

FINAL NOTES on the Shelley Circle:

Claire Clairmont's daughter by Byron, Allegra, died at the hands of surgeons in a convent school in 1821 just weeks prior to Shelley's death. Our depiction of Claire's encounter with her stepsister after these twin tragedies is an invention, as far as we know. It is known that Claire accepted a post as governess to a wealthy Russian family and never married.

As a single mother and working writer, **Mary Godwin Shelley** edited and wrote comprehensive posthumous notes for Shelley's collected works, thus preserving (creating?) his literary legacy and persona. She wrote and published a range of works throughout her life, self-financed their son's Cambridge education, survived smallpox and nervous illness, and finally died at the age of 53, attended by her one remaining son, Percy Florence – the only one of four children to survive past early childhood. Mary is buried between her mother Mary Wollestonecraft, and her father William Godwin, in St. Peter's churchyard, Bournemouth, Sussex.

After the Geneva summer, **John William Polidori** became a great reporter of the goings-on in the Shelley/Byron circle, and his notes, articles and letters became a source for researchers on the subject. He attained some literary success with the short story, "The Vampyre," published in 1819, and is often with inventing the vampire fiction genre (which Bram Stoker capitalized on.) As mentioned here, he died an apparent suicide.

Indeed a "rock star" of his time, the handsome, gifted and troubled **George Gordon, Lord Byron** had remarkable influence on Western poetry, drama, music and art – though his scandalous lifestyle was widely condemned by polite society. In spite of a lifelong, painful deformity of the foot and leg (sometimes referred to as a club foot) Byron joined the fight for Greek independence, as did other European patriots. It is our belief this was in part motivated by grief over the deaths of Shelley, Allegra and others. Celebrated even today as a hero in Greece, the "mad, bad and dangerous to know" English poet died of marsh fever (and the leech) at Missolonghi in 1824.

When **Percy Bysshe Shelley** drowned off the coast of Lerici, Italy in 1821, a volume of Keats was found in his pocket. The reports of his death included this Tweet-worthy notice in the *Courier*: "Shelley, the writer of some infidel poetry has been drowned; now he knows whether there is a God or no." It was claimed by a number of witnesses that when his ashes were collected for burial, the heart had remained untouched by the fire, and that Mary preserved it for many years in a small casket, along with locks of hair and fragments of bone.

CLAIRE

TO FIND ONE'S PLACE IN IT
TO SEEK, TO SEARCH

ALL

TO DREAM, TO FLY
NEVER TO DIE
TO BE A GOD, TO CREATE – TO THINK
TO GAZE INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH
AND DARE TO DRINK

BYRON

TO LOOK DEEP INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH

SHELLEY & MARY

TO LOOK DEEP INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH

MARY

AND TO DEEPLY DRINK.

(LIGHTS slowly fade as Mary sharpens her pen before the fire, and a new vision of the 21st Century arises in her mind.

(BLACKOUT. THE END.)

ETERNITY MARY

IMMORTALITY BYRON

IMMORTALITY SHELLEY

IMMORTALITY MARY

ALL THREE
WE COULD LIVE FOREVER

(Polidori appears.)

POLIDORI
IT IS THE AGE OF MIRACLES
IT IS THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

S/B/M (Refrain)
LIFE. CHANGE
THE EBB AND FLOW
TO BE IN TOUCH WITH IT
TO SEE, TO KNOW
TO KNOW

POLI (Counterpoint)
ANATOMY, ASTRONOMY
KINESTHETICS, TAXONOMY
COSMOLOGY, PHYSIOLOGY
MATHEMATICS, ASTROLOGY

TRUTH MARY

BYRON
(Echoing:) TRUTH

TIME MARY

SHELLEY & POLIDORI
(Echoing:) TIME

UNIVERSE MEN

(Claire appears.)

(THUNDER rumbles ominously as Mary opens the casket, reaches in and takes out ...

(A small NOTEBOOK and PENCIL. She begins to write, as Shelley stands over her.)

BEGIN TRACK 14: "Eternity Reprise/Finale"

SHELLEY

Life ...

MARY (writing:)

Life is not the thing romance writers describe it, going through the measures of dance, and after various evolutions arriving at a conclusion, where the dancers may sit down and repose. While there is life there is action and ...

SHELLEY

Change ...

MARY (writing:)

Change. We go on, each thought linked to the one which was its parent.... No joy or sorrow dies barren of progeny, which for ever generated and generating, weave the chain that makes our life. One day calls to another ... a cry to a cry ... and a sorrow to a sorrow.... O, wherefore are love and ruin forever joined in this our mortal dream?

SHELLEY

Mary. Dearest Spirit ...

MARY

Sssh! I'm working. *(Writing:)* Life ... change

(Shelley steps back, as if into Mary's memory again.)

SHELLEY

THOUGHT IS FLIGHT, PURE POETRY
SWEET LIGHT, ETERNITY

(Byron appears.)

BYRON

THOUGHT IS FLIGHT
PURE POETRY
SWEET LIGHT
YOUTH

MARY

Truth ...

Time ...

(Simply:) The world is such a lonely place without you, Shelley.

SHELLEY

I expect it must be.

MARY

I have tried. But I don't think I can bear it.

SHELLEY

Yet you must.

MARY

How?

(A few bars of "Free" UNDERSCORE, as he looks at her with humor and compassion.)

SHELLEY

I cannot say. You must make your own decision. You are a free woman after all.

MARY

How am I free when, wherever I go, I am pursued by demons?

SHELLEY

Demons have been good to you in the past.

MARY

Joke if you like. Just now I feel like the last man on earth!

SHELLEY

(Smiling:) The last man, eh?

(LIGHTNING. Mary stops, then suddenly sits back down. THUNDER rumbles as she grabs up the little gilt casket.)

MARY

The Last Man ...

(A burst of UNDERSCORE: "Eternity Reprise." With sudden energy, Mary calls out to the Proprietor:)

My good man, is that kettle hot yet? And have you got a brighter lamp?

PROPRIETOR (Off)

Yes, Madam Shelley! Right away!

WHEN YOU LOOK –

(Music stops as, with a gesture, Claire stops Mary from speaking. Finally, with effort, Claire meets her sister's glance.)

CLAIRE

I can't, Mary. You see ... it reminds me. Seeing you, your voice, your eyes ... they remind me. Forgive me.

(Grabbing up her cloak and gloves, Claire sweeps out, disappearing quickly into the shadows.)

MARY

Claire! Please don't – !

(Mary is left alone. UNDERSCORE shifts to: "I Could Go." Mary touches the small gilt casket on the table, then sings:)

I COULD GO
WOULD IT WERE SO SIMPLE!
LEAVE MY THINGS
WALK OUT THE DOOR
HERE AM I, ON MY OWN AGAIN...
ALONE AGAIN ...
FREE ONCE MORE ...

When did I ask for this much freedom?

(Underscore continues as Mary stands, struggling with her emotions. But this time, she loses the battle. She lowers her head and sinks back into her chair.

(Shelley's LIGHT fades up again. He smiles at Mary.)

SHELLEY

Now, Mary. It isn't like you to wallow.

(Mary raises her head to reply, with a bit of fire.)

MARY

Easy enough for you to say! You aren't the one who's left behind with all of your debts. The one who must raise our one remaining child, alone, without a father. You aren't the one –

(Music STOPS. Mary turns to face Shelley.)

Allegra had her special baby names for everyone.

WHAT WAS THAT NAME SHE CALLED ME?
I DON'T REMEMBER
I DON'T REMEMBER

I SIT IN THE CAFÉ, MY MIND IS EMPTY
THE SUN WARMS MY FACE
I HEAR LAUGHTER, BEAUTIFUL BELLS
SCHOOLGIRLS PASSING: PARDON ME, MADAME
IT IS NOT ALLEGRA
I SIP COFFEE, I STARE AT THE CROWD

IN THE MORNING, A LITTLE MORE POWDER
IN THE EVENING, A LITTLE MORE ROUGE
ON SUNDAYS, A LOT MORE SLEEP
EVERY SPRING, A NEW PAIR OF SHOES
A PRETTY HAT AND THAT IS THAT
ANOTHER BRANDY, HOW MANY WAS IT?
I HAVE FORGOTTEN
ANOTHER WALTZ, ANOTHER MAN
WHAT DOES IT MATTER?
WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

SOMETIMES I DREAM OF MY ALLEGRA
I SEE HER CLEARLY, BATHED IN LIGHT
SHE IS SMILING, MY BEAUTIFUL DAUGHTER
BUT THEN I WAKE AND IT IS NIGHT
WHAT WAS THAT NAME SHE CALLED ME
I DON'T REMEMBER
I DON'T REMEMBER
I DON'T REMEMBER
WHAT DOES IT MATTER?

(LIGHTS resume as before. Mary reaches for Claire's hand, but Claire stands up, briskly putting on a casual attitude.)

Well! My slippers are almost dry. And I have an engagement.

MARY

But, Claire! I'd hoped we might have dinner. And a nice talk, like the old days. I've missed you!

WHEN I LOOK AT YOU I SEE
ALL I HOPE TO BE
AND I KNOW YOU KNOW MY HEART

(From the pocket of her cloak, Mary removes a small GILT CASKET, which she sets on the table. At the sight of it, the Proprietor freezes, horrified.)

(Shelley's LIGHT FADES out.)

PROPRIETOR

Oh, look, the pot has gone cold, and the fire down to ashes. Excuse me, ladies, I'll just Excuse me!

(The PROPRIETOR bows clumsily, snatches up the teapot and scurries out. As if to mark his exit, THUNDER rattles the windows.)

MARY

That was wicked of me. But I couldn't help it, the old busybody!

(A few bars of "Sisters Eyes" UNDERSCORE start, then stop.)

CLAIRE

(As if talking to herself:) There is one more who didn't survive that cursed summer. Not that she matters to anyone.

MARY

Of course she does! Dear Claire ...

CLAIRE

Sympathy, sister? No thank you kindly. I am quite beyond such things now.

BEGIN TRACK 13 : "Allegra"

(Sings:)

WHEN I FIRST HELD HER
 WHEN I FIRST HELD ALLEGRA IN MY ARMS
 A DAUGHTER, I SAID
 A DAUGHTER, A GIRL
 IT SEEMS SO LONG AGO
 I CAN HARDLY RECALL HER FACE
 SHE WAS CRYING, AND I
 I WAS CRYING AS WELL
 FOR PAIN, FOR JOY, FOR ... SOMETHING
 I DON'T REMEMBER

HER HAIR WAS BROWN, I THINK
 HER EYES MIGHT HAVE BEEN BLUE
 BUT SHE GREW SO QUICKLY, SO QUICKLY
 WHAT WAS THAT NAME SHE CALLED ME?

PROPRIETOR

Is it true what I heard? His body washed up on the beach?

(Near Mary, Shelley appears in a SPOTLIGHT, looking handsome, happy.)

SHELLEY

THE SEA IS STILL
THE SKY SHOWS THE LAST LIGHT OF DAY
SHALL WE LIE HERE
TOGETHER FOREVER, DIE HERE?
BY THE BLUE SEA

MARY

BY THE BLUE SEA!

BOTH

BESIDE YOU ...

(Shelley remains, as if still alive in Mary's memory.)

CLAIRE

(Aside to the Proprietor:) Oh, it was horrible! In a romantic Italian seaside sort of a way, of course. In the midst of a cholera outbreak, they wouldn't allow him to be buried. So there was a great funeral pyre. As if it were the Middle Ages! The fiery poet, burnt to ashes. All but his heart.

(Shelley's light glows ORANGE around him, but he seems untouched by the flames.)

PROPRIETOR

His heart?

CLAIRE

It wouldn't burn. They say Mary snatched it out of the embers, and carried it back to London.

PROPRIETOR

(Enthused:) You don't say!

MARY

They say ... (Turning:) She keeps the heart in a little gilt casket, which she carries wherever she goes. What else would you expect from the creator of the Frankenstein fiend?

MARY

Dear Polidori?

PROPRIETOR

Yes. What an intriguing fellow! I don't recall ...

CLAIRE

Gambling debts and large dose of Prussic acid done him in.

MARY

Claire!

CLAIRE

Beg pardon. Did him in.

PROPRIETOR

The poor devil. So they are gone, all three?

CLAIRE

(Bitterly:) Dead and dead and dead again. Shelley drowned. Byron in the Greek war. And poor Poli a suicide. Though that was hushed up, of course.

MARY

Sssh, Claire! I'm afraid we ladies are the only survivors.

PROPRIETOR

If I may say so, Madam Shelley, I was most grieved to hear about your husband. A great mind, truly. A grand poet. My sincerest condolences, I'm sure.

MARY

Thank you.

*(Mary moves closer to the fire downstage, as if to dry her skirts.
Claire and the Proprietor gossip out of Mary's hearing.)*

PROPRIETOR

(To Claire:) A boating accident, I heard?

CLAIRE

Yes. And he'd nearly drowned once before, you know. That time in Geneva.

PROPRIETOR

You don't say!

CLAIRE

He ought to have learned how to swim after that. Poor, impractical Shelley.

CLAIRE

Byron's and mine. I have that much of him at least. So he and I will be connected, always.

POLIDORI

Yes. You and he.

(Claire falls asleep as Polidori sings:)

AFTER THE FIRE DIES
 THAT'S WHEN YOU REALIZE
 (THAT) YOU ARE ALL ALONE
 THE DAMP CREEPS CRUELLY IN
 AND IN AND IN AND IN
 BONE BY BONE BY BONE ... BY BONE ... BY BONE

OH, THERE IS MADNESS IN LOVE
 I LONG TO FEEL IT AGAIN
 TO TWIST WITH ITS IRRESISTABLE PAIN
 TO REACH INTO THE FIRE
 IS OF COURSE QUITE INSANE
 BUT THEN, LOVE IS MADNESS
 SUCH DAMN'D SPLENDID MADNESS

(Coda:)
 THAT IS WHY, AMID THE EMBERS
 THROUGH ALL OUR JUNES AND OUR NOVEMBERS
 WE FOOLS ...
 WE POOR FOOLS
 WE POOR, MAD FOOLS GO ON SEARCHING ...
 (FOR LOVE.)

(Instead of finishing the last line, Polidori drinks the long draught of laudanum.)

(BLACKOUT. Sweeping RAIN sounds.)

(LIGHTS come up on Mary, as in the opening of Act One, in the coffee shop, 1825. After a beat, the light widens, and Claire is seen as well, cloaked as at the beginning of the play. The PROPRIETOR leans nearby, against the sideboard, absorbed in the story.)

PROPRIETOR

Whatever happened to him?

CLAIRE

The fire is going out.

POLIDORI

And no more coal til the girl comes in the morning. Are you cold?

CLAIRE

A little.

(Bridge/variation:)

AFTER THE FIRE DIES
THAT'S WHEN YOU REALIZE
(THAT) YOU ARE ALL ALONE
THE DAMP CREEPS CRUELLY IN
AND IN AND IN AND IN
BONE BY BONE ... BY BONE

POLIDORI

Here.

(He wraps a cloak around her shoulders.)

CLAIRE

You won't leave me alone, will you? In the dark?

POLIDORI

It will be light soon enough. Perhaps tomorrow the sun will shine at last, and for good.

CLAIRE

Oh, I hope so!

(Polidori is preparing his own draught of laudanum; a rather large one.)

POLIDORI

Sleep. I will stay with you.

(Claire curls up, smiling drowsily.)

CLAIRE

At least I will have the baby.

POLIDORI

Baby?

CLAIRE

What is it?

POLIDORI

Something to give you a bit of peace, that's all.

*(She takes the glass and drinks, like Juliet downing the potion.
After a beat.)*

CLAIRE

Will I die quickly?

POLIDORI

What?

CLAIRE

The poison. Is it quick-acting? Will I die right away?

POLIDORI

You're not going to die at all, dear girl. It's just a sleeping draught. Did you really think I'd poison you?

CLAIRE

I was hoping you would.

POLIDORI

Try to sleep. If one is lucky, the draught can bring quite beautiful dreams.

CLAIRE

Oh! I feel ...

POLIDORI

Drowsy?

CLAIRE

Tingly ... and the embers in the hearth look so lovely!

POLIDORI

Look at them, then.

CLAIRE

Doctor?

POLIDORI

Yes?

POLIDORI

(With compassion:) How could you not? You were in love.

(Sings:)

THERE IS MADNESS IN LOVE
MADNESS STRONGER THAN GIN
FIRST IT BURNS, THEN IT TURNS
ALL YOUR OUTSIDES IN
YOU'RE POSSESSED, YOU ARE BLESSED
YOU HAVE LOST, YET YOU WIN
YOU KNOW IT IS MADNESS
ONLY BRIGHT, BITTER MADNESS
BUT IN THAT CUP OF MADNESS
STILL YOU TASTE LOVE

When I saw you standing on the parapet, for a moment I was afraid for you.

CLAIRE

Why? You don't even like me.

POLIDORI

But I do understand you.

(Polidori takes a vial from his doctor's bag.)

CLAIRE

I believe you do.

