it?

GODWIN: I wish to see you a minute. (*Mrs. Godwin comes in.*)

MRS. GODWIN (*peevishly*): I'm dusting. What is it you want?

GODWIN (*resuming seat*): Have you noticed anything strange about Mary lately?

MRS. GODWIN: No, except that she is growing very obstinate.

GODWIN: Does she go out much at night?

MRS. GODWIN: No more than usual. What are you trying to find out, anyhow?

GODWIN: Hookham just told me that Mr. Shelley is paying her improper attentions.

MRS. GODWIN: The wretch! I've always said he was capable of anything! but I did not dream he would dare do anything like that. Why do you persist in having him here?

GODWIN: I will look into the affair—please do not mention what I have said to anyone.

MRS. GODWIN: Oh, you'll look into the affair, will you! Why, Godwin, you are totally incompetent to deal with a—with an impudent, crazy man like Shelley. Better let me send him about his business.

GODWIN (*with decision*): I have decided to attend to this affair myself. Please do not interfere with my own way of looking after my own child.

MRS. GODWIN: Oh, very well; suit yourself.

GODWIN: And remember, I do not wish you to allude to my suspicions to anyone. If it is necessary to speak to Mr. Shelley, I will do so.

MRS. GODWIN: After it is too late, I suppose; but I will let you reap the results of your fear of exercising a parent's authority. I'm going to continue my dusting.

GODWIN: Kindly ask Mary to come to me.

MRS. GODWIN: I will—and you please remember, spare the rod and spoil the child. (*She goes out. Mary comes in directly.*)

MARY: You want to see me, papa?

GODWIN: Yes, I want to talk to you about Mr. Shelley.

MARY: Shelley? (*Parrying.*) Has he not been here to-day?

GODWIN: He just left. (*Short pause.*) I want to know what your relations are to him, Mary?

MARY: Why, papa—I do not know why you ask such a question. I consider Shelley a very dear friend, indeed—if that is what you mean.

GODWIN: I want to know what your relations are to him; how you feel towards him; I mean, Mary, do you love him?

MARY: I think we all love him, papa. I am sure you do, and——

GODWIN: You do not understand me. Mr. Hookham just called and informed me that Mr. Shelley is paying you attentions which are improper for a girl to receive, coming, as they do, from a married man.

MARY (*blushing*): I assure you, papa, that Mr. Hookham is mistaken.

GODWIN: He said Mr. Shelley wrote you suggestive poems, and also that you and he took lonely walks together, and frequented St. Pancras Churchyard at night. Is this true, Mary?

MARY: We have taken lonely walks, and gone to

St. Pancras; but there is not the slightest thing in our relation that anyone could object to.

GODWIN: What about the poetry?

MARY: True, he has dedicated a few poems to me—you know how enthusiastic he is about everyone whom he likes—but why Mr. Hookham should infer that there is anything more than friendship existing between us, I am sure I do not know. The poems are just the same as others which you have seen—shall I get them for you?

GODWIN: No; I do not doubt your word, Mary. Now that you have assured me that Mr. Hookham is mistaken, I am perfectly satisfied. However, be very careful about doing anything rashly that Mr. Shelley may suggest. Remember—you are a young girl and should take the best possible care of your—yourself.

MARY (putting her arms around him): Believe me, papa: I do assure you Mr. Hookham is mistaken.

GODWIN (*affected by her demonstrativeness*): There, there, your old father was afraid only of the future; he did not believe his little girl had done anything that she should not do. We will say no more about it. How is our library?

MARY: We are getting along fine.

GODWIN: Mr. Shelley is coming to help you catalogue some books—are they new ones?

MARY: Yes, some that he and Mr. Hogg gave us.

GODWIN: You have not met Mr. Hogg yet, have you?

MARY: No.

GODWIN: He was here this morning with——

CLAIRE (*coming in*): Mama wants the books taken out of the dining room.

MARY: I will go at once. (*She goes out.*)

CLAIRE (*lying to discredit Hookham's information*): Do you know, papa, the other day when I was at Hookham's, he wanted me to sell him some of our

rare works below cost. Did he speak to you about it?

GODWIN: No; when did he say this?

SHELLEY (*coming in*): It is all right; nothing dangerous; the mother and daughter have a low fever, and were actually weak for the want of food. However, they will soon recover. Could you not manage to send them the household washing, Godwin?

GODWIN (*rising, looking at his large silver watch*): I will see, Mr. Shelley; I will consult Mrs. Godwin.

SHELLEY: It would be more than charity. (*To Claire.*) Is Mary ready to commence the books?

CLAIRE: I think so.

GODWIN (*going out*): I have an engagement to dine out to-day. Shall I see you this afternoon?

SHELLEY: I think not; I am going to Mrs. Rob-
inson's at three o'clock.

GODWIN: To-morrow, then?

SHELLEY: Yes. (*Godwin goes out.*)

CLAIRE: You came to see Mary, I suppose?

SHELLEY: Yes; to help her with the books. (*Starting towards the door.*) Let us commence.

CLAIRE: May I talk to you a few moments first?

SHELLEY (*stops*): Certainly.

CLAIRE: Then I want to ask your advice.

SHELLEY: To which you are welcome with all my heart.

CLAIRE (*after a moment's silence*): I have been thinking of leaving home.

SHELLEY: Why? And what would you do?

CLAIRE: I could get a position as governess.

SHELLEY: Maybe you could; but why do you wish to leave? Are not you and Mary dear companions? And your mother and father and——

CLAIRE (*moving about*): Yes, yes; but a girl wants something more than a family and a companion. Every healthy girl with cosmic sap flowing through her veins wants joy, life, and freedom.

SHELLEY: It is only natural that you should; however, something has evidently gone amiss. What is it, Claire?

CLAIRE: Nothing—nothing, except that I want to live my own life in my own way. Why—my mother treats me just as she did six years ago. No one seems to realize that I am developing, changing, growing into womanhood. It's "Jane, do be careful—Jane, you must not do that—Jane, you should not be so forward"—just as if I were a machine made exclusively for parental use.

SHELLEY: Godwin surely does not abuse your individuality?

CLAIRE (*sitting down*): No; papa is good to me; but, as you said a while ago—he is growing old—superannuated.

SHELLEY: Are you very fond of anyone, Claire? Are you in love?

CLAIRE: I have no opportunity here to ever get in love. That is just the trouble. I'm a child of poverty, shut out from the adventures of the world.

SHELLEY: What is it you desire, Claire?

CLAIRE: All that I am capable of enjoying.

SHELLEY: I do not understand you.

CLAIRE: Listen to me: only a short time ago I was satisfied to long for a man who could win my love. I was content to dream of a little cottage far off somewhere in the mountains, surrounded by gay flowers and sweet-singing birds; a fireside of my own, with my children gathered around me as I would sew by the evening fire. (*Getting up.*) But now I am through with dreams and ideals—now I want reality—I want to stand on the floor of satisfaction. You surely would not advise me to remain here in this monotonous tomb.

SHELLEY: No, not if you feel that way, you cannot in justice to yourself remain at Skinner street. But

do not do anything until the end of this month, when I may be able to assist you.

CLAIRE (*joyously*): I knew it! I knew it would happen; I——

SHELLEY (*startled*): You knew?

CLAIRE (*consciously*): Why, er—that, that you would help me.

