

МЭРИ ШЕЛЛИ

MATHILDA

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Mathilda

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Mathilda:

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Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Mathilda

PREFACE

This volume prints for the first time the full text of Mary Shelley's novelette *Mathilda* together with the opening pages of its rough draft, *The Fields of Fancy*. They are transcribed from the microfilm of the notebooks belonging to Lord Abinger which is in the library of Duke University.

The text follows Mary Shelley's manuscript exactly except for the omission of mere corrections by the author, most of which are negligible; those that are significant are included and explained in the notes. Footnotes indicated by an asterisk are Mrs. Shelley's own notes. She was in general a fairly good speller, but certain words, especially those in which there was a question of doubling or not doubling a letter, gave her trouble: untill (though occasionally she deleted the final *l* or wrote the word correctly), agreeable, occurred, conferring, bubble, meanness, receded, as well as hopeless, lonely, separate, extractive, sacrifice, desert, and words ending in –ance or –ence. These and other misspellings (even those of proper names) are reproduced without change or comment. The use of *sic* and of square brackets is reserved to indicate evident slips of the pen, obviously

incorrect, unclear, or incomplete phrasing and punctuation, and my conjectures in emending them.

I am very grateful to the library of Duke University and to its librarian, Dr. Benjamin E. Powell, not only for permission to transcribe and publish this work by Mary Shelley but also for the many courtesies shown to me when they welcomed me as a visiting scholar in 1956. To Lord Abinger also my thanks are due for adding his approval of my undertaking, and to the Curators of the Bodleian Library for permitting me to use and to quote from the papers in the reserved Shelley Collection. Other libraries and individuals helped me while I was editing *Mathilda*: the Enoch Pratt Free Library of Baltimore, whose Literature and Reference Departments went to endless trouble for me; the Julia Rogers Library of Goucher College and its staff; the library of the University of Pennsylvania; Miss R. Glynn Grylls (Lady Mander); Professor Lewis Patton of Duke University; Professor Frederick L. Jones of the University of Pennsylvania; and many other persons who did me favors that seemed to them small but that to me were very great.

I owe much also to previous books by and about the Shelleys. Those to which I have referred more than once in the introduction and notes are here given with the abbreviated form which I have used:

Frederick L. Jones, ed. *The Letters of Mary W. Shelley*, 2 vols. Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, 1944 (*Letters*)
– *Mary Shelley's Journal*. Norman: University of Oklahoma

Press, 1947 (*Journal*)

Roger Ingpen and W.E. Peck, eds. *The Complete Works of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, Julian Edition, 10 vols. London, 1926-1930 (Julian Works)

Newman Ivey White. *Shelley*, 2 vols. New York: Knopf, 1940 (White, *Shelley*)

Elizabeth Nitchie. *Mary Shelley, Author of "Frankenstein."* New Brunswick: Rutgers University Press, 1953 (Nitchie, *Mary Shelley*)

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INTRODUCTION

Of all the novels and stories which Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley left in manuscript,¹ only one novelette, *Mathilda*, is complete. It exists in both rough draft and final copy. In this story, as in all Mary Shelley's writing, there is much that is autobiographical: it would be hard to find a more self-revealing work. For an understanding of Mary's character, especially as she saw herself, and of her attitude toward Shelley and toward Godwin in 1819, this tale is an important document. Although the main narrative, that of the father's incestuous love for his daughter, his suicide, and Mathilda's consequent withdrawal from society to a lonely heath, is not in any real sense

¹ They are listed in Nitchie, *Mary Shelley*, Appendix II, pp. 205-208. To them should be added an unfinished and unpublished novel, *Cecil*, in Lord Abinger's collection.

autobiographical, many elements in it are drawn from reality. The three main characters are clearly Mary herself, Godwin, and Shelley, and their relations can easily be reassorted to correspond with actuality.

Highly personal as the story was, Mary Shelley hoped that it would be published, evidently believing that the characters and the situations were sufficiently disguised. In May of 1820 she sent it to England by her friends, the Gisbornes, with a request that her father would arrange for its publication. But *Mathilda*, together with its rough draft entitled *The Fields of Fancy*, remained unpublished among the Shelley papers. Although Mary's references to it in her letters and journal aroused some curiosity among scholars, it also remained unexamined until comparatively recently.

This seeming neglect was due partly to the circumstances attending the distribution of the family papers after the deaths of Sir Percy and Lady Shelley. One part of them went to the Bodleian Library to become a reserved collection which, by the terms of Lady Shelley's will, was opened to scholars only under definite restrictions. Another part went to Lady Shelley's niece and, in turn, to her heirs, who for a time did not make the manuscripts available for study. A third part went to Sir John Shelley-Rolls, the poet's grand-nephew, who released much important Shelley material, but not all the scattered manuscripts. In this division, the two notebooks containing the finished draft of *Mathilda* and a portion of *The Fields of Fancy* went to Lord

Abinger, the notebook containing the remainder of the rough draft to the Bodleian Library, and some loose sheets containing additions and revisions to Sir John Shelley-Rolls. Happily all the manuscripts are now accessible to scholars, and it is possible to publish the full text of *Mathilda* with such additions from *The Fields of Fancy* as are significant.²

The three notebooks are alike in format.³ One of Lord Abinger's notebooks contains the first part of *The Fields of Fancy*, Chapter 1 through the beginning of Chapter 10, 116 pages. The concluding portion occupies the first fifty-four pages of the Bodleian notebook. There is then a blank page, followed by three and a half pages, scored out, of what seems to be a variant of the end of Chapter 1 and the beginning of Chapter 2. A revised and expanded version of the first part of Mathilda's narrative follows (Chapter 2 and the beginning of Chapter 3),

² On the basis of the Bodleian notebook and some information about the complete story kindly furnished me by Miss R. Glynn Grylls, I wrote an article, "Mary Shelley's Mathilda, an Unpublished Story and Its Biographical Significance," which appeared in *Studies in Philology*, XL (1943), 447-462. When the other manuscripts became available, I was able to use them for my book, *Mary Shelley*, and to draw conclusions more certain and well-founded than the conjectures I had made ten years earlier.

³ A note, probably in Richard Garnett's hand, enclosed in a MS box with the two notebooks in Lord Abinger's collection describes them as of Italian make with "slanting head bands, inserted through the covers." Professor Lewis Patton's list of the contents of the microfilms in the Duke University Library (*Library Notes*, No. 27, April, 1953) describes them as vellum bound, the back cover of the Mathilda notebook being missing. Lord Abinger's notebooks are on Reel 11. The Bodleian notebook is catalogued as MSS. Shelley d. 1, the Shelley-Rolls fragments as MSS. Shelley adds c. 5.

with a break between the account of her girlhood in Scotland and the brief description of her father after his return. Finally there are four pages of a new opening, which was used in *Mathilda*. This is an extremely rough draft: punctuation is largely confined to the dash, and there are many corrections and alterations. The Shelley-Rolls fragments, twenty-five sheets or slips of paper, usually represent additions to or revisions of *The Fields of Fancy*: many of them are numbered, and some are keyed into the manuscript in Lord Abinger's notebook. Most of the changes were incorporated in *Mathilda*.

