

ACT TWO

Scene One

St Pancras Churchyard. Bright sunshine filtered through trees. One large tomb – that of Mary Wollstonecraft – dominates the space. JANE runs up to it, and sits upon it, arranging her skirts and hair to their full advantage.

MARY and SHELLEY appear from the same direction. They are deep in discussion.

SHELLEY. All established religions work hand in hand with tyranny. They dull men's minds. They stop us from thinking we can make our own moral choices.

MARY. That I do agree with. It's what my father always taught us.

SHELLEY. By fixing men's minds on the idea of an afterlife, they make them wary – terrified even – of all forms of dissent.

MARY. Yes.

SHELLEY. And a crowd of privileged gentlemen called parsons get very well paid to convince their congregations that 'sinning' includes any kind of opposition to governments, or kings or landowners or the waging of wars.

JANE. I hope the vicar isn't listening to this!

MARY. But if you take faith away from people, what do you replace it with? Faith can make people feel stronger. United. And the poor must have more need of it than the rich.

SHELLEY. Because we are human, we have doubts and fears – yes. And we look for something to reassure us.

MARY. And to empower us.

SHELLEY. But imagine how much stronger we could become if we looked only to ourselves and our fellow human beings for the comfort and... philosophy we need.

They have reached the tomb.

Is this it?

MARY. Yes. This is it.

SHELLEY *stares at the tomb. He runs his hands over the stone.*

JANE. Is it how you imagined it would be?

SHELLEY. It's strong. And honest. That seems right.

MARY. This side's usually shady. This is where I sit and read.

JANE. Sometimes I even lie back, like this. (*Lies on top of the tomb.*) But last time I did it, one of the gravediggers came past and stared at me as though I were a lunatic.

SHELLEY (*reading the lettering on the tomb*). 'Mary.
Wollstonecraft.'

MARY. My mother believed in God. Her own sense of God.

SHELLEY. Perhaps that's why you want to believe.

MARY. But that's just it – I don't want to believe. I know you're right. Logically. You and my father. But then I look at the world about me, and I think – mankind did not create this. We couldn't create it. And perhaps it is only a form of weakness – arrogance, not to believe in God. Some of the greatest people have turned to God when they are really desperate and afraid. And I can't be entirely sure that I wouldn't.

SHELLEY. But we should never give in to fear.

MARY. Do you not think it would be a comfort – to know that you could one day lie down in a place like this? Safe in the shadow of the church?

SHELLEY. I think I would be happy in some woodland glade.
Safe in the shadow of the trees.

Or in a giant mausoleum, on the top of a dusty hill in some Latin land.

JANE. You two are too gloomy! And on such a heavenly day.

SHELLEY. I do believe in the human spirit. Profoundly. I believe we are more than we seem to be.

MARY. Yes.

They are staring at each other – truly connected. JANE gets up.

JANE. I'm going to take a turn around the churchyard. All this talk of death is making me want to run about. I suppose neither of you will come?

SHELLEY. I think we might sit here for a while. But call out if you have need of us.

JANE. I shan't be long.

She goes. MARY and SHELLEY are quiet for a few moments.

MARY. Your poem... *Queen Mab*... When I was reading it...

SHELLEY. What?

MARY. It's so honest. Savagely honest. And so right about the state of the world. And yet you... You seem to contain so much... joy...

SHELLEY. Because I have hope. And belief in what can be achieved. I was fourteen when I first read *Political Justice*. I wept. I suppose it was a sort of relief. To have found that there was someone with the vision and clarity of mind to be able to strip away all that is wrong and useless and present a way of living which would allow mankind to achieve its potential. To achieve perfection. I will never stop striving for that world.

Did you like it – my poem?

MARY. I loved it.

SHELLEY. Do I come close to Byron? Can I?

MARY. I think you are every bit as talented.

He touches her face, momentarily. Then they sit quietly for a moment.

SHELLEY. Thank you for bringing me here.

MARY. It's so peaceful here. Yet we're only a few yards from the streets. The river is just beyond those willows.

Sometimes I come here to write. My thoughts seem to flow more easily when I'm here.

SHELLEY. I like to walk when I'm working, and I always try to memorise – exactly – the lines that come to me. Because I know that when I get back inside, with paper and pen, I will never find the freshness I found in the field or by the stream.

MARY. Yes. Have you started another poem?

SHELLEY. I've tried to. It's been a difficult few days.

MARY. Has it?

