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\*\*\* START OF THE PROJECT GUTENBERG EBOOK FRANKENSTEIN; OR, THE MODERN PROMETHEUS \*\*\*

Frankenstein;

or, the Modern Prometheus

by Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin) Shelley

CONTENTS

Letter 1

Letter 2

Letter 3

Letter 4

Chapter 1

Chapter 2

Chapter 3

Chapter 4

Chapter 5

Chapter 6

Chapter 7

Chapter 8

Chapter 9

Chapter 10

Chapter 11

Chapter 12

Chapter 13

Chapter 14

Chapter 15

Chapter 16

Chapter 17

Chapter 18

Chapter 19

Chapter 20

Chapter 21

Chapter 22

Chapter 23

Chapter 24

Letter 1

\_To Mrs. Saville, England.\_

St. Petersburgh, Dec. 11th, 17—.

You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the

commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil

forebodings. I arrived here yesterday, and my first task is to assure

my dear sister of my welfare and increasing confidence in the success

of my undertaking.

I am already far north of London, and as I walk in the streets of

Petersburgh, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which

braces my nerves and fills me with delight. Do you understand this

feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards

which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes.

Inspirited by this wind of promise, my daydreams become more fervent

and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of

frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the

region of beauty and delight. There, Margaret, the sun is for ever

visible, its broad disk just skirting the horizon and diffusing a

perpetual splendour. There—for with your leave, my sister, I will put

some trust in preceding navigators—there snow and frost are banished;

and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in

wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable

globe. Its productions and features may be without example, as the

phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered

solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I

may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle and may

regulate a thousand celestial observations that require only this

voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever. I

shall satiate my ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world

never before visited, and may tread a land never before imprinted by

the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are sufficient to

conquer all fear of danger or death and to induce me to commence this

laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little

boat, with his holiday mates, on an expedition of discovery up his

native river. But supposing all these conjectures to be false, you

cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on all

mankind, to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole

to those countries, to reach which at present so many months are

requisite; or by ascertaining the secret of the magnet, which, if at

all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking such as mine.

These reflections have dispelled the agitation with which I began my

letter, and I feel my heart glow with an enthusiasm which elevates me

to heaven, for nothing contributes so much to tranquillise the mind as

a steady purpose—a point on which the soul may fix its intellectual

eye. This expedition has been the favourite dream of my early years. I

have read with ardour the accounts of the various voyages which have

been made in the prospect of arriving at the North Pacific Ocean

through the seas which surround the pole. You may remember that a

history of all the voyages made for purposes of discovery composed the

whole of our good Uncle Thomas’ library. My education was neglected,

yet I was passionately fond of reading. These volumes were my study

day and night, and my familiarity with them increased that regret which

I had felt, as a child, on learning that my father’s dying injunction

had forbidden my uncle to allow me to embark in a seafaring life.

These visions faded when I perused, for the first time, those poets

whose effusions entranced my soul and lifted it to heaven. I also

became a poet and for one year lived in a paradise of my own creation;

I imagined that I also might obtain a niche in the temple where the

names of Homer and Shakespeare are consecrated. You are well

acquainted with my failure and how heavily I bore the disappointment.

But just at that time I inherited the fortune of my cousin, and my

thoughts were turned into the channel of their earlier bent.

Six years have passed since I resolved on my present undertaking. I

can, even now, remember the hour from which I dedicated myself to this

great enterprise. I commenced by inuring my body to hardship. I

accompanied the whale-fishers on several expeditions to the North Sea;

I voluntarily endured cold, famine, thirst, and want of sleep; I often

worked harder than the common sailors during the day and devoted my

nights to the study of mathematics, the theory of medicine, and those

branches of physical science from which a naval adventurer might derive

the greatest practical advantage. Twice I actually hired myself as an

under-mate in a Greenland whaler, and acquitted myself to admiration. I

must own I felt a little proud when my captain offered me the second

dignity in the vessel and entreated me to remain with the greatest

earnestness, so valuable did he consider my services.

And now, dear Margaret, do I not deserve to accomplish some great purpose?

My life might have been passed in ease and luxury, but I preferred glory to

every enticement that wealth placed in my path. Oh, that some encouraging

voice would answer in the affirmative! My courage and my resolution is

firm; but my hopes fluctuate, and my spirits are often depressed. I am

about to proceed on a long and difficult voyage, the emergencies of which

will demand all my fortitude: I am required not only to raise the spirits

of others, but sometimes to sustain my own, when theirs are failing.

This is the most favourable period for travelling in Russia. They fly

quickly over the snow in their sledges; the motion is pleasant, and, in

my opinion, far more agreeable than that of an English stagecoach. The

cold is not excessive, if you are wrapped in furs—a dress which I have

already adopted, for there is a great difference between walking the

deck and remaining seated motionless for hours, when no exercise

prevents the blood from actually freezing in your veins. I have no

ambition to lose my life on the post-road between St. Petersburgh and

Archangel.

I shall depart for the latter town in a fortnight or three weeks; and my

intention is to hire a ship there, which can easily be done by paying the

insurance for the owner, and to engage as many sailors as I think necessary

among those who are accustomed to the whale-fishing. I do not intend to

sail until the month of June; and when shall I return? Ah, dear sister, how

can I answer this question? If I succeed, many, many months, perhaps years,

will pass before you and I may meet. If I fail, you will see me again soon,

or never.

Farewell, my dear, excellent Margaret. Heaven shower down blessings on you,

and save me, that I may again and again testify my gratitude for all your

love and kindness.

Your affectionate brother,

R. Walton

Letter 2

\_To Mrs. Saville, England.\_

Archangel, 28th March, 17—.

How slowly the time passes here, encompassed as I am by frost and snow!

Yet a second step is taken towards my enterprise. I have hired a

vessel and am occupied in collecting my sailors; those whom I have

already engaged appear to be men on whom I can depend and are certainly

possessed of dauntless courage.

But I have one want which I have never yet been able to satisfy, and the

absence of the object of which I now feel as a most severe evil, I have no

friend, Margaret: when I am glowing with the enthusiasm of success, there

will be none to participate my joy; if I am assailed by disappointment, no

one will endeavour to sustain me in dejection. I shall commit my thoughts

to paper, it is true; but that is a poor medium for the communication of

feeling. I desire the company of a man who could sympathise with me, whose

eyes would reply to mine. You may deem me romantic, my dear sister, but I

bitterly feel the want of a friend. I have no one near me, gentle yet

courageous, possessed of a cultivated as well as of a capacious mind, whose

tastes are like my own, to approve or amend my plans. How would such a

friend repair the faults of your poor brother! I am too ardent in execution

and too impatient of difficulties. But it is a still greater evil to me

that I am self-educated: for the first fourteen years of my life I ran wild

on a common and read nothing but our Uncle Thomas’ books of voyages.

At that age I became acquainted with the celebrated poets of our own

country; but it was only when it had ceased to be in my power to derive its

most important benefits from such a conviction that I perceived the

necessity of becoming acquainted with more languages than that of my native

country. Now I am twenty-eight and am in reality more illiterate than many

schoolboys of fifteen. It is true that I have thought more and that my

daydreams are more extended and magnificent, but they want (as the painters

call it) \_keeping;\_ and I greatly need a friend who would have sense

enough not to despise me as romantic, and affection enough for me to

endeavour to regulate my mind.

Well, these are useless complaints; I shall certainly find no friend on the

wide ocean, nor even here in Archangel, among merchants and seamen. Yet

some feelings, unallied to the dross of human nature, beat even in these

rugged bosoms. My lieutenant, for instance, is a man of wonderful courage

and enterprise; he is madly desirous of glory, or rather, to word my phrase

more characteristically, of advancement in his profession. He is an

Englishman, and in the midst of national and professional prejudices,

unsoftened by cultivation, retains some of the noblest endowments of

humanity. I first became acquainted with him on board a whale vessel;

finding that he was unemployed in this city, I easily engaged him to assist

in my enterprise.

The master is a person of an excellent disposition and is remarkable in the

ship for his gentleness and the mildness of his discipline. This

circumstance, added to his well-known integrity and dauntless courage, made

me very desirous to engage him. A youth passed in solitude, my best years

spent under your gentle and feminine fosterage, has so refined the

groundwork of my character that I cannot overcome an intense distaste to

the usual brutality exercised on board ship: I have never believed it to be

necessary, and when I heard of a mariner equally noted for his kindliness

of heart and the respect and obedience paid to him by his crew, I felt

myself peculiarly fortunate in being able to secure his services. I heard

of him first in rather a romantic manner, from a lady who owes to him the

happiness of her life. This, briefly, is his story. Some years ago he loved

a young Russian lady of moderate fortune, and having amassed a considerable

sum in prize-money, the father of the girl consented to the match. He saw

his mistress once before the destined ceremony; but she was bathed in

tears, and throwing herself at his feet, entreated him to spare her,

confessing at the same time that she loved another, but that he was poor,

and that her father would never consent to the union. My generous friend

reassured the suppliant, and on being informed of the name of her lover,

instantly abandoned his pursuit. He had already bought a farm with his

money, on which he had designed to pass the remainder of his life; but he

bestowed the whole on his rival, together with the remains of his

prize-money to purchase stock, and then himself solicited the young

woman’s father to consent to her marriage with her lover. But the old

man decidedly refused, thinking himself bound in honour to my friend, who,

when he found the father inexorable, quitted his country, nor returned

until he heard that his former mistress was married according to her

inclinations. “What a noble fellow!” you will exclaim. He is

so; but then he is wholly uneducated: he is as silent as a Turk, and a kind

of ignorant carelessness attends him, which, while it renders his conduct

the more astonishing, detracts from the interest and sympathy which

otherwise he would command.

Yet do not suppose, because I complain a little or because I can

conceive a consolation for my toils which I may never know, that I am

wavering in my resolutions. Those are as fixed as fate, and my voyage

is only now delayed until the weather shall permit my embarkation. The

winter has been dreadfully severe, but the spring promises well, and it

is considered as a remarkably early season, so that perhaps I may sail

sooner than I expected. I shall do nothing rashly: you know me

sufficiently to confide in my prudence and considerateness whenever the

safety of others is committed to my care.

I cannot describe to you my sensations on the near prospect of my

undertaking. It is impossible to communicate to you a conception of

the trembling sensation, half pleasurable and half fearful, with which

I am preparing to depart. I am going to unexplored regions, to “the

land of mist and snow,” but I shall kill no albatross; therefore do not

be alarmed for my safety or if I should come back to you as worn and

woeful as the “Ancient Mariner.” You will smile at my allusion, but I

will disclose a secret. I have often attributed my attachment to, my

passionate enthusiasm for, the dangerous mysteries of ocean to that

production of the most imaginative of modern poets. There is something

at work in my soul which I do not understand. I am practically

industrious—painstaking, a workman to execute with perseverance and

labour—but besides this there is a love for the marvellous, a belief

in the marvellous, intertwined in all my projects, which hurries me out

of the common pathways of men, even to the wild sea and unvisited

regions I am about to explore.

But to return to dearer considerations. Shall I meet you again, after

having traversed immense seas, and returned by the most southern cape of

Africa or America? I dare not expect such success, yet I cannot bear to

look on the reverse of the picture. Continue for the present to write to

me by every opportunity: I may receive your letters on some occasions when

I need them most to support my spirits. I love you very tenderly.

Remember me with affection, should you never hear from me again.

Your affectionate brother,

Robert Walton

Letter 3

\_To Mrs. Saville, England.\_

July 7th, 17—.

My dear Sister,

I write a few lines in haste to say that I am safe—and well advanced

on my voyage. This letter will reach England by a merchantman now on

its homeward voyage from Archangel; more fortunate than I, who may not

see my native land, perhaps, for many years. I am, however, in good

spirits: my men are bold and apparently firm of purpose, nor do the

floating sheets of ice that continually pass us, indicating the dangers

of the region towards which we are advancing, appear to dismay them. We

have already reached a very high latitude; but it is the height of

summer, and although not so warm as in England, the southern gales,

which blow us speedily towards those shores which I so ardently desire

to attain, breathe a degree of renovating warmth which I had not

expected.

No incidents have hitherto befallen us that would make a figure in a

letter. One or two stiff gales and the springing of a leak are

accidents which experienced navigators scarcely remember to record, and

I shall be well content if nothing worse happen to us during our voyage.

Adieu, my dear Margaret. Be assured that for my own sake, as well as

yours, I will not rashly encounter danger. I will be cool,

persevering, and prudent.

But success \_shall\_ crown my endeavours. Wherefore not? Thus far I

have gone, tracing a secure way over the pathless seas, the very stars

themselves being witnesses and testimonies of my triumph. Why not

still proceed over the untamed yet obedient element? What can stop the

determined heart and resolved will of man?

My swelling heart involuntarily pours itself out thus. But I must

finish. Heaven bless my beloved sister!

R.W.

Letter 4

\_To Mrs. Saville, England.\_

August 5th, 17—.

So strange an accident has happened to us that I cannot forbear

recording it, although it is very probable that you will see me before

these papers can come into your possession.

Last Monday (July 31st) we were nearly surrounded by ice, which closed

in the ship on all sides, scarcely leaving her the sea-room in which

she floated. Our situation was somewhat dangerous, especially as we

were compassed round by a very thick fog. We accordingly lay to,

hoping that some change would take place in the atmosphere and weather.

About two o’clock the mist cleared away, and we beheld, stretched out

in every direction, vast and irregular plains of ice, which seemed to

have no end. Some of my comrades groaned, and my own mind began to

grow watchful with anxious thoughts, when a strange sight suddenly

attracted our attention and diverted our solicitude from our own

situation. We perceived a low carriage, fixed on a sledge and drawn by

dogs, pass on towards the north, at the distance of half a mile; a

being which had the shape of a man, but apparently of gigantic stature,

sat in the sledge and guided the dogs. We watched the rapid progress

of the traveller with our telescopes until he was lost among the

distant inequalities of the ice.

This appearance excited our unqualified wonder. We were, as we believed,

many hundred miles from any land; but this apparition seemed to denote that

it was not, in reality, so distant as we had supposed. Shut in, however, by

ice, it was impossible to follow his track, which we had observed with the

greatest attention.

About two hours after this occurrence we heard the ground sea, and before

night the ice broke and freed our ship. We, however, lay to until the

morning, fearing to encounter in the dark those large loose masses which

float about after the breaking up of the ice. I profited of this time to

rest for a few hours.

In the morning, however, as soon as it was light, I went upon deck and

found all the sailors busy on one side of the vessel, apparently

talking to someone in the sea. It was, in fact, a sledge, like that we

had seen before, which had drifted towards us in the night on a large

fragment of ice. Only one dog remained alive; but there was a human

being within it whom the sailors were persuading to enter the vessel.

He was not, as the other traveller seemed to be, a savage inhabitant of

some undiscovered island, but a European. When I appeared on deck the

master said, “Here is our captain, and he will not allow you to perish

on the open sea.”

On perceiving me, the stranger addressed me in English, although with a

foreign accent. “Before I come on board your vessel,” said he,

“will you have the kindness to inform me whither you are bound?”

You may conceive my astonishment on hearing such a question addressed

to me from a man on the brink of destruction and to whom I should have

supposed that my vessel would have been a resource which he would not

have exchanged for the most precious wealth the earth can afford. I

replied, however, that we were on a voyage of discovery towards the

northern pole.

Upon hearing this he appeared satisfied and consented to come on board.

Good God! Margaret, if you had seen the man who thus capitulated for

his safety, your surprise would have been boundless. His limbs were

nearly frozen, and his body dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and

suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition. We attempted

to carry him into the cabin, but as soon as he had quitted the fresh

air he fainted. We accordingly brought him back to the deck and

restored him to animation by rubbing him with brandy and forcing him to

swallow a small quantity. As soon as he showed signs of life we

wrapped him up in blankets and placed him near the chimney of the

kitchen stove. By slow degrees he recovered and ate a little soup,

which restored him wonderfully.

Two days passed in this manner before he was able to speak, and I often

feared that his sufferings had deprived him of understanding. When he

had in some measure recovered, I removed him to my own cabin and

attended on him as much as my duty would permit. I never saw a more

interesting creature: his eyes have generally an expression of

wildness, and even madness, but there are moments when, if anyone

performs an act of kindness towards him or does him any the most

trifling service, his whole countenance is lighted up, as it were, with

a beam of benevolence and sweetness that I never saw equalled. But he

is generally melancholy and despairing, and sometimes he gnashes his

teeth, as if impatient of the weight of woes that oppresses him.

When my guest was a little recovered I had great trouble to keep off

the men, who wished to ask him a thousand questions; but I would not

allow him to be tormented by their idle curiosity, in a state of body

and mind whose restoration evidently depended upon entire repose.

Once, however, the lieutenant asked why he had come so far upon the ice

in so strange a vehicle.

His countenance instantly assumed an aspect of the deepest gloom, and

he replied, “To seek one who fled from me.”

“And did the man whom you pursued travel in the same fashion?”

“Yes.”

“Then I fancy we have seen him, for the day before we picked you up we

saw some dogs drawing a sledge, with a man in it, across the ice.”

This aroused the stranger’s attention, and he asked a multitude of

questions concerning the route which the dæmon, as he called him, had

pursued. Soon after, when he was alone with me, he said, “I have,

doubtless, excited your curiosity, as well as that of these good

people; but you are too considerate to make inquiries.”

“Certainly; it would indeed be very impertinent and inhuman in me to

trouble you with any inquisitiveness of mine.”

“And yet you rescued me from a strange and perilous situation; you have

benevolently restored me to life.”

Soon after this he inquired if I thought that the breaking up of the

ice had destroyed the other sledge. I replied that I could not answer

with any degree of certainty, for the ice had not broken until near

midnight, and the traveller might have arrived at a place of safety

before that time; but of this I could not judge.

From this time a new spirit of life animated the decaying frame of the

stranger. He manifested the greatest eagerness to be upon deck to watch for

the sledge which had before appeared; but I have persuaded him to remain in

the cabin, for he is far too weak to sustain the rawness of the atmosphere.

I have promised that someone should watch for him and give him instant

notice if any new object should appear in sight.

Such is my journal of what relates to this strange occurrence up to the

present day. The stranger has gradually improved in health but is very

silent and appears uneasy when anyone except myself enters his cabin.

Yet his manners are so conciliating and gentle that the sailors are all

interested in him, although they have had very little communication

with him. For my own part, I begin to love him as a brother, and his

constant and deep grief fills me with sympathy and compassion. He must

have been a noble creature in his better days, being even now in wreck

so attractive and amiable.

I said in one of my letters, my dear Margaret, that I should find no friend

on the wide ocean; yet I have found a man who, before his spirit had been

broken by misery, I should have been happy to have possessed as the brother

of my heart.

I shall continue my journal concerning the stranger at intervals,

should I have any fresh incidents to record.

August 13th, 17—.

My affection for my guest increases every day. He excites at once my

admiration and my pity to an astonishing degree. How can I see so

noble a creature destroyed by misery without feeling the most poignant

grief? He is so gentle, yet so wise; his mind is so cultivated, and

when he speaks, although his words are culled with the choicest art,

yet they flow with rapidity and unparalleled eloquence.

He is now much recovered from his illness and is continually on the deck,

apparently watching for the sledge that preceded his own. Yet, although

unhappy, he is not so utterly occupied by his own misery but that he

interests himself deeply in the projects of others. He has frequently

conversed with me on mine, which I have communicated to him without

disguise. He entered attentively into all my arguments in favour of my

eventual success and into every minute detail of the measures I had taken

to secure it. I was easily led by the sympathy which he evinced to use the

language of my heart, to give utterance to the burning ardour of my soul

and to say, with all the fervour that warmed me, how gladly I would

sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to the furtherance of my

enterprise. One man’s life or death were but a small price to pay for

the acquirement of the knowledge which I sought, for the dominion I should

acquire and transmit over the elemental foes of our race. As I spoke, a

dark gloom spread over my listener’s countenance. At first I

perceived that he tried to suppress his emotion; he placed his hands before

his eyes, and my voice quivered and failed me as I beheld tears trickle

fast from between his fingers; a groan burst from his heaving breast. I

paused; at length he spoke, in broken accents: “Unhappy man! Do you

share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught? Hear me;

let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips!”

Such words, you may imagine, strongly excited my curiosity; but the

paroxysm of grief that had seized the stranger overcame his weakened

powers, and many hours of repose and tranquil conversation were

necessary to restore his composure.

Having conquered the violence of his feelings, he appeared to despise

himself for being the slave of passion; and quelling the dark tyranny of

despair, he led me again to converse concerning myself personally. He asked

me the history of my earlier years. The tale was quickly told, but it

awakened various trains of reflection. I spoke of my desire of finding a

friend, of my thirst for a more intimate sympathy with a fellow mind than

had ever fallen to my lot, and expressed my conviction that a man could

boast of little happiness who did not enjoy this blessing.

“I agree with you,” replied the stranger; “we are

unfashioned creatures, but half made up, if one wiser, better, dearer than

ourselves—such a friend ought to be—do not lend his aid to

perfectionate our weak and faulty natures. I once had a friend, the most

noble of human creatures, and am entitled, therefore, to judge respecting

friendship. You have hope, and the world before you, and have no cause for

despair. But I—I have lost everything and cannot begin life

anew.”

As he said this his countenance became expressive of a calm, settled

grief that touched me to the heart. But he was silent and presently

retired to his cabin.

Even broken in spirit as he is, no one can feel more deeply than he

does the beauties of nature. The starry sky, the sea, and every sight

afforded by these wonderful regions seem still to have the power of

elevating his soul from earth. Such a man has a double existence: he

may suffer misery and be overwhelmed by disappointments, yet when he

has retired into himself, he will be like a celestial spirit that has a

halo around him, within whose circle no grief or folly ventures.

Will you smile at the enthusiasm I express concerning this divine

wanderer? You would not if you saw him. You have been tutored and

refined by books and retirement from the world, and you are therefore

somewhat fastidious; but this only renders you the more fit to

appreciate the extraordinary merits of this wonderful man. Sometimes I

have endeavoured to discover what quality it is which he possesses that

elevates him so immeasurably above any other person I ever knew. I

believe it to be an intuitive discernment, a quick but never-failing

power of judgment, a penetration into the causes of things, unequalled

for clearness and precision; add to this a facility of expression and a

voice whose varied intonations are soul-subduing music.

August 19th, 17—.

Yesterday the stranger said to me, “You may easily perceive, Captain

Walton, that I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortunes. I had

determined at one time that the memory of these evils should die with

me, but you have won me to alter my determination. You seek for

knowledge and wisdom, as I once did; and I ardently hope that the

gratification of your wishes may not be a serpent to sting you, as mine

has been. I do not know that the relation of my disasters will be

useful to you; yet, when I reflect that you are pursuing the same

course, exposing yourself to the same dangers which have rendered me

what I am, I imagine that you may deduce an apt moral from my tale, one

that may direct you if you succeed in your undertaking and console you

in case of failure. Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually

deemed marvellous. Were we among the tamer scenes of nature I might

fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps your ridicule; but many things

will appear possible in these wild and mysterious regions which would

provoke the laughter of those unacquainted with the ever-varied powers

of nature; nor can I doubt but that my tale conveys in its series

internal evidence of the truth of the events of which it is composed.”

You may easily imagine that I was much gratified by the offered

communication, yet I could not endure that he should renew his grief by

a recital of his misfortunes. I felt the greatest eagerness to hear

the promised narrative, partly from curiosity and partly from a strong

desire to ameliorate his fate if it were in my power. I expressed

these feelings in my answer.

“I thank you,” he replied, “for your sympathy, but it is

useless; my fate is nearly fulfilled. I wait but for one event, and then I

shall repose in peace. I understand your feeling,” continued he,

perceiving that I wished to interrupt him; “but you are mistaken, my

friend, if thus you will allow me to name you; nothing can alter my

destiny; listen to my history, and you will perceive how irrevocably it is

determined.”

He then told me that he would commence his narrative the next day when I

should be at leisure. This promise drew from me the warmest thanks. I have

resolved every night, when I am not imperatively occupied by my duties, to

record, as nearly as possible in his own words, what he has related during

the day. If I should be engaged, I will at least make notes. This

manuscript will doubtless afford you the greatest pleasure; but to me, who

know him, and who hear it from his own lips—with what interest and

sympathy shall I read it in some future day! Even now, as I commence my

task, his full-toned voice swells in my ears; his lustrous eyes dwell on me

with all their melancholy sweetness; I see his thin hand raised in

animation, while the lineaments of his face are irradiated by the soul

within. Strange and harrowing must be his story, frightful the storm which

embraced the gallant vessel on its course and wrecked it—thus!

Chapter 1

I am by birth a Genevese, and my family is one of the most

distinguished of that republic. My ancestors had been for many years

counsellors and syndics, and my father had filled several public

situations with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who

knew him for his integrity and indefatigable attention to public

business. He passed his younger days perpetually occupied by the

affairs of his country; a variety of circumstances had prevented his

marrying early, nor was it until the decline of life that he became a

husband and the father of a family.

As the circumstances of his marriage illustrate his character, I cannot

refrain from relating them. One of his most intimate friends was a

merchant who, from a flourishing state, fell, through numerous

mischances, into poverty. This man, whose name was Beaufort, was of a

proud and unbending disposition and could not bear to live in poverty

and oblivion in the same country where he had formerly been

distinguished for his rank and magnificence. Having paid his debts,

therefore, in the most honourable manner, he retreated with his

daughter to the town of Lucerne, where he lived unknown and in

wretchedness. My father loved Beaufort with the truest friendship and

was deeply grieved by his retreat in these unfortunate circumstances.

He bitterly deplored the false pride which led his friend to a conduct

so little worthy of the affection that united them. He lost no time in

endeavouring to seek him out, with the hope of persuading him to begin

the world again through his credit and assistance.

Beaufort had taken effectual measures to conceal himself, and it was ten

months before my father discovered his abode. Overjoyed at this discovery,

he hastened to the house, which was situated in a mean street near the

Reuss. But when he entered, misery and despair alone welcomed him. Beaufort

had saved but a very small sum of money from the wreck of his fortunes, but

it was sufficient to provide him with sustenance for some months, and in

the meantime he hoped to procure some respectable employment in a

merchant’s house. The interval was, consequently, spent in inaction;

his grief only became more deep and rankling when he had leisure for

reflection, and at length it took so fast hold of his mind that at the end

of three months he lay on a bed of sickness, incapable of any exertion.

His daughter attended him with the greatest tenderness, but she saw

with despair that their little fund was rapidly decreasing and that

there was no other prospect of support. But Caroline Beaufort

possessed a mind of an uncommon mould, and her courage rose to support

her in her adversity. She procured plain work; she plaited straw and

by various means contrived to earn a pittance scarcely sufficient to

support life.

Several months passed in this manner. Her father grew worse; her time

was more entirely occupied in attending him; her means of subsistence

decreased; and in the tenth month her father died in her arms, leaving

her an orphan and a beggar. This last blow overcame her, and she knelt

by Beaufort’s coffin weeping bitterly, when my father entered the

chamber. He came like a protecting spirit to the poor girl, who

committed herself to his care; and after the interment of his friend he

conducted her to Geneva and placed her under the protection of a

relation. Two years after this event Caroline became his wife.

There was a considerable difference between the ages of my parents, but

this circumstance seemed to unite them only closer in bonds of devoted

affection. There was a sense of justice in my father’s upright mind

which rendered it necessary that he should approve highly to love

strongly. Perhaps during former years he had suffered from the

late-discovered unworthiness of one beloved and so was disposed to set

a greater value on tried worth. There was a show of gratitude and

worship in his attachment to my mother, differing wholly from the

doting fondness of age, for it was inspired by reverence for her

virtues and a desire to be the means of, in some degree, recompensing

her for the sorrows she had endured, but which gave inexpressible grace

to his behaviour to her. Everything was made to yield to her wishes

and her convenience. He strove to shelter her, as a fair exotic is

sheltered by the gardener, from every rougher wind and to surround her

with all that could tend to excite pleasurable emotion in her soft and

benevolent mind. Her health, and even the tranquillity of her hitherto

constant spirit, had been shaken by what she had gone through. During

the two years that had elapsed previous to their marriage my father had

gradually relinquished all his public functions; and immediately after

their union they sought the pleasant climate of Italy, and the change

of scene and interest attendant on a tour through that land of wonders,

as a restorative for her weakened frame.

From Italy they visited Germany and France. I, their eldest child, was born

at Naples, and as an infant accompanied them in their rambles. I remained

for several years their only child. Much as they were attached to each

other, they seemed to draw inexhaustible stores of affection from a very

mine of love to bestow them upon me. My mother’s tender caresses and

my father’s smile of benevolent pleasure while regarding me are my

first recollections. I was their plaything and their idol, and something

better—their child, the innocent and helpless creature bestowed on

them by Heaven, whom to bring up to good, and whose future lot it was in

their hands to direct to happiness or misery, according as they fulfilled

their duties towards me. With this deep consciousness of what they owed

towards the being to which they had given life, added to the active spirit

of tenderness that animated both, it may be imagined that while during

every hour of my infant life I received a lesson of patience, of charity,

and of self-control, I was so guided by a silken cord that all seemed but

one train of enjoyment to me.

For a long time I was their only care. My mother had much desired to have a

daughter, but I continued their single offspring. When I was about five

years old, while making an excursion beyond the frontiers of Italy, they

passed a week on the shores of the Lake of Como. Their benevolent

disposition often made them enter the cottages of the poor. This, to my

mother, was more than a duty; it was a necessity, a

passion—remembering what she had suffered, and how she had been

relieved—for her to act in her turn the guardian angel to the

afflicted. During one of their walks a poor cot in the foldings of a vale

attracted their notice as being singularly disconsolate, while the number

of half-clothed children gathered about it spoke of penury in its worst

shape. One day, when my father had gone by himself to Milan, my mother,

accompanied by me, visited this abode. She found a peasant and his wife,

hard working, bent down by care and labour, distributing a scanty meal to

five hungry babes. Among these there was one which attracted my mother far

above all the rest. She appeared of a different stock. The four others were

dark-eyed, hardy little vagrants; this child was thin and very fair. Her

hair was the brightest living gold, and despite the poverty of her

clothing, seemed to set a crown of distinction on her head. Her brow was

clear and ample, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of

her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness that none could behold

her without looking on her as of a distinct species, a being heaven-sent,

and bearing a celestial stamp in all her features.

The peasant woman, perceiving that my mother fixed eyes of wonder and

admiration on this lovely girl, eagerly communicated her history. She was

not her child, but the daughter of a Milanese nobleman. Her mother was a

German and had died on giving her birth. The infant had been placed with

these good people to nurse: they were better off then. They had not been

long married, and their eldest child was but just born. The father of their

charge was one of those Italians nursed in the memory of the antique glory

of Italy—one among the \_schiavi ognor frementi,\_ who exerted

himself to obtain the liberty of his country. He became the victim of its

weakness. Whether he had died or still lingered in the dungeons of Austria

was not known. His property was confiscated; his child became an orphan and

a beggar. She continued with her foster parents and bloomed in their rude

abode, fairer than a garden rose among dark-leaved brambles.

When my father returned from Milan, he found playing with me in the hall of

our villa a child fairer than pictured cherub—a creature who seemed

to shed radiance from her looks and whose form and motions were lighter

than the chamois of the hills. The apparition was soon explained. With his

permission my mother prevailed on her rustic guardians to yield their

charge to her. They were fond of the sweet orphan. Her presence had seemed

a blessing to them, but it would be unfair to her to keep her in poverty

and want when Providence afforded her such powerful protection. They

consulted their village priest, and the result was that Elizabeth Lavenza

became the inmate of my parents’ house—my more than

sister—the beautiful and adored companion of all my occupations and

my pleasures.

Everyone loved Elizabeth. The passionate and almost reverential

attachment with which all regarded her became, while I shared it, my

pride and my delight. On the evening previous to her being brought to

my home, my mother had said playfully, “I have a pretty present for my

Victor—tomorrow he shall have it.” And when, on the morrow, she

presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift, I, with childish

seriousness, interpreted her words literally and looked upon Elizabeth

as mine—mine to protect, love, and cherish. All praises bestowed on

her I received as made to a possession of my own. We called each other

familiarly by the name of cousin. No word, no expression could body

forth the kind of relation in which she stood to me—my more than

sister, since till death she was to be mine only.

Chapter 2

We were brought up together; there was not quite a year difference in

our ages. I need not say that we were strangers to any species of

disunion or dispute. Harmony was the soul of our companionship, and

the diversity and contrast that subsisted in our characters drew us

nearer together. Elizabeth was of a calmer and more concentrated

disposition; but, with all my ardour, I was capable of a more intense

application and was more deeply smitten with the thirst for knowledge.

She busied herself with following the aerial creations of the poets;

and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss

home —the sublime shapes of the mountains, the changes of the seasons,

tempest and calm, the silence of winter, and the life and turbulence of

our Alpine summers—she found ample scope for admiration and delight.

While my companion contemplated with a serious and satisfied spirit the

magnificent appearances of things, I delighted in investigating their

causes. The world was to me a secret which I desired to divine.

Curiosity, earnest research to learn the hidden laws of nature,

gladness akin to rapture, as they were unfolded to me, are among the

earliest sensations I can remember.

On the birth of a second son, my junior by seven years, my parents gave

up entirely their wandering life and fixed themselves in their native

country. We possessed a house in Geneva, and a \_campagne\_ on Belrive,

the eastern shore of the lake, at the distance of rather more than a

league from the city. We resided principally in the latter, and the

lives of my parents were passed in considerable seclusion. It was my

temper to avoid a crowd and to attach myself fervently to a few. I was

indifferent, therefore, to my school-fellows in general; but I united

myself in the bonds of the closest friendship to one among them. Henry

Clerval was the son of a merchant of Geneva. He was a boy of singular

talent and fancy. He loved enterprise, hardship, and even danger for

its own sake. He was deeply read in books of chivalry and romance. He

composed heroic songs and began to write many a tale of enchantment and

knightly adventure. He tried to make us act plays and to enter into

masquerades, in which the characters were drawn from the heroes of

Roncesvalles, of the Round Table of King Arthur, and the chivalrous

train who shed their blood to redeem the holy sepulchre from the hands

of the infidels.

No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself. My

parents were possessed by the very spirit of kindness and indulgence.

We felt that they were not the tyrants to rule our lot according to

their caprice, but the agents and creators of all the many delights

which we enjoyed. When I mingled with other families I distinctly

discerned how peculiarly fortunate my lot was, and gratitude assisted

the development of filial love.

My temper was sometimes violent, and my passions vehement; but by some

law in my temperature they were turned not towards childish pursuits

but to an eager desire to learn, and not to learn all things

indiscriminately. I confess that neither the structure of languages,

nor the code of governments, nor the politics of various states

possessed attractions for me. It was the secrets of heaven and earth

that I desired to learn; and whether it was the outward substance of

things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man

that occupied me, still my inquiries were directed to the metaphysical,

or in its highest sense, the physical secrets of the world.

Meanwhile Clerval occupied himself, so to speak, with the moral

relations of things. The busy stage of life, the virtues of heroes,

and the actions of men were his theme; and his hope and his dream was

to become one among those whose names are recorded in story as the

gallant and adventurous benefactors of our species. The saintly soul

of Elizabeth shone like a shrine-dedicated lamp in our peaceful home.

Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of

her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless and animate us. She was

the living spirit of love to soften and attract; I might have become

sullen in my study, rough through the ardour of my nature, but that

she was there to subdue me to a semblance of her own gentleness. And

Clerval—could aught ill entrench on the noble spirit of Clerval? Yet

he might not have been so perfectly humane, so thoughtful in his

generosity, so full of kindness and tenderness amidst his passion for

adventurous exploit, had she not unfolded to him the real loveliness of

beneficence and made the doing good the end and aim of his soaring

ambition.

I feel exquisite pleasure in dwelling on the recollections of childhood,

before misfortune had tainted my mind and changed its bright visions of

extensive usefulness into gloomy and narrow reflections upon self. Besides,

in drawing the picture of my early days, I also record those events which

led, by insensible steps, to my after tale of misery, for when I would

account to myself for the birth of that passion which afterwards ruled my

destiny I find it arise, like a mountain river, from ignoble and almost

forgotten sources; but, swelling as it proceeded, it became the torrent

which, in its course, has swept away all my hopes and joys.

Natural philosophy is the genius that has regulated my fate; I desire,

therefore, in this narration, to state those facts which led to my

predilection for that science. When I was thirteen years of age we all went

on a party of pleasure to the baths near Thonon; the inclemency of the

weather obliged us to remain a day confined to the inn. In this house I

chanced to find a volume of the works of Cornelius Agrippa. I opened it

with apathy; the theory which he attempts to demonstrate and the wonderful

facts which he relates soon changed this feeling into enthusiasm. A new

light seemed to dawn upon my mind, and bounding with joy, I communicated my

discovery to my father. My father looked carelessly at the title page of my

book and said, “Ah! Cornelius Agrippa! My dear Victor, do not waste

your time upon this; it is sad trash.”

If, instead of this remark, my father had taken the pains to explain to me

that the principles of Agrippa had been entirely exploded and that a modern

system of science had been introduced which possessed much greater powers

than the ancient, because the powers of the latter were chimerical, while

those of the former were real and practical, under such circumstances I

should certainly have thrown Agrippa aside and have contented my

imagination, warmed as it was, by returning with greater ardour to my

former studies. It is even possible that the train of my ideas would never

have received the fatal impulse that led to my ruin. But the cursory glance

my father had taken of my volume by no means assured me that he was

acquainted with its contents, and I continued to read with the greatest

avidity.

When I returned home my first care was to procure the whole works of this

author, and afterwards of Paracelsus and Albertus Magnus. I read and

studied the wild fancies of these writers with delight; they appeared to me

treasures known to few besides myself. I have described myself as always

having been imbued with a fervent longing to penetrate the secrets of

nature. In spite of the intense labour and wonderful discoveries of modern

philosophers, I always came from my studies discontented and unsatisfied.

Sir Isaac Newton is said to have avowed that he felt like a child picking

up shells beside the great and unexplored ocean of truth. Those of his

successors in each branch of natural philosophy with whom I was acquainted

appeared even to my boy’s apprehensions as tyros engaged in the same

pursuit.