SHELLEY: I only said I may be able to assist you. I am not positive.

CLAIRE: Let's hope for the best—I sincerely wish you success.

SHELLEY: Wish me success in what?

CLAIRE: That you—that we all may be happy some day.

SHELLEY (*bewildered*): I trust so. (*Short silence.*)

CLAIRE: I have something to tell you—confidentially.

SHELLEY: What?

CLAIRE: Will you promise not to say anything to Mary about it, just now?

SHELLEY: I do not like to make promises, Claire. How long must I remain silent?

CLAIRE: Only a week—maybe a few days.

SHELLEY: Very well, I will promise.

CLAIRE: Hookham has just been here and told papa that you were paying attentions to Mary which were hardly proper from a married man. I listened from (*pointing*) the door.

SHELLEY: No, did he? Hookham came here and told Godwin that!

CLAIRE: Yes; and papa and Mary have——

SHELLEY (*interrupting her*): By all that is sacred! Am I to be hounded by vituperative beasts forever? Claire, I do not blame you for wanting to leave—you can count upon me to——

MARY (*looking in at door*): Shelley!

CLAIRE (*whispers*): Remember your promise.

SHELLEY: Mary! (*He darts over to her, takes her by the hand, and brings her into the room*): I came to help you one-half hour ago, and was sent for by a sick woman.

MARY (*who carries a copy of "Queen Mab"*): Better late than never. Is anything serious the matter with her?

SHELLEY: No, I had the doctor. A low fever; he could not tell exactly what, but nothing contagious.

MARY: Claire and I were wondering why you did not come yesterday. Bye-the-bye, Claire, what have you been telling mama? She insists that I was going to try to poison the family by baking some pies.

CLAIRE (*laughing*): I had quite forgotten—I did send her on a wild goose chase to get rid of her.

MARY: How unkind; however, (*to Shelley*) you have not told us where you were yesterday?

SHELLEY: Yesterday, yesterday, where was I? Oh, yes, Hogg and I did some translating, and I lost all track of the time.

CLAIRE: What book is that you have with you—a new one?

SHELLEY (*taking it out of pocket*): It is Ariosto's "Orlando Furioso"—a delightful epic. I see Mary still carries "Queen Mab."

CLAIRE: Yes; and if I were as closely akin to the author as she is, I suppose I would do the same. But I'm going to leave you now.

SHELLEY: Are you going far?

CLAIRE: Not very—only to the kitchen.

SHELLEY: Oh!

CLAIRE: I'll try to interest mama.

MARY: Do. Tell her Shelley is discoursing on astronomy. (*They all laugh.*)

CLAIRE: That would be a falsehood. (*She goes*)

out. Shelley takes Mary's hand and pats it as if she were a child. He looks earnestly at her.)

MARY: Tell me, Shelley, what is the matter? You look unusually troubled.

SHELLEY: What should a little girl like you want to know about trouble?

MARY: I am not a little girl; there, now!

SHELLEY (*dropping her hand*): Very well, I will call you Miss Godwin. Let us go to the library.

MARY (*seriously, putting her hand on his shoulder*): Laying all joking aside, Shelley, I do not like to see you look sad. Tell me, have you had any further bad news from Harriet?

SHELLEY: No; what further bad news could I have?

MARY (*inadvertently*): Something might have happened to Ianthe.

SHELLEY: I am sure I do not know; Harriet does not write.

MARY: How absurd of me to think such a thing—Of course nothing has happened.

SHELLEY (*to himself*): Poor Ianthe! Weaned from a mother's breast; nursed by a hired woman; cared for by Eliza's hands.

MARY: Why feel so bitter?

SHELLEY: Because she was the cause of Harriet's leaving me. I hate her with all my heart and soul. It is a memory which awakens an inexpressible sensation of disgust and horror to recollect how she caressed my poor child, in whom I may hereafter find the consolation of sympathy. I sometimes feel faint with the fatigue of checking the overflowing of my unbounded abhorrence for this miserable wretch.

MARY: But she means Ianthe no harm.

SHELLEY: No; she is no more than a blind and loathsome worm that cannot see to sting.

MARY (*coming close to him*): Dear Shelley, you

know how much it pains me to see that you are unhappy.

SHELLEY: Does it, honestly, Mary? Do you really care so much?

MARY (*softly*): You know I do— (*He looks straight at her; her eyes drop.*) Yes.

SHELLEY: And yet—

MARY (*going away from him, sitting down*): Let me read again my inscription in my copy of "Queen Mab." (*Opens book; reads.*) This book is sacred to me, and as no other creature shall ever look into it I may write in it what I please—yet what shall I write—that I love the author beyond all powers of expression and that I am parted from him—dearest and only love—by that love we have promised to each other; although I may not be yours, I can never be another's. But I am thine, exclusively thine.

SHELLEY (*excitedly, rushing about*): Do you not see, Mary, that we love each other by the very force of necessity? You are the only power that causes me to exist from day to day. It is—

MARY: Stop, dear. Why talk about the inevitable? Only to think, for making just one little mistake we must be miserable the rest of our lives.

SHELLEY: I will be damned if you shall—or I will. I—

MARY: Shelley! I will not listen to you. (*She runs out of room.*)

ACT II.

A corner of old St. Pancras Churchyard at fading twilight. Monuments and tombstones, almost all of which exhibit a cross and the initials R. I. P., are seen in every direction. The place has not been used in many years, and consequently is in a state of dilapidation. In the back ground is a high wooden fence. To the right, a corner of the church can be seen. To the left, Mary Wollstonecraft's grave is made prominent by a fine weeping-willow. Mary enters from the back, walks slowly to the willow tree, against which she leans and is silent for a few moments.

MARY (*speaking to her mother's grave*): Oh, mother! Can you not help me? It seems as though you were urging me on, to break all chains of conventionality and follow wherever this great love which has come to me may lead to.

CLAIRE (*out of sight*): May I come in?

MARY: Yes, for a little while.

CLAIRE (*entering*): How is it you're alone?

MARY: I thought I would come a little early—it is so warm in the house.

CLAIRE: I feel like talking this evening, but I'll go as soon as he comes. I saw him this afternoon. (*Claire sits alongside of Mary. Pause.*) Have you ever thought, Mary, what a mockery it was to inter a woman of your mother's genius in this haunt of superstition?

MARY: Yes, many, many times; her heart was too loving, her intellect too broad, to receive the impress of creed or dogma.

CLAIRE: She was too advanced for her contemporaries. Just think what maudlin idiots the most of these men and women resting here were—yes, and the living are no better—your Uncle Charles, for example.

MARY: Uncle Charles was no better nor worse than the generation that he lived in.

CLAIRE: What of that? That doesn't excuse his abominable conduct towards your mother.

MARY: You mean after mama had separated from Imlay——

CLAIRE: Yes, when he offered to procure her a position as weaver in a woolen mill, if she would send her "illegal" child to a foundling's home.

MARY: Fanny! It was a brutal thing to say, but mama understood the social pressure which caused him to regard family honor as sacred.

CLAIRE: And consign to slavery his "erring" sister.

CLAIRE: And sacrifice ourselves to alien things—Claire, and do away with evil by the power of kindness and affection.

CLAIRE: And sacrifice ourselves to alien things: offer ourselves up to misery on the altar of Love and Humanity. Well, I for one will not.