SHELLEY. Distracting. Harriet has come. With her sister and the baby. At first it was only to buy a new bonnet – and apparently there are only a handful of London shops that are good enough for bonnets – but now it seems she has decided to stay longer. And she says my lodgings aren't suitable, so I've been running around trying to find somewhere better.

MARY. That is difficult.

SHELLEY. Yes. Not that I'm complaining. It's only that... these domestic things... they seem so trivial sometimes. And...

MARY. I love you.

He stops. Their hearts leap.

SHELLEY. When I get the money I'm expecting, perhaps I will buy a house. Close to here...

He kisses her – suddenly and passionately.

Oh, Mary. Mary. I love you. I love you. From the very first moment I saw you. Can it be true? Oh, no – no – don't cry.

MARY. I can't help it.

SHELLEY. Beautiful. You are so beautiful.

They kiss.

MARY. What are we going to do?

SHELLEY. I...

He can't answer. After a moment, they hear JANE approaching. MARY dries her eyes.

JANE. Two rabbits and a jay. Such a dandy in his pink and blue.

Ah. You know it's completely obvious.

MARY. What is?

JANE. I'm not such a fool as all that.

SHELLEY. Jane...

JANE. I know. I know. And it's utterly, unspeakably thrilling.

Scene Two

The parlour. Skinner Street. MARY and JANE enter. JANE rushes straight to the window. Voices can be heard coming from behind the closed door of the study. JANE suddenly waves enthusiastically.

JANE. He turned back to look. You should have waved.

MARY is too overwhelmed with her excitement to respond.

Oh, Mary.

What did he say? I want to know everything.

MARY. It was I who spoke first.

JANE. You?

MARY. But he had already touched my face.

JANE. He touched your face? And did he... I mean, did he kiss you?

MARY. Yes.

JANE. Oh!

MARY. Yes, he did. We mustn't say anything to Papa.

JANE. No! Or to Mama.

MARY. But will you help me? Help me to meet him again?

JANE. Of course I will. Mary, I must confess, I am the tiniest bit jealous, but you will allow me that, I think?

MARY. Oh, Jane.

JANE. And deep down, I think I always knew. I always knew that he would choose you, because you are her real daughter, and Papa is your real papa. He was bound to be drawn to you.

FANNY *enters from the study. We hear the voices of GODWIN and MRS GODWIN, rather heated.*

FANNY. Secrets?

MARY. No.

JANE. No. We were just talking.

FANNY. Where have you been?

MARY. We just went for a walk. To the churchyard.

FANNY. Well, I wish you hadn't been so long.

JANE. Are they arguing?

FANNY. I had to close the shop for an hour. I don't know why you two think you can go off to the churchyard whenever you like and just leave me to...

JANE. We had promised Mr Shelley.

FANNY. You took Shelley?

MARY. Yes. To show him Mother's grave. We said we would. Remember?

FANNY. I wish you'd asked me. I would have liked to have come. Very much.

MARY. I'm sorry. I assumed you were busy.

JANE. What are they arguing about?

FANNY. Me. About whether I should go and spend some days with my aunts. They're in Wales. By the sea. Mama thinks she cannot spare me. Judging by today, I would say she's right.

JANE. Oh, don't be so hoity-toity, Fanny.

FANNY *decides to try to let the matter rest.*

FANNY. How was Shelley?

MARY. Well. Do you want to go to the seaside?

FANNY. Yes. I do. Papa thinks my aunts are going to ask me to go and work at the school in Dublin.

JANE. Really?

MARY. Would you?

FANNY. I think so. I think it would be good for me to have some new society. And proper employment. A little income of my own.

MARY. Yes.

FANNY. If I stay here always... Well... I don't suppose anything will ever happen.

MRS GODWIN *enters, shortly followed by GODWIN.*

MRS GODWIN. One day you shall find that I am not here, Mr Godwin. I shall take myself off to the seaside.

GODWIN. We shall very soon have the maid back...

MRS GODWIN. No other woman in her right mind would put up with what I am expected to put up with.

GODWIN. I know. We are all very fortunate to have you.

MRS GODWIN. This is not what I was promised!

(*Starts to go then turns on FANNY.*) I hope you're satisfied!
Ungrateful girl!

It will kill me. That's all. Kill me.

She rushes out.

FANNY. Papa, if it's going to cause such a deal of trouble...

GODWIN. You may write to your aunts and tell them you will accept their kind invitation.