The untaught peasant beheld the elements around him and was acquainted

with their practical uses. The most learned philosopher knew little

more. He had partially unveiled the face of Nature, but her immortal

lineaments were still a wonder and a mystery. He might dissect,

anatomise, and give names; but, not to speak of a final cause, causes

in their secondary and tertiary grades were utterly unknown to him. I

had gazed upon the fortifications and impediments that seemed to keep

human beings from entering the citadel of nature, and rashly and

ignorantly I had repined.

But here were books, and here were men who had penetrated deeper and knew

more. I took their word for all that they averred, and I became their

disciple. It may appear strange that such should arise in the eighteenth

century; but while I followed the routine of education in the schools of

Geneva, I was, to a great degree, self-taught with regard to my favourite

studies. My father was not scientific, and I was left to struggle with a

child’s blindness, added to a student’s thirst for knowledge.

Under the guidance of my new preceptors I entered with the greatest

diligence into the search of the philosopher’s stone and the elixir

of life; but the latter soon obtained my undivided attention. Wealth was an

inferior object, but what glory would attend the discovery if I could

banish disease from the human frame and render man invulnerable to any but

a violent death!

Nor were these my only visions. The raising of ghosts or devils was a

promise liberally accorded by my favourite authors, the fulfilment of which

I most eagerly sought; and if my incantations were always unsuccessful, I

attributed the failure rather to my own inexperience and mistake than to a

want of skill or fidelity in my instructors. And thus for a time I was

occupied by exploded systems, mingling, like an unadept, a thousand

contradictory theories and floundering desperately in a very slough of

multifarious knowledge, guided by an ardent imagination and childish

reasoning, till an accident again changed the current of my ideas.

When I was about fifteen years old we had retired to our house near

Belrive, when we witnessed a most violent and terrible thunderstorm. It

advanced from behind the mountains of Jura, and the thunder burst at once

with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. I remained,

while the storm lasted, watching its progress with curiosity and delight.

As I stood at the door, on a sudden I beheld a stream of fire issue from an

old and beautiful oak which stood about twenty yards from our house; and so

soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared, and nothing

remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found

the tree shattered in a singular manner. It was not splintered by the

shock, but entirely reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never beheld

anything so utterly destroyed.

Before this I was not unacquainted with the more obvious laws of

electricity. On this occasion a man of great research in natural

philosophy was with us, and excited by this catastrophe, he entered on

the explanation of a theory which he had formed on the subject of

electricity and galvanism, which was at once new and astonishing to me.

All that he said threw greatly into the shade Cornelius Agrippa,

Albertus Magnus, and Paracelsus, the lords of my imagination; but by

some fatality the overthrow of these men disinclined me to pursue my

accustomed studies. It seemed to me as if nothing would or could ever

be known. All that had so long engaged my attention suddenly grew

despicable. By one of those caprices of the mind which we are perhaps

most subject to in early youth, I at once gave up my former

occupations, set down natural history and all its progeny as a deformed

and abortive creation, and entertained the greatest disdain for a

would-be science which could never even step within the threshold of

real knowledge. In this mood of mind I betook myself to the

mathematics and the branches of study appertaining to that science as

being built upon secure foundations, and so worthy of my consideration.

Thus strangely are our souls constructed, and by such slight ligaments

are we bound to prosperity or ruin. When I look back, it seems to me

as if this almost miraculous change of inclination and will was the

immediate suggestion of the guardian angel of my life—the last effort

made by the spirit of preservation to avert the storm that was even

then hanging in the stars and ready to envelop me. Her victory was

announced by an unusual tranquillity and gladness of soul which

followed the relinquishing of my ancient and latterly tormenting

studies. It was thus that I was to be taught to associate evil with

their prosecution, happiness with their disregard.

It was a strong effort of the spirit of good, but it was ineffectual.

Destiny was too potent, and her immutable laws had decreed my utter and

terrible destruction.

Chapter 3

When I had attained the age of seventeen my parents resolved that I

should become a student at the university of Ingolstadt. I had

hitherto attended the schools of Geneva, but my father thought it

necessary for the completion of my education that I should be made

acquainted with other customs than those of my native country. My

departure was therefore fixed at an early date, but before the day

resolved upon could arrive, the first misfortune of my life

occurred—an omen, as it were, of my future misery.

Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever; her illness was severe, and she was

in the greatest danger. During her illness many arguments had been urged to

persuade my mother to refrain from attending upon her. She had at first

yielded to our entreaties, but when she heard that the life of her

favourite was menaced, she could no longer control her anxiety. She

attended her sickbed; her watchful attentions triumphed over the malignity

of the distemper—Elizabeth was saved, but the consequences of this

imprudence were fatal to her preserver. On the third day my mother

sickened; her fever was accompanied by the most alarming symptoms, and the

looks of her medical attendants prognosticated the worst event. On her

deathbed the fortitude and benignity of this best of women did not desert

her. She joined the hands of Elizabeth and myself. “My

children,” she said, “my firmest hopes of future happiness were

placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the

consolation of your father. Elizabeth, my love, you must supply my place to

my younger children. Alas! I regret that I am taken from you; and, happy

and beloved as I have been, is it not hard to quit you all? But these are

not thoughts befitting me; I will endeavour to resign myself cheerfully to

death and will indulge a hope of meeting you in another world.”

She died calmly, and her countenance expressed affection even in death.

I need not describe the feelings of those whose dearest ties are rent

by that most irreparable evil, the void that presents itself to the

soul, and the despair that is exhibited on the countenance. It is so

long before the mind can persuade itself that she whom we saw every day

and whose very existence appeared a part of our own can have departed

for ever—that the brightness of a beloved eye can have been

extinguished and the sound of a voice so familiar and dear to the ear

can be hushed, never more to be heard. These are the reflections of

the first days; but when the lapse of time proves the reality of the

evil, then the actual bitterness of grief commences. Yet from whom has

not that rude hand rent away some dear connection? And why should I

describe a sorrow which all have felt, and must feel? The time at

length arrives when grief is rather an indulgence than a necessity; and

the smile that plays upon the lips, although it may be deemed a

sacrilege, is not banished. My mother was dead, but we had still

duties which we ought to perform; we must continue our course with the

rest and learn to think ourselves fortunate whilst one remains whom the

spoiler has not seized.

My departure for Ingolstadt, which had been deferred by these events,

was now again determined upon. I obtained from my father a respite of

some weeks. It appeared to me sacrilege so soon to leave the repose,

akin to death, of the house of mourning and to rush into the thick of

life. I was new to sorrow, but it did not the less alarm me. I was

unwilling to quit the sight of those that remained to me, and above

all, I desired to see my sweet Elizabeth in some degree consoled.

She indeed veiled her grief and strove to act the comforter to us all.

She looked steadily on life and assumed its duties with courage and

zeal. She devoted herself to those whom she had been taught to call

her uncle and cousins. Never was she so enchanting as at this time,

when she recalled the sunshine of her smiles and spent them upon us.

She forgot even her own regret in her endeavours to make us forget.

The day of my departure at length arrived. Clerval spent the last

evening with us. He had endeavoured to persuade his father to permit

him to accompany me and to become my fellow student, but in vain. His

father was a narrow-minded trader and saw idleness and ruin in the

aspirations and ambition of his son. Henry deeply felt the misfortune

of being debarred from a liberal education. He said little, but when

he spoke I read in his kindling eye and in his animated glance a

restrained but firm resolve not to be chained to the miserable details

of commerce.

We sat late. We could not tear ourselves away from each other nor

persuade ourselves to say the word “Farewell!” It was said, and we

retired under the pretence of seeking repose, each fancying that the

other was deceived; but when at morning’s dawn I descended to the

carriage which was to convey me away, they were all there—my father

again to bless me, Clerval to press my hand once more, my Elizabeth to

renew her entreaties that I would write often and to bestow the last

feminine attentions on her playmate and friend.

I threw myself into the chaise that was to convey me away and indulged in

the most melancholy reflections. I, who had ever been surrounded by

amiable companions, continually engaged in endeavouring to bestow mutual

pleasure—I was now alone. In the university whither I was going I

must form my own friends and be my own protector. My life had hitherto

been remarkably secluded and domestic, and this had given me invincible

repugnance to new countenances. I loved my brothers, Elizabeth, and

Clerval; these were “old familiar faces,” but I believed myself

totally unfitted for the company of strangers. Such were my reflections as

I commenced my journey; but as I proceeded, my spirits and hopes rose. I

ardently desired the acquisition of knowledge. I had often, when at home,

thought it hard to remain during my youth cooped up in one place and had

longed to enter the world and take my station among other human beings.

Now my desires were complied with, and it would, indeed, have been folly to

repent.

I had sufficient leisure for these and many other reflections during my

journey to Ingolstadt, which was long and fatiguing. At length the

high white steeple of the town met my eyes. I alighted and was

conducted to my solitary apartment to spend the evening as I pleased.

The next morning I delivered my letters of introduction and paid a visit to

some of the principal professors. Chance—or rather the evil

influence, the Angel of Destruction, which asserted omnipotent sway over me

from the moment I turned my reluctant steps from my father’s

door—led me first to M. Krempe, professor of natural philosophy. He

was an uncouth man, but deeply imbued in the secrets of his science. He

asked me several questions concerning my progress in the different branches

of science appertaining to natural philosophy. I replied carelessly, and

partly in contempt, mentioned the names of my alchemists as the principal

authors I had studied. The professor stared. “Have you,” he

said, “really spent your time in studying such nonsense?”

I replied in the affirmative. “Every minute,” continued M. Krempe with

warmth, “every instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly

and entirely lost. You have burdened your memory with exploded systems

and useless names. Good God! In what desert land have you lived,

where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies which you

have so greedily imbibed are a thousand years old and as musty as they

are ancient? I little expected, in this enlightened and scientific

age, to find a disciple of Albertus Magnus and Paracelsus. My dear

sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew.”

So saying, he stepped aside and wrote down a list of several books

treating of natural philosophy which he desired me to procure, and

dismissed me after mentioning that in the beginning of the following

week he intended to commence a course of lectures upon natural

philosophy in its general relations, and that M. Waldman, a fellow

professor, would lecture upon chemistry the alternate days that he

omitted.

I returned home not disappointed, for I have said that I had long

considered those authors useless whom the professor reprobated; but I

returned not at all the more inclined to recur to these studies in any

shape. M. Krempe was a little squat man with a gruff voice and a

repulsive countenance; the teacher, therefore, did not prepossess me in

favour of his pursuits. In rather a too philosophical and connected a

strain, perhaps, I have given an account of the conclusions I had come

to concerning them in my early years. As a child I had not been

content with the results promised by the modern professors of natural

science. With a confusion of ideas only to be accounted for by my

extreme youth and my want of a guide on such matters, I had retrod the

steps of knowledge along the paths of time and exchanged the

discoveries of recent inquirers for the dreams of forgotten alchemists.

Besides, I had a contempt for the uses of modern natural philosophy.

It was very different when the masters of the science sought

immortality and power; such views, although futile, were grand; but now

the scene was changed. The ambition of the inquirer seemed to limit

itself to the annihilation of those visions on which my interest in

science was chiefly founded. I was required to exchange chimeras of

boundless grandeur for realities of little worth.

Such were my reflections during the first two or three days of my

residence at Ingolstadt, which were chiefly spent in becoming

acquainted with the localities and the principal residents in my new

abode. But as the ensuing week commenced, I thought of the information

which M. Krempe had given me concerning the lectures. And although I

could not consent to go and hear that little conceited fellow deliver

sentences out of a pulpit, I recollected what he had said of M.

Waldman, whom I had never seen, as he had hitherto been out of town.

Partly from curiosity and partly from idleness, I went into the lecturing

room, which M. Waldman entered shortly after. This professor was very

unlike his colleague. He appeared about fifty years of age, but with an

aspect expressive of the greatest benevolence; a few grey hairs covered his

temples, but those at the back of his head were nearly black. His person

was short but remarkably erect and his voice the sweetest I had ever heard.

He began his lecture by a recapitulation of the history of chemistry and

the various improvements made by different men of learning, pronouncing

with fervour the names of the most distinguished discoverers. He then took

a cursory view of the present state of the science and explained many of

its elementary terms. After having made a few preparatory experiments, he

concluded with a panegyric upon modern chemistry, the terms of which I

shall never forget:

“The ancient teachers of this science,” said he,

“promised impossibilities and performed nothing. The modern masters

promise very little; they know that metals cannot be transmuted and that

the elixir of life is a chimera but these philosophers, whose hands seem

only made to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or

crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They penetrate into the recesses

of nature and show how she works in her hiding-places. They ascend into the

heavens; they have discovered how the blood circulates, and the nature of

the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers;

they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the earthquake, and even

mock the invisible world with its own shadows.”

Such were the professor’s words—rather let me say such the words of

the fate—enounced to destroy me. As he went on I felt as if my soul

were grappling with a palpable enemy; one by one the various keys were

touched which formed the mechanism of my being; chord after chord was

sounded, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one conception,

one purpose. So much has been done, exclaimed the soul of

Frankenstein—more, far more, will I achieve; treading in the steps

already marked, I will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and

unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

I closed not my eyes that night. My internal being was in a state of

insurrection and turmoil; I felt that order would thence arise, but I

had no power to produce it. By degrees, after the morning’s dawn,

sleep came. I awoke, and my yesternight’s thoughts were as a dream.

There only remained a resolution to return to my ancient studies and to

devote myself to a science for which I believed myself to possess a

natural talent. On the same day I paid M. Waldman a visit. His

manners in private were even more mild and attractive than in public,

for there was a certain dignity in his mien during his lecture which in

his own house was replaced by the greatest affability and kindness. I

gave him pretty nearly the same account of my former pursuits as I had

given to his fellow professor. He heard with attention the little

narration concerning my studies and smiled at the names of Cornelius

Agrippa and Paracelsus, but without the contempt that M. Krempe had

exhibited. He said that “These were men to whose indefatigable zeal

modern philosophers were indebted for most of the foundations of their

knowledge. They had left to us, as an easier task, to give new names

and arrange in connected classifications the facts which they in a

great degree had been the instruments of bringing to light. The

labours of men of genius, however erroneously directed, scarcely ever

fail in ultimately turning to the solid advantage of mankind.” I

listened to his statement, which was delivered without any presumption

or affectation, and then added that his lecture had removed my

prejudices against modern chemists; I expressed myself in measured

terms, with the modesty and deference due from a youth to his

instructor, without letting escape (inexperience in life would have

made me ashamed) any of the enthusiasm which stimulated my intended

labours. I requested his advice concerning the books I ought to

procure.

“I am happy,” said M. Waldman, “to have gained a

disciple; and if your application equals your ability, I have no doubt of

your success. Chemistry is that branch of natural philosophy in which the

greatest improvements have been and may be made; it is on that account that

I have made it my peculiar study; but at the same time, I have not

neglected the other branches of science. A man would make but a very sorry

chemist if he attended to that department of human knowledge alone. If your

wish is to become really a man of science and not merely a petty

experimentalist, I should advise you to apply to every branch of natural

philosophy, including mathematics.”

He then took me into his laboratory and explained to me the uses of his

various machines, instructing me as to what I ought to procure and

promising me the use of his own when I should have advanced far enough in

the science not to derange their mechanism. He also gave me the list of

books which I had requested, and I took my leave.

Thus ended a day memorable to me; it decided my future destiny.

Chapter 4

From this day natural philosophy, and particularly chemistry, in the

most comprehensive sense of the term, became nearly my sole occupation.

I read with ardour those works, so full of genius and discrimination,

which modern inquirers have written on these subjects. I attended the

lectures and cultivated the acquaintance of the men of science of the

university, and I found even in M. Krempe a great deal of sound sense

and real information, combined, it is true, with a repulsive

physiognomy and manners, but not on that account the less valuable. In

M. Waldman I found a true friend. His gentleness was never tinged by

dogmatism, and his instructions were given with an air of frankness and

good nature that banished every idea of pedantry. In a thousand ways

he smoothed for me the path of knowledge and made the most abstruse

inquiries clear and facile to my apprehension. My application was at

first fluctuating and uncertain; it gained strength as I proceeded and

soon became so ardent and eager that the stars often disappeared in the

light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory.

As I applied so closely, it may be easily conceived that my progress

was rapid. My ardour was indeed the astonishment of the students, and

my proficiency that of the masters. Professor Krempe often asked me,

with a sly smile, how Cornelius Agrippa went on, whilst M. Waldman

expressed the most heartfelt exultation in my progress. Two years

passed in this manner, during which I paid no visit to Geneva, but was

engaged, heart and soul, in the pursuit of some discoveries which I

hoped to make. None but those who have experienced them can conceive

of the enticements of science. In other studies you go as far as

others have gone before you, and there is nothing more to know; but in

a scientific pursuit there is continual food for discovery and wonder.

A mind of moderate capacity which closely pursues one study must

infallibly arrive at great proficiency in that study; and I, who

continually sought the attainment of one object of pursuit and was

solely wrapped up in this, improved so rapidly that at the end of two

years I made some discoveries in the improvement of some chemical

instruments, which procured me great esteem and admiration at the

university. When I had arrived at this point and had become as well

acquainted with the theory and practice of natural philosophy as

depended on the lessons of any of the professors at Ingolstadt, my

residence there being no longer conducive to my improvements, I thought

of returning to my friends and my native town, when an incident

happened that protracted my stay.

One of the phenomena which had peculiarly attracted my attention was

the structure of the human frame, and, indeed, any animal endued with

life. Whence, I often asked myself, did the principle of life proceed?

It was a bold question, and one which has ever been considered as a

mystery; yet with how many things are we upon the brink of becoming

acquainted, if cowardice or carelessness did not restrain our

inquiries. I revolved these circumstances in my mind and determined

thenceforth to apply myself more particularly to those branches of

natural philosophy which relate to physiology. Unless I had been

animated by an almost supernatural enthusiasm, my application to this

study would have been irksome and almost intolerable. To examine the

causes of life, we must first have recourse to death. I became

acquainted with the science of anatomy, but this was not sufficient; I

must also observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body.

In my education my father had taken the greatest precautions that my

mind should be impressed with no supernatural horrors. I do not ever

remember to have trembled at a tale of superstition or to have feared

the apparition of a spirit. Darkness had no effect upon my fancy, and

a churchyard was to me merely the receptacle of bodies deprived of

life, which, from being the seat of beauty and strength, had become

food for the worm. Now I was led to examine the cause and progress of

this decay and forced to spend days and nights in vaults and

charnel-houses. My attention was fixed upon every object the most

insupportable to the delicacy of the human feelings. I saw how the

fine form of man was degraded and wasted; I beheld the corruption of

death succeed to the blooming cheek of life; I saw how the worm

inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. I paused, examining and

analysing all the minutiae of causation, as exemplified in the change

from life to death, and death to life, until from the midst of this

darkness a sudden light broke in upon me—a light so brilliant and

wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the immensity

of the prospect which it illustrated, I was surprised that among so

many men of genius who had directed their inquiries towards the same

science, that I alone should be reserved to discover so astonishing a

secret.

Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. The sun does not

more certainly shine in the heavens than that which I now affirm is

true. Some miracle might have produced it, yet the stages of the

discovery were distinct and probable. After days and nights of

incredible labour and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of

generation and life; nay, more, I became myself capable of bestowing

animation upon lifeless matter.

The astonishment which I had at first experienced on this discovery

soon gave place to delight and rapture. After so much time spent in

painful labour, to arrive at once at the summit of my desires was the

most gratifying consummation of my toils. But this discovery was so

great and overwhelming that all the steps by which I had been

progressively led to it were obliterated, and I beheld only the result.

What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation

of the world was now within my grasp. Not that, like a magic scene, it

all opened upon me at once: the information I had obtained was of a

nature rather to direct my endeavours so soon as I should point them

towards the object of my search than to exhibit that object already

accomplished. I was like the Arabian who had been buried with the dead

and found a passage to life, aided only by one glimmering and seemingly

ineffectual light.

I see by your eagerness and the wonder and hope which your eyes

express, my friend, that you expect to be informed of the secret with

which I am acquainted; that cannot be; listen patiently until the end

of my story, and you will easily perceive why I am reserved upon that

subject. I will not lead you on, unguarded and ardent as I then was,

to your destruction and infallible misery. Learn from me, if not by my

precepts, at least by my example, how dangerous is the acquirement of

knowledge and how much happier that man is who believes his native town

to be the world, than he who aspires to become greater than his nature

will allow.

When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands, I hesitated

a long time concerning the manner in which I should employ it.

Although I possessed the capacity of bestowing animation, yet to

prepare a frame for the reception of it, with all its intricacies of

fibres, muscles, and veins, still remained a work of inconceivable

difficulty and labour. I doubted at first whether I should attempt the

creation of a being like myself, or one of simpler organization; but my

imagination was too much exalted by my first success to permit me to

doubt of my ability to give life to an animal as complex and wonderful

as man. The materials at present within my command hardly appeared

adequate to so arduous an undertaking, but I doubted not that I should

ultimately succeed. I prepared myself for a multitude of reverses; my

operations might be incessantly baffled, and at last my work be

imperfect, yet when I considered the improvement which every day takes

place in science and mechanics, I was encouraged to hope my present

attempts would at least lay the foundations of future success. Nor

could I consider the magnitude and complexity of my plan as any

argument of its impracticability. It was with these feelings that I

began the creation of a human being. As the minuteness of the parts

formed a great hindrance to my speed, I resolved, contrary to my first

intention, to make the being of a gigantic stature, that is to say,

about eight feet in height, and proportionably large. After having

formed this determination and having spent some months in successfully

collecting and arranging my materials, I began.

No one can conceive the variety of feelings which bore me onwards, like

a hurricane, in the first enthusiasm of success. Life and death

appeared to me ideal bounds, which I should first break through, and

pour a torrent of light into our dark world. A new species would bless

me as its creator and source; many happy and excellent natures would

owe their being to me. No father could claim the gratitude of his

child so completely as I should deserve theirs. Pursuing these

reflections, I thought that if I could bestow animation upon lifeless

matter, I might in process of time (although I now found it impossible)

renew life where death had apparently devoted the body to corruption.

These thoughts supported my spirits, while I pursued my undertaking

with unremitting ardour. My cheek had grown pale with study, and my

person had become emaciated with confinement. Sometimes, on the very

brink of certainty, I failed; yet still I clung to the hope which the

next day or the next hour might realise. One secret which I alone

possessed was the hope to which I had dedicated myself; and the moon

gazed on my midnight labours, while, with unrelaxed and breathless

eagerness, I pursued nature to her hiding-places. Who shall conceive

the horrors of my secret toil as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps

of the grave or tortured the living animal to animate the lifeless

clay? My limbs now tremble, and my eyes swim with the remembrance; but

then a resistless and almost frantic impulse urged me forward; I seemed

to have lost all soul or sensation but for this one pursuit. It was

indeed but a passing trance, that only made me feel with renewed

acuteness so soon as, the unnatural stimulus ceasing to operate, I had

returned to my old habits. I collected bones from charnel-houses and

disturbed, with profane fingers, the tremendous secrets of the human

frame. In a solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house,

and separated from all the other apartments by a gallery and staircase,

I kept my workshop of filthy creation; my eyeballs were starting from

their sockets in attending to the details of my employment. The

dissecting room and the slaughter-house furnished many of my materials;

and often did my human nature turn with loathing from my occupation,

whilst, still urged on by an eagerness which perpetually increased, I

brought my work near to a conclusion.

The summer months passed while I was thus engaged, heart and soul, in

one pursuit. It was a most beautiful season; never did the fields

bestow a more plentiful harvest or the vines yield a more luxuriant

vintage, but my eyes were insensible to the charms of nature. And the

same feelings which made me neglect the scenes around me caused me also

to forget those friends who were so many miles absent, and whom I had

not seen for so long a time. I knew my silence disquieted them, and I

well remembered the words of my father: “I know that while you are

pleased with yourself you will think of us with affection, and we shall

hear regularly from you. You must pardon me if I regard any

interruption in your correspondence as a proof that your other duties

are equally neglected.”

I knew well therefore what would be my father’s feelings, but I could

not tear my thoughts from my employment, loathsome in itself, but which

had taken an irresistible hold of my imagination. I wished, as it

were, to procrastinate all that related to my feelings of affection

until the great object, which swallowed up every habit of my nature,

should be completed.

I then thought that my father would be unjust if he ascribed my neglect

to vice or faultiness on my part, but I am now convinced that he was

justified in conceiving that I should not be altogether free from

blame. A human being in perfection ought always to preserve a calm and

peaceful mind and never to allow passion or a transitory desire to

disturb his tranquillity. I do not think that the pursuit of knowledge

is an exception to this rule. If the study to which you apply yourself

has a tendency to weaken your affections and to destroy your taste for

those simple pleasures in which no alloy can possibly mix, then that

study is certainly unlawful, that is to say, not befitting the human

mind. If this rule were always observed; if no man allowed any pursuit

whatsoever to interfere with the tranquillity of his domestic

affections, Greece had not been enslaved, Cæsar would have spared his

country, America would have been discovered more gradually, and the

empires of Mexico and Peru had not been destroyed.

But I forget that I am moralizing in the most interesting part of my

tale, and your looks remind me to proceed.

My father made no reproach in his letters and only took notice of my

silence by inquiring into my occupations more particularly than before.

Winter, spring, and summer passed away during my labours; but I did not

watch the blossom or the expanding leaves—sights which before always

yielded me supreme delight—so deeply was I engrossed in my

occupation. The leaves of that year had withered before my work drew near

to a close, and now every day showed me more plainly how well I had

succeeded. But my enthusiasm was checked by my anxiety, and I appeared

rather like one doomed by slavery to toil in the mines, or any other

unwholesome trade than an artist occupied by his favourite employment.

Every night I was oppressed by a slow fever, and I became nervous to a most

painful degree; the fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned my fellow

creatures as if I had been guilty of a crime. Sometimes I grew alarmed at

the wreck I perceived that I had become; the energy of my purpose alone

sustained me: my labours would soon end, and I believed that exercise and

amusement would then drive away incipient disease; and I promised myself

both of these when my creation should be complete.

Chapter 5

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment

of my toils. With an anxiety that almost amounted to agony, I

collected the instruments of life around me, that I might infuse a

spark of being into the lifeless thing that lay at my feet. It was

already one in the morning; the rain pattered dismally against the

panes, and my candle was nearly burnt out, when, by the glimmer of the

half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature

open; it breathed hard, and a convulsive motion agitated its limbs.

How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe, or how delineate

the wretch whom with such infinite pains and care I had endeavoured to

form? His limbs were in proportion, and I had selected his features as

beautiful. Beautiful! Great God! His yellow skin scarcely covered

the work of muscles and arteries beneath; his hair was of a lustrous

black, and flowing; his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these

luxuriances only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes,

that seemed almost of the same colour as the dun-white sockets in which

they were set, his shrivelled complexion and straight black lips.

The different accidents of life are not so changeable as the feelings

of human nature. I had worked hard for nearly two years, for the sole

purpose of infusing life into an inanimate body. For this I had

deprived myself of rest and health. I had desired it with an ardour

that far exceeded moderation; but now that I had finished, the beauty

of the dream vanished, and breathless horror and disgust filled my

heart. Unable to endure the aspect of the being I had created, I

rushed out of the room and continued a long time traversing my

bed-chamber, unable to compose my mind to sleep. At length lassitude

succeeded to the tumult I had before endured, and I threw myself on the

bed in my clothes, endeavouring to seek a few moments of forgetfulness.

But it was in vain; I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest

dreams. I thought I saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in

the streets of Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, I embraced her,

but as I imprinted the first kiss on her lips, they became livid with

the hue of death; her features appeared to change, and I thought that I

held the corpse of my dead mother in my arms; a shroud enveloped her

form, and I saw the grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.

I started from my sleep with horror; a cold dew covered my forehead, my

teeth chattered, and every limb became convulsed; when, by the dim and

yellow light of the moon, as it forced its way through the window

shutters, I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had

created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they

may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened, and he muttered some

inarticulate sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have

spoken, but I did not hear; one hand was stretched out, seemingly to

detain me, but I escaped and rushed downstairs. I took refuge in the

courtyard belonging to the house which I inhabited, where I remained

during the rest of the night, walking up and down in the greatest

agitation, listening attentively, catching and fearing each sound as if

it were to announce the approach of the demoniacal corpse to which I

had so miserably given life.

Oh! No mortal could support the horror of that countenance. A mummy

again endued with animation could not be so hideous as that wretch. I

had gazed on him while unfinished; he was ugly then, but when those

muscles and joints were rendered capable of motion, it became a thing

such as even Dante could not have conceived.

I passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes my pulse beat so quickly and

hardly that I felt the palpitation of every artery; at others, I nearly

sank to the ground through languor and extreme weakness. Mingled with

this horror, I felt the bitterness of disappointment; dreams that had

been my food and pleasant rest for so long a space were now become a

hell to me; and the change was so rapid, the overthrow so complete!

Morning, dismal and wet, at length dawned and discovered to my

sleepless and aching eyes the church of Ingolstadt, its white steeple

and clock, which indicated the sixth hour. The porter opened the gates

of the court, which had that night been my asylum, and I issued into

the streets, pacing them with quick steps, as if I sought to avoid the

wretch whom I feared every turning of the street would present to my

view. I did not dare return to the apartment which I inhabited, but

felt impelled to hurry on, although drenched by the rain which poured

from a black and comfortless sky.

I continued walking in this manner for some time, endeavouring by

bodily exercise to ease the load that weighed upon my mind. I

traversed the streets without any clear conception of where I was or

what I was doing. My heart palpitated in the sickness of fear, and I

hurried on with irregular steps, not daring to look about me:

Like one who, on a lonely road,

Doth walk in fear and dread,

And, having once turned round, walks on,

And turns no more his head;

Because he knows a frightful fiend

Doth close behind him tread.

[Coleridge’s “Ancient Mariner.”]

Continuing thus, I came at length opposite to the inn at which the various

diligences and carriages usually stopped. Here I paused, I knew not why;

but I remained some minutes with my eyes fixed on a coach that was coming

towards me from the other end of the street. As it drew nearer I observed

that it was the Swiss diligence; it stopped just where I was standing, and

on the door being opened, I perceived Henry Clerval, who, on seeing me,

instantly sprung out. “My dear Frankenstein,” exclaimed he,

“how glad I am to see you! How fortunate that you should be here at

the very moment of my alighting!”

Nothing could equal my delight on seeing Clerval; his presence brought back

to my thoughts my father, Elizabeth, and all those scenes of home so dear

to my recollection. I grasped his hand, and in a moment forgot my horror

and misfortune; I felt suddenly, and for the first time during many months,

calm and serene joy. I welcomed my friend, therefore, in the most cordial

manner, and we walked towards my college. Clerval continued talking for

some time about our mutual friends and his own good fortune in being

permitted to come to Ingolstadt. “You may easily believe,” said

he, “how great was the difficulty to persuade my father that all

necessary knowledge was not comprised in the noble art of book-keeping;

and, indeed, I believe I left him incredulous to the last, for his constant

answer to my unwearied entreaties was the same as that of the Dutch

schoolmaster in The Vicar of Wakefield: ‘I have ten thousand florins

a year without Greek, I eat heartily without Greek.’ But his

affection for me at length overcame his dislike of learning, and he has

permitted me to undertake a voyage of discovery to the land of

knowledge.”

“It gives me the greatest delight to see you; but tell me how you left

my father, brothers, and Elizabeth.”

“Very well, and very happy, only a little uneasy that they hear from

you so seldom. By the by, I mean to lecture you a little upon their

account myself. But, my dear Frankenstein,” continued he, stopping

short and gazing full in my face, “I did not before remark how very ill

you appear; so thin and pale; you look as if you had been watching for

several nights.”

“You have guessed right; I have lately been so deeply engaged in one

occupation that I have not allowed myself sufficient rest, as you see;

but I hope, I sincerely hope, that all these employments are now at an

end and that I am at length free.”

I trembled excessively; I could not endure to think of, and far less to

allude to, the occurrences of the preceding night. I walked with a

quick pace, and we soon arrived at my college. I then reflected, and

the thought made me shiver, that the creature whom I had left in my

apartment might still be there, alive and walking about. I dreaded to

behold this monster, but I feared still more that Henry should see him.

Entreating him, therefore, to remain a few minutes at the bottom of the

stairs, I darted up towards my own room. My hand was already on the

lock of the door before I recollected myself. I then paused, and a

cold shivering came over me. I threw the door forcibly open, as

children are accustomed to do when they expect a spectre to stand in

waiting for them on the other side; but nothing appeared. I stepped

fearfully in: the apartment was empty, and my bedroom was also freed

from its hideous guest. I could hardly believe that so great a good

fortune could have befallen me, but when I became assured that my enemy

had indeed fled, I clapped my hands for joy and ran down to Clerval.

We ascended into my room, and the servant presently brought breakfast;

but I was unable to contain myself. It was not joy only that possessed

me; I felt my flesh tingle with excess of sensitiveness, and my pulse

beat rapidly. I was unable to remain for a single instant in the same

place; I jumped over the chairs, clapped my hands, and laughed aloud.

Clerval at first attributed my unusual spirits to joy on his arrival,

but when he observed me more attentively, he saw a wildness in my eyes

for which he could not account, and my loud, unrestrained, heartless

laughter frightened and astonished him.

“My dear Victor,” cried he, “what, for God’s sake,

is the matter? Do not laugh in that manner. How ill you are! What is the

cause of all this?”

“Do not ask me,” cried I, putting my hands before my eyes, for I

thought I saw the dreaded spectre glide into the room; “\_he\_ can

tell. Oh, save me! Save me!” I imagined that the monster seized me;

I struggled furiously and fell down in a fit.

Poor Clerval! What must have been his feelings? A meeting, which he

anticipated with such joy, so strangely turned to bitterness. But I

was not the witness of his grief, for I was lifeless and did not

recover my senses for a long, long time.

This was the commencement of a nervous fever which confined me for

several months. During all that time Henry was my only nurse. I

afterwards learned that, knowing my father’s advanced age and unfitness

for so long a journey, and how wretched my sickness would make

Elizabeth, he spared them this grief by concealing the extent of my

disorder. He knew that I could not have a more kind and attentive

nurse than himself; and, firm in the hope he felt of my recovery, he

did not doubt that, instead of doing harm, he performed the kindest

action that he could towards them.

But I was in reality very ill, and surely nothing but the unbounded and

unremitting attentions of my friend could have restored me to life.

The form of the monster on whom I had bestowed existence was for ever

before my eyes, and I raved incessantly concerning him. Doubtless my

words surprised Henry; he at first believed them to be the wanderings

of my disturbed imagination, but the pertinacity with which I

continually recurred to the same subject persuaded him that my disorder

indeed owed its origin to some uncommon and terrible event.

By very slow degrees, and with frequent relapses that alarmed and

grieved my friend, I recovered. I remember the first time I became

capable of observing outward objects with any kind of pleasure, I

perceived that the fallen leaves had disappeared and that the young

buds were shooting forth from the trees that shaded my window. It was

a divine spring, and the season contributed greatly to my

convalescence. I felt also sentiments of joy and affection revive in

my bosom; my gloom disappeared, and in a short time I became as

cheerful as before I was attacked by the fatal passion.

“Dearest Clerval,” exclaimed I, “how kind, how very good

you are to me. This whole winter, instead of being spent in study, as you

promised yourself, has been consumed in my sick room. How shall I ever

repay you? I feel the greatest remorse for the disappointment of which I

have been the occasion, but you will forgive me.”

“You will repay me entirely if you do not discompose yourself, but get

well as fast as you can; and since you appear in such good spirits, I

may speak to you on one subject, may I not?”

I trembled. One subject! What could it be? Could he allude to an object on

whom I dared not even think?

“Compose yourself,” said Clerval, who observed my change of

colour, “I will not mention it if it agitates you; but your father

and cousin would be very happy if they received a letter from you in your

own handwriting. They hardly know how ill you have been and are uneasy at

your long silence.”

“Is that all, my dear Henry? How could you suppose that my first

thought would not fly towards those dear, dear friends whom I love and

who are so deserving of my love?”

“If this is your present temper, my friend, you will perhaps be glad

to see a letter that has been lying here some days for you; it is from

your cousin, I believe.”

Chapter 6

Clerval then put the following letter into my hands. It was from my

own Elizabeth:

“My dearest Cousin,

“You have been ill, very ill, and even the constant letters of dear

kind Henry are not sufficient to reassure me on your account. You are

forbidden to write—to hold a pen; yet one word from you, dear Victor,

is necessary to calm our apprehensions. For a long time I have thought

that each post would bring this line, and my persuasions have

restrained my uncle from undertaking a journey to Ingolstadt. I have

prevented his encountering the inconveniences and perhaps dangers of so

long a journey, yet how often have I regretted not being able to

perform it myself! I figure to myself that the task of attending on

your sickbed has devolved on some mercenary old nurse, who could never

guess your wishes nor minister to them with the care and affection of

your poor cousin. Yet that is over now: Clerval writes that indeed

you are getting better. I eagerly hope that you will confirm this

intelligence soon in your own handwriting.

“Get well—and return to us. You will find a happy, cheerful home and

friends who love you dearly. Your father’s health is vigorous, and he

asks but to see you, but to be assured that you are well; and not a

care will ever cloud his benevolent countenance. How pleased you would

be to remark the improvement of our Ernest! He is now sixteen and full

of activity and spirit. He is desirous to be a true Swiss and to enter

into foreign service, but we cannot part with him, at least until his

elder brother returns to us. My uncle is not pleased with the idea of

a military career in a distant country, but Ernest never had your

powers of application. He looks upon study as an odious fetter; his

time is spent in the open air, climbing the hills or rowing on the

lake. I fear that he will become an idler unless we yield the point

and permit him to enter on the profession which he has selected.