THERE IS MADNESS IN LOVE
MADNESS BLACKER THAN NIGHT
IT BLINDS YOU AND WINDS YOU
TIL DARKNESS IS LIGHT
THE THING THAT YOU CLING TO'S
THE DEMON YOU FIGHT
IT IS UTTER MADNESS
(IT IS) NOTHING BUT MADNESS
AND YET, BLINDED BY MADNESS
WE REACH FOR LOVE

(Polidori has poured out a small draught of liquid.)

POLIDORI

Calm yourself. Here.

CLAIRE

Yes, Doctor?

POLIDORI

The rain is spoiling the carpet.

CLAIRE

Oh.

(Polidori hurries up the stairs and takes Claire's arm. She allows him to help her down. As he closes the windows against the storm, she crumples.)

CLAIRE

I should never have come to Geneva!

POLIDORI

I am in agreement on that point. *(More kindly:)* It was, my dear lady ... unwise.

CLAIRE

It was idiotic! I was never anything but a momentary distraction to him. A toy!

(Polidori observes her closely, lest she spring for the window again.)

POLIDORI

If a toy, then at least a most beguiling and beautiful one.

CLAIRE

I wanted my own grand passion! An even greater poet than Shelley, and I his adored and adoring muse! Ha! Byron's muse, I?

POLIDORI

(Ironically:) Not muse, but momentary amusement.

CLAIRE

Twist the knife if that's what amuses you, Doctor!

POLIDORI

Dear lady, you misunderstand. Not cruelty, but sympathy. Loving one who does not return your affections... that, I'm afraid, is a quite common malady. Practically epidemic.

CLAIRE

It was all completely one-sided! *(Abjectly:)* How could I be so deluded?

(UNDERSCORE begins: "Madness in Love" – a romantic tango.)

(UNDERSCORE rises. The Creature grabs William, who cries out; then silences the boy by wrapping his hands around his throat.

(A SHIFT OF LIGHT thrusts the two struggling figures into silhouette. Mary looks on with horror at her own vision: the demon she has created brutally strangling the child named for her own William.

(Music CRESCENDO accents the violent struggle.)

MARY

William!

(MUSIC ENDS. The struggle is over. Mary covers her face and disappears into BLACKOUT.

(On the other side of the stage, LIGHTS SHIFT as the silhouette of the Creature holding the murdered child changes into the intertwined figures of Byron and Claire. After a moment, Byron casts the clinging girl away.)

BYRON

Do you think your woman's tricks will work with me? I am finished with you!
FINISHED!

(He exits to his room, BOLTING the door.

(An ominous UNDERSCORE begins, echoing "Cast Out," as Claire rises and runs up the stairs blindly, weeping. As she passes the landing window, LIGHTNING strikes outside. She stops, transfixed by the storm outside the window.

(MUSIC builds. Claire throws the window open, jumps up. She stands on the ledge, looking down. Just as it seems she might step out into empty space, Polidori appears at the foot of the stairs.)

POLIDORI

(Calmly:) Miss Clairmont.

(Framed in the window, Claire stops, but does not turn her head.)

My dear Miss Clairmont!

(Underscore STOPS.)

NEST OF ROBINS, YELLOWJACKET
 QUEEN ANNE'S LACE ... BUTTERFLY!
 GOLDEN LOCKET HOLDS THE SECRET

(The boy begins to stalk the butterfly as Mary looks on.)

QUIETLY, QUIETLY
 BUTTERFLY, COME TO ME
 QUIETLY, QUIETLY
 BUTTERFLY ...

Ah!

(He has caught the insect! He holds it in his cupped hands.)

GOLDEN LOCKET HOLDS THE SECRET!
 BEAUTIFUL, BEAUTIFUL, GOLDEN, GOLDEN
 BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL GOLD!
 HURRAH FOR THE PIRATE, WILLIAM WILLIAM
 WILLIAM THE PIRATE BOLD

(A tall, shadowy creature enters the circle of William's light. The Creature is watching William at play, stalking him as the boy stalked the butterfly.)

WILLIAM

CREATURE

BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL
 GOLDEN GOLDEN
 BEAUTIFUL BEAUTIFUL GOLD!
 HURRAH FOR THE PIRATE
 WILLIAM WILLIAM

GOLDEN ...
 GOLDEN ...

WILLIAM
 WILLIAM!

(As Mary watches, the boy and the Creature confront one another.)

WILLIAM

Who are you?

CREATURE

QUIETLY, QUIETLY
 BUTTERFLY, COME TO ME
 QUIETLY, QUIETLY
 BUTTERFLY!

CLAIRE

But Mary, I don't know what I'll do!

MARY

(Firmly, but not unkindly:) You will do what you must do, Claire. Think about your future. Shelley and I will help. But it is your life. Tell Byron or don't tell him, you must make your own choice.

(Mary brings the lamp nearer, and dips her pen in the inkwell.)

CLAIRE

Writing, writing! Can't we be done with this stupid competition?

MARY

Sssshh!

(LIGHTS shift, isolating Mary and Claire in two separate POOLS of light.)

CLAIRE

This is real life, Mary. Life and death! Not some trivial story no one will ever remember!

MARY

(Absently:) You are right, I'm sure.

(As Mary writes, LIGHTS SHIFT.)

(The distraught Claire steps hesitantly toward Byron's door ... and passes through a GOLDEN POOL of light. She is transformed into the young boy William, playing at pirates in a spring meadow.)

BEGIN TRACK 12 : "Pirate William"WILLIAM

(Sings:)

RABBIT'S FOOT, BIT OF LEATHER
 ARROWHEAD, CRIMSON FEATHER
 LISTEN, LISTEN!
 WILLOW WHISPERS: TREASURE, TREASURE
 PIRATE WILLIAM, LOOK UP HIGH
 GOLDEN LOCKET HOLDS A SECRET
 PIRATE WILLIAM, LOOK UP HIGH

(There is a pause while William looks, trying to spot the treasure.)

SILVER MEADOW, COPPER BRANCHES
 RUBY SUN, SAPPHIRE SKY

THIS HATED, HATED BLOOD
 THIS BURNING, BURNING BLOOD
 FILLING MY SOUL WITH FIRE, WITH FIRE
 WITH FIRE!
 WITH RAGING FIRE!

(The Creature howls one last threat as he turns to go:)

(Spoken:) I WILL BE WITH YOU ON YOUR WEDDING NIGHT!

*(LIGHTS shift, coming back up on the drawing room. Underscore:
 "Sister's Eyes.")*

(Claire runs down the stairs and past the sleeping Polidori. She approaches Byron, whose back is turned. She touches his shoulder and turns on her, filled with the Creature's murderous rage.)

BYRON

WHAT DO YOU WANT?

CLAIRE

(Frightened:) I ... nothing!

(Byron exits; his door SLAMS. With a glance at the sleeping Polidori, Claire runs to Mary, who is crouched over her notebook.)

CLAIRE

Mary!

MARY

What is it now, Claire?

CLAIRE

Byron is alone now. You must tell him for me. About the baby.

MARY

You still haven't done it?

CLAIRE

I haven't wanted to spoil his mood. But tonight, he frightens me. Did you see the way he just looked at me? As if he might commit murder?

MARY

Claire, don't be silly. I promised myself I'd write this idea down before it runs away.

CREATURE

You promised me a wife! A creature like myself! *Shall each man ... find a wife for his bosom, and each beast have his mate, and I be alone? I have waited long enough!*

WHERE IS MY SHE-BEAST, MY COMPANION?
WHERE IS THE ONE TO RAISE HER HORRIBLE VOICE
TO HOWL AGAINST MY PAIN?

VICTOR

Look around you! See the remnants of my efforts, destroyed by my own hand.

CREATURE

CURSE YOU FOR A FIEND AND TRAITOR
YOU SWORE TO ME AS MY CREATOR!
AAAAH!

VICTOR

Yes, I swore. To my everlasting regret, I swore! Yet, try as I might, I could not bring myself to fulfill the promise I made. I could not!

CREATURE

Then you will curse the day you brought me into being.

VICTOR

I already curse that day, a thousand times over. Now leave me! Or kill me, I care not which.

(As MUSIC builds, the Creature takes Victor by the throat, but after a moment, releases him. Victor gasps for breath.)

CREATURE

No, my Father. Not death, not now, though it is within my power. But I will make you wish for death. Do not imagine you can escape me. Not in this life. (Hissing:) *"I will be with you on your wedding night."*

(His face distorted with rage, the Creature stands over Victor.)

CAST OUT, I AM CAST OUT!
MY VERY SOUL IS TORN FROM ME
I TASTE THE BITTERNESS WITH EV'RY BEAT OF MY HEART
WITH EV'RY PULSE OF BLOOD
WITH EV'RY THROB OF BLOOD
WITH EV'RY FLAMING DROP OF BLOOD
IN THESE LOATHED VEINS
THIS HATED BLOOD,

CREATURE

CAST OUT, I AM CAST OUT
 MY VERY HEART IS TORN FROM ME
 I FEEL THE BURNING WITH EV'RY BEAT OF MY DYING HEART
 WITH EV'RY PULSE OF BLOOD
 WITH EV'RY THROB OF BLOOD
 WITH EV'RY FLOW OF BLOOD
 THROUGH THESE LOATHED VEINS
 THIS HATED BLOOD
 THIS HATED, HATED BLOOD
 FILLING ME WITH THE FIRE OF LONELINESS!

MARY

Alone. I am alone.

CREATURE

ALONE, I AM ALONE
 ALONE I CONTEMPLATE THESE WRETCHED HANDS
 THESE ARMS THAT REACH FOR
 COMFORT, SUCCOR, CONSOLATION
 NOW ENFOLD EACH OTHER AND ARE EMPTIER STILL
 WITH EV'RY PULSE OF BLOOD
 WITH EV'RY THROB OF BLOOD
 WITH EV'RY FLOW OF BLOOD
 THROUGH THESE HIDEOUS ARMS
 THESE HIDEOUS, EMPTY ARMS
 EMBRACING THE RAGING FIRE OF LONELINESS!

CURSED, CURSED CREATOR!
 MONSTROUS BUILDER OF MONSTERS!
 THE BITTER PERFECTION OF YOUR FOUL DEED
 WAS TO GIVE YOUR VILE ADAM NO EVIL EVE
 SATAN HAD HIS FELLOW DEVILS TO ADMIRE HIM
 EVEN HE: BUT THIS POOR DEVIL IS
 SOLITARY
 CAST OUT ... AMONG THE BEASTS

(Another LIGHT illuminates Shelley as Victor Frankenstein. The Creature turns on him with a cry of rage.)

CREATURE

If you have forgotten me, Creator, I have not forgotten you!

VICTOR

Why do you pursue me, Demon?

SHELLEY

I do believe writing is good for you, Mary. You are my old Spirit again. Bright, rosy-cheeked. Keep on, Spirit! Keep on!

MARY

Oh, I shall, Atheist. I shall!

(They kiss again.)

BYRON

I was wondering when the night's entertainment would begin. Poli! You are missing the sex show.

(Byron elbows Polidori, who is drowsing in his chair.)

Do you two need a third? Or is it to be an all out orgy?

CLAIRE

An orgy! There's a game we've not yet played! Not all of us at once anyway.

(With a disgusted glance at Claire, Byron takes the brandy bottle and exits. His passage barely causes the snoozing Polidori to stir.)

SHELLEY

(Suggestively, to Mary:) As our gracious hosts seem to have retired

MARY

I think I'll stay up a bit longer. You've given me an idea for a new chapter. Don't look at me like that. Didn't you just tell me to keep on?

SHELLEY

Alas and woe is me. I have created a monster! Come, Claire, we may as well leave the geniuses to their work.

(Shelley kisses Mary's hand, and goes up the stairs, with Claire reluctantly following behind.)

(LIGHTS dim on the drawing room, with a SPOTLIGHT remaining on Mary. She opens her notebook, dips her pen, and begins to write.)

MARY

Cast out. I am cast out ...

(Isolated in a POOL of light down left, Byron appears as the Creature.)

(He kisses her. And Mary kisses him back. But then stops.)

SHELLEY

(Gravely:) No woman can own a man, Mary. Nor man a woman. That is not love; it is slavery. That would be embracing, not life, but death. Don't you see?

MARY

I see ... only you.

HERE IN YOUR EMBRACE
THOUGH THEY'LL SAY IT'S WRONG
I HAVE FOUND MY PLACE
THE PLACE WHERE I BELONG
AT LONG LAST, I BELONG!

TOGETHER

BELIEVE IN ME, LOVE
AND I'LL TRAVEL THIS EARTH WITH YOU
TO FACE WHAT ARROWS FATE MAY SEND OUR WAY
LIVING FREE, LOVE
AND LOVING AS WE DO
WE'LL DELIGHT IN EV'RY MOMENT, EV'RY DAY

WHEN I LOOK AT YOU
WHEN YOU TOUCH MY HAND
THIS I KNOW IS TRUE
THIS I UNDERSTAND
LOVE'S A SIMPLE FACT
AS REAL AS REAL CAN BE
LET US MAKE A PACT
TOGETHER TO BE FREE

[Coda, like bells pealing:]
FREE TO GO BEYOND DESIRE
FREE TO STEP INTO THE FIRE
GIVE YOURSELF TO ME
AND TOGETHER WE WILL BE ...
FREE!

(They begin to make love.)

(LIGHTS resume again on the drawing room, Mary and Shelley are intertwined in an embrace.)

MARY*(Smiling:)* Does one make love in such a place? Among the dead?SHELLEY

Where better to celebrate the living?

(Now he is very close to her indeed, sharing the same breath.)

Do you feel it, too, Mary? Between us? Life?

MARY

I feel ...

(Bridge:)

THOUGH WE'VE BARELY MET
 WHEN YOU'RE NEAR TO ME
 IT'S IMPOSSIBLE, AND YET
 YOU ARE DEAR TO ME
 SUDDENLY SO DEAR TO ME!

Can such a thing really happen so quickly?

SHELLEY

It can. It has. One never knows when lightning will strike.

*(Shelley takes her in his arms. At that moment, LIGHTNING does strike! They both jump. Then Mary laughs.)*MARY

There, Atheist! Do you doubt the spirits now? I believe my mother likes you!

SHELLEY

And what about you, Spirit? Do you like me?

MARY

(Sincerely:) I AGREE THAT FREE MEN
 AND FREE WOMEN, TOO
 SHOULD BE FREE TO FOLLOW WHAT IS IN THEIR HEARTS
 AND I AM FREE, THEN
 TO FOLLOW MINE TO YOU
 FOR IT'S IN YOUR EYES THAT MY JOURNEY STARTS
 WHEN I TOUCH YOUR HAND
 THIS WORLD FALLS AWAY
 AS OUR HEARTS DO COMMAND
 OUR LIPS MUST OBEY
 OUR LIPS MUST ...

SHELLEY

WHEN I TOUCH YOUR HAND
THIS WORLD FALLS AWAY
AS HEARTS DO COMMAND
DARE LIPS DISOBEY?

(Mary stops Shelley's advance with her next words.)

MARY

I'm curious, does Mrs. Shelley agree with your unconventional ideas? Father mentioned a wife. A legally wedded wife?

SHELLEY

(Sadly:) Poor Harriet!

MARY

Marriage does seem to run contrary to your philosophy.

SHELLEY

(In awkward fits and starts:) She was young, we both were so And, well, she wanted So it seemed the kindest thing. I thought I could help her, but then she became ill. Her mind

MARY

You don't owe me explanations, Mr. Shelley.

SHELLEY

(Earnestly:) I will never abandon her. And because I won't, and yet maintain as a human being I have the right find joy in my own life if I can, people think me cruel. They are the ones who are cruel.

MARY

But surely you don't care what anyone thinks? Not you.

(Sings:)

YOU BELIEVE IN FREEDOM
FREEDOM AT ANY COST
THOUGH IT BEARS A PRICE THAT FEW CAN PAY

...

(The underscore continues, but she breaks off because Shelley has stepped even nearer. A light MIST begins to rise.)

SHELLEY

Am I a scoundrel, Mary? A married man making love to a woman I hardly know?

A CHILDISH MAGIC SHOW
WHILE OTHERS GO ON DREAMING
I'LL LIVE WITH WHAT I KNOW
AND ONLY WHAT I KNOW ...

Don't encourage me, or I shall go on.

MARY

I'm listening, Atheist.

SHELLEY

I BELIEVE IN FREE WILL
IN FOLLOWING MY MUSE
IN LOOKING OTHERS STRAIGHT-ON IN THE EYE
I BELIEVE IN FREE LOVE
SHARING MYSELF WITH WHOM I CHOOSE
WITHOUT THE NEED FOR EXPLANATIONS WHY
PASSION'S TRANSITORY
IT PASSES, LIKE THE SPRING
ROMANCE IN ALL ITS GLORY
IS BUT A FLEETING THING
A FRAGILE, FLEETING THING ...

We mortals are duty bound to live every single moment. That's what I believe.

MARY

Duty bound to whom? To what?

SHELLEY

To Nature.

MARY

You don't believe in marriage, then?

SHELLEY

(Bridge:)

I DO BELIEVE IN MARRIAGE, OF A KIND
THE UNION OF A TRUE, COURAGEOUS MIND WITH ITS LIKE
BUT ONE NEVER KNOWS WHEN SUCH LIGHTNING WILL STRIKE

MARY

YES, IT'S TRUE, I SUPPOSE
ONE NEVER KNOWS
WHEN LIGHTNING WILL STRIKE

(Shelley steps closer to Mary, takes her hand.)

