

ACT THREE

Scene One

MARY is dreaming. In her dream, it is night. She is on a mountain top. The wind is howling. Thunder crashes overhead. Ahead of her is a figure dressed in black. She clammers towards it, stumbling. She calls out in desperation.

MARY. Father!

The figure turns and stares at her with hostility. It is GODWIN. Then he turns away from her and walks on.

Scene Two

Night. A lofty room, in a large dilapidated house in Switzerland. MARY is trying to open the shutters at the window, as quietly as she can. SHELLEY and JANE are sleeping on a bed. SHELLEY awakens and comes to her.

SHELLEY. Mary?

MARY. I woke up. I can't get back to sleep.

SHELLEY. You're not feeling unwell again?

MARY. No. I didn't mean to disturb you.

He puts his arms around her and kisses her.

I was hoping a little light might come in, but there isn't any moon tonight. I was going to write in the journal.

SHELLEY. Good idea.

MARY. That's the last of the candle.

SHELLEY. I know.

MARY. We'll have to get some more tomorrow.

SHELLEY. Yes.

MARY. Where will we get them from?

SHELLEY. I don't know. We'll have to walk down to the village and knock on people's doors. What's the French for candle?

MARY. They won't even open their doors. It's as though they're afraid of us.

Shelley, I don't like this house. I know the mountains are wonderful – and the skies, and the air. But there's something melancholy about this place.

SHELLEY. Something hostile.

MARY. Yes. I wish we hadn't taken it. Six months. Right through the winter.

SHELLEY. I tried to light the stove after you came up to bed. It doesn't work.

MARY. What?

SHELLEY. No wonder the owners were smiling when they handed over the keys.

MARY. Do we have any money left? Please tell me – I'd rather know.

SHELLEY. Not much. About twenty pounds. Just enough to get home with.

MARY. Is that what you want to do?

SHELLEY. I don't know what else we can do. My watch was the last valuable thing I had. No one's going to send us any money from England. I've left a trail of debts.

MARY. I dreamt about my father again just now.

SHELLEY. What did you dream?

MARY. Do you remember that desolate village we passed through – the one where the Cossacks had been through and taken everything?

SHELLEY. Yes.

MARY. I dreamt I was there. Alone – I mean, without you and Jane. It was night. I saw a figure emerging from between two of the houses. Moving silently. Dressed in black. And I followed him, and when I got closer, I could see that it was my father. He moved through the village, up towards the hills. I could hardly keep up, he was moving so fast. And I knew that he was making for the tower that we saw – the dark tower on the headland.

SHELLEY. Yes. I remember it.

MARY. And I wanted to stop him before he got there. I had to. And I called out to him, but the wind blew the words back into my mouth. Then he stopped suddenly, and he looked round at me. And his look was so cold. So forbidding. And he turned away. And then I woke up.

SHELLEY. You have to write that down.

MARY. When I think of him, I have this feeling of dismay, deep inside. I've disappointed him.

SHELLEY. He was shocked, that's all. He'll come to see the situation more reasonably. He probably already has. It must be hard, I know. You've been close to him.

MARY. Yes.

SHELLEY. My parents were always so distant from me. But I'm glad, in a way. Those family ties; they're not entirely useful. They can stop us from pursuing what's really important. Would your father – or your mother – ever have written anything if they'd stayed in their villages? Stayed with their families?

MARY. Probably not.

SHELLEY. We cannot put the needs of our loved ones before the greater good. We cannot be ruled by sentimentality.

MARY. *Political Justice*.

SHELLEY. Yes. It's pure *Political Justice*. We'll re-read those chapters tomorrow. It will help.

MARY. Thank you.

I see Jane's with us again.

SHELLEY. She heard rats in her room. I couldn't turn her away.
You don't mind, do you?

MARY. I suppose I wouldn't want to sleep alone in this house.

Let's write in the journal.

SHELLEY. Yes.

MARY places the journal next to the candle and takes up a pen.

MARY. I'll write something, and then you can write.

SHELLEY. One day people will read this journal, and they'll know that we were really living.

Scene Three

The parlour. Skinner Street. GODWIN is sorting through a pile of books. MRS GODWIN is working on an inventory. FANNY enters carrying a small parcel of books.