“Little alteration, except the growth of our dear children, has taken

place since you left us. The blue lake and snow-clad mountains—they

never change; and I think our placid home and our contented hearts are

regulated by the same immutable laws. My trifling occupations take up

my time and amuse me, and I am rewarded for any exertions by seeing

none but happy, kind faces around me. Since you left us, but one

change has taken place in our little household. Do you remember on

what occasion Justine Moritz entered our family? Probably you do not;

I will relate her history, therefore in a few words. Madame Moritz,

her mother, was a widow with four children, of whom Justine was the

third. This girl had always been the favourite of her father, but

through a strange perversity, her mother could not endure her, and

after the death of M. Moritz, treated her very ill. My aunt observed

this, and when Justine was twelve years of age, prevailed on her mother

to allow her to live at our house. The republican institutions of our

country have produced simpler and happier manners than those which

prevail in the great monarchies that surround it. Hence there is less

distinction between the several classes of its inhabitants; and the

lower orders, being neither so poor nor so despised, their manners are

more refined and moral. A servant in Geneva does not mean the same

thing as a servant in France and England. Justine, thus received in

our family, learned the duties of a servant, a condition which, in our

fortunate country, does not include the idea of ignorance and a

sacrifice of the dignity of a human being.

“Justine, you may remember, was a great favourite of yours; and I

recollect you once remarked that if you were in an ill humour, one

glance from Justine could dissipate it, for the same reason that

Ariosto gives concerning the beauty of Angelica—she looked so

frank-hearted and happy. My aunt conceived a great attachment for her,

by which she was induced to give her an education superior to that

which she had at first intended. This benefit was fully repaid;

Justine was the most grateful little creature in the world: I do not

mean that she made any professions I never heard one pass her lips, but

you could see by her eyes that she almost adored her protectress.

Although her disposition was gay and in many respects inconsiderate,

yet she paid the greatest attention to every gesture of my aunt. She

thought her the model of all excellence and endeavoured to imitate her

phraseology and manners, so that even now she often reminds me of her.

“When my dearest aunt died every one was too much occupied in their own

grief to notice poor Justine, who had attended her during her illness

with the most anxious affection. Poor Justine was very ill; but other

trials were reserved for her.

“One by one, her brothers and sister died; and her mother, with the

exception of her neglected daughter, was left childless. The

conscience of the woman was troubled; she began to think that the

deaths of her favourites was a judgement from heaven to chastise her

partiality. She was a Roman Catholic; and I believe her confessor

confirmed the idea which she had conceived. Accordingly, a few months

after your departure for Ingolstadt, Justine was called home by her

repentant mother. Poor girl! She wept when she quitted our house; she

was much altered since the death of my aunt; grief had given softness

and a winning mildness to her manners, which had before been remarkable

for vivacity. Nor was her residence at her mother’s house of a nature

to restore her gaiety. The poor woman was very vacillating in her

repentance. She sometimes begged Justine to forgive her unkindness,

but much oftener accused her of having caused the deaths of her

brothers and sister. Perpetual fretting at length threw Madame Moritz

into a decline, which at first increased her irritability, but she is

now at peace for ever. She died on the first approach of cold weather,

at the beginning of this last winter. Justine has just returned to us;

and I assure you I love her tenderly. She is very clever and gentle,

and extremely pretty; as I mentioned before, her mien and her

expression continually remind me of my dear aunt.

“I must say also a few words to you, my dear cousin, of little darling

William. I wish you could see him; he is very tall of his age, with

sweet laughing blue eyes, dark eyelashes, and curling hair. When he

smiles, two little dimples appear on each cheek, which are rosy with

health. He has already had one or two little \_wives,\_ but Louisa Biron

is his favourite, a pretty little girl of five years of age.

“Now, dear Victor, I dare say you wish to be indulged in a little

gossip concerning the good people of Geneva. The pretty Miss Mansfield

has already received the congratulatory visits on her approaching

marriage with a young Englishman, John Melbourne, Esq. Her ugly

sister, Manon, married M. Duvillard, the rich banker, last autumn. Your

favourite schoolfellow, Louis Manoir, has suffered several misfortunes

since the departure of Clerval from Geneva. But he has already

recovered his spirits, and is reported to be on the point of marrying a

lively pretty Frenchwoman, Madame Tavernier. She is a widow, and much

older than Manoir; but she is very much admired, and a favourite with

everybody.

“I have written myself into better spirits, dear cousin; but my anxiety

returns upon me as I conclude. Write, dearest Victor,—one line—one

word will be a blessing to us. Ten thousand thanks to Henry for his

kindness, his affection, and his many letters; we are sincerely

grateful. Adieu! my cousin; take care of yourself; and, I entreat

you, write!

“Elizabeth Lavenza.

“Geneva, March 18th, 17—.”

“Dear, dear Elizabeth!” I exclaimed, when I had read her

letter: “I will write instantly and relieve them from the anxiety

they must feel.” I wrote, and this exertion greatly fatigued me; but

my convalescence had commenced, and proceeded regularly. In another

fortnight I was able to leave my chamber.

One of my first duties on my recovery was to introduce Clerval to the

several professors of the university. In doing this, I underwent a

kind of rough usage, ill befitting the wounds that my mind had

sustained. Ever since the fatal night, the end of my labours, and the

beginning of my misfortunes, I had conceived a violent antipathy even

to the name of natural philosophy. When I was otherwise quite restored

to health, the sight of a chemical instrument would renew all the agony

of my nervous symptoms. Henry saw this, and had removed all my

apparatus from my view. He had also changed my apartment; for he

perceived that I had acquired a dislike for the room which had

previously been my laboratory. But these cares of Clerval were made of

no avail when I visited the professors. M. Waldman inflicted torture

when he praised, with kindness and warmth, the astonishing progress I

had made in the sciences. He soon perceived that I disliked the

subject; but not guessing the real cause, he attributed my feelings to

modesty, and changed the subject from my improvement, to the science

itself, with a desire, as I evidently saw, of drawing me out. What

could I do? He meant to please, and he tormented me. I felt as if he

had placed carefully, one by one, in my view those instruments which

were to be afterwards used in putting me to a slow and cruel death. I

writhed under his words, yet dared not exhibit the pain I felt.

Clerval, whose eyes and feelings were always quick in discerning the

sensations of others, declined the subject, alleging, in excuse, his

total ignorance; and the conversation took a more general turn. I

thanked my friend from my heart, but I did not speak. I saw plainly

that he was surprised, but he never attempted to draw my secret from

me; and although I loved him with a mixture of affection and reverence

that knew no bounds, yet I could never persuade myself to confide in

him that event which was so often present to my recollection, but which

I feared the detail to another would only impress more deeply.

M. Krempe was not equally docile; and in my condition at that time, of

almost insupportable sensitiveness, his harsh blunt encomiums gave me even

more pain than the benevolent approbation of M. Waldman. “D—n

the fellow!” cried he; “why, M. Clerval, I assure you he has

outstript us all. Ay, stare if you please; but it is nevertheless true. A

youngster who, but a few years ago, believed in Cornelius Agrippa as firmly

as in the gospel, has now set himself at the head of the university; and if

he is not soon pulled down, we shall all be out of countenance.—Ay,

ay,” continued he, observing my face expressive of suffering,

“M. Frankenstein is modest; an excellent quality in a young man.

Young men should be diffident of themselves, you know, M. Clerval: I was

myself when young; but that wears out in a very short time.”

M. Krempe had now commenced an eulogy on himself, which happily turned

the conversation from a subject that was so annoying to me.

Clerval had never sympathised in my tastes for natural science; and his

literary pursuits differed wholly from those which had occupied me. He

came to the university with the design of making himself complete

master of the oriental languages, and thus he should open a field for

the plan of life he had marked out for himself. Resolved to pursue no

inglorious career, he turned his eyes toward the East, as affording

scope for his spirit of enterprise. The Persian, Arabic, and Sanskrit

languages engaged his attention, and I was easily induced to enter on

the same studies. Idleness had ever been irksome to me, and now that I

wished to fly from reflection, and hated my former studies, I felt

great relief in being the fellow-pupil with my friend, and found not

only instruction but consolation in the works of the orientalists. I

did not, like him, attempt a critical knowledge of their dialects, for

I did not contemplate making any other use of them than temporary

amusement. I read merely to understand their meaning, and they well

repaid my labours. Their melancholy is soothing, and their joy

elevating, to a degree I never experienced in studying the authors of

any other country. When you read their writings, life appears to

consist in a warm sun and a garden of roses,—in the smiles and frowns

of a fair enemy, and the fire that consumes your own heart. How

different from the manly and heroical poetry of Greece and Rome!

Summer passed away in these occupations, and my return to Geneva was

fixed for the latter end of autumn; but being delayed by several

accidents, winter and snow arrived, the roads were deemed impassable,

and my journey was retarded until the ensuing spring. I felt this

delay very bitterly; for I longed to see my native town and my beloved

friends. My return had only been delayed so long, from an

unwillingness to leave Clerval in a strange place, before he had become

acquainted with any of its inhabitants. The winter, however, was spent

cheerfully; and although the spring was uncommonly late, when it came

its beauty compensated for its dilatoriness.

The month of May had already commenced, and I expected the letter daily

which was to fix the date of my departure, when Henry proposed a

pedestrian tour in the environs of Ingolstadt, that I might bid a

personal farewell to the country I had so long inhabited. I acceded

with pleasure to this proposition: I was fond of exercise, and Clerval

had always been my favourite companion in the ramble of this nature

that I had taken among the scenes of my native country.

We passed a fortnight in these perambulations: my health and spirits

had long been restored, and they gained additional strength from the

salubrious air I breathed, the natural incidents of our progress, and

the conversation of my friend. Study had before secluded me from the

intercourse of my fellow-creatures, and rendered me unsocial; but

Clerval called forth the better feelings of my heart; he again taught

me to love the aspect of nature, and the cheerful faces of children.

Excellent friend! how sincerely you did love me, and endeavour to

elevate my mind until it was on a level with your own. A selfish

pursuit had cramped and narrowed me, until your gentleness and

affection warmed and opened my senses; I became the same happy creature

who, a few years ago, loved and beloved by all, had no sorrow or care.

When happy, inanimate nature had the power of bestowing on me the most

delightful sensations. A serene sky and verdant fields filled me with

ecstasy. The present season was indeed divine; the flowers of spring

bloomed in the hedges, while those of summer were already in bud. I

was undisturbed by thoughts which during the preceding year had pressed

upon me, notwithstanding my endeavours to throw them off, with an

invincible burden.

Henry rejoiced in my gaiety, and sincerely sympathised in my feelings: he

exerted himself to amuse me, while he expressed the sensations that filled

his soul. The resources of his mind on this occasion were truly

astonishing: his conversation was full of imagination; and very often, in

imitation of the Persian and Arabic writers, he invented tales of wonderful

fancy and passion. At other times he repeated my favourite poems, or drew

me out into arguments, which he supported with great ingenuity.

We returned to our college on a Sunday afternoon: the peasants were

dancing, and every one we met appeared gay and happy. My own spirits were

high, and I bounded along with feelings of unbridled joy and hilarity.

Chapter 7

On my return, I found the following letter from my father:—

“My dear Victor,

“You have probably waited impatiently for a letter to fix the date of

your return to us; and I was at first tempted to write only a few

lines, merely mentioning the day on which I should expect you. But

that would be a cruel kindness, and I dare not do it. What would be

your surprise, my son, when you expected a happy and glad welcome, to

behold, on the contrary, tears and wretchedness? And how, Victor, can

I relate our misfortune? Absence cannot have rendered you callous to

our joys and griefs; and how shall I inflict pain on my long absent

son? I wish to prepare you for the woeful news, but I know it is

impossible; even now your eye skims over the page to seek the words

which are to convey to you the horrible tidings.

“William is dead!—that sweet child, whose smiles delighted and warmed

my heart, who was so gentle, yet so gay! Victor, he is murdered!

“I will not attempt to console you; but will simply relate the

circumstances of the transaction.

“Last Thursday (May 7th), I, my niece, and your two brothers, went to

walk in Plainpalais. The evening was warm and serene, and we prolonged

our walk farther than usual. It was already dusk before we thought of

returning; and then we discovered that William and Ernest, who had gone

on before, were not to be found. We accordingly rested on a seat until

they should return. Presently Ernest came, and enquired if we had seen

his brother; he said, that he had been playing with him, that William

had run away to hide himself, and that he vainly sought for him, and

afterwards waited for a long time, but that he did not return.

“This account rather alarmed us, and we continued to search for him

until night fell, when Elizabeth conjectured that he might have

returned to the house. He was not there. We returned again, with

torches; for I could not rest, when I thought that my sweet boy had

lost himself, and was exposed to all the damps and dews of night;

Elizabeth also suffered extreme anguish. About five in the morning I

discovered my lovely boy, whom the night before I had seen blooming and

active in health, stretched on the grass livid and motionless; the

print of the murder’s finger was on his neck.

“He was conveyed home, and the anguish that was visible in my

countenance betrayed the secret to Elizabeth. She was very earnest to

see the corpse. At first I attempted to prevent her but she persisted,

and entering the room where it lay, hastily examined the neck of the

victim, and clasping her hands exclaimed, ‘O God! I have murdered my

darling child!’

“She fainted, and was restored with extreme difficulty. When she again

lived, it was only to weep and sigh. She told me, that that same

evening William had teased her to let him wear a very valuable

miniature that she possessed of your mother. This picture is gone, and

was doubtless the temptation which urged the murderer to the deed. We

have no trace of him at present, although our exertions to discover him

are unremitted; but they will not restore my beloved William!

“Come, dearest Victor; you alone can console Elizabeth. She weeps

continually, and accuses herself unjustly as the cause of his death;

her words pierce my heart. We are all unhappy; but will not that be an

additional motive for you, my son, to return and be our comforter?

Your dear mother! Alas, Victor! I now say, Thank God she did not live

to witness the cruel, miserable death of her youngest darling!

“Come, Victor; not brooding thoughts of vengeance against the assassin,

but with feelings of peace and gentleness, that will heal, instead of

festering, the wounds of our minds. Enter the house of mourning, my

friend, but with kindness and affection for those who love you, and not

with hatred for your enemies.

“Your affectionate and afflicted father,

“Alphonse Frankenstein.

“Geneva, May 12th, 17—.”

Clerval, who had watched my countenance as I read this letter, was

surprised to observe the despair that succeeded the joy I at first

expressed on receiving news from my friends. I threw the letter on the

table, and covered my face with my hands.

“My dear Frankenstein,” exclaimed Henry, when he perceived me

weep with bitterness, “are you always to be unhappy? My dear friend,

what has happened?”

I motioned him to take up the letter, while I walked up and down the

room in the extremest agitation. Tears also gushed from the eyes of

Clerval, as he read the account of my misfortune.

“I can offer you no consolation, my friend,” said he;

“your disaster is irreparable. What do you intend to do?”

“To go instantly to Geneva: come with me, Henry, to order the horses.”

During our walk, Clerval endeavoured to say a few words of consolation;

he could only express his heartfelt sympathy. “Poor William!” said he,

“dear lovely child, he now sleeps with his angel mother! Who that had

seen him bright and joyous in his young beauty, but must weep over his

untimely loss! To die so miserably; to feel the murderer’s grasp! How

much more a murdered that could destroy radiant innocence! Poor little

fellow! one only consolation have we; his friends mourn and weep, but

he is at rest. The pang is over, his sufferings are at an end for ever.

A sod covers his gentle form, and he knows no pain. He can no longer

be a subject for pity; we must reserve that for his miserable

survivors.”

Clerval spoke thus as we hurried through the streets; the words

impressed themselves on my mind and I remembered them afterwards in

solitude. But now, as soon as the horses arrived, I hurried into a

cabriolet, and bade farewell to my friend.

My journey was very melancholy. At first I wished to hurry on, for I longed

to console and sympathise with my loved and sorrowing friends; but when I

drew near my native town, I slackened my progress. I could hardly sustain

the multitude of feelings that crowded into my mind. I passed through

scenes familiar to my youth, but which I had not seen for nearly six years.

How altered every thing might be during that time! One sudden and

desolating change had taken place; but a thousand little circumstances

might have by degrees worked other alterations, which, although they were

done more tranquilly, might not be the less decisive. Fear overcame me; I

dared no advance, dreading a thousand nameless evils that made me tremble,

although I was unable to define them.

I remained two days at Lausanne, in this painful state of mind. I

contemplated the lake: the waters were placid; all around was calm; and the

snowy mountains, “the palaces of nature,” were not changed. By

degrees the calm and heavenly scene restored me, and I continued my journey

towards Geneva.

The road ran by the side of the lake, which became narrower as I

approached my native town. I discovered more distinctly the black

sides of Jura, and the bright summit of Mont Blanc. I wept like a

child. “Dear mountains! my own beautiful lake! how do you welcome your

wanderer? Your summits are clear; the sky and lake are blue and

placid. Is this to prognosticate peace, or to mock at my unhappiness?”

I fear, my friend, that I shall render myself tedious by dwelling on

these preliminary circumstances; but they were days of comparative

happiness, and I think of them with pleasure. My country, my beloved

country! who but a native can tell the delight I took in again

beholding thy streams, thy mountains, and, more than all, thy lovely

lake!

Yet, as I drew nearer home, grief and fear again overcame me. Night also

closed around; and when I could hardly see the dark mountains, I felt still

more gloomily. The picture appeared a vast and dim scene of evil, and I

foresaw obscurely that I was destined to become the most wretched of human

beings. Alas! I prophesied truly, and failed only in one single

circumstance, that in all the misery I imagined and dreaded, I did not

conceive the hundredth part of the anguish I was destined to endure.

It was completely dark when I arrived in the environs of Geneva; the gates

of the town were already shut; and I was obliged to pass the night at

Secheron, a village at the distance of half a league from the city. The sky

was serene; and, as I was unable to rest, I resolved to visit the spot

where my poor William had been murdered. As I could not pass through the

town, I was obliged to cross the lake in a boat to arrive at Plainpalais.

During this short voyage I saw the lightning playing on the summit of Mont

Blanc in the most beautiful figures. The storm appeared to approach

rapidly, and, on landing, I ascended a low hill, that I might observe its

progress. It advanced; the heavens were clouded, and I soon felt the rain

coming slowly in large drops, but its violence quickly increased.

I quitted my seat, and walked on, although the darkness and storm

increased every minute, and the thunder burst with a terrific crash

over my head. It was echoed from Salêve, the Juras, and the Alps of

Savoy; vivid flashes of lightning dazzled my eyes, illuminating the

lake, making it appear like a vast sheet of fire; then for an instant

every thing seemed of a pitchy darkness, until the eye recovered itself

from the preceding flash. The storm, as is often the case in

Switzerland, appeared at once in various parts of the heavens. The

most violent storm hung exactly north of the town, over the part of the

lake which lies between the promontory of Belrive and the village of

Copêt. Another storm enlightened Jura with faint flashes; and another

darkened and sometimes disclosed the Môle, a peaked mountain to the

east of the lake.

While I watched the tempest, so beautiful yet terrific, I wandered on with

a hasty step. This noble war in the sky elevated my spirits; I clasped my

hands, and exclaimed aloud, “William, dear angel! this is thy

funeral, this thy dirge!” As I said these words, I perceived in the

gloom a figure which stole from behind a clump of trees near me; I stood

fixed, gazing intently: I could not be mistaken. A flash of lightning

illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly to me; its

gigantic stature, and the deformity of its aspect more hideous than belongs

to humanity, instantly informed me that it was the wretch, the filthy

dæmon, to whom I had given life. What did he there? Could he be (I

shuddered at the conception) the murderer of my brother? No sooner did that

idea cross my imagination, than I became convinced of its truth; my teeth

chattered, and I was forced to lean against a tree for support. The figure

passed me quickly, and I lost it in the gloom. Nothing in human shape could

have destroyed the fair child. \_He\_ was the murderer! I could not

doubt it. The mere presence of the idea was an irresistible proof of the

fact. I thought of pursuing the devil; but it would have been in vain, for

another flash discovered him to me hanging among the rocks of the nearly

perpendicular ascent of Mont Salêve, a hill that bounds Plainpalais on the

south. He soon reached the summit, and disappeared.

I remained motionless. The thunder ceased; but the rain still

continued, and the scene was enveloped in an impenetrable darkness. I

revolved in my mind the events which I had until now sought to forget:

the whole train of my progress toward the creation; the appearance of

the works of my own hands at my bedside; its departure. Two years had

now nearly elapsed since the night on which he first received life; and

was this his first crime? Alas! I had turned loose into the world a

depraved wretch, whose delight was in carnage and misery; had he not

murdered my brother?

No one can conceive the anguish I suffered during the remainder of the

night, which I spent, cold and wet, in the open air. But I did not

feel the inconvenience of the weather; my imagination was busy in

scenes of evil and despair. I considered the being whom I had cast

among mankind, and endowed with the will and power to effect purposes

of horror, such as the deed which he had now done, nearly in the light

of my own vampire, my own spirit let loose from the grave, and forced

to destroy all that was dear to me.

Day dawned; and I directed my steps towards the town. The gates were

open, and I hastened to my father’s house. My first thought was to

discover what I knew of the murderer, and cause instant pursuit to be

made. But I paused when I reflected on the story that I had to tell. A

being whom I myself had formed, and endued with life, had met me at

midnight among the precipices of an inaccessible mountain. I

remembered also the nervous fever with which I had been seized just at

the time that I dated my creation, and which would give an air of

delirium to a tale otherwise so utterly improbable. I well knew that

if any other had communicated such a relation to me, I should have

looked upon it as the ravings of insanity. Besides, the strange nature

of the animal would elude all pursuit, even if I were so far credited

as to persuade my relatives to commence it. And then of what use would

be pursuit? Who could arrest a creature capable of scaling the

overhanging sides of Mont Salêve? These reflections determined me, and

I resolved to remain silent.

It was about five in the morning when I entered my father’s house. I

told the servants not to disturb the family, and went into the library

to attend their usual hour of rising.

Six years had elapsed, passed in a dream but for one indelible trace, and I

stood in the same place where I had last embraced my father before my

departure for Ingolstadt. Beloved and venerable parent! He still remained

to me. I gazed on the picture of my mother, which stood over the

mantel-piece. It was an historical subject, painted at my father’s

desire, and represented Caroline Beaufort in an agony of despair, kneeling

by the coffin of her dead father. Her garb was rustic, and her cheek pale;

but there was an air of dignity and beauty, that hardly permitted the

sentiment of pity. Below this picture was a miniature of William; and my

tears flowed when I looked upon it. While I was thus engaged, Ernest

entered: he had heard me arrive, and hastened to welcome me:

“Welcome, my dearest Victor,” said he. “Ah! I wish you

had come three months ago, and then you would have found us all joyous and

delighted. You come to us now to share a misery which nothing can

alleviate; yet your presence will, I hope, revive our father, who seems

sinking under his misfortune; and your persuasions will induce poor

Elizabeth to cease her vain and tormenting self-accusations.—Poor

William! he was our darling and our pride!”

Tears, unrestrained, fell from my brother’s eyes; a sense of mortal

agony crept over my frame. Before, I had only imagined the

wretchedness of my desolated home; the reality came on me as a new, and

a not less terrible, disaster. I tried to calm Ernest; I enquired more

minutely concerning my father, and here I named my cousin.

“She most of all,” said Ernest, “requires consolation; she accused

herself of having caused the death of my brother, and that made her

very wretched. But since the murderer has been discovered—”

“The murderer discovered! Good God! how can that be? who could attempt

to pursue him? It is impossible; one might as well try to overtake the

winds, or confine a mountain-stream with a straw. I saw him too; he

was free last night!”

“I do not know what you mean,” replied my brother, in accents of

wonder, “but to us the discovery we have made completes our misery. No

one would believe it at first; and even now Elizabeth will not be

convinced, notwithstanding all the evidence. Indeed, who would credit

that Justine Moritz, who was so amiable, and fond of all the family,

could suddenly become so capable of so frightful, so appalling a crime?”

“Justine Moritz! Poor, poor girl, is she the accused? But it is

wrongfully; every one knows that; no one believes it, surely, Ernest?”

“No one did at first; but several circumstances came out, that have

almost forced conviction upon us; and her own behaviour has been so

confused, as to add to the evidence of facts a weight that, I fear,

leaves no hope for doubt. But she will be tried today, and you will

then hear all.”

He then related that, the morning on which the murder of poor William

had been discovered, Justine had been taken ill, and confined to her

bed for several days. During this interval, one of the servants,

happening to examine the apparel she had worn on the night of the

murder, had discovered in her pocket the picture of my mother, which

had been judged to be the temptation of the murderer. The servant

instantly showed it to one of the others, who, without saying a word to

any of the family, went to a magistrate; and, upon their deposition,

Justine was apprehended. On being charged with the fact, the poor girl

confirmed the suspicion in a great measure by her extreme confusion of

manner.

This was a strange tale, but it did not shake my faith; and I replied

earnestly, “You are all mistaken; I know the murderer. Justine, poor,

good Justine, is innocent.”

At that instant my father entered. I saw unhappiness deeply impressed

on his countenance, but he endeavoured to welcome me cheerfully; and,

after we had exchanged our mournful greeting, would have introduced

some other topic than that of our disaster, had not Ernest exclaimed,

“Good God, papa! Victor says that he knows who was the murderer of

poor William.”

“We do also, unfortunately,” replied my father, “for indeed I had

rather have been for ever ignorant than have discovered so much

depravity and ungratitude in one I valued so highly.”

“My dear father, you are mistaken; Justine is innocent.”

“If she is, God forbid that she should suffer as guilty. She is to be

tried today, and I hope, I sincerely hope, that she will be acquitted.”

This speech calmed me. I was firmly convinced in my own mind that

Justine, and indeed every human being, was guiltless of this murder. I

had no fear, therefore, that any circumstantial evidence could be

brought forward strong enough to convict her. My tale was not one to

announce publicly; its astounding horror would be looked upon as

madness by the vulgar. Did any one indeed exist, except I, the

creator, who would believe, unless his senses convinced him, in the

existence of the living monument of presumption and rash ignorance

which I had let loose upon the world?

We were soon joined by Elizabeth. Time had altered her since I last

beheld her; it had endowed her with loveliness surpassing the beauty of

her childish years. There was the same candour, the same vivacity, but

it was allied to an expression more full of sensibility and intellect.

She welcomed me with the greatest affection. “Your arrival, my dear

cousin,” said she, “fills me with hope. You perhaps will find some

means to justify my poor guiltless Justine. Alas! who is safe, if she

be convicted of crime? I rely on her innocence as certainly as I do

upon my own. Our misfortune is doubly hard to us; we have not only

lost that lovely darling boy, but this poor girl, whom I sincerely

love, is to be torn away by even a worse fate. If she is condemned, I

never shall know joy more. But she will not, I am sure she will not;

and then I shall be happy again, even after the sad death of my little

William.”

“She is innocent, my Elizabeth,” said I, “and that shall

be proved; fear nothing, but let your spirits be cheered by the assurance

of her acquittal.”

“How kind and generous you are! every one else believes in her guilt,

and that made me wretched, for I knew that it was impossible: and to

see every one else prejudiced in so deadly a manner rendered me

hopeless and despairing.” She wept.

“Dearest niece,” said my father, “dry your tears. If she

is, as you believe, innocent, rely on the justice of our laws, and the

activity with which I shall prevent the slightest shadow of

partiality.”

Chapter 8

We passed a few sad hours until eleven o’clock, when the trial was to

commence. My father and the rest of the family being obliged to attend

as witnesses, I accompanied them to the court. During the whole of

this wretched mockery of justice I suffered living torture. It was to

be decided whether the result of my curiosity and lawless devices would

cause the death of two of my fellow beings: one a smiling babe full of

innocence and joy, the other far more dreadfully murdered, with every

aggravation of infamy that could make the murder memorable in horror.

Justine also was a girl of merit and possessed qualities which promised

to render her life happy; now all was to be obliterated in an

ignominious grave, and I the cause! A thousand times rather would I

have confessed myself guilty of the crime ascribed to Justine, but I

was absent when it was committed, and such a declaration would have

been considered as the ravings of a madman and would not have

exculpated her who suffered through me.

The appearance of Justine was calm. She was dressed in mourning, and

her countenance, always engaging, was rendered, by the solemnity of her

feelings, exquisitely beautiful. Yet she appeared confident in

innocence and did not tremble, although gazed on and execrated by

thousands, for all the kindness which her beauty might otherwise have

excited was obliterated in the minds of the spectators by the

imagination of the enormity she was supposed to have committed. She

was tranquil, yet her tranquillity was evidently constrained; and as

her confusion had before been adduced as a proof of her guilt, she

worked up her mind to an appearance of courage. When she entered the

court she threw her eyes round it and quickly discovered where we were

seated. A tear seemed to dim her eye when she saw us, but she quickly

recovered herself, and a look of sorrowful affection seemed to attest

her utter guiltlessness.

The trial began, and after the advocate against her had stated the

charge, several witnesses were called. Several strange facts combined

against her, which might have staggered anyone who had not such proof

of her innocence as I had. She had been out the whole of the night on

which the murder had been committed and towards morning had been

perceived by a market-woman not far from the spot where the body of the

murdered child had been afterwards found. The woman asked her what she

did there, but she looked very strangely and only returned a confused

and unintelligible answer. She returned to the house about eight

o’clock, and when one inquired where she had passed the night, she

replied that she had been looking for the child and demanded earnestly

if anything had been heard concerning him. When shown the body, she

fell into violent hysterics and kept her bed for several days. The

picture was then produced which the servant had found in her pocket;

and when Elizabeth, in a faltering voice, proved that it was the same

which, an hour before the child had been missed, she had placed round

his neck, a murmur of horror and indignation filled the court.

Justine was called on for her defence. As the trial had proceeded, her

countenance had altered. Surprise, horror, and misery were strongly

expressed. Sometimes she struggled with her tears, but when she was

desired to plead, she collected her powers and spoke in an audible

although variable voice.

“God knows,” she said, “how entirely I am innocent. But I

do not pretend that my protestations should acquit me; I rest my innocence

on a plain and simple explanation of the facts which have been adduced

against me, and I hope the character I have always borne will incline my

judges to a favourable interpretation where any circumstance appears

doubtful or suspicious.”

She then related that, by the permission of Elizabeth, she had passed

the evening of the night on which the murder had been committed at the

house of an aunt at Chêne, a village situated at about a league from

Geneva. On her return, at about nine o’clock, she met a man who asked

her if she had seen anything of the child who was lost. She was

alarmed by this account and passed several hours in looking for him,

when the gates of Geneva were shut, and she was forced to remain

several hours of the night in a barn belonging to a cottage, being

unwilling to call up the inhabitants, to whom she was well known. Most

of the night she spent here watching; towards morning she believed that

she slept for a few minutes; some steps disturbed her, and she awoke.

It was dawn, and she quitted her asylum, that she might again endeavour

to find my brother. If she had gone near the spot where his body lay,

it was without her knowledge. That she had been bewildered when

questioned by the market-woman was not surprising, since she had passed

a sleepless night and the fate of poor William was yet uncertain.

Concerning the picture she could give no account.

“I know,” continued the unhappy victim, “how heavily and

fatally this one circumstance weighs against me, but I have no power of

explaining it; and when I have expressed my utter ignorance, I am only left

to conjecture concerning the probabilities by which it might have been

placed in my pocket. But here also I am checked. I believe that I have no

enemy on earth, and none surely would have been so wicked as to destroy me

wantonly. Did the murderer place it there? I know of no opportunity

afforded him for so doing; or, if I had, why should he have stolen the

jewel, to part with it again so soon?

“I commit my cause to the justice of my judges, yet I see no room for

hope. I beg permission to have a few witnesses examined concerning my

character, and if their testimony shall not overweigh my supposed

guilt, I must be condemned, although I would pledge my salvation on my

innocence.”

Several witnesses were called who had known her for many years, and

they spoke well of her; but fear and hatred of the crime of which they

supposed her guilty rendered them timorous and unwilling to come

forward. Elizabeth saw even this last resource, her excellent

dispositions and irreproachable conduct, about to fail the accused,

when, although violently agitated, she desired permission to address

the court.

“I am,” said she, “the cousin of the unhappy child who

was murdered, or rather his sister, for I was educated by and have lived

with his parents ever since and even long before his birth. It may

therefore be judged indecent in me to come forward on this occasion, but

when I see a fellow creature about to perish through the cowardice of her

pretended friends, I wish to be allowed to speak, that I may say what I

know of her character. I am well acquainted with the accused. I have lived

in the same house with her, at one time for five and at another for nearly

two years. During all that period she appeared to me the most amiable and

benevolent of human creatures. She nursed Madame Frankenstein, my aunt, in

her last illness, with the greatest affection and care and afterwards

attended her own mother during a tedious illness, in a manner that excited

the admiration of all who knew her, after which she again lived in my

uncle’s house, where she was beloved by all the family. She was

warmly attached to the child who is now dead and acted towards him like a

most affectionate mother. For my own part, I do not hesitate to say that,

notwithstanding all the evidence produced against her, I believe and rely

on her perfect innocence. She had no temptation for such an action; as to

the bauble on which the chief proof rests, if she had earnestly desired it,

I should have willingly given it to her, so much do I esteem and value

her.”

A murmur of approbation followed Elizabeth’s simple and powerful

appeal, but it was excited by her generous interference, and not in

favour of poor Justine, on whom the public indignation was turned with

renewed violence, charging her with the blackest ingratitude. She

herself wept as Elizabeth spoke, but she did not answer. My own

agitation and anguish was extreme during the whole trial. I believed

in her innocence; I knew it. Could the dæmon who had (I did not for a

minute doubt) murdered my brother also in his hellish sport have

betrayed the innocent to death and ignominy? I could not sustain the

horror of my situation, and when I perceived that the popular voice and

the countenances of the judges had already condemned my unhappy victim,

I rushed out of the court in agony. The tortures of the accused did

not equal mine; she was sustained by innocence, but the fangs of

remorse tore my bosom and would not forgo their hold.

I passed a night of unmingled wretchedness. In the morning I went to

the court; my lips and throat were parched. I dared not ask the fatal

question, but I was known, and the officer guessed the cause of my

visit. The ballots had been thrown; they were all black, and Justine

was condemned.

I cannot pretend to describe what I then felt. I had before

experienced sensations of horror, and I have endeavoured to bestow upon

them adequate expressions, but words cannot convey an idea of the

heart-sickening despair that I then endured. The person to whom I

addressed myself added that Justine had already confessed her guilt.

“That evidence,” he observed, “was hardly required in so glaring a

case, but I am glad of it, and, indeed, none of our judges like to

condemn a criminal upon circumstantial evidence, be it ever so

decisive.”

This was strange and unexpected intelligence; what could it mean? Had

my eyes deceived me? And was I really as mad as the whole world would

believe me to be if I disclosed the object of my suspicions? I

hastened to return home, and Elizabeth eagerly demanded the result.

“My cousin,” replied I, “it is decided as you may have expected; all

judges had rather that ten innocent should suffer than that one guilty

should escape. But she has confessed.”

This was a dire blow to poor Elizabeth, who had relied with firmness upon

Justine’s innocence. “Alas!” said she. “How shall I

ever again believe in human goodness? Justine, whom I loved and esteemed as

my sister, how could she put on those smiles of innocence only to betray?

Her mild eyes seemed incapable of any severity or guile, and yet she has

committed a murder.”

Soon after we heard that the poor victim had expressed a desire to see my

cousin. My father wished her not to go but said that he left it to her own

judgment and feelings to decide. “Yes,” said Elizabeth,

“I will go, although she is guilty; and you, Victor, shall accompany

me; I cannot go alone.” The idea of this visit was torture to me, yet

I could not refuse.

We entered the gloomy prison chamber and beheld Justine sitting on some

straw at the farther end; her hands were manacled, and her head rested on

her knees. She rose on seeing us enter, and when we were left alone with

her, she threw herself at the feet of Elizabeth, weeping bitterly. My

cousin wept also.

“Oh, Justine!” said she. “Why did you rob me of my last consolation?

I relied on your innocence, and although I was then very wretched, I

was not so miserable as I am now.”

“And do you also believe that I am so very, very wicked? Do you also

join with my enemies to crush me, to condemn me as a murderer?” Her

voice was suffocated with sobs.

“Rise, my poor girl,” said Elizabeth; “why do you kneel,

if you are innocent? I am not one of your enemies, I believed you

guiltless, notwithstanding every evidence, until I heard that you had

yourself declared your guilt. That report, you say, is false; and be

assured, dear Justine, that nothing can shake my confidence in you for a

moment, but your own confession.”

“I did confess, but I confessed a lie. I confessed, that I might

obtain absolution; but now that falsehood lies heavier at my heart than

all my other sins. The God of heaven forgive me! Ever since I was

condemned, my confessor has besieged me; he threatened and menaced,

until I almost began to think that I was the monster that he said I

was. He threatened excommunication and hell fire in my last moments if

I continued obdurate. Dear lady, I had none to support me; all looked

on me as a wretch doomed to ignominy and perdition. What could I do?

In an evil hour I subscribed to a lie; and now only am I truly

miserable.”

She paused, weeping, and then continued, “I thought with horror, my

sweet lady, that you should believe your Justine, whom your blessed

aunt had so highly honoured, and whom you loved, was a creature capable

of a crime which none but the devil himself could have perpetrated.

Dear William! dearest blessed child! I soon shall see you again in

heaven, where we shall all be happy; and that consoles me, going as I

am to suffer ignominy and death.”

“Oh, Justine! Forgive me for having for one moment distrusted you.

Why did you confess? But do not mourn, dear girl. Do not fear. I

will proclaim, I will prove your innocence. I will melt the stony

hearts of your enemies by my tears and prayers. You shall not die!

You, my playfellow, my companion, my sister, perish on the scaffold!

No! No! I never could survive so horrible a misfortune.”

Justine shook her head mournfully. “I do not fear to die,” she said;

“that pang is past. God raises my weakness and gives me courage to

endure the worst. I leave a sad and bitter world; and if you remember

me and think of me as of one unjustly condemned, I am resigned to the

fate awaiting me. Learn from me, dear lady, to submit in patience to

the will of heaven!”

During this conversation I had retired to a corner of the prison room,

where I could conceal the horrid anguish that possessed me. Despair!

Who dared talk of that? The poor victim, who on the morrow was to pass

the awful boundary between life and death, felt not, as I did, such

deep and bitter agony. I gnashed my teeth and ground them together,

uttering a groan that came from my inmost soul. Justine started. When

she saw who it was, she approached me and said, “Dear sir, you are very

kind to visit me; you, I hope, do not believe that I am guilty?”