MARY: If every one were as good as you, there would be no need to emancipate our fellow-beings. However, even as things are, I know you are ready to do your share of the world's work. You are not so indifferent to progress and philosophy as you try to make people believe.

CLAIRE: Oh! Mary, why persist in trying to make an angel of me, when I am thoroughly bad in every sense of the word.

MARY: You bad, Claire? You, my life-long, devoted friend! You would not like another than yourself to say that.

CLAIRE: Don't you understand that I am only your

friend because it gives me pleasure to be? If it afforded me more pleasure to hate and torment you, I should most assuredly do so.

MARY: But you are usually on the side of goodness and the oppressed.

CLAIRE: It is pleasant to me to fight oppression. As for goodness—I despise it.

MARY (*getting up*): Listen! What was that? It is not time for Shelley, but I am sure I heard footsteps.

CLAIRE: Oh, probably some morbid person~~x~~ come to commune with the dead. Look, Mary! Here he comes. Why, it's papa—(*to Godwin*) whatever brings you here?

GODWIN (*coming in, seemingly surprised*): I might ask the same question of you, but to answer you, I was restless and thought to get some inspiration for my new book by an evening walk. (*Turning.*) Have you girls noticed what a delightful twilight we have to-night, and how picturesque the old church looks?

MARY (*to Claire*): Get him away from here.

CLAIRE (*to Godwin*): By-the-bye, papa, I quite forgot; I met Mr. Hogg this afternoon, and he said he was particularly anxious to see you, and he would call at eight o'clock this evening.

GODWIN (*looking at silver watch*): I had better return then immediately. It is nearly eight o'clock now. I suppose you will be back soon?

CLAIRE: Yes, very soon. (*Godwin goes out.*)

MARY (*sitting down*): Thank Goodness, Shelley is not early. Well, go on and tell me why you despise goodness?

CLAIRE: Wait a minute—did it occur to you, Mary, that papa may have been spying on you?

MARY (*incredulously*): Papa spying on anyone! I do not believe it, Claire; you are too—but wait—I

do not know but that you are right. Papa did speak to me about coming here at night with Shelley.

CLAIRE: Yes, I know.

MARY: You know? Tell me, how did you find it out?

CLAIRE: I listened when Hookham called. Now do you understand why I despise goodness?

MARY: You mean that when Hookham told papa his suspicions, he did an act of goodness?

CLAIRE: Yes; as he said himself, he discharged his duty which is tantamount to goodness—that old worn-out idea of Christianity in a new dress. We must define terms by the meanings that usage gives them, otherwise we do not represent things truly, but as we should like to have them.

MARY: That is a matter of choice. But try as you will, you cannot tell me why you are bad.

CLAIRE: Because I would steal and rob, cheat and murder, to gain my point, if occasion required it.

MARY: Claire! I never heard you talk this way before. Do tell me what is the matter?

CLAIRE: Oh! nothing new, only I'm driven to desperation by the racking monotony of the life I am forced to lead.

MARY: Why not get something definite to do, something to occupy your mind—some work, some study, and by and bye home duties will take their place. I am sure you would be much happier if you only had an object in life.

CLAIRE: Yes, I tried that as governess—sold my freedom for £2 10s. a month. No, thanks, I want no more slavery, no more drudging for another's interest, for me.

MARY: Even so—you do not want to shirk all responsibility, do you?

CLAIRE: Yes, I do; I only want to please myself. I don't care that (*snapping her fingers*) for others,

nor those stupid, meaningless, abstract words, such as responsibility, morality, duty, honor, justice, etc. Why should I make a slave of myself to an intangible essence? Why should I bow submissively before other people's thoughts, called philosophy?

MARY: Surely, thinking is the greatest achievement of man, for without thought we would be on a level with beasts. And, the best thoughts supply us with conceptions that should inspire us to do nobler things, to help each other.

CLAIRE: Thought is all right only when it is my pleasure to use it. The difference between you and me is, that I use thought, and you allow thought to use you. Not even thought shall be my master. And conceptions—they have meanings only for people who believe in them, like religions.

MARY (*annoyed*): I did not ask you, Claire, for your opinion of my slavishness to philosophy. I see you are in a very bad humor. Shelley asked me to—

CLAIRE (*putting her arm around her*): Forgive me, dear; I did not mean to hurt you.

MARY: I did feel hurt for a second, but never mind. What you were saying is interesting. I understand now why you always disagree with Shelley about the workingmen.

CLAIRE: Yes, I'd work them twice as hard, if I were their mistress. (*Pause.*)

MARY: The women, too?

CLAIRE: Yes.

MARY: I thought you agreed with mama in her "Rights of Women"?

CLAIRE: So I did; and I admire the work even yet, but I cannot agree with it the way I have felt lately.

MARY: You mean that you are bored at home?

CLAIRE: Partly that, but I also feel a great surging passion, a something *new* being born within me. Oh! I don't know how to say it, a love for wickedness.

MARY: Maybe you really are in love?

CLAIRE: I only wish I were! Oh, for some great, big brute of a man to try to master—some monster who would compel everything to obey him; yes, even beat me until I fainted from his blows.

MARY: I think I partly understand you and can even sympathize with you. I, too, have experienced something of that same feeling. I do not mean to injure anyone—but to be loved by a great Force that would fight for human glorification, that would struggle against present evils. I wonder what it can be!

CLAIRE: I know.

MARY: What?

CLAIRE: The arrival of blood-red womanhood that is pulsating through our veins.

MARY: But it is such an all-consuming passion, I am afraid of it. I want to make it obedient to justice, at least, my conception of justice.

CLAIRE: I don't. The Force that drives me on to enjoyment and selfishness is me; it says, make everything you can your own; it is Life itself. (*Passionately*) You must take me away, you must take me with you.

MARY: Where? I am not going away.

CLAIRE: There is no use trying to deceive me any longer, Mary.

MARY: I am not trying to deceive you, Claire. What do you mean?

CLAIRE (*Looking at her*): Can it be that you really do not know?

MARY (*annoyed*): For the last time, Claire, I will ask you what you mean?

CLAIRE: I mean that Shelley loves you. (*Pause.*)

MARY: Yes, I know it.

CLAIRE: And don't you know that it is only a question of time before he will insist on your going away with him? Why, I believe he is about to ask

you now—this very night. He was uncommonly excited when I saw him late this afternoon.

MARY: No, I do not know that, Claire.

CLAIRE: Well, I do. And what are you going to say to him?

MARY: That I shall not go—should he ask me such a question.

CLAIRE (*warmly*): You, the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft, her professed disciple and co-worker, renouncing the man you love because conventional morality says you *must*!

MARY: It is not morality; I was not thinking of that.

CLAIRE: What then? in the name of common sense.

MARY: I was thinking what an effect such an action on my part would have on our parents, Shelley's wife and his child.

CLAIRE (*sarcastically*): Oh, I see! Not morality—only humane feelings.

MARY: Yes.

CLAIRE: In other words, respect other people's feelings and disrespect your own.

MARY: Even so, there are more than two people to be made unhappy by our eloping, and why should the many be made miserable at the expense of the few?

CLAIRE: So Christianity is right, after all. Self-renunciation is the noblest thing in life. The early fanatics sacrificed themselves to God, and now, you wish to sacrifice yourself to Humanity.

