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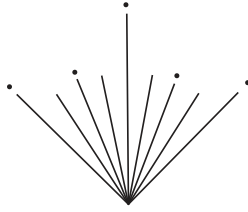
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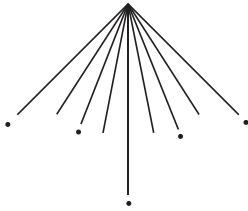
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This book owes its existence to Charlie Sheppard, who commissioned me to write it. If you hadn't asked, the book wouldn't exist.

With special love to my father Miraj din Dogar, who, like Mary and her mother, as well as Byshe and Claire, knows all about exile.

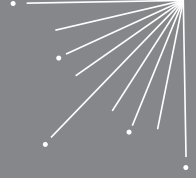
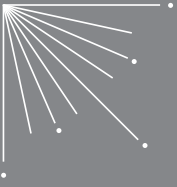


Each man kills the thing he loves . . .
The coward does it with a kiss,
The brave man with a sword!

Oscar Wilde

Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay
To mould me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me?

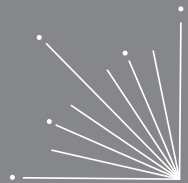
John Milton, Paradise Lost



PART



ONE



2ND JUNE 1812: 41 SKINNER STREET, LONDON

Mary stands at the top of the stairs seething with the unfairness of it all. Her stepmother has sent her to her bedchamber – again. Mrs Godwin says it's for refusing to do as she's told, when really they both know it is because Mary refuses to call her Mamma. Mrs Godwin is not her mamma. Mary has managed to avoid calling her Mamma for the last ten years and is not about to break that vow to herself – and her real mamma – now.

Mary hovers at the top of the long flight of narrow stairs waiting for the sound of her papa's study door opening and then closing. Once he's inside she can creep down the stairs. She hears him cross the room and sit in his chair but still she waits. If he hears her open the kitchen door he will get up and ask where she is going – and once she tells him he will want to come. She couldn't bear that; she wants to visit Mamma alone.

Below her, Mary can hear her stepsister Jane and Mrs Godwin laughing together. The sound grates. Papa would not mind if Jane decided to call him Mr Godwin rather than Papa. He would not send her to her room. Or make such a silly fuss about it. That's the problem with her stepfamily, thinks Mary – they have no capacity for reason. And that is why they do not understand her decision never to call Mrs Godwin Mamma. It is not a mere fancy, but based upon the sound principles that her father has taught her. All feelings must be studied before being acted upon. Nothing must be done in haste or without prolonged thought. Mary has thought about what it means to have a stepmother and come to a reasoned decision. It is clearly

true that a girl cannot have more than one mamma. And she already has one.

Mary takes a deep breath, it would not be reasonable to do what she wishes, which is to rush down the stairs and confront Mrs Godwin and Jane. Their laughter feels deliberate. Look, it seems to say, how happy we are, without you. If there is a God then she does not understand why he allows people like Mrs Godwin to survive. She would like to run down the stairs and scream at the pair of them: it's MY HOUSE, MY FATHER. But she is fourteen now and far too old to behave in such a childish manner. She closes her eyes, visualising her mother's face in the portrait above Papa's desk. If only she can keep quiet and wait a little longer, then she might creep out of the door and be gone.

'Mary?'

'Oh!' She stifles a cry as she turns, but it's only Fanny, her older sister. Fanny is as quiet as a mouse. She can sit in the corner of a room for hours without anyone noticing, and then she moves and they jump at her presence – as though she has appeared out of nowhere – a ghost.

'What are you doing, Mary?'

'What are *you* doing?' Mary hisses back. 'Creeping up on me!'

Fanny sighs; it is obvious from the expression on Mary's face that she is planning something. She has that look in her eyes, a look of determination and fury that is peculiarly Mary – and that usually means trouble. 'I wasn't creeping up on you,' Fanny says mildly. 'I was simply coming down the stairs!'

Mary is immediately contrite. 'I'm sorry,' she whispers. 'I'm trying to get out without anyone noticing.'

'Why?' Fanny whispers back.

'Because I want to visit Mamma.'

'But—' begins Fanny.

'Alone,' Mary says quickly.

‘Why can’t you just ask Papa if you might go alone?’ says Fanny. ‘I’m sure he would let you.’