FANNY. I've found a few more copies of *Lessons for Children*.

GODWIN. Ah. Where were they?

FANNY. In the spare room. Under some blankets. There are... five.

GODWIN. Very good. Add them to the inventory, Mrs Godwin.

MRS GODWIN. A fat lot of difference that will make.

FANNY. When is the valuer coming about the copyrights, Papa?

GODWIN. Tomorrow, I hope. If he can fit us in.

FANNY. Did he give any indication of what they might be worth?

GODWIN. No. But he's a good man. Thorough. He'll make sure we don't undersell ourselves.

MRS GODWIN. Undersell ourselves to whom? Mr Nobody?
Nobody is going to buy this business. Nobody would be mad enough.

GODWIN. I disagree.

MRS GODWIN. And we certainly won't find a buyer in time.

GODWIN. It's a promising concern for anyone with some capital to invest.

MRS GODWIN. It's a disaster. It has been from the very start.

When I think of the hours I've spent, running to and fro to the printers, standing behind that counter in the draughts, writing into the small hours. And where has it got us?

FANNY. It hasn't been a complete disaster, Mama. We've just been a little unlucky with investment and...

MRS GODWIN. Oh, you don't know anything about it. Don't pretend you do. I feel sick.

FANNY. Please don't upset yourself.

MRS GODWIN. I really think I'm going to be sick.

GODWIN. Then please do it quietly. These figures won't add themselves.

MRS GODWIN. And Charles won't even come home to help. I am abandoned by my own son.

There is a knock on the door of the shop downstairs. They all stop dead.

Oh, my good Lord.

FANNY. Are we expecting anyone?

MRS GODWIN. What if it's the bailiffs?

GODWIN. How could it possibly be? We haven't yet heard from the court.

The banging comes again. FANNY goes to the window and looks out, cautiously.

MRS GODWIN. Don't be seen, you silly girl!

FANNY. Shall I go down, Papa?

GODWIN. Yes. But check who it is before you open the door.

FANNY. I will.

She leaves.

MRS GODWIN. What if it's the bailiffs?

GODWIN. Try to control yourself, my dear. I'm quite sure it won't be.

MRS GODWIN. I can't go to prison, Mr Godwin.

GODWIN. I know. I doubt very much that it will come to that.

MRS GODWIN. Would it help if I went to see this monstrous man who wants to ruin us?

GODWIN. I don't think that would help.

MRS GODWIN. I can be very charming when I need to be.

GODWIN. It's not personal. He has no wish to see us destitute. He simply wants his money. And he no longer cares how he gets it. If we should find ourselves in prison...

MRS GODWIN. Oh, don't...

GODWIN....my friends and my supporters will rally round, I'm sure, and...

MRS GODWIN. And what can they do? None of them has the sort of money we need. A bunch of useless old wastrels.

FANNY enters. She has a note in her hand.

FANNY. It's a letter. I think it's from him.

MRS GODWIN. From the creditor?

FANNY. No. I think it's from Shelley. It's his handwriting.

She hands the letter to GODWIN, who opens it.

MRS GODWIN. Shelley? What does it say?

GODWIN. Hardly a letter. He thinks this a fit way to communicate.

MRS GODWIN. What does he say? Where was it posted?

GODWIN. They're back.

FANNY. Back? In England?

GODWIN. Yes.

MRS GODWIN. Oh, thank God.

FANNY. Are they safe? Well?

GODWIN. It would seem so. They've taken lodgings.

MRS GODWIN. You mean, they're not coming here?

FANNY. Whereabouts?

GODWIN. St Marylebone.

MRS GODWIN. That's miles away!

FANNY. It's not so far.

MRS GODWIN (*to GODWIN*). You said they would come back here. You said they would come back with their tails between their legs.

GODWIN *does not reply*.

Well. I suppose I had better get dressed, if I'm going all the way to Marylebone.

GODWIN. Nobody will be going to see them.

MRS GODWIN. But...

GODWIN. Nor will they be admitted to this house. Not unless they apologise and ask to return on a permanent basis.

MRS GODWIN. But I want to see Jane. I haven't seen her for months. I can only imagine what a state she's in. What if he is keeping her against her will?