MARY: If it is necessary, I am ready to do so.

CLAIRE (*argumentatively*): Well, who is Humanity? You, papa, Shelley, Hogg, and myself? No; we are individuals, we do things; we suffer, enjoy and the like. But Humanity does nothing, in fact, it is nothing except an essence, a conception, a new God.

MARY: But Shelley's wife and her child are individuals; papa and mama are also individuals, all of whom would be very unhappy if I eloped.

CLAIRE: Nonsense! But how in the name of reason is anyone or everybody going to be elevated and freed, if we are all going to be slaves to anyone or everybody, eh? Don't you see that the one or ones that you submit to, are inexorable, tyrannical? When individuals cease creating and accepting judges and masters then we may enjoy something that will not be a mockery to liberty.

MARY: Yes, yes, but I cannot see why the many should suffer for the few; they for me. It is no use, Claire, you can never make me believe it.

CLAIRE: Suffer, indeed! What are they going to suffer from?

MARY: They would suffer from my selfishness, in case I were incapable of self-restraint.

CLAIRE: Oh, then! So you are going to restrain yourself from being yourself and make yourself miserable in order not to offend conceptions of duty that you do not believe in. You are not going to act in accordance with your own ideas, but in accordance with ideas held by other people—and so reap the reward of unselfishness, a clear conscience and what not. Admirable! And also sacrifice Shelley to your beautiful unselfishness.

MARY (*startled*): What do you say?

CLAIRE: I said, and also sacrifice Shelley to your immaculate, clear conscience.

MARY: We are only dreaming, Claire; talking about what may be.

CLAIRE: You will learn that we are talking about what is to be. And, moreover, you will learn the after effect of stifling your love.

MARY: That effect I already know.

CLAIRE: Maybe you do, but you don't know what

effect your refusal will have on Shelley. Maiden thoughts at forty, and the recollection of casting off a loved one, would not appeal to me.

MARY: And no doubt, by refusing to go, I would be sacrificing you?

CLAIRE: Certainly. But you will be murdering yourself and—

MARY: Shelley.

CLAIRE: Yes. (*Pause.*) Listen, Mary: You talk about your conscience, duty, etc. What about your duty to Posterity? It will be larger than Humanity. Has it no claims on you?

MARY: Yes, you are right, I have a duty to fulfill, but—

CLAIRE: But what?

MARY: But how do I know that, er—

CLAIRE: Shelley will give you a chance.

MARY: I did not say so.

CLAIRE: Very well, I'll take it back. (*Pause.*)

MARY: You do not seem to realize that I am chiefly concerned in this affair; yes, even compromised.

CLAIRE: I most painfully do, Mary. If I were the principal, I would act instead of talking.

MARY: Talking about acting is much easier than doing. It is hard to be placed as I am; it is hard for me to forego the joys of life.

CLAIRE: Do you think if I loved a man as you love Shelley, that any public consideration could keep me from him? No! I'd rather win the love of a first-rate man, even though he shared it with other women, than have the exclusive possession of a second-rate one.

MARY (*taking her hand*): I know you feel for me, dear, and perhaps you are right; but I cannot say at present. This dreadful upset condition has robbed me of the power to think, or act. I have anticipated what you prophesy for weeks and weeks.

CLAIRE: But you must act—you must do something. I firmly believe Shelley is going to speak to-night. (*Looks at her watch.*) He will be here any minute now.

MARY: I want to do whatever is best; I shall try to do whatever is best for all, but, I fear, I do not know but that Shelley's sentiment for old memories may cause him to become reconciled to Harriet. (*Claire smiles.*)

CLAIRE: No, Mary, Shelley is not a sentimental idiot. You must decide his future as well as your own, and remember, you cannot sacrifice yourself without sacrificing *him* also. But I'm sure everything will come out all right, only be brave. (*Some one is heard walking. They both rise.*) He's coming now. (*Kisses her.*) Be brave. (*She goes out.*)

(*Shelley, dominated by a wild, ungovernable passion, rushes in. He runs to Mary, clasps her in his arms and kisses her.*)

MARY (*breathlessly*): Shelley! (*Disengages herself.*)

SHELLEY: There, Mary, do not be angry, I have suffered from an insane delusion for the last four hours that you would not meet me to-night. And—when I saw you, my joy completely mastered me.

MARY: But—but what has happened?

SHELLEY: An inevitable crisis has come in my life, and I could not have lived twenty-four hours longer without stating my case to you as a final judge, and coming to an understanding. (*He begins to walk up and down. Mary leans against willow-tree.*) Please do not interrupt me: let me briefly sketch the course of my unhappy life. From my very childhood the iron arm of despotism has been upon me. My boyhood walks by moonlight were spied upon by my father's servants. My schooldays were embittered by persecuting companions. My college career ended in

expulsion, because I dared to express my honest convictions. And now, worst of all, my soul is being choked by a damnable ring of gold—the emblem of respectability. Oh, fool that I was! to have acted contrary to the dictates of my reason.

MARY (*softly*): You mean by marrying Harriet?

SHELLEY: Ay, but the fault was not entirely hers, nor mine. The fault lies in the alternative between celibacy and unjust social persecution. You know of my unfortunate experience: Westbrook insisted upon Harriet's returning to school against her will. The brutal authority of parental dictatorship has destroyed countless submissive children; and Harriet appealed to me to save her from her father's tyranny. I protest against the inhuman treatment of pristine soul stuff, the mother's threat, the father's command, the attempted annihilation of budding individuality by Vampires who endeavor to think and feel for the personified Joys of Cupid. I could not let Harriet glut the poisonous vat of submission. We eloped, and in my weakness I made the momentous mistake of substituting my will for the will of public opinion. I sought in my delusion to protect Harriet, and so we were married. My father stopped my allowance—the Westbrook's denounced me—and only for the magnanimity of a few dear friends we two children would have starved to death. At this very minute I feel nothing but pity for my wife and I respect her sincerity in voluntarily leaving me; but Mary (*going closer to her*), I never loved her: chivalry and friendship were the causes which made me decide to cast my lot with hers: not love, the love of man for woman which spurs man on to climb the alpine heights of Difficulty, in order to be better able to help Humanity and facilitate the sacred Brotherhood of Man. Through the cruelty and kindness of Fate, Mary, I was attracted to your father by the splendor of his genius. It is now two years since we first met, and

at that time I was at the zenith of what I mistook for Happiness. Then I was comparatively free from care—and yet, I felt the need of *something* which I did not have; a longing for *something*, I knew not what. Now I am a free man; my wife has abandoned me and I recognize no duty to man nor God before the duty I owe to myself. Mary, you know what I mean: you may struggle against the Will of Nature, but, believe me, you will not succeed; you may talk of conjugal ties, yet you cannot but realize the meaninglessness of your words; you may hesitate, but sooner or later you shall requite my love.

MARY: But—Harriet?

SHELLEY: I have every reason to believe that Harriet has been untrue to me.

MARY (*much moved*): Oh, I do not know what to do! I cannot believe it is wrong to love—it is so grand, so noble, and still, I cannot give my consent at present. Let us talk it over, dear, we do not want to do anything rash. Oh, Shelley! Shelley! can we be right and everyone else wrong?