MARY

Boy, you may go to the head of the class. May I introduce my mother?

(She clears a bit of ivy away from the stone for him to read:)

SHELLEY

Mary Wollestonecraft! Now I don't fault your choice of company!

MARY

And I like you better for that.

SHELLEY

So you did dislike me, I felt it! No sooner had we been introduced than you disappeared.

MARY

My hasty exit had rather more to do with the ladies of the party, I'm afraid.

SHELLEY

The dead are better company?

MARY

Oh, infinitely! I somehow love this place. I suppose it makes me feel closer to my mother, or to her spirit anyway. Sometimes I talk to her. (Pause.) I realize you have no use for spirits.

SHELLEY

You find my atheism shocking?

MARY

Not in the least. (With mischief:) But it does make me wonder. And my mother would like to know as well, wouldn't you, Mother? Yes, Mother and I would like to know: what does someone like you believe in, Mr. Shelley?

SHELLEY

I believe in ... reality. This moment. The here and the now. I believe in what I observe with my own eyes. What I feel with my own heart. That and only that.

(Sings:)

I BELIEVE IN FREE THOUGHT

IN SCIENTIFIC FACT

IN THINGS THAT ONE CAN SEE AND HEAR AND FEEL

I BELIEVE IN FREE CHOICE

THAT FREE MEN ARE FREE TO ACT

AND THAT ACTION IS MAN'S PRINCIPAL IDEAL

ALL ELSE IS MERELY SEEMING

MARY

So they say.

CLAIRE

Well, she did kill her mother at two weeks old, sort of. That is, Mary was two weeks old, not her mother. A mother at two weeks of age, wouldn't that be bizarre?

POLIDORI

There's a horror story for you! The womb ... within the womb!

CLAIRE

Sssh, Doctor! Anyway, she died of childbed fever. The famous Mary I mean. So one shouldn't wonder that the un-famous one turned out morbid and antisocial. Always slipping off to her mother's grave.

POLIDORI

The womb within the womb ... on a tomb!

CLAIRE

I ask you, what young girl spends all her time in a cemetery alone?

SHELLEY

She wasn't always alone.

MARY

(Smiling at Shelley:) No. Not always ...

SHELLEY

Claire, did you never think it might have been your conversation that drove your sister to her mother's graveside?

(LIGHTS begin to shift, until Shelley and Mary are isolated in their own POOL of light, near the terrace – in a memory of their first meeting, less than three years earlier.)

(A younger Mary, barely sixteen, sits on her mother's gravestone, surrounded by MIST. Shelley approaches, clears his throat.)

SHELLEY

Miss Godwin. Here you are!

MARY

Mr. Shelley. I'm afraid you found father's party too dull.

SHELLEY

Your sister said I might find you here. But what is this place? A graveyard?

POLIDORI

(Acidly:) What about you, Miss Clairmont? We anxiously await the product of your fair genius.

CLAIRE

Why, I haven't got any story.

POLIDORI

What a shame!

CLAIRE

If it was a love story competition, I'd have half a chance. But with ghost stories, Mary has an unfair advantage, over us all.

SHELLEY

Unfair how?

(THUNDER rumbles.)

CLAIRE

She's always had an affinity for gloom. I shouldn't doubt she even likes this abysmal weather.

MARY

(Smiling:) It is rather conducive to horror.

CLAIRE

You know what they say of her ...

(Sings:)

A LITTLE FEY, A TRIFLE DAFT
THE DAUGHTER OF MARY WOLLESTONECRAFT ...
BY WILLIAM GODWIN ... OH SHE'S AN ODD ONE!

MARY

Aren't you going to finish, Claire?

HARRIDAN, HAG, WITCH, WHATEVER
UNCANNILY WISE AND AWFULLY CLEVER
KILLED HER MOTHER AT TWO WEEKS OLD
AND NOW SHE HAS A TASTE FOR MOLD

BYRON

(Intimately, to Mary:) So you're a murderess, are you?

BYRON

But you must continue!

POLIDORI

Yes, we must know more about your hero, the Doctor. What was the peculiar name you gave him?

MARY

Frankenstein.

POLIDORI

Well, that will never do. Too ... Germanic. I'd reconsider if I were you.

MARY

I'll take it under advisement, Doctor.

POLIDORI

Whatever his name, this doctor is most fascinating. Don't you agree, Byron?

BYRON

(With emotion:) No, I do not. Mary, it is your beast! What an invention! A deformed soul, exiled by his Creator. God, it makes me weep to think of him!

POLIDORI

Calm yourself, Byron. Shelley, take the glass away.

BYRON

Get your hands away from me! There is nothing in your doctoring that can give a cure to this despair, this loneliness that sits deep in the soul! Mary Godwin, you have given my heart to your Creature.

MARY

It's just a story.

SHELLEY

No, my dear Mary, he is right. To give this Creature a voice, to write in sympathy with the hideous outcast as well as his creator, it is more than a ghost story. It has the mark of genius. Who but you could have thought of it? Brava, Mary!

MARY

Thank you.

(Shelley bows to her, playfully, and yet completely heartfelt. Their eyes meet and hold for a moment. Then Shelley breaks away.)

Who will go next?

(Victor is irresistibly drawn back to complete his work. He brings the ILLUMINATED VIAL closer to the Creature.)

I HOLD THE VIAL OF LIFE
I WILL NOT HESITATE!
WHAT WILL COME WILL COME
WHAT WILL COME WILL COME!

MARY

(Reading:) "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."

(LIGHTNING FLASHES dramatically behind Victor, as he holds the AMBER vial over the recumbent Creature. The Creature GASPS, takes a few tortured breaths, then opens its AMBER EYES and screams in agony.)

CREATURE

NO! The light! The light!

VICTOR

My God, what have I done?

MARY

The eye. The yellow eye ...

(The Creature covers its eyes. Victor turns away from him.)

(LIGHTS abruptly resume on the drawing room as before. Byron lies on the couch, Shelley stands behind him, holding a glass of Scotch; Claire is in a chair nearby, and Polidori has rejoined the group. All are transfixed by Mary's story.)

MARY

And that is as far as I've gotten.

SHELLEY

What?

CLAIRE

(Overlapping:) That's all?

MARY

All I've written down.

VICTOR

ENRAPTURED, ENRAPTURED
 BY DARKNESS CAPTURED
 CALLING DEATH BY ALL HER NAMES
 BRIGHT ANGEL, PALE PRIESTESS
 OH, SWEET QUEEN OF DREAMS
 OPEN YOUR GOLDEN EYE
 THAT I MAY LIVE IN AMBER LIGHT
 IN AMBER LIGHT LUXURIATE
 I HOLD THE VIAL OF LIFE
 AND YET I HESITATE

(Victor pauses, holding aloft a beaker filled with AMBER exilir that catches the light.)

(Nearby, an AMBER pinspot illuminates Byron's closed EYES; now he takes on the role of the CREATURE, not yet reanimated.)

MARY

(Reading:) I beheld my creation, locked in the dream of death.

(Victor turns away from his creation.)

VICTOR

No, it is too horrible! I can't go on.

(But his eyes are drawn back to the Creature, on whom the light intensifies. Stiltedly at first, as if learning to speak, the Creature sings with his eyes still closed:)

CREATURE

ENRAPTURED ... ENRAPTURED
 BY DARKNESS CAPTURED
 CARESSED ... SUCKLED AT THE BREAST OF PARADISE
 SILENCE, SILENCE ... PEACE
 THE MILK OF ECSTASY
 ECSTASY ... ECSTASY
 (Repeats, as Victor joins back in:)

VICTOR

ENRAPTURED, ENRAPTURED, BY DARKNESS CAPTURED
 CALLING DEATH BY ALL HER NAMES
 BRIGHT ANGEL, PALE PRIESTESS
 OH, SWEET QUEEN OF DREAMS
 OPEN YOUR GOLDEN EYE THAT I MAY LIVE IN AMBER LIGHT
 IN AMBER LIGHT LUXURIATE

MARY
I DARE NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY

(Shelley stands near Mary to read over her shoulder at first. Then, he moves downstage as the LIGHTS begin to dim on the rest of the group. Shelley begins to take on the role of Victor Frankenstein.)

MARY & SHELLEY
(Reading:) ... the moon gazed on my midnight labors, while, with ... breathless eagerness, I pursued Nature to her hiding places. Who shall conceive the horror of my secret toil as I dabbled among the unhallowed damps of the grave?

(Mary remains in half-light, as Shelley takes over the reading.)

SHELLEY (with Mary at first)
BONES DISTURBED BY PROFANE FINGERS
HEEDLESS OF OBSCENITY
ELBOW-DEEP IN THE BOWELS OF DEATH
I DARE NOT TAKE RESPONSIBILITY
FROM WHENCE CAME THIS DISCOVERY?

MARY
(Spoken:) I know not.

(The transformation is complete. Shelley has become Victor.)

VICTOR
AN UNSEEN HAND

MARY
(Echoing:) AN UNSEEN HAND

VICTOR
DIRECTED MINE

MARY
(Echoing:) DIRECTED MINE

BOTH
AN UNSEEN HAND DIRECTED MINE

(LIGHTS brighten on Victor, absorbed in working over the shadowy form of his Creature.)

BYRON

Go on, Mary Godwin.

BEGIN TRACK 11 : "Creation"MARY

(Sings:)

I SEE IT STILL, THE SHUTTERED ROOM
 THE DARK PARQUET STRIPED WITH MOON
 OUTSIDE THE UNRELENTING RAIN
 LIKE FINGERS AT THE WINDOW PANE
 MY LOVER THERE, ASLEEP AND STILL
 I STARING AT THE FIRE UNTIL ...

(Mary nervously swallows, then continues.)

IT COULD NOT BE SAID THAT I SLEPT
 NOR DID I TURN MY MIND TO THOUGHT
 AND YET IMAGINATION CREPT
 ACROSS THE COALS AND SWIRLED AND CAUGHT
 AND THERE I SAW THE SCIENTIST BENT
 OVER HIS EXPERIMENT
 I SAW HIM TURN, HIS ARM RAISED ON HIGH
 I HEARD THE ANGUISHED, AWESTRUCK CRY
 THEN SAW THE SLOWLY OPENING YELLOW EYE!

(Mary lowers her notebook, embarrassed.)

No, it's too horrible. I can't go on.

SHELLEY

You must continue, Mary.

MARY

AN UNSEEN HAND

SHELLEY

(Echoing:) AN UNSEEN HAND

MARY

DIRECTED MINE

SHELLEY

(Echoing:) AN UNSEEN HAND DIRECTED MINE

(Claire is near the downstage right exit, watching for Polidori.)

CLAIRE

Well someone must read something, or soon we'll be in for Chapter Ten!

(Mary has been quietly sitting in a corner all this time, pretending to be invisible.)

BYRON

It is up to you, Miss Godwin.

MARY

Me?

SHELLEY

You've been scribbling like a demon for three days. You must have something in that notebook of yours.

MARY

It's not finished ... and my throat is rather dry.

BYRON

Well, the latter is easily remedied. Give the woman a drink!

(Shelley goes to sideboard to fill a glass for Mary.)

CLAIRE

I think I hear him! Mary, you must begin! Hurry!

SHELLEY

It's all right, Mary. Our expectations aren't very high. Anything will do.

BYRON

Anything but Skullheaded Ladies. Go on, woman! What's it called?

MARY

The Modern Prometheus.

SHELLEY

Well, never mind the title. How did the idea come to you?

MARY

Well. I awoke from a dream. The dream of William. You remember.

CLAIRE

He's coming! Hurry! Do begin!

CLAIRE

Oh, thank God! But of course as soon as he returns, the torture will continue.

BYRON

The only thing to do is, when he comes back, someone else must be in the midst of reading his story.

SHELLEY

Capital idea, Byron! Go ahead.

BYRON

(Graciously:) After you, Mr. Fish.

SHELLEY

No, no, you are our host.

BYRON

As host, I insist the honor is yours.

CLAIRE

Byron, I don't believe you have done a story at all, have you?

BYRON

Well ... I've started a new poem.

SHELLEY

It's not about Don Ju-an, is it?

BYRON

No. But that is a good idea.

CLAIRE

I expect Shelley will have to go then.

SHELLEY

I would, but ...

BYRON

Ha! You haven't written a story either!

SHELLEY

No, but I did start –

SHELLEY & BYRON

A new poem!

CLAIRE

I thought that must be it. Oh! The gleaming knifeblade, dripping with gore! And those oozing, bloodshot eyes!

(Gesticulating wildly, Claire spills a copious amount of port down the front of Polidori's fancy waistcoat. Byron laughs.)

MARY

Claire!

CLAIRE

How clumsy of me!

POLIDORI

Nonsense, nonsense, you were simply caught up in the story, my dear.

CLAIRE

Oh, Doctor, your beautiful silk waistcoat! It will be ruined! You must go upstairs and change immediately.

POLIDORI

Oh, it's nothing, hardly noticeable. On to Chapter Ten! Now this is really the crux of the tale. Our hero wakes from a narco-hypnotic trance, you see ...

CLAIRE

(To Byron:) What shall we do now?

BYRON

Excuse me, Doctor, but Miss Clairmont is right. It is a damp night, after all.

POLIDORI

Well, I suppose I should change. But never fear, I'll hurry!

SHELLEY

Never mind, Doctor, we'll wait. Wouldn't want to miss the crux.

CLAIRE

Perhaps you should take a moment and soak the stain in cold water in the basin. Wine stains are the very dickens. Cold water is the only thing.

POLIDORI

Oh. Good idea. Cold water ... and then, the crux!

(Shelley ushers Polidori out. As soon as he's gone:)

(Claire gets a tray from the sideboard and passes around glasses of port, managing to continue flirting with Byron at the same time.)

Mary? I know I need a little fortification after all this suspense. Doctor! Horrifying!

SHELLEY

Ghastly. Absolutely ghastly.

POLIDORI

Why thank you, Shelley, dear fellow! I'm sure we shall all enjoy your story just as much.

SHELLEY

Oh, after this, I'm thinking of giving up writing altogether.

POLIDORI

Oh, you mustn't be discouraged, my good man. Fiction and poetry are two distinct genres.

CLAIRE

Do you know my favorite part? In Chapter Four, the bit with the licking tongues of fire. Lord Byron, will you have a glass?

BYRON

Several. And stay near with the bottle.

(Byron whispers in Claire's ear; Claire giggles.)

CLAIRE

Doctor, you've frightened everyone nearly out of his wits! Why, I almost fainted in Chapter Six.

SHELLEY

Mary was dead out halfway through the Prologue.

(Claire rises with the bottle of port and approaches Polidori.)

CLAIRE

I don't know where you come up with such original details, Doctor. I suppose you must draw on your extensive medical knowledge?

POLIDORI

(Flattered:) Well, I may have a slight advantage in my profession ...

PRAY TO THE GOD WHO MADE THEE
FOR YOUR HERO'S SOUL, SUNK IN THE HOLE
OF THE DREAD SKULLHEADED LADY!
AAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAH! AH! AH!

(Polidori takes a sip of water as Claire again applauds loudly. The men enthusiastically join in.)

CLAIRE

Doctor, how thrilling! I'm sure we could all do with some refreshment.

POLIDORI

But there's more!

SHELLEY

No!

POLIDORI

(Cheerfully:) Honestly, I'm only up to Chapter Ten!

CLAIRE

You must be exhausted, Doctor.

BYRON

I know I am.

CLAIRE

Mary, dear, will you have a glass of port?

MARY

(Yawning:) Is it over?

CLAIRE

No, no, dear, he's got five more lovely chapters. Haven't you, Doctor?

POLIDORI

And there's an epilogue!

SHELLEY

Not an epilogue!

BYRON

I'll pour.

CLAIRE

No, no, let me do it.

POLIDORI

(Correcting them:)

DERANGED AND HEINOUS HAIR!

WHO GHOST, SAID I, DIMSIGHTEDLY
 WITH CATARACTILE FEVER
 ARE YOU A FAIRY-SPRITE, A NYMPH
 OR SOME DEVILISH DECEIVER?
 OH, OCULAR HORROR, WHAT DO I SEE?
 A HELL HOUND OUT OF HADE!
 SHE CASTS HER EVIL EYE ON ME:
 AAAH! THE SKULLHEADED LADY!

MARY

(Drowsily:) Lady?

SHELLEY

Lady.

ALL

THE DREAD SKULLHEADED LADY!

POLIDORI

(In the voice of the Skullheaded Lady:)
 AAAAAH! AAAH! (THE SIREN SANG)
 AAAAAAH, AAAAAH, AAAAAAH!

BYRON

Dear God, save us!

POLIDORI

Precisely!

AAAAAAH!
 I HAVE A CAVE OF VITRIOL SO BEAUTIFULLY CASCADE-Y
 WHERE YOU SHALL DWELL IN EVERLASTING HELL
 WITH YOUR SWEET SKULLHEADED LADY!

*(Thinking – or hoping – he has finished Claire begins to applaud.
 Polidori silences her with a grand, theatrical gesture.)*

YOU IN YOUR MERRY MEADOWS
 SO PASTORAL AND SHADY
 YOU IN YOUR GREEN AND GRASSY
 GLORIOUS, GLOSSY, GLIST'NING GLADE-Y
 YOU AT YOUR HAPPY HOMEFIRES

ACT TWO

(Musical STING as a bright PINSPOT illuminates Polidori, elegantly dressed as if for a dinner party – or a funeral – standing downstage center.