GODWIN. I think Jane made it clear to you in Dover that it is very much her will to remain with Mr Shelley. I will not have you humiliating yourself by going after her again.

MRS GODWIN. But she might have changed her mind.

GODWIN. This says she has not.

Pause.

FANNY. I could go. I could take them any message you wish to send.

GODWIN. No one shall go. Now let us get on with our task.
We have more important matters to deal with.

Scene Four

Day. Outside a tavern. A noisy street. FANNY is waiting.

SHELLEY arrives and rushes to her.

SHELLEY. Fanny! I wasn't sure that you would come.
Hello.

FANNY. Hello.

SHELLEY. You found it all right. Hardly the most salubrious place to meet.

FANNY. I can't stay long. If he knew where I was...

SHELLEY. How could he know? Unless he's taken to following you? Has he?

FANNY. No. But it took me an hour to walk here. He'll be wondering where I've gone. And if he asks me... you know I can't lie to him.

SHELLEY. It's his fault we have to meet like this. You know we came to the shop two days ago? We stood on the street for almost half an hour.

FANNY. Yes.

SHELLEY. Were you in?

FANNY. We were all in.

How's Mary? How's Jane?

SHELLEY. They're well. Thriving. Mary's pregnant.

FANNY. Oh.

SHELLEY. It took us an age to realise it. But it's quite obvious now.

FANNY. I see.

SHELLEY. We're overjoyed. Although I don't know quite how we will manage. Things are rather difficult – financially. In fact I've been running around all morning trying to find a friend who can lend me enough for the rent. The landlady is getting belligerent.

FANNY. I'm sorry. It's dreadful – being in debt. Crushing.

SHELLEY. Are things bad at Skinner Street?

FANNY. They've never been worse.

SHELLEY looks down in shame.

It's not your fault.

SHELLEY. I wish I could have given him more, but...

FANNY. It's not your fault.

Will you tell Jane that I'm sure her mother would see her, if she came to the house alone. If she waited until my father went out.

SHELLEY. Yes.

FANNY. Mama is quite unwell. She's desperate to see Jane.

SHELLEY. I'll tell her. Will you tell Godwin about the baby for us?

FANNY. I can't. He has forbidden me from having any contact with you. He checks the post.

SHELLEY. Of course.

FANNY. Write to him.

SHELLEY. You think we should? We didn't want to put it in a letter.

FANNY. You must. It might make a difference. I hope it will.

Pause.

SHELLEY. This is how it's to be then, Fanny. Two camps. Enemy lines. And you're the only one who can cross them. If anyone can bring us all together again, it's you.

FANNY. I don't know why you think that.

SHELLEY. I have faith in you. I always have had.

FANNY. Why?

MARY enters, and approaches cautiously.

MARY. Hello, Fanny.

FANNY looks astonished. Her face flushes.

FANNY. Mary. Mary. I'm glad... about your baby. I have to go.

MARY. But don't.

FANNY. I'm sorry. I didn't know that you would be here. I promised him.

She rushes away.

MARY. Fanny!

FANNY has gone.

How absurd. How ridiculous.

SHELLEY. Don't be too hard on her. We...

MARY. What does she think he can do to her? She's a grown woman. How stupid...

SHELLEY. Mary...

MARY. How stupid.

MARY walks off. **SHELLEY** goes after her.

Scene Five

Day. The parlour. Skinner Street. JANE is sitting with MRS GODWIN and FANNY.

JANE. I think we must have looked rather funny – trekking through France on an ass. And it wasn't even a very good ass. It couldn't even carry two of us. In fact there were times when we had to carry *it*. But we did see some wonderful places.

You really ought to try travelling, Fanny. I feel quite different now. Quite changed. We took a large house in a village. It was terribly dark and gloomy. Shelley and I were sure that it was haunted. And it was cold – even in August! But then the stove broke and we had to leave. I thought that was a little rash – just because the stove needed mending. Actually, I've started to think it might have had something to do with money. We certainly aren't living as I supposed a baronet would live.

MRS GODWIN. He's not a baronet. Not yet.

JANE. But then, he is so far above all things material.