SHELLEY (*more calmly*): Surely you must agree with me that a husband and a wife ought to continue so long united as they love each other; and any law which binds them to live together for one moment after the decay of their affections is most intolerable tyranny. Love withers under constraint; its very essence is liberty; it is compatible neither with obedience, jealousy nor fear.

MARY: I feel it, I believe it, but oh! the other people must have some truth on their side.

SHELLEY: You mean, I suppose, the Christian moralists. This is their truth: The woman I now love may be infinitely inferior to many others; the creed I now profess may be a mass of errors and absurdities; but I exclude myself from all future information as to the amiability of the one and the truth

of the other, resolving blindly and in spite of conviction to adhere to them. Is this the language of delicacy and reason?

MARY (*more calmly*): No, it is not. And think of the thousands of girls who must suffer—suffer—suffer.

SHELLEY (*deliberately*): Yes, prostitution is the legitimate offspring of marriage and its accompanying errors. Women for no other crime than having followed the dictates of a natural appetite, are driven with fury from the comforts and sympathies of society. And chastity! that monkish, evangelical superstition! It is a greater foe to natural temperance even than unintellectual sensuality; it strikes at the root of all domestic happiness and consigns more than half of the human race to misery that some few may monopolize according to law.

MARY: It is truly awful. What a system!

SHELLEY: A system could not well have been devised more studiously hostile to human happiness than marriage. (*More excitedly.*) And for the sake of this system of organized misery—you hesitate to grant me your love.

MARY: But, dear Shelley, are you quite sure that we are not unfair to Harriet and Ianthe in our mutual desire?

SHELLEY: Mary, I could only be unfair to Harriet by continuing my present relation to her. I owe something to my wife and child which I must pay. I owe Harriet the liberty of finding a congenial partner, a man whose love she can win, a companion whose presence shall eliminate all the dark clouds and shadows which our unhappy union has caused, a husband to build up a happier home and brighter fireside than it was in my power to do. And Ianthe: should she be brought up in an atmosphere of domestic discord? Should quarrels and incongruity be her first

lesson? Or should Harriet and I glue a lie to our individual natures and don the mask of hypocrisy? No, Mary; that cannot be. By this grave (*pointing*) where lie the remains of your talented mother, the greatest woman that has ever ever trod this massive ball of heterogeneous grief and joy, I ask you in all the reverence which true love claims, to share with me a common future. Ah, Mary, with you to inspire me, to grant me the love and affection that I have already won, to help me carry on the struggle for improvement until this revolving sphere, now choked with urban wastes, is one great green ball of laughing joy, is in very truth the reality of Heaven. (*Holding his arms open to her*) Will you, Mary—will you be my companion?

MARY (*putting her hands in his*): Yes, Shelley. (*He kisses her.*)

SHELLEY: Mary!

MARY (*smiling and looking up at him*): And, dear, it was not your reasoning which caused me to come to this decision—it was just because I loved you.

SHELLEY: A new life is dawning for both of us. To-morrow I shall send for Harriet, tell her my determination, and make arrangements for her support. With your power to elevate and ennoble me, Mary, I shall endeavor to make the name of Shelley among the foremost of my time; to rank with that of Wollstonecraft, Godwin and Paine. I wish posterity to say that Percy Bysshe Shelley was a worthy companion of the daughter of Mary Wollstonecraft. (*Mary throws herself into his arms.*)

ACT III.

Shelley's lodgings, Hatton Garden, on the afternoon of July 14th. To the left, door; farther back a sofa and a book shelf on which books are piled irregularly, many being open. To the right, a large easy chair almost surrounded by books and papers. In back, writing table with chairs around it. On the table are many manuscripts and open books. The room shows signs of long neglect. Shelley, greatly excited, eyes blood-shot, dress disordered, sits at the table. He is trying to read, but cannot sufficiently concentrate his thoughts to do so. He picks up a bottle of laudanum, is about to swallow its contents, hesitates and slowly puts it down. He falls into a deep reverie and is oblivious to his surroundings for a few moments. A knock. Shelley starts, cautiously gets up and opens the door. A servant enters.

SERVANT: Mr. Peacock, to see you, sir.

SHELLEY: Show him up. (*Servant retires.*)

PEACOCK (*coming in*): My dear fellow, I am glad to see you. (*Looks at him.*) What is the matter? You look ill.

SHELLEY (*as they shake hands*): You received my letter, I see. Pray be seated. (*Peacock sits down.*) As we have not seen each other for a long time, Peacock, you are unfamiliar with my recent affairs and the nature of a personal trouble about which I ask your indulgence to hear and advise me.

PEACOCK: I am extremely distressed to hear you speak of a personal trouble, Shelley, although I trust you have overrated it and that it will prove no more

than a bad dream of your poetic fancy. If I am capable of any service, command me.

SHELLEY: No, Peacock, it is more than poetic fancy. (*Catching up the bottle of laudanum.*) I never part from this. I am always repeating to myself your lines from Sophocles:

“Man’s happiest lot is not to be:
And when we tread life’s thorny steep
Most blest are they who earliest free
Descend to death’s eternal sleep.”

PEACOCK: Constrain yourself, my dear fellow, and tell me the trouble?

SHELLEY: The facts are these: Harriet has abandoned me—our affection is ended.

PEACOCK: It always appeared to me that you were very fond of Harriet.

SHELLEY: But you did not know how I hated her sister.

PEACOCK: Who?

SHELLEY: Eliza.

PEACOCK: Why?

SHELLEY: Because she was the cause of Harriet’s leaving me. During my loneliness, my abject wretchedness, I have fallen in love with Mary Godwin.

PEACOCK: Truly romantic and poetic, but for a gentleman in your position, rather embarrassing.

SHELLEY: Yes, for a gentleman, rather embarrassing, but I want to rise above the mere man of gentility, as my present difficulty requires a more difficult solution than mere politeness can offer.

PEACOCK: How can I assist you?

SHELLEY: As friend to friend, I ask you to give me your honest thoughts, and as I want to come to a definite conclusion on how I shall act, by talking the affair over with you, I entreat you not to take offense at anything I say. You can plainly see that I am in no condition to be polite.

PEACOCK: Very well, as friend to friend, I cannot advise you to gratify your new love by openly leaving your wife and child, and sacrificing your social standing, although I see you are inclined to do so.

SHELLEY: But, you cannot advise me to sacrifice my happiness, Mary's happiness, for public opinion, which you call social standing? Everyone must know that the partner of my life should be one who can feel poetry and understand philosophy. Harriet is a noble animal, but she can do neither. (*Pause. Shelley sits down.*)

PEACOCK: Permit me to talk plainly.

SHELLEY: It is my sincere desire that you should.

PEACOCK: Very well. Of course, Shelley, I am familiar with your notes to *Queen Mab*. I thoroughly understand your radical arguments and partly sympathize with them, especially your struggle against religious superstition. However, in your zeal for promoting advanced ideas, you have indiscriminately attacked all existing institutions, under the belief that because some socially recognized institutions are erroneous, all are erroneous. One might as well conclude, because one man is bad, all men are bad. I refer to your attacks on the marriage ceremony.

SHELLEY: But there is evidence and reason——

PEACOCK: One minute, please. I am not through.

SHELLEY: I beg your pardon.