FANNY. Very well. Thank you.

GODWIN. Go after your mother, if you please, Jane. Do something. Tea, perhaps.

JANE. Yes, Papa.

She goes.

MARY. Are you all right, Papa?

GODWIN. Yes. Weathered worse.

He goes back to his study.

MARY. What a performance. She acts as though she never has a holiday. Didn't she go to Kent last summer?

FANNY. I suppose that seems a long time ago now. She does work hard.

MARY. Yes, but...

FANNY. And there was an incident at lunchtime which upset her. One of Papa's creditors came to the door. Mama saw him. He was very rude. Threatening almost.

MARY. Do we owe a lot of people money?

FANNY. It will all be all right soon. The business with Shelley's bond is almost done. Mary, I don't think you and Jane should have walked out with Mr Shelley.

MARY. We didn't walk out with him. We took him to see Mother's grave.

FANNY. Seeing him here is one thing, but to be seen about the streets with him...

MARY. You said you wanted to come.

FANNY....without Mama or Papa, or his wife. I don't think you should do that.

MARY. How very conventional.

FANNY. All I am saying, is that we should all, all of us, tread a little carefully. He is a married man.

MARY *scoffs.*

It means something, Mary.

MARY. Surely it would be worse if he wasn't married?

FANNY. We have to respect the fact that he is not at liberty to...
he is not at liberty.

MARY looks down. FANNY is silent for a moment.

Has something happened?

MARY. No.

FANNY. If you think of walking out with him again, please tell
Papa.

MARY. You sound terribly old when you talk like that, Fanny.

FANNY. Don't do that.

I must get on.

She starts to go.

MARY. Fanny, I'm sorry.

FANNY comes back to her and kisses her hand.

I'm sorry. Our mother loved a married man. Before she even
met your father.

FANNY. Yes. And she realised that nothing would come of it.

Nothing except heartache, and loss.

Loving... may be beautiful, but it's complicated. Always
complicated. I know that much.

She leaves.

Scene Three

*Evening. St Pancras Churchyard. SHELLEY is waiting by
Mary Wollstonecraft's tomb. MARY and JANE appear and
rush towards him. They all embrace, and then SHELLEY kisses
MARY passionately.*

JANE. Go. Go. I'll keep watch.

*MARY and SHELLEY move into the shelter of the tomb,
and fall into each other's arms. Their embraces become*

increasingly daring and sexual, until SHELLEY stops for a moment, and takes hold of MARY's face, staring into her eyes.

SHELLEY. I am yours now. Only yours. Even though I must go back to her...

MARY. Don't.

SHELLEY....you must lie down tonight and know that I am with you. My heart conjoined with yours. My soul within your body.

MARY. I cannot live without you.

SHELLEY. You will not have to. We will be together. Soon. There will be no lies. No pretence. This is the truth now.

They fall into embraces once again.

Scene Four

Evening. The parlour. Skinner Street. GODWIN, MRS GODWIN, MARY, JANE and SHELLEY are sitting together.

MRS GODWIN *is pouring wine.*

GODWIN. To the very top, Mrs Godwin. To the very top.

MRS GODWIN. That is the top! It's almost overflowing!

GODWIN. I think we need a bacchanalian flavour to our revelries tonight. What do you say, Shelley?

SHELLEY. Certainly. Let us shame the gods.

GODWIN. I'm only sorry that Fanny is not with us. She worked as hard as anyone towards this day.

JANE. We must write to her in Wales.

GODWIN. Indeed we must. (*To MRS GODWIN.*) That's it. That's it. Mary too.

MARY. Just a little more then.

MRS GODWIN. You will have us all inebriated.

GODWIN. And a song, Jane. Will you oblige us with a song?

SHELLEY. A song!

JANE. What shall I sing?

MRS GODWIN. She sings beautifully, Mr Shelley.

SHELLEY. Does she?

MRS GODWIN. We paid for lessons. Sing the one you were practising, Jane.

JANE. But I don't know that one properly yet.

GODWIN. Any song. Any song. I shall sing myself in a minute and then where will we be?

JANE. Oh, I know!

She begins to sing a pretty, happy song.

SHELLEY. Ah, yes. I've heard this one.

JANE (*faltering*). Oh, no... I can't remember the last bit...

MARY joins in to help her, quickly followed by SHELLEY and the GODWINS. They finish the song.

MRS GODWIN. Well, that is jolly.