‘Are you?’ spits Mary. ‘You don’t think SHE would make him say no just to spite me, and that Papa would agree with her as he always does, and then SHE would make sure to arrange that he was busy as soon we are about to visit Mamma?’

‘You deliberately irritate her, Mary. Why can’t you agree to call her Mamma – if you could only do that then everything would be easier!’

‘But I can’t,’ Mary says, scratching the inner elbow of her arm. The skin is already raw and bleeding but she does not notice until Fanny gently holds her fingers back to stop her. ‘If I were to call her Mamma it would feel like I was betraying our own mother. Our real mother,’ she says staring pointedly, at Fanny.

‘Shall I go downstairs and distract HER for you?’ Fanny suggests, feeling guilty.

‘Thank you!’ Mary clutches Fanny’s arm, grateful for her offer of help because she knows how much her sister hates to do anything that might cause trouble.

She waits until she hears Fanny’s voice guiding Mrs Godwin further down the stairs and into the bookshop below the house. She hears the heavy door between the house and the shop swing shut; her stepmother will be in there for a while now. The juvenile bookshop is her pride and joy, despite the fact that it fails to make them any money. Mary starts off down the stairs. Her father coughs as she creeps past his door, but she carries on into the kitchen. She opens the back door, carefully sliding back the bolt and slipping through before closing it silently behind her, making sure the latch catches. Once she is through the yard and out she begins to run. She meant to walk quietly and confidently away from the house but she cannot help herself. The feel of the breeze in her face releasing all the pent-up fury.

The sight of a young woman running makes people stare. Young women should be calm and considered. Young women should be able to manage themselves, and young women should not allow their own desires to overcome convention. But Mary doesn't care. Whenever she is angry she forgets her shyness, enjoying the looks of surprise, the knowledge that she is different. She was not born to be like other girls; she was born to be like her mother. An outlaw. A radical. She runs until she can feel her heart pumping and her breath coming short and sharp. She runs until she crosses over the bridge into the churchyard, and it is only the thought that she does not want to arrive at her mamma's grave perspiring and breathless that slows her down as she makes her way up the short hill to where Mamma lies buried.

At the sight of the square gravestone standing beneath two tall willows she feels her heartbeat slow, and the usual calm that being near her mother brings begin to embrace her. She sits on the damp grass beside the stone. This is where her papa taught her to read, lifting her small fingers to follow the letters bitten deep into the stone. She lifts her hand now, tracing the letters of her mamma's name:

MARY WOLLSTONECRAFT GODWIN
AUTHOR OF *A VINDICATION OF THE RIGHTS OF WOMAN*

'Papa's sending me away, Mamma!' she cries out as she presses her hand over her mother's name. 'To Scotland!' She leans her head against the stone. Today it is cool and damp. In the summer it is warm and soothing. Mary knows the feel of it intimately. It is the touch of her mother. The only one she has ever known.

The stone accepts the weight of her thoughts as she rests against it. She does not want to go to Scotland, to leave Papa. What if the family she is to stay with do not like her? Silently the stone relieves her of her fears. 'After all,' she imagines Mamma saying, 'it might be an adventure. Something to write about.'

'Thank you,' she whispers, brushing the hair from her face. 'I'm sorry I won't be able to visit you for a while, Mamma!' The wind lifts the branches of the willow. 'But I'll think of you,' promises Mary, 'and I will have your books with me.'

The stone remains silent.

'Goodbye.' Mary touches the stone with her lips, sweeping the fingers of her hand one last time over the letters of her mother's name before she turns to go.

'Where's Mary?' Jane asks Fanny. 'I can't find her anywhere!'

Fanny does not move from her position by the nursery window, where she is watching anxiously for Mary's return, ready to wave her in when it is safe. She shrugs her shoulders at Jane and holds her tongue, but she is hopeless at lying, can already feel a dreadful blush beginning to creep across her cheeks.

'I won't tell,' says Jane, stepping closer. 'You know I won't. I just want to ask her something.'

'What?'

'Whether or not she's going to take the brown pelisse to Scotland.'

'Why?'

'I look so nice in it! And it's a shame not to be able to wear it.' Jane imagines herself stepping down from a carriage in the coat they each share; it has a high fur collar and a matching hat. It is very *soignée*. Jane's mamma speaks French and has taught Jane the language. She would like to look *soignée*.