PEACOCK: It seems to me that it is absolutely necessary to have some social means of preventing unbridled gratification among the sexes. Otherwise the number of illegitimate children would be appalling, and morality would turn into degeneracy. When a man is angry, he or the law must restrain his anger. If this were not so, murders would annihilate the race.

SHELLEY (*getting up and walking the floor*): The fundamental scheme of the universe, Peacock, is its liability to change. Any institution which is regarded

as permanent is a barrier to all human progress. Unless men and women are free to act according to their immediate requirements, they are slaves. That is my philosophic reason for attacking the ceremony originally invented to make women chattel property. Now, you say that the father and mother instinct is immoral unless regulated by an incantation presided over by an official. Prove it! You compare Nature's only means of Life Creation in its highest developed species—Man, to a destructive impulse on the part of a few individuals; and even that you misrepresent when you say laws prevent the assassination of humanity by men.

PEACOCK: My dear fellow, you are falling into your old habit of philosophizing at great length, and drawing me in as well. Let us return to our starting point. How are you going to extricate yourself from your present dilemma?

SHELLEY: Yes, you are right; that is what I wish to talk about.

PEACOCK: You say Harriet has abandoned you—there has evidently been some misunderstanding. Shelley, do you not think that a few kind words on your part would restore domestic harmony, revive your former mutual affection?

SHELLEY: No; a few kind words is an excellent means of bringing about a reconciliation between people who have quarrelled; but Harriet and I have not—the trouble is more deeply seated than that.

PEACOCK: What is it, then?

SHELLEY: A natural psychological change which neither my wife nor I are able to control.

PEACOCK: Well, I only know of one other course.

SHELLEY: What is that?

PEACOCK: You wish to do all the good to your fellowman that you can?

SHELLEY: Yes.

PEACOCK: You wish to live the life of a reformer,

to influence men to follow the road of goodness and justice?

SHELLEY: Of Truth.

PEACOCK: Exactly. Now, do you not see that in order to hold that position, you must be held in esteem by those whom you wish to influence?

SHELLEY: And sacrifice——

PEACOCK: The heart flowing o'er with love of the unsophisticated mundane goddess—Mary Godwin! No, not even that. You agree with me that an untarnished name is necessary to your object in life. Now, then—public disavowal of your solemn oath to the mother of your child is impossible. Such a scandal could never be outlived.

SHELLEY (*holding the back of a chair, strung to a high pitch of excitement*): Well! well!! well!!! The alternative?

PEACOCK: Godwin is a freethinker. He sympathizes with your extreme views on the sex problem. Why not a secret liaison with Mary, and make the best of your conjugal situation?

SHELLEY (*flinging the chair away from him*): Plain Hell! Nadir of degeneracy!! Can I believe my own ears? Peacock—you—you—advise me—!!!

PEACOCK (*rising*): I beg your pardon, Mr. Shelley! You do not seem to be accountable for what you say.

SHELLEY (*somewhat calmer*): Peacock, you do not mean it—you cannot—that I should inoculate my emotions by secrecy—place the free and natural love of a young girl in the same category with something too vile to be spoken of in public! No! No! No! No!!!

PEACOCK: Ah, yes, free love is the prerogative of those who have sufficient intellect to appreciate it. My congratulations.

SHELLEY (*sinking into a chair, to himself*): Oh, if I were only dead!

PEACOCK : I have no doubt but that you will be—socially—in a very short time.

SHELLEY : So be it. Better ten thousand dead men than one live slave and his master—Public Opinion.

PEACOCK : As you wish. I will go now. (*He starts to go out. A knock.*)

SHELLEY : Come. (*Godwin enters.*)

GODWIN : Good-morning, Mr. Shelley.

SHELLEY (*getting up*) : How are you, Godwin? Let me introduce Mr. Peacock.

GODWIN : I am happy to make your acquaintance, sir.

PEACOCK (*shaking hands*) : I also am pleased to meet you.

SHELLEY (*to Godwin*) : Won't you be seated?

GODWIN : No, I thank you. However, if you will let me know as soon as you are disengaged; I have—

PEACOCK : Pray remain. I was on my way out as you came in. Good-bye.

GODWIN : Good-bye, Mr. Peacock. (*He goes out.*) The young poet I have heard you speak of?

SHELLEY : Yes.

GODWIN : I would not have interrupted you on any account, had I not something of great importance to communicate to you.

SHELLEY (*abstractedly*) : Don't mention it.

GODWIN (*smiling*) : Pay attention to what I have to say. I have good news for you.

SHELLEY (*dejectedly*) : Good news for me—I am afraid not, Godwin.

GODWIN : Yes, I have, and it will cheer you up, too.

SHELLEY (*indifferently*) : Well?

GODWIN : Harriet has unexpectedly come from Bath to see you.

SHELLEY : Did she say she had come unexpectedly?

GODWIN : Yes, as a surprise to you. Pray forgive

me, Shelley, if I take a liberty in referring to your unhappy married relation, but as a friend who feels deeply for your interests, I should like to give you the benefit of my experience—if you will permit me to advise you?

SHELLEY: By all means.

GODWIN: When two young people have quarrelled, the intervals at which a reconciliation is possible grow fewer and fewer as time goes on. The longer the length of time that elapses, the shorter the intervals, until a final separation is inevitable.

SHELLEY: What then?

GODWIN: I am sure Harriet still loves you and wishes a reconciliation—at this minute.

SHELLEY: Has she told you so?

GODWIN: Practically, yes. However, she is waiting right outside the door, and can tell you herself.

SHELLEY: Why did she not come in with you?

GODWIN: I suggested seeing you first, so as to prepare you. But, before I call her—may I expect you both for supper this evening?

SHELLEY: It will be impossible for me to come.

GODWIN: Nevertheless, the reconciliation will take place, and remember, it is very important that no unpleasant reminiscences should follow this meeting to interfere with a joyous future. Regardless of feeling, I would go more than half way, if I were in your place. (*He goes out. Shelley walks about, trying to get complete control of himself. He puts laudanum bottle out of sight. Godwin re-enters with Harriet, whose attitude is decidedly cold and distant, to whom he speaks.*) There he is, Mrs. Shelley, our same old untidy poet. Bless me! Just look at the room! It looks as if a woman could find a little tidying-up to do, does it not? The next time I come it will be different—but I must go—good-bye. (*He goes out.*)

SHELLEY (*offering her a chair*): Won't you sit down, Harriet?

HARRIET (*coldly*): Thank you. (*She sits down. After a moment's pause*) You sent for me, Bysshe—what is it you wish?

SHELLEY (*walking up and down the room*): To come to some definite understanding with you, Harriet.

HARRIET: Yes, I am listening.

SHELLEY (*standing back of a chair*): I am afraid that you made a mistake in marrying me, Harriet. You probably did not know me, as I really am, that day you decided to place yourself under my protection.

HARRIET: You speak truly, I was deceived in you.

SHELLEY: We have tried to get along together now, for three years, without even average success.

HARRIET: Again, I agree with you.

SHELLEY: In other words, we have two sets of interests. The things in which I am interested are disagreeable to you; and the things in which you are interested, bore me.

HARRIET: You never tried to change it; never attempted to concern yourself with *my things*; you never even met me half way in coming to a ground of common interest.

SHELLEY: Maybe not, Harriet.

HARRIET: No, and you persisted in talking dull philosophy, and expected me to show enthusiasm over your exasperating poetry.