GODWIN. Bravo, Jane!

SHELLEY. You do sing beautifully.

JANE. Do I? Oh, thank you.

GODWIN. Now, I think a few words are in order.

MRS GODWIN. Oh yes, I should say so. Order! Order!

JANE. Oh, Maman!

GODWIN. Yes. As you know, Shelley, I set very little store by gratitude. But what I offer you this evening, is my respect. My heartfelt respect. There are many men who claim to believe in the revolution which is *Political Justice*, but few who are prepared to put it at the very centre of the way they live their lives. Today, with the arrival of the pecuniary

cavalry, shall we say, I think we have struck a small blow against the forces of reaction. Against the criminality of property rights, of inheritance, and of the land-owning class. A blow which I vow to capitalise on, to the very best of my ability, with every moment of my labour. We are liberators! Liberators, no less, of the resources of mankind!

SHELLEY. Hear! Hear!

GODWIN (*raising his glass*). To *Political Justice*!

ALL. *Political Justice*!

They all drink.

MRS GODWIN. What a day! What a day for us all.

GODWIN. More wine required, Mrs Godwin.

MRS GODWIN. More wine? Good heavens above, Mr Godwin!

GODWIN. Shelley's glass is empty, look.

SHELLEY. But I've had plenty. It doesn't take very much to...

GODWIN. Can't have that. Two bottles, my dearest. In the kitchen. If you would?

MRS GODWIN *leaves*.

JANE. It's so delicious, isn't it, Mary?

MARY. Yes.

SHELLEY. I have no wish for gratitude, Godwin. I hope you know that. And I think you know what your respect means to me.

GODWIN. Yes, my friend. I believe I do.

Pause.

SHELLEY. I wonder if you would care for a stroll?

GODWIN. A stroll? Now?

SHELLEY. Yes. It is such a balmy evening. And I would welcome the opportunity to discuss certain things with you.

MARY. It is a lovely evening, Papa.

GODWIN. I don't think my legs would get me down the stairs tonight. No, no. Let us stay here. A Skinner Street celebration. High spirits at Skinner Street, eh?

So, the money has arrived with your bankers?

SHELLEY. Yes. They assured me I will be able to give you your share tomorrow.

GODWIN. In cash?

SHELLEY. If that's what you would like?

GODWIN. Yes, I think that would be best. No names involved. And easier to distribute, of course.

SHELLEY. But, Godwin, I must warn you... the amount... your share, will be a little less than we discussed.

GODWIN. What's that?

JANE. I will go and help Mama.

MARY. Yes.

SHELLEY. I have decided we must split the money down the middle. One thousand, two hundred and fifty each, to be precise. The fact is, I have need of more money than I realised.

GODWIN. But I have need of the amount we agreed upon. Two thousand, Shelley. One thousand... it is enough to cover my most pressing debts, but beyond that...

SHELLEY. We can sell another bond. Soon, if you wish.

The fact is, Godwin, Mary and I are entirely in love. And we mean to be together. We plan to go abroad. We think that would make things easier for everyone. And we both have the desire to travel.

GODWIN. What are you talking about?

MARY. We love each other, Papa.

SHELLEY. We plan to go to the Continent. We shall travel down through France. I have told Harriet. Of course, I must continue to provide for her... so I will need a great deal more money than I anticipated.

GODWIN. No...

MRS GODWIN *enters with the wine.*

MRS GODWIN. Now, who's for a little more?

GODWIN. Out. Please. Please leave us for a moment.

MRS GODWIN. Whatever's the matter?

GODWIN. Leave us. Please.

MRS GODWIN *leaves, reluctantly. There is a silence.*

MARY. I'm sorry if we've shocked you, Papa. But we thought you would rather know the truth.

GODWIN. I will not allow this.

MARY. But...

SHELLEY. We are decided. We are inseparable. Our love is a fact which must be acted upon.

Pause.

GODWIN. I would like to speak to Mr Shelley alone, Mary.

MARY. But I would rather... No... I would rather hear what you have to say.

GODWIN. I will speak to him alone. Kindly go to your room.

MARY. But...

SHELLEY (*to MARY*). It's all right. It's all right. Don't worry.

She leaves.

It is a cause to rejoice, Godwin. I'm sure that you will come to see that.

GODWIN. I hardly know where to begin.

SHELLEY. It took us by surprise. It has been overwhelming. A revelation.