The second Abinger notebook contains the complete and final draft of *Mathilda*, 226 pages. It is for the most part a fair copy. The text is punctuated and there are relatively few corrections, most of them, apparently the result of a final rereading, made to avoid the repetition of words. A few additions are written in the margins. On several pages slips of paper containing evident revisions (quite possibly originally among the Shelley-Rolls fragments) have been pasted over the corresponding lines of the text. An occasional passage is scored out and some words and phrases are crossed out to make way for a revision. Following page 216, four sheets containing the conclusion of the story are cut out of the notebook. They appear, the pages numbered 217 to 223, among the Shelley-Rolls fragments. A revised version, pages 217 to 226, follows the cut.⁴

The mode of telling the story in the final draft differs radically

⁴ See note 83 to *Mathilda*, page 89.

from that in the rough draft. In *The Fields of Fancy* Mathilda's history is set in a fanciful framework. The author is transported by the fairy Fantasia to the Elysian Fields, where she listens to the discourse of Diotima and meets Mathilda. Mathilda tells her story, which closes with her death. In the final draft this unrealistic and largely irrelevant framework is discarded: Mathilda, whose death is approaching, writes out for her friend Woodville the full details of her tragic history which she had never had the courage to tell him in person.

The title of the rough draft, *The Fields of Fancy*, and the setting and framework undoubtedly stem from Mary Wollstonecraft's unfinished tale, *The Cave of Fancy*, in which one of the souls confined in the center of the earth to purify themselves from the dross of their earthly existence tells to Sagesta (who may be compared with Diotima) the story of her ill-fated love for a man whom she hopes to rejoin after her purgation is completed.⁵ Mary was completely familiar with her mother's works. This title was, of course, abandoned when the framework was abandoned, and the name of the heroine was substituted. Though it is worth noticing that Mary chose a name with the same initial letter as her own, it was probably taken from Dante. There are several references in the story to the cantos of the *Purgatorio* in which Mathilda appears. Mathilda's father is never named, nor is Mathilda's surname given. The name of the

⁵ See Posthumous Works of the Author of a Vindication of the Rights of Woman (4 vols., London, 1798), IV, 97-155.

poet went through several changes: Welford, Lovel, Herbert, and finally Woodville.

The evidence for dating *Mathilda* in the late summer and autumn of 1819 comes partly from the manuscript, partly from Mary's journal. On the pages succeeding the portions of *The Fields of Fancy* in the Bodleian notebook are some of Shelley's drafts of verse and prose, including parts of *Prometheus Unbound* and of *Epipsychidion*, both in Italian, and of the preface to the latter in English, some prose fragments, and extended portions of the *Defence of Poetry*. Written from the other end of the book are the *Ode to Naples* and *The Witch of Atlas*. Since these all belong to the years 1819, 1820, and 1821, it is probable that Mary finished her rough draft some time in 1819, and that when she had copied her story, Shelley took over the notebook. Chapter 1 of *Mathilda* in Lord Abinger's notebook is headed, "Florence Nov. 9th. 1819." Since the whole of *Mathilda*'s story takes place in England and Scotland, the date must be that of the manuscript. Mary was in Florence at that time.

These dates are supported by entries in Mary's journal which indicate that she began writing *Mathilda*, early in August, while the Shelleys were living in the Villa Valosano, near Leghorn. On August 4, 1819, after a gap of two months from the time of her little son's death, she resumed her diary. Almost every day thereafter for a month she recorded, "Write," and by September 4, she was saying, "Copy." On September 12 she wrote, "Finish copying my Tale." The next entry to indicate literary activity

is the one word, "write," on November 8. On the 12th Percy Florence was born, and Mary did no more writing until March, when she was working on *Valperga*. It is probable, therefore, that Mary wrote and copied *Mathilda* between August 5 and September 12, 1819, that she did some revision on November 8 and finally dated the manuscript November 9.

The subsequent history of the manuscript is recorded in letters and journals. When the Gisbornes went to England on May 2, 1820, they took *Mathilda* with them; they read it on the journey and recorded their admiration of it in their journal.⁶ They were to show it to Godwin and get his advice about publishing it. Although Medwin heard about the story when he was with the Shelleys in 1820⁷ and Mary read it – perhaps from the rough draft – to Edward and Jane Williams in the summer of 1821,⁸ this manuscript apparently stayed in Godwin's hands. He evidently did not share the Gisbornes' enthusiasm: his approval was qualified. He thought highly of certain parts of it, less highly of others; and he regarded the subject as "disgusting and detestable," saying that the story would need a preface to prevent readers "from being tormented by the apprehension ... of the fall of the heroine," – that is, if it was ever published.⁹ There

⁶ See Maria Gisborne & Edward E. Williams ... Their Journals and Letters, ed. by Frederick L. Jones (Norman: University of Oklahoma Press, [1951]), p. 27.

⁷ See Thomas Medwin, *The Life of Percy Bysshe Shelley*, revised, with introduction and notes by H. Buxton Forman (London, 1913), p. 252.

⁸ Journal, pp. 159, 160.

⁹ Maria Gisborne, etc., pp. 43-44.

is, however, no record of his having made any attempt to get it into print. From January 18 through June 2, 1822, Mary repeatedly asked Mrs. Gisborne to retrieve the manuscript and have it copied for her, and Mrs. Gisborne invariably reported her failure to do so. The last references to the story are after Shelley's death in an unpublished journal entry and two of Mary's letters. In her journal for October 27, 1822, she told of the solace for her misery she had once found in writing *Mathilda*. In one letter to Mrs. Gisborne she compared the journey of herself and Jane to Pisa and Leghorn to get news of Shelley and Williams to that of Mathilda in search of her father, "driving – (like Matilda), towards the *sea* to learn if we were to be for ever doomed to misery."¹⁰ And on May 6, 1823, she wrote, "Matilda foretells even many small circumstances most truly – and the whole of it is a monument of what now is."¹¹

These facts not only date the manuscript but also show Mary's feeling of personal involvement in the story. In the events of 1818-1819 it is possible to find the basis for this morbid tale and consequently to assess its biographical significance.

On September 24, 1818, the Shelleys' daughter, Clara Everina, barely a year old, died at Venice. Mary and her children had gone from Bagni di Lucca to Este to join Shelley at Byron's villa. Clara was not well when they started, and she grew worse on the journey. From Este Shelley and Mary took her to Venice

¹⁰ Letters, I, 182.

¹¹ Ibid., I, 224.

to consult a physician, a trip which was beset with delays and difficulties. She died almost as soon as they arrived. According to Newman Ivey White,¹² Mary, in the unreasoning agony of her grief, blamed Shelley for the child's death and for a time felt toward him an extreme physical antagonism which subsided into apathy and spiritual alienation. Mary's black moods made her difficult to live with, and Shelley himself fell into deep dejection. He expressed his sense of their estrangement in some of the lyrics of 1818 – "all my saddest poems." In one fragment of verse, for example, he lamented that Mary had left him "in this dreary world alone."

Thy form is here indeed – a lovely one —
But thou art fled, gone down the dreary road,
That leads to Sorrow's most obscure abode.
Thou sittest on the hearth of pale despair,
Where
For thine own sake I cannot follow thee.

Professor White believed that Shelley recorded this estrangement only "in veiled terms" in *Julian and Maddalo* or in poems that he did not show to Mary, and that Mary acknowledged it only after Shelley's death, in her poem "The Choice" and in her editorial notes on his poems of that year. But this unpublished story, written after the death of their other child William, certainly contains, though also in veiled terms, Mary's

¹² See White, Shelley, II, 40-56.

immediate recognition and remorse. Mary well knew, I believe, what she was doing to Shelley. In an effort to purge her own emotions and to acknowledge her fault, she poured out on the pages of *Mathilda* the suffering and the loneliness, the bitterness and the self-recrimination of the past months.