(He is in the midst of reading his ghost story, and reveling in the spotlight.)

BEGIN TRACK 10 : “The Skullheaded Lady”

POLIDORI

The Skullheaded Lady! Chapter Nine!

I WAS SAFELY SNUGABED
WITH PIPE AND PEN AND LAMP
WHEN CURSED THIRST OCCURRED AT FIRST
I FANCIED SOMETHING DAMP

(Lights slowly rise on the drawing room as he sings. A yellow MOONLIGHT illuminates dense FOG outside the terrace doors, and the room is dramatically lit with CANDELABRA.

(The others are in various places around the room, suppressing yawns and laughter. On the sofa, Claire is snuggled seductively next to Byron, who is so bored he permits it. Shelley is slumped in a chair, his face in his hands. Mary is asleep in her chair, her notebook in her lap.)

I CAST ASIDE MY SPECTACLES
NE’ER THINKING OF THE MORROR
I HURRIED DOWN THE CORRIDOR
AND THERE I MET WITH HORROR!
IN DUSKY GLOOM, MY MUSKY DOOM
DID STEAL UPON THE STAIR
WITH JAUNDICED EYE, SKIN HOARY WHITE
DERANGED AND HEINOUS HAIR!

CLAIRE

Hair?

SHELLEY

Hair?

BYRON

Hair.

Final sequence (as house lights flicker):

(CLOCK begins to strike midnight as LIGHTS illuminate Mary, still at her writing table, but now sitting frozen, her notebook clutched to her chest as if it is a life preserver. She has stage fright.

(BLACKOUT. Underscore "Flying/Falling" as house lights dim.)

(END OF ENTR'ACTE)

(Polidori notices Claire, sleeping on the couch. He steps near her, then briskly SLAMS the book shut, waking her up.)

CLAIRE

Uhhh?

(Claire looks toward Byron's door, but finding the way blocked by Polidori, she exits up the stairs. Once she is gone:)

POLIDORI

Ha!

(Polidori goes out the way he came in, taking the book.)

(BLACKOUT.)

Sequence 3 (Evening of Day Three):

(Unkempt and ink-stained, Shelley descends the staircase, reading to himself from a loose sheaf of papers.)

SHELLEY

Hmm ... hmmm – hmph.

(He crumples a page, then a second, throwing them into the FIRE.)

Damn!

(Disgusted, he tosses the entire manuscript into the fire. PAGES flutter out over the audience.)

(Simultaneously to the above action, LIGHTS illuminate Mary at her writing table above. Wearing only her nightdress, her hair wild and neglected, she is furiously writing. She blots the page of her NOTEBOOK hastily; turns to the next; then stops, thinking. The answer comes in a rush.)

MARY

Oh ...? Oh. OH!

(LIGHTS FADE.)

ENTR'ACTE

(NOTE: Throughout the intermission period, we hear the sound of a CLOCK TICKING and LIGHT CHANGES indicate the passage of three days' time. We see the slow disintegration of order onstage, so the drawing room becomes much more chaotic, cluttered with books, ink pots, glasses and various other paraphernalia. Changes may be made by the actors during brief intervals of activity onstage, interspersed with periods of quiet/darkness.

(The last five minutes of intermission should be without any activity, except the slow darkening of the now very cluttered stage to black.)

Sequence 1 (Dusk of Day One):

(Byron bursts out of his chamber in dressing gown and slippers, chuckling to himself as he waves a page of manuscript, drying the ink. He crosses to the sideboard and pours himself a tumbler of wine; drinks it down; pours another, reading what he's read.)

BYRON

Bah!

(Claire comes in, bearing CANDELABRA. She spies Byron, who is now moving down left toward his rooms.)

CLAIRE

(Delighted:) Oh!

(Byron escapes to his rooms. His DOOR SLAMS.)

(Disappointed:) Oh.

(Claire sets the candelabra in place and goes to sit on the couch, gradually falls asleep as ...

(Night falls. BLACKOUT.)

Sequence 2 (Morning of Day Two):

(Polidori rushes in from down right. He takes up a large BOOK from a shelf, blows dust off of it, consults it.)

POLIDORI

(Softly:) Aha!

AND I'LL STAY
I WILL STAY ...
I WILL STAY!

(As the song ends, Byron steps out of the shadows, from where he has been watching Mary. They look at each other.

(Underscore: "Flying/Falling.")

(Shelley enters at the top of the stairs, sees them. His and Byron's eyes meet. Mary turns her head and sees Shelley, who bows and exits again.

(Mary turns back to Byron. He touches her. Then they kiss as ...

(ACT ONE CURTAIN falls.)

POLIDORI

And read aloud ...

CLAIRE

By candlelight!

(The CLOCK begins to strike midnight as the FOG deepens on the terrace.)

BYRON

Midnight, three days from now, the competition begins. To your bloody work!

(Claire tries to head toward Byron's room, but is prevented by Polidori, so she sulks off up the stairs. Polidori exits as well.

(Mary is left standing between Shelley and Byron. Shelley offers his hand to each of them in turn.)

SHELLEY

Best of luck, Mary. Byron.

(Byron retreats into the shadows. Mary watches as Shelley bounds up the stairs, already composing a story in his head. Mary is isolated in a SPOTLIGHT.)

MARY

HE MAY THINK THAT HE HAS WON
 BUT THIS GAME HAS JUST BEGUN
 MARY GODWIN'S IN TO WIN
 AND WINNING'S GOING TO BE FUN
 YES, HE DRIVES ME TO DISTRACTION
 YES, HE'S WILLFUL, HEAVEN KNOWS
 BUT DAMN THE MAN, I LOVE THE MAN
 AND HE'S THE MAN I CHOSE
 SO IT GOES ...

I MAY LOSE
 BUT I'LL NOT SURRENDER
 GIVING IN ISN'T MY WAY
 HEADS MAY TURN
 HEARTS MAY BREAK
 SLEEPING DEMONS MAY WAKE
 THAT'S A CHANCE THAT I'LL TAKE
 GLADLY TAKE, IF I STAY

MARY

Ghost stories! And everyone shall participate. Even the ladies.

SHELLEY

Indeed, Mary? You?

BYRON

Very good, Miss Godwin. A ghost story writing competition it is. Are we on, gentlemen?
And ladies?

SHELLEY

We are on.

MARY

Yes.

POLIDORI

Alright. But how long should we give ourselves to come up with a story? A week?

CLAIRE

We'll all be dead of boredom in a week.

MARY

Let us say three days.

SHELLEY

That's a bit ambitious. Remember, you've never written anything before, Mary.

CLAIRE

Except her diary. Which isn't very good.

MARY

Nevertheless. I shall have my ghost story in three days' time.

BYRON

Ghostly visions, eh, Miss Godwin? Something to make the blood tingle ... as it terrifies?
In only three days?

*(There is a hint of "Flying/Falling" UNDERSCORE as Byron
steps closer to Mary. She boldly meets his eyes.)*

MARY

Exactly.

SHELLEY

Very good. The stories to be done in three days' time ...

Oh.

SHELLEY

Of course I shoot! What shall it be, Byron? Pistols at twenty paces?

MARY

Wait. I have an idea.

BYRON

Godwin's daughter has an idea.

MARY

What if you chose ... gentler weapons?

CLAIRE

Ooh, I like the sound of that!

BYRON

Gentler weapons, hm. Swords?

SHELLEY

Daggers?

MARY

Words.

BYRON

The sharpest weapon of all!

SHELLEY

All right, words it is! A duel of words. What shall it be? Ballades? Canzones? Sonnets!

BYRON

No, the atmosphere is already dismal enough. Let us say ... stories.

POLIDORI

Sea stories?

CLAIRE

Love stories!

BYRON

Ghost stories.

(The candles FLICKER in a gust of wind. FOG begins to float into the room.)

BYRON

We must howl at the moon. Or if the moon will not show itself, we must grieve her absence with an even greater howl!

(He HOWLS, a sound that is filled with rage and grief.)

POLIDORI

Calm yourself, Byron.

BYRON

(To Polidori:) You understand nothing. But she understands.

(Claire beams at first, but then realizes he means Mary.)

Isn't that right, Godwin's daughter?

MARY

We do have a reputation to uphold, Lord Byron. You most especially.

BYRON

Ha! You have insight, Miss Godwin. *(To the group at large:)* Slackers! Ingrates! Why should I tolerate your presence, if you won't entertain me? I require amusement!

SHELLEY

Alright, Byron. Fair enough, we must earn our keep. What shall we play?

CLAIRE

Oh! I know a good game. But it has to be played in the dark.

BYRON

Bah! *(Eying Shelley ominously:)* I propose ... a duel.

MARY

You're not serious.

SHELLEY

A duel, eh?

BYRON

Yes, Mr. Fish. Between two so-called men of letters. You shoot, I suppose?

CLAIRE

(To Mary:) I didn't know Shelley could ...

(Mary shakes her head "no.")

BYRON

Oh, shut up. You too, Poli. Shelley! (Bellowing:) Mr. Fish! You are wanted!

(Shelley comes out onto the landing.)

SHELLEY

Did I miss something? Hello, Mary. Going somewhere?

(As Shelley comes down the stairs, Mary throws her cloak off and tosses it onto the couch.)

(There is substantial tension between Mary and Shelley, as there is between Claire and Polidori. All stand or sit, looking expectantly at Byron.)

BYRON

Ladies. Gentlemen. And others. I suppose you are all wondering why I have called you here. It is because ...

(A pregnant pause, as Byron drains his whiskey glass and slams it down on the table.)

I am bored. Bored stupid. Bored to my back teeth. Bored in every limb and fiber of my wretched being. Have I made myself clear?

POLIDORI

I believe the Lord Byron is bored.

SHELLEY

It would seem so.

CLAIRE

Well, I like that!

BYRON

Look at the clock there, does it not accuse us? I swear that face is frowning. 'Tsk, tsk, tsk! Not even midnight, and you lot take to your beds like so many clerks and parsons. Is this not Lord Byron: mad, bad and dangerous to know? And these, the very renegades and degenerates that have scandalized all of London society? For shame!'

MARY

He is right. We are disgraced, and must redeem ourselves.

SHELLEY

How?

NOTE: CD VARIES FROM SCRIPT
SCENE INTERPOLATED HERE

I AM GODWIN'S DAUGHTER
 AND MY MOTHER'S ONLY SON
 SHALL I RUN?
 SHALL I RUN AWAY?
 OR SHALL I –

(A rumble of THUNDER cuts Mary off.)

(UNDERSCORE continues as Byron bursts into the room, followed by Claire who seems happy, if a bit tousled. Passing Mary, she kisses her sweetly on the cheek.)

CLAIRE

(Blissfully:) Mary, you're wonderful! Life is ... wonderful!

MARY

Then you told him?

CLAIRE

Oh that. Not yet. We had better things to do.

(FOG creeps across the terrace. Byron turns the couch back right side up and sits down, waving his hand imperiously at Claire.)

BYRON

Make yourself useful, woman. Whiskey! Where's everyone? There's Shelley's concubine, but where is the man himself? Shelley! Polidori!

(Polidori comes out, wearing pajamas.)

POLIDORI

For God's sake, Byron. We'd all gone to sleep.

CLAIRE

Not all of us, dear Doctor.

(Claire brings Byron his whiskey and sits near him on the arm of the couch, which intimacy he allows and Polidori takes note of.)

POLIDORI

(To Byron:) Did you get any work done?

CLAIRE

Alas, no, he was distracted.

PACK MY THINGS, OPEN THE DOOR
 WALK AWAY ON MY OWN AGAIN
 ALONE AGAIN, FREE ONCE MORE
 NO REGRETS, NO TEARS, NO PROMISES
 HE ALWAYS SAYS, GO YOUR OWN WAY
 THERE'S NO REASON TO STAY

(Now she is defiant, energized by the gift of anger. The song gains momentum as Mary grabs up her CLOAK, puts it on:)

I COULD GO
 WOULDN'T THAT BE SOMETHING?
 WOULDN'T THAT SERVE HIM RIGHT?
 I COULD LAUGH WHEN I THINK OF IT
 HOW SURE OF ME HE WAS TONIGHT
 I CAN SEE HE'D NOT STAND IN MY WAY
 HE'D SMILINGLY BID ME GOODBYE
 BUT THAT SMILE HIDES A LIE

(Recitative:)

HE CARES, I KNOW IT
 BUT HE DARES NOT SHOW IT ... WHY?

(Building to a new rhythm:)

IF HE LETS ME IN TOO DEEP
 WHERE ALL HIS HIDDEN DEMONS SLEEP
 I MAY STUMBLE ON THE SECRET
 THAT HE WOULD RATHER KEEP
 I MAY SEE THROUGH HIS DISGUISE
 I MAY SOMEHOW RECOGNIZE
 THE FRIGHTENED MAN WHO LIVES BEHIND
 THE LAUGHTER AND THE LIES

(A bit faster:)

I SHOULD GO, I KNOW I SHOULD
 GET OUT WHILE THE GETTING'S GOOD
 HE'LL ALWAYS BE THE WAY HE IS
 THAT'S UNDERSTOOD
 IF I LEAVE HE'LL ALWAYS SAY
 THAT HE WANTED IT THAT WAY
 HE'LL HAVE WON I GUESS
 YES, I'LL CONFESS

(She stops.)

THAT IS, UNLESS I STAY ...

MARY

(To herself:) IF HE LOVES ME, WHERE'S THE PROOF?
HE'S SO DISTANT AND ALOOF

SHELLEY

I wish you every joy in this life, which is far too short and punctuated by griefs.

MARY

(Bursts out, suddenly:) I COULD GO, YOU KNOW
I COULD GO TO HIM
I COULD GO!

(Pause. Pulsing UNDERSCORE continues under.)

SHELLEY

So, why don't you?

(Mary is silent.)

Ah. He's with Claire. Perhaps that is really what's got under your skin. Poor Mary.

MARY

Oh, for God's sake! Must you be so patronizing and, and ... reasonable?

SHELLEY

If we both can't be reasonable, Mary, one of us has to be.

MARY

(Exploding:) But why must it always be YOU?

(She storms out. For a moment, it seems he might follow her, but then he lies down on the chaise.)

(LIGHTS dim on Shelley. FIERY UNDERSCORE RISES. LIGHTS follow Mary as she runs down the stairs into the empty drawing room.)

MARY

(Fiercely:) I COULD!
YES, I COULD!
WHAT'S TO STOP ME?

(Mary looks from Byron's door to the terrace doors.)

BEGIN TRACK 9: "I Could Go"

I COULD GO
IT WOULD BE SO SIMPLE

MARY

Not him, Byron! Just now, downstairs. He would have done more if Claire hadn't come in.

SHELLEY

Well, of course he would.

MARY

Is that all you can say?

SHELLEY

What else ought I to say?

MARY

I see. You think I wouldn't have gone with him, so it doesn't matter.

SHELLEY

Loyalty is one of your best qualities, Mary.

(AGITATED UNDERSCORE to "I Could Go" rises. Mary paces, containing her anger.)

MARY

I might have gone with him, Shelley. Do you hear me? I was tempted.

(To herself:) HE'S SO SMUG AND SURE OF ME
MORE THAN HE'S A RIGHT TO BE

SHELLEY

I suppose you may do what you like with whom you like.

MARY

Oh, may I? Thank you very much. But I don't need your permission, you know.

SHELLEY

Of course not. You're a free woman. I couldn't hold you. And if I could, I wouldn't.

MARY

You wouldn't?

SHELLEY

Not if it meant your happiness. Mary, you are my soul's companion. And Byron is my friend. I love you both.

(Claire takes Byron's hand and puts it on her bosom. Mary turns at the top of the stairs to see Byron take her sister into his room, Claire giggling seductively.)

(STORM SOUNDS.)

(LIGHTS shift to the Shelley bedchamber, where Polidori is tending to Shelley.)

POLIDORI

No coffee?

MARY

I'm sorry, I ...

POLIDORI

Never mind. He'll be all right. Try to keep him sitting up for awhile if you can.

SHELLEY

Because the room, you see. Goes round and around.

MARY

Thank you, Doctor.

(Polidori exits.)

SHELLEY

Mary, what's wrong? You look funny.

MARY

I daresay I must.

SHELLEY

Come, let me look at you. If I'm not mistaken, you're angry! What has set you off? Me? Really, a man must get drunk once in awhile to call himself a man.

MARY

Do you know what he did?

SHELLEY

What?

MARY

He kissed me! Or tried to.

SHELLEY

Polidori?

(The duet builds to tempo.)

BOTH

IT IS TOO BRIEF A MOMENT TO LET IT GO BY

BYRON

YOU MUST SEIZE THE MOMENT

MARY

SEIZE THE MOMENT

BYRON

SEIZE THE MOMENT
IF YOU FALL YOU FALL

MARY

IF YOU FALL YOU FALL

BOTH

IF YOU FALL YOU FALL
BUT YOU CAN FLY!

(They almost kiss. But pull apart as Claire comes out onto the landing above.)