'But it's far too smart just to wear!' says Fanny. 'And Scotland

can be cold even in summer. I think Mary should take it,' she says firmly.

'But she might not want it,' insists Jane. 'She doesn't care very much for clothes. She says women should focus more upon the quality of their minds – and less upon the cut of their cloth!' Jane mimics Mary's prim voice so exactly that it is hard for Fanny not to smile, but she manages to resist, despite Jane's infectious laughter. It is hard to believe, sometimes, that the two girls could almost be twins, there is only eight months between them but Mary is by far the more grown-up.

'Is your mamma really making Papa send Mary to Scotland?' Fanny asks.

Jane stops laughing at once. 'Mary blames my mother for everything,' she snaps. 'It's not Mamma's fault that your father fell in love with her.'

'Of course it isn't her fault!' agrees Fanny soothingly, although she and Mary most definitely have their doubts about that. When they are alone together Mary often cruelly imitates their stepmother: '*Oh! Is this the famous Mr Godwin I see before me!*' she says in a sickly sweet, cloying voice of feminine flattery, before pretending to faint upon the bed. Fanny is both horrified and amused by Mary's performance. 'She looks after us very well!' she often says in her stepmother's defence. But Mary will not be swayed.

'Why are you smiling?' asks Jane.

'No reason,' says Fanny quickly, 'but Jane, I can't understand why Papa would send Mary away. Without her here who will help him entertain his philosophers and poets?'

'I could sing for them,' says Jane. There is a short silence as both girls try to imagine it.

'I think Papa's friends prefer talking and thinking to singing and dancing,' says Fanny eventually.

‘Well, perhaps with Mary away they might learn to like it!’ suggests Jane.

‘Is that what your mamma says?’

‘No!’

‘Then why *is* Mary being sent away?’ Fanny persists.

‘Perhaps,’ snaps Jane finally, ‘it’s because she’s unbearable.’

‘Jane!’

‘Well, she is sometimes – even you must be able to see that.’

Fanny says nothing. She does not want to be disloyal, and yet she does not want to lie. She cannot bear to admit that at times the thought of a house free of Mary’s furious feuding with their stepmother fills her with relief.

‘Mamma says it will be good for Mary to get out of London,’ says Jane. She does not repeat what her mother has really said, which is that it might do Mary some good to listen less to the sound of her own voice and to have the experience of having her nose put out of joint occasionally. Jane is both thrilled and a little disturbed by her mamma’s dislike of Mary. At times she imagines what it might be like to be her stepsister, to have grown men pay such serious attention to her and to feel that whatever she had to say would be listened to and approved of, simply because she was the daughter of the great Mary Wollstonecraft and the philosopher Godwin. ‘*She has the mind of her mother!*’ Papa’s guests exclaim of Mary, whilst Jane and Fanny sit quietly in the background, listening.

‘Well, I can’t say what’s *really* happening because Mamma’s asked me not to!’ Jane tells Fanny.

‘Well then, I don’t want to know,’ agrees Fanny properly. ‘Not if it would betray a trust.’

‘Mamma says that Papa is in such debt,’ Jane continues without hesitation, ‘that he is sending Mary away to save her from the shame of it – should he be sent to prison!’

‘Oh!’

‘What is it, Fanny?’ Jane runs to her stepsister, for the colour has leached from Fanny’s face, and she is swaying where she stands.

‘Nothing,’ says Fanny, ‘it is nothing at all.’ But it is not nothing. It is *everything*; for the truth of the matter is that it hurts to know that once again she has been forgotten. As usual Papa has made provision for Mary, and Mrs Godwin has looked after Jane, but no one has thought about Fanny. She does not know why it is always so, but assumes it must be because she is not as clever as Mary. Or as bold.

For a moment Fanny is tempted to turn away from the window. She imagines Mary looking up and finding the space behind the panes empty. But she can’t do it. And Mary would probably just walk into the house boldly and take whatever punishment was meted out anyway – arguing that she has a perfect right to be disobedient if she is being treated unfairly. And then Papa, although he never stops Mrs Godwin punishing Mary, will smile at her proud disobedience. But if Papa is really sent to prison, what will happen to *her*? Where would she go? Will she be left here with her stepmother and Jane and Charles, her stepbrother? Perhaps they are keeping her here because they need her to help her stepmother look after little William? Yes, that makes sense, thinks Fanny, for it will save them the extra cost of a servant.