The biographical elements are clear: Mathilda is certainly Mary herself; Mathilda's father is Godwin; Woodville is an idealized Shelley.

Like Mathilda Mary was a woman of strong passions and affections which she often hid from the world under a placid appearance. Like Mathilda's, Mary's mother had died a few days after giving her birth. Like Mathilda she spent part of her girlhood in Scotland. Like Mathilda she met and loved a poet of "exceeding beauty," and – also like Mathilda – in that sad year she had treated him ill, having become "captious and unreasonable" in her sorrow. Mathilda's loneliness, grief, and remorse can be paralleled in Mary's later journal and in "The Choice." This story was the outlet for her emotions in 1819.

Woodville, the poet, is virtually perfect, "glorious from his youth," like "an angel with winged feet" – all beauty, all goodness, all gentleness. He is also successful as a poet, his poem written at the age of twenty-three having been universally acclaimed. Making allowance for Mary's exaggeration and wishful thinking, we easily recognize Shelley: Woodville has his poetic ideals, the charm of his conversation, his high moral qualities, his sense of dedication and responsibility to those he

loved and to all humanity. He is Mary's earliest portrait of her husband, drawn in a year when she was slowly returning to him from "the hearth of pale despair."

The early circumstances and education of Godwin and of Mathilda's father were different. But they produced similar men, each extravagant, generous, vain, dogmatic. There is more of Godwin in this tale than the account of a great man ruined by character and circumstance. The relationship between father and daughter, before it was destroyed by the father's unnatural passion, is like that between Godwin and Mary. She herself called her love for him "excessive and romantic."¹³ She may well have been recording, in Mathilda's sorrow over her alienation from her father and her loss of him by death, her own grief at a spiritual separation from Godwin through what could only seem to her his cruel lack of sympathy. He had accused her of being cowardly and insincere in her grief over Clara's death¹⁴ and later he belittled her loss of William.¹⁵ He had also called Shelley "a disgraceful and flagrant person" because of Shelley's refusal to send him more money.¹⁶ No wonder if Mary felt that, like Mathilda, she had lost a beloved but cruel father.

Thus Mary took all the blame for the rift with Shelley upon

¹³ See Letters, II, 88, and note 23 to Mathilda.

¹⁴ See Shelley and Mary (4 vols. Privately printed [for Sir Percy and Lady Shelley], 1882), II, 338A.

¹⁵ See Mrs. Julian Marshall, *The Life and Letters of Mary W. Shelley* (2 vols. London: Richard Bentley & Son, 1889), I, 255.

¹⁶ *Julian Works*, X, 69.

herself and transferred the physical alienation to the break in sympathy with Godwin. That she turned these facts into a story of incest is undoubtedly due to the interest which she and Shelley felt in the subject at this time. They regarded it as a dramatic and effective theme. In August of 1819 Shelley completed *The Cenci*. During its progress he had talked over with Mary the arrangement of scenes; he had even suggested at the outset that she write the tragedy herself. And about a year earlier he had been urging upon her a translation of Alfieri's *Myrrha*. Thomas Medwin, indeed, thought that the story which she was writing in 1819 was specifically based on *Myrrha*. That she was thinking of that tragedy while writing *Mathilda* is evident from her effective use of it at one of the crises in the tale. And perhaps she was remembering her own handling of the theme when she wrote the biographical sketch of Alfieri for Lardner's *Cabinet Cyclopaedia* nearly twenty years later. She then spoke of the difficulties inherent in such a subject, "inequality of age adding to the unnatural incest. To shed any interest over such an attachment, the dramatist ought to adorn the father with such youthful attributes as would be by no means contrary to probability."¹⁷ This she endeavored to do in *Mathilda* (aided indeed by the fact that the situation was the reverse of that in *Myrrha*). *Mathilda*'s father was young: he married before he

¹⁷ Lives of the Most Eminent Literary and Scientific Men of Italy, Spain, and Portugal (3 vols., Nos. 63, 71, and 96 of the Rev. Dionysius Lardner's Cabinet Cyclopaedia, London, 1835-1837), II, 291-292.

was twenty. When he returned to Mathilda, he still showed "the ardour and freshness of feeling incident to youth." He lived in the past and saw his dead wife reincarnated in his daughter. Thus Mary attempts to validate the situation and make it "by no means contrary to probability."

Mathilda offers a good example of Mary Shelley's methods of revision. A study of the manuscript shows that she was a careful workman, and that in polishing this bizarre story she strove consistently for greater credibility and realism, more dramatic (if sometimes melodramatic) presentation of events, better motivation, conciseness, and exclusion of purple passages. In the revision and rewriting, many additions were made, so that *Mathilda* is appreciably longer than *The Fields of Fancy*. But the additions are usually improvements: a much fuller account of Mathilda's father and mother and of their marriage, which makes of them something more than lay figures and to a great extent explains the tragedy; development of the character of the Steward, at first merely the servant who accompanies Mathilda in her search for her father, into the sympathetic confidant whose responses help to dramatise the situation; an added word or short phrase that marks Mary Shelley's penetration into the motives and actions of both Mathilda and her father. Therefore *Mathilda* does not impress the reader as being longer than *The Fields of Fancy* because it better sustains his interest. And with all the additions there are also effective omissions of the obvious, of the

tautological, of the artificially elaborate.¹⁸

The finished draft, *Mathilda*, still shows Mary Shelley's faults as a writer: verbosity, loose plotting, somewhat stereotyped and extravagant characterization. The reader must be tolerant of its heroine's overwhelming lamentations. But she is, after all, in the great tradition of romantic heroines: she compares her own weeping to that of Boccaccio's Ghismonda over the heart of Guiscardo. If the reader can accept Mathilda on her own terms, he will find not only biographical interest in her story but also intrinsic merits: a feeling for character and situation and phrasing that is often vigorous and precise.

¹⁸ The most significant revisions are considered in detail in the notes. The text of the opening of *The Fields of Fancy*, containing the fanciful framework of the story, later discarded, is printed after the text of *Mathilda*.

MATHILDA ¹⁹

¹⁹ The name is spelled thus in the MSS of *Mathilda* and *The Fields of Fancy*, though in the printed *Journal* (taken from *Shelley and Mary*) and in the *Letters* it is spelled *Matilda*. In the MS of the journal, however, it is spelled first *Matilda*, later *Mathilda*.

CHAP. I

Florence. Nov. 9th 1819

It is only four o'clock; but it is winter and the sun has already set: there are no clouds in the clear, frosty sky to reflect its slant beams, but the air itself is tinged with a slight roseate colour which is again reflected on the snow that covers the ground. I live in a lone cottage on a solitary, wide heath: no voice of life reaches me. I see the desolate plain covered with white, save a few black patches that the noonday sun has made at the top of those sharp pointed hillocks from which the snow, sliding as it fell, lay thinner than on the plain ground: a few birds are pecking at the hard ice that covers the pools – for the frost has been of long continuance.²⁰

I am in a strange state of mind.²¹ I am alone – quite alone – in the world – the blight of misfortune has passed over me and withered me; I know that I am about to die and I feel happy – joyous. – I feel my pulse; it beats fast: I place my thin hand on my cheek; it burns: there is a slight, quick spirit within me which is now emitting its last sparks. I shall never see the snows of another winter – I do believe that I shall never again feel the vivifying

²⁰ Mary has here added detail and contrast to the description in *F of F – A*, in which the passage "save a few black patches ... on the plain ground" does not appear.