SHELLEY: That is my life, Harriet. What would you have had me do?

HARRIET: I think it is the duty of every husband to make some concessions to his wife—to partly map out his day with a view to pleasing her.

SHELLEY: And what about a wife?

HARRIET: I forced myself to my utmost, Bysshe.

SHELLEY (*starting to walk up and down again*): And so did I, Harriet. We both have tried to please each other, and we have failed.

HARRIET: The man is stronger than the woman, should not he make a greater effort?

SHELLEY: No, Harriet. Interest and affection may be pretended, but they can never be forced.

HARRIET: Then you justify your unreasonableness?

SHELLEY: It is a matter of temperament, Harriet, not reason.

HARRIET: Reason is reason! A person must act reasonably or unreasonably. Nobody can gainsay that.

SHELLEY: To put it in other words, then: my reason is not your reason. We see things from different view-points. We are attracted by almost diametrically different ways of life.

HARRIET: Yes, and what shall be done with Ianthe is one cause of contention. You objected to me, her mother, caring for her in my own way.

SHELLEY (*agitated*): I did; it seemed to me a most unnatural way. In fact, it was not *a way*, but turning her over to strange people, whom I, her father, detested.

HARRIET (*walking across the room and coming back to her chair*): Do you mean to insult my sister again in my presence? I believe on a previous occasion I requested you to leave her out of our discussions.

SHELLEY: No, nor do I even wish to reproach you. We will never come to an understanding by bringing indictments against each other.

HARRIET: I was not aware that I began it.

SHELLEY: I did not accuse you of beginning it. (*Pause.*)

HARRIET: Well, Bysshe, what is it you wish to come to an understanding about with me? As a result of complying with your request, I have had a long, tedious journey from Bath, and I am tired out.

SHELLEY (*commencing to walk again and bracing himself to carry out his determination*): In order to

explain I am compelled to say this, which, please remember, I do not mean as a reproach.

HARRIET: Well?

SHELLEY (*quite calmly*): I have entreated you to return to our sad and silent home, with its desolated hearth; I have implored you to pity if you could not love—forever in vain! I have asked you to do the impossible. We have tried, Harriet, and have failed—and as a result of our unwedded conduct towards each other, I have decided to end our conjugal relations forever.

HARRIET: Why in the name of Heaven did you ask me to come here? Do you think I enjoy your abuse?

SHELLEY: I protest that I am not abusing you; I am not blaming you—we are simply not adapted to administer to each other's needs. I wish to act justly towards you, as well as myself, and—make arrangements for your support

HARRIET (*freezingly*): Indeed.

SHELLEY: Do not make my position harder for me than it already is, Harriet. In me you will ever find a warm and constant friend, to whom your welfare will be always dear—by whom your feelings will never be wilfully injured. From none can you expect this but me.

HARRIET (*treating what he has said as a spasmodic whim*): Bysshe, please stop talking that nonsense. I haven't seen you in a long time, and I do not think you should expect me to humor your whims in the future, anyhow. I wish to live in London this summer: you must see about getting a place for Eliza, Ianthe and myself. I want our own home again—we cannot, and should not, live apart as we have been doing for so long a time.

SHELLEY (*standing still and speaking very deliberately*): I fear you misunderstand me, Harriet.

In justice to ourselves and our child, we *must* live apart, now and forever!

HARRIET (*getting up*): You are in a very unreasonable mood. I am going.

SHELLEY (*as if to detain her*): Not yet—I am in deadly earnest—our co-habitation is ended forever. In the future I have decided to cast my lot with another woman.

HARRIET (*deathly pale, vainly trying to conceal her agitation*): Oh! by that do I understand you wish an absolute separation?

SHELLEY: That is what I mean, Harriet.

HARRIET: And may I inquire the name of this—this *woman*, with whom you are to cast your lot, as you term it?

SHELLEY: Mary Godwin.

HARRIET (*resuming her seat and nervously tapping the floor with her right foot*): I suppose I am too illiterate to be the “companion” of the illustrious Percy Bysshe Shelley! No doubt, *she* can appreciate your literary efforts.

SHELLEY: This is no time for sarcasm, Harriet. I do not want you to feel bitter towards Mary nor me. (*Holding out his hand.*) Let us be friends.

HARRIET: Be the friend of that free-loving she devil! Never! That daughter of a strumpet! She stole your affections from me. Yes, she did, and you need not deny it! (*Shelley walks over to sofa, Harriet gets up.*) Didn't I sacrifice my family, my youth, my happiness, my peace of mind, my life! for you? Didn't I bear you your child? Didn't I go whenever and wherever you wanted to? Didn't I allow you to have a strange woman in the house—how many wives do you suppose would have put up with that?

SHELLEY (*quickly*): You know there were no improper relations between Miss Brown and me.

HARRIET (*disregarding him*): Didn't I hear my

faith, my religion, everything I held sacred, desecrated by you in the name of philosophy? And now, after all this, I am to be abandoned, cast off, for a young girl, because she happens to bear the name of Godwin and was the daughter of a notorious woman!

SHELLEY (*coming forward*): Gently, Harriet. You are in positive danger of deceiving yourself. I deny that I am casting you off as a worn out thing, as you assert. It is untrue. You seem to forget that you took the initiative in breaking up our home. (*Excitedly.*) It was you who first left me, Harriet, please remember that. And even after our false reconciliation you were the one who taunted me by asking: why I had enticed you from comfortable surroundings and congenial companions to return to my dungeon; by declaring that you had only come back to accommodate me; that you had condescended to give me another chance! No, Harriet, you cannot spurn me one day and control my affections the next. Right up to a few months ago I loved you in spite of your coldness and indifference. I was the one who begged, while you condescended. But now—I am determined to use my prerogative—to be true to myself—to live my own life in my own way.

HARRIET (*bitterly*): Yes, be true to yourself and make me suffer—for that designing creature.

SHELLEY: I shall see that you are amply provided for. There is nothing that I know of to make you suffer.

HARRIET (*walking about*): No wonder they called you "Mad Shelley" at Eton!

SHELLEY: What do you mean by that?

HARRIET: That you are mad, mad to say you know of nothing to make me suffer—after you have humiliated me in this fashion! What do you suppose people will say?

SHELLEY: I do not know; I have not thought of what they will say.

HARRIET (*excitedly*): Well, I have; it is the woman who has to bear the taunts. How can I ever look anyone in the face again? They will point me out as the forsaken wife of "Mad Shelley," the degenerate, the deserter, the crazy poet! (*Pause. She goes to middle of room.*) Bysshe! if you go with this—low creature, then (*pointing upward*) in the name of the living God, the Father, Son and Holy Ghost, I hurl my undying curse at both of you. (*Silence.*)

CLAIRE (*outside*): If papa isn't here, Mary, you wait while I go to Hookham's—unless (*laughing*) you care to go and compliment him on his keen insight into personal affairs.

MARY (*also outside*): No, I hardly care to see Hookham just now. (*They enter.*)

SHELLEY (*to Claire*): I am very busy at present—can you not wait until another time?

CLAIRE: Certainly. (*She turns to go.*)

MARY (*slightly disconcerted*): How do you do, Harriet?

HARRIET: Mrs. Shelley, if you please, Miss Godwin!

MARY: Oh!