MRS GODWIN. And I dare say he never will be if he carries on like this.

JANE. I must say, Fanny, France was a great deal dirtier than I'd imagined it would be.

FANNY. Oh. I suppose it's still recovering from the war...

JANE. And rough does not begin to describe some of the people we were forced to mix with. Why, one night, we were going up the stairs to bed in this horrible, filthy *pension*, when the landlord stopped us and asked if he could join us! Can you imagine. He caught hold of my skirt. He said three wasn't a good number, and he thought I would be left out. I assured him I wouldn't be, but we had to bar the door for the whole night, just in case. And then on the way home, we travelled on a boat up the Rhine and the sailors – well, even Shelley found it hard to be civil.

MRS GODWIN. You slept in the same room?

JANE. Of course. Lots of times. Oh, don't look like that, Mama.

You really are terribly 'worldly'. It's hard to define the connection the three of us have. Shelley is passionate about the idea of 'community'. He could never be happy living with just one person. That's what we want to start – a community. He wants to bring his sisters to join us in Marylebone.

FANNY. His sisters? Surely they wouldn't be allowed to...

JANE. He wants to rescue them. Like he rescued us. And he asked Harriet to come too. He wrote her such sweet letters, but she says she won't come. You heard she had the baby? Shelley's simply delighted about it. He's been grinning from ear to ear. A son and heir. And now there's Mary expecting too. He will have had two new babies in the space of six months. Think of it. Who knows how many more there will be.

MRS GODWIN. Leave us, Fanny. Please.

FANNY *stands*.

JANE. Oh, Fanny, could you find my pink dress for me? And some clean stockings? I can't tell you how I need them.

FANNY. Yes. All right.

FANNY *leaves*.

JANE. I'm sorry you have been unwell, Mama. You really mustn't fret on my account. I'm perfectly happy – as you see.

MRS GODWIN. I will do my very best to express myself in...
(Cannot finish the sentence.)

JANE. What?

MRS GODWIN....in a reasonable fashion, as Mr Godwin would say.

JANE. Really, Mama. If you're going to tell me that I should...

MRS GODWIN. When I was not much older than you are, I was seduced. Used. By a man who should have known better.

JANE. Do you mean Charles's father? My father? But he married you. You can hardly say he 'seduced' you when...

MRS GODWIN. No, he did not. And he wasn't your father.

When he discovered that I was expecting your brother, he paid me to go away from him. He wanted nothing to do with me.

JANE. So... who was my father? You always made me think that...

MRS GODWIN. Your father was a country squire. Rotten through and through. He took advantage of my desperate situation – of my poverty. He treated me like so much dirt under his shoe. When you were born, he would not even accept that you were his. When you were three months old, we were in prison. You were too young to have remembered it, thank God.

JANE. In prison for what?

MRS GODWIN. Debt, of course. What else? Debt. Debt. Always debt! I did everything I could to get you out of there. Filthy, squalid place. You caught a fever and almost died. Then one of the other women was released and she took you out, and Charles, and kept you safe until I could come for you.

JANE. I don't believe this. You're making this up.

MRS GODWIN. Do you really think I would make up such a dreadful, shameful tale? I had hoped to never tell you this. It has taken me years, years to make some sort of life for myself and for you. You cannot know what I have endured. And now you are making exactly the same mistakes I made.

JANE. No, I am not. My situation is completely different.

MRS GODWIN. Another young girl whose life is ruined. Over.

JANE. Oh, don't be so ridiculous...

MRS GODWIN. You are fallen. Tainted. The one fate I prayed you would never have to suffer.

JANE. You have no idea of the delicacy, the beauty of the relationship I...

MRS GODWIN. Nobody decent will ever come near you now. You have lost all chance of a normal, decent match...

JANE. Mr Godwin married you, it seems.

MRS GODWIN. There are not many like Mr Godwin in the world. And Shelley isn't going to marry you, is he? Well, is he?

I want you to come home. Immediately. If you come now, we can say that you went with Mary in order to look after her – to try to bring her home.

JANE. Shelley said that you would do this. He said you would do anything to make me stay here.

MRS GODWIN. Shelley? 'Shelley said...' Why do you listen to him and not to me?