CLAIRE

Mary! Where are you? Oh. Shelley wants you.

(Mary hurries up the stairs. As she passes Claire:)

(Whispering, to Mary:) You're such a darling!

MARY

But Claire, I –

CLAIRE

Later. He's waiting for me.

(Claire rushes down the stairs expectantly, toward Byron, who is still watching Mary. Only when Claire is touching to his arm does he notice her.)

BYRON

What do you want?

BYRON

It is madness, isn't it? All one's life, to be given everything: title, wealth, talent, even fame. Yet still, the soul seeks.

MARY

Yes.

BYRON

It's loneliness, Mary. The essential loneliness of being. And only occasionally are we poor mortals given a glimpse of what our souls long to look at.

IT IS SO BRIEF
IT IS A MOMENT
NOT EVEN A MOMENT
IT IS A SPARK
AND ALL OF LIFE IS WAITING FOR THAT MOMENT
A TINY FLASH OF COLOR BURNING THROUGH THE DARK
IT IS TOO BRIEF TO LET IT GO BY
YOU MUST SEIZE THE MOMENT
YOU MUST FALL
YOU MUST FLY

MARY

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED

BYRON

YOU BRUSH AGAINST A STRANGER

MARY

TAKES YOU BY SURPRISE

BYRON

THE SUBTLE SCENT OF DANGER

MARY

YOU FEEL A BIT FAINTHEARTED

BYRON

YOU FEEL A MOMENT'S PANIC
YOU LOOK INTO HER EYES

TOGETHER

SOMEHOW IT MAKES YOU TINGLE
AS IT TERRIFIES

I AM SWINGING, I AM SWINGING
 AND UNDER MY BREATH I AM SINGING
 THE SKY HAS GROWN DARK, SOON THE STORM MUST BEGIN
 NO MATTER THE WEATHER, I'LL NEVER GO IN
 I'M A BAD LITTLE GIRL AND I REALLY DON'T CARE
 THAT I SHOULDN'T BE OUT IN THE CHILLY NIGHT AIR
 DON'T TRY TO STOP ME
 I'M ALMOST THERE
 I'M SWINGING, I'M FLYING
 I'M LAUGHING AND CRYING
 THE WIND TEARS MY HAT OFF, MY HAIR TUMBLES DOWN
 I'M FLYING, FALLING, CAN'T HEAR THEM CALLING ME
 CAN'T TOUCH, CAN'T TOUCH, CAN'T TOUCH
 THE GROUND!

BYRON

But if it is so exhilarating ...

MARY

Oh, it is!

BYRON

Then why does it make you cry?

MARY

IT IS SO BRIEF
 IT IS A MOMENT
 NOT EVEN A MOMENT
 IT IS A SPARK
 AND ALL OF LIFE IS WAITING FOR THAT MOMENT
 A TINY FLASH OF COLOR
 BURNING THROUGH THE DARK
 IT IS A PAINFUL PLEASURE
 A JOYOUS GRIEF
 IT IS TOO BRIEF ... TOO BRIEF

BYRON

Why, Mary, you're unhappy.

MARY

But I have everything! My life with Shelley has been like living a romantic novel. But still I keep reaching ... for what? No wonder you call me mad.

BYRON

You might be surprised to hear the things I worry about.

(Byron goes to the window, where the curtains are blowing.)

The wind is coming up again. Smell that! The air before a rainstorm. Come on, I won't bite, Mary Godwin. Come. Breathe it in.

(She goes to his side, and takes a deep breath, as he does.)

Isn't that intoxicating?

MARY

It is, it's lovely. I used to adore storms, when I was little. Especially one coming up suddenly like this. The way the wind makes you catch your breath.

BEGIN TRACK 8: "Flying/Falling"

SOMETHING UNEXPECTED
TAKES YOU BY SURPRISE
YOU FEEL A BIT FAINTHEARTED
TEARS COME TO YOUR EYES
BUT SOMEHOW IT MAKES YOU TINGLE
AS IT TERRIFIES

NOTE: SCRIPT VARIES FROM TRACK

(WIND lifts her hair and ruffles her clothing as she stands in the terrace doorway. RAIN begins to fall.)

Oh, here it comes!

(She holds her arms out, to feel the rain.)

BYRON

Mad girl, come back in. You'll be drenched.

(Mary laughs.)

Why are you laughing?

MARY

Because suddenly I feel I am ten years old!

I AM GIDDY, RECKLESS AND WILD
I REMEMBER BEING A CHILD
IN MY FATHER'S GARDEN, UNDERNEATH A TREE
AND THE SUMMER WIND WHISPERS TO ME
IS IT WISE? IS IT WISE?
MARY, IS IT WISE?

BYRON

Wait! You wanted to talk, Miss Godwin. Let's talk. But not about your sister. About you. You are the only member of this company I haven't gotten to know. Now is our chance.

(Byron circles her.)

SO THIS IS GODWIN'S DAUGHTER
THIS SOLITARY FAIRY
AS PALE AS ANY PARSON
AND AS STILL AS STATUARY ...

You look positively terrified. Am I really so hideous as all that?

MARY

I haven't said so. And don't think it.

BYRON

(Seductively:) Then why won't you look at me, Mary Godwin?

(She does. Eye to eye, there is no mistaking Byron's intent.)

MARY

You're not ... flirting with me?

BYRON

I do not flirt. I am making a rather obvious pass.

MARY

Well, that is something I didn't expect.

BYRON

You can't tell me you aren't just a little tempted.

MARY

No, I can't. Or at least won't.

BYRON

Civil of you. For a moment I was worried I was losing my touch.

(Distant THUNDER rumbles. The sound of WIND picks up.)

MARY

I shouldn't think the famous Lord Byron would worry about such a thing.

MARY

But that seems rather cruel, after what you've been to each other.

BYRON

What a naïve, romantic child you are. I'd expected a bit of sophistication from William Godwin's daughter.

MARY

I am sorry to be a disappointment.

BYRON

Not a disappointment. Rather a surprise.

CAN THIS BE GODWIN'S DAUGHTER
THE WILD AND WAYWARD MARY
WHOM ERRANT SHELLEY COURTED IN THE FAMILY CEMETERY?
HER MOTHER'S GRAVE, IT'S SAID, DID PAVE
THEIR SECRET SANCTUARY
CAN THIS BE GODWIN'S DAUGHTER?
THE FAMOUS GODWIN'S DAUGHTER?

MARY

You mustn't forget my other parent, Mary Wollestonecraft. Though I never really knew her, that influence was easily as great as my father's.

BYRON

Was it indeed?

SHALL I ASSUME THE DAFT SIDE
WAS THE WOLLESTONECRAFT SIDE?

MARY

(Trying again:) I do wish you would take pity and speak to my sister. She has something to say to you.

BYRON

I heard everything that empty-headed girl could possibly have to say within the first five minutes of knowing her.

(Mary seems about to retort, but then moves to go toward the kitchen exit, up left.)

MARY

I told the doctor I would see to the coffee.

(Byron intercepts her.)

BYRON

Don't think so. Unless I'm dreaming. Am I? Dreaming?

MARY

I don't think so.

BYRON

Then I must be awake.

(He closes his eyes again.)

MARY

Good. That is, I've been wanting to speak with you. Alone, that is.

(Byron sits up.)

BYRON

Indeed? What about?

MARY

About my stepsister. Claire.

BYRON

I can think of any number of subjects suitable for intimate conversation, Miss Godwin, but your stepsister is not one of them.

MARY

You cannot dismiss her out of hand.

BYRON

Why not?

MARY

But she so desperately desires to speak with you!

BYRON

Then why does she contrive a plot and send a go-between?

MARY

You know the answer to that. When she tries on her own, Polidori sends her away.

BYRON

That is as I wish it.

CLAIRE

He may need medical attention.

POLIDORI

What he needs is dry clothing. And a gallon or so of coffee.

CLAIRE

Excellent idea, Doctor! Mary, would you be a dear and fetch up a fresh pot? Meanwhile, we'll get him out of these wet things and into a warm bed, won't we, Doctor?
(Whispered, to Mary:) Now's your chance.

MARY

Chance?

CLAIRE

To speak with Byron.

MARY

Now?

CLAIRE

You promised!

MARY

Oh, all right, Claire! I'll be up shortly.

(Claire joins Polidori, who is coaxing Shelley up the stairs.)

POLIDORI

That's right, Captain Fish. Right foot, left foot, right foot, left foot ...

(As they disappear, Mary stands uncomfortably looking at Byron, who has taken off his sodden shirt and stockings and hung them near the fire. Wearing only his breeches, he is lounging in a chair with his eyes closed. Mary approaches him, but seems unable to speak.)

(Pause.)

BYRON

I thought you were going to fetch coffee.

MARY

You're not asleep then?

(He opens his eyes.)

SHELLEY

I haven't wanted to break the news, old fellow, but the name is pronounced Don Hwan, not Don Jew-One. Spanish, you know.

BYRON

It rhymes with 'true one.'

SHELLEY

No, it doesn't!

POLIDORI

Who gives a bloody damn? Cast off!

RAISE THE SAIL AND SOUND THE BELL
MIZZEN MATES AND COMRADES ALL

SHELLEY

SMELL OF SALT AND CRY OF GULL

BYRON

ROLL ON, THOU DEEP AND DARK BLUE OCEAN, ROLL!

(The drunken trio has tipped over the couch. Everyone manages to land on their feet except Shelley, who remains face down on the floor. Byron nudges him with a toe, then collapses into a chair.)

BYRON

I believe Shelley is

POLIDORI

Fatigued.

MARY

Can someone help me get him up and into bed? Doctor?

(With Polidori's help, she gets Shelley to his feet. But Claire rushes over as they start toward the stairs, taking Mary's place under one of Shelley's arms.)

CLAIRE

I'm stronger than you are, Mary. The doctor and I will carry him up. All right doctor?

POLIDORI

I suppose ...

POLIDORI

Then we realized he wasn't coming back up. But luckily, Byron's a fantastic swimmer.

BYRON

We managed to pull him back in the boat. Though all of our gear now lies at the bottom of the lake, blast you, Shelley!

(Shelley lies blissfully on his back on the carpet, as if floating.)

SHELLEY

Oh, you should have been there, Mary!

MARY

I'm rather glad I wasn't.

SHELLEY

I was ... I was ...

BYRON

Petrified.

SHELLEY

(Jumping up:) No! I was ... living the moment. I have never felt so alive!

POLIDORI

Yes, being near death can have that effect. If one survives.

CLAIRE

Well, thank God you did survive. *(To Byron:)* All of you.

BYRON

Well of course we did. It would have been humiliating to drown in a mere lake!

SHELLEY

Byron, my good friend, what a day! I heartily thank you! Mary, I'm going to build my own boat. Byron and I are going to build it together.

BYRON

Going to call it the Don Ju-an.

SHELLEY

No, no, the Ariel. A sprite of the sea.

BYRON

(Competitively:) The Don Ju-an.

CLAIRE

Why he's dead drunk!

POLIDORI

Of course he is, Miss Clairmont. We all are! Funny. Feels like I'm still on deck.

(Polidori sways in the center of the room. Shelley is blissed, at a loss for words.)

SHELLEY

Mary! It was ...!

BYRON

Magnificent.

SHELLEY

Magnificent!

POLIDORI

(Laughing:) Why didn't you tell us you couldn't swim, Shelley?

SHELLEY

Dunno. At the moment, it didn't seem ...

BYRON

Relevant.

SHELLEY

Not in the least.

BYRON

You ought to have seen him. The wind howling, the rain bucketing down, the boat pitching and rolling. But there Shelley sits, in the bow, like a statue. Like Ozymandius himself.

SHELLEY

Ozymandius!

(Obligingly, Shelley takes up a position on the arm of the couch, as if sitting in the bow of a boat.)

BYRON

Over the side the great emperor goes, and yet stoical he remains. As he sinks beneath the waves, his face remains unperturbed, serene.

(Shelley demonstrates, sublimely sinking to the floor.)

MARY

All right. When they get back, I'll try to persuade Byron to see you at least. So you can tell him.

CLAIRE

Oh, I don't deserve a sister such as you!

MARY

No, you don't.

(They embrace. BLACKOUT. STORM sounds rise.)

(LIGHTS come up again on the drawing room. It is now midday, and the weather has taken another bad turn. WIND blows and Mary is pacing worriedly as the RAIN comes down in torrents. After a moment, Claire comes in from the upstage left entrance, shaking off her wet cloak.)

MARY

Any sign?

CLAIRE

I saw a lantern coming up the back path. Two of them are carrying the third.

MARY

Is that moaning I hear?

(Both women go to look out the terrace windows.)

CLAIRE

I think ... it's singing!

(At that moment, a triumphant Shelley stumbles into view, soaked to the skin, in his shirtsleeves. He is followed closely by Byron and Polidori, who are holding each other up.)

(Shelley falls into Mary, almost dragging her to the ground.)

SHELLEY

Hello, Mary. I went sailing. And nearly drowned!

MARY

What?

ALL THESE YEARS I'VE MISSED HER
I SUPPOSE A ROSE MUST HAVE HER THORN
AS I HAVE YOU, MY SISTER

CLAIRE

MY SISTER ...

BOTH

YOU WERE ALWAYS A MIRROR TO ME
LOOK INSIDE, LOOK INSIDE
WHEN YOU LOOK IN A SISTER'S EYES
YOU CAN NEVER HIDE

CLAIRE

WHEN I LOOK AT YOU I SEE, ALL I HOPE TO BE

MARY

AND I KNOW YOU KNOW MY HEART, WHEN YOU LOOK AT ME

MARY

MY DARKEST DREAM

CLAIRE

MY SECRET PRAYER

MARY

MY EV'RY THOUGHT

CLAIRE

MY HEART'S DESIRE

BOTH

EVERYTHING THERE IS TO SEE
WHAT'S BACK OF THE EMBROIDERY

CLAIRE

PURE

MARY

OR OTHERWISE

BOTH

IT'S THERE ... IN MY SISTERS EYES.

CLAIRE

Mary ...

(Claire starts to cry again. Which makes Mary cry, too.)

BEGIN TRACK 7: "Sister's Eyes"

MARY

Claire, do stop it! You know I can't bear it when you cry. Where's your handkerchief?

FIRST BORN IS CAREWORN, ALWAYS LOOKING AFTER

CLAIRE

LAST BORN IS CHILD OF SCORN, OBJECT OF LAUGHTER

MARY

You are a funny little thing. Look at your dress. You always did make me laugh so, Claire.

CLAIRE

Mary, what was that rhyme we used to say?

WHEN I LOOK AT YOU, I SEE ...

BOTH (ad lib:)

ALL I HOPE TO BE
AND I KNOW YOU KNOW MY HEART
WHEN YOU LOOK AT ME

CLAIRE

YOU WERE ALWAYS A MIRROR TO ME
LOOK INSIDE, LOOK INSIDE
WHEN YOU LOOK IN A SISTER'S EYES
YOU CAN NEVER HIDE

Remember who used to climb in bed with you when the wind rattled the windows?

MARY

Oh, yes.

CLAIRE

WHEN THERE WAS A THUNDERSTORM
SHE'D CREEP UNDER THE COVERS
AND WE'D CLING SO VERY CLOSE
CLOSER THAN TWO LOVERS

Remember, Mary?

MARY

ALTHOUGH HER FEET WERE NEVER WARM

Of course I care. MARY

Then you'll help? CLAIRE

Naturally, I'll do what I can. MARY

You'll speak to Byron on my behalf? CLAIRE

I? MARY

CLAIRE
You can be persuasive if you put your mind to it. I'll distract the Doctor, while you get Byron alone. Tell him he needs a woman's companionship. I could make him happy, I know I could. Tell him he must speak to me! He owes me that much.

MARY
But, Claire, he has a wife in London.

CLAIRE
So has Shelley.

MARY
That's not the point.

CLAIRE
It's exactly the point! Byron's wife will never have him back. And this could be his son! Every man wants a son. And if I am his son's mother, then I'll always have a place in his life, and I shall be content.

MARY
Claire! You haven't done this on purpose?

CLAIRE
It worked with Shelley, didn't it?

(Stung, Mary turns away.)

God, Mary, don't you see how I'm suffering? I don't even know what I'm saying! In a few weeks, everyone will know. If I can't rely on my sister, on whom can I rely? Oh, Mary ...

CLAIRE

Don't say that! Don't say that! He must want me!

(Claire bursts into tears.)

MARY

Claire. What is it?

CLAIRE

Haven't you guessed?

(Pause.)

MARY

Oh, Claire. How long have you known?

CLAIRE

I suspected it right away. But now there's no doubt.

MARY

Why didn't you tell me sooner?

CLAIRE

I was afraid you'd be jealous.

MARY

Jealous?

CLAIRE

After all, your baby was sickly and died. So how can I be happy to have my own baby, Byron's baby? But I am happy. *(Defiantly:)* I'm overjoyed!

MARY

Yes, I can see you are. What are we going to do?

CLAIRE

I've been trying to see him privately. But that beast Polidori keeps me out. I know, if Byron knew, everything would change. He loved me once. I know he could again. Sometimes he looks at me ...

MARY

Claire, sometimes he looks at me! He's a man, after all. They look, even where they have no intention of going.

CLAIRE

Fine. You have your lover, so what do you care if I'm miserable?