GODWIN. If you cannot see that everything about this proposal is wrong... in every possible sense...

SHELLEY. But why?

GODWIN. Why? Have you forgotten that you are a married man? That you have a wife and a child, and another on the way, from all accounts?

SHELLEY. My marriage is over. For my part, at least. And as you say in *Political Justice*, a marriage should not be made to continue if one of the partners decides it is no longer what...

GODWIN. And if you read the second edition of *Political Justice*, you would see that I put forward a very different opinion on what marriage must mean in...

SHELLEY. Oh, I never read second editions. You know that. Second editions are the fruits of fear. First editions with the guts ripped out.

GODWIN. You are quite wrong. Second editions allow time for reflection...

SHELLEY. You mean for qualification?

GODWIN. Ideas should always be allowed to evolve. It is imperative that they evolve. And I did not ever mean to suggest that any relationship between two people should attempt to exist outside the mores of society in its present state...

SHELLEY. I believe in what you originally wrote, Godwin. Even if you do not. And the more I live, the more I know that you were right.

GODWIN. I was speaking of an ideal world, Shelley.

SHELLEY. Then let us begin it now. For if we do not, who will? I will not be enslaved by the expectations of society. And neither will Mary.

GODWIN. Please do not assume to speak for my daughter. I know my daughter a great deal better than you.

GODWIN *fights to recover his composure.*

SHELLEY. I'm sorry if we have upset you...

GODWIN. I cannot give my permission for what you propose.

I would like you to go now, Shelley. I will come and see you tomorrow afternoon about the money – if that would be acceptable?

SHELLEY. Certainly.

GODWIN. We will talk further then. I would like you to think about what I have said.

SHELLEY. It will make no difference.

GODWIN. And in the meantime, I must ask that you do not attempt to see Mary.

SHELLEY. Before tomorrow afternoon?

GODWIN. Yes. In the first instance. If you would oblige me in that?

SHELLEY. Very well. But I must say goodbye to her now.

GODWIN. No. I will say goodbye on your behalf. I think that best. I will see you tomorrow.

SHELLEY. It will make no difference.

SHELLEY leaves. GODWIN stands very still, trying to process the shock. After a few moments, MRS GODWIN enters. JANE hovers behind her in the doorway.

MRS GODWIN. Are you going to tell me what is going on?

MARY *rushes in.*

MARY. Has he gone?

GODWIN. Yes.

MARY. What did you say to him?

When is he coming back? Papa?

MRS GODWIN. Oh, I see. I see now, what it is.

I might have guessed. I suppose I should just be thankful that it isn't Jane.

(To MARY.) Has he touched you? Has he?

MARY. Oh, don't be so vulgar.

MRS GODWIN. You... I should flay the hide off you!

GODWIN. No! We will be civilised.

MRS GODWIN (*to JANE*). Did you know about this?

JANE. I...

GODWIN. He says goodbye to you, Mary. Now let us all get some rest.

MARY. What did you say to him?

GODWIN. I said what any father would say: that you are a sixteen-year-old girl, and that he is a married man.

MARY. I can't believe you're behaving like this. You're behaving like the worst kind of autocrat. Forgive me, but you are. Would you really have preferred it if we were to sneak around behind your back? Lying? Pretending that things are other than they are?

MRS GODWIN. He would have preferred it if you hadn't gone near each other in the first place! Have you any idea what this will do to us? To our reputation?

MARY. I don't care about any of that!

MRS GODWIN. Well, you should! And then there is the money. What is going to happen with...

GODWIN. We shall have the money. Now... that is enough. Enough. I will not hear another word on the subject. Not tonight. Let us put an end to this day. To bed. Everyone.

MARY *does not move.*

Go to bed, Mary.

MARY. And we will talk tomorrow?

GODWIN. Yes.

She goes. JANE follows her.

MRS GODWIN. I tried to warn you. But did you listen?

As you sow, so shall you reap.

GODWIN leaves suddenly.

Scene Five

Early afternoon. Two days later. The parlour. Skinner Street.
MRS GODWIN is setting the table for tea. JANE rushes in. She is wearing her outdoor shawl.

JANE. Mary? Oh.

MRS GODWIN. Where have you been?

JANE. I went to get bread. You said we needed some.

MRS GODWIN. Where is it, then?

JANE. I put it in the kitchen. Really, Maman.

MRS GODWIN. Tell me next time you think of leaving this house. Do you understand?

JANE. I was only gone a few minutes. I was only trying to help.