I could not answer. “No, Justine,” said Elizabeth; “he is more

convinced of your innocence than I was, for even when he heard that you

had confessed, he did not credit it.”

“I truly thank him. In these last moments I feel the sincerest

gratitude towards those who think of me with kindness. How sweet is

the affection of others to such a wretch as I am! It removes more than

half my misfortune, and I feel as if I could die in peace now that my

innocence is acknowledged by you, dear lady, and your cousin.”

Thus the poor sufferer tried to comfort others and herself. She indeed

gained the resignation she desired. But I, the true murderer, felt the

never-dying worm alive in my bosom, which allowed of no hope or

consolation. Elizabeth also wept and was unhappy, but hers also was

the misery of innocence, which, like a cloud that passes over the fair

moon, for a while hides but cannot tarnish its brightness. Anguish and

despair had penetrated into the core of my heart; I bore a hell within

me which nothing could extinguish. We stayed several hours with

Justine, and it was with great difficulty that Elizabeth could tear

herself away. “I wish,” cried she, “that I were to die with you; I

cannot live in this world of misery.”

Justine assumed an air of cheerfulness, while she with difficulty

repressed her bitter tears. She embraced Elizabeth and said in a voice

of half-suppressed emotion, “Farewell, sweet lady, dearest Elizabeth,

my beloved and only friend; may heaven, in its bounty, bless and

preserve you; may this be the last misfortune that you will ever

suffer! Live, and be happy, and make others so.”

And on the morrow Justine died. Elizabeth’s heart-rending eloquence

failed to move the judges from their settled conviction in the

criminality of the saintly sufferer. My passionate and indignant

appeals were lost upon them. And when I received their cold answers

and heard the harsh, unfeeling reasoning of these men, my purposed

avowal died away on my lips. Thus I might proclaim myself a madman,

but not revoke the sentence passed upon my wretched victim. She

perished on the scaffold as a murderess!

From the tortures of my own heart, I turned to contemplate the deep and

voiceless grief of my Elizabeth. This also was my doing! And my

father’s woe, and the desolation of that late so smiling home all was

the work of my thrice-accursed hands! Ye weep, unhappy ones, but these

are not your last tears! Again shall you raise the funeral wail, and

the sound of your lamentations shall again and again be heard!

Frankenstein, your son, your kinsman, your early, much-loved friend; he

who would spend each vital drop of blood for your sakes, who has no

thought nor sense of joy except as it is mirrored also in your dear

countenances, who would fill the air with blessings and spend his life

in serving you—he bids you weep, to shed countless tears; happy beyond

his hopes, if thus inexorable fate be satisfied, and if the destruction

pause before the peace of the grave have succeeded to your sad torments!

Thus spoke my prophetic soul, as, torn by remorse, horror, and despair,

I beheld those I loved spend vain sorrow upon the graves of William and

Justine, the first hapless victims to my unhallowed arts.

Chapter 9

Nothing is more painful to the human mind than, after the feelings have

been worked up by a quick succession of events, the dead calmness of

inaction and certainty which follows and deprives the soul both of hope

and fear. Justine died, she rested, and I was alive. The blood flowed

freely in my veins, but a weight of despair and remorse pressed on my

heart which nothing could remove. Sleep fled from my eyes; I wandered

like an evil spirit, for I had committed deeds of mischief beyond

description horrible, and more, much more (I persuaded myself) was yet

behind. Yet my heart overflowed with kindness and the love of virtue.

I had begun life with benevolent intentions and thirsted for the moment

when I should put them in practice and make myself useful to my fellow

beings. Now all was blasted; instead of that serenity of conscience

which allowed me to look back upon the past with self-satisfaction, and

from thence to gather promise of new hopes, I was seized by remorse and

the sense of guilt, which hurried me away to a hell of intense tortures

such as no language can describe.

This state of mind preyed upon my health, which had perhaps never

entirely recovered from the first shock it had sustained. I shunned

the face of man; all sound of joy or complacency was torture to me;

solitude was my only consolation—deep, dark, deathlike solitude.

My father observed with pain the alteration perceptible in my disposition

and habits and endeavoured by arguments deduced from the feelings of his

serene conscience and guiltless life to inspire me with fortitude and

awaken in me the courage to dispel the dark cloud which brooded over me.

“Do you think, Victor,” said he, “that I do not suffer

also? No one could love a child more than I loved your

brother”—tears came into his eyes as he spoke—“but

is it not a duty to the survivors that we should refrain from augmenting

their unhappiness by an appearance of immoderate grief? It is also a duty

owed to yourself, for excessive sorrow prevents improvement or enjoyment,

or even the discharge of daily usefulness, without which no man is fit for

society.”

This advice, although good, was totally inapplicable to my case; I

should have been the first to hide my grief and console my friends if

remorse had not mingled its bitterness, and terror its alarm, with my

other sensations. Now I could only answer my father with a look of

despair and endeavour to hide myself from his view.

About this time we retired to our house at Belrive. This change was

particularly agreeable to me. The shutting of the gates regularly at

ten o’clock and the impossibility of remaining on the lake after that

hour had rendered our residence within the walls of Geneva very irksome

to me. I was now free. Often, after the rest of the family had

retired for the night, I took the boat and passed many hours upon the

water. Sometimes, with my sails set, I was carried by the wind; and

sometimes, after rowing into the middle of the lake, I left the boat to

pursue its own course and gave way to my own miserable reflections. I

was often tempted, when all was at peace around me, and I the only

unquiet thing that wandered restless in a scene so beautiful and

heavenly—if I except some bat, or the frogs, whose harsh and

interrupted croaking was heard only when I approached the shore—often,

I say, I was tempted to plunge into the silent lake, that the waters

might close over me and my calamities for ever. But I was restrained,

when I thought of the heroic and suffering Elizabeth, whom I tenderly

loved, and whose existence was bound up in mine. I thought also of my

father and surviving brother; should I by my base desertion leave them

exposed and unprotected to the malice of the fiend whom I had let loose

among them?

At these moments I wept bitterly and wished that peace would revisit my

mind only that I might afford them consolation and happiness. But that

could not be. Remorse extinguished every hope. I had been the author of

unalterable evils, and I lived in daily fear lest the monster whom I had

created should perpetrate some new wickedness. I had an obscure feeling

that all was not over and that he would still commit some signal crime,

which by its enormity should almost efface the recollection of the past.

There was always scope for fear so long as anything I loved remained

behind. My abhorrence of this fiend cannot be conceived. When I thought of

him I gnashed my teeth, my eyes became inflamed, and I ardently wished to

extinguish that life which I had so thoughtlessly bestowed. When I

reflected on his crimes and malice, my hatred and revenge burst all bounds

of moderation. I would have made a pilgrimage to the highest peak of the

Andes, could I, when there, have precipitated him to their base. I wished

to see him again, that I might wreak the utmost extent of abhorrence on his

head and avenge the deaths of William and Justine.

Our house was the house of mourning. My father’s health was deeply

shaken by the horror of the recent events. Elizabeth was sad and

desponding; she no longer took delight in her ordinary occupations; all

pleasure seemed to her sacrilege toward the dead; eternal woe and tears she

then thought was the just tribute she should pay to innocence so blasted

and destroyed. She was no longer that happy creature who in earlier youth

wandered with me on the banks of the lake and talked with ecstasy of our

future prospects. The first of those sorrows which are sent to wean us from

the earth had visited her, and its dimming influence quenched her dearest

smiles.

“When I reflect, my dear cousin,” said she, “on the miserable death of

Justine Moritz, I no longer see the world and its works as they before

appeared to me. Before, I looked upon the accounts of vice and

injustice that I read in books or heard from others as tales of ancient

days or imaginary evils; at least they were remote and more familiar to

reason than to the imagination; but now misery has come home, and men

appear to me as monsters thirsting for each other’s blood. Yet I am

certainly unjust. Everybody believed that poor girl to be guilty; and

if she could have committed the crime for which she suffered, assuredly

she would have been the most depraved of human creatures. For the sake

of a few jewels, to have murdered the son of her benefactor and friend,

a child whom she had nursed from its birth, and appeared to love as if

it had been her own! I could not consent to the death of any human

being, but certainly I should have thought such a creature unfit to

remain in the society of men. But she was innocent. I know, I feel

she was innocent; you are of the same opinion, and that confirms me.

Alas! Victor, when falsehood can look so like the truth, who can

assure themselves of certain happiness? I feel as if I were walking on

the edge of a precipice, towards which thousands are crowding and

endeavouring to plunge me into the abyss. William and Justine were

assassinated, and the murderer escapes; he walks about the world free,

and perhaps respected. But even if I were condemned to suffer on the

scaffold for the same crimes, I would not change places with such a

wretch.”

I listened to this discourse with the extremest agony. I, not in deed,

but in effect, was the true murderer. Elizabeth read my anguish in my

countenance, and kindly taking my hand, said, “My dearest friend, you

must calm yourself. These events have affected me, God knows how

deeply; but I am not so wretched as you are. There is an expression of

despair, and sometimes of revenge, in your countenance that makes me

tremble. Dear Victor, banish these dark passions. Remember the

friends around you, who centre all their hopes in you. Have we lost

the power of rendering you happy? Ah! While we love, while we are

true to each other, here in this land of peace and beauty, your native

country, we may reap every tranquil blessing—what can disturb our

peace?”

And could not such words from her whom I fondly prized before every

other gift of fortune suffice to chase away the fiend that lurked in my

heart? Even as she spoke I drew near to her, as if in terror, lest at

that very moment the destroyer had been near to rob me of her.

Thus not the tenderness of friendship, nor the beauty of earth, nor of

heaven, could redeem my soul from woe; the very accents of love were

ineffectual. I was encompassed by a cloud which no beneficial

influence could penetrate. The wounded deer dragging its fainting

limbs to some untrodden brake, there to gaze upon the arrow which had

pierced it, and to die, was but a type of me.

Sometimes I could cope with the sullen despair that overwhelmed me, but

sometimes the whirlwind passions of my soul drove me to seek, by bodily

exercise and by change of place, some relief from my intolerable

sensations. It was during an access of this kind that I suddenly left

my home, and bending my steps towards the near Alpine valleys, sought

in the magnificence, the eternity of such scenes, to forget myself and

my ephemeral, because human, sorrows. My wanderings were directed

towards the valley of Chamounix. I had visited it frequently during my

boyhood. Six years had passed since then: \_I\_ was a wreck, but nought

had changed in those savage and enduring scenes.

I performed the first part of my journey on horseback. I afterwards

hired a mule, as the more sure-footed and least liable to receive

injury on these rugged roads. The weather was fine; it was about the

middle of the month of August, nearly two months after the death of

Justine, that miserable epoch from which I dated all my woe. The

weight upon my spirit was sensibly lightened as I plunged yet deeper in

the ravine of Arve. The immense mountains and precipices that overhung

me on every side, the sound of the river raging among the rocks, and

the dashing of the waterfalls around spoke of a power mighty as

Omnipotence—and I ceased to fear or to bend before any being less

almighty than that which had created and ruled the elements, here

displayed in their most terrific guise. Still, as I ascended higher,

the valley assumed a more magnificent and astonishing character.

Ruined castles hanging on the precipices of piny mountains, the

impetuous Arve, and cottages every here and there peeping forth from

among the trees formed a scene of singular beauty. But it was

augmented and rendered sublime by the mighty Alps, whose white and

shining pyramids and domes towered above all, as belonging to another

earth, the habitations of another race of beings.

I passed the bridge of Pélissier, where the ravine, which the river

forms, opened before me, and I began to ascend the mountain that

overhangs it. Soon after, I entered the valley of Chamounix. This

valley is more wonderful and sublime, but not so beautiful and

picturesque as that of Servox, through which I had just passed. The

high and snowy mountains were its immediate boundaries, but I saw no

more ruined castles and fertile fields. Immense glaciers approached

the road; I heard the rumbling thunder of the falling avalanche and

marked the smoke of its passage. Mont Blanc, the supreme and

magnificent Mont Blanc, raised itself from the surrounding \_aiguilles\_,

and its tremendous \_dôme\_ overlooked the valley.

A tingling long-lost sense of pleasure often came across me during this

journey. Some turn in the road, some new object suddenly perceived and

recognised, reminded me of days gone by, and were associated with the

lighthearted gaiety of boyhood. The very winds whispered in soothing

accents, and maternal Nature bade me weep no more. Then again the

kindly influence ceased to act—I found myself fettered again to grief

and indulging in all the misery of reflection. Then I spurred on my

animal, striving so to forget the world, my fears, and more than all,

myself—or, in a more desperate fashion, I alighted and threw myself on

the grass, weighed down by horror and despair.

At length I arrived at the village of Chamounix. Exhaustion succeeded

to the extreme fatigue both of body and of mind which I had endured.

For a short space of time I remained at the window watching the pallid

lightnings that played above Mont Blanc and listening to the rushing of

the Arve, which pursued its noisy way beneath. The same lulling sounds

acted as a lullaby to my too keen sensations; when I placed my head

upon my pillow, sleep crept over me; I felt it as it came and blessed

the giver of oblivion.

Chapter 10

I spent the following day roaming through the valley. I stood beside

the sources of the Arveiron, which take their rise in a glacier, that

with slow pace is advancing down from the summit of the hills to

barricade the valley. The abrupt sides of vast mountains were before

me; the icy wall of the glacier overhung me; a few shattered pines were

scattered around; and the solemn silence of this glorious

presence-chamber of imperial Nature was broken only by the brawling

waves or the fall of some vast fragment, the thunder sound of the

avalanche or the cracking, reverberated along the mountains, of the

accumulated ice, which, through the silent working of immutable laws,

was ever and anon rent and torn, as if it had been but a plaything in

their hands. These sublime and magnificent scenes afforded me the

greatest consolation that I was capable of receiving. They elevated me

from all littleness of feeling, and although they did not remove my

grief, they subdued and tranquillised it. In some degree, also, they

diverted my mind from the thoughts over which it had brooded for the

last month. I retired to rest at night; my slumbers, as it were,

waited on and ministered to by the assemblance of grand shapes which I

had contemplated during the day. They congregated round me; the

unstained snowy mountain-top, the glittering pinnacle, the pine woods,

and ragged bare ravine, the eagle, soaring amidst the clouds—they all

gathered round me and bade me be at peace.

Where had they fled when the next morning I awoke? All of

soul-inspiriting fled with sleep, and dark melancholy clouded every

thought. The rain was pouring in torrents, and thick mists hid the

summits of the mountains, so that I even saw not the faces of those

mighty friends. Still I would penetrate their misty veil and seek them

in their cloudy retreats. What were rain and storm to me? My mule was

brought to the door, and I resolved to ascend to the summit of

Montanvert. I remembered the effect that the view of the tremendous

and ever-moving glacier had produced upon my mind when I first saw it.

It had then filled me with a sublime ecstasy that gave wings to the

soul and allowed it to soar from the obscure world to light and joy.

The sight of the awful and majestic in nature had indeed always the

effect of solemnising my mind and causing me to forget the passing

cares of life. I determined to go without a guide, for I was well

acquainted with the path, and the presence of another would destroy the

solitary grandeur of the scene.

The ascent is precipitous, but the path is cut into continual and short

windings, which enable you to surmount the perpendicularity of the

mountain. It is a scene terrifically desolate. In a thousand spots

the traces of the winter avalanche may be perceived, where trees lie

broken and strewed on the ground, some entirely destroyed, others bent,

leaning upon the jutting rocks of the mountain or transversely upon

other trees. The path, as you ascend higher, is intersected by ravines

of snow, down which stones continually roll from above; one of them is

particularly dangerous, as the slightest sound, such as even speaking

in a loud voice, produces a concussion of air sufficient to draw

destruction upon the head of the speaker. The pines are not tall or

luxuriant, but they are sombre and add an air of severity to the scene.

I looked on the valley beneath; vast mists were rising from the rivers

which ran through it and curling in thick wreaths around the opposite

mountains, whose summits were hid in the uniform clouds, while rain

poured from the dark sky and added to the melancholy impression I

received from the objects around me. Alas! Why does man boast of

sensibilities superior to those apparent in the brute; it only renders

them more necessary beings. If our impulses were confined to hunger,

thirst, and desire, we might be nearly free; but now we are moved by

every wind that blows and a chance word or scene that that word may

convey to us.

We rest; a dream has power to poison sleep.

We rise; one wand’ring thought pollutes the day.

We feel, conceive, or reason; laugh or weep,

Embrace fond woe, or cast our cares away;

It is the same: for, be it joy or sorrow,

The path of its departure still is free.

Man’s yesterday may ne’er be like his morrow;

Nought may endure but mutability!

It was nearly noon when I arrived at the top of the ascent. For some

time I sat upon the rock that overlooks the sea of ice. A mist covered

both that and the surrounding mountains. Presently a breeze dissipated

the cloud, and I descended upon the glacier. The surface is very

uneven, rising like the waves of a troubled sea, descending low, and

interspersed by rifts that sink deep. The field of ice is almost a

league in width, but I spent nearly two hours in crossing it. The

opposite mountain is a bare perpendicular rock. From the side where I

now stood Montanvert was exactly opposite, at the distance of a league;

and above it rose Mont Blanc, in awful majesty. I remained in a recess

of the rock, gazing on this wonderful and stupendous scene. The sea,

or rather the vast river of ice, wound among its dependent mountains,

whose aerial summits hung over its recesses. Their icy and glittering

peaks shone in the sunlight over the clouds. My heart, which was

before sorrowful, now swelled with something like joy; I exclaimed,

“Wandering spirits, if indeed ye wander, and do not rest in your narrow

beds, allow me this faint happiness, or take me, as your companion,

away from the joys of life.”

As I said this I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance,

advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the

crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his

stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of man. I was

troubled; a mist came over my eyes, and I felt a faintness seize me,

but I was quickly restored by the cold gale of the mountains. I

perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!)

that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and

horror, resolving to wait his approach and then close with him in

mortal combat. He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish,

combined with disdain and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness

rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes. But I scarcely

observed this; rage and hatred had at first deprived me of utterance,

and I recovered only to overwhelm him with words expressive of furious

detestation and contempt.

“Devil,” I exclaimed, “do you dare approach me? And do

not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head?

Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay, that I may trample you to dust! And,

oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore

those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!”

“I expected this reception,” said the dæmon. “All men hate the

wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all

living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creature,

to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of

one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life?

Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of

mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and

you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw of death, until it

be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends.”

“Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too

mild a vengeance for thy crimes. Wretched devil! You reproach me with

your creation, come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I

so negligently bestowed.”

My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the

feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me and said,

“Be calm! I entreat you to hear me before you give vent to your hatred

on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to

increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of

anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made

me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my

joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in

opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and

docile to my natural lord and king if thou wilt also perform thy part,

the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable to every

other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy

clemency and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature;

I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou

drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I

alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made

me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous.”

“Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you

and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight,

in which one must fall.”

“How can I move thee? Will no entreaties cause thee to turn a

favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and

compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed

with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my

creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures,

who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and

dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the

caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the

only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they

are kinder to me than your fellow beings. If the multitude of mankind

knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for

my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep

no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my

wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver

them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great, that

not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be

swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be

moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale; when you have heard

that, abandon or commiserate me, as you shall judge that I deserve.

But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they

are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen

to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with

a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the

eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me; listen to me,

and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands.”

“Why do you call to my remembrance,” I rejoined, “circumstances of

which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and

author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw

light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you!

You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power

to consider whether I am just to you or not. Begone! Relieve me from

the sight of your detested form.”

“Thus I relieve thee, my creator,” he said, and placed his hated hands

before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; “thus I take from

thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me and grant

me thy compassion. By the virtues that I once possessed, I demand this

from you. Hear my tale; it is long and strange, and the temperature of

this place is not fitting to your fine sensations; come to the hut upon

the mountain. The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends

to hide itself behind your snowy precipices and illuminate another

world, you will have heard my story and can decide. On you it rests,

whether I quit for ever the neighbourhood of man and lead a harmless

life, or become the scourge of your fellow creatures and the author of

your own speedy ruin.”

As he said this he led the way across the ice; I followed. My heart

was full, and I did not answer him, but as I proceeded, I weighed the

various arguments that he had used and determined at least to listen to

his tale. I was partly urged by curiosity, and compassion confirmed my

resolution. I had hitherto supposed him to be the murderer of my

brother, and I eagerly sought a confirmation or denial of this opinion.

For the first time, also, I felt what the duties of a creator towards

his creature were, and that I ought to render him happy before I

complained of his wickedness. These motives urged me to comply with

his demand. We crossed the ice, therefore, and ascended the opposite

rock. The air was cold, and the rain again began to descend; we

entered the hut, the fiend with an air of exultation, I with a heavy

heart and depressed spirits. But I consented to listen, and seating

myself by the fire which my odious companion had lighted, he thus began

his tale.

Chapter 11

“It is with considerable difficulty that I remember the original era of

my being; all the events of that period appear confused and indistinct.

A strange multiplicity of sensations seized me, and I saw, felt, heard,

and smelt at the same time; and it was, indeed, a long time before I

learned to distinguish between the operations of my various senses. By

degrees, I remember, a stronger light pressed upon my nerves, so that I

was obliged to shut my eyes. Darkness then came over me and troubled

me, but hardly had I felt this when, by opening my eyes, as I now

suppose, the light poured in upon me again. I walked and, I believe,

descended, but I presently found a great alteration in my sensations.

Before, dark and opaque bodies had surrounded me, impervious to my

touch or sight; but I now found that I could wander on at liberty, with

no obstacles which I could not either surmount or avoid. The light

became more and more oppressive to me, and the heat wearying me as I

walked, I sought a place where I could receive shade. This was the

forest near Ingolstadt; and here I lay by the side of a brook resting

from my fatigue, until I felt tormented by hunger and thirst. This

roused me from my nearly dormant state, and I ate some berries which I

found hanging on the trees or lying on the ground. I slaked my thirst

at the brook, and then lying down, was overcome by sleep.

“It was dark when I awoke; I felt cold also, and half frightened, as it

were, instinctively, finding myself so desolate. Before I had quitted

your apartment, on a sensation of cold, I had covered myself with some

clothes, but these were insufficient to secure me from the dews of

night. I was a poor, helpless, miserable wretch; I knew, and could

distinguish, nothing; but feeling pain invade me on all sides, I sat

down and wept.

“Soon a gentle light stole over the heavens and gave me a sensation of

pleasure. I started up and beheld a radiant form rise from among the

trees. [The moon] I gazed with a kind of wonder. It moved slowly,

but it enlightened my path, and I again went out in search of berries.

I was still cold when under one of the trees I found a huge cloak, with

which I covered myself, and sat down upon the ground. No distinct

ideas occupied my mind; all was confused. I felt light, and hunger,

and thirst, and darkness; innumerable sounds rang in my ears, and on

all sides various scents saluted me; the only object that I could

distinguish was the bright moon, and I fixed my eyes on that with

pleasure.

“Several changes of day and night passed, and the orb of night had

greatly lessened, when I began to distinguish my sensations from each

other. I gradually saw plainly the clear stream that supplied me with

drink and the trees that shaded me with their foliage. I was delighted

when I first discovered that a pleasant sound, which often saluted my

ears, proceeded from the throats of the little winged animals who had

often intercepted the light from my eyes. I began also to observe,

with greater accuracy, the forms that surrounded me and to perceive the

boundaries of the radiant roof of light which canopied me. Sometimes I

tried to imitate the pleasant songs of the birds but was unable.

Sometimes I wished to express my sensations in my own mode, but the

uncouth and inarticulate sounds which broke from me frightened me into

silence again.

“The moon had disappeared from the night, and again, with a lessened

form, showed itself, while I still remained in the forest. My

sensations had by this time become distinct, and my mind received every

day additional ideas. My eyes became accustomed to the light and to

perceive objects in their right forms; I distinguished the insect from

the herb, and by degrees, one herb from another. I found that the

sparrow uttered none but harsh notes, whilst those of the blackbird and

thrush were sweet and enticing.

“One day, when I was oppressed by cold, I found a fire which had been

left by some wandering beggars, and was overcome with delight at the

warmth I experienced from it. In my joy I thrust my hand into the live

embers, but quickly drew it out again with a cry of pain. How strange,

I thought, that the same cause should produce such opposite effects! I

examined the materials of the fire, and to my joy found it to be

composed of wood. I quickly collected some branches, but they were wet

and would not burn. I was pained at this and sat still watching the

operation of the fire. The wet wood which I had placed near the heat

dried and itself became inflamed. I reflected on this, and by touching

the various branches, I discovered the cause and busied myself in

collecting a great quantity of wood, that I might dry it and have a

plentiful supply of fire. When night came on and brought sleep with

it, I was in the greatest fear lest my fire should be extinguished. I

covered it carefully with dry wood and leaves and placed wet branches

upon it; and then, spreading my cloak, I lay on the ground and sank

into sleep.

“It was morning when I awoke, and my first care was to visit the fire.

I uncovered it, and a gentle breeze quickly fanned it into a flame. I

observed this also and contrived a fan of branches, which roused the

embers when they were nearly extinguished. When night came again I

found, with pleasure, that the fire gave light as well as heat and that

the discovery of this element was useful to me in my food, for I found

some of the offals that the travellers had left had been roasted, and

tasted much more savoury than the berries I gathered from the trees. I

tried, therefore, to dress my food in the same manner, placing it on

the live embers. I found that the berries were spoiled by this

operation, and the nuts and roots much improved.

“Food, however, became scarce, and I often spent the whole day

searching in vain for a few acorns to assuage the pangs of hunger. When

I found this, I resolved to quit the place that I had hitherto

inhabited, to seek for one where the few wants I experienced would be

more easily satisfied. In this emigration I exceedingly lamented the

loss of the fire which I had obtained through accident and knew not how

to reproduce it. I gave several hours to the serious consideration of

this difficulty, but I was obliged to relinquish all attempt to supply

it, and wrapping myself up in my cloak, I struck across the wood

towards the setting sun. I passed three days in these rambles and at

length discovered the open country. A great fall of snow had taken

place the night before, and the fields were of one uniform white; the

appearance was disconsolate, and I found my feet chilled by the cold

damp substance that covered the ground.

“It was about seven in the morning, and I longed to obtain food and

shelter; at length I perceived a small hut, on a rising ground, which

had doubtless been built for the convenience of some shepherd. This

was a new sight to me, and I examined the structure with great

curiosity. Finding the door open, I entered. An old man sat in it,

near a fire, over which he was preparing his breakfast. He turned on

hearing a noise, and perceiving me, shrieked loudly, and quitting the

hut, ran across the fields with a speed of which his debilitated form

hardly appeared capable. His appearance, different from any I had ever

before seen, and his flight somewhat surprised me. But I was enchanted

by the appearance of the hut; here the snow and rain could not

penetrate; the ground was dry; and it presented to me then as exquisite

and divine a retreat as Pandæmonium appeared to the dæmons of hell

after their sufferings in the lake of fire. I greedily devoured the

remnants of the shepherd’s breakfast, which consisted of bread, cheese,

milk, and wine; the latter, however, I did not like. Then, overcome by

fatigue, I lay down among some straw and fell asleep.

“It was noon when I awoke, and allured by the warmth of the sun, which

shone brightly on the white ground, I determined to recommence my

travels; and, depositing the remains of the peasant’s breakfast in a

wallet I found, I proceeded across the fields for several hours, until

at sunset I arrived at a village. How miraculous did this appear! The

huts, the neater cottages, and stately houses engaged my admiration by

turns. The vegetables in the gardens, the milk and cheese that I saw

placed at the windows of some of the cottages, allured my appetite. One

of the best of these I entered, but I had hardly placed my foot within

the door before the children shrieked, and one of the women fainted.

The whole village was roused; some fled, some attacked me, until,

grievously bruised by stones and many other kinds of missile weapons, I

escaped to the open country and fearfully took refuge in a low hovel,

quite bare, and making a wretched appearance after the palaces I had

beheld in the village. This hovel however, joined a cottage of a neat

and pleasant appearance, but after my late dearly bought experience, I

dared not enter it. My place of refuge was constructed of wood, but so

low that I could with difficulty sit upright in it. No wood, however,

was placed on the earth, which formed the floor, but it was dry; and

although the wind entered it by innumerable chinks, I found it an

agreeable asylum from the snow and rain.

“Here, then, I retreated and lay down happy to have found a shelter,

however miserable, from the inclemency of the season, and still more

from the barbarity of man. As soon as morning dawned I crept from my

kennel, that I might view the adjacent cottage and discover if I could

remain in the habitation I had found. It was situated against the back

of the cottage and surrounded on the sides which were exposed by a pig

sty and a clear pool of water. One part was open, and by that I had

crept in; but now I covered every crevice by which I might be perceived

with stones and wood, yet in such a manner that I might move them on

occasion to pass out; all the light I enjoyed came through the sty, and

that was sufficient for me.

“Having thus arranged my dwelling and carpeted it with clean straw, I

retired, for I saw the figure of a man at a distance, and I remembered

too well my treatment the night before to trust myself in his power. I

had first, however, provided for my sustenance for that day by a loaf

of coarse bread, which I purloined, and a cup with which I could drink

more conveniently than from my hand of the pure water which flowed by

my retreat. The floor was a little raised, so that it was kept

perfectly dry, and by its vicinity to the chimney of the cottage it was

tolerably warm.

“Being thus provided, I resolved to reside in this hovel until

something should occur which might alter my determination. It was

indeed a paradise compared to the bleak forest, my former residence,

the rain-dropping branches, and dank earth. I ate my breakfast with

pleasure and was about to remove a plank to procure myself a little

water when I heard a step, and looking through a small chink, I beheld

a young creature, with a pail on her head, passing before my hovel. The

girl was young and of gentle demeanour, unlike what I have since found

cottagers and farmhouse servants to be. Yet she was meanly dressed, a

coarse blue petticoat and a linen jacket being her only garb; her fair

hair was plaited but not adorned: she looked patient yet sad. I lost

sight of her, and in about a quarter of an hour she returned bearing

the pail, which was now partly filled with milk. As she walked along,

seemingly incommoded by the burden, a young man met her, whose

countenance expressed a deeper despondence. Uttering a few sounds with

an air of melancholy, he took the pail from her head and bore it to the

cottage himself. She followed, and they disappeared. Presently I saw

the young man again, with some tools in his hand, cross the field

behind the cottage; and the girl was also busied, sometimes in the

house and sometimes in the yard.

“On examining my dwelling, I found that one of the windows of the

cottage had formerly occupied a part of it, but the panes had been

filled up with wood. In one of these was a small and almost

imperceptible chink through which the eye could just penetrate.

Through this crevice a small room was visible, whitewashed and clean

but very bare of furniture. In one corner, near a small fire, sat an

old man, leaning his head on his hands in a disconsolate attitude. The

young girl was occupied in arranging the cottage; but presently she

took something out of a drawer, which employed her hands, and she sat

down beside the old man, who, taking up an instrument, began to play

and to produce sounds sweeter than the voice of the thrush or the

nightingale. It was a lovely sight, even to me, poor wretch who had

never beheld aught beautiful before. The silver hair and benevolent

countenance of the aged cottager won my reverence, while the gentle

manners of the girl enticed my love. He played a sweet mournful air

which I perceived drew tears from the eyes of his amiable companion, of

which the old man took no notice, until she sobbed audibly; he then

pronounced a few sounds, and the fair creature, leaving her work, knelt

at his feet. He raised her and smiled with such kindness and affection

that I felt sensations of a peculiar and overpowering nature; they were

a mixture of pain and pleasure, such as I had never before experienced,

either from hunger or cold, warmth or food; and I withdrew from the

window, unable to bear these emotions.

“Soon after this the young man returned, bearing on his shoulders a

load of wood. The girl met him at the door, helped to relieve him of

his burden, and taking some of the fuel into the cottage, placed it on

the fire; then she and the youth went apart into a nook of the cottage,

and he showed her a large loaf and a piece of cheese. She seemed

pleased and went into the garden for some roots and plants, which she

placed in water, and then upon the fire. She afterwards continued her

work, whilst the young man went into the garden and appeared busily

employed in digging and pulling up roots. After he had been employed

thus about an hour, the young woman joined him and they entered the

cottage together.

“The old man had, in the meantime, been pensive, but on the appearance

of his companions he assumed a more cheerful air, and they sat down to

eat. The meal was quickly dispatched. The young woman was again

occupied in arranging the cottage, the old man walked before the

cottage in the sun for a few minutes, leaning on the arm of the youth.

Nothing could exceed in beauty the contrast between these two excellent

creatures. One was old, with silver hairs and a countenance beaming

with benevolence and love; the younger was slight and graceful in his

figure, and his features were moulded with the finest symmetry, yet his

eyes and attitude expressed the utmost sadness and despondency. The

old man returned to the cottage, and the youth, with tools different

from those he had used in the morning, directed his steps across the

fields.

“Night quickly shut in, but to my extreme wonder, I found that the

cottagers had a means of prolonging light by the use of tapers, and was

delighted to find that the setting of the sun did not put an end to the

pleasure I experienced in watching my human neighbours. In the evening

the young girl and her companion were employed in various occupations

which I did not understand; and the old man again took up the

instrument which produced the divine sounds that had enchanted me in

the morning. So soon as he had finished, the youth began, not to play,

but to utter sounds that were monotonous, and neither resembling the

harmony of the old man’s instrument nor the songs of the birds; I since

found that he read aloud, but at that time I knew nothing of the

science of words or letters.

“The family, after having been thus occupied for a short time,

extinguished their lights and retired, as I conjectured, to rest.”

Chapter 12

“I lay on my straw, but I could not sleep. I thought of the

occurrences of the day. What chiefly struck me was the gentle manners

of these people, and I longed to join them, but dared not. I

remembered too well the treatment I had suffered the night before from

the barbarous villagers, and resolved, whatever course of conduct I

might hereafter think it right to pursue, that for the present I would

remain quietly in my hovel, watching and endeavouring to discover the

motives which influenced their actions.

“The cottagers arose the next morning before the sun. The young woman

arranged the cottage and prepared the food, and the youth departed

after the first meal.

“This day was passed in the same routine as that which preceded it.

The young man was constantly employed out of doors, and the girl in

various laborious occupations within. The old man, whom I soon

perceived to be blind, employed his leisure hours on his instrument or

in contemplation. Nothing could exceed the love and respect which the

younger cottagers exhibited towards their venerable companion. They

performed towards him every little office of affection and duty with

gentleness, and he rewarded them by his benevolent smiles.

“They were not entirely happy. The young man and his companion often

went apart and appeared to weep. I saw no cause for their unhappiness,

but I was deeply affected by it. If such lovely creatures were

miserable, it was less strange that I, an imperfect and solitary being,

should be wretched. Yet why were these gentle beings unhappy? They

possessed a delightful house (for such it was in my eyes) and every

luxury; they had a fire to warm them when chill and delicious viands

when hungry; they were dressed in excellent clothes; and, still more,

they enjoyed one another’s company and speech, interchanging each day

looks of affection and kindness. What did their tears imply? Did they

really express pain? I was at first unable to solve these questions,

but perpetual attention and time explained to me many appearances which

were at first enigmatic.

“A considerable period elapsed before I discovered one of the causes of

the uneasiness of this amiable family: it was poverty, and they

suffered that evil in a very distressing degree. Their nourishment

consisted entirely of the vegetables of their garden and the milk of

one cow, which gave very little during the winter, when its masters

could scarcely procure food to support it. They often, I believe,

suffered the pangs of hunger very poignantly, especially the two

younger cottagers, for several times they placed food before the old

man when they reserved none for themselves.

“This trait of kindness moved me sensibly. I had been accustomed,

during the night, to steal a part of their store for my own

consumption, but when I found that in doing this I inflicted pain on

the cottagers, I abstained and satisfied myself with berries, nuts, and

roots which I gathered from a neighbouring wood.

“I discovered also another means through which I was enabled to assist

their labours. I found that the youth spent a great part of each day

in collecting wood for the family fire, and during the night I often

took his tools, the use of which I quickly discovered, and brought home

firing sufficient for the consumption of several days.

“I remember, the first time that I did this, the young woman, when she

opened the door in the morning, appeared greatly astonished on seeing a great

pile of wood on the outside. She uttered some words in a loud voice, and the

youth joined her, who also expressed surprise. I observed, with pleasure,

that he did not go to the forest that day, but spent it in repairing the

cottage and cultivating the garden.

“By degrees I made a discovery of still greater moment. I found that

these people possessed a method of communicating their experience and

feelings to one another by articulate sounds. I perceived that the words

they spoke sometimes produced pleasure or pain, smiles or sadness, in the

minds and countenances of the hearers. This was indeed a godlike science,

and I ardently desired to become acquainted with it. But I was baffled in

every attempt I made for this purpose. Their pronunciation was quick, and

the words they uttered, not having any apparent connection with visible

objects, I was unable to discover any clue by which I could unravel the

mystery of their reference. By great application, however, and after having

remained during the space of several revolutions of the moon in my hovel, I

discovered the names that were given to some of the most familiar objects of

discourse; I learned and applied the words, \_fire, milk, bread,\_ and

\_wood.\_ I learned also the names of the cottagers themselves. The youth

and his companion had each of them several names, but the old man had only

one, which was \_father.\_ The girl was called \_sister\_ or

\_Agatha,\_ and the youth \_Felix, brother,\_ or \_son\_. I cannot

describe the delight I felt when I learned the ideas appropriated to each of

these sounds and was able to pronounce them. I distinguished several other

words without being able as yet to understand or apply them, such as \_good,

dearest, unhappy.\_

“I spent the winter in this manner. The gentle manners and beauty of

the cottagers greatly endeared them to me; when they were unhappy, I

felt depressed; when they rejoiced, I sympathised in their joys. I saw

few human beings besides them, and if any other happened to enter the

cottage, their harsh manners and rude gait only enhanced to me the

superior accomplishments of my friends. The old man, I could perceive,

often endeavoured to encourage his children, as sometimes I found that

he called them, to cast off their melancholy. He would talk in a

cheerful accent, with an expression of goodness that bestowed pleasure

even upon me. Agatha listened with respect, her eyes sometimes filled

with tears, which she endeavoured to wipe away unperceived; but I

generally found that her countenance and tone were more cheerful after

having listened to the exhortations of her father. It was not thus

with Felix. He was always the saddest of the group, and even to my

unpractised senses, he appeared to have suffered more deeply than his

friends. But if his countenance was more sorrowful, his voice was more

cheerful than that of his sister, especially when he addressed the old

man.