JANE *stands*.

I'm your mother! Why would you doubt that I want what's best for you? When have I done anything which isn't best for you?

JANE. I won't be coming back, Mama.

MRS GODWIN. Oh, you silly, foolish girl!

JANE. I detest this place. I hadn't realised how much I detest it until now. I shall collect my things and then I shall go.

MRS GODWIN. Jane...

JANE. And it's not Jane any more. It's Claire. Jane is such a very dull name. Claire is romantic. Shelley thinks so.

JANE *leaves*.

Scene Six

Night. The living room. The lodgings in Marylebone. JANE is sobbing. SHELLY is with her.

SHELLY. It's all right. It's all right, now.

What did your mother say to you?

JANE cannot answer.

You seemed so cheerful when you got back – we thought it must have gone well.

She shakes her head.

Did Godwin come home? Did he see you?

JANE. No.

SHELLEY. It was brave of you to go. I can't imagine what your mother thinks to achieve by making you wretched.

JANE. You won't abandon me, will you?

SHELLEY. Abandon you? Is that what she said I would do?

JANE. You won't give me money to make me go away from you?

SHELLEY. Forgive me, but your mother can be very foolish sometimes. Jane...

JANE. Claire.

SHELLEY. Claire...

JANE. I don't want to be alone. I don't think I'd be very good at it.

SHELLEY. You can stay with Mary and I for as long as you like.

JANE. Can I?

SHELLEY. Oh, I don't even see it like that. We're all together because we want to be. And while we want to be, we must be together.

JANE. Yes.

SHELLEY. There are no rules. No demands. No promises. Only what we want. What we all want.

Pause.

JANE. Do I matter?

SHELLEY. Of course you matter.

JANE. Do I matter to you?

SHELLEY. Yes.

JANE. Can I touch you?

She reaches out and touches him.

I have always longed to touch you. Sometimes, when I've been lying on the end of your bed, my hand has fallen very close to you. Close to your skin. And I've imagined... what it would be like... to touch you. And it's like this. Touch me. Please.

She takes hold of his hand and puts it against her body. They kiss. They stare into each other's eyes – a suspended moment. MARY enters from the bedroom.

MARY. What's going on?

SHELLEY. I heard her crying. She's been very upset by her visit this afternoon.

JANE. I'm sorry. I didn't mean to wake you up. I know you need your sleep, Mary.

Pause.

SHELLEY. I think we all need some sleep.

JANE. Can I come in your room?

MARY. No. I think you should stay in here. It's hard enough for me to get comfortable as it is.

SHELLEY. We could probably manage, couldn't we? I could always sleep on the floor...

MARY. No. (*Suddenly gasping with pain.*) Ah!

SHELLEY. Mary?

MARY. Ah! Oh! That's... Ah!

SHELLEY. Mary, what is it?

MARY. Something's... Oh!

JANE. Is it the baby?

SHELLEY. Do you need to sit...?

MARY. No. No. No. Oh, my Lord...

JANE. Is it the baby? It can't be the baby, can it? It's too soon.

MARY takes deep breaths.

SHELLEY. Is it easing? Mary?

JANE. Perhaps you should go for the doctor?

MARY. I've never felt anything quite so... Do you think it's the baby? Could it be?

SHELLEY. I don't know. Do you think it is?

MARY. I think it might be.

JANE. Shall I do something?

MARY. Go away.

JANE. My goodness. You're very stern this evening...

MARY. Just go away! Ah! It's coming again. Shelley!

SHELLEY. That's it. I'll hold you, shall I?

JANE. Shall I go for the landlady? She might know a midwife.

MARY. It's too soon. I'm frightened.

SHELLEY. Try to keep calm. It might not come.

MARY. Shelley...

SHELLEY. Oh, my poor darling...

MARY. If I die...

SHELLEY. You won't. You won't die.

MARY. But I might. I might.

Scene Seven

Day. The lodgings. MARY is lying on the daybed, sleeping. FANNY is sitting close to her, with a baby in her arms. MARY opens her eyes.

FANNY. Hello, clever little sister.

MARY. How long have you been here?

FANNY. Not long.

MARY. I wanted you to come. I kept asking for you.