What's going on? The best china. Is someone coming?

MRS GODWIN *glances out of the window.*

MRS GODWIN. They're here.

JANE. Who are?

MRS GODWIN. Go and fetch madam from the bedroom. Tell her to come here at once. And then you can stay too. I want you to hear this.

JANE. Who is it?

MRS GODWIN. Do as I say.

JANE *hurries out.* MRS GODWIN *puts the finishing touches to the table, and straightens her skirts. After a moment,*
GODWIN *escorts HARRIET SHELLEY into the room.*
HARRIET *is about six months pregnant.*

GODWIN. Please come in. You remember Mrs Godwin?

MRS GODWIN. Of course she does. I'm sorry we meet again under such trying circumstances. It is very upsetting for us all, I'm sure. Would you care for some tea?

HARRIET. No, thank you. I do not wish to stay any longer than I must.

JANE *appears in the doorway and stops.*

GODWIN. Jane.

JANE *enters.*

Jane is our youngest daughter.

MRS GODWIN. My daughter.

MARY *enters.*

GODWIN. And this is Mary.

Mary, I would like you to meet Mrs Shelley.

JANE *gasps slightly.*

Perhaps we had better sit down.

MARY and HARRIET *remain standing.*

MARY. Papa...?

GODWIN. Mrs Shelley has been made acquainted with her husband's situation regarding you, Mary. Quite naturally, she has certain things she wishes to say to you.

MARY. I cannot think that this... can be of any benefit to any of us.

HARRIET. My husband is very erratic, Miss Godwin. He becomes extremely impassioned, dedicated to something, and then he just as quickly loses interest in it. He drops it.

It is simply his nature. I am sorry for it.

His love for me... was intense. And though I accept that the nature of his love has changed somewhat of late, it is still love. He loves me. As a husband loves a wife. That is apparent, I think.

We have a daughter. Did you know? Ianthe. After the maiden in his poem. The poem he dedicated to me. She is not yet two. This baby will be born in September. I think it will be a boy. We hope it will be. I see you are not without feeling. I would like to think there is not a woman on earth who would willingly deprive a child of its father. Even animals, I believe, stay close to their young in order to protect them.

She is becoming distressed.

GODWIN. Please do sit down.

MRS GODWIN (*offering a chair*). Here.

HARRIET sits.

HARRIET. I have been in this situation before. Hardly six months ago. He became rather too close to the wife of one of his friends. I will not name the lady. But I have made Mr Godwin aware of the details – in case he should have need of them. They do not see each other now. Her husband took her away. But you see, you are not the first.

Please don't imagine that you are.

GODWIN. Mary, Mrs Shelley and I would like you to give us your word that you will have no further contact with Shelley.

MARY *sways slightly, as though her legs will give way.*

JANE. Ah!

MRS GODWIN. Leave her.

GODWIN. You can now be under no illusion as to the damage this situation could engender. Let it stop now.

Do we have your word?

Mary?

MARY (*almost inaudibly*). Yes.

GODWIN. Good. Later, I shall ask you to put it in writing. But for now, that will suffice.

HARRIET (*to GODWIN*). Thank you.

She stands to go.

(To MARY.) Do you believe in God?

He is your witness. As well as I.

MRS GODWIN. Shall I show you out, my dear?

HARRIET. Good day.

She leaves with MRS GODWIN. In the silence, JANE sobs suddenly. GODWIN looks at MARY.

GODWIN. It needed doing. For your sake as much as anyone's.

It is over, Mary. I saw Shelley earlier today, and said the same thing to him.

MARY. May I go now?

GODWIN. I have written to Fanny and asked her to come home immediately.

MARY. May I go now?

GODWIN. You are young. You will soon recover. You don't need him, Mary.

MARY leaves.

Scene Six

The bedroom. The beds and floor are littered with Mary Wollstonecraft's books. MARY enters. She is distressed and angry and frightened – overwhelmed with conflicting emotions. She collapses to her knees.

She takes up one of the books and clutches it to her heart.

JANE enters, cautiously.

JANE. That was so cruel. I'm so sorry.

MARY turns away from her touch.

MARY. Don't. Please.

JANE takes a scrap of paper from her pocket, and gives it to MARY.

JANE. Here. It's from him.

MARY. You saw him?

JANE. He sent someone into the shop. I went to meet him. He is desperate. Quite desperate.