“I could mention innumerable instances which, although slight, marked

the dispositions of these amiable cottagers. In the midst of poverty

and want, Felix carried with pleasure to his sister the first little

white flower that peeped out from beneath the snowy ground. Early in

the morning, before she had risen, he cleared away the snow that

obstructed her path to the milk-house, drew water from the well, and

brought the wood from the outhouse, where, to his perpetual

astonishment, he found his store always replenished by an invisible

hand. In the day, I believe, he worked sometimes for a neighbouring

farmer, because he often went forth and did not return until dinner,

yet brought no wood with him. At other times he worked in the garden,

but as there was little to do in the frosty season, he read to the old

man and Agatha.

“This reading had puzzled me extremely at first, but by degrees I

discovered that he uttered many of the same sounds when he read as when

he talked. I conjectured, therefore, that he found on the paper signs

for speech which he understood, and I ardently longed to comprehend

these also; but how was that possible when I did not even understand

the sounds for which they stood as signs? I improved, however,

sensibly in this science, but not sufficiently to follow up any kind of

conversation, although I applied my whole mind to the endeavour, for I

easily perceived that, although I eagerly longed to discover myself to

the cottagers, I ought not to make the attempt until I had first become

master of their language, which knowledge might enable me to make them

overlook the deformity of my figure, for with this also the contrast

perpetually presented to my eyes had made me acquainted.

“I had admired the perfect forms of my cottagers—their grace, beauty,

and delicate complexions; but how was I terrified when I viewed myself

in a transparent pool! At first I started back, unable to believe that

it was indeed I who was reflected in the mirror; and when I became

fully convinced that I was in reality the monster that I am, I was

filled with the bitterest sensations of despondence and mortification.

Alas! I did not yet entirely know the fatal effects of this miserable

deformity.

“As the sun became warmer and the light of day longer, the snow

vanished, and I beheld the bare trees and the black earth. From this

time Felix was more employed, and the heart-moving indications of

impending famine disappeared. Their food, as I afterwards found, was

coarse, but it was wholesome; and they procured a sufficiency of it.

Several new kinds of plants sprang up in the garden, which they

dressed; and these signs of comfort increased daily as the season

advanced.

“The old man, leaning on his son, walked each day at noon, when it did

not rain, as I found it was called when the heavens poured forth its

waters. This frequently took place, but a high wind quickly dried the

earth, and the season became far more pleasant than it had been.

“My mode of life in my hovel was uniform. During the morning I

attended the motions of the cottagers, and when they were dispersed in

various occupations, I slept; the remainder of the day was spent in

observing my friends. When they had retired to rest, if there was any

moon or the night was star-light, I went into the woods and collected

my own food and fuel for the cottage. When I returned, as often as it

was necessary, I cleared their path from the snow and performed those

offices that I had seen done by Felix. I afterwards found that these

labours, performed by an invisible hand, greatly astonished them; and

once or twice I heard them, on these occasions, utter the words \_good

spirit, wonderful\_; but I did not then understand the signification

of these terms.

“My thoughts now became more active, and I longed to discover the

motives and feelings of these lovely creatures; I was inquisitive to

know why Felix appeared so miserable and Agatha so sad. I thought

(foolish wretch!) that it might be in my power to restore happiness to

these deserving people. When I slept or was absent, the forms of the

venerable blind father, the gentle Agatha, and the excellent Felix

flitted before me. I looked upon them as superior beings who would be

the arbiters of my future destiny. I formed in my imagination a

thousand pictures of presenting myself to them, and their reception of

me. I imagined that they would be disgusted, until, by my gentle

demeanour and conciliating words, I should first win their favour and

afterwards their love.

“These thoughts exhilarated me and led me to apply with fresh ardour to

the acquiring the art of language. My organs were indeed harsh, but

supple; and although my voice was very unlike the soft music of their

tones, yet I pronounced such words as I understood with tolerable ease.

It was as the ass and the lap-dog; yet surely the gentle ass whose

intentions were affectionate, although his manners were rude, deserved

better treatment than blows and execration.

“The pleasant showers and genial warmth of spring greatly altered the

aspect of the earth. Men who before this change seemed to have been

hid in caves dispersed themselves and were employed in various arts of

cultivation. The birds sang in more cheerful notes, and the leaves

began to bud forth on the trees. Happy, happy earth! Fit habitation

for gods, which, so short a time before, was bleak, damp, and

unwholesome. My spirits were elevated by the enchanting appearance of

nature; the past was blotted from my memory, the present was tranquil,

and the future gilded by bright rays of hope and anticipations of joy.”

Chapter 13

“I now hasten to the more moving part of my story. I shall relate

events that impressed me with feelings which, from what I had been,

have made me what I am.

“Spring advanced rapidly; the weather became fine and the skies

cloudless. It surprised me that what before was desert and gloomy

should now bloom with the most beautiful flowers and verdure. My

senses were gratified and refreshed by a thousand scents of delight and

a thousand sights of beauty.

“It was on one of these days, when my cottagers periodically rested

from labour—the old man played on his guitar, and the children

listened to him—that I observed the countenance of Felix was

melancholy beyond expression; he sighed frequently, and once his father

paused in his music, and I conjectured by his manner that he inquired

the cause of his son’s sorrow. Felix replied in a cheerful accent, and

the old man was recommencing his music when someone tapped at the door.

“It was a lady on horseback, accompanied by a country-man as a guide.

The lady was dressed in a dark suit and covered with a thick black

veil. Agatha asked a question, to which the stranger only replied by

pronouncing, in a sweet accent, the name of Felix. Her voice was

musical but unlike that of either of my friends. On hearing this word,

Felix came up hastily to the lady, who, when she saw him, threw up her

veil, and I beheld a countenance of angelic beauty and expression. Her

hair of a shining raven black, and curiously braided; her eyes were

dark, but gentle, although animated; her features of a regular

proportion, and her complexion wondrously fair, each cheek tinged with

a lovely pink.

“Felix seemed ravished with delight when he saw her, every trait of

sorrow vanished from his face, and it instantly expressed a degree of

ecstatic joy, of which I could hardly have believed it capable; his

eyes sparkled, as his cheek flushed with pleasure; and at that moment I

thought him as beautiful as the stranger. She appeared affected by

different feelings; wiping a few tears from her lovely eyes, she held

out her hand to Felix, who kissed it rapturously and called her, as

well as I could distinguish, his sweet Arabian. She did not appear to

understand him, but smiled. He assisted her to dismount, and

dismissing her guide, conducted her into the cottage. Some

conversation took place between him and his father, and the young

stranger knelt at the old man’s feet and would have kissed his hand,

but he raised her and embraced her affectionately.

“I soon perceived that although the stranger uttered articulate sounds

and appeared to have a language of her own, she was neither understood

by nor herself understood the cottagers. They made many signs which I

did not comprehend, but I saw that her presence diffused gladness

through the cottage, dispelling their sorrow as the sun dissipates the

morning mists. Felix seemed peculiarly happy and with smiles of

delight welcomed his Arabian. Agatha, the ever-gentle Agatha, kissed

the hands of the lovely stranger, and pointing to her brother, made

signs which appeared to me to mean that he had been sorrowful until she

came. Some hours passed thus, while they, by their countenances,

expressed joy, the cause of which I did not comprehend. Presently I

found, by the frequent recurrence of some sound which the stranger

repeated after them, that she was endeavouring to learn their language;

and the idea instantly occurred to me that I should make use of the

same instructions to the same end. The stranger learned about twenty

words at the first lesson; most of them, indeed, were those which I had

before understood, but I profited by the others.

“As night came on, Agatha and the Arabian retired early. When they

separated Felix kissed the hand of the stranger and said, ‘Good night

sweet Safie.’ He sat up much longer, conversing with his father, and

by the frequent repetition of her name I conjectured that their lovely

guest was the subject of their conversation. I ardently desired to

understand them, and bent every faculty towards that purpose, but found

it utterly impossible.

“The next morning Felix went out to his work, and after the usual

occupations of Agatha were finished, the Arabian sat at the feet of the

old man, and taking his guitar, played some airs so entrancingly

beautiful that they at once drew tears of sorrow and delight from my

eyes. She sang, and her voice flowed in a rich cadence, swelling or

dying away like a nightingale of the woods.

“When she had finished, she gave the guitar to Agatha, who at first

declined it. She played a simple air, and her voice accompanied it in

sweet accents, but unlike the wondrous strain of the stranger. The old

man appeared enraptured and said some words which Agatha endeavoured to

explain to Safie, and by which he appeared to wish to express that she

bestowed on him the greatest delight by her music.

“The days now passed as peaceably as before, with the sole alteration

that joy had taken place of sadness in the countenances of my friends.

Safie was always gay and happy; she and I improved rapidly in the

knowledge of language, so that in two months I began to comprehend most

of the words uttered by my protectors.

“In the meanwhile also the black ground was covered with herbage, and

the green banks interspersed with innumerable flowers, sweet to the

scent and the eyes, stars of pale radiance among the moonlight woods;

the sun became warmer, the nights clear and balmy; and my nocturnal

rambles were an extreme pleasure to me, although they were considerably

shortened by the late setting and early rising of the sun, for I never

ventured abroad during daylight, fearful of meeting with the same

treatment I had formerly endured in the first village which I entered.

“My days were spent in close attention, that I might more speedily

master the language; and I may boast that I improved more rapidly than

the Arabian, who understood very little and conversed in broken

accents, whilst I comprehended and could imitate almost every word that

was spoken.

“While I improved in speech, I also learned the science of letters as

it was taught to the stranger, and this opened before me a wide field

for wonder and delight.

“The book from which Felix instructed Safie was Volney’s \_Ruins

of Empires\_. I should not have understood the purport of this book had not

Felix, in reading it, given very minute explanations. He had chosen this

work, he said, because the declamatory style was framed in imitation of the

Eastern authors. Through this work I obtained a cursory knowledge of history

and a view of the several empires at present existing in the world; it gave

me an insight into the manners, governments, and religions of the different

nations of the earth. I heard of the slothful Asiatics, of the stupendous

genius and mental activity of the Grecians, of the wars and wonderful virtue

of the early Romans—of their subsequent degenerating—of the

decline of that mighty empire, of chivalry, Christianity, and kings. I heard

of the discovery of the American hemisphere and wept with Safie over the

hapless fate of its original inhabitants.

“These wonderful narrations inspired me with strange feelings. Was

man, indeed, at once so powerful, so virtuous and magnificent, yet so

vicious and base? He appeared at one time a mere scion of the evil

principle and at another as all that can be conceived of noble and

godlike. To be a great and virtuous man appeared the highest honour

that can befall a sensitive being; to be base and vicious, as many on

record have been, appeared the lowest degradation, a condition more

abject than that of the blind mole or harmless worm. For a long time I

could not conceive how one man could go forth to murder his fellow, or

even why there were laws and governments; but when I heard details of

vice and bloodshed, my wonder ceased and I turned away with disgust and

loathing.

“Every conversation of the cottagers now opened new wonders to me.

While I listened to the instructions which Felix bestowed upon the

Arabian, the strange system of human society was explained to me. I

heard of the division of property, of immense wealth and squalid

poverty, of rank, descent, and noble blood.

“The words induced me to turn towards myself. I learned that the

possessions most esteemed by your fellow creatures were high and

unsullied descent united with riches. A man might be respected with

only one of these advantages, but without either he was considered,

except in very rare instances, as a vagabond and a slave, doomed to

waste his powers for the profits of the chosen few! And what was I? Of

my creation and creator I was absolutely ignorant, but I knew that I

possessed no money, no friends, no kind of property. I was, besides,

endued with a figure hideously deformed and loathsome; I was not even

of the same nature as man. I was more agile than they and could

subsist upon coarser diet; I bore the extremes of heat and cold with

less injury to my frame; my stature far exceeded theirs. When I looked

around I saw and heard of none like me. Was I, then, a monster, a blot

upon the earth, from which all men fled and whom all men disowned?

“I cannot describe to you the agony that these reflections inflicted

upon me; I tried to dispel them, but sorrow only increased with

knowledge. Oh, that I had for ever remained in my native wood, nor

known nor felt beyond the sensations of hunger, thirst, and heat!

“Of what a strange nature is knowledge! It clings to the mind when it

has once seized on it like a lichen on the rock. I wished sometimes to

shake off all thought and feeling, but I learned that there was but one

means to overcome the sensation of pain, and that was death—a state

which I feared yet did not understand. I admired virtue and good

feelings and loved the gentle manners and amiable qualities of my

cottagers, but I was shut out from intercourse with them, except

through means which I obtained by stealth, when I was unseen and

unknown, and which rather increased than satisfied the desire I had of

becoming one among my fellows. The gentle words of Agatha and the

animated smiles of the charming Arabian were not for me. The mild

exhortations of the old man and the lively conversation of the loved

Felix were not for me. Miserable, unhappy wretch!

“Other lessons were impressed upon me even more deeply. I heard of the

difference of sexes, and the birth and growth of children, how the

father doted on the smiles of the infant, and the lively sallies of the

older child, how all the life and cares of the mother were wrapped up

in the precious charge, how the mind of youth expanded and gained

knowledge, of brother, sister, and all the various relationships which

bind one human being to another in mutual bonds.

“But where were my friends and relations? No father had watched my

infant days, no mother had blessed me with smiles and caresses; or if

they had, all my past life was now a blot, a blind vacancy in which I

distinguished nothing. From my earliest remembrance I had been as I

then was in height and proportion. I had never yet seen a being

resembling me or who claimed any intercourse with me. What was I? The

question again recurred, to be answered only with groans.

“I will soon explain to what these feelings tended, but allow me now to

return to the cottagers, whose story excited in me such various

feelings of indignation, delight, and wonder, but which all terminated

in additional love and reverence for my protectors (for so I loved, in

an innocent, half-painful self-deceit, to call them).”

Chapter 14

“Some time elapsed before I learned the history of my friends. It was

one which could not fail to impress itself deeply on my mind, unfolding

as it did a number of circumstances, each interesting and wonderful to

one so utterly inexperienced as I was.

“The name of the old man was De Lacey. He was descended from a good

family in France, where he had lived for many years in affluence,

respected by his superiors and beloved by his equals. His son was bred

in the service of his country, and Agatha had ranked with ladies of the

highest distinction. A few months before my arrival they had lived in

a large and luxurious city called Paris, surrounded by friends and

possessed of every enjoyment which virtue, refinement of intellect, or

taste, accompanied by a moderate fortune, could afford.

“The father of Safie had been the cause of their ruin. He was a

Turkish merchant and had inhabited Paris for many years, when, for some

reason which I could not learn, he became obnoxious to the government.

He was seized and cast into prison the very day that Safie arrived from

Constantinople to join him. He was tried and condemned to death. The

injustice of his sentence was very flagrant; all Paris was indignant;

and it was judged that his religion and wealth rather than the crime

alleged against him had been the cause of his condemnation.

“Felix had accidentally been present at the trial; his horror and

indignation were uncontrollable when he heard the decision of the

court. He made, at that moment, a solemn vow to deliver him and then

looked around for the means. After many fruitless attempts to gain

admittance to the prison, he found a strongly grated window in an

unguarded part of the building, which lighted the dungeon of the

unfortunate Muhammadan, who, loaded with chains, waited in despair the

execution of the barbarous sentence. Felix visited the grate at night

and made known to the prisoner his intentions in his favour. The Turk,

amazed and delighted, endeavoured to kindle the zeal of his deliverer

by promises of reward and wealth. Felix rejected his offers with

contempt, yet when he saw the lovely Safie, who was allowed to visit

her father and who by her gestures expressed her lively gratitude, the

youth could not help owning to his own mind that the captive possessed

a treasure which would fully reward his toil and hazard.

“The Turk quickly perceived the impression that his daughter had made

on the heart of Felix and endeavoured to secure him more entirely in

his interests by the promise of her hand in marriage so soon as he

should be conveyed to a place of safety. Felix was too delicate to

accept this offer, yet he looked forward to the probability of the

event as to the consummation of his happiness.

“During the ensuing days, while the preparations were going forward for

the escape of the merchant, the zeal of Felix was warmed by several

letters that he received from this lovely girl, who found means to

express her thoughts in the language of her lover by the aid of an old

man, a servant of her father who understood French. She thanked him in

the most ardent terms for his intended services towards her parent, and

at the same time she gently deplored her own fate.

“I have copies of these letters, for I found means, during my residence

in the hovel, to procure the implements of writing; and the letters

were often in the hands of Felix or Agatha. Before I depart I will

give them to you; they will prove the truth of my tale; but at present,

as the sun is already far declined, I shall only have time to repeat

the substance of them to you.

“Safie related that her mother was a Christian Arab, seized and made a

slave by the Turks; recommended by her beauty, she had won the heart of

the father of Safie, who married her. The young girl spoke in high and

enthusiastic terms of her mother, who, born in freedom, spurned the

bondage to which she was now reduced. She instructed her daughter in

the tenets of her religion and taught her to aspire to higher powers of

intellect and an independence of spirit forbidden to the female

followers of Muhammad. This lady died, but her lessons were indelibly

impressed on the mind of Safie, who sickened at the prospect of again

returning to Asia and being immured within the walls of a harem,

allowed only to occupy herself with infantile amusements, ill-suited to

the temper of her soul, now accustomed to grand ideas and a noble

emulation for virtue. The prospect of marrying a Christian and

remaining in a country where women were allowed to take a rank in

society was enchanting to her.

“The day for the execution of the Turk was fixed, but on the night

previous to it he quitted his prison and before morning was distant

many leagues from Paris. Felix had procured passports in the name of

his father, sister, and himself. He had previously communicated his

plan to the former, who aided the deceit by quitting his house, under

the pretence of a journey and concealed himself, with his daughter, in

an obscure part of Paris.

“Felix conducted the fugitives through France to Lyons and across Mont

Cenis to Leghorn, where the merchant had decided to wait a favourable

opportunity of passing into some part of the Turkish dominions.

“Safie resolved to remain with her father until the moment of his

departure, before which time the Turk renewed his promise that she

should be united to his deliverer; and Felix remained with them in

expectation of that event; and in the meantime he enjoyed the society

of the Arabian, who exhibited towards him the simplest and tenderest

affection. They conversed with one another through the means of an

interpreter, and sometimes with the interpretation of looks; and Safie

sang to him the divine airs of her native country.

“The Turk allowed this intimacy to take place and encouraged the hopes

of the youthful lovers, while in his heart he had formed far other

plans. He loathed the idea that his daughter should be united to a

Christian, but he feared the resentment of Felix if he should appear

lukewarm, for he knew that he was still in the power of his deliverer

if he should choose to betray him to the Italian state which they

inhabited. He revolved a thousand plans by which he should be enabled

to prolong the deceit until it might be no longer necessary, and

secretly to take his daughter with him when he departed. His plans

were facilitated by the news which arrived from Paris.

“The government of France were greatly enraged at the escape of their

victim and spared no pains to detect and punish his deliverer. The

plot of Felix was quickly discovered, and De Lacey and Agatha were

thrown into prison. The news reached Felix and roused him from his

dream of pleasure. His blind and aged father and his gentle sister lay

in a noisome dungeon while he enjoyed the free air and the society of

her whom he loved. This idea was torture to him. He quickly arranged

with the Turk that if the latter should find a favourable opportunity

for escape before Felix could return to Italy, Safie should remain as a

boarder at a convent at Leghorn; and then, quitting the lovely Arabian,

he hastened to Paris and delivered himself up to the vengeance of the

law, hoping to free De Lacey and Agatha by this proceeding.

“He did not succeed. They remained confined for five months before the

trial took place, the result of which deprived them of their fortune

and condemned them to a perpetual exile from their native country.

“They found a miserable asylum in the cottage in Germany, where I

discovered them. Felix soon learned that the treacherous Turk, for

whom he and his family endured such unheard-of oppression, on

discovering that his deliverer was thus reduced to poverty and ruin,

became a traitor to good feeling and honour and had quitted Italy with

his daughter, insultingly sending Felix a pittance of money to aid him,

as he said, in some plan of future maintenance.

“Such were the events that preyed on the heart of Felix and rendered

him, when I first saw him, the most miserable of his family. He could

have endured poverty, and while this distress had been the meed of his

virtue, he gloried in it; but the ingratitude of the Turk and the loss

of his beloved Safie were misfortunes more bitter and irreparable. The

arrival of the Arabian now infused new life into his soul.

“When the news reached Leghorn that Felix was deprived of his wealth

and rank, the merchant commanded his daughter to think no more of her

lover, but to prepare to return to her native country. The generous

nature of Safie was outraged by this command; she attempted to

expostulate with her father, but he left her angrily, reiterating his

tyrannical mandate.

“A few days after, the Turk entered his daughter’s apartment and told

her hastily that he had reason to believe that his residence at Leghorn

had been divulged and that he should speedily be delivered up to the

French government; he had consequently hired a vessel to convey him to

Constantinople, for which city he should sail in a few hours. He

intended to leave his daughter under the care of a confidential

servant, to follow at her leisure with the greater part of his

property, which had not yet arrived at Leghorn.

“When alone, Safie resolved in her own mind the plan of conduct that it

would become her to pursue in this emergency. A residence in Turkey

was abhorrent to her; her religion and her feelings were alike averse

to it. By some papers of her father which fell into her hands she

heard of the exile of her lover and learnt the name of the spot where

he then resided. She hesitated some time, but at length she formed her

determination. Taking with her some jewels that belonged to her and a

sum of money, she quitted Italy with an attendant, a native of Leghorn,

but who understood the common language of Turkey, and departed for

Germany.

“She arrived in safety at a town about twenty leagues from the cottage

of De Lacey, when her attendant fell dangerously ill. Safie nursed her

with the most devoted affection, but the poor girl died, and the

Arabian was left alone, unacquainted with the language of the country

and utterly ignorant of the customs of the world. She fell, however,

into good hands. The Italian had mentioned the name of the spot for

which they were bound, and after her death the woman of the house in

which they had lived took care that Safie should arrive in safety at

the cottage of her lover.”

Chapter 15

“Such was the history of my beloved cottagers. It impressed me deeply.

I learned, from the views of social life which it developed, to admire

their virtues and to deprecate the vices of mankind.

“As yet I looked upon crime as a distant evil, benevolence and

generosity were ever present before me, inciting within me a desire to

become an actor in the busy scene where so many admirable qualities

were called forth and displayed. But in giving an account of the

progress of my intellect, I must not omit a circumstance which occurred

in the beginning of the month of August of the same year.

“One night during my accustomed visit to the neighbouring wood where I

collected my own food and brought home firing for my protectors, I found on

the ground a leathern portmanteau containing several articles of dress and

some books. I eagerly seized the prize and returned with it to my hovel.

Fortunately the books were written in the language, the elements of which I

had acquired at the cottage; they consisted of \_Paradise Lost\_, a volume

of \_Plutarch’s Lives\_, and the \_Sorrows of Werter\_. The

possession of these treasures gave me extreme delight; I now continually

studied and exercised my mind upon these histories, whilst my friends were

employed in their ordinary occupations.

“I can hardly describe to you the effect of these books. They produced

in me an infinity of new images and feelings, that sometimes raised me

to ecstasy, but more frequently sunk me into the lowest dejection. In

the \_Sorrows of Werter\_, besides the interest of its simple and affecting

story, so many opinions are canvassed and so many lights thrown upon

what had hitherto been to me obscure subjects that I found in it a

never-ending source of speculation and astonishment. The gentle and

domestic manners it described, combined with lofty sentiments and

feelings, which had for their object something out of self, accorded

well with my experience among my protectors and with the wants which

were for ever alive in my own bosom. But I thought Werter himself a

more divine being than I had ever beheld or imagined; his character

contained no pretension, but it sank deep. The disquisitions upon

death and suicide were calculated to fill me with wonder. I did not

pretend to enter into the merits of the case, yet I inclined towards

the opinions of the hero, whose extinction I wept, without precisely

understanding it.

“As I read, however, I applied much personally to my own feelings and

condition. I found myself similar yet at the same time strangely

unlike to the beings concerning whom I read and to whose conversation I

was a listener. I sympathised with and partly understood them, but I

was unformed in mind; I was dependent on none and related to none.

‘The path of my departure was free,’ and there was none to lament my

annihilation. My person was hideous and my stature gigantic. What did

this mean? Who was I? What was I? Whence did I come? What was my

destination? These questions continually recurred, but I was unable to

solve them.

“The volume of \_Plutarch’s Lives\_ which I possessed contained the

histories of the first founders of the ancient republics. This book

had a far different effect upon me from the \_Sorrows of Werter\_. I

learned from Werter’s imaginations despondency and gloom, but Plutarch

taught me high thoughts; he elevated me above the wretched sphere of my

own reflections, to admire and love the heroes of past ages. Many

things I read surpassed my understanding and experience. I had a very

confused knowledge of kingdoms, wide extents of country, mighty rivers,

and boundless seas. But I was perfectly unacquainted with towns and

large assemblages of men. The cottage of my protectors had been the

only school in which I had studied human nature, but this book

developed new and mightier scenes of action. I read of men concerned

in public affairs, governing or massacring their species. I felt the

greatest ardour for virtue rise within me, and abhorrence for vice, as

far as I understood the signification of those terms, relative as they

were, as I applied them, to pleasure and pain alone. Induced by these

feelings, I was of course led to admire peaceable lawgivers, Numa,

Solon, and Lycurgus, in preference to Romulus and Theseus. The

patriarchal lives of my protectors caused these impressions to take a

firm hold on my mind; perhaps, if my first introduction to humanity had

been made by a young soldier, burning for glory and slaughter, I should

have been imbued with different sensations.

“But \_Paradise Lost\_ excited different and far deeper emotions. I read

it, as I had read the other volumes which had fallen into my hands, as

a true history. It moved every feeling of wonder and awe that the

picture of an omnipotent God warring with his creatures was capable of

exciting. I often referred the several situations, as their similarity

struck me, to my own. Like Adam, I was apparently united by no link to

any other being in existence; but his state was far different from mine

in every other respect. He had come forth from the hands of God a

perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of

his Creator; he was allowed to converse with and acquire knowledge from

beings of a superior nature, but I was wretched, helpless, and alone.

Many times I considered Satan as the fitter emblem of my condition, for

often, like him, when I viewed the bliss of my protectors, the bitter

gall of envy rose within me.

“Another circumstance strengthened and confirmed these feelings. Soon

after my arrival in the hovel I discovered some papers in the pocket of

the dress which I had taken from your laboratory. At first I had

neglected them, but now that I was able to decipher the characters in

which they were written, I began to study them with diligence. It was

your journal of the four months that preceded my creation. You

minutely described in these papers every step you took in the progress

of your work; this history was mingled with accounts of domestic

occurrences. You doubtless recollect these papers. Here they are.

Everything is related in them which bears reference to my accursed

origin; the whole detail of that series of disgusting circumstances

which produced it is set in view; the minutest description of my odious

and loathsome person is given, in language which painted your own

horrors and rendered mine indelible. I sickened as I read. ‘Hateful

day when I received life!’ I exclaimed in agony. ‘Accursed creator!

Why did you form a monster so hideous that even \_you\_ turned from me in

disgust? God, in pity, made man beautiful and alluring, after his own

image; but my form is a filthy type of yours, more horrid even from the

very resemblance. Satan had his companions, fellow devils, to admire

and encourage him, but I am solitary and abhorred.’

“These were the reflections of my hours of despondency and solitude;

but when I contemplated the virtues of the cottagers, their amiable and

benevolent dispositions, I persuaded myself that when they should

become acquainted with my admiration of their virtues they would

compassionate me and overlook my personal deformity. Could they turn

from their door one, however monstrous, who solicited their compassion

and friendship? I resolved, at least, not to despair, but in every way

to fit myself for an interview with them which would decide my fate. I

postponed this attempt for some months longer, for the importance

attached to its success inspired me with a dread lest I should fail.

Besides, I found that my understanding improved so much with every

day’s experience that I was unwilling to commence this undertaking

until a few more months should have added to my sagacity.

“Several changes, in the meantime, took place in the cottage. The

presence of Safie diffused happiness among its inhabitants, and I also

found that a greater degree of plenty reigned there. Felix and Agatha

spent more time in amusement and conversation, and were assisted in

their labours by servants. They did not appear rich, but they were

contented and happy; their feelings were serene and peaceful, while

mine became every day more tumultuous. Increase of knowledge only

discovered to me more clearly what a wretched outcast I was. I

cherished hope, it is true, but it vanished when I beheld my person

reflected in water or my shadow in the moonshine, even as that frail

image and that inconstant shade.

“I endeavoured to crush these fears and to fortify myself for the trial

which in a few months I resolved to undergo; and sometimes I allowed my

thoughts, unchecked by reason, to ramble in the fields of Paradise, and

dared to fancy amiable and lovely creatures sympathising with my

feelings and cheering my gloom; their angelic countenances breathed

smiles of consolation. But it was all a dream; no Eve soothed my

sorrows nor shared my thoughts; I was alone. I remembered Adam’s

supplication to his Creator. But where was mine? He had abandoned me,

and in the bitterness of my heart I cursed him.

“Autumn passed thus. I saw, with surprise and grief, the leaves decay

and fall, and nature again assume the barren and bleak appearance it

had worn when I first beheld the woods and the lovely moon. Yet I did

not heed the bleakness of the weather; I was better fitted by my

conformation for the endurance of cold than heat. But my chief

delights were the sight of the flowers, the birds, and all the gay

apparel of summer; when those deserted me, I turned with more attention

towards the cottagers. Their happiness was not decreased by the

absence of summer. They loved and sympathised with one another; and

their joys, depending on each other, were not interrupted by the

casualties that took place around them. The more I saw of them, the

greater became my desire to claim their protection and kindness; my

heart yearned to be known and loved by these amiable creatures; to see

their sweet looks directed towards me with affection was the utmost

limit of my ambition. I dared not think that they would turn them from

me with disdain and horror. The poor that stopped at their door were

never driven away. I asked, it is true, for greater treasures than a

little food or rest: I required kindness and sympathy; but I did not

believe myself utterly unworthy of it.

“The winter advanced, and an entire revolution of the seasons had taken

place since I awoke into life. My attention at this time was solely

directed towards my plan of introducing myself into the cottage of my

protectors. I revolved many projects, but that on which I finally

fixed was to enter the dwelling when the blind old man should be alone.

I had sagacity enough to discover that the unnatural hideousness of my

person was the chief object of horror with those who had formerly

beheld me. My voice, although harsh, had nothing terrible in it; I

thought, therefore, that if in the absence of his children I could gain

the good will and mediation of the old De Lacey, I might by his means

be tolerated by my younger protectors.

“One day, when the sun shone on the red leaves that strewed the ground

and diffused cheerfulness, although it denied warmth, Safie, Agatha,

and Felix departed on a long country walk, and the old man, at his own

desire, was left alone in the cottage. When his children had departed,

he took up his guitar and played several mournful but sweet airs, more

sweet and mournful than I had ever heard him play before. At first his

countenance was illuminated with pleasure, but as he continued,

thoughtfulness and sadness succeeded; at length, laying aside the

instrument, he sat absorbed in reflection.

“My heart beat quick; this was the hour and moment of trial, which

would decide my hopes or realise my fears. The servants were gone to a

neighbouring fair. All was silent in and around the cottage; it was an

excellent opportunity; yet, when I proceeded to execute my plan, my

limbs failed me and I sank to the ground. Again I rose, and exerting

all the firmness of which I was master, removed the planks which I had

placed before my hovel to conceal my retreat. The fresh air revived

me, and with renewed determination I approached the door of their

cottage.

“I knocked. ‘Who is there?’ said the old man. ‘Come in.’

“I entered. ‘Pardon this intrusion,’ said I; ‘I am

a traveller in want of a little rest; you would greatly oblige me if you

would allow me to remain a few minutes before the fire.’

“‘Enter,’ said De Lacey, ‘and I will try in what

manner I can to relieve your wants; but, unfortunately, my children are

from home, and as I am blind, I am afraid I shall find it difficult to

procure food for you.’

“‘Do not trouble yourself, my kind host; I have food; it is

warmth and rest only that I need.’

“I sat down, and a silence ensued. I knew that every minute was

precious to me, yet I remained irresolute in what manner to commence

the interview, when the old man addressed me.

‘By your language, stranger, I suppose you are my countryman; are you

French?’

“‘No; but I was educated by a French family and understand that

language only. I am now going to claim the protection of some friends,

whom I sincerely love, and of whose favour I have some hopes.’

“‘Are they Germans?’

“‘No, they are French. But let us change the subject. I am an

unfortunate and deserted creature, I look around and I have no relation

or friend upon earth. These amiable people to whom I go have never

seen me and know little of me. I am full of fears, for if I fail

there, I am an outcast in the world for ever.’

“‘Do not despair. To be friendless is indeed to be unfortunate, but

the hearts of men, when unprejudiced by any obvious self-interest, are

full of brotherly love and charity. Rely, therefore, on your hopes;

and if these friends are good and amiable, do not despair.’

“‘They are kind—they are the most excellent creatures in the world;

but, unfortunately, they are prejudiced against me. I have good

dispositions; my life has been hitherto harmless and in some degree

beneficial; but a fatal prejudice clouds their eyes, and where they

ought to see a feeling and kind friend, they behold only a detestable

monster.’

“‘That is indeed unfortunate; but if you are really blameless, cannot

you undeceive them?’

“‘I am about to undertake that task; and it is on that account that I

feel so many overwhelming terrors. I tenderly love these friends; I

have, unknown to them, been for many months in the habits of daily

kindness towards them; but they believe that I wish to injure them, and

it is that prejudice which I wish to overcome.’

“‘Where do these friends reside?’

“‘Near this spot.’

“The old man paused and then continued, ‘If you will unreservedly

confide to me the particulars of your tale, I perhaps may be of use in

undeceiving them. I am blind and cannot judge of your countenance, but

there is something in your words which persuades me that you are

sincere. I am poor and an exile, but it will afford me true pleasure

to be in any way serviceable to a human creature.’

“‘Excellent man! I thank you and accept your generous offer. You

raise me from the dust by this kindness; and I trust that, by your aid,

I shall not be driven from the society and sympathy of your fellow

creatures.’

“‘Heaven forbid! Even if you were really criminal, for that can only

drive you to desperation, and not instigate you to virtue. I also am

unfortunate; I and my family have been condemned, although innocent;

judge, therefore, if I do not feel for your misfortunes.’

“‘How can I thank you, my best and only benefactor? From your lips

first have I heard the voice of kindness directed towards me; I shall

be for ever grateful; and your present humanity assures me of success

with those friends whom I am on the point of meeting.’

“‘May I know the names and residence of those friends?’

“I paused. This, I thought, was the moment of decision, which was to

rob me of or bestow happiness on me for ever. I struggled vainly for

firmness sufficient to answer him, but the effort destroyed all my

remaining strength; I sank on the chair and sobbed aloud. At that

moment I heard the steps of my younger protectors. I had not a moment

to lose, but seizing the hand of the old man, I cried, ‘Now is the

time! Save and protect me! You and your family are the friends whom I

seek. Do not you desert me in the hour of trial!’

“‘Great God!’ exclaimed the old man. ‘Who are you?’

“At that instant the cottage door was opened, and Felix, Safie, and

Agatha entered. Who can describe their horror and consternation on

beholding me? Agatha fainted, and Safie, unable to attend to her

friend, rushed out of the cottage. Felix darted forward, and with

supernatural force tore me from his father, to whose knees I clung, in

a transport of fury, he dashed me to the ground and struck me violently

with a stick. I could have torn him limb from limb, as the lion rends

the antelope. But my heart sank within me as with bitter sickness, and

I refrained. I saw him on the point of repeating his blow, when,

overcome by pain and anguish, I quitted the cottage, and in the general

tumult escaped unperceived to my hovel.”

Chapter 16

“Cursed, cursed creator! Why did I live? Why, in that instant, did I

not extinguish the spark of existence which you had so wantonly

bestowed? I know not; despair had not yet taken possession of me; my

feelings were those of rage and revenge. I could with pleasure have

destroyed the cottage and its inhabitants and have glutted myself with

their shrieks and misery.

“When night came I quitted my retreat and wandered in the wood; and

now, no longer restrained by the fear of discovery, I gave vent to my

anguish in fearful howlings. I was like a wild beast that had broken

the toils, destroying the objects that obstructed me and ranging

through the wood with a stag-like swiftness. Oh! What a miserable

night I passed! The cold stars shone in mockery, and the bare trees

waved their branches above me; now and then the sweet voice of a bird

burst forth amidst the universal stillness. All, save I, were at rest

or in enjoyment; I, like the arch-fiend, bore a hell within me, and

finding myself unsympathised with, wished to tear up the trees, spread

havoc and destruction around me, and then to have sat down and enjoyed

the ruin.

“But this was a luxury of sensation that could not endure; I became

fatigued with excess of bodily exertion and sank on the damp grass in

the sick impotence of despair. There was none among the myriads of men

that existed who would pity or assist me; and should I feel kindness

towards my enemies? No; from that moment I declared everlasting war

against the species, and more than all, against him who had formed me

and sent me forth to this insupportable misery.

“The sun rose; I heard the voices of men and knew that it was

impossible to return to my retreat during that day. Accordingly I hid

myself in some thick underwood, determining to devote the ensuing hours

to reflection on my situation.

“The pleasant sunshine and the pure air of day restored me to some

degree of tranquillity; and when I considered what had passed at the

cottage, I could not help believing that I had been too hasty in my

conclusions. I had certainly acted imprudently. It was apparent that

my conversation had interested the father in my behalf, and I was a

fool in having exposed my person to the horror of his children. I

ought to have familiarised the old De Lacey to me, and by degrees to

have discovered myself to the rest of his family, when they should have

been prepared for my approach. But I did not believe my errors to be

irretrievable, and after much consideration I resolved to return to the

cottage, seek the old man, and by my representations win him to my

party.

“These thoughts calmed me, and in the afternoon I sank into a profound

sleep; but the fever of my blood did not allow me to be visited by

peaceful dreams. The horrible scene of the preceding day was for ever

acting before my eyes; the females were flying and the enraged Felix

tearing me from his father’s feet. I awoke exhausted, and finding that

it was already night, I crept forth from my hiding-place, and went in

search of food.