²¹ The addition of "I am alone ... withered me" motivates Mathilda's state of mind and her resolve to write her history.

warmth of another summer sun; and it is in this persuasion that I begin to write my tragic history. Perhaps a history such as mine had better die with me, but a feeling that I cannot define leads me on and I am too weak both in body and mind to resist the slightest impulse. While life was strong within me I thought indeed that there was a sacred horror in my tale that rendered it unfit for utterance, and now about to die I pollute its mystic terrors. It is as the wood of the Eumenides none but the dying may enter; and Oedipus is about to die.²²

What am I writing? – I must collect my thoughts. I do not know that any will peruse these pages except you, my friend, who will receive them at my death. I do not address them to you alone because it will give me pleasure to dwell upon our friendship in a way that would be needless if you alone read what I shall write. I shall relate my tale therefore as if I wrote for strangers. You have often asked me the cause of my solitary life; my tears; and above all of my impenetrable and unkind silence. In life I dared not; in death I unveil the mystery. Others will toss these pages lightly over: to you, Woodville, kind, affectionate friend, they will be dear – the precious memorials of a heart-broken girl who, dying, is still warmed by gratitude towards you:²³ your tears will fall on

²² Mathilda too is the unwitting victim in a story of incest. Like Oedipus, she has lost her parent-lover by suicide; like him she leaves the scene of the revelation overwhelmed by a sense of her own guilt, "a sacred horror"; like him, she finds a measure of peace as she is about to die.

²³ The addition of "the precious memorials ... gratitude towards you," by its suggestion of the relationship between Mathilda and Woodville, serves to justify the

the words that record my misfortunes; I know they will – and while I have life I thank you for your sympathy.

But enough of this. I will begin my tale: it is my last task, and I hope I have strength sufficient to fulfill it. I record no crimes; my faults may easily be pardoned; for they proceeded not from evil motive but from want of judgement; and I believe few would say that they could, by a different conduct and superior wisdom, have avoided the misfortunes to which I am the victim. My fate has been governed by necessity, a hideous necessity. It required hands stronger than mine; stronger I do believe than any human force to break the thick, adamant chain that has bound me, once breathing nothing but joy, ever possessed by a warm love & delight in goodness, – to misery only to be ended, and now about to be ended, in death. But I forget myself, my tale is yet untold. I will pause a few moments, wipe my dim eyes, and endeavour to lose the present obscure but heavy feeling of unhappiness in the more acute emotions of the past.²⁴

I was born in England. My father was a man of rank:²⁵ he had lost his father early, and was educated by a weak mother

detailed narration.

²⁴ At this point two sheets have been removed from the notebook. There is no break in continuity, however.

²⁵ The descriptions of Mathilda's father and mother and the account of their marriage in the next few pages are greatly expanded from *F of F – A*, where there is only one brief paragraph. The process of expansion can be followed in *S-R fr* and in *F of F – B*. The development of the character of Diana (who represents Mary's own mother, Mary Wollstonecraft) gave Mary the most trouble. For the identifications with Mary's father and mother, see Nitchie, *Mary Shelley*, pp. 11, 90-93, 96-97.

with all the indulgence she thought due to a nobleman of wealth. He was sent to Eton and afterwards to college; & allowed from childhood the free use of large sums of money; thus enjoying from his earliest youth the independance which a boy with these advantages, always acquires at a public school.

Under the influence of these circumstances his passions found a deep soil wherein they might strike their roots and flourish either as flowers or weeds as was their nature. By being always allowed to act for himself his character became strongly and early marked and exhibited a various surface on which a quick sighted observer might see the seeds of virtues and of misfortunes. His careless extravagance, which made him squander immense sums of money to satisfy passing whims, which from their apparent energy he dignified with the name of passions, often displayed itself in unbounded generosity. Yet while he earnestly occupied himself about the wants of others his own desires were gratified to their fullest extent. He gave his money, but none of his own wishes were sacrificed to his gifts; he gave his time, which he did not value, and his affections which he was happy in any manner to have called into action.

I do not say that if his own desires had been put in competition with those of others that he would have displayed undue selfishness, but this trial was never made. He was nurtured in prosperity and attended by all its advantages; every one loved him and wished to gratify him. He was ever employed in promoting the pleasures of his companions – but their pleasures were his;

and if he bestowed more attention upon the feelings of others than is usual with schoolboys it was because his social temper could never enjoy itself if every brow was not as free from care as his own.

While at school, emulation and his own natural abilities made him hold a conspicuous rank in the forms among his equals; at college he discarded books; he believed that he had other lessons to learn than those which they could teach him. He was now to enter into life and he was still young enough to consider study as a school-boy shackle, employed merely to keep the unruly out of mischief but as having no real connexion with life – whose wisdom of riding – gaming &c. he considered with far deeper interest – So he quickly entered into all college follies although his heart was too well moulded to be contaminated by them – it might be light but it was never cold. He was a sincere and sympathizing friend – but he had met with none who superior or equal to himself could aid him in unfolding his mind, or make him seek for fresh stores of thought by exhausting the old ones. He felt himself superior in quickness of judgement to those around him: his talents, his rank and wealth made him the chief of his party, and in that station he rested not only contented but glorying, conceiving it to be the only ambition worthy for him to aim at in the world.

By a strange narrowness of ideas he viewed all the world in connexion only as it was or was not related to his little society. He considered queer and out of fashion all opinions that were

exploded by his circle of intimates, and he became at the same time dogmatic and yet fearful of not coinciding with the only sentiments he could consider orthodox. To the generality of spectators he appeared careless of censure, and with high disdain to throw aside all dependance on public prejudices; but at the same time that he strode with a triumphant stride over the rest of the world, he cowered, with self disguised lowliness, to his own party, and although its [chi]ef never dared express an opinion or a feeling until he was assured that it would meet with the approbation of his companions.

Yet he had one secret hidden from these dear friends; a secret he had nurtured from his earliest years, and although he loved his fellow collegiates he would not trust it to the delicacy or sympathy of any one among them. He loved. He feared that the intensity of his passion might become the subject of their ridicule; and he could not bear that they should blaspheme it by considering that trivial and transitory which he felt was the life of his life.

There was a gentleman of small fortune who lived near his family mansion who had three lovely daughters. The eldest was far the most beautiful, but her beauty was only an addition to her other qualities – her understanding was clear & strong and her disposition angelically gentle. She and my father had been playmates from infancy: Diana, even in her childhood had been a favourite with his mother; this partiality encreased with the years of this beautiful and lively girl and thus during his school

& college vacations²⁶ they were perpetually together. Novels and all the various methods by which youth in civilized life are led to a knowledge of the existence of passions before they really feel them, had produced a strong effect on him who was so peculiarly susceptible of every impression. At eleven years of age Diana was his favourite playmate but he already talked the language of love. Although she was elder than he by nearly two years the nature of her education made her more childish at least in the knowledge and expression of feeling; she received his warm protestations with innocence, and returned them unknowing of what they meant. She had read no novels and associated only with her younger sisters, what could she know of the difference between love and friendship? And when the development of her understanding disclosed the true nature of this intercourse to her, her affections were already engaged to her friend, and all she feared was lest other attractions and fickleness might make him break his infant vows.