SHELLEY

Kiss the sailor gone to sea, lonely fisher's widow. Mustn't miss the tide, you know!

(He runs out. Claire calls after him:)

CLAIRE

For heaven's sake, it's a LAKE!

(The men have disappeared. Mary yawns.)

MARY

Is that coffee I smell?

CLAIRE

Yes, and it's still hot. Here.

(Claire pours Mary a cup of coffee.)

I didn't know Shelley could sail.

MARY

He can't. He really isn't himself of late. Or perhaps too much himself, too ... oh, what am I worried about? Shall I begrudge him joy?

(Mary pours herself a cup of coffee. Then she stands in the terrace doorway, looking out at the weather.)

Claire, look! What is that strange, luminous orb peeking through the clouds? Can it actually be the sun?

(She notices Claire is sitting morosely in a chair.)

What is the matter? We finally get a glimpse of sky, and look at you!

CLAIRE

At least while the weather kept us indoors, I had a chance of seeing Byron alone. Now those three will be out gallivanting, and we'll be left behind like two maiden aunts.

MARY

I, for one, shall enjoy a bit of peace and quiet. We can get the girl to air out these rooms.

(Claire is silent. Mary goes to her.)

Come, darling, don't be sad. If Byron doesn't want you any more, then you must find someone else.

IN RUSTLY BLUE SATIN AND WHISP'RING WHITE LACE
 HER VOICE IT IS MUSIC, HER DANCE IS SEDUCTION
 SHE SIGHS, I HAVE LOVED YOU, THEN SHE VEILS HER FACE

ALL (including Claire)

ROLL ON, THOU DEEP AND DARK BLUE OCEAN, ROLL!
 ROLL ON, ROLL ON, ROLL ON, ROLL ON ...
 ROLL ON!

*(The men, loaded down with all their gear, are ready to exit
 through the terrace doors. Claire runs forward with a bundle.)*

CLAIRE

Here, I've wrapped up a jar of coffee to keep you warm.

BYRON

Who needs coffee?

(He grabs a bottle or two of brandy off the sideboard.)

Are we ready, men?

POLIDORI

We are indeed!

CLAIRE

(Pouting:) What am I supposed to do while you are all gone?

SHELLEY

Something quiet. Poor Mary needs her sleep.

(Mary has appeared on the stairs.)

MARY

You might have thought of that before all the shouting.

SHELLEY

Mary, you're up! Look, the sun is out! We're going sailing after all!

BYRON

Come, Mr. Fish, or we'll miss the tide!

*(Byron and Polidori exit through the terrace doors. Shelley lags
 behind just long enough to kiss Mary, which he does boisterously.)*

MIZZEN MATES AND COMRADES ALL!

POLIDORI

SMELL OF SALT AND CRY OF GULL!

BYRON

ROLL ON, THOU DEEP AND DARK BLUE OCEAN, ROLL

MEN

ROLL ON, ROLL ON, ROLL ON!

SHELLEY

OH THE SEA IS A WOMAN, A GREEN-EYED WOMAN
IN RUSTLY BLUE SATIN AND **WHISP'RING** WHITE LACE
HER VOICE IT IS MUSIC, HER DANCE IS SEDUCTION
SHE SIGHS, I HAVE LOVED YOU, THEN SHE VEILS HER FACE

MEN

SHE VEILS HER FACE, SHE VEILS HER FACE
SHE KNOWS YOU WILL FOLLOW
AND SHE VEILS HER FACE

(The men turn the couch into their sailboat, the window curtains into sails, etc. Claire is happy to join in on the frolic, ultimately taking the part of the buxom figurehead on the prow of the "ship.")

POLIDORI

OH, IS SHE A LOVER, OR IS SHE A LADY?
OH, WHO IS THIS WOMAN? OH, WHY DO I WEEP?
SHE OPENS HER CLOAK AND SHE WRAPS IT AROUND ME
MY TEARS ARE FORGOTTEN, SHE ROCKS ME TO SLEEP

MEN

SHE ROCKS ME TO SLEEP, SHE ROCKS ME TO SLEEP
SHE SINGS TO ME SOFTLY AND ROCKS ME TO SLEEP

BYRON

SHE IS BONNY, SHE IS CRUEL
HER HAIR IS A BLUE-BLACK STORM
HER HAND IS LIKE ICE
AND YET WARM

(Counterline repeats over below.)

POLIDORI & SHELLEY

OH THE SEA IS A WOMAN, A GREEN-EYED WOMAN

SHELLEY
ALONE BESIDE THE BLUE SEA

MARY
THE BLUE SEA

SHELLEY
TOGETHER

MARY
TOGETHER

BOTH
BESIDE YOU

(Shelley blows out the lamp and takes Mary back to bed.

(For a moment, it is DARK. Then the light of DAWN shows at the drawing room windows. For once, it isn't raining. BIRDS are even cheerfully chirping.

(LIGHTS come up in the drawing room, as the men are getting ready to go boating, laden with lunch pails, oars, fishpoles, etc. Shelley in particular seems almost overexcited about the proposed outing. Claire is hanging about, handing around coffee and rain slickers, and fussing over them all, especially Byron.)

SHELLEY
Finally, a bit of decent weather!

POLIDORI
With some fine gusts of wind, too.

BYRON
We shall see whether you are the great sailor you boast of being, Shelley.

SHELLEY
Likewise, my friend. I can hardly wait to smell that salt air!

CLAIRE
Salt air? Isn't it a freshwater lake?

SHELLEY
Poetic license, my dear Claire. Poetic license.

BEGIN TRACK 6: "Roll On!"
RAISE THE SAIL AND SOUND THE BELL!

IT'S MORNING ... IT'S MORNING

Do you see it now?

MARY

Yes.

SHELLEY

Tell me what you see.

MARY

DEEP IN YOUR EYES
THE SEE IS SO VAST AND SO BLUE
BLUE AS SUMMER, BLUE AS THE SKY OF SUMMER
HOW DID I COME HERE? HOW DID I COME TO BE HERE
ALONE BESIDE THE BLUE SEA
BESIDE YOU?

SHELLEY

BESIDE YOU ...
NOW THE SUN BLAZES ABOVE US
AS THE SEA DANCES BELOW
COME TAKE MY HAND, LOVE
WILL YOU WALK WITH ME?

MARY

I'LL WALK WITH YOU
ON TIL THE END OF DAY
DEAR COMPANION, SIDE BY SIDE

BOTH(echoing one another)

WE SHALL WALK – JUST WALK – ALONG THE TIDE

SHELLEY

THE SUN SINKS LOW

MARY

THE SUN SINKS LOW

SHELLEY

THE SEA IS A MIRROR OF FIRE

BOTH

IT IS BURNING, THE EDGE OF THE SEA IS BURNING
SHALL WE LIE HERE TOGETHER FOREVER, DIE HERE?

MARY

Look what you've done!

SHELLEY

It is chilly, come back to bed, dearest.

MARY

It's no use. I cannot sleep.

SHELLEY

Then at least put your robe on.

MARY

Poor William! I cannot believe we have lost him.

SHELLEY

You must believe it, for it is true. We both must believe it.

MARY

But my dreams –

SHELLEY

Your dreams arise from that busy brain of yours. You must give it something better to think about.

MARY

I have tried. All other thoughts are crowded out, save William and this endless, torturing rain that never stops. The sound of it will drive me mad!

SHELLEY

There are other visions to see. Of sunnier places and times to come. And other sounds to hear.

MARY

I hear only the storm.

SHELLEY

Then you must listen harder. Look into my eyes, and let the sound in. Don't fight it.

BEGIN TRACK 5: "Blue Sea"

Listen. It isn't rain at all that you hear. It is the ocean, gently rising and falling.

THE SEA IS STILL
THE SKY SHOWS THE FIRST BLUSH OF DAWN
CAN YOU SEE IT? MARY DEAR, CAN YOU SEE IT?
IT IS BURNING, THE EDGE OF THE SKY IS BURNING
A SUMMER DAY IS BORN

CLAIRE

And I you, Doctor. You are most accomplished! Who on earth was your dancing master?

POLIDORI

Though it may sound immodest to say so, I am completely self-taught.

CLAIRE

Not really! And have you any other hidden talents?

POLIDORI

Not talents exactly. More traits of character.

CLAIRE

Such as?

POLIDORI

Steadfastness. Persistence. Determination.

(The fandango has reached its conclusion. Polidori has cleverly managed to escort Claire to the stairs. He has won, for now.)

(Bowing:) Goodnight, Miss Clairmont.

CLAIRE

I will see him. If not tonight, then tomorrow.

(Claire goes up the stairs. Polidori remains for a moment to be sure she is gone, then takes the one remaining lamp and goes out to his own rooms, down left.

(The drawing room is left in darkness. There is the sound of WIND. Underscore: "Lullabye."

(In the Shelley bedchamber, a bright shaft of MOONLIGHT falls on Mary's ROBE, lying crumpled on a bedside chair. Mary is sitting on the edge of the bed in her nightgown, as Shelley lies sleeping. She gets up and goes to the chair, picks up the robe, bundling it in her arms.)

SHELLEY

Mary! What are you doing? You have been dreaming again. Mary!

(Shelley gets out of bed, goes to her and shakes her. The bundled robe unravels, and Mary is left looking at her empty arms.)

AND SOME STIMULOUS YOU DESIRE?
 A CHEERY CONVERSATION, NO DOUBT
 TWO WITS EXCHANGING QUIPS
 OR SOMETHING MORE ATHLETIC, PERHAPS
 WITH CHAINS AND ROPES AND WHIPS?
 DO YOU TELL EACH OTHER STORIES
 OR HAVE A GO AT CHESS?
 DO YOU PLAY AT LORDS AND LADIES?
 IF SO, WHO WEARS THE DRESS?
 I'M SURE IT'S SOMETHING NAUGHTY
 NOW, COME, CONFESS!

NOTE: SCRIPT VARIES FROM CD

POLIDORI

You are most entertaining, Miss Clairmont.

CLAIRE

Why that's exactly the same compliment Byron has paid me! In somewhat different circumstances, of course.

POLIDORI

However, this clever wordplay – if you call it clever – isn't my sort of game.

CLAIRE

What games do you go in for then?

WHAT SORT OF THINGS
 DO YOU AND YOUR FRIEND DO
 WHEN AT DAY'S END, YOU
 NEED SOME RAISING UP?
 WHEN YOU ARE BORED, YOU AND THE LORD
 I'M NOT SUGGESTING ANYTHING UNTOWARD
 BUT WHEN THE TWO OF YOU ARE FEELING RATHER BLUE
 WHAT SORT OF THINGS ...
 WHAT SORT OF MANLY THINGS?
 WHAT SORT OF THINGS ...
 DO YOU DO?

(DANCE INTERLUDE: As MUSIC continues under, Polidori and Claire engage in an odd fandango where she repeatedly tries to get to Byron's door, and he repeatedly prevents her from doing so. As they dance, they keep the conversation going:)

POLIDORI

I could dance with you all night, my dear Miss Clairmont.

POLIDORI

He is never cross with me, when we are alone together. On the contrary, we get on famously.

CLAIRE

Is that so?

BEGIN TRACK 4: "What Sort of Things?"

A BACHELOR REFINED
AND ONE OF SIMILAR KIND
MUTUALLY DEVOTED TO THE CULTURE OF THE MIND

Is that it?

POLIDORI

Exactly.

CLAIRE

HOW INSPIRING 'TIS TO SEE SUCH CAMARADERIE
IT WARMS THE HEART AND PIQUES THE CURIOSITY
ONE WONDERS JUST WHAT DEVILMENT
TWO SUCH GENTEEL GENTS INVENT
WHEN THEY ARE ON PLEASURE BENT

WHAT SORT OF THINGS
DO YOU DO TOGETHER
HE AND YOU, TOGETHER
WHENEVER YOU ARE ALONE?
WHAT SORT OF PLANS
DO YOU PLOT TOGETHER
WHEN YOU'VE GOT TOGETHER
AND YOU HAVEN'T A CHAPERONE?
WHEN YOU ARE ALL SECLUDED
WITH YOUR COMRADE SYMPATIQUE
DO YOU GO IN FOR BILLIARDS
BACKGAMMON OR BEZIQUE?
OR NOW AND THEN A FRIENDLY GAME OF HIDE AND SEEK?
OF COURSE I'M SPEAKING STRICTLY
TONGUE IN CHEEK

WHAT SORT OF SPORT
DO YOU PLAY, DEAR DOCTOR
IF I MAY, DEAR DOCTOR
BE BOLD ENOUGH TO ENQUIRE?
WHAT KIND OF FUN
DO YOU FIND IS FESTIVE
WHEN YOUR MIND IS RESTIVE

CLAIRE

It seems you sleep far too little yourself, Doctor.

POLIDORI

Someone must keep you company, Miss Clairmont.

CLAIRE

You're so kind.

(There is another pause. And another yawn. Claire giggles.)

POLIDORI

Does something strike you as amusing, Miss Clairmont?

CLAIRE

Come now, both of us know what you're up to. You're trying to keep me and Byron apart.

POLIDORI

Nonsense.

CLAIRE

You did it in London, and now you're doing it here. Don't you think he can make up his own mind about whom he wants to share his bed with?

POLIDORI

Miss Clairmont, the Lord Byron is my patient, and as his doctor –

CLAIRE

You are more than his doctor.

POLIDORI

Of course. I am also his –

CLAIRE

Toady? Acolyte? Boot polisher?

POLIDORI

If you suppose insults will move me, you are mistaken, Miss Clairmont. Byron is my friend and my patient. In both cases, I am devoted to his welfare.

CLAIRE

He is a difficult man to have for a friend. That terrible temper, for example.

SHELLEY

If the weather clears.

BYRON

(Darkly:) Weather or not, Mr. Fish, tomorrow we sail.

(Ignoring Claire, Byron exits to his rooms. Mary and Shelley start up the stairs.)

SHELLEY

(Cheerily:) Goodnight, Byron. Poli.

MARY

Are you coming, Claire?

CLAIRE

Not just yet. Leave a light for me, will you?

(Mary and Shelley exit. Claire rises and goes to the sideboard.)

CLAIRE

Will you have something, Doctor?

POLIDORI

No, thank you, Miss Clairmont.

(As Claire pours two brandies and approaches Byron's door:)

Miss Clairmont. Our host has retired.

CLAIRE

But he has only just now gone in, and I thought –

POLIDORI

As you know, Lord Byron usually works at this hour. And has left strict instructions never to be disturbed.

CLAIRE

Then I shall wait.

POLIDORI

When he is through working, he will need his sleep. He sleeps far too little.

(There is a long pause. Neither moves. Finally, Polidori yawns.)

POLIDORI

(Aside to Byron:) More's the pity.

BYRON

Shut up, Poli.

SHELLEY

(Examining his injured hand:) What a gorgeous red blood is, don't you think? Wine does not remotely rival it, nor even the rose. Our veins such a dusky indigo, and yet what flows out of them so gloriously crimson, and glistening! Look how it catches the light.

(He waves his hand in Claire's direction, and she recoils.)

CLAIRE

Ugh! Now who's being morbid?

SHELLEY

(Emphatically:) To the contrary, Claire: this is life. This salty red, a sign that I'm a living man, and most grateful for it. I am indebted to you, Byron, for this handy reminder.

BYRON

What is a mere jawbone, I say, if it's sacrificed in the name of restoring Mr. Fish's good humor?

CLAIRE

(To Byron:) Poor thing, does it hurt?

(Claire has dipped handkerchief in the ice bucket and offers it to Byron. But Polidori steps in between them, and it is he who takes the compress.)

POLIDORI

Thank you, Miss Clairmont. I'll tend to it. It's past two anyway. Perhaps it's best we retire?

MARY

Shelley.

SHELLEY

But it's early yet!

BYRON

No, no, the doctor is right. The hour is late, and don't forget, gentlemen, we must be up in a few hours to go sailing.

(Mary jumps up and grabs Polidori's arm just in time to save the chandelier. The pistol FLASHES and goes off out the terrace doors, shattering a window. Mary and Polidori fall into a heap.

(Claire screams and claps delightedly as the two poets circle one another, feinting punches. Finally, Shelley manages to land a solid clout to Byron's jaw.)

BYRON

Damn!

SHELLEY

(Clutching his hand:) Ow!

(Enraged, Byron grabs the fallen pistol and aims it at Shelley. Everyone freezes.)

BYRON

Bloody fool.

POLIDORI

Byron! Stop!

(Pause. Then Byron breaks the tension, lowering the gun. He reaches a hand to Shelley.)

BYRON

(Smiling:) For God's sake, no one reloaded it, my good fellow. You have a heavy fist, sir, for an atheist.

SHELLEY

And you, my friend, have a hard jaw. For a poet.

POLIDORI

You're bleeding, Shelley.

SHELLEY

(Delighted:) Oh, look, Mary. I'm bleeding!

MARY

Serves you right. Better come upstairs and let me tend that hand.

SHELLEY

Oh, it's nothing, just a split knuckle. I can still hold a pen.

Damned.

SHELLEY

Destined.

BYRON

(Annoyed:) You must have the last word I see, Shelley.

CLAIRE

Come, come, you two. Is it to be fisticuffs next?

BYRON

Fisticuffs? Now that is inspired!