“When my hunger was appeased, I directed my steps towards the

well-known path that conducted to the cottage. All there was at peace.

I crept into my hovel and remained in silent expectation of the

accustomed hour when the family arose. That hour passed, the sun

mounted high in the heavens, but the cottagers did not appear. I

trembled violently, apprehending some dreadful misfortune. The inside

of the cottage was dark, and I heard no motion; I cannot describe the

agony of this suspense.

“Presently two countrymen passed by, but pausing near the cottage, they

entered into conversation, using violent gesticulations; but I did not

understand what they said, as they spoke the language of the country,

which differed from that of my protectors. Soon after, however, Felix

approached with another man; I was surprised, as I knew that he had not

quitted the cottage that morning, and waited anxiously to discover from

his discourse the meaning of these unusual appearances.

“‘Do you consider,’ said his companion to him,

‘that you will be obliged to pay three months’ rent and to lose

the produce of your garden? I do not wish to take any unfair advantage, and

I beg therefore that you will take some days to consider of your

determination.’

“‘It is utterly useless,’ replied Felix; ‘we can

never again inhabit your cottage. The life of my father is in the greatest

danger, owing to the dreadful circumstance that I have related. My wife and

my sister will never recover from their horror. I entreat you not to reason

with me any more. Take possession of your tenement and let me fly from this

place.’

“Felix trembled violently as he said this. He and his companion

entered the cottage, in which they remained for a few minutes, and then

departed. I never saw any of the family of De Lacey more.

“I continued for the remainder of the day in my hovel in a state of

utter and stupid despair. My protectors had departed and had broken

the only link that held me to the world. For the first time the

feelings of revenge and hatred filled my bosom, and I did not strive to

control them, but allowing myself to be borne away by the stream, I

bent my mind towards injury and death. When I thought of my friends,

of the mild voice of De Lacey, the gentle eyes of Agatha, and the

exquisite beauty of the Arabian, these thoughts vanished and a gush of

tears somewhat soothed me. But again when I reflected that they had

spurned and deserted me, anger returned, a rage of anger, and unable to

injure anything human, I turned my fury towards inanimate objects. As

night advanced, I placed a variety of combustibles around the cottage,

and after having destroyed every vestige of cultivation in the garden,

I waited with forced impatience until the moon had sunk to commence my

operations.

“As the night advanced, a fierce wind arose from the woods and quickly

dispersed the clouds that had loitered in the heavens; the blast tore

along like a mighty avalanche and produced a kind of insanity in my

spirits that burst all bounds of reason and reflection. I lighted the

dry branch of a tree and danced with fury around the devoted cottage,

my eyes still fixed on the western horizon, the edge of which the moon

nearly touched. A part of its orb was at length hid, and I waved my

brand; it sank, and with a loud scream I fired the straw, and heath,

and bushes, which I had collected. The wind fanned the fire, and the

cottage was quickly enveloped by the flames, which clung to it and

licked it with their forked and destroying tongues.

“As soon as I was convinced that no assistance could save any part of

the habitation, I quitted the scene and sought for refuge in the woods.

“And now, with the world before me, whither should I bend my steps? I

resolved to fly far from the scene of my misfortunes; but to me, hated

and despised, every country must be equally horrible. At length the

thought of you crossed my mind. I learned from your papers that you

were my father, my creator; and to whom could I apply with more fitness

than to him who had given me life? Among the lessons that Felix had

bestowed upon Safie, geography had not been omitted; I had learned from

these the relative situations of the different countries of the earth.

You had mentioned Geneva as the name of your native town, and towards

this place I resolved to proceed.

“But how was I to direct myself? I knew that I must travel in a

southwesterly direction to reach my destination, but the sun was my

only guide. I did not know the names of the towns that I was to pass

through, nor could I ask information from a single human being; but I

did not despair. From you only could I hope for succour, although

towards you I felt no sentiment but that of hatred. Unfeeling,

heartless creator! You had endowed me with perceptions and passions

and then cast me abroad an object for the scorn and horror of mankind.

But on you only had I any claim for pity and redress, and from you I

determined to seek that justice which I vainly attempted to gain from

any other being that wore the human form.

“My travels were long and the sufferings I endured intense. It was

late in autumn when I quitted the district where I had so long resided.

I travelled only at night, fearful of encountering the visage of a

human being. Nature decayed around me, and the sun became heatless;

rain and snow poured around me; mighty rivers were frozen; the surface

of the earth was hard and chill, and bare, and I found no shelter. Oh,

earth! How often did I imprecate curses on the cause of my being! The

mildness of my nature had fled, and all within me was turned to gall

and bitterness. The nearer I approached to your habitation, the more

deeply did I feel the spirit of revenge enkindled in my heart. Snow

fell, and the waters were hardened, but I rested not. A few incidents

now and then directed me, and I possessed a map of the country; but I

often wandered wide from my path. The agony of my feelings allowed me

no respite; no incident occurred from which my rage and misery could

not extract its food; but a circumstance that happened when I arrived

on the confines of Switzerland, when the sun had recovered its warmth

and the earth again began to look green, confirmed in an especial

manner the bitterness and horror of my feelings.

“I generally rested during the day and travelled only when I was

secured by night from the view of man. One morning, however, finding

that my path lay through a deep wood, I ventured to continue my journey

after the sun had risen; the day, which was one of the first of spring,

cheered even me by the loveliness of its sunshine and the balminess of

the air. I felt emotions of gentleness and pleasure, that had long

appeared dead, revive within me. Half surprised by the novelty of

these sensations, I allowed myself to be borne away by them, and

forgetting my solitude and deformity, dared to be happy. Soft tears

again bedewed my cheeks, and I even raised my humid eyes with

thankfulness towards the blessed sun, which bestowed such joy upon me.

“I continued to wind among the paths of the wood, until I came to its

boundary, which was skirted by a deep and rapid river, into which many

of the trees bent their branches, now budding with the fresh spring.

Here I paused, not exactly knowing what path to pursue, when I heard

the sound of voices, that induced me to conceal myself under the shade

of a cypress. I was scarcely hid when a young girl came running

towards the spot where I was concealed, laughing, as if she ran from

someone in sport. She continued her course along the precipitous sides

of the river, when suddenly her foot slipped, and she fell into the

rapid stream. I rushed from my hiding-place and with extreme labour,

from the force of the current, saved her and dragged her to shore. She

was senseless, and I endeavoured by every means in my power to restore

animation, when I was suddenly interrupted by the approach of a rustic,

who was probably the person from whom she had playfully fled. On

seeing me, he darted towards me, and tearing the girl from my arms,

hastened towards the deeper parts of the wood. I followed speedily, I

hardly knew why; but when the man saw me draw near, he aimed a gun,

which he carried, at my body and fired. I sank to the ground, and my

injurer, with increased swiftness, escaped into the wood.

“This was then the reward of my benevolence! I had saved a human being

from destruction, and as a recompense I now writhed under the miserable

pain of a wound which shattered the flesh and bone. The feelings of

kindness and gentleness which I had entertained but a few moments

before gave place to hellish rage and gnashing of teeth. Inflamed by

pain, I vowed eternal hatred and vengeance to all mankind. But the

agony of my wound overcame me; my pulses paused, and I fainted.

“For some weeks I led a miserable life in the woods, endeavouring to

cure the wound which I had received. The ball had entered my shoulder,

and I knew not whether it had remained there or passed through; at any

rate I had no means of extracting it. My sufferings were augmented

also by the oppressive sense of the injustice and ingratitude of their

infliction. My daily vows rose for revenge—a deep and deadly revenge,

such as would alone compensate for the outrages and anguish I had

endured.

“After some weeks my wound healed, and I continued my journey. The

labours I endured were no longer to be alleviated by the bright sun or

gentle breezes of spring; all joy was but a mockery which insulted my

desolate state and made me feel more painfully that I was not made for

the enjoyment of pleasure.

“But my toils now drew near a close, and in two months from this time I

reached the environs of Geneva.

“It was evening when I arrived, and I retired to a hiding-place among

the fields that surround it to meditate in what manner I should apply

to you. I was oppressed by fatigue and hunger and far too unhappy to

enjoy the gentle breezes of evening or the prospect of the sun setting

behind the stupendous mountains of Jura.

“At this time a slight sleep relieved me from the pain of reflection,

which was disturbed by the approach of a beautiful child, who came

running into the recess I had chosen, with all the sportiveness of

infancy. Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me that this

little creature was unprejudiced and had lived too short a time to have

imbibed a horror of deformity. If, therefore, I could seize him and

educate him as my companion and friend, I should not be so desolate in

this peopled earth.

“Urged by this impulse, I seized on the boy as he passed and drew him

towards me. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before

his eyes and uttered a shrill scream; I drew his hand forcibly from his

face and said, ‘Child, what is the meaning of this? I do not intend to

hurt you; listen to me.’

“He struggled violently. ‘Let me go,’ he cried;

‘monster! Ugly wretch! You wish to eat me and tear me to pieces. You

are an ogre. Let me go, or I will tell my papa.’

“‘Boy, you will never see your father again; you must come with me.’

“‘Hideous monster! Let me go. My papa is a syndic—he is M.

Frankenstein—he will punish you. You dare not keep me.’

“‘Frankenstein! you belong then to my enemy—to him towards whom I have

sworn eternal revenge; you shall be my first victim.’

“The child still struggled and loaded me with epithets which carried

despair to my heart; I grasped his throat to silence him, and in a

moment he lay dead at my feet.

“I gazed on my victim, and my heart swelled with exultation and hellish

triumph; clapping my hands, I exclaimed, ‘I too can create desolation;

my enemy is not invulnerable; this death will carry despair to him, and

a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him.’

“As I fixed my eyes on the child, I saw something glittering on his

breast. I took it; it was a portrait of a most lovely woman. In spite

of my malignity, it softened and attracted me. For a few moments I

gazed with delight on her dark eyes, fringed by deep lashes, and her

lovely lips; but presently my rage returned; I remembered that I was

for ever deprived of the delights that such beautiful creatures could

bestow and that she whose resemblance I contemplated would, in

regarding me, have changed that air of divine benignity to one

expressive of disgust and affright.

“Can you wonder that such thoughts transported me with rage? I only

wonder that at that moment, instead of venting my sensations in

exclamations and agony, I did not rush among mankind and perish in the

attempt to destroy them.

“While I was overcome by these feelings, I left the spot where I had

committed the murder, and seeking a more secluded hiding-place, I

entered a barn which had appeared to me to be empty. A woman was

sleeping on some straw; she was young, not indeed so beautiful as her

whose portrait I held, but of an agreeable aspect and blooming in the

loveliness of youth and health. Here, I thought, is one of those whose

joy-imparting smiles are bestowed on all but me. And then I bent over

her and whispered, ‘Awake, fairest, thy lover is near—he who would

give his life but to obtain one look of affection from thine eyes; my

beloved, awake!’

“The sleeper stirred; a thrill of terror ran through me. Should she

indeed awake, and see me, and curse me, and denounce the murderer? Thus

would she assuredly act if her darkened eyes opened and she beheld me.

The thought was madness; it stirred the fiend within me—not I, but

she, shall suffer; the murder I have committed because I am for ever

robbed of all that she could give me, she shall atone. The crime had

its source in her; be hers the punishment! Thanks to the lessons of

Felix and the sanguinary laws of man, I had learned now to work

mischief. I bent over her and placed the portrait securely in one of

the folds of her dress. She moved again, and I fled.

“For some days I haunted the spot where these scenes had taken place,

sometimes wishing to see you, sometimes resolved to quit the world and

its miseries for ever. At length I wandered towards these mountains,

and have ranged through their immense recesses, consumed by a burning

passion which you alone can gratify. We may not part until you have

promised to comply with my requisition. I am alone and miserable; man

will not associate with me; but one as deformed and horrible as myself

would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species

and have the same defects. This being you must create.”

Chapter 17

The being finished speaking and fixed his looks upon me in the

expectation of a reply. But I was bewildered, perplexed, and unable to

arrange my ideas sufficiently to understand the full extent of his

proposition. He continued,

“You must create a female for me with whom I can live in the

interchange of those sympathies necessary for my being. This you alone

can do, and I demand it of you as a right which you must not refuse to

concede.”

The latter part of his tale had kindled anew in me the anger that had

died away while he narrated his peaceful life among the cottagers, and

as he said this I could no longer suppress the rage that burned within

me.

“I do refuse it,” I replied; “and no torture shall ever extort a

consent from me. You may render me the most miserable of men, but you

shall never make me base in my own eyes. Shall I create another like

yourself, whose joint wickedness might desolate the world. Begone! I

have answered you; you may torture me, but I will never consent.”

“You are in the wrong,” replied the fiend; “and instead

of threatening, I am content to reason with you. I am malicious because I

am miserable. Am I not shunned and hated by all mankind? You, my creator,

would tear me to pieces and triumph; remember that, and tell me why I

should pity man more than he pities me? You would not call it murder if you

could precipitate me into one of those ice-rifts and destroy my frame, the

work of your own hands. Shall I respect man when he condemns me? Let him

live with me in the interchange of kindness, and instead of injury I would

bestow every benefit upon him with tears of gratitude at his acceptance.

But that cannot be; the human senses are insurmountable barriers to our

union. Yet mine shall not be the submission of abject slavery. I will

revenge my injuries; if I cannot inspire love, I will cause fear, and

chiefly towards you my arch-enemy, because my creator, do I swear

inextinguishable hatred. Have a care; I will work at your destruction, nor

finish until I desolate your heart, so that you shall curse the hour of

your birth.”

A fiendish rage animated him as he said this; his face was wrinkled

into contortions too horrible for human eyes to behold; but presently

he calmed himself and proceeded—

“I intended to reason. This passion is detrimental to me, for you do

not reflect that \_you\_ are the cause of its excess. If any being felt

emotions of benevolence towards me, I should return them a hundred and a

hundredfold; for that one creature’s sake I would make peace with the

whole kind! But I now indulge in dreams of bliss that cannot be realised.

What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate; I demand a creature of

another sex, but as hideous as myself; the gratification is small, but it

is all that I can receive, and it shall content me. It is true, we shall be

monsters, cut off from all the world; but on that account we shall be more

attached to one another. Our lives will not be happy, but they will be

harmless and free from the misery I now feel. Oh! My creator, make me

happy; let me feel gratitude towards you for one benefit! Let me see that I

excite the sympathy of some existing thing; do not deny me my

request!”

I was moved. I shuddered when I thought of the possible consequences

of my consent, but I felt that there was some justice in his argument.

His tale and the feelings he now expressed proved him to be a creature

of fine sensations, and did I not as his maker owe him all the portion

of happiness that it was in my power to bestow? He saw my change of

feeling and continued,

“If you consent, neither you nor any other human being shall ever see

us again; I will go to the vast wilds of South America. My food is not

that of man; I do not destroy the lamb and the kid to glut my appetite;

acorns and berries afford me sufficient nourishment. My companion will

be of the same nature as myself and will be content with the same fare.

We shall make our bed of dried leaves; the sun will shine on us as on

man and will ripen our food. The picture I present to you is peaceful

and human, and you must feel that you could deny it only in the

wantonness of power and cruelty. Pitiless as you have been towards me,

I now see compassion in your eyes; let me seize the favourable moment

and persuade you to promise what I so ardently desire.”

“You propose,” replied I, “to fly from the habitations of

man, to dwell in those wilds where the beasts of the field will be your

only companions. How can you, who long for the love and sympathy of man,

persevere in this exile? You will return and again seek their kindness, and

you will meet with their detestation; your evil passions will be renewed,

and you will then have a companion to aid you in the task of destruction.

This may not be; cease to argue the point, for I cannot consent.”

“How inconstant are your feelings! But a moment ago you were moved by

my representations, and why do you again harden yourself to my complaints?

I swear to you, by the earth which I inhabit, and by you that made me, that

with the companion you bestow, I will quit the neighbourhood of man and

dwell, as it may chance, in the most savage of places. My evil passions

will have fled, for I shall meet with sympathy! My life will flow quietly

away, and in my dying moments I shall not curse my maker.”

His words had a strange effect upon me. I compassionated him and

sometimes felt a wish to console him, but when I looked upon him, when

I saw the filthy mass that moved and talked, my heart sickened and my

feelings were altered to those of horror and hatred. I tried to stifle

these sensations; I thought that as I could not sympathise with him, I

had no right to withhold from him the small portion of happiness which

was yet in my power to bestow.

“You swear,” I said, “to be harmless; but have you not

already shown a degree of malice that should reasonably make me distrust

you? May not even this be a feint that will increase your triumph by

affording a wider scope for your revenge?”

“How is this? I must not be trifled with, and I demand an answer. If

I have no ties and no affections, hatred and vice must be my portion;

the love of another will destroy the cause of my crimes, and I shall

become a thing of whose existence everyone will be ignorant. My vices

are the children of a forced solitude that I abhor, and my virtues will

necessarily arise when I live in communion with an equal. I shall feel

the affections of a sensitive being and become linked to the chain of

existence and events from which I am now excluded.”

I paused some time to reflect on all he had related and the various

arguments which he had employed. I thought of the promise of virtues which

he had displayed on the opening of his existence and the subsequent blight

of all kindly feeling by the loathing and scorn which his protectors had

manifested towards him. His power and threats were not omitted in my

calculations; a creature who could exist in the ice-caves of the glaciers

and hide himself from pursuit among the ridges of inaccessible precipices

was a being possessing faculties it would be vain to cope with. After a

long pause of reflection I concluded that the justice due both to him and

my fellow creatures demanded of me that I should comply with his request.

Turning to him, therefore, I said,

“I consent to your demand, on your solemn oath to quit Europe for ever,

and every other place in the neighbourhood of man, as soon as I shall

deliver into your hands a female who will accompany you in your exile.”

“I swear,” he cried, “by the sun, and by the blue sky of

heaven, and by the fire of love that burns my heart, that if you grant my

prayer, while they exist you shall never behold me again. Depart to your

home and commence your labours; I shall watch their progress with

unutterable anxiety; and fear not but that when you are ready I shall

appear.”

Saying this, he suddenly quitted me, fearful, perhaps, of any change in

my sentiments. I saw him descend the mountain with greater speed than

the flight of an eagle, and quickly lost among the undulations of the

sea of ice.

His tale had occupied the whole day, and the sun was upon the verge of

the horizon when he departed. I knew that I ought to hasten my descent

towards the valley, as I should soon be encompassed in darkness; but my

heart was heavy, and my steps slow. The labour of winding among the

little paths of the mountain and fixing my feet firmly as I advanced

perplexed me, occupied as I was by the emotions which the occurrences

of the day had produced. Night was far advanced when I came to the

halfway resting-place and seated myself beside the fountain. The stars

shone at intervals as the clouds passed from over them; the dark pines

rose before me, and every here and there a broken tree lay on the

ground; it was a scene of wonderful solemnity and stirred strange

thoughts within me. I wept bitterly, and clasping my hands in agony, I

exclaimed, “Oh! stars and clouds and winds, ye are all about to mock

me; if ye really pity me, crush sensation and memory; let me become as

nought; but if not, depart, depart, and leave me in darkness.”

These were wild and miserable thoughts, but I cannot describe to you

how the eternal twinkling of the stars weighed upon me and how I

listened to every blast of wind as if it were a dull ugly siroc on its

way to consume me.

Morning dawned before I arrived at the village of Chamounix; I took no

rest, but returned immediately to Geneva. Even in my own heart I could

give no expression to my sensations—they weighed on me with a

mountain’s weight and their excess destroyed my agony beneath them.

Thus I returned home, and entering the house, presented myself to the

family. My haggard and wild appearance awoke intense alarm, but I

answered no question, scarcely did I speak. I felt as if I were placed

under a ban—as if I had no right to claim their sympathies—as if

never more might I enjoy companionship with them. Yet even thus I

loved them to adoration; and to save them, I resolved to dedicate

myself to my most abhorred task. The prospect of such an occupation

made every other circumstance of existence pass before me like a dream,

and that thought only had to me the reality of life.

Chapter 18

Day after day, week after week, passed away on my return to Geneva; and

I could not collect the courage to recommence my work. I feared the

vengeance of the disappointed fiend, yet I was unable to overcome my

repugnance to the task which was enjoined me. I found that I could not

compose a female without again devoting several months to profound

study and laborious disquisition. I had heard of some discoveries

having been made by an English philosopher, the knowledge of which was

material to my success, and I sometimes thought of obtaining my

father’s consent to visit England for this purpose; but I clung to

every pretence of delay and shrank from taking the first step in an

undertaking whose immediate necessity began to appear less absolute to

me. A change indeed had taken place in me; my health, which had

hitherto declined, was now much restored; and my spirits, when

unchecked by the memory of my unhappy promise, rose proportionably. My

father saw this change with pleasure, and he turned his thoughts

towards the best method of eradicating the remains of my melancholy,

which every now and then would return by fits, and with a devouring

blackness overcast the approaching sunshine. At these moments I took

refuge in the most perfect solitude. I passed whole days on the lake

alone in a little boat, watching the clouds and listening to the

rippling of the waves, silent and listless. But the fresh air and

bright sun seldom failed to restore me to some degree of composure, and

on my return I met the salutations of my friends with a readier smile

and a more cheerful heart.

It was after my return from one of these rambles that my father,

calling me aside, thus addressed me,

“I am happy to remark, my dear son, that you have resumed your former

pleasures and seem to be returning to yourself. And yet you are still

unhappy and still avoid our society. For some time I was lost in

conjecture as to the cause of this, but yesterday an idea struck me,

and if it is well founded, I conjure you to avow it. Reserve on such a

point would be not only useless, but draw down treble misery on us all.”

I trembled violently at his exordium, and my father continued—

“I confess, my son, that I have always looked forward to your

marriage with our dear Elizabeth as the tie of our domestic comfort and the

stay of my declining years. You were attached to each other from your

earliest infancy; you studied together, and appeared, in dispositions and

tastes, entirely suited to one another. But so blind is the experience of

man that what I conceived to be the best assistants to my plan may have

entirely destroyed it. You, perhaps, regard her as your sister, without any

wish that she might become your wife. Nay, you may have met with another

whom you may love; and considering yourself as bound in honour to

Elizabeth, this struggle may occasion the poignant misery which you appear

to feel.”

“My dear father, reassure yourself. I love my cousin tenderly and

sincerely. I never saw any woman who excited, as Elizabeth does, my

warmest admiration and affection. My future hopes and prospects are

entirely bound up in the expectation of our union.”

“The expression of your sentiments of this subject, my dear Victor,

gives me more pleasure than I have for some time experienced. If you

feel thus, we shall assuredly be happy, however present events may cast

a gloom over us. But it is this gloom which appears to have taken so

strong a hold of your mind that I wish to dissipate. Tell me,

therefore, whether you object to an immediate solemnisation of the

marriage. We have been unfortunate, and recent events have drawn us

from that everyday tranquillity befitting my years and infirmities. You

are younger; yet I do not suppose, possessed as you are of a competent

fortune, that an early marriage would at all interfere with any future

plans of honour and utility that you may have formed. Do not suppose,

however, that I wish to dictate happiness to you or that a delay on

your part would cause me any serious uneasiness. Interpret my words

with candour and answer me, I conjure you, with confidence and

sincerity.”

I listened to my father in silence and remained for some time incapable

of offering any reply. I revolved rapidly in my mind a multitude of

thoughts and endeavoured to arrive at some conclusion. Alas! To me

the idea of an immediate union with my Elizabeth was one of horror and

dismay. I was bound by a solemn promise which I had not yet fulfilled

and dared not break, or if I did, what manifold miseries might not

impend over me and my devoted family! Could I enter into a festival

with this deadly weight yet hanging round my neck and bowing me to the

ground? I must perform my engagement and let the monster depart with

his mate before I allowed myself to enjoy the delight of a union from

which I expected peace.

I remembered also the necessity imposed upon me of either journeying to

England or entering into a long correspondence with those philosophers

of that country whose knowledge and discoveries were of indispensable

use to me in my present undertaking. The latter method of obtaining

the desired intelligence was dilatory and unsatisfactory; besides, I

had an insurmountable aversion to the idea of engaging myself in my

loathsome task in my father’s house while in habits of familiar

intercourse with those I loved. I knew that a thousand fearful

accidents might occur, the slightest of which would disclose a tale to

thrill all connected with me with horror. I was aware also that I

should often lose all self-command, all capacity of hiding the

harrowing sensations that would possess me during the progress of my

unearthly occupation. I must absent myself from all I loved while thus

employed. Once commenced, it would quickly be achieved, and I might be

restored to my family in peace and happiness. My promise fulfilled,

the monster would depart for ever. Or (so my fond fancy imaged) some

accident might meanwhile occur to destroy him and put an end to my

slavery for ever.

These feelings dictated my answer to my father. I expressed a wish to

visit England, but concealing the true reasons of this request, I

clothed my desires under a guise which excited no suspicion, while I

urged my desire with an earnestness that easily induced my father to

comply. After so long a period of an absorbing melancholy that

resembled madness in its intensity and effects, he was glad to find

that I was capable of taking pleasure in the idea of such a journey,

and he hoped that change of scene and varied amusement would, before my

return, have restored me entirely to myself.

The duration of my absence was left to my own choice; a few months, or

at most a year, was the period contemplated. One paternal kind

precaution he had taken to ensure my having a companion. Without

previously communicating with me, he had, in concert with Elizabeth,

arranged that Clerval should join me at Strasburgh. This interfered

with the solitude I coveted for the prosecution of my task; yet at the

commencement of my journey the presence of my friend could in no way be

an impediment, and truly I rejoiced that thus I should be saved many

hours of lonely, maddening reflection. Nay, Henry might stand between

me and the intrusion of my foe. If I were alone, would he not at times

force his abhorred presence on me to remind me of my task or to

contemplate its progress?

To England, therefore, I was bound, and it was understood that my union

with Elizabeth should take place immediately on my return. My father’s

age rendered him extremely averse to delay. For myself, there was one

reward I promised myself from my detested toils—one consolation for my

unparalleled sufferings; it was the prospect of that day when,

enfranchised from my miserable slavery, I might claim Elizabeth and

forget the past in my union with her.

I now made arrangements for my journey, but one feeling haunted me

which filled me with fear and agitation. During my absence I should

leave my friends unconscious of the existence of their enemy and

unprotected from his attacks, exasperated as he might be by my

departure. But he had promised to follow me wherever I might go, and

would he not accompany me to England? This imagination was dreadful in

itself, but soothing inasmuch as it supposed the safety of my friends.

I was agonised with the idea of the possibility that the reverse of

this might happen. But through the whole period during which I was the

slave of my creature I allowed myself to be governed by the impulses of

the moment; and my present sensations strongly intimated that the fiend

would follow me and exempt my family from the danger of his

machinations.

It was in the latter end of September that I again quitted my native

country. My journey had been my own suggestion, and Elizabeth

therefore acquiesced, but she was filled with disquiet at the idea of

my suffering, away from her, the inroads of misery and grief. It had

been her care which provided me a companion in Clerval—and yet a man

is blind to a thousand minute circumstances which call forth a woman’s

sedulous attention. She longed to bid me hasten my return; a thousand

conflicting emotions rendered her mute as she bade me a tearful, silent

farewell.

I threw myself into the carriage that was to convey me away, hardly

knowing whither I was going, and careless of what was passing around.

I remembered only, and it was with a bitter anguish that I reflected on

it, to order that my chemical instruments should be packed to go with

me. Filled with dreary imaginations, I passed through many beautiful

and majestic scenes, but my eyes were fixed and unobserving. I could

only think of the bourne of my travels and the work which was to occupy

me whilst they endured.

After some days spent in listless indolence, during which I traversed

many leagues, I arrived at Strasburgh, where I waited two days for

Clerval. He came. Alas, how great was the contrast between us! He

was alive to every new scene, joyful when he saw the beauties of the

setting sun, and more happy when he beheld it rise and recommence a new

day. He pointed out to me the shifting colours of the landscape and

the appearances of the sky. “This is what it is to live,” he cried;

“now I enjoy existence! But you, my dear Frankenstein, wherefore are

you desponding and sorrowful!” In truth, I was occupied by gloomy

thoughts and neither saw the descent of the evening star nor the golden

sunrise reflected in the Rhine. And you, my friend, would be far more

amused with the journal of Clerval, who observed the scenery with an

eye of feeling and delight, than in listening to my reflections. I, a

miserable wretch, haunted by a curse that shut up every avenue to

enjoyment.

We had agreed to descend the Rhine in a boat from Strasburgh to

Rotterdam, whence we might take shipping for London. During this

voyage we passed many willowy islands and saw several beautiful towns.

We stayed a day at Mannheim, and on the fifth from our departure from

Strasburgh, arrived at Mainz. The course of the Rhine below Mainz

becomes much more picturesque. The river descends rapidly and winds

between hills, not high, but steep, and of beautiful forms. We saw

many ruined castles standing on the edges of precipices, surrounded by

black woods, high and inaccessible. This part of the Rhine, indeed,

presents a singularly variegated landscape. In one spot you view

rugged hills, ruined castles overlooking tremendous precipices, with

the dark Rhine rushing beneath; and on the sudden turn of a promontory,

flourishing vineyards with green sloping banks and a meandering river

and populous towns occupy the scene.

We travelled at the time of the vintage and heard the song of the labourers

as we glided down the stream. Even I, depressed in mind, and my spirits

continually agitated by gloomy feelings, even I was pleased. I lay at the

bottom of the boat, and as I gazed on the cloudless blue sky, I seemed to

drink in a tranquillity to which I had long been a stranger. And if these

were my sensations, who can describe those of Henry? He felt as if he had

been transported to Fairy-land and enjoyed a happiness seldom tasted by

man. “I have seen,” he said, “the most beautiful scenes

of my own country; I have visited the lakes of Lucerne and Uri, where the

snowy mountains descend almost perpendicularly to the water, casting black

and impenetrable shades, which would cause a gloomy and mournful appearance

were it not for the most verdant islands that relieve the eye by their gay

appearance; I have seen this lake agitated by a tempest, when the wind tore

up whirlwinds of water and gave you an idea of what the water-spout must be

on the great ocean; and the waves dash with fury the base of the mountain,

where the priest and his mistress were overwhelmed by an avalanche and

where their dying voices are still said to be heard amid the pauses of the

nightly wind; I have seen the mountains of La Valais, and the Pays de Vaud;

but this country, Victor, pleases me more than all those wonders. The

mountains of Switzerland are more majestic and strange, but there is a

charm in the banks of this divine river that I never before saw equalled.

Look at that castle which overhangs yon precipice; and that also on the

island, almost concealed amongst the foliage of those lovely trees; and now

that group of labourers coming from among their vines; and that village

half hid in the recess of the mountain. Oh, surely the spirit that inhabits

and guards this place has a soul more in harmony with man than those who

pile the glacier or retire to the inaccessible peaks of the mountains of

our own country.”

Clerval! Beloved friend! Even now it delights me to record your words and

to dwell on the praise of which you are so eminently deserving. He was a

being formed in the “very poetry of nature.” His wild and

enthusiastic imagination was chastened by the sensibility of his heart. His

soul overflowed with ardent affections, and his friendship was of that

devoted and wondrous nature that the worldly-minded teach us to look for only

in the imagination. But even human sympathies were not sufficient to

satisfy his eager mind. The scenery of external nature, which others regard

only with admiration, he loved with ardour:—

——The sounding cataract

Haunted him like a passion: the tall rock,

The mountain, and the deep and gloomy wood,

Their colours and their forms, were then to him

An appetite; a feeling, and a love,

That had no need of a remoter charm,

By thought supplied, or any interest

Unborrow’d from the eye.

[Wordsworth’s “Tintern Abbey”.]

And where does he now exist? Is this gentle and lovely being lost

for ever? Has this mind, so replete with ideas, imaginations fanciful

and magnificent, which formed a world, whose existence depended on the

life of its creator;—has this mind perished? Does it now only exist

in my memory? No, it is not thus; your form so divinely wrought, and

beaming with beauty, has decayed, but your spirit still visits and

consoles your unhappy friend.

Pardon this gush of sorrow; these ineffectual words are but a slight

tribute to the unexampled worth of Henry, but they soothe my heart,

overflowing with the anguish which his remembrance creates. I will

proceed with my tale.

Beyond Cologne we descended to the plains of Holland; and we resolved to

post the remainder of our way, for the wind was contrary and the stream of

the river was too gentle to aid us.

Our journey here lost the interest arising from beautiful scenery, but we

arrived in a few days at Rotterdam, whence we proceeded by sea to England.

It was on a clear morning, in the latter days of December, that I first saw

the white cliffs of Britain. The banks of the Thames presented a new scene;

they were flat but fertile, and almost every town was marked by the

remembrance of some story. We saw Tilbury Fort and remembered the Spanish

Armada, Gravesend, Woolwich, and Greenwich—places which I had heard

of even in my country.

At length we saw the numerous steeples of London, St. Paul’s towering

above all, and the Tower famed in English history.

Chapter 19

London was our present point of rest; we determined to remain several

months in this wonderful and celebrated city. Clerval desired the

intercourse of the men of genius and talent who flourished at this

time, but this was with me a secondary object; I was principally

occupied with the means of obtaining the information necessary for the

completion of my promise and quickly availed myself of the letters of

introduction that I had brought with me, addressed to the most

distinguished natural philosophers.

If this journey had taken place during my days of study and happiness,

it would have afforded me inexpressible pleasure. But a blight had

come over my existence, and I only visited these people for the sake of

the information they might give me on the subject in which my interest

was so terribly profound. Company was irksome to me; when alone, I

could fill my mind with the sights of heaven and earth; the voice of

Henry soothed me, and I could thus cheat myself into a transitory

peace. But busy, uninteresting, joyous faces brought back despair to

my heart. I saw an insurmountable barrier placed between me and my

fellow men; this barrier was sealed with the blood of William and

Justine, and to reflect on the events connected with those names filled

my soul with anguish.

But in Clerval I saw the image of my former self; he was inquisitive

and anxious to gain experience and instruction. The difference of

manners which he observed was to him an inexhaustible source of

instruction and amusement. He was also pursuing an object he had long

had in view. His design was to visit India, in the belief that he had

in his knowledge of its various languages, and in the views he had

taken of its society, the means of materially assisting the progress of

European colonization and trade. In Britain only could he further the

execution of his plan. He was for ever busy, and the only check to his

enjoyments was my sorrowful and dejected mind. I tried to conceal this

as much as possible, that I might not debar him from the pleasures

natural to one who was entering on a new scene of life, undisturbed by

any care or bitter recollection. I often refused to accompany him,

alleging another engagement, that I might remain alone. I now also

began to collect the materials necessary for my new creation, and this

was to me like the torture of single drops of water continually falling

on the head. Every thought that was devoted to it was an extreme

anguish, and every word that I spoke in allusion to it caused my lips

to quiver, and my heart to palpitate.

After passing some months in London, we received a letter from a person in

Scotland who had formerly been our visitor at Geneva. He mentioned the

beauties of his native country and asked us if those were not sufficient

allurements to induce us to prolong our journey as far north as Perth,

where he resided. Clerval eagerly desired to accept this invitation, and I,

although I abhorred society, wished to view again mountains and streams and

all the wondrous works with which Nature adorns her chosen dwelling-places.

We had arrived in England at the beginning of October, and it was now

February. We accordingly determined to commence our journey towards the

north at the expiration of another month. In this expedition we did not

intend to follow the great road to Edinburgh, but to visit Windsor, Oxford,

Matlock, and the Cumberland lakes, resolving to arrive at the completion of

this tour about the end of July. I packed up my chemical instruments and

the materials I had collected, resolving to finish my labours in some

obscure nook in the northern highlands of Scotland.

We quitted London on the 27th of March and remained a few days at

Windsor, rambling in its beautiful forest. This was a new scene to us

mountaineers; the majestic oaks, the quantity of game, and the herds of

stately deer were all novelties to us.

From thence we proceeded to Oxford. As we entered this city, our minds

were filled with the remembrance of the events that had been transacted

there more than a century and a half before. It was here that Charles

I. had collected his forces. This city had remained faithful to him,

after the whole nation had forsaken his cause to join the standard of

Parliament and liberty. The memory of that unfortunate king and his

companions, the amiable Falkland, the insolent Goring, his queen, and

son, gave a peculiar interest to every part of the city which they

might be supposed to have inhabited. The spirit of elder days found a

dwelling here, and we delighted to trace its footsteps. If these

feelings had not found an imaginary gratification, the appearance of

the city had yet in itself sufficient beauty to obtain our admiration.

The colleges are ancient and picturesque; the streets are almost

magnificent; and the lovely Isis, which flows beside it through meadows

of exquisite verdure, is spread forth into a placid expanse of waters,

which reflects its majestic assemblage of towers, and spires, and

domes, embosomed among aged trees.

I enjoyed this scene, and yet my enjoyment was embittered both by the

memory of the past and the anticipation of the future. I was formed

for peaceful happiness. During my youthful days discontent never

visited my mind, and if I was ever overcome by \_ennui\_, the sight of what

is beautiful in nature or the study of what is excellent and sublime in

the productions of man could always interest my heart and communicate

elasticity to my spirits. But I am a blasted tree; the bolt has

entered my soul; and I felt then that I should survive to exhibit what

I shall soon cease to be—a miserable spectacle of wrecked humanity,

pitiable to others and intolerable to myself.

We passed a considerable period at Oxford, rambling among its environs

and endeavouring to identify every spot which might relate to the most

animating epoch of English history. Our little voyages of discovery

were often prolonged by the successive objects that presented

themselves. We visited the tomb of the illustrious Hampden and the

field on which that patriot fell. For a moment my soul was elevated

from its debasing and miserable fears to contemplate the divine ideas

of liberty and self-sacrifice of which these sights were the monuments

and the remembrancers. For an instant I dared to shake off my chains

and look around me with a free and lofty spirit, but the iron had eaten

into my flesh, and I sank again, trembling and hopeless, into my

miserable self.

We left Oxford with regret and proceeded to Matlock, which was our next

place of rest. The country in the neighbourhood of this village

resembled, to a greater degree, the scenery of Switzerland; but

everything is on a lower scale, and the green hills want the crown of

distant white Alps which always attend on the piny mountains of my

native country. We visited the wondrous cave and the little cabinets

of natural history, where the curiosities are disposed in the same

manner as in the collections at Servox and Chamounix. The latter name

made me tremble when pronounced by Henry, and I hastened to quit

Matlock, with which that terrible scene was thus associated.