FANNY. I know. I came as soon as we got the news.

MARY. Is Father going to come?

FANNY. No. No. But he allowed me to, and that's something, isn't it?

She's beautiful.

MARY. She's very small.

FANNY. But she's perfect.

MARY. Shelley says she's alert. It's so hard – I don't have anything to compare her with.

FANNY. She's certainly looking about. (*To baby.*) Aren't you, little one?

(*To MARY.*) How are you feeling?

MARY. I'm fine. Truly. I'm certainly not going to spend another day lying down. Tomorrow we shall both be up and dressed and taking our first walk.

FANNY. Are you sure you ought to?

MARY. I don't hold with all this lying-in. Neither does Shelley. Mother didn't.

FANNY. No.

MARY. And we need some fresh air. It's damp in this place.

FANNY *passes MARY a small bundle of baby clothes.*

FANNY. Here. They're from Mama – Mrs Godwin. I think they must have been Jane's.

MARY *looks at the clothes.*

It's kind of her, isn't it? She cares more than you think she does.

MARY. More than he does, apparently.

FANNY. Mary...

MARY. What did he say – when he heard she'd been born? He didn't say anything, did he?

FANNY. He said you'd had a girl. And then he said that I could come and see you if I wished.

That was his present, in a way.

Things are very hard for him at the moment...

MARY. You know, I really think he doesn't care. Not in a real way. All those times when he was cold and distant from us, and I used to think it didn't matter, because deep down, there was this... bedrock of love. But now I don't think there is. If I can do one thing, one thing he doesn't approve of and yet he can't forgive me.

FANNY. Perhaps we shouldn't talk about this now.

MARY. I know what he thinks: that I've betrayed my gifts – my promise – but he's so wrong. Because this is it – I'm living out my promise. I'm living the life with Shelley that he and my mother dreamt of living. Does he think I've just thrown everything up to swoon about like some lovesick girl? I'm reading and learning and thinking and writing more than I've ever done. (*Pointing to the books beside her.*) Look. Look at all these. I've read them all. And Shelley and I talk about them. Talk and talk like I used to do with him. I want you to tell him that. Make him see that.

FANNY. I'll try. He's... He has a lot of worries at the moment.

MARY. I don't care. She's his first grandchild.

FANNY. We have to sell the business. He's desperately trying to find a buyer. One of his creditors has taken him to court. If we can't find the money, we'll be made bankrupt. I'm sorry. I wasn't going to tell you today.

JANE and SHELLEY enter. JANE is carrying a cake.

SHELLEY imitates a trumpet fanfare.

JANE. We present... the cake!

MARY and FANNY laugh.

MARY. How did you manage that?

SHELLEY. The mother of a friend. She never could resist me.

JANE. We're going to go down and make some tea, and find some plates, and...

SHELLEY. And have a party.

JANE. Shelley has written a song for Clara. It's so funny. I'm going to sing it.

SHELLEY. We won't be long. Don't even think about leaving, Fanny.

JANE and SHELLEY leave. MARY and FANNY smile at each other.

MARY (*of the baby*). She's called Clara.

FANNY. Shelley told me.

MARY. Jane has started saying that she wants to be called Claire.

FANNY. Yes.

MARY. I didn't let that put me off. She knows it's always been my favourite name. She copies everything I do. It's insufferable.

FANNY. I remember when we used to sit in the graveyard and talk about what our daughters would be called. Yours was always Clara.

MARY. And yours was Mary.

FANNY. And now look...

She smiles down at the baby.

MARY. I'll try to do something to help Papa.

FANNY. Don't think about that now.

MARY. I'll talk to Shelley. I'll try.

Scene Eight

The parlour. Skinner Street. GODWIN and MRS GODWIN are with FANNY.

MRS GODWIN. But I don't understand. How can Shelley pay our debts when he hasn't got any money himself?

FANNY. He has looked into the possibility of selling another bond – a post-obit bond. But the sums he was offered were derisory.

GODWIN. I told him we were fortunate the first time.

FANNY. So, what he is proposing is that he goes to our more serious creditors and offers to... to take on our debts. He will promise to pay them what we owe, as soon as he inherits some money. And he'll offer them a considerable sum of interest besides.