SHELLEY

The very thing! Who will referee? Polidori?

POLIDORI

What?

(Byron hands the pistol to Polidori.)

What's this for?

BYRON

The starting gun.

(Byron and Shelley take off their coats and roll up their sleeves.)

POLIDORI

Gentlemen, to your corners.

CLAIRE

Wonderful! Wonderful! (To Mary:) I didn't know Shelley could box.

MARY

He can't.

(Shelley and Byron square off. Polidori holds the loaded gun poised, pointing in the air dangerously near the chandelier.)

POLIDORI

Ready ... set ...

BYRON

Without medicine, there would still be Scotch.

(Shelley laughs.)

POLIDORI

Oh, you are drunk. Both of you.

BYRON

Both of me? You are the one who is drunk.

SHELLEY

Ha-ha, bravo!

BYRON

I cannot make myself think about science.

SHELLEY

A fellow poet speaks.

BYRON

I by no means rank poetry high in the scale of intelligence, Mr. Fish. It is a vile affliction, a disease, a curse. There is no worse curse than the curse of verse.

MARY

You are cynical, Lord Byron, for one who has been so often blessed by inspiration.

BYRON

Inspiration, damned inspiration!
The plague of the lyrical class
How I wish that inspiration, like gas, might –

(He finishes by belching royally. Shelley laughs.)

SHELLEY

But you counter your own argument, Byron. You are inspired even while you blast inspiration. You cannot help yourself. You are a poet through and through. Compelled to poetry.

BYRON

Cursed, you mean.

SHELLEY

Driven.

BYRON

BYRON

IMMORTALITY

POLIDORI

WE COULD LIVE FOREVER
IT IS THE AGE OF MIRACLES
IT IS THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT

ALL THREE

IMMORTALITY

(The trio of geniuses now overlap in a soaring fugue:)

SHELLEY

THOUGHT IS FLIGHT, PURE POETRY, SWEET LIGHT, etc.

BYRON

YOUTH ... TRUTH ... IMMORTALITY, etc.

POLIDORI

ANATOMY, ASTRONOMY, ECONOMICS, TAXONOMY, etc.

BYRON & POLIDORI

WE COULD LIVE FOREVER

SHELLEY

WE LIVE FOREVER

POLIDORI

A WORM HAS SHOWN US THE WAY!

SHELLEY

Doctor, your science is merely mechanics. Puzzle-making. The only true science is the science of the mind.

TO BE A GOD, TO CREATE, TO THINK
IS TO GAZE INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH
AND DARE TO DRINK
TO LOOK DEEP INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH
AND TO DEEPLY DRINK.

POLIDORI

Still, sir, you must grant that your mind can only operate in a vigorous body. Without medicine –

MAGNETISM, GALVINISM, CATASTROPHISM, ATOMISM
AESTHETICS, KINETICS, HERMETICS, THEORETICS

We could live forever!

SHELLEY

We do live forever, Doctor! Not through theory, but through thought. We can never achieve physical immortality. But through the power of the mind, one begins at least to understand –

LIFE, CHANGE, THE EBB AND FLOW
TO BE IN TOUCH WITH IT
TO SEE, TO KNOW
TRUTH, TIME, UNIVERSE
TO FIND ONE'S PLACE IN IT
TO SEEK, TO SEARCH
TO DREAM, TO FLY, NEVER TO DIE
TO BE A GOD, TO CREATE, TO THINK
TO GAZE INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH
AND DARE TO DRINK
TO LOOK DEEP INTO THE WELL OF TRUTH
AND DARE TO DRINK

BYRON

(Spoken:) To drink!

SHELLEY

THOUGHT IS FLIGHT
PURE POETRY, SWEET LIGHT
ETERNITY
THOUGHT IS FLIGHT
PURE POETRY, SWEET LIGHT

BYRON

YOUTH

SHELLEY

ETERNITY

BYRON

IMMORTALITY

SHELLEY

IMMORTALITY

BYRON

(Toasting:) REANIMATION!

SHELLEY

Reanimation! You miss the point entirely. Of what use is it if Darwin has o'erturned the laws of Nature and harnessed the forces of galvanism to cause a dead worm to twitch as if alive?

PAUSE TRACK

I SEE HIM NOW: MAD DOCTOR DARWIN
 SURROUNDED BY DISEASE AND DEATH
 LONG INTO THE NIGHT HE LABORS
 SHORT OF SLEEP, SHORT OF BREATH
 I SEE HIM NOW: OLD MAN ERASMUS
 HIS DOCTOR'S OATH IS LONG FORGOT
 WHAT SORT OF HORROR HE MAY FATHER
 WHAT EVIL STIR, HE CARES NOT
 HE CARES NOT FOR THE RULE OF NATURE
 HE CARES NOT FOR THE LAWS OF EARTH
 HE DARES DEFY THE NAT'RAL CYCLE
 OF DEATH AND LIFE, DECAY AND BIRTH
 HE LIFTS THE VIAL OF ELIXIR
 HE TAKES THE NEEDLE FROM THE SHELF
 HE WOULD HARNESS LIGHTNING, THUNDER
 HE WOULD HARNESS HELL ITSELF
 NOW THAT HE HAS TASTED POW'R
 HIS APPETITE CAN NE'ER BE SATED
 HE GLORIES IN HIS FINEST HOUR ...
 A WORM HAS BEEN REANIMATED!

(Shelley has recovered himself; he is smiling and calm again.)

That is what this poet thinks of your science.

(Byron applauds Shelley's impromptu performance.)

BYRON

Bravo! You have had your blessed scientific debate now, Doctor. And you've lost - to a lyricist!

POLIDORI

Laugh if you will, gentlemen. But it isn't poetry that does real good in the world. It is science.

RESUME TRACK

ANATOMY, ASTRONOMY, ECONOMICS, TAXONOMY
 HOROLOGY, PHYSIOLOGY, MATHEMATICS, COSMOLOGY

SLEEP

(Lights resume as before. Byron heads directly for the decanters on the sideboard.)

BYRON

I need another drink. And Shelley, you look as if you could use one, too.

CLAIRE

Mary, this is hardly a subject calculated to lighten the atmosphere!

MARY

But the very atmosphere serves to remind me! Isn't it odd that we should come here this summer of all summers? And that I should dream of William? And, the very next day, Dr. Polidori should inform us that there is such a thing as reanimation?

(Every word is a blow to Shelley.)

BYRON

Dr. Polidori is an ass! *(To Shelley:)* I say, good fellow, is the Godwin woman always so morbid?

MARY

I don't mean to be morbid. It was so real, so beautiful. I believe it might one day be true.

POLIDORI

Reanimation, Miss Godwin! If you're interested, I've some pamphlets.

MARY

Oh, indeed, thank you!

CLAIRE

Now we shall never get him off the subject.

BYRON

If you must know, Poli, we are all bored to death with your outlandish conjectures. And there remains little hope of reviving our interest.

POLIDORI

But they are not conjectures, Byron. This is science. Darwin has reanimated a worm! Think about it!

BEGIN TRACK 3: "Eternity"

IT IS THE AGE OF MIRACLES
THE IMPOSSIBLE IS PROVED
IT IS THE AGE OF ENLIGHTENMENT
THE IMMOVABLE IS MOVED
REANIMATION!

MARY

But it wasn't. It was the most miraculous dream. Shelley, our little William came alive again. *He'd only been cold. And we rubbed his little hands and legs before the fire and he cried and wanted to be nursed.*

(Shelley is riveted on Mary.)

BEGIN TRACK 2: "Lullabye"

IT WAS A VISION FULL OF COLOR AND POWER
 BRIGHTER THAN LIFE, RICHER THAN LIFE
 SWEETER THAN LIFE WAS THE DREAM
 I COULD SEE POSSIBILITY
 WHAT WAS AND WHAT WILL BE
 IN MY DREAM
 IN MY DREAM I AM AT PEACE
 AND THE ROOM IS WARM AND DRY
 AND THE LITTLE BABY IN MY ARMS
 WAKES AND BEGINS TO CRY

LULLABYE, DARLING WILLIAM, LULLABYE
 LULLABYE, LULLABYE, MY BOY
 LIFE IS A PROMISE NEWLY MADE
 THERE IS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF
 DO NOT WEEP ... SLEEP
 LULLABYE, DARLING WILLIAM, LULLABYE
 LULLABYE, MY DEAR LITTLE CHILD
 ONLY A YEAR AGO, LAST SPRING
 I MYSELF WAS A LITTLE THING
 JUST LIKE YOU ... LIKE YOU

WHO COULD HAVE SEEN IT WOULD COME TO PASS?
 WHO WOULD HAVE GUESSED IT COULD HAPPEN SO –
 THAT YOU AND I SHOULD MEET EACH NIGHT
 STEALTHILY, BY CANDLELIGHT?
 DO NOT THINK I COULD EVER LOVE ANOTHER
 THE ONE WHO LIES THERE IS ONLY MY LOVER
 YOU ARE MY SON
 MY OWN LITTLE ONE

(Shelley turns away, obviously pained by her vision.)

LULLABYE, DARLING WILLIAM, LULLABYE
 LULLABYE, LULLABYE, MY BOY
 LIFE IS A PROMISE NEWLY MADE
 THERE IS NOTHING TO BE AFRAID OF
 DO NOT WEEP ... SLEEP
 SLEEP

SHELLEY

(Disquieted:) Allow me to suggest, Doctor, that even death has its place in the world. It is part of Nature's cycle. Man has no control over such things. Nor should he have.

(Polidori turns to Mary, who is lost in thought.)

POLIDORI

Miss Godwin. You are an educated woman, I appeal to you. Miss Godwin?

(Mary appears not to hear.)

BYRON

Speaking of raising the dead.

SHELLEY

Mary! What can you be thinking of?

MARY

I was just thinking of our little baby. *(To Polidori:)* Shelley and I had a baby who died in the spring. We'd named him for my father, William.

CLAIRE

Darling, you mustn't!

SHELLEY

I've told you over and over, Mary. It wasn't your fault. There was nothing that could be done.

MARY

He only lived a few days, poor little chap.

SHELLEY

There is no need to think about it now.

MARY

But I can't help myself from thinking about it. Last night I dreamed about him. I dreamed he came alive again.

POLIDORI

Did you indeed?

CLAIRE

Mary, how awful!

Reanimation. POLIDORI

What? MARY

Reanimation of the dead! POLIDORI

You mean corpses? BYRON

(Overlapping:) Nonsense. SHELLEY

(Mary's mood seems to have suddenly brightened. She draws closer to Polidori.)

Do you really think such a thing could happen? MARY

I do. POLIDORI

(Shelley steps in, trying to derail the conversation.)

Come, Doctor! You honestly believe a SHELLEY physician could revive a corpse? Say, some aging victim of cancer?

I believe it with all my heart. I'd do it myself if I could. POLIDORI

Of course you would. MARY

And should you be doing the poor fellow a favor, Doctor? To restore him to his painful disease, to a continual state of approaching death but never achieving its release? You'd commit this crime? SHELLEY

Naturally. Then physicians such as Doctor Polidori would never lack for employment. They would tend both the living and the dead. BYRON

POLIDORI

A most intriguing discussion topic. It's right in front of me: modern medicine! I don't know why I didn't think of it sooner!

BYRON

But you did, Poli. Every night you most tediously turn the conversation to science ...

SHELLEY

Dr. Erasmus Darwin ...

CLAIRE

And his extraordinary ...

ALL (except Polidori)

Medical experiments.

POLIDORI

But this is truly extraordinary! I've just been reading about Dr. Darwin's latest experiments with the forces of galvanism.

MARY

I believe I have seen quite enough lightning to last a lifetime.

SHELLEY

Here, here!

POLIDORI

(With great significance:) But lately Doctor Darwin has been using worms –

BYRON

Using what?

POLIDORI

Worms! The lowly worm, cut into sections!

CLAIRE

Ugh. So soon after supper?

POLIDORI

It's the birth of a new Prometheus, I tell you. The bringer of light into a new age! Don't you see what I am talking about?

SHELLEY

What are you talking about, Doctor?

For example? BYRON

Atheism? SHELLEY

God save us! BYRON

All right then. Metaphysics. SHELLEY

Haven't we done that? CLAIRE

All last week. MARY

Poetry! Keats for example! "A thing of beauty –"
SHELLEY

(Byron groans and aims the pistol at his own head.)

Perhaps not.

Surely we can think of something. MARY

By the gods! POLIDORI

What's wrong, Doctor? SHELLEY

Did someone die? Will you have to return to England at once? CLAIRE

(Polidori waves the letter he has been reading. LIGHTNING.)

This is it! POLIDORI

What are you talking about, Poli? BYRON

(BLACKOUT. Sounds of a relentless STORM, with heavy sweeping RAIN and WIND.

(LIGHTS come up on the DRAWING ROOM at the Villa Diodati. The room is littered with the debris accumulated over a three-week period: scattered books and games, bottles and glasses – and five very restless people.

(Mary and Shelley are in one corner, half-heartedly playing chess. Claire is morosely watching Byron, who is in a dark mood. Between lightning bursts, he loads and fires a single shot flintlock pistol out the terrace doors into the rain; this startles Polidori, who is trying to read his mail.

(BANG!)

POLIDORI

Must you fire that thing out the window?

BYRON

Would you prefer that I fire it indoors, Doctor? I came to bloody Geneva to go shooting, and shoot I shall!

SHELLEY

How many days since we arrived in this godforsaken place?

MARY

Seventeen.

SHELLEY

And how many days without a single ray of sunshine?

ALL

Seventeen!

CLAIRE

Do you suppose it's possible that a person could actually die of boredom?

BYRON

(With a pointed glance at Claire:) If only.

(BANG!)

POLIDORI

A debate, perhaps, on some interesting topic?

CLAIRE

IS IT THE MOON ON THE LAKE
OR THE SOFT SUMMER BREEZE?

BYRON

(Sardonically:) IS IT THE SWISS?
IS IT THE CHEESE?

ENSEMBLE

AH, GENEVA!
GENEVA OUGHT TO BE
OUGHT TO BE GLORIOUS

MARY

OUGHT TO BE INTIMATE

CLAIRE

OUGHT TO BE SENSUAL

POLIDORI

OUGHT TO BE CIVILIZED

SHELLEY

PRACT'CALLY PARADISE

POLIDORI

MARVELOUS

CLAIRE

FRIVOLOUS

BYRON

MAD, BAD AND DANGEROUS

MARY

I'M GETTING CURIOUS

SHELLEY

(Shouted:) WHAT ARE WE WAITING FOR?

ENSEMBLE

GENEVA OUGHT TO BE, OUGHT BE GLORIOUS!
GLORIOUS!

(The song ends with a HUGE THUNDERCLAP!)

POLIDORI

(Joining in:) AH, GENEVA

SHELLEY

(Adding on:) AH, GENEVA

WOMEN

(Likewise:) AH, GENEVA!

(The Shelley party has closed their trunks, and the mound of luggage now becomes a carriage that they climb aboard, on the journey to Switzerland. The ensemble sings a quintet with multiple interweaving counterpoints:)

MARY & SHELLEY

IT IS LOVELY IN GENEVA
THE AIR IS LIKE CHAMPAGNE, etc.

CLAIRE

ALL THE PARTIES, ALL THE PASTRIES, etc.

BYRON & POLIDORI

WE'LL DISCUSS POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, ART, etc.

(Now the Shelley group travels by moonlight.)

ENSEMBLE

EV'RY DAY ...

SHELLEY *(Recitative:)*

IN THE CITY OF GENEVA, WE SHALL DO JUST AS WE PLEASE

ENSEMBLE

EV'RY DAY ...

MARY

THE ALPS ARE FAR SUPERIOR TO THE PYRENEES

ENSEMBLE

A DELIGHT ...

POLIDORI

WHAT IS IT ABOUT GENEVA THAT SETS MY HEART AT EASE?

(Song builds again to rousing waltz tempo.)

WHAT IT MEANS
TO BE ALIVE
AH, GENEVA! AH GENEVA!
WHEN WE GET THERE
YOU WILL SEE

IN THE SUN, ON THE BEACH
IN THE NUDE
AH, GENEVA! AH GENEVA!
LA-LA-LA!

TOGETHER

IN GENEVA, WE'LL BE WELCOME
WE'LL BE HAPPY, WE'LL BE FREE!

SHELLEY

Free to live by our own rules. To go our own way.

MARY

It would be good to get away from the wagging tongues in London.

CLAIRE

Exactly. In Geneva, we'll be having such a grand time, no one will know whose mistress you are! I've got it all worked out. I've written to that nuisance, Polidori: "This will be the most auspicious –"

(Lights brighten on Byron and Polidori, as before. Byron is reading from Claire's letter.)

RESUME TRACK

BYRON

(Overlapping:) "Meeting of minds the world has ever known." Bah! But if Shelley can shoot and sail, maybe Geneva won't be such a bore this summer, Poli. If I can manage to keep clear of the energetic Miss Clairmont –

GENEVA OUGHT TO BE – INT'RESTING

SHELLEY

(Overlapping:) GENEVA OUGHT TO BE GLORIOUS

BOTH

THIS TIME OF YEAR!

POLIDORI

If you hadn't encouraged the moonstruck cow in the first place ...