HARRIET (*looking at her witheringly*): So you are the *person* whom I have to thank for ensnaring my husband? As his wife, I request you to leave Mr. Shelley entirely alone and not keep coming here and forcing yourself upon him. You are placing yourself in a very delicate position by coming to Mr. Shelley's lodgings at all.

CLAIRE: Although you did not—

MARY: Please, Claire—allow me to speak. I am here, Mrs. Shelley, on an errand, but were I not, I would still deem it my privilege to move and act entirely as I see fit.

HARRIET (*crying with vexation*): You vixen! You hussy! You dare to force your attentions on a married man! Don't you see that Shelley is tired of you? I am mistress here, withdraw—go at once!

MARY (*successfully concealing her annoyance, to Shelley*): A gentleman is waiting at the house to see papa. I thought he might be here?

(*Harriet retires to other end of room.*)

SHELLEY: No, Godwin left here some time ago; I have not any idea where you can find him.

CLAIRE: Thanks, I'm sorry we interrupted you. (*They go out.*)

SHELLEY: If you will kindly send your solicitor to me, Harriet, it will save us the painful necessity of attending to the monetary arrangements ourselves.

HARRIET (*crying*): Yes. (*Pause.*)

SHELLEY: And, Harriet, and (*almost breaking down*) what about Ianthe?

HARRIET (*realizing she has found a weak point, artfully*): Our child, our little baby? You could not think of separating us!

SHELLEY (*almost sobbing*): No, not if you wish to keep her. I wish we could remain friends, Harriet, if only for Ianthe's sake.

HARRIET (*snappingly*): If you care so much for Ianthe, why not stay with her?

SHELLEY: That is impossible.

HARRIET (*again, trying to take advantage of his feelings*): And when she asks me about her father—what shall I say to her?

SHELLEY (*annoyed*): If she wants to see me—send her to me, of course.

HARRIET (*indignantly*): No, never! To be contaminated by that vile woman, that daughter of a—

SHELLEY: Stop! There is a limit to even my patience.

HARRIET (*preparing to go, tauntingly*): Oh, you

can't bear to hear the truth about your, (*bitterly*) your sweetheart! Well, go to her, yes, go; but I know you will want to come back to me! Satisfy yourself, and when you have got tired of vice and long for the society of a respectable woman, I will talk to you, perhaps. At present I will not detain you from going to Miss Mary Godwin, your poor, dear, newly found affinity! Just think, she is the daughter of Godwin and Wollstonecraft! That was enough to bring you to her feet, wasn't it? Any old thing that pertains to philosophy can make a fool of you, can't it, Bysshe? No doubt, your pure fatherly love will prick your conscience, but then, that, that home wrecker, that cat, who stole you from me, must be supported.

SHELLEY (*offering his hand*): Good-bye.

HARRIET: I am a decent woman—do not defile me with your hand, poisoned by that creature. Remember that, Bysshe Shelley—I am a decent woman! (*She goes out.*)

ACT IV.

Hatton Garden at sunrise, on the morning of July 28th. In the background is a corner of the square at which stand a post-chaise. The driver and the post-boy, who are rubbing down the horses, are the only ones in sight.

DRIVER: We've been waitin' 'ere nearly an' hour, Bill. I expects hits another runaway match an' the loidy 'as backed out at the last moment.

POSTBOY: Well, an' wot d'you care? The gen'l'm'n will 'ave to pay just the same, and I'm in no uncommon bad way to be hoff to Dover.

DRIVER: You haint got no pride, Bill. Wot are we for? me a driver an' you a postboy, but to hexercise the 'orses an'—'ere 'e comes now.

SHELLEY (*coming in sight*): Are you ready to start?

DRIVER: Right away, sir. I wants to put some hoil on the left wheel, sir; are you in a 'urry, sir?

SHELLEY: I want to start as soon as the ladies arrive. There will be three of us.

DRIVER: Very good, sir. Bill—give us an 'and. (*They proceed to oil the wheel.*)

SHELLEY (*restlessly moving about, speaking to himself*): It is time they were here— Why do they not come? Oh, I am so impatient to begin life anew—free and independent of all conventionality—among new surroundings—new scenes that will not remind me of past sorrows. My only regret is in leaving Ianthe behind, to be brought up by my accursed sister-in-law. (*Footsteps are heard; he turns. Mary and Claire arrive, carrying bundles, boxes, etc.*)

CLAIRE: Do you know, I really believe Mary's courage almost failed her—but (*with satisfaction*) we are here a tlast!

MARY: Why, Claire!

SHELLEY: Give me your bundles! (*As he takes them from Mary some things drop out.*) The driver will be ready directly.

MARY: Then let us re-tie these parcels. We heard a stir in the house and thought it best not to—

CLAIRE: Disturb mama to help us pack. Here are the boxes. (*Puts them down.*) I'm helpless when it comes to packing. I'm going to talk to the driver.

SHELLEY (*as he and Mary commence to re-pack the parcels*): Tell him we will be ready whenever he is. (*Claire retires to post-chaise.*)

MARY: I cannot help thinking of Harriet. I have not been able to get her out of my mind all night.

SHELLEY: Please do not talk of her, Mary. I have done everything for Harriet that is in my power. My love I cannot give at will, or I might have been foolish enough to give her that also.

MARY (*looking up*): You have seen that she is well provided for?

SHELLEY: Yes, I have even sacrificed our own financial independence to secure her every comfort that money can afford.

MARY (*stops and looks at him tenderly*): Oh, Shelley! You do not realize the force with which you attract me. All your acts are so noble, so generous!

SHELLEY: You set too much stress on my generosity—but, dear, how do you feel about leaving? Are you coming with me without one regret?

MARY (*passionately, still on her knees, doing up bundles*): Yes! I am thine for now and—

SHELLEY: As long as our love continues.

MARY: Yes. (*Pause.*) But had we not better

hurry and get on our way? Mama must have discovered our absence by this time.

SHELLEY (*tying last bundle*): Yes, we must hurry.

MARY (*rising*): I hardly dare to think of the sensation our departure will cause.

SHELLEY (*also getting up*): I beseech of you, Mary, do not let it concern you. In years to come, when the human race has attained the point at which we now stand, we shall be praised and admired for having dared to free ourselves from moral superstition.

MARY: Oh, Shelley! I am so happy! July 28th! What an eventful day for me!—for both of us!

SHELLEY: Yes, and the world— Is the driver ready, Claire?

DRIVER: In one minute, sir.

MARY: You mean our action will teach other people to do the same. Every time I think of it I am filled with dread. Supposing, dear, we should influence others to—desert their homes—their duty?

SHELLEY: No! No!! On the contrary, we will influence others to live their own lives in their own way; to be free and attain the perfection of the Gods.

MARY: Oh, if everyone could only think as we do!

SHELLEY: Believe me, as long as men speak and write our language our names shall be respected by future generations. We, Mary, are the pioneers of progress; the forerunners of the new; the arrival of the better. (*The driver climbs up into his seat; the post boy mounts his horse.*)

CLAIRE (*coming forward*): Come! We're ready.

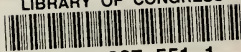
SHELLEY: Away to Dover—

CLAIRE: And then to Paris—

SHELLEY (*helping them into post-chaise*): And carry the torch of Reason far, far into the future: we three comrades together! (*He gets in; the driver cracks his whip, and they are off.*)

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