From Derby, still journeying northwards, we passed two months in

Cumberland and Westmorland. I could now almost fancy myself among the

Swiss mountains. The little patches of snow which yet lingered on the

northern sides of the mountains, the lakes, and the dashing of the

rocky streams were all familiar and dear sights to me. Here also we

made some acquaintances, who almost contrived to cheat me into

happiness. The delight of Clerval was proportionably greater than

mine; his mind expanded in the company of men of talent, and he found

in his own nature greater capacities and resources than he could have

imagined himself to have possessed while he associated with his

inferiors. “I could pass my life here,” said he to me; “and among

these mountains I should scarcely regret Switzerland and the Rhine.”

But he found that a traveller’s life is one that includes much pain

amidst its enjoyments. His feelings are for ever on the stretch; and

when he begins to sink into repose, he finds himself obliged to quit

that on which he rests in pleasure for something new, which again

engages his attention, and which also he forsakes for other novelties.

We had scarcely visited the various lakes of Cumberland and Westmorland

and conceived an affection for some of the inhabitants when the period

of our appointment with our Scotch friend approached, and we left them

to travel on. For my own part I was not sorry. I had now neglected my

promise for some time, and I feared the effects of the dæmon’s

disappointment. He might remain in Switzerland and wreak his vengeance

on my relatives. This idea pursued me and tormented me at every moment

from which I might otherwise have snatched repose and peace. I waited

for my letters with feverish impatience; if they were delayed I was

miserable and overcome by a thousand fears; and when they arrived and I

saw the superscription of Elizabeth or my father, I hardly dared to

read and ascertain my fate. Sometimes I thought that the fiend

followed me and might expedite my remissness by murdering my companion.

When these thoughts possessed me, I would not quit Henry for a moment,

but followed him as his shadow, to protect him from the fancied rage of

his destroyer. I felt as if I had committed some great crime, the

consciousness of which haunted me. I was guiltless, but I had indeed

drawn down a horrible curse upon my head, as mortal as that of crime.

I visited Edinburgh with languid eyes and mind; and yet that city might

have interested the most unfortunate being. Clerval did not like it so well

as Oxford, for the antiquity of the latter city was more pleasing to him.

But the beauty and regularity of the new town of Edinburgh, its romantic

castle and its environs, the most delightful in the world, Arthur’s

Seat, St. Bernard’s Well, and the Pentland Hills, compensated him for

the change and filled him with cheerfulness and admiration. But I was

impatient to arrive at the termination of my journey.

We left Edinburgh in a week, passing through Coupar, St. Andrew’s, and

along the banks of the Tay, to Perth, where our friend expected us.

But I was in no mood to laugh and talk with strangers or enter into

their feelings or plans with the good humour expected from a guest; and

accordingly I told Clerval that I wished to make the tour of Scotland

alone. “Do you,” said I, “enjoy yourself, and let this be our

rendezvous. I may be absent a month or two; but do not interfere with

my motions, I entreat you; leave me to peace and solitude for a short

time; and when I return, I hope it will be with a lighter heart, more

congenial to your own temper.”

Henry wished to dissuade me, but seeing me bent on this plan, ceased to

remonstrate. He entreated me to write often. “I had rather be with

you,” he said, “in your solitary rambles, than with these Scotch

people, whom I do not know; hasten, then, my dear friend, to return,

that I may again feel myself somewhat at home, which I cannot do in

your absence.”

Having parted from my friend, I determined to visit some remote spot of

Scotland and finish my work in solitude. I did not doubt but that the

monster followed me and would discover himself to me when I should have

finished, that he might receive his companion.

With this resolution I traversed the northern highlands and fixed on one of

the remotest of the Orkneys as the scene of my labours. It was a place

fitted for such a work, being hardly more than a rock whose high sides were

continually beaten upon by the waves. The soil was barren, scarcely

affording pasture for a few miserable cows, and oatmeal for its

inhabitants, which consisted of five persons, whose gaunt and scraggy limbs

gave tokens of their miserable fare. Vegetables and bread, when they

indulged in such luxuries, and even fresh water, was to be procured from

the mainland, which was about five miles distant.

On the whole island there were but three miserable huts, and one of

these was vacant when I arrived. This I hired. It contained but two

rooms, and these exhibited all the squalidness of the most miserable

penury. The thatch had fallen in, the walls were unplastered, and the

door was off its hinges. I ordered it to be repaired, bought some

furniture, and took possession, an incident which would doubtless have

occasioned some surprise had not all the senses of the cottagers been

benumbed by want and squalid poverty. As it was, I lived ungazed at

and unmolested, hardly thanked for the pittance of food and clothes

which I gave, so much does suffering blunt even the coarsest sensations

of men.

In this retreat I devoted the morning to labour; but in the evening,

when the weather permitted, I walked on the stony beach of the sea to

listen to the waves as they roared and dashed at my feet. It was a

monotonous yet ever-changing scene. I thought of Switzerland; it was

far different from this desolate and appalling landscape. Its hills

are covered with vines, and its cottages are scattered thickly in the

plains. Its fair lakes reflect a blue and gentle sky, and when

troubled by the winds, their tumult is but as the play of a lively

infant when compared to the roarings of the giant ocean.

In this manner I distributed my occupations when I first arrived, but

as I proceeded in my labour, it became every day more horrible and

irksome to me. Sometimes I could not prevail on myself to enter my

laboratory for several days, and at other times I toiled day and night

in order to complete my work. It was, indeed, a filthy process in

which I was engaged. During my first experiment, a kind of

enthusiastic frenzy had blinded me to the horror of my employment; my

mind was intently fixed on the consummation of my labour, and my eyes

were shut to the horror of my proceedings. But now I went to it in

cold blood, and my heart often sickened at the work of my hands.

Thus situated, employed in the most detestable occupation, immersed in

a solitude where nothing could for an instant call my attention from

the actual scene in which I was engaged, my spirits became unequal; I

grew restless and nervous. Every moment I feared to meet my

persecutor. Sometimes I sat with my eyes fixed on the ground, fearing

to raise them lest they should encounter the object which I so much

dreaded to behold. I feared to wander from the sight of my fellow

creatures lest when alone he should come to claim his companion.

In the mean time I worked on, and my labour was already considerably

advanced. I looked towards its completion with a tremulous and eager

hope, which I dared not trust myself to question but which was

intermixed with obscure forebodings of evil that made my heart sicken

in my bosom.

Chapter 20

I sat one evening in my laboratory; the sun had set, and the moon was just

rising from the sea; I had not sufficient light for my employment, and I

remained idle, in a pause of consideration of whether I should leave my

labour for the night or hasten its conclusion by an unremitting attention

to it. As I sat, a train of reflection occurred to me which led me to

consider the effects of what I was now doing. Three years before, I was

engaged in the same manner and had created a fiend whose unparalleled

barbarity had desolated my heart and filled it for ever with the bitterest

remorse. I was now about to form another being of whose dispositions I was

alike ignorant; she might become ten thousand times more malignant than her

mate and delight, for its own sake, in murder and wretchedness. He had

sworn to quit the neighbourhood of man and hide himself in deserts, but she

had not; and she, who in all probability was to become a thinking and

reasoning animal, might refuse to comply with a compact made before her

creation. They might even hate each other; the creature who already lived

loathed his own deformity, and might he not conceive a greater abhorrence

for it when it came before his eyes in the female form? She also might turn

with disgust from him to the superior beauty of man; she might quit him,

and he be again alone, exasperated by the fresh provocation of being

deserted by one of his own species.

Even if they were to leave Europe and inhabit the deserts of the new world,

yet one of the first results of those sympathies for which the dæmon

thirsted would be children, and a race of devils would be propagated upon

the earth who might make the very existence of the species of man a

condition precarious and full of terror. Had I right, for my own benefit,

to inflict this curse upon everlasting generations? I had before been moved

by the sophisms of the being I had created; I had been struck senseless by

his fiendish threats; but now, for the first time, the wickedness of my

promise burst upon me; I shuddered to think that future ages might curse me

as their pest, whose selfishness had not hesitated to buy its own peace at

the price, perhaps, of the existence of the whole human race.

I trembled and my heart failed within me, when, on looking up, I saw by

the light of the moon the dæmon at the casement. A ghastly grin

wrinkled his lips as he gazed on me, where I sat fulfilling the task

which he had allotted to me. Yes, he had followed me in my travels; he

had loitered in forests, hid himself in caves, or taken refuge in wide

and desert heaths; and he now came to mark my progress and claim the

fulfilment of my promise.

As I looked on him, his countenance expressed the utmost extent of

malice and treachery. I thought with a sensation of madness on my

promise of creating another like to him, and trembling with passion,

tore to pieces the thing on which I was engaged. The wretch saw me

destroy the creature on whose future existence he depended for

happiness, and with a howl of devilish despair and revenge, withdrew.

I left the room, and locking the door, made a solemn vow in my own

heart never to resume my labours; and then, with trembling steps, I

sought my own apartment. I was alone; none were near me to dissipate

the gloom and relieve me from the sickening oppression of the most

terrible reveries.

Several hours passed, and I remained near my window gazing on the sea;

it was almost motionless, for the winds were hushed, and all nature

reposed under the eye of the quiet moon. A few fishing vessels alone

specked the water, and now and then the gentle breeze wafted the sound

of voices as the fishermen called to one another. I felt the silence,

although I was hardly conscious of its extreme profundity, until my ear

was suddenly arrested by the paddling of oars near the shore, and a

person landed close to my house.

In a few minutes after, I heard the creaking of my door, as if some one

endeavoured to open it softly. I trembled from head to foot; I felt a

presentiment of who it was and wished to rouse one of the peasants who

dwelt in a cottage not far from mine; but I was overcome by the sensation

of helplessness, so often felt in frightful dreams, when you in vain

endeavour to fly from an impending danger, and was rooted to the spot.

Presently I heard the sound of footsteps along the passage; the door

opened, and the wretch whom I dreaded appeared. Shutting the door, he

approached me and said in a smothered voice,

“You have destroyed the work which you began; what is it that you

intend? Do you dare to break your promise? I have endured toil and misery;

I left Switzerland with you; I crept along the shores of the Rhine, among

its willow islands and over the summits of its hills. I have dwelt many

months in the heaths of England and among the deserts of Scotland. I have

endured incalculable fatigue, and cold, and hunger; do you dare destroy my

hopes?”

“Begone! I do break my promise; never will I create another like

yourself, equal in deformity and wickedness.”

“Slave, I before reasoned with you, but you have proved yourself

unworthy of my condescension. Remember that I have power; you believe

yourself miserable, but I can make you so wretched that the light of

day will be hateful to you. You are my creator, but I am your master;

obey!”

“The hour of my irresolution is past, and the period of your power is

arrived. Your threats cannot move me to do an act of wickedness; but

they confirm me in a determination of not creating you a companion in

vice. Shall I, in cool blood, set loose upon the earth a dæmon whose

delight is in death and wretchedness? Begone! I am firm, and your

words will only exasperate my rage.”

The monster saw my determination in my face and gnashed his teeth in the

impotence of anger. “Shall each man,” cried he, “find a

wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I had

feelings of affection, and they were requited by detestation and scorn.

Man! You may hate, but beware! Your hours will pass in dread and misery,

and soon the bolt will fall which must ravish from you your happiness for

ever. Are you to be happy while I grovel in the intensity of my

wretchedness? You can blast my other passions, but revenge

remains—revenge, henceforth dearer than light or food! I may die, but

first you, my tyrant and tormentor, shall curse the sun that gazes on your

misery. Beware, for I am fearless and therefore powerful. I will watch with

the wiliness of a snake, that I may sting with its venom. Man, you shall

repent of the injuries you inflict.”

“Devil, cease; and do not poison the air with these sounds of malice.

I have declared my resolution to you, and I am no coward to bend

beneath words. Leave me; I am inexorable.”

“It is well. I go; but remember, I shall be with you on your

wedding-night.”

I started forward and exclaimed, “Villain! Before you sign my

death-warrant, be sure that you are yourself safe.”

I would have seized him, but he eluded me and quitted the house with

precipitation. In a few moments I saw him in his boat, which shot

across the waters with an arrowy swiftness and was soon lost amidst the

waves.

All was again silent, but his words rang in my ears. I burned with rage to

pursue the murderer of my peace and precipitate him into the ocean. I

walked up and down my room hastily and perturbed, while my imagination

conjured up a thousand images to torment and sting me. Why had I not

followed him and closed with him in mortal strife? But I had suffered him

to depart, and he had directed his course towards the mainland. I shuddered

to think who might be the next victim sacrificed to his insatiate revenge.

And then I thought again of his words—“\_I will be with you on

your wedding-night.\_” That, then, was the period fixed for the

fulfilment of my destiny. In that hour I should die and at once satisfy and

extinguish his malice. The prospect did not move me to fear; yet when I

thought of my beloved Elizabeth, of her tears and endless sorrow, when she

should find her lover so barbarously snatched from her, tears, the first I

had shed for many months, streamed from my eyes, and I resolved not to fall

before my enemy without a bitter struggle.

The night passed away, and the sun rose from the ocean; my feelings became

calmer, if it may be called calmness when the violence of rage sinks into

the depths of despair. I left the house, the horrid scene of the last

night’s contention, and walked on the beach of the sea, which I

almost regarded as an insuperable barrier between me and my fellow

creatures; nay, a wish that such should prove the fact stole across me. I

desired that I might pass my life on that barren rock, wearily, it is true,

but uninterrupted by any sudden shock of misery. If I returned, it was to

be sacrificed or to see those whom I most loved die under the grasp of a

dæmon whom I had myself created.

I walked about the isle like a restless spectre, separated from all it

loved and miserable in the separation. When it became noon, and the

sun rose higher, I lay down on the grass and was overpowered by a deep

sleep. I had been awake the whole of the preceding night, my nerves

were agitated, and my eyes inflamed by watching and misery. The sleep

into which I now sank refreshed me; and when I awoke, I again felt as

if I belonged to a race of human beings like myself, and I began to

reflect upon what had passed with greater composure; yet still the

words of the fiend rang in my ears like a death-knell; they appeared

like a dream, yet distinct and oppressive as a reality.

The sun had far descended, and I still sat on the shore, satisfying my

appetite, which had become ravenous, with an oaten cake, when I saw a

fishing-boat land close to me, and one of the men brought me a packet;

it contained letters from Geneva, and one from Clerval entreating me to

join him. He said that he was wearing away his time fruitlessly where

he was, that letters from the friends he had formed in London desired

his return to complete the negotiation they had entered into for his

Indian enterprise. He could not any longer delay his departure; but as

his journey to London might be followed, even sooner than he now

conjectured, by his longer voyage, he entreated me to bestow as much of

my society on him as I could spare. He besought me, therefore, to

leave my solitary isle and to meet him at Perth, that we might proceed

southwards together. This letter in a degree recalled me to life, and

I determined to quit my island at the expiration of two days.

Yet, before I departed, there was a task to perform, on which I shuddered

to reflect; I must pack up my chemical instruments, and for that purpose I

must enter the room which had been the scene of my odious work, and I must

handle those utensils the sight of which was sickening to me. The next

morning, at daybreak, I summoned sufficient courage and unlocked the door

of my laboratory. The remains of the half-finished creature, whom I had

destroyed, lay scattered on the floor, and I almost felt as if I had

mangled the living flesh of a human being. I paused to collect myself and

then entered the chamber. With trembling hand I conveyed the instruments

out of the room, but I reflected that I ought not to leave the relics of my

work to excite the horror and suspicion of the peasants; and I accordingly

put them into a basket, with a great quantity of stones, and laying them

up, determined to throw them into the sea that very night; and in the

meantime I sat upon the beach, employed in cleaning and arranging my

chemical apparatus.

Nothing could be more complete than the alteration that had taken place

in my feelings since the night of the appearance of the dæmon. I had

before regarded my promise with a gloomy despair as a thing that, with

whatever consequences, must be fulfilled; but I now felt as if a film

had been taken from before my eyes and that I for the first time saw

clearly. The idea of renewing my labours did not for one instant occur

to me; the threat I had heard weighed on my thoughts, but I did not

reflect that a voluntary act of mine could avert it. I had resolved in

my own mind that to create another like the fiend I had first made

would be an act of the basest and most atrocious selfishness, and I

banished from my mind every thought that could lead to a different

conclusion.

Between two and three in the morning the moon rose; and I then, putting my

basket aboard a little skiff, sailed out about four miles from the shore.

The scene was perfectly solitary; a few boats were returning towards land,

but I sailed away from them. I felt as if I was about the commission of a

dreadful crime and avoided with shuddering anxiety any encounter with my

fellow creatures. At one time the moon, which had before been clear, was

suddenly overspread by a thick cloud, and I took advantage of the moment of

darkness and cast my basket into the sea; I listened to the gurgling sound

as it sank and then sailed away from the spot. The sky became clouded, but

the air was pure, although chilled by the northeast breeze that was then

rising. But it refreshed me and filled me with such agreeable sensations

that I resolved to prolong my stay on the water, and fixing the rudder in a

direct position, stretched myself at the bottom of the boat. Clouds hid the

moon, everything was obscure, and I heard only the sound of the boat as its

keel cut through the waves; the murmur lulled me, and in a short time I

slept soundly.

I do not know how long I remained in this situation, but when I awoke I

found that the sun had already mounted considerably. The wind was high, and

the waves continually threatened the safety of my little skiff. I found

that the wind was northeast and must have driven me far from the coast from

which I had embarked. I endeavoured to change my course but quickly found

that if I again made the attempt the boat would be instantly filled with

water. Thus situated, my only resource was to drive before the wind. I

confess that I felt a few sensations of terror. I had no compass with me

and was so slenderly acquainted with the geography of this part of the

world that the sun was of little benefit to me. I might be driven into the

wide Atlantic and feel all the tortures of starvation or be swallowed up in

the immeasurable waters that roared and buffeted around me. I had already

been out many hours and felt the torment of a burning thirst, a prelude to

my other sufferings. I looked on the heavens, which were covered by clouds

that flew before the wind, only to be replaced by others; I looked upon the

sea; it was to be my grave. “Fiend,” I exclaimed, “your

task is already fulfilled!” I thought of Elizabeth, of my father, and

of Clerval—all left behind, on whom the monster might satisfy his

sanguinary and merciless passions. This idea plunged me into a reverie so

despairing and frightful that even now, when the scene is on the point of

closing before me for ever, I shudder to reflect on it.

Some hours passed thus; but by degrees, as the sun declined towards the

horizon, the wind died away into a gentle breeze and the sea became

free from breakers. But these gave place to a heavy swell; I felt sick

and hardly able to hold the rudder, when suddenly I saw a line of high

land towards the south.

Almost spent, as I was, by fatigue and the dreadful suspense I endured

for several hours, this sudden certainty of life rushed like a flood of

warm joy to my heart, and tears gushed from my eyes.

How mutable are our feelings, and how strange is that clinging love we have

of life even in the excess of misery! I constructed another sail with a

part of my dress and eagerly steered my course towards the land. It had a

wild and rocky appearance, but as I approached nearer I easily perceived

the traces of cultivation. I saw vessels near the shore and found myself

suddenly transported back to the neighbourhood of civilised man. I

carefully traced the windings of the land and hailed a steeple which I at

length saw issuing from behind a small promontory. As I was in a state of

extreme debility, I resolved to sail directly towards the town, as a place

where I could most easily procure nourishment. Fortunately I had money with

me. As I turned the promontory I perceived a small neat town and a good

harbour, which I entered, my heart bounding with joy at my unexpected

escape.

As I was occupied in fixing the boat and arranging the sails, several

people crowded towards the spot. They seemed much surprised at my

appearance, but instead of offering me any assistance, whispered

together with gestures that at any other time might have produced in me

a slight sensation of alarm. As it was, I merely remarked that they

spoke English, and I therefore addressed them in that language. “My

good friends,” said I, “will you be so kind as to tell me the name of

this town and inform me where I am?”

“You will know that soon enough,” replied a man with a hoarse voice.

“Maybe you are come to a place that will not prove much to your taste,

but you will not be consulted as to your quarters, I promise you.”

I was exceedingly surprised on receiving so rude an answer from a

stranger, and I was also disconcerted on perceiving the frowning and

angry countenances of his companions. “Why do you answer me so

roughly?” I replied. “Surely it is not the custom of Englishmen to

receive strangers so inhospitably.”

“I do not know,” said the man, “what the custom of the

English may be, but it is the custom of the Irish to hate villains.”

While this strange dialogue continued, I perceived the crowd rapidly

increase. Their faces expressed a mixture of curiosity and anger, which

annoyed and in some degree alarmed me. I inquired the way to the inn, but

no one replied. I then moved forward, and a murmuring sound arose from the

crowd as they followed and surrounded me, when an ill-looking man

approaching tapped me on the shoulder and said, “Come, sir, you must

follow me to Mr. Kirwin’s to give an account of yourself.”

“Who is Mr. Kirwin? Why am I to give an account of myself? Is not

this a free country?”

“Ay, sir, free enough for honest folks. Mr. Kirwin is a magistrate,

and you are to give an account of the death of a gentleman who was

found murdered here last night.”

This answer startled me, but I presently recovered myself. I was innocent;

that could easily be proved; accordingly I followed my conductor in silence

and was led to one of the best houses in the town. I was ready to sink from

fatigue and hunger, but being surrounded by a crowd, I thought it politic

to rouse all my strength, that no physical debility might be construed into

apprehension or conscious guilt. Little did I then expect the calamity that

was in a few moments to overwhelm me and extinguish in horror and despair

all fear of ignominy or death.

I must pause here, for it requires all my fortitude to recall the memory of

the frightful events which I am about to relate, in proper detail, to my

recollection.

Chapter 21

I was soon introduced into the presence of the magistrate, an old

benevolent man with calm and mild manners. He looked upon me, however,

with some degree of severity, and then, turning towards my conductors,

he asked who appeared as witnesses on this occasion.

About half a dozen men came forward; and, one being selected by the

magistrate, he deposed that he had been out fishing the night before with

his son and brother-in-law, Daniel Nugent, when, about ten o’clock,

they observed a strong northerly blast rising, and they accordingly put in

for port. It was a very dark night, as the moon had not yet risen; they did

not land at the harbour, but, as they had been accustomed, at a creek about

two miles below. He walked on first, carrying a part of the fishing tackle,

and his companions followed him at some distance. As he was proceeding

along the sands, he struck his foot against something and fell at his

length on the ground. His companions came up to assist him, and by the

light of their lantern they found that he had fallen on the body of a man,

who was to all appearance dead. Their first supposition was that it was the

corpse of some person who had been drowned and was thrown on shore by the

waves, but on examination they found that the clothes were not wet and even

that the body was not then cold. They instantly carried it to the cottage

of an old woman near the spot and endeavoured, but in vain, to restore it

to life. It appeared to be a handsome young man, about five and twenty

years of age. He had apparently been strangled, for there was no sign of

any violence except the black mark of fingers on his neck.

The first part of this deposition did not in the least interest me, but

when the mark of the fingers was mentioned I remembered the murder of

my brother and felt myself extremely agitated; my limbs trembled, and a

mist came over my eyes, which obliged me to lean on a chair for

support. The magistrate observed me with a keen eye and of course drew

an unfavourable augury from my manner.

The son confirmed his father’s account, but when Daniel Nugent was

called he swore positively that just before the fall of his companion, he

saw a boat, with a single man in it, at a short distance from the shore;

and as far as he could judge by the light of a few stars, it was the same

boat in which I had just landed.

A woman deposed that she lived near the beach and was standing at the door

of her cottage, waiting for the return of the fishermen, about an hour

before she heard of the discovery of the body, when she saw a boat with

only one man in it push off from that part of the shore where the corpse

was afterwards found.

Another woman confirmed the account of the fishermen having brought the

body into her house; it was not cold. They put it into a bed and

rubbed it, and Daniel went to the town for an apothecary, but life was

quite gone.

Several other men were examined concerning my landing, and they agreed

that, with the strong north wind that had arisen during the night, it

was very probable that I had beaten about for many hours and had been

obliged to return nearly to the same spot from which I had departed.

Besides, they observed that it appeared that I had brought the body

from another place, and it was likely that as I did not appear to know

the shore, I might have put into the harbour ignorant of the distance

of the town of —— from the place where I had deposited the corpse.

Mr. Kirwin, on hearing this evidence, desired that I should be taken into

the room where the body lay for interment, that it might be observed what

effect the sight of it would produce upon me. This idea was probably

suggested by the extreme agitation I had exhibited when the mode of the

murder had been described. I was accordingly conducted, by the magistrate

and several other persons, to the inn. I could not help being struck by the

strange coincidences that had taken place during this eventful night; but,

knowing that I had been conversing with several persons in the island I had

inhabited about the time that the body had been found, I was perfectly

tranquil as to the consequences of the affair.

I entered the room where the corpse lay and was led up to the coffin. How

can I describe my sensations on beholding it? I feel yet parched with

horror, nor can I reflect on that terrible moment without shuddering and

agony. The examination, the presence of the magistrate and witnesses,

passed like a dream from my memory when I saw the lifeless form of Henry

Clerval stretched before me. I gasped for breath, and throwing myself on

the body, I exclaimed, “Have my murderous machinations deprived you

also, my dearest Henry, of life? Two I have already destroyed; other

victims await their destiny; but you, Clerval, my friend, my

benefactor—”

The human frame could no longer support the agonies that I endured, and

I was carried out of the room in strong convulsions.

A fever succeeded to this. I lay for two months on the point of death; my

ravings, as I afterwards heard, were frightful; I called myself the

murderer of William, of Justine, and of Clerval. Sometimes I entreated my

attendants to assist me in the destruction of the fiend by whom I was

tormented; and at others I felt the fingers of the monster already grasping

my neck, and screamed aloud with agony and terror. Fortunately, as I spoke

my native language, Mr. Kirwin alone understood me; but my gestures and

bitter cries were sufficient to affright the other witnesses.

Why did I not die? More miserable than man ever was before, why did I not

sink into forgetfulness and rest? Death snatches away many blooming

children, the only hopes of their doting parents; how many brides and

youthful lovers have been one day in the bloom of health and hope, and the

next a prey for worms and the decay of the tomb! Of what materials was I

made that I could thus resist so many shocks, which, like the turning of

the wheel, continually renewed the torture?

But I was doomed to live and in two months found myself as awaking from

a dream, in a prison, stretched on a wretched bed, surrounded by

gaolers, turnkeys, bolts, and all the miserable apparatus of a dungeon.

It was morning, I remember, when I thus awoke to understanding; I had

forgotten the particulars of what had happened and only felt as if some

great misfortune had suddenly overwhelmed me; but when I looked around

and saw the barred windows and the squalidness of the room in which I

was, all flashed across my memory and I groaned bitterly.

This sound disturbed an old woman who was sleeping in a chair beside

me. She was a hired nurse, the wife of one of the turnkeys, and her

countenance expressed all those bad qualities which often characterise

that class. The lines of her face were hard and rude, like that of

persons accustomed to see without sympathising in sights of misery. Her

tone expressed her entire indifference; she addressed me in English,

and the voice struck me as one that I had heard during my sufferings.

“Are you better now, sir?” said she.

I replied in the same language, with a feeble voice, “I believe I am;

but if it be all true, if indeed I did not dream, I am sorry that I am

still alive to feel this misery and horror.”

“For that matter,” replied the old woman, “if you mean about the

gentleman you murdered, I believe that it were better for you if you

were dead, for I fancy it will go hard with you! However, that’s none

of my business; I am sent to nurse you and get you well; I do my duty

with a safe conscience; it were well if everybody did the same.”

I turned with loathing from the woman who could utter so unfeeling a

speech to a person just saved, on the very edge of death; but I felt

languid and unable to reflect on all that had passed. The whole series

of my life appeared to me as a dream; I sometimes doubted if indeed it

were all true, for it never presented itself to my mind with the force

of reality.

As the images that floated before me became more distinct, I grew

feverish; a darkness pressed around me; no one was near me who soothed

me with the gentle voice of love; no dear hand supported me. The

physician came and prescribed medicines, and the old woman prepared

them for me; but utter carelessness was visible in the first, and the

expression of brutality was strongly marked in the visage of the

second. Who could be interested in the fate of a murderer but the

hangman who would gain his fee?

These were my first reflections, but I soon learned that Mr. Kirwin had

shown me extreme kindness. He had caused the best room in the prison

to be prepared for me (wretched indeed was the best); and it was he who

had provided a physician and a nurse. It is true, he seldom came to

see me, for although he ardently desired to relieve the sufferings of

every human creature, he did not wish to be present at the agonies and

miserable ravings of a murderer. He came, therefore, sometimes to see

that I was not neglected, but his visits were short and with long

intervals.

One day, while I was gradually recovering, I was seated in a chair, my eyes

half open and my cheeks livid like those in death. I was overcome by gloom

and misery and often reflected I had better seek death than desire to

remain in a world which to me was replete with wretchedness. At one time I

considered whether I should not declare myself guilty and suffer the

penalty of the law, less innocent than poor Justine had been. Such were my

thoughts when the door of my apartment was opened and Mr. Kirwin entered.

His countenance expressed sympathy and compassion; he drew a chair close to

mine and addressed me in French,

“I fear that this place is very shocking to you; can I do anything to

make you more comfortable?”

“I thank you, but all that you mention is nothing to me; on the whole

earth there is no comfort which I am capable of receiving.”

“I know that the sympathy of a stranger can be but of little relief to

one borne down as you are by so strange a misfortune. But you will, I

hope, soon quit this melancholy abode, for doubtless evidence can

easily be brought to free you from the criminal charge.”

“That is my least concern; I am, by a course of strange events, become

the most miserable of mortals. Persecuted and tortured as I am and

have been, can death be any evil to me?”

“Nothing indeed could be more unfortunate and agonising than the

strange chances that have lately occurred. You were thrown, by some

surprising accident, on this shore, renowned for its hospitality,

seized immediately, and charged with murder. The first sight that was

presented to your eyes was the body of your friend, murdered in so

unaccountable a manner and placed, as it were, by some fiend across

your path.”

As Mr. Kirwin said this, notwithstanding the agitation I endured on

this retrospect of my sufferings, I also felt considerable surprise at

the knowledge he seemed to possess concerning me. I suppose some

astonishment was exhibited in my countenance, for Mr. Kirwin hastened

to say,

“Immediately upon your being taken ill, all the papers that were on

your person were brought me, and I examined them that I might discover some

trace by which I could send to your relations an account of your misfortune

and illness. I found several letters, and, among others, one which I

discovered from its commencement to be from your father. I instantly wrote

to Geneva; nearly two months have elapsed since the departure of my letter.

But you are ill; even now you tremble; you are unfit for agitation of any

kind.”

“This suspense is a thousand times worse than the most horrible event;

tell me what new scene of death has been acted, and whose murder I am

now to lament?”

“Your family is perfectly well,” said Mr. Kirwin with

gentleness; “and someone, a friend, is come to visit you.”

I know not by what chain of thought the idea presented itself, but it

instantly darted into my mind that the murderer had come to mock at my

misery and taunt me with the death of Clerval, as a new incitement for

me to comply with his hellish desires. I put my hand before my eyes,

and cried out in agony,

“Oh! Take him away! I cannot see him; for God’s sake, do not

let him enter!”

Mr. Kirwin regarded me with a troubled countenance. He could not help

regarding my exclamation as a presumption of my guilt and said in

rather a severe tone,

“I should have thought, young man, that the presence of your father

would have been welcome instead of inspiring such violent repugnance.”

“My father!” cried I, while every feature and every muscle was relaxed

from anguish to pleasure. “Is my father indeed come? How kind, how

very kind! But where is he, why does he not hasten to me?”

My change of manner surprised and pleased the magistrate; perhaps he

thought that my former exclamation was a momentary return of delirium,

and now he instantly resumed his former benevolence. He rose and

quitted the room with my nurse, and in a moment my father entered it.

Nothing, at this moment, could have given me greater pleasure than the

arrival of my father. I stretched out my hand to him and cried,

“Are you then safe—and Elizabeth—and Ernest?”

My father calmed me with assurances of their welfare and endeavoured, by

dwelling on these subjects so interesting to my heart, to raise my

desponding spirits; but he soon felt that a prison cannot be the abode of

cheerfulness. “What a place is this that you inhabit, my son!”

said he, looking mournfully at the barred windows and wretched appearance

of the room. “You travelled to seek happiness, but a fatality seems

to pursue you. And poor Clerval—”

The name of my unfortunate and murdered friend was an agitation too

great to be endured in my weak state; I shed tears.

“Alas! Yes, my father,” replied I; “some destiny of the

most horrible kind hangs over me, and I must live to fulfil it, or surely I

should have died on the coffin of Henry.”

We were not allowed to converse for any length of time, for the

precarious state of my health rendered every precaution necessary that

could ensure tranquillity. Mr. Kirwin came in and insisted that my

strength should not be exhausted by too much exertion. But the

appearance of my father was to me like that of my good angel, and I

gradually recovered my health.

As my sickness quitted me, I was absorbed by a gloomy and black

melancholy that nothing could dissipate. The image of Clerval was

for ever before me, ghastly and murdered. More than once the agitation

into which these reflections threw me made my friends dread a dangerous

relapse. Alas! Why did they preserve so miserable and detested a

life? It was surely that I might fulfil my destiny, which is now

drawing to a close. Soon, oh, very soon, will death extinguish these

throbbings and relieve me from the mighty weight of anguish that bears

me to the dust; and, in executing the award of justice, I shall also

sink to rest. Then the appearance of death was distant, although the

wish was ever present to my thoughts; and I often sat for hours

motionless and speechless, wishing for some mighty revolution that

might bury me and my destroyer in its ruins.

The season of the assizes approached. I had already been three months

in prison, and although I was still weak and in continual danger of a

relapse, I was obliged to travel nearly a hundred miles to the country

town where the court was held. Mr. Kirwin charged himself with every

care of collecting witnesses and arranging my defence. I was spared

the disgrace of appearing publicly as a criminal, as the case was not

brought before the court that decides on life and death. The grand

jury rejected the bill, on its being proved that I was on the Orkney

Islands at the hour the body of my friend was found; and a fortnight

after my removal I was liberated from prison.

My father was enraptured on finding me freed from the vexations of a

criminal charge, that I was again allowed to breathe the fresh

atmosphere and permitted to return to my native country. I did not

participate in these feelings, for to me the walls of a dungeon or a

palace were alike hateful. The cup of life was poisoned for ever, and

although the sun shone upon me, as upon the happy and gay of heart, I

saw around me nothing but a dense and frightful darkness, penetrated by

no light but the glimmer of two eyes that glared upon me. Sometimes

they were the expressive eyes of Henry, languishing in death, the dark

orbs nearly covered by the lids and the long black lashes that fringed

them; sometimes it was the watery, clouded eyes of the monster, as I

first saw them in my chamber at Ingolstadt.

My father tried to awaken in me the feelings of affection. He talked

of Geneva, which I should soon visit, of Elizabeth and Ernest; but

these words only drew deep groans from me. Sometimes, indeed, I felt a

wish for happiness and thought with melancholy delight of my beloved

cousin or longed, with a devouring \_maladie du pays\_, to see once more

the blue lake and rapid Rhone, that had been so dear to me in early

childhood; but my general state of feeling was a torpor in which a

prison was as welcome a residence as the divinest scene in nature; and

these fits were seldom interrupted but by paroxysms of anguish and

despair. At these moments I often endeavoured to put an end to the

existence I loathed, and it required unceasing attendance and vigilance

to restrain me from committing some dreadful act of violence.

Yet one duty remained to me, the recollection of which finally

triumphed over my selfish despair. It was necessary that I should

return without delay to Geneva, there to watch over the lives of those

I so fondly loved and to lie in wait for the murderer, that if any

chance led me to the place of his concealment, or if he dared again to

blast me by his presence, I might, with unfailing aim, put an end to

the existence of the monstrous image which I had endued with the

mockery of a soul still more monstrous. My father still desired to

delay our departure, fearful that I could not sustain the fatigues of a

journey, for I was a shattered wreck—the shadow of a human being. My

strength was gone. I was a mere skeleton, and fever night and day

preyed upon my wasted frame.

Still, as I urged our leaving Ireland with such inquietude and impatience,

my father thought it best to yield. We took our passage on board a vessel

bound for Havre-de-Grace and sailed with a fair wind from the Irish shores.

It was midnight. I lay on the deck looking at the stars and listening to

the dashing of the waves. I hailed the darkness that shut Ireland from my

sight, and my pulse beat with a feverish joy when I reflected that I should

soon see Geneva. The past appeared to me in the light of a frightful dream;

yet the vessel in which I was, the wind that blew me from the detested

shore of Ireland, and the sea which surrounded me, told me too forcibly

that I was deceived by no vision and that Clerval, my friend and dearest

companion, had fallen a victim to me and the monster of my creation. I

repassed, in my memory, my whole life; my quiet happiness while residing

with my family in Geneva, the death of my mother, and my departure for

Ingolstadt. I remembered, shuddering, the mad enthusiasm that hurried me on

to the creation of my hideous enemy, and I called to mind the night in

which he first lived. I was unable to pursue the train of thought; a

thousand feelings pressed upon me, and I wept bitterly.

Ever since my recovery from the fever, I had been in the custom of taking

every night a small quantity of laudanum, for it was by means of this drug

only that I was enabled to gain the rest necessary for the preservation of

life. Oppressed by the recollection of my various misfortunes, I now

swallowed double my usual quantity and soon slept profoundly. But sleep did

not afford me respite from thought and misery; my dreams presented a

thousand objects that scared me. Towards morning I was possessed by a kind

of nightmare; I felt the fiend’s grasp in my neck and could not free

myself from it; groans and cries rang in my ears. My father, who was

watching over me, perceiving my restlessness, awoke me; the dashing waves

were around, the cloudy sky above, the fiend was not here: a sense of

security, a feeling that a truce was established between the present hour

and the irresistible, disastrous future imparted to me a kind of calm

forgetfulness, of which the human mind is by its structure peculiarly

susceptible.