‘Mary’s waving at you!’ says Jane. ‘From across the square. Where *has* she been?’

‘To visit our mamma,’ says Fanny. ‘Will you listen at the door and tell me when the coast is clear?’

Jane runs to the door, happy to be a part of the sisters’ intrigue. She peers over the bannisters. ‘I can’t hear anything – I think Mamma’s still in the bookshop, and I can’t hear Papa!’

Fanny watches Mary as she stands waiting across the square,

her black silk cloak making her a dark shadow in the afternoon light.

Jane rushes back into the room. ‘Coast clear!’ she whispers. Fanny lifts her hand and waves.

7TH JUNE 1812: GRAVESEND TO BROUGHTY FERRY, SCOTLAND

‘You’re sending me away,’ blurts Mary, unable to stop herself.

‘Mr Baxter is a good man,’ Papa says awkwardly, ‘and perhaps Isobel and Christine will make better companions for you than Charles and Jane – or Fanny?’ he adds quickly. He always forgets Fanny.

Mary stares up at the boat; she hopes she won’t be sick. She has a strange lost feeling inside, as though a part of her is already somewhere else across the sea.

‘Mamma believes the Scottish air might help to heal your skin,’ says Papa.

‘No! She simply wants to be rid of me!’ declares Mary.

Papa sighs. ‘Mary, we both think it is for the best.’

‘Do you?’ asks Mary coldly. ‘Or are you simply agreeing with her, the way you always do, with no thought for me?’ She swallows, hard. She must not cry; only girls like Jane use tears to express themselves. Her mamma would not cry. She would hold her head up and stride on to the boat, then write a book about it. Sometimes Mary wonders if she can ever really live up to her mother. She begins to scratch.

‘Stop it!’ snaps Papa.

Mary wraps her fingers over the sore skin, longing for the moment when she is alone on the boat and can scratch as freely

as she likes. The boat's horn sounds. 'Goodbye, Papa.' She would like to reach out and touch him, to be able to show that she is sad to be leaving. 'Do I eat my meals in my cabin?' she asks suddenly. 'Or should I go somewhere else?' She has never been alone on a boat overnight before.

'Excuse me!' her father calls at a passing woman.

The woman turns and stares at them. She is wearing an elaborate hat and travelling coat with a wide expensive fur collar. 'I am in a hurry,' the woman says. It is clear that she does not wish to be detained. Mary shrinks back a little as her papa continues regardless.

'My name is William Godwin,' he says loudly, as though the woman might recognise his name, but she does not. 'My daughter,' her father goes on, 'is fourteen, and travelling alone. Perhaps you might be so kind as to chaperone her?'

'Come, come!' the woman says, sweeping away up the busy gangplank. Mary turns and looks at Papa. 'Go on, quickly!' he says, shooing her forward. She does as she is told, running after the woman and turning briefly at the railings to spot her father's back already walking away. Oh, she thinks, we did not really say goodbye . . .

She would like to call out to him as some of the children next to her are doing; to shout his name and wave gaily, but the very thought of behaving with such abandon makes her blush. Papa would not want her to behave like that. She stands at the rails and waits; perhaps he might turn and wave at *her*. But he does not. She watches until he disappears, swallowed up by the crowd. When she turns back the woman has gone. Mary walks the deck, searching everywhere for her, but she is nowhere to be seen.

Slowly Mary makes her way to her small cabin. She sits on the narrow, hard bed. The boat journey is for two days and one night, and then she will be in Dundee, where she is to be picked up by her father's friend William Baxter, and driven by carriage

to Broughty Ferry. He has three daughters, two at home – Christine and Isobel – and another called Margaret, who is married and living nearby. *Christine and Isobel*. She says the names slowly to herself so that she does not forget them. *Christine*. *Isobel*. She hopes they will be more like herself and less like Jane, who would rather play at pretending to be married than discuss why marriage is a shackle that makes women nothing but a man's property. And yet, if she's being honest with herself, she knows she'll miss Jane's admiration – the way her stepsister sometimes