But they became every day more ardent and tender. It was a

²⁶ The passage "There was a gentleman ... school & college vacations" is on a slip of paper pasted on page 11 of the MS. In the margin are two fragments, crossed out, evidently parts of what is supplanted by the substituted passage: "an angelic disposition and a quick, penetrating understanding" and "her visits ... to ... his house were long & frequent & there." In *F of F - B* Mary wrote of Diana's understanding "that often receives the name of masculine from its firmness and strength." This adjective had often been applied to Mary Wollstonecraft's mind. Mary Shelley's own understanding had been called masculine by Leigh Hunt in 1817 in the *Examiner*. The word was used also by a reviewer of her last published work, *Rambles in Germany and Italy, 1844*. (See Nitchie, *Mary Shelley*, p. 178.)

passion that had grown with his growth; it had become entwined with every faculty and every sentiment and only to be lost with life. None knew of their love except their own two hearts; yet although in all things else, and even in this he dreaded the censure of his companions, for thus truly loving one inferior to him in fortune, nothing was ever able for a moment to shake his purpose of uniting himself to her as soon as he could muster courage sufficient to meet those difficulties he was determined to surmount.

Diana was fully worthy of his deepest affection. There were few who could boast of so pure a heart, and so much real humbleness of soul joined to a firm reliance on her own integrity and a belief in that of others. She had from her birth lived a retired life. She had lost her mother when very young, but her father had devoted himself to the care of her education – He had many peculiar ideas which influenced the system he had adopted with regard to her – She was well acquainted with the heroes of Greece and Rome or with those of England who had lived some hundred years ago, while she was nearly ignorant of the passing events of the day: she had read few authors who had written during at least the last fifty years but her reading with this exception was very extensive. Thus although she appeared to be less initiated in the mysteries of life and society than he her knowledge was of a deeper kind and laid on firmer foundations; and if even her beauty and sweetness had not fascinated him her understanding would ever have held his in thrall. He looked up

to her as his guide, and such was his adoration that he delighted to augment to his own mind the sense of inferiority with which she sometimes impressed him.²⁷

When he was nineteen his mother died. He left college on this event and shaking off for a while his old friends he retired to the neighbourhood of his Diana and received all his consolation from her sweet voice and dearer caresses. This short separation from his companions gave him courage to assert his independence. He had a feeling that however they might express ridicule of his intended marriage they would not dare display it when it had taken place; therefore seeking the consent of his guardian which with some difficulty he obtained, and of the father of his mistress which was more easily given, without acquainting any one else of his intention, by the time he had attained his twentieth birthday he had become the husband of Diana.

He loved her with passion and her tenderness had a charm for him that would not permit him to think of aught but her. He invited some of his college friends to see him but their frivolity disgusted him. Diana had torn the veil which had before kept him in his boyhood: he was become a man and he was surprised how he could ever have joined in the cant words and ideas of his fellow collegiates or how for a moment he had feared the censure of such as these. He discarded his old friendships not from fickleness but because they were indeed unworthy of

²⁷ The account of Diana in *Mathilda* is much better ordered and more coherent than that in *F of F - B*.

him. Diana filled up all his heart: he felt as if by his union with her he had received a new and better soul. She was his mistress as he learned what were the true ends of life. It was through her beloved lessons that he cast off his old pursuits and gradually formed himself to become one among his fellow men, a distinguished member of society, a Patriot; and an enlightened lover of truth and virtue. – He loved her for her beauty and for her amiable disposition but he seemed to love her more for what he considered her superior wisdom. They studied, they rode together; they were never separate and seldom admitted a third to their society.

Thus my father, born in affluence, and always prosperous, clomb without the difficulty and various disappointments that all human beings seem destined to encounter, to the very topmost pinnacle of happiness: Around him was sunshine, and clouds whose shapes of beauty made the prospect divine concealed from him the barren reality which lay hidden below them. From this dizzy point he was dashed at once as he unawares congratulated himself on his felicity. Fifteen months after their marriage I was born, and my mother died a few days after my birth.

A sister of my father was with him at this period. She was nearly fifteen years older than he, and was the offspring of a former marriage of his father. When the latter died this sister was taken by her maternal relations: they had seldom seen one another, and were quite unlike in disposition. This aunt, to whose care I was afterwards consigned, has often related to me the effect

that this catastrophe had on my father's strong and susceptible character. From the moment of my mother's death untill his departure she never heard him utter a single word: buried in the deepest melancholy he took no notice of any one; often for hours his eyes streamed tears or a more fearful gloom overpowered him. All outward things seemed to have lost their existence relatively to him and only one circumstance could in any degree recall him from his motionless and mute despair: he would never see me. He seemed insensible to the presence of any one else, but if, as a trial to awaken his sensibility, my aunt brought me into the room he would instantly rush out with every symptom of fury and distraction. At the end of a month he suddenly quitted his house and, unattended [*sic*] by any servant, departed from that part of the country without by word or writing informing any one of his intentions. My aunt was only relieved of her anxiety concerning his fate by a letter from him dated Hamburgh.

How often have I wept over that letter which untill I was sixteen was the only relick I had to remind me of my parents. "Pardon me," it said, "for the uneasiness I have unavoidably given you: but while in that unhappy island, where every thing breathes *her* spirit whom I have lost for ever, a spell held me. It is broken: I have quitted England for many years, perhaps for ever. But to convince you that selfish feeling does not entirely engross me I shall remain in this town untill you have made by letter every arrangement that you judge necessary. When I leave this place do not expect to hear from me: I must break all ties that at present

exist. I shall become a wanderer, a miserable outcast – alone! alone!" – In another part of the letter he mentioned me – "As for that unhappy little being whom I could not see, and hardly dare mention, I leave her under your protection. Take care of her and cherish her: one day I may claim her at your hands; but futurity is dark, make the present happy to her."

My father remained three months at Hamburgh; when he quitted it he changed his name, my aunt could never discover that which he adopted and only by faint hints, could conjecture that he had taken the road of Germany and Hungary to Turkey.²⁸

Thus this towering spirit who had excited interest and high expectation in all who knew and could value him became at once, as it were, extinct. He existed from this moment for himself only. His friends remembered him as a brilliant vision which would never again return to them. The memory of what he had been faded away as years passed; and he who before had been as a part of themselves and of their hopes was now no longer counted among the living.

²⁸ The description of the effect of Diana's death on her husband is largely new in *Mathilda*. *F of F – B* is frankly incomplete; *F of F – A* contains some of this material; *Mathilda* puts it in order and fills in the gaps.

CHAPTER II

I now come to my own story. During the early part of my life there is little to relate, and I will be brief; but I must be allowed to dwell a little on the years of my childhood that it may be apparent how when one hope failed all life was to be a blank; and how when the only affection I was permitted to cherish was blasted my existence was extinguished with it.

I have said that my aunt was very unlike my father. I believe that without the slightest tinge of a bad heart she had the coldest that ever filled a human breast: it was totally incapable of any affection. She took me under her protection because she considered it her duty; but she had too long lived alone and undisturbed by the noise and prattle of children to allow that I should disturb her quiet. She had never been married; and for the last five years had lived perfectly alone on an estate, that had descended to her through her mother, on the shores of Loch Lomond in Scotland. My father had expressed a wish in his letters that she should reside with me at his family mansion which was situated in a beautiful country near Richmond in Yorkshire. She would not consent to this proposition, but as soon as she had arranged the affairs which her brother's departure had caused to fall to her care, she quitted England and took me with her to her scotch estate.