MRS GODWIN. Well... will they accept that?

GODWIN. Yes. Most likely. It would be a far better bet than a claim against a failing business.

MRS GODWIN. Then we must accept his offer.

FANNY. You would not have to do anything, Papa. You would not have to be present at any of the meetings. I can liaise with Shelley.

MRS GODWIN. Well, I think it is a very fair offer. And certainly no more than he owes us.

GODWIN. If I accept this offer, Mrs Godwin, it will not be because of anything we are 'owed'. It will be on exactly the same basis as our last arrangement. A philosophical basis.
Political Justice.

MRS GODWIN. Oh, no one really believed that in the first place. It's all over the city that you sold your daughters – one for eight hundred and the other for seven.

GODWIN. How dare you repeat that in this house?

MRS GODWIN. You must face facts, Mr Godwin. And the fact is that we have no earthly option but to accept.

Pause.

FANNY. I'll leave you to think about it.

MRS GODWIN. There's nothing to think about. If you don't accept this offer, Mr Godwin, I shall...

GODWIN. You shall die. Yes, yes, Mrs Godwin. You have been tantalising us with the promise of your demise for several months now and yet here you are, as large as life.

MRS GODWIN. How cruel. You are a very cruel man.

She begins to cry, and leaves. FANNY and GODWIN are silent for a few moments.

FANNY. They really want to help.

GODWIN. You may tell Mr Shelley that I accept his offer.

FANNY. Right. Good.

GODWIN. You may also tell him that there will be no word of thanks from me. Nor will this form the basis of a reconciliation.

FANNY. As you wish.

The baby is adorable. And Mary's writing and reading a great deal. She wanted you to know...

GODWIN *walks out.*

Scene Nine

Night. The lodgings. SHELLEY and JANE enter. SHELLEY is holding a candlestick. They do not notice, at first, that MARY is kneeling in the middle of the floor.

SHELLEY. But an audience doesn't want an actor to bludgeon them about the head like that.

JANE. He was loud, I agree, but he was very imposing. Isn't that what the character required?

SHELLEY. He certainly imposed upon me – for two and a half hours.

JANE (*laughing*). You're terrible.

SHELLEY. We'd better be quiet.

JANE. Yes.

JANE *suddenly catches sight of MARY and lets out a little shriek.*

Oh, Mary. You gave me such a fright!

SHELLEY. What's wrong?

MARY. She's dead.

MARY's gaze moves to a chair, where she has left the swaddled baby. SHELLEY walks over to the chair, and kneeling down, touches the baby's face.

I went to wake her for her last feed, and she was like that.

SHELLEY. Oh, no.

MARY. I don't know why. She had been so happy today.

JANE (*approaching SHELLEY*). Are you sure she's...? I mean...?

SHELLEY. Jane, no. No. She's gone.

SHELLEY *goes to MARY and puts his arms around her.*

MARY. I'm sorry.

SHELLEY *sobs.*

Scene Ten

Late evening. The parlour. Skinner Street. Outside, a thunder storm is raging. FANNY arrives home. She is soaked to the skin, and exhausted. GODWIN enters from his study.

GODWIN. Could they not have put you in a carriage?

FANNY. I was wet when I arrived there. It made no difference.
Besides, they have just as little money as we do.

GODWIN. I'm sure Shelley could run to the cost of a carriage.

FANNY. Shelley wasn't there.

GODWIN. Oh?

FANNY. He's had to stay away from the house for a few days.
One of his creditors isn't prepared to wait. There's a warrant
out for his arrest.

GODWIN. I see.

FANNY. He and Mary have been meeting in the cathedral.

GODWIN. Sanctuary.

FANNY. Yes. It's a terrible shame. Just when she has such need
of him. I told her she should speak to the creditor and
explain what's happened. Surely he would show a little
compassion?

GODWIN. The world does not stop turning because of the
death of one child. Nor should it.

FANNY looks at him in dismay. MRS GODWIN enters.

MRS GODWIN. So, you're back then.

FANNY. Yes.

MRS GODWIN. Couldn't they have put you in a carriage?

FANNY. I didn't mind.