Chapter 22

The voyage came to an end. We landed, and proceeded to Paris. I soon

found that I had overtaxed my strength and that I must repose before I

could continue my journey. My father’s care and attentions were

indefatigable, but he did not know the origin of my sufferings and

sought erroneous methods to remedy the incurable ill. He wished me to

seek amusement in society. I abhorred the face of man. Oh, not

abhorred! They were my brethren, my fellow beings, and I felt

attracted even to the most repulsive among them, as to creatures of an

angelic nature and celestial mechanism. But I felt that I had no right

to share their intercourse. I had unchained an enemy among them whose

joy it was to shed their blood and to revel in their groans. How they

would, each and all, abhor me and hunt me from the world, did they know

my unhallowed acts and the crimes which had their source in me!

My father yielded at length to my desire to avoid society and strove by

various arguments to banish my despair. Sometimes he thought that I

felt deeply the degradation of being obliged to answer a charge of

murder, and he endeavoured to prove to me the futility of pride.

“Alas! My father,” said I, “how little do you know me.

Human beings, their feelings and passions, would indeed be degraded if such

a wretch as I felt pride. Justine, poor unhappy Justine, was as innocent

as I, and she suffered the same charge; she died for it; and I am the cause

of this—I murdered her. William, Justine, and Henry—they all

died by my hands.”

My father had often, during my imprisonment, heard me make the same

assertion; when I thus accused myself, he sometimes seemed to desire an

explanation, and at others he appeared to consider it as the offspring of

delirium, and that, during my illness, some idea of this kind had presented

itself to my imagination, the remembrance of which I preserved in my

convalescence. I avoided explanation and maintained a continual silence

concerning the wretch I had created. I had a persuasion that I should be

supposed mad, and this in itself would for ever have chained my tongue. But,

besides, I could not bring myself to disclose a secret which would fill my

hearer with consternation and make fear and unnatural horror the inmates of

his breast. I checked, therefore, my impatient thirst for sympathy and was

silent when I would have given the world to have confided the fatal secret.

Yet, still, words like those I have recorded would burst uncontrollably

from me. I could offer no explanation of them, but their truth in part

relieved the burden of my mysterious woe.

Upon this occasion my father said, with an expression of unbounded wonder,

“My dearest Victor, what infatuation is this? My dear son, I entreat

you never to make such an assertion again.”

“I am not mad,” I cried energetically; “the sun and the heavens, who

have viewed my operations, can bear witness of my truth. I am the

assassin of those most innocent victims; they died by my machinations.

A thousand times would I have shed my own blood, drop by drop, to have

saved their lives; but I could not, my father, indeed I could not

sacrifice the whole human race.”

The conclusion of this speech convinced my father that my ideas were

deranged, and he instantly changed the subject of our conversation and

endeavoured to alter the course of my thoughts. He wished as much as

possible to obliterate the memory of the scenes that had taken place in

Ireland and never alluded to them or suffered me to speak of my

misfortunes.

As time passed away I became more calm; misery had her dwelling in my

heart, but I no longer talked in the same incoherent manner of my own

crimes; sufficient for me was the consciousness of them. By the utmost

self-violence I curbed the imperious voice of wretchedness, which

sometimes desired to declare itself to the whole world, and my manners

were calmer and more composed than they had ever been since my journey

to the sea of ice.

A few days before we left Paris on our way to Switzerland, I received the

following letter from Elizabeth:

“My dear Friend,

“It gave me the greatest pleasure to receive a letter from my uncle

dated at Paris; you are no longer at a formidable distance, and I may

hope to see you in less than a fortnight. My poor cousin, how much you

must have suffered! I expect to see you looking even more ill than

when you quitted Geneva. This winter has been passed most miserably,

tortured as I have been by anxious suspense; yet I hope to see peace in

your countenance and to find that your heart is not totally void of

comfort and tranquillity.

“Yet I fear that the same feelings now exist that made you so miserable

a year ago, even perhaps augmented by time. I would not disturb you at

this period, when so many misfortunes weigh upon you, but a

conversation that I had with my uncle previous to his departure renders

some explanation necessary before we meet.

Explanation! You may possibly say, What can Elizabeth have to explain? If

you really say this, my questions are answered and all my doubts satisfied.

But you are distant from me, and it is possible that you may dread and yet

be pleased with this explanation; and in a probability of this being the

case, I dare not any longer postpone writing what, during your absence, I

have often wished to express to you but have never had the courage to begin.

“You well know, Victor, that our union had been the favourite plan of

your parents ever since our infancy. We were told this when young, and

taught to look forward to it as an event that would certainly take

place. We were affectionate playfellows during childhood, and, I

believe, dear and valued friends to one another as we grew older. But

as brother and sister often entertain a lively affection towards each

other without desiring a more intimate union, may not such also be our

case? Tell me, dearest Victor. Answer me, I conjure you by our mutual

happiness, with simple truth—Do you not love another?

“You have travelled; you have spent several years of your life at

Ingolstadt; and I confess to you, my friend, that when I saw you last

autumn so unhappy, flying to solitude from the society of every

creature, I could not help supposing that you might regret our

connection and believe yourself bound in honour to fulfil the wishes of

your parents, although they opposed themselves to your inclinations.

But this is false reasoning. I confess to you, my friend, that I love

you and that in my airy dreams of futurity you have been my constant

friend and companion. But it is your happiness I desire as well as my

own when I declare to you that our marriage would render me eternally

miserable unless it were the dictate of your own free choice. Even now

I weep to think that, borne down as you are by the cruellest

misfortunes, you may stifle, by the word \_honour\_, all hope of that

love and happiness which would alone restore you to yourself. I, who

have so disinterested an affection for you, may increase your miseries

tenfold by being an obstacle to your wishes. Ah! Victor, be assured

that your cousin and playmate has too sincere a love for you not to be

made miserable by this supposition. Be happy, my friend; and if you

obey me in this one request, remain satisfied that nothing on earth

will have the power to interrupt my tranquillity.

“Do not let this letter disturb you; do not answer tomorrow, or the

next day, or even until you come, if it will give you pain. My uncle

will send me news of your health, and if I see but one smile on your

lips when we meet, occasioned by this or any other exertion of mine, I

shall need no other happiness.

“Elizabeth Lavenza.

“Geneva, May 18th, 17—”

This letter revived in my memory what I had before forgotten, the threat of

the fiend—“\_I will be with you on your

wedding-night!\_” Such was my sentence, and on that night would the

dæmon employ every art to destroy me and tear me from the glimpse of

happiness which promised partly to console my sufferings. On that night he

had determined to consummate his crimes by my death. Well, be it so; a

deadly struggle would then assuredly take place, in which if he were

victorious I should be at peace and his power over me be at an end. If he

were vanquished, I should be a free man. Alas! What freedom? Such as the

peasant enjoys when his family have been massacred before his eyes, his

cottage burnt, his lands laid waste, and he is turned adrift, homeless,

penniless, and alone, but free. Such would be my liberty except that in my

Elizabeth I possessed a treasure, alas, balanced by those horrors of

remorse and guilt which would pursue me until death.

Sweet and beloved Elizabeth! I read and reread her letter, and some

softened feelings stole into my heart and dared to whisper paradisiacal

dreams of love and joy; but the apple was already eaten, and the

angel’s arm bared to drive me from all hope. Yet I would die to make

her happy. If the monster executed his threat, death was inevitable; yet,

again, I considered whether my marriage would hasten my fate. My

destruction might indeed arrive a few months sooner, but if my torturer

should suspect that I postponed it, influenced by his menaces, he would

surely find other and perhaps more dreadful means of revenge. He had vowed

\_to be with me on my wedding-night\_, yet he did not consider that

threat as binding him to peace in the meantime, for as if to show me that

he was not yet satiated with blood, he had murdered Clerval immediately

after the enunciation of his threats. I resolved, therefore, that if my

immediate union with my cousin would conduce either to hers or my

father’s happiness, my adversary’s designs against my life

should not retard it a single hour.

In this state of mind I wrote to Elizabeth. My letter was calm and

affectionate. “I fear, my beloved girl,” I said, “little happiness

remains for us on earth; yet all that I may one day enjoy is centred in

you. Chase away your idle fears; to you alone do I consecrate my life

and my endeavours for contentment. I have one secret, Elizabeth, a

dreadful one; when revealed to you, it will chill your frame with

horror, and then, far from being surprised at my misery, you will only

wonder that I survive what I have endured. I will confide this tale of

misery and terror to you the day after our marriage shall take place,

for, my sweet cousin, there must be perfect confidence between us. But

until then, I conjure you, do not mention or allude to it. This I most

earnestly entreat, and I know you will comply.”

In about a week after the arrival of Elizabeth’s letter we returned

to Geneva. The sweet girl welcomed me with warm affection, yet tears were

in her eyes as she beheld my emaciated frame and feverish cheeks. I saw a

change in her also. She was thinner and had lost much of that heavenly

vivacity that had before charmed me; but her gentleness and soft looks of

compassion made her a more fit companion for one blasted and miserable as I

was.

The tranquillity which I now enjoyed did not endure. Memory brought madness

with it, and when I thought of what had passed, a real insanity possessed

me; sometimes I was furious and burnt with rage, sometimes low and

despondent. I neither spoke nor looked at anyone, but sat motionless,

bewildered by the multitude of miseries that overcame me.

Elizabeth alone had the power to draw me from these fits; her gentle voice

would soothe me when transported by passion and inspire me with human

feelings when sunk in torpor. She wept with me and for me. When reason

returned, she would remonstrate and endeavour to inspire me with

resignation. Ah! It is well for the unfortunate to be resigned, but for the

guilty there is no peace. The agonies of remorse poison the luxury there is

otherwise sometimes found in indulging the excess of grief.

Soon after my arrival my father spoke of my immediate marriage with

Elizabeth. I remained silent.

“Have you, then, some other attachment?”

“None on earth. I love Elizabeth and look forward to our union with

delight. Let the day therefore be fixed; and on it I will consecrate

myself, in life or death, to the happiness of my cousin.”

“My dear Victor, do not speak thus. Heavy misfortunes have befallen

us, but let us only cling closer to what remains and transfer our love

for those whom we have lost to those who yet live. Our circle will be

small but bound close by the ties of affection and mutual misfortune.

And when time shall have softened your despair, new and dear objects of

care will be born to replace those of whom we have been so cruelly

deprived.”

Such were the lessons of my father. But to me the remembrance of the

threat returned; nor can you wonder that, omnipotent as the fiend had

yet been in his deeds of blood, I should almost regard him as

invincible, and that when he had pronounced the words “\_I shall be with

you on your wedding-night\_,” I should regard the threatened fate as

unavoidable. But death was no evil to me if the loss of Elizabeth were

balanced with it, and I therefore, with a contented and even cheerful

countenance, agreed with my father that if my cousin would consent, the

ceremony should take place in ten days, and thus put, as I imagined,

the seal to my fate.

Great God! If for one instant I had thought what might be the hellish

intention of my fiendish adversary, I would rather have banished myself

for ever from my native country and wandered a friendless outcast over

the earth than have consented to this miserable marriage. But, as if

possessed of magic powers, the monster had blinded me to his real

intentions; and when I thought that I had prepared only my own death, I

hastened that of a far dearer victim.

As the period fixed for our marriage drew nearer, whether from cowardice or

a prophetic feeling, I felt my heart sink within me. But I concealed my

feelings by an appearance of hilarity that brought smiles and joy to the

countenance of my father, but hardly deceived the ever-watchful and nicer

eye of Elizabeth. She looked forward to our union with placid contentment,

not unmingled with a little fear, which past misfortunes had impressed,

that what now appeared certain and tangible happiness might soon dissipate

into an airy dream and leave no trace but deep and everlasting regret.

Preparations were made for the event, congratulatory visits were received,

and all wore a smiling appearance. I shut up, as well as I could, in my own

heart the anxiety that preyed there and entered with seeming earnestness

into the plans of my father, although they might only serve as the

decorations of my tragedy. Through my father’s exertions a part of

the inheritance of Elizabeth had been restored to her by the Austrian

government. A small possession on the shores of Como belonged to her. It

was agreed that, immediately after our union, we should proceed to Villa

Lavenza and spend our first days of happiness beside the beautiful lake

near which it stood.

In the meantime I took every precaution to defend my person in case the

fiend should openly attack me. I carried pistols and a dagger

constantly about me and was ever on the watch to prevent artifice, and

by these means gained a greater degree of tranquillity. Indeed, as the

period approached, the threat appeared more as a delusion, not to be

regarded as worthy to disturb my peace, while the happiness I hoped for

in my marriage wore a greater appearance of certainty as the day fixed

for its solemnisation drew nearer and I heard it continually spoken of

as an occurrence which no accident could possibly prevent.

Elizabeth seemed happy; my tranquil demeanour contributed greatly to

calm her mind. But on the day that was to fulfil my wishes and my

destiny, she was melancholy, and a presentiment of evil pervaded her;

and perhaps also she thought of the dreadful secret which I had

promised to reveal to her on the following day. My father was in the

meantime overjoyed, and, in the bustle of preparation, only recognised in

the melancholy of his niece the diffidence of a bride.

After the ceremony was performed a large party assembled at my

father’s, but it was agreed that Elizabeth and I should commence our

journey by water, sleeping that night at Evian and continuing our

voyage on the following day. The day was fair, the wind favourable;

all smiled on our nuptial embarkation.

Those were the last moments of my life during which I enjoyed the

feeling of happiness. We passed rapidly along; the sun was hot, but we

were sheltered from its rays by a kind of canopy while we enjoyed the

beauty of the scene, sometimes on one side of the lake, where we saw

Mont Salêve, the pleasant banks of Montalègre, and at a distance,

surmounting all, the beautiful Mont Blanc, and the assemblage of snowy

mountains that in vain endeavour to emulate her; sometimes coasting the

opposite banks, we saw the mighty Jura opposing its dark side to the

ambition that would quit its native country, and an almost

insurmountable barrier to the invader who should wish to enslave it.

I took the hand of Elizabeth. “You are sorrowful, my love. Ah! If

you knew what I have suffered and what I may yet endure, you would

endeavour to let me taste the quiet and freedom from despair that this

one day at least permits me to enjoy.”

“Be happy, my dear Victor,” replied Elizabeth; “there is, I hope,

nothing to distress you; and be assured that if a lively joy is not

painted in my face, my heart is contented. Something whispers to me

not to depend too much on the prospect that is opened before us, but I

will not listen to such a sinister voice. Observe how fast we move

along and how the clouds, which sometimes obscure and sometimes rise

above the dome of Mont Blanc, render this scene of beauty still more

interesting. Look also at the innumerable fish that are swimming in

the clear waters, where we can distinguish every pebble that lies at

the bottom. What a divine day! How happy and serene all nature

appears!”

Thus Elizabeth endeavoured to divert her thoughts and mine from all

reflection upon melancholy subjects. But her temper was fluctuating;

joy for a few instants shone in her eyes, but it continually gave place

to distraction and reverie.

The sun sank lower in the heavens; we passed the river Drance and

observed its path through the chasms of the higher and the glens of the

lower hills. The Alps here come closer to the lake, and we approached

the amphitheatre of mountains which forms its eastern boundary. The

spire of Evian shone under the woods that surrounded it and the range

of mountain above mountain by which it was overhung.

The wind, which had hitherto carried us along with amazing rapidity,

sank at sunset to a light breeze; the soft air just ruffled the water

and caused a pleasant motion among the trees as we approached the

shore, from which it wafted the most delightful scent of flowers and

hay. The sun sank beneath the horizon as we landed, and as I touched

the shore I felt those cares and fears revive which soon were to clasp

me and cling to me for ever.

Chapter 23

It was eight o’clock when we landed; we walked for a short time on the

shore, enjoying the transitory light, and then retired to the inn and

contemplated the lovely scene of waters, woods, and mountains, obscured

in darkness, yet still displaying their black outlines.

The wind, which had fallen in the south, now rose with great violence

in the west. The moon had reached her summit in the heavens and was

beginning to descend; the clouds swept across it swifter than the

flight of the vulture and dimmed her rays, while the lake reflected the

scene of the busy heavens, rendered still busier by the restless waves

that were beginning to rise. Suddenly a heavy storm of rain descended.

I had been calm during the day, but so soon as night obscured the

shapes of objects, a thousand fears arose in my mind. I was anxious

and watchful, while my right hand grasped a pistol which was hidden in

my bosom; every sound terrified me, but I resolved that I would sell my

life dearly and not shrink from the conflict until my own life or that

of my adversary was extinguished.

Elizabeth observed my agitation for some time in timid and fearful silence,

but there was something in my glance which communicated terror to her, and

trembling, she asked, “What is it that agitates you, my dear Victor?

What is it you fear?”

“Oh! Peace, peace, my love,” replied I; “this night, and

all will be safe; but this night is dreadful, very dreadful.”

I passed an hour in this state of mind, when suddenly I reflected how

fearful the combat which I momentarily expected would be to my wife,

and I earnestly entreated her to retire, resolving not to join her

until I had obtained some knowledge as to the situation of my enemy.

She left me, and I continued some time walking up and down the passages

of the house and inspecting every corner that might afford a retreat to

my adversary. But I discovered no trace of him and was beginning to

conjecture that some fortunate chance had intervened to prevent the

execution of his menaces when suddenly I heard a shrill and dreadful

scream. It came from the room into which Elizabeth had retired. As I

heard it, the whole truth rushed into my mind, my arms dropped, the

motion of every muscle and fibre was suspended; I could feel the blood

trickling in my veins and tingling in the extremities of my limbs. This

state lasted but for an instant; the scream was repeated, and I rushed

into the room.

Great God! Why did I not then expire! Why am I here to relate the

destruction of the best hope and the purest creature on earth? She was

there, lifeless and inanimate, thrown across the bed, her head hanging down

and her pale and distorted features half covered by her hair. Everywhere I

turn I see the same figure—her bloodless arms and relaxed form flung

by the murderer on its bridal bier. Could I behold this and live? Alas!

Life is obstinate and clings closest where it is most hated. For a moment

only did I lose recollection; I fell senseless on the ground.

When I recovered I found myself surrounded by the people of the inn; their

countenances expressed a breathless terror, but the horror of others

appeared only as a mockery, a shadow of the feelings that oppressed me. I

escaped from them to the room where lay the body of Elizabeth, my love, my

wife, so lately living, so dear, so worthy. She had been moved from the

posture in which I had first beheld her, and now, as she lay, her head upon

her arm and a handkerchief thrown across her face and neck, I might have

supposed her asleep. I rushed towards her and embraced her with ardour, but

the deadly languor and coldness of the limbs told me that what I now held

in my arms had ceased to be the Elizabeth whom I had loved and cherished.

The murderous mark of the fiend’s grasp was on her neck, and the

breath had ceased to issue from her lips.

While I still hung over her in the agony of despair, I happened to look up.

The windows of the room had before been darkened, and I felt a kind of

panic on seeing the pale yellow light of the moon illuminate the chamber.

The shutters had been thrown back, and with a sensation of horror not to be

described, I saw at the open window a figure the most hideous and abhorred.

A grin was on the face of the monster; he seemed to jeer, as with his

fiendish finger he pointed towards the corpse of my wife. I rushed towards

the window, and drawing a pistol from my bosom, fired; but he eluded me,

leaped from his station, and running with the swiftness of lightning,

plunged into the lake.

The report of the pistol brought a crowd into the room. I pointed to

the spot where he had disappeared, and we followed the track with

boats; nets were cast, but in vain. After passing several hours, we

returned hopeless, most of my companions believing it to have been a

form conjured up by my fancy. After having landed, they proceeded to

search the country, parties going in different directions among the

woods and vines.

I attempted to accompany them and proceeded a short distance from the

house, but my head whirled round, my steps were like those of a drunken

man, I fell at last in a state of utter exhaustion; a film covered my

eyes, and my skin was parched with the heat of fever. In this state I

was carried back and placed on a bed, hardly conscious of what had

happened; my eyes wandered round the room as if to seek something that

I had lost.

After an interval I arose, and as if by instinct, crawled into the room

where the corpse of my beloved lay. There were women weeping around; I

hung over it and joined my sad tears to theirs; all this time no

distinct idea presented itself to my mind, but my thoughts rambled to

various subjects, reflecting confusedly on my misfortunes and their

cause. I was bewildered, in a cloud of wonder and horror. The death

of William, the execution of Justine, the murder of Clerval, and lastly

of my wife; even at that moment I knew not that my only remaining

friends were safe from the malignity of the fiend; my father even now

might be writhing under his grasp, and Ernest might be dead at his

feet. This idea made me shudder and recalled me to action. I started

up and resolved to return to Geneva with all possible speed.

There were no horses to be procured, and I must return by the lake; but the

wind was unfavourable, and the rain fell in torrents. However, it was

hardly morning, and I might reasonably hope to arrive by night. I hired men

to row and took an oar myself, for I had always experienced relief from

mental torment in bodily exercise. But the overflowing misery I now felt,

and the excess of agitation that I endured rendered me incapable of any

exertion. I threw down the oar, and leaning my head upon my hands, gave way

to every gloomy idea that arose. If I looked up, I saw scenes which were

familiar to me in my happier time and which I had contemplated but the day

before in the company of her who was now but a shadow and a recollection.

Tears streamed from my eyes. The rain had ceased for a moment, and I saw

the fish play in the waters as they had done a few hours before; they had

then been observed by Elizabeth. Nothing is so painful to the human mind as

a great and sudden change. The sun might shine or the clouds might lower,

but nothing could appear to me as it had done the day before. A fiend had

snatched from me every hope of future happiness; no creature had ever been

so miserable as I was; so frightful an event is single in the history of

man.

But why should I dwell upon the incidents that followed this last

overwhelming event? Mine has been a tale of horrors; I have reached their

\_acme\_, and what I must now relate can but be tedious to you. Know

that, one by one, my friends were snatched away; I was left desolate. My

own strength is exhausted, and I must tell, in a few words, what remains of

my hideous narration.

I arrived at Geneva. My father and Ernest yet lived, but the former sunk

under the tidings that I bore. I see him now, excellent and venerable old

man! His eyes wandered in vacancy, for they had lost their charm and their

delight—his Elizabeth, his more than daughter, whom he doted on with

all that affection which a man feels, who in the decline of life, having

few affections, clings more earnestly to those that remain. Cursed, cursed

be the fiend that brought misery on his grey hairs and doomed him to waste

in wretchedness! He could not live under the horrors that were accumulated

around him; the springs of existence suddenly gave way; he was unable to

rise from his bed, and in a few days he died in my arms.

What then became of me? I know not; I lost sensation, and chains and

darkness were the only objects that pressed upon me. Sometimes,

indeed, I dreamt that I wandered in flowery meadows and pleasant vales

with the friends of my youth, but I awoke and found myself in a

dungeon. Melancholy followed, but by degrees I gained a clear

conception of my miseries and situation and was then released from my

prison. For they had called me mad, and during many months, as I

understood, a solitary cell had been my habitation.

Liberty, however, had been a useless gift to me, had I not, as I

awakened to reason, at the same time awakened to revenge. As the

memory of past misfortunes pressed upon me, I began to reflect on their

cause—the monster whom I had created, the miserable dæmon whom I had

sent abroad into the world for my destruction. I was possessed by a

maddening rage when I thought of him, and desired and ardently prayed

that I might have him within my grasp to wreak a great and signal

revenge on his cursed head.

Nor did my hate long confine itself to useless wishes; I began to

reflect on the best means of securing him; and for this purpose, about

a month after my release, I repaired to a criminal judge in the town

and told him that I had an accusation to make, that I knew the

destroyer of my family, and that I required him to exert his whole

authority for the apprehension of the murderer.

The magistrate listened to me with attention and kindness. “Be

assured, sir,” said he, “no pains or exertions on my part shall

be spared to discover the villain.”

“I thank you,” replied I; “listen, therefore, to the

deposition that I have to make. It is indeed a tale so strange that I

should fear you would not credit it were there not something in truth

which, however wonderful, forces conviction. The story is too connected to

be mistaken for a dream, and I have no motive for falsehood.” My

manner as I thus addressed him was impressive but calm; I had formed in my

own heart a resolution to pursue my destroyer to death, and this purpose

quieted my agony and for an interval reconciled me to life. I now related

my history briefly but with firmness and precision, marking the dates with

accuracy and never deviating into invective or exclamation.

The magistrate appeared at first perfectly incredulous, but as I continued

he became more attentive and interested; I saw him sometimes shudder with

horror; at others a lively surprise, unmingled with disbelief, was painted

on his countenance.

When I had concluded my narration, I said, “This is the being whom I

accuse and for whose seizure and punishment I call upon you to exert your

whole power. It is your duty as a magistrate, and I believe and hope that

your feelings as a man will not revolt from the execution of those

functions on this occasion.”

This address caused a considerable change in the physiognomy of my own

auditor. He had heard my story with that half kind of belief that is given

to a tale of spirits and supernatural events; but when he was called upon

to act officially in consequence, the whole tide of his incredulity

returned. He, however, answered mildly, “I would willingly afford you

every aid in your pursuit, but the creature of whom you speak appears to

have powers which would put all my exertions to defiance. Who can follow an

animal which can traverse the sea of ice and inhabit caves and dens where

no man would venture to intrude? Besides, some months have elapsed since

the commission of his crimes, and no one can conjecture to what place he

has wandered or what region he may now inhabit.”

“I do not doubt that he hovers near the spot which I inhabit, and if

he has indeed taken refuge in the Alps, he may be hunted like the chamois

and destroyed as a beast of prey. But I perceive your thoughts; you do not

credit my narrative and do not intend to pursue my enemy with the

punishment which is his desert.”

As I spoke, rage sparkled in my eyes; the magistrate was intimidated.

“You are mistaken,” said he. “I will exert myself, and if

it is in my power to seize the monster, be assured that he shall suffer

punishment proportionate to his crimes. But I fear, from what you have

yourself described to be his properties, that this will prove

impracticable; and thus, while every proper measure is pursued, you should

make up your mind to disappointment.”

“That cannot be; but all that I can say will be of little avail. My

revenge is of no moment to you; yet, while I allow it to be a vice, I

confess that it is the devouring and only passion of my soul. My rage

is unspeakable when I reflect that the murderer, whom I have turned

loose upon society, still exists. You refuse my just demand; I have

but one resource, and I devote myself, either in my life or death, to

his destruction.”

I trembled with excess of agitation as I said this; there was a frenzy

in my manner, and something, I doubt not, of that haughty fierceness

which the martyrs of old are said to have possessed. But to a Genevan

magistrate, whose mind was occupied by far other ideas than those of

devotion and heroism, this elevation of mind had much the appearance of

madness. He endeavoured to soothe me as a nurse does a child and

reverted to my tale as the effects of delirium.

“Man,” I cried, “how ignorant art thou in thy pride of

wisdom! Cease; you know not what it is you say.”

I broke from the house angry and disturbed and retired to meditate on

some other mode of action.

Chapter 24

My present situation was one in which all voluntary thought was

swallowed up and lost. I was hurried away by fury; revenge alone

endowed me with strength and composure; it moulded my feelings and

allowed me to be calculating and calm at periods when otherwise

delirium or death would have been my portion.

My first resolution was to quit Geneva for ever; my country, which, when I

was happy and beloved, was dear to me, now, in my adversity, became

hateful. I provided myself with a sum of money, together with a few jewels

which had belonged to my mother, and departed.

And now my wanderings began which are to cease but with life. I have

traversed a vast portion of the earth and have endured all the hardships

which travellers in deserts and barbarous countries are wont to meet. How I

have lived I hardly know; many times have I stretched my failing limbs upon

the sandy plain and prayed for death. But revenge kept me alive; I dared

not die and leave my adversary in being.

When I quitted Geneva my first labour was to gain some clue by which I

might trace the steps of my fiendish enemy. But my plan was unsettled,

and I wandered many hours round the confines of the town, uncertain

what path I should pursue. As night approached I found myself at the

entrance of the cemetery where William, Elizabeth, and my father

reposed. I entered it and approached the tomb which marked their

graves. Everything was silent except the leaves of the trees, which

were gently agitated by the wind; the night was nearly dark, and the

scene would have been solemn and affecting even to an uninterested

observer. The spirits of the departed seemed to flit around and to

cast a shadow, which was felt but not seen, around the head of the

mourner.

The deep grief which this scene had at first excited quickly gave way to

rage and despair. They were dead, and I lived; their murderer also lived,

and to destroy him I must drag out my weary existence. I knelt on the grass

and kissed the earth and with quivering lips exclaimed, “By the

sacred earth on which I kneel, by the shades that wander near me, by the

deep and eternal grief that I feel, I swear; and by thee, O Night, and the

spirits that preside over thee, to pursue the dæmon who caused this misery,

until he or I shall perish in mortal conflict. For this purpose I will

preserve my life; to execute this dear revenge will I again behold the sun

and tread the green herbage of earth, which otherwise should vanish from my

eyes for ever. And I call on you, spirits of the dead, and on you, wandering

ministers of vengeance, to aid and conduct me in my work. Let the cursed

and hellish monster drink deep of agony; let him feel the despair that now

torments me.”

I had begun my adjuration with solemnity and an awe which almost assured me

that the shades of my murdered friends heard and approved my devotion, but

the furies possessed me as I concluded, and rage choked my utterance.

I was answered through the stillness of night by a loud and fiendish

laugh. It rang on my ears long and heavily; the mountains re-echoed

it, and I felt as if all hell surrounded me with mockery and laughter.

Surely in that moment I should have been possessed by frenzy and have

destroyed my miserable existence but that my vow was heard and that I

was reserved for vengeance. The laughter died away, when a well-known

and abhorred voice, apparently close to my ear, addressed me in an

audible whisper, “I am satisfied, miserable wretch! You have

determined to live, and I am satisfied.”

I darted towards the spot from which the sound proceeded, but the devil

eluded my grasp. Suddenly the broad disk of the moon arose and shone

full upon his ghastly and distorted shape as he fled with more than

mortal speed.

I pursued him, and for many months this has been my task. Guided by a

slight clue, I followed the windings of the Rhone, but vainly. The

blue Mediterranean appeared, and by a strange chance, I saw the fiend

enter by night and hide himself in a vessel bound for the Black Sea. I

took my passage in the same ship, but he escaped, I know not how.

Amidst the wilds of Tartary and Russia, although he still evaded me, I

have ever followed in his track. Sometimes the peasants, scared by

this horrid apparition, informed me of his path; sometimes he himself,

who feared that if I lost all trace of him I should despair and die,

left some mark to guide me. The snows descended on my head, and I saw

the print of his huge step on the white plain. To you first entering

on life, to whom care is new and agony unknown, how can you understand

what I have felt and still feel? Cold, want, and fatigue were the

least pains which I was destined to endure; I was cursed by some devil

and carried about with me my eternal hell; yet still a spirit of good

followed and directed my steps and when I most murmured would suddenly

extricate me from seemingly insurmountable difficulties. Sometimes,

when nature, overcome by hunger, sank under the exhaustion, a repast

was prepared for me in the desert that restored and inspirited me. The

fare was, indeed, coarse, such as the peasants of the country ate, but

I will not doubt that it was set there by the spirits that I had

invoked to aid me. Often, when all was dry, the heavens cloudless, and

I was parched by thirst, a slight cloud would bedim the sky, shed the

few drops that revived me, and vanish.

I followed, when I could, the courses of the rivers; but the dæmon

generally avoided these, as it was here that the population of the

country chiefly collected. In other places human beings were seldom

seen, and I generally subsisted on the wild animals that crossed my

path. I had money with me and gained the friendship of the villagers

by distributing it; or I brought with me some food that I had killed,

which, after taking a small part, I always presented to those who had

provided me with fire and utensils for cooking.

My life, as it passed thus, was indeed hateful to me, and it was during

sleep alone that I could taste joy. O blessed sleep! Often, when most

miserable, I sank to repose, and my dreams lulled me even to rapture. The

spirits that guarded me had provided these moments, or rather hours, of

happiness that I might retain strength to fulfil my pilgrimage. Deprived of

this respite, I should have sunk under my hardships. During the day I was

sustained and inspirited by the hope of night, for in sleep I saw my

friends, my wife, and my beloved country; again I saw the benevolent

countenance of my father, heard the silver tones of my Elizabeth’s

voice, and beheld Clerval enjoying health and youth. Often, when wearied by

a toilsome march, I persuaded myself that I was dreaming until night should

come and that I should then enjoy reality in the arms of my dearest

friends. What agonising fondness did I feel for them! How did I cling to

their dear forms, as sometimes they haunted even my waking hours, and

persuade myself that they still lived! At such moments vengeance, that

burned within me, died in my heart, and I pursued my path towards the

destruction of the dæmon more as a task enjoined by heaven, as the

mechanical impulse of some power of which I was unconscious, than as the

ardent desire of my soul.

What his feelings were whom I pursued I cannot know. Sometimes, indeed, he

left marks in writing on the barks of the trees or cut in stone that guided

me and instigated my fury. “My reign is not yet

over”—these words were legible in one of these

inscriptions—“you live, and my power is complete. Follow me; I

seek the everlasting ices of the north, where you will feel the misery of

cold and frost, to which I am impassive. You will find near this place, if

you follow not too tardily, a dead hare; eat and be refreshed. Come on, my

enemy; we have yet to wrestle for our lives, but many hard and miserable

hours must you endure until that period shall arrive.”

Scoffing devil! Again do I vow vengeance; again do I devote thee,

miserable fiend, to torture and death. Never will I give up my search

until he or I perish; and then with what ecstasy shall I join my

Elizabeth and my departed friends, who even now prepare for me the

reward of my tedious toil and horrible pilgrimage!

As I still pursued my journey to the northward, the snows thickened and the

cold increased in a degree almost too severe to support. The peasants were

shut up in their hovels, and only a few of the most hardy ventured forth to

seize the animals whom starvation had forced from their hiding-places to

seek for prey. The rivers were covered with ice, and no fish could be

procured; and thus I was cut off from my chief article of maintenance.

The triumph of my enemy increased with the difficulty of my labours. One

inscription that he left was in these words: “Prepare! Your toils

only begin; wrap yourself in furs and provide food, for we shall soon enter

upon a journey where your sufferings will satisfy my everlasting

hatred.”

My courage and perseverance were invigorated by these scoffing words; I

resolved not to fail in my purpose, and calling on Heaven to support

me, I continued with unabated fervour to traverse immense deserts,

until the ocean appeared at a distance and formed the utmost boundary

of the horizon. Oh! How unlike it was to the blue seasons of the

south! Covered with ice, it was only to be distinguished from land by

its superior wildness and ruggedness. The Greeks wept for joy when

they beheld the Mediterranean from the hills of Asia, and hailed with

rapture the boundary of their toils. I did not weep, but I knelt down

and with a full heart thanked my guiding spirit for conducting me in

safety to the place where I hoped, notwithstanding my adversary’s gibe,

to meet and grapple with him.

Some weeks before this period I had procured a sledge and dogs and thus

traversed the snows with inconceivable speed. I know not whether the

fiend possessed the same advantages, but I found that, as before I had

daily lost ground in the pursuit, I now gained on him, so much so that

when I first saw the ocean he was but one day’s journey in advance, and

I hoped to intercept him before he should reach the beach. With new

courage, therefore, I pressed on, and in two days arrived at a wretched

hamlet on the seashore. I inquired of the inhabitants concerning the

fiend and gained accurate information. A gigantic monster, they said,

had arrived the night before, armed with a gun and many pistols,

putting to flight the inhabitants of a solitary cottage through fear of

his terrific appearance. He had carried off their store of winter

food, and placing it in a sledge, to draw which he had seized on a

numerous drove of trained dogs, he had harnessed them, and the same

night, to the joy of the horror-struck villagers, had pursued his

journey across the sea in a direction that led to no land; and they

conjectured that he must speedily be destroyed by the breaking of the

ice or frozen by the eternal frosts.

On hearing this information I suffered a temporary access of despair.

He had escaped me, and I must commence a destructive and almost endless

journey across the mountainous ices of the ocean, amidst cold that few

of the inhabitants could long endure and which I, the native of a

genial and sunny climate, could not hope to survive. Yet at the idea

that the fiend should live and be triumphant, my rage and vengeance

returned, and like a mighty tide, overwhelmed every other feeling.

After a slight repose, during which the spirits of the dead hovered

round and instigated me to toil and revenge, I prepared for my journey.

I exchanged my land-sledge for one fashioned for the inequalities of

the Frozen Ocean, and purchasing a plentiful stock of provisions, I

departed from land.

I cannot guess how many days have passed since then, but I have endured

misery which nothing but the eternal sentiment of a just retribution

burning within my heart could have enabled me to support. Immense and

rugged mountains of ice often barred up my passage, and I often heard

the thunder of the ground sea, which threatened my destruction. But

again the frost came and made the paths of the sea secure.

By the quantity of provision which I had consumed, I should guess that

I had passed three weeks in this journey; and the continual protraction

of hope, returning back upon the heart, often wrung bitter drops of

despondency and grief from my eyes. Despair had indeed almost secured

her prey, and I should soon have sunk beneath this misery. Once, after

the poor animals that conveyed me had with incredible toil gained the

summit of a sloping ice mountain, and one, sinking under his fatigue,

died, I viewed the expanse before me with anguish, when suddenly my eye

caught a dark speck upon the dusky plain. I strained my sight to

discover what it could be and uttered a wild cry of ecstasy when I

distinguished a sledge and the distorted proportions of a well-known

form within. Oh! With what a burning gush did hope revisit my heart!

Warm tears filled my eyes, which I hastily wiped away, that they might

not intercept the view I had of the dæmon; but still my sight was

dimmed by the burning drops, until, giving way to the emotions that

oppressed me, I wept aloud.

But this was not the time for delay; I disencumbered the dogs of their

dead companion, gave them a plentiful portion of food, and after an

hour’s rest, which was absolutely necessary, and yet which was bitterly

irksome to me, I continued my route. The sledge was still visible, nor

did I again lose sight of it except at the moments when for a short

time some ice-rock concealed it with its intervening crags. I indeed

perceptibly gained on it, and when, after nearly two days’ journey, I

beheld my enemy at no more than a mile distant, my heart bounded within

me.

But now, when I appeared almost within grasp of my foe, my hopes were

suddenly extinguished, and I lost all trace of him more utterly than I had

ever done before. A ground sea was heard; the thunder of its progress, as

the water