The care of me while a baby, and afterwards untill I had

reached my eighth year devolved on a servant of my mother's, who had accompanied us in our retirement for that purpose. I was placed in a remote part of the house, and only saw my aunt at stated hours. These occurred twice a day; once about noon she came to my nursery, and once after her dinner I was taken to her. She never caressed me, and seemed all the time I staid in the room to fear that I should annoy her by some childish freak. My good nurse always schooled me with the greatest care before she ventured into the parlour – and the awe my aunt's cold looks and few constrained words inspired was so great that I seldom disgraced her lessons or was betrayed from the exemplary stillness which I was taught to observe during these short visits.²⁹

Under my good nurse's care I ran wild about our park and the neighbouring fields. The offspring of the deepest love I displayed from my earliest years the greatest sensibility of disposition. I cannot say with what passion I loved every thing even the inanimate objects that surrounded me. I believe that I bore an individual attachment to every tree in our park; every animal that inhabited it knew me and I loved them. Their occasional deaths filled my infant heart with anguish. I cannot number the birds that I have saved during the long and severe winters of that climate; or the hares and rabbits that I have defended from the attacks of our dogs, or have nursed when accidentally wounded.

When I was seven years of age my nurse left me. I now forget

²⁹ This paragraph is an elaboration of the description of her aunt's coldness as found in *F of F - B*. There is only one sentence in *F of F - A*.

the cause of her departure if indeed I ever knew it. She returned to England, and the bitter tears she shed at parting were the last I saw flow for love of me for many years. My grief was terrible: I had no friend but her in the whole world. By degrees I became reconciled to solitude but no one supplied her place in my affections. I lived in a desolate country where

– there were none to praise
And very few to love.³⁰

It is true that I now saw a little more of my aunt, but she was in every way an unsocial being; and to a timid child she was as a plant beneath a thick covering of ice; I should cut my hands in endeavouring to get at it. So I was entirely thrown upon my own resources. The neighbouring minister was engaged to give me lessons in reading, writing and french, but he was without family and his manners even to me were always perfectly characteristic of the profession in the exercise of whose functions he chiefly shone, that of a schoolmaster. I sometimes strove to form friendships with the most attractive of the girls who inhabited the neighbouring village; but I believe I should never have succeeded [even] had not my aunt interposed her authority to prevent all intercourse between me and the peasantry; for she was fearful lest I should acquire the scotch accent and dialect; a little of it I had, although great pains was taken that my tongue

³⁰ Wordsworth

should not disgrace my English origin.

As I grew older my liberty encreased with my desires, and my wanderings extended from our park to the neighbouring country. Our house was situated on the shores of the lake and the lawn came down to the water's edge. I rambled amidst the wild scenery of this lovely country and became a complete mountaineer: I passed hours on the steep brow of a mountain that overhung a waterfall or rowed myself in a little skiff to some one of the islands. I wandered for ever about these lovely solitudes, gathering flower after flower singing as I might the wild melodies of the country, or occupied by pleasant day dreams. My greatest pleasure was the enjoyment of a serene sky amidst these verdant woods: yet I loved all the changes of Nature; and rain, and storm, and the beautiful clouds of heaven brought their delights with them. When rocked by the waves of the lake my spirits rose in triumph as a horseman feels with pride the motions of his high fed steed.

Ond' era pinta tutta la mia via³¹

But my pleasures arose from the contemplation of nature alone, I had no companion: my warm affections finding no return from any other human heart were forced to run waste on inanimate objects.³² Sometimes indeed I wept when my aunt

³¹ Dante

³² The description of Mathilda's love of nature and of animals is elaborated from

received my caresses with repulsive coldness, and when I looked round and found none to love; but I quickly dried my tears. As I grew older books in some degree supplied the place of human intercourse: the library of my aunt was very small; Shakespear, Milton, Pope and Cowper were the stranglely [*sic*] assorted poets of her collection; and among the prose authors a translation of Livy and Rollin's ancient history were my chief favourites although as I emerged from childhood I found others highly interesting which I had before neglected as dull.

When I was twelve years old it occurred to my aunt that I ought to learn music; she herself played upon the harp. It was with great hesitation that she persuaded herself to undertake my instruction; yet believing this accomplishment a necessary part of my education, and balancing the evils of this measure or of having some one in the house to instruct me she submitted to the inconvenience. A harp was sent for that my playing might not interfere with hers, and I began: she found me a docile and when I had conquered the first rudiments a very apt scholar. I had acquired in my harp a companion in rainy days; a sweet soother of my feelings when any untoward accident ruffled them: I often addressed it as my only friend; I could pour forth to it my hopes and loves, and I fancied that its sweet accents answered me. I have now mentioned all my studies.

both rough drafts. The effect, like that of the preceding addition (see note 11), is to emphasize Mathilda's loneliness. For the theme of loneliness in Mary Shelley's work, see Nitchie, *Mary Shelley*, pp. 13-17.

I was a solitary being, and from my infant years, ever since my dear nurse left me, I had been a dreamer. I brought Rosalind and Miranda and the lady of Comus to life to be my companions, or on my isle acted over their parts imagining myself to be in their situations. Then I wandered from the fancies of others and formed affections and intimacies with the aerial creations of my own brain – but still clinging to reality I gave a name to these conceptions and nursed them in the hope of realization. I clung to the memory of my parents; my mother I should never see, she was dead: but the idea of [my] unhappy, wandering father was the idol of my imagination. I bestowed on him all my affections; there was a miniature of him that I gazed on continually; I copied his last letter and read it again and again. Sometimes it made me weep; and at other [times] I repeated with transport those words, – "One day I may claim her at your hands." I was to be his consoler, his companion in after years. My favourite vision was that when I grew up I would leave my aunt, whose coldness lulled my conscience, and disguised like a boy I would seek my father through the world. My imagination hung upon the scene of recognition; his miniature, which I should continually wear exposed on my breast, would be the means and I imaged the moment to my mind a thousand and a thousand times, perpetually varying the circumstances. Sometimes it would be in a desert; in a populous city; at a ball; we should perhaps meet in a vessel; and his first words constantly were, "My daughter, I love thee"! What extactic moments have I passed in these dreams!

How many tears I have shed; how often have I laughed aloud.³³

This was my life for sixteen years. At fourteen and fifteen I often thought that the time was come when I should commence my pilgrimage, which I had cheated my own mind into believing was my imperious duty: but a reluctance to quit my Aunt; a remorse for the grief which, I could not conceal from myself, I should occasion her for ever withheld me. Sometimes when I had planned the next morning for my escape a word of more than usual affection from her lips made me postpone my resolution. I reproached myself bitterly for what I called a culpable weakness; but this weakness returned upon me whenever the critical moment approached, and I never found courage to depart.³⁴

³³ This paragraph is a revision of *F of F – B*, which is fragmentary. There is nothing in *F of F – A* and only one scored-out sentence in *S-R fr*. None of the rough drafts tells of her plans to join her father.

³⁴ The final paragraph in Chapter II is entirely new.

CHAPTER III

It was on my sixteenth birthday that my aunt received a letter from my father. I cannot describe the tumult of emotions that arose within me as I read it. It was dated from London; he had returned!³⁵ I could only relieve my transports by tears, tears of unmingled joy. He had returned, and he wrote to know whether my aunt would come to London or whether he should visit her in Scotland. How delicious to me were the words of his letter that concerned me: "I cannot tell you," it said, "how ardently I desire to see my Mathilda. I look on her as the creature who will form the happiness of my future life: she is all that exists on earth that interests me. I can hardly prevent myself from hastening immediately to you but I am necessarily detained a week and I write because if you come here I may see you somewhat sooner." I read these words with devouring eyes; I kissed them, wept over them and exclaimed, "He will love me!" —

My aunt would not undertake so long a journey, and in a fortnight we had another letter from my father, it was dated Edinburgh: he wrote that he should be with us in three days. "As he approached his desire of seeing me," he said, "became more and more ardent, and he felt that the moment when he should

³⁵ The account of the return of Mathilda's father is very slightly revised from that in *F of F - A*. *F of F - B* has only a few fragmentary sentences, scored out. It resumes with the paragraph beginning, "My father was very little changed."

first clasp me in his arms would be the happiest of his life."