MRS GODWIN. I don't know why you had to go in the first place. She's got Jane to comfort her.

FANNY. She asked for me. She wanted me. I should have gone days ago.

MRS GODWIN. And how is madam?

FANNY. Oh, please don't do that!

MRS GODWIN. I beg your pardon?

FANNY. Mary is... coping. She's sad. Bereft. But she's trying very hard. She's reading Shakespeare, Papa. Just like you always do when things are... dreadful. Papa, please, please go and see her.

MRS GODWIN. Oh, you silly girl.

FANNY. It would mean so much to her. Or write to her at least. If you could only see how bewildered she is... how shocked...

MRS GODWIN. And that's supposed to be our fault, is it?

FANNY. They have done so much to make amends. Taken on our debts...

GODWIN. Please be quiet.

FANNY. I'm sorry. It's just...

FANNY *does not dare to go on.*

MRS GODWIN. Of course, there are some who would say that they brought this on themselves. With their sinfulness.

FANNY. Who would say that?

MRS GODWIN. Some would say it is God's punishment.

GODWIN. Please do not introduce hocus-pocus into the equation.

MRS GODWIN. I'm only saying what others will say.

GODWIN. Go and change out of those wet things, Fanny. The last thing we need is for you to catch a cold.

FANNY *leaves.*

Scene Eleven

Night. The lodgings. The storm is still overhead. MARY, alone on the daybed, is dreaming. The book she was reading has fallen from her hands.

She dreams that SHELLEY is there, with the baby's body in his arms.

SHELLEY. Quickly, Mary. Come closer to the fire. We must make her warm.

MARY goes to him. They crouch by the fire.

We can bring her back to life.

MARY. Can we?

SHELLEY. We can breathe the life back into her. Breathe on her, like this.

They begin to breathe over the baby's body.

Look – she's stirring. Life and death are nothing, Mary. They are the same.

MARY. She's breathing. Clara? Clara? Clara?

MARY wakes up suddenly.

Clara?

She realises that she has been dreaming. She begins to cry. JANE comes out of the bedroom and sees her.

She goes to her and puts her arms around her.

JANE. Oh, don't, Mary. Don't cry.

Scene Twelve

A graveyard. It's snowing. MARY and SHELLEY are muffled up against the cold. They stand, hand in hand, looking down at the baby's grave. It is marked by a small, simple headstone.

MARY (reading). 'Clara Shelley.'

SHELLEY. It's all I could afford. Is it all right?

MARY. Yes. Yes. Of course it is. What else is there to say?

Pause.

SHELLEY. Mary, I got a letter from my father's lawyer today.
It seems my grandfather has died.

MARY. Your grandfather? I'm so sorry.

SHELLEY. My father inherits the estate, of course. But he wants to come to an arrangement with me – a financial arrangement. Mary, it means we will soon have money. As much money as we need.

MARY. I see.

SHELLEY. And I can help so many people. Do so much good.

MARY. Yes.

SHELLEY. I can help your father. And Harriet – she needs more money for the children.

MARY. Yes.

SHELLEY. I've been thinking: we should go abroad. Leave England. Or at least make plans to. It will be some time before the money is mine.

MARY. How long?

SHELLEY. Two months? Three? But as soon as we have it, we should go and live somewhere beautiful. Somewhere inspiring. Away from all the distractions and the disapproval.

MARY. Somewhere we can write.

SHELLEY. Yes. Yes.

MARY. What about Jane?

SHELLEY. I thought Jane could come with us. Mary darling, it isn't good for two people to be always together. Forced in upon each other...

MARY. You make it sound like a form of torture.

SHELLEY. We should take whoever wants to come. And we will meet people there, I'm sure. We will form a community of like-minded people.

MARY. Then tell Jane your heart is mine. Your heart is mine alone. Make her understand that.

SHELLEY. I will then. Because it's true.

Let's walk home through the snow.

MARY. Yes.

They leave the graveyard. GODWIN suddenly walks into view. MARY sees him and turns pale.

(Quietly.) My father.

GODWIN, closer now, sees them and stops.

SHELLEY. Godwin. This is a fortuitous...

GODWIN walks past them, without looking at them. He is gone.

MARY. My father...

End of Act Three.