MARY *reads the note.*

He wants you to go away with him, doesn't he? To elope.

MARY. Yes.

JANE. Mary, if you want to go, I will come with you. He thinks I should. I could be so useful to you. I can speak French. Think what a help that would be. And I cannot stay here. Mama is already treating me like a prisoner. Imagine what it will be like after you've gone.

MARY. She has his child. She loves him.

JANE. But he does not love her. She isn't right for him. It was a mistake.

MARY. Would you please leave me, Jane?

JANE. Oh, my poor Mary. You will answer him, won't you? He's waiting for your answer. I will find a way to take it to him.

MARY. Thank you.

JANE *starts to go, then pauses.*

JANE. There is no life but loving.

JANE *leaves.*

In her mind, MARY sees HARRIET struggling in the river, just as her mother did. HARRIET is trying to hold the baby's head above the water, even as she forces her own head under.

MARY can bear it no longer. She closes her eyes and covers her ears, and buries her face.

Scene Seven

Night. The bedroom. MARY and JANE are asleep. Raised voices can be heard downstairs, and a little screech of alarm. MARY awakens and sits up. She listens.

MARY. Jane. Jane. Wake up.

JANE wakes up, slowly.

I think he's here.

JANE. Shelley?

MARY. I heard his voice. It's him. I know it is.

MARY is on her feet. MRS GODWIN enters. She is in her dressing gown.

MRS GODWIN. Back into bed.

MARY. Is it Shelley? What's happening?

MRS GODWIN. Yes, it is Shelley. And I never saw a man in such a state. He's taken something – that's obvious.

JANE. What do you mean?

MRS GODWIN. Laudanum or something of the sort.

JANE. Oh, no!

MARY. I want to see him.

MRS GODWIN. His eyes are as wide as saucers. Mr Godwin is going to walk him about the streets. And try to talk some sense into him. Your poor father. At this time of night.

MARY. I can walk him round the streets. Papa doesn't have to.

MRS GODWIN. And this is the sort of man you want to throw away your life for? None of them are worth it. Let me tell you. For all their promises and their grand gestures. They're weak. Weak inside. And they leave us to pay the price for it.

MARY. You don't know him at all!

Downstairs, a door is heard closing. MARY rushes to the window and starts to open it. MRS GODWIN rushes forward and pushes her aside, roughly and desperately.

JANE. Mary!

MRS GODWIN (*distressed*). Now look what you've done.

Please. Just settle down. This place has become a madhouse, and I shan't have it.

She leaves. MARY is trembling.

JANE. Do you think he'll be all right?

It's frightening. Laudanum.

MARY. Find me a pen, will you?

JANE. A pen?

JANE finds one, and MARY takes up a piece of paper.

MARY takes the pen, and begins to write.

Is it your answer?

MARY. Yes.

Scene Eight

Early morning. Two days later. GODWIN's study. GODWIN enters and opens the curtains. He goes to his desk, preparing to start work. He notices a note on the top of some books. He looks at it for a moment, before picking it up and reading it.

MRS GODWIN *rushes in.*

MRS GODWIN. Where are the girls? They're not in their...

GODWIN. They've gone,

With him.

MRS GODWIN. Gone?

GODWIN. To France, I assume. Apparently they will write as soon as they arrive at their destination.

MRS GODWIN. But... But not Jane? Why? Why would she...?
Oh, no. Oh, no. Jane.

GODWIN. Who would have thought they could be so quiet?

MRS GODWIN. We must get the first coach to Dover. They can't have been gone very long. We shall have to close the shop. Well, it can't be helped. If we stop them quickly, no one...

GODWIN. I will not go after them.

MRS GODWIN. Yes you will. Of course you will.

GODWIN. I will not. She gave me her word.

MRS GODWIN. Then I will!

She rushes out. GODWIN is white-faced with anger and shock. He reads the note again, then crumples it in his hand.

In another part of the stage, we see FANNY, in Wales, opening GODWIN's letter containing the news about MARY and SHELLEY. She feels as though she has been dealt a physical blow.

FANNY. Oh, no. Mary. Mary.

It grows dark. In a boat, on the Channel, MARY, SHELLEY and JANE are being rowed across to France. It is cold, and the water beneath them is black and churning. MARY is lying with her head against SHELLEY's chest. She is thinking of her father and of FANNY. But a kiss from SHELLEY is enough to recall her to the relief and pleasure of being with him.

The boat moves on, over the water.

End of Act Two.