How irksome were these three days to me! All sleep and appetite fled from me; I could only read and re-read his letter, and in the solitude of the woods imagine the moment of our meeting. On the eve of the third day I retired early to my room, I could not sleep but paced all night about my chamber and, as you may in Scotland at midsummer, watched the crimson track of the sun as it almost skirted the northern horizon. At day break I hastened to the woods; the hours past on while I indulged in wild dreams that gave wings to the slothful steps of time, and beguiled my eager impatience. My father was expected at noon but when I wished to return to me[e]t him I found that I had lost my way: it seemed that in every attempt to find it I only became more involved in the intricacies of the woods, and the trees hid all trace by which I might be guided.³⁶ I grew impatient, I wept; [*sic*] and wrung my hands but still I could not discover my path.

It was past two o'clock when by a sudden turn I found myself close to the lake near a cove where a little skiff was moored – It was not far from our house and I saw my father and aunt walking on the lawn. I jumped into the boat, and well accustomed to such feats, I pushed it from shore, and exerted all my strength to row swiftly across. As I came, dressed in white, covered only by my tartan *rachan*, my hair streaming on my shoulders, and shooting across with greater speed than it could be supposed I could give to my boat, my father has often told me that I looked more like a

³⁶ Symbolic of Mathilda's subsequent life.

spirit than a human maid. I approached the shore, my father held the boat, I leapt lightly out, and in a moment was in his arms.

And now I began to live. All around me was changed from a dull uniformity to the brightest scene of joy and delight. The happiness I enjoyed in the company of my father far exceeded my sanguine expectations. We were for ever together; and the subjects of our conversations were inexhaustible. He had passed the sixteen years of absence among nations nearly unknown to Europe; he had wandered through Persia, Arabia and the north of India and had penetrated among the habitations of the natives with a freedom permitted to few Europeans. His relations of their manners, his anecdotes and descriptions of scenery whiled away delicious hours, when we were tired of talking of our own plans of future life.

The voice of affection was so new to me that I hung with delight upon his words when he told me what he had felt concerning me during these long years of apparent forgetfulness. "At first" – said he, "I could not bear to think of my poor little girl; but afterwards as grief wore off and hope again revisited me I could only turn to her, and amidst cities and deserts her little fairy form, such as I imagined it, for ever flitted before me. The northern breeze as it refreshed me was sweeter and more balmy for it seemed to carry some of your spirit along with it. I often thought that I would instantly return and take you along with me to some fertile island where we should live at peace for ever. As I returned my fervent hopes were dashed by so many fears;

my impatience became in the highest degree painful. I dared not think that the sun should shine and the moon rise not on your living form but on your grave. But, no, it is not so; I have my Mathilda, my consolation, and my hope." —

My father was very little changed from what he described himself to be before his misfortunes. It is intercourse with civilized society; it is the disappointment of cherished hopes, the falsehood of friends, or the perpetual clash of mean passions that changes the heart and damps the ardour of youthful feelings; lonely wanderings in a wild country among people of simple or savage manners may inure the body but will not tame the soul, or extinguish the ardour and freshness of feeling incident to youth. The burning sun of India, and the freedom from all restraint had rather encreased the energy of his character: before he bowed under, now he was impatient of any censure except that of his own mind. He had seen so many customs and witnessed so great a variety of moral creeds that he had been obliged to form an independant one for himself which had no relation to the peculiar notions of any one country: his early prejudices of course influenced his judgement in the formation of his principles, and some raw colledge ideas were strangely mingled with the deepest deductions of his penetrating mind.

The vacuity his heart endured of any deep interest in life during his long absence from his native country had had a singular effect upon his ideas. There was a curious feeling of unreality attached by him to his foreign life in comparison with

the years of his youth. All the time he had passed out of England was as a dream, and all the interest of his soul[,] all his affections belonged to events which had happened and persons who had existed sixteen years before. It was strange when you heard him talk to see how he passed over this lapse of time as a night of visions; while the remembrances of his youth standing separate as they did from his after life had lost none of their vigour. He talked of my Mother as if she had lived but a few weeks before; not that he expressed poignant grief, but his description of her person, and his relation of all anecdotes connected with her was thus fervent and vivid.

In all this there was a strangeness that attracted and enchanted me. He was, as it were, now awakened from his long, visionary sleep, and he felt some what like one of the seven sleepers, or like Nourjahad,³⁷ in that sweet imitation of an eastern tale: Diana was gone; his friends were changed or dead, and now on his awakening I was all that he had to love on earth.

How dear to me were the waters, and mountains, and woods of Loch Lomond now that I had so beloved a companion for my rambles. I visited with my father every delightful spot, either on the islands, or by the side of the tree-sheltered waterfalls; every shady path, or dingle entangled with underwood and fern. My ideas were enlarged by his conversation. I felt as if I were

³⁷ *Illusion, or the Trances of Nourjahad*, a melodrama, was performed at Drury Lane, November 25, 1813. It was anonymous, but it was attributed by some reviewers to Byron, a charge which he indignantly denied. See Byron, *Letters and Journals*, ed. by Rowland E. Prothero (6 vols. London: Murray, 1902-1904), II, 288.

recreated and had about me all the freshness and life of a new being: I was, as it were, transported since his arrival from a narrow spot of earth into a universe boundless to the imagination and the understanding. My life had been before as a pleasing country rill, never destined to leave its native fields, but when its task was fulfilled quietly to be absorbed, and leave no trace. Now it seemed to me to be as a various river flowing through a fertile and lovely landscape, ever changing and ever beautiful. Alas! I knew not the desert it was about to reach; the rocks that would tear its waters, and the hideous scene that would be reflected in a more distorted manner in its waves. Life was then brilliant; I began to learn to hope and what brings a more bitter despair to the heart than hope destroyed?

Is it not strange³⁸ that grief should quickly follow so divine a happiness? I drank of an enchanted cup but gall was at the bottom of its long drawn sweetness. My heart was full of deep affection, but it was calm from its very depth and fulness. I had no idea that misery could arise from love, and this lesson that all at last must learn was taught me in a manner few are obliged to receive it. I lament now, I must ever lament, those few short months of Paraisaical bliss; I disobeyed no command, I ate no apple, and

³⁸ This paragraph is in F of $F - B$ but not in F of $F - A$. In the margin of the latter, however, is written: "It was not of the tree of knowledge that I ate for no evil followed – it must be of the tree of life that grows close beside it or – ". Perhaps this was intended to go in the preceding paragraph after "My ideas were enlarged by his conversation." Then, when this paragraph was added, the figure, noticeably changed, was included here.

yet I was ruthlessly driven from it. Alas! my companion did, and I was precipitated in his fall.³⁹ But I wander from my relation – let woe come at its appointed time; I may at this stage of my story still talk of happiness.