BYRON

I might never have had the opportunity to go shooting with the worst poet since Keats!

AH, GENEVA

(Byron grabs the letter away and peruses it.)

BYRON

Hm. Shelley's lady friend is coming along as well, eh? At least that may be ...

... INT'RESTING

GENEVA MAY PROVE TO BE INT'RESTING
THIS TIME OF YEAR ...

*(Focus returns to the Shelley party, finishing their packing, as
Byron and Polidori remain in half-light, arguing.)*

CLAIRE

The historic meeting of Byron and Shelley. And we shall bear witness, Mary!

SHELLEY

WE'LL DEBATE AND WE'LL JEST
MATCH WITS WITH THE BEST
ON EV'RY CONCEIVABLE TOPIC
DIVINE OR OBSCENE, FROM KEATS TO CUISINE
FROM THE STARS TO A DROP MICROSCOPIC

SHELLEY & CLAIRE

AH, GENEVA! AH, GENEVA!
IT IS SIMPLY PARADISE
AH, GENEVA! AH GENEVA!

MARY

I SUPPOSE IT MIGHT BE NICE

CLAIRE

It'll be more than nice, Mary! It'll be positively depraved!

SHELLEY

Two minutes in such stimulating society, and you will be my Mary again, I promise you.

(Shelley and Claire sing in counterpoint:)

SHELLEY

IN GENEVA
DEAREST MARY
YOU WILL FLOURISH
YOU WILL THRIVE
REDISCOVER
IN GENEVA

CLAIRE

ALL THE PARTIES,
ALL THE PASTRIES
ALL THE PEOPLE
ALL THE FOOD
WON'T IT BE EXOTIC?
WON'T IT BE EROTIC?

SHELLEY

A bit of sunshine will be just the thing to set our minds free, Mary. Away from the smoke and the gloom, in the company of interesting, free-thinking people.

CLAIRE

Byron is dying to meet you both. And he's been missing me so, the poor dear!

(Another POOL of light reveals the darkly handsome BYRON and his physician and traveling companion, DR. POLIDORI, who is reading a letter from Claire.)

BYRON

What? The Clairmont girl, coming here?

POLIDORI

She says you invited her.

BYRON

I was probably drunk. Damn the sex-starved creature!

POLIDORI

She's bringing along Shelley!

BYRON

Who?

POLIDORI

The poet. Percy B. Shelley.

BYRON

What's the B stand for.

POLIDORI

Bish.

BYRON

Bish? Like fish? Oh, the atheist. Dreadful poet.

POLIDORI

Oh, he's not so bad. Not as bad as –

TOGETHER

(An in joke:) Keats!

POLIDORI

I could write them not to come.

LEAVING HOUSES UP FOR LEASE
 FOR A FEW FRANCS, NEXT TO NOTHING
 ONE CAN LIVE LIKE ROYALTY
 ALL THE HOUSES GO SO CHEAPLY
 THAT THEY MIGHT AS WELL BE FREE

CLAIRE & SHELLEY

AH, GENEVA! AH, GENEVA!
 EVEN IF WE'RE POOR AS FLEAS
 IN GENEVA, DEAR GENEVA
 WE SHALL LIVE A LIFE OF EASE

MARY

You sound like a travel brochure.

CLAIRE

Byron has a huge, rattling old villa on the lake: the Villa Diodati. Milton once lived there.

SHELLEY

Imagine that, Mary. Walking in Milton's footsteps!

I CAN SEE US IN GENEVA
 SAILING DAILY ON THE LAKE
 AND AT TWILIGHT, IN THE VILLA
 WHAT CONVERSATION WE'LL MAKE
 WE'LL DISCUSS POLITICS, PHILOSOPHY, ART

RESUME TRACK

CLAIRE

AND THEN WE'LL MOVE ON TO THE TRIVIA
 SCANDAL AT COURT, AND THE VINTAGE OF WINES
 AND WHO WAS THE KING OF BOLIVIA

SHELLEY

IN GENEVA IN JUNE, WE'LL SLEEP UNTIL NOON
 THEN RING UP FOR CHOC'LATE AND STRUDEL
 AND THEN IF YOU LIKE, WE'LL GO FOR A HIKE
 I MIGHT EVEN TEACH YOU TO YODEL

PAUSE TRACK

SHELLEY & CLAIRE

AH GENEVA! AH GENEVA!
 I CAN'T WAIT TIL WE ARE THERE
 IN SUNNY OLD GENEVA
 ALL THAT WHOLESOME MOUNTAIN AIR!

(A handsome man – every inch the Romantic poet – appears in a SPOTLIGHT. The young SHELLEY smiles and extends a hand to Mary. Mary turns and steps toward him, smiling.)

MARY

It was summer, wasn't it? And we thought ...

GENEVA ... OUGHT TO BE BEAUTIFUL

SHELLEY

GENEVA OUGHT TO BE BEAUTIFUL

BOTH

THIS TIME OF YEAR ...

(Now the time transition is complete. Mary has dropped her veil and mourning cloak and is dressed in a simple pale summer gown. It is 1816, and she is ten years younger. Claire, too, is suddenly younger again, vibrant and full of exuberant sensuality. Not a touch of her adult bitterness.)

(Behind them, a mountain of trunks and other LUGGAGE appears. The party has clearly been packing.)

CLAIRE

Think of it, Mary! Shelley and you. And Byron and me. Alone in beautiful Geneva! What could be more romantic?

RESUME TRACK 1

IT IS LOVELY IN GENEVA
THE AIR IS LIKE CHAMPAGNE
IT'S SO LIVELY, IS GENEVA
INTOXICATING, INSANE
AH, GENEVA! AH, GENEVA!
SO BEAUTIFUL, SO BRIGHT
AH, GENEVA, AH GENEVA!
EVERY DAY, A DELIGHT

PAUSE TRACK

MARY

How can we afford it? We are poor as the fleas on a field mouse.

CLAIRE

It's cheaper than London.

EVERY SUMMER, FROM GENEVA
ALL THE LOCALS GO TO GREECE
GONE THE RABBLE WITH THEIR BABBLE

If you please.

(The Proprietor takes Claire's glass and exits to refill it. Claire goes to the doorway to look out at the rain. THUNDER.)

MARY

How have you been, Claire?

CLAIRE

We were trapped in a storm once before, remember, Mary? That time in Geneva?

(UNDERSCORE begins: "Geneva.")

MARY

How could I not? Geneva!

CLAIRE

Ah, Geneva!

BEGIN TRACK 1: "Geneva"
NOTE: TRACK VARIES FROM
SCRIPT, PAUSE FOR DIALOG
AS INDICATED

MARY

(Sings:)

OUR FIRST SIGHT OF THE TOWN
 FROM A HEIGHT, LOOKING DOWN
 INTO THE BLUE BOWL OF LAND
 TOOK OUR BREATH AWAY
 IT WAS GLORIOUS, GAY
 THE WAY THE MOUNTAIN HELD A SAPPHIRE
 IN THE PALM OF HER HAND

PAUSE TRACK

(As she sings, the stage begins to change. The tea shop fades, and the two women are momentarily suspended in time.)

MARY

How young we were. How energetic.

CLAIRE

How foolish.

MARY

Everyone is foolish when they are young. Ah, Geneva!

CLAIRE

You didn't even want to go. Shelley and I had to practically drag you!

CLAIRE

I'd have thought you'd have been too busy to think of me anyway, what with editing Shelley's papers and a dramatization of your book at the Opera House. What did they call it? *The Fate of Frankenstein*? Personally, I liked your original title better.

(Overhearing this last, the Proprietor has returned with a tray, bearing two glasses of brandy, and tea things. Claire immediately grabs up her glass.)

PROPRIETOR

I thought so! You are! Mary Godwin Shelley, the authoress, as I live and breathe!

(In a flush of enthusiasm, the Proprietor bows grandly, much to Mary's embarrassment.)

My humble establishment is honored, Madame Shelley! (With a wink:) You know, you must be responsible for more sleepless nights than any woman in the world.

CLAIRE

Now there's a compliment to be proud of!

MARY

You are most kind, sir, I'm sure. May I present my sister, Miss Clairmont?

PROPRIETOR

Not ... Lord Byron's Miss Clairmont?

MARY

Sir! That is none of your business.

CLAIRE

Oh, Mary, it doesn't matter in the least any more. Yes, dear sir, you may go home and boast to your wife, who will then gossip to all your neighbors, that you had in your shop both Madame Shelley and her notorious stepsister, in the very flesh. By tomorrow, I daresay you'll be quite famous yourself.

PROPRIETOR

I meant no disrespect, Miss Clairmont. I wasn't placing any judgment on your ... former circumstance. Artists live by their own rules, I always say.

CLAIRE

How very modern of you.

(Claire has already drained her glass, and holds it out to him.)

MARY

We may have to swim in order to find out.

CLAIRE

We shall drown anyway if we don't do something! Take my arm. One ... two ... THREE!

(UNDERSCORE brightens, hinting at the lively waltz that is to come, as the two sisters clasp arms and plunge into the rain. They cross the "street" and run into the shop. By the time they are inside, shedding their dripping coats, they are laughing like two schoolgirls, their former mood set aside.)

PROPRIETOR

Welcome, ladies!

MARY

Good man, have you a table?

(Taking their cloaks, the man makes a show of looking around the entirely empty shop.)

PROPRIETOR

I believe I might squeeze you in.

(Claire has already taken the most comfortable chair.)

What shall I bring you? A pot of nice hot tea?

CLAIRE

Yes, yes, but first brandy! Lots of brandy. Do hurry, we are soaked to the skin!

PROPRIETOR

Right away.

(Eyeing them curiously over his shoulder, the Proprietor moves off. Mary falls into a chair as Claire pulls off her sodden gloves.)

CLAIRE

I meant to call on you when I first got to London, Mary, really I did. You must think me a terrible sister.

MARY

Of course I don't.

CLAIRE

How funny seeing you like this, Mary. You look a bit pale. But quite well.

MARY

Come, Claire, does any woman really look well in weeds? You are stunning, as always. That gown!

CLAIRE

Isn't it a smasher? But it shall be a rag in no time in this monsoon! How I hate this town!

(On the opposite side of the stage, a POOL OF WARM LIGHT fades up, illuminating an area that designates a small tea shop, where a cheery fire is going. The equally cheery Proprietor sets out tea things on a small, white-clothed table.)

MARY

Not a coach in sight. Your poor shoes!

CLAIRE

Not the most practical. But I could never resist red satin.

MARY

(Smiling softly:) No, you never could.

(Claire and Mary both eye the tea shop. After a slight pause:)

CLAIRE

Darling, I heard about poor Shelley, of course.

MARY

I didn't know how to reach you.

CLAIRE

I was traveling, as always. Paris? Madrid? I don't remember. But I was quite beside myself when I heard. Dear, kind Shelley! I meant to write.

MARY

I know.

(Pause. Both women watch through the haze of rain as the Proprietor inside the tea shop across the way pours boiling water into a teapot. Steam rises, tantalizing.)

CLAIRE

Is that a tea shop?

PROLOGUE – LONDON, 1825

(NOTE: The Prologue scene is lightly underscored in fits and starts, finally building to the ensemble song “Geneva.”)

(THUNDER. The sound of pouring RAIN.

(A POOL OF COOL LIGHT illuminates MARY SHELLEY, nee Godwin, an attractive matron not quite thirty, standing under a streetlamp in the midst of a London downpour. Cloaked in mourning, her face hidden behind a translucent veil, she is trying to shelter herself under the ledge of a building, with little success. She looks up and down the street for a hansom cab. None are in site. After a beat:

(THUNDER rumbles again, bringing with it sounds of a distant HORSEDRAWN CAB. Mary steps out as if to hail the driver.

(At the same moment, from the shadows another woman CLAIRE CLAIRMONT appears, vying for the same conveyance. Claire is of a similar age to Mary, but more extravagantly dressed, as if she’s just come from a party in her fragile, rain-spotted dancing slippers. The two women – estranged sisters – nearly collide.)

MARY

I beg your pardon!

CLAIRE

As well you might! I have been waiting here for nearly half an hour, and then you appear out of nowhere to steal my carriage!

(Mary stops.)

MARY

Claire?

CLAIRE

Can it be? Mary!

(Mary pulls back her veil and with cries of affection, the two women fall into each other’s arms and embrace. But almost immediately, discomfort separates them again. They crowd against the building to keep out of the rain, which continues to pound.)

MARY

Have you just arrived in London?

MARY S.

SCRIPT NOTE

All parts of the libretto and lyrics are original, with the exception of public domain quotations from Mary's two classic works of science fiction (*Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus* and her less well known apocalyptic vision of the 21st Century, *The Last Man*.)

These quotes are interpolated as Mary is depicted as either reading from or writing these two works, are clearly marked as quotations within the script *through the use of italics*.

ABOUT ACCOMPANYING AUDIO TRACKS:

The libretto and some lyrics have been substantially “reanimated” since the original demo for *Mary S.* was recorded. As the authors now live across the country from one another, working by phone/email, it hasn't been possible to get back into a studio to re-record; therefore, some discrepancies exist between script and audio CD. **In all cases, the libretto is most current and correct.**

In particular, the complex first ensemble, “Geneva,” has been substantially restructured, so interpolated dialogue and action were out of sync with the new script. But since we didn't want this establishing song to be left out, we have included a truncated version, and indicated PAUSE or RESUME TRACK where the CD should be stopped and started again.

A few songs from Act Two either have not been recorded yet or have changed so much we felt it would be misleading to include an outdated version. Other than these few exceptions, the CD is fairly complete, and red notations in the script indicate where to start a given track.

Thank you for your understanding. And thanks for reading and listening. After a number of years, we are thrilled to be bringing this work back to life.

MARY S.

SET DESCRIPTION & ENVIRONMENTAL EFFECTS

The main action of *Mary S.* takes place in 1816 in the drawing room of Byron's rented Swiss Villa Diodati, a large, Italianate room furnished with couches, chairs, side tables, bookshelves and a well-stocked sideboard bar.

- Up center, French doors opening onto a stone terrace are framed by curtains
- Down left is a short corridor or anteroom, leading to Byron's offstage rooms
- Down right a similar corridor leading to Polidori's unseen chamber
- Up left is an alcove/exit to the rest of the house (kitchen, etc.)
- Up right, stairs lead to a high landing with a large window, beyond which various weather indicators can be seen: rain, cloud cover, zigzags of lightning, etc.
- The stairs continue on to additional wing above where the Shelley party is housed
- A fireplace is presumed down center.

Through dramatic lighting and key furnishings, various stage areas represent additional locations, including:

- A London tea shop (1825), where Mary and Claire wait out a rainstorm
- A corner of Mary and Shelley's chamber, with chaise lounge and writing table
- The graveside of Mary's mother, Mary Wollestonecraft
- Various imaginary locations from the novel *Frankenstein*.

FX NOTE

The weather is almost another character in the play. Rain, fog and storm effects such as lightning and thunder are part of the underscore and important to setting the proper mood; at certain moments, they cue character action. Creative solutions to making environmental effects (such as adding thunder sheet or other such instruments played in real time to the orchestra) are encouraged.

MARY S.

CAST

Mary S. has an ensemble cast of five. All must be highly skilled singing actors with exceptional legit musical theater voices.

The ensemble portrays the youthful, rebellious members of the famous Shelley circle, cooped up in Lord Byron's Geneva villa during the tempestuous June of 1816, known as "the year without a summer." To combat boredom, a ghost story writing competition was suggested, and eighteen year old Mary Godwin's entry was the first germ of the iconic science fiction novel *Frankenstein or The Modern Prometheus*.

In Act Two of *Mary S.*, as Mary reads passages from her narrative, the story comes to life with some cast members portraying characters from *Frankenstein*.

- **Mary** (Mary Godwin Shelley) (late teens - 20s; soprano) – daughter of two famous English writers and the author of *Frankenstein*; introverted and quietly brilliant, with an assertive, passionate side; "still waters run deep"
- **Claire** (Claire Clairmont) (late teens - 20s; mezzo soprano) – Mary's slightly younger stepsister; vibrant and fun-loving, if a bit frivolous; "love is all"
 - (*Also plays the innocent boy, William*)
- **Shelley** (Percy Bysshe Shelley) (late 20s - 30; lyric baritone) – fiery poet and iconoclast; an impractical, high-minded intellectual and free-thinker; "live for today"
 - (*Also plays the obsessed scientist, Victor Frankenstein*)
- **Byron** (George Gordon, Lord Byron) (30s; baritone) – 19th Century rock star poet and bad boy; a tortured soul; "mad, bad and dangerous"
 - (*Also plays the tormented Creature*)
- **Polidori** (John William Polidori) (30s; tenor) – Byron's protective friend, personal physician and acolyte; a bit of a bumbler at times; kind-hearted, with insight into human character; "physician, heal thyself"
 - (*Also plays Tea Shop Manager, 1825*)

MARY S.

MARY S.
a gothic chamber musical

©1986, 2012

MARY S.
a gothic chamber musical

Concept: Abra Bigham
Book & Lyrics: Abra Bigham*
Music: Roger L. Nelson

(*with Kathryn Morath)

Contact:
Abra Bigham
200 Haven Avenue #3F
New York, NY 10033
917.553.3390
abrabigham@me.com

©1986, 2012