Three months passed away in this delightful intercourse, when my aunt fell ill. I passed a whole month in her chamber nursing her, but her disease was mortal and she died, leaving me for some time inconsolable, Death is so dreadful to the living;⁴⁰ the chains of habit are so strong even when affection does not link them that the heart must be agonized when they break. But my father was beside me to console me and to drive away bitter memories by bright hopes: methought that it was sweet to grieve that he might dry my tears.

Then again he distracted my thoughts from my sorrow by comparing it with his despair when he lost my mother. Even at that time I shuddered at the picture he drew of his passions: he had the imagination of a poet, and when he described the whirlwind that then tore his feelings he gave his words the impress of life so vividly that I believed while I trembled. I wondered how he could ever again have entered into the offices of life after his wild thoughts seemed to have given him affinity with the unearthly; while he spoke so tremendous were the ideas

³⁹ Here the MS of *F of F – B* breaks off to resume only with the meeting of Mathilda and Woodville.

⁴⁰ At the end of the story (p. 79) Mathilda says, "Death is too terrible an object for the living." Mary was thinking of the deaths of her two children.

which he conveyed that it appeared as if the human heart were far too bounded for their conception. His feelings seemed better fitted for a spirit whose habitation is the earthquake and the volcano than for one confined to a mortal body and human lineaments. But these were merely memories; he was changed since then. He was now all love, all softness; and when I raised my eyes in wonder at him as he spoke the smile on his lips told me that his heart was possessed by the gentlest passions.

Two months after my aunt's death we removed to London where I was led by my father to attend to deeper studies than had before occupied me. My improvement was his delight; he was with me during all my studies and assisted or joined with me in every lesson. We saw a great deal of society, and no day passed that my father did not endeavour to embellish by some new enjoyment. The tender attachment that he bore me, and the love and veneration with which I returned it cast a charm over every moment. The hours were slow for each minute was employed; we lived more in one week than many do in the course of several months and the variety and novelty of our pleasures gave zest to each.

We perpetually made excursions together. And whether it were to visit beautiful scenery, or to see fine pictures, or sometimes for no object but to seek amusement as it might chance to arise, I was always happy when near my father. It was a subject of regret to me whenever we were joined by a third person, yet if I turned with a disturbed look towards my father,

his eyes fixed on me and beaming with tenderness instantly restored joy to my heart. O, hours of intense delight! Short as ye were ye are made as long to me as a whole life when looked back upon through the mist of grief that rose immediately after as if to shut ye from my view. Alas! ye were the last of happiness that I ever enjoyed; a few, a very few weeks and all was destroyed. Like Psyche⁴¹ I lived for awhile in an enchanted palace, amidst odours, and music, and every luxurious delight; when suddenly I was left on a barren rock; a wide ocean of despair rolled around me: above all was black, and my eyes closed while I still inhabited a universal death. Still I would not hurry on; I would pause for ever on the recollections of these happy weeks; I would repeat every word, and how many do I remember, record every enchantment of the faery habitation. But, no, my tale must not pause; it must be as rapid as was my fate, – I can only describe in short although strong expressions my precipitate and irremediable change from happiness to despair.⁴²

⁴¹ Mary had read the story of Cupid and Psyche in Apuleius in 1817 and she had made an Italian translation, the MS of which is now in the Library of Congress. See *Journal*, pp. 79, 85-86.

⁴² The end of this paragraph gave Mary much trouble. In *F of F – A* after the words, "my tale must," she develops an elaborate figure: "go with the stream that hurries on – & now was this stream precipitated by an overwhelming fall from the pleasant vallies through which it wandered – down hideous precipieces to a desert black & hopeless –". This, the original ending of the chapter, was scored out, and a new, simplified version which, with some deletions and changes, became that used in *Mathilda* was written in the margins of two pages (ff. 57, 58). This revision is a good example of Mary's frequent improvement of her style by the omission of purple patches.

CHAPTER IV

Among our most assiduous visitors was a young man of rank, well informed, and agreeable in his person. After we had spent a few weeks in London his attentions towards me became marked and his visits more frequent. I was too much taken up by my own occupations and feelings to attend much to this, and then indeed I hardly noticed more than the bare surface of events as they passed around me; but I now remember that my father was restless and uneasy whenever this person visited us, and when we talked together watched us with the greatest apparent anxiety although he himself maintained a profound silence. At length these obnoxious visits suddenly ceased altogether, but from that moment I must date the change of my father: a change that to remember makes me shudder and then filled me with the deepest grief. There were no degrees which could break my fall from happiness to misery; it was as the stroke of lightning – sudden and entire.⁴³ Alas! I now met frowns where before I had been

⁴³ In *F of F – A* there follows a passage which has been scored out and which does not appear in *Mathilda*: "I have tried in somewhat feeble language to describe the excess of what I may almost call my adoration for my father – you may then in some faint manner imagine my despair when I found that he shunned [me] & that all the little arts I used to re-awaken his lost love made him" – . This is a good example of Mary's frequent revision for the better by the omission of the obvious and expository. But the passage also has intrinsic interest. Mathilda's "adoration" for her father may be compared to Mary's feeling for Godwin. In an unpublished letter (1822) to Jane

welcomed only with smiles: he, my beloved father, shunned me, and either treated me with harshness or a more heart-breaking coldness. We took no more sweet counsel together; and when I tried to win him again to me, his anger, and the terrible emotions that he exhibited drove me to silence and tears.

And this was sudden. The day before we had passed alone together in the country; I remember we had talked of future travels that we should undertake together – . There was an eager delight in our tones and gestures that could only spring from deep & mutual love joined to the most unrestrained confidence[;] and now the next day, the next hour, I saw his brows contracted, his eyes fixed in sullen fierceness on the ground, and his voice so gentle and so dear made me shiver when he addressed me. Often, when my wandering fancy brought by its various images now consolation and now aggravation of grief to my heart,⁴⁴ I have compared myself to Proserpine who was gaily and heedlessly gathering flowers on the sweet plain of Enna, when the King of Hell snatched her away to the abodes of death and misery. Alas! I who so lately knew of nought but the joy of life; who had slept only to dream sweet dreams and awoke to incomparable happiness, I now passed my days and nights in tears. I who sought and had found joy in the love-breathing countenance of my father

Williams she wrote, "Until I met Shelley I [could?] justly say that he was my God – and I remember many childish instances of the [ex]cess of attachment I bore for him." See Nitchie, *Mary Shelley*, p. 89, and note 9.

⁴⁴ Cf. the account of the services of Fantasia in the opening chapter of *F of F – A* (see pp. 90-102) together with note 3 to *The Fields of Fancy*.

now when I dared fix on him a supplicating look it was ever answered by an angry frown. I dared not speak to him; and when sometimes I had worked up courage to meet him and to ask an explanation one glance at his face where a chaos of mighty passion seemed for ever struggling made me tremble and shrink to silence. I was dashed down from heaven to earth as a silly sparrow when pounced on by a hawk; my eyes swam and my head was bewildered by the sudden apparition of grief. Day after day⁴⁵ passed marked only by my complaints and my tears; often I lifted my soul in vain prayer for a softer descent from joy to woe, or if that were denied me that I might be allowed to die, and fade for ever under the cruel blast that swept over me,

⁴⁵ This passage beginning "Day after day" and closing with the quotation is not in *F of F – A*, but it is in *S-R fr*. The quotation is from *The Captain* by John Fletcher and a collaborator, possibly Massinger. These lines from Act I, Sc. 3 are part of a speech by Lelia addressed to her lover. Later in the play Lelia attempts to seduce her father – possibly a reason for Mary's selection of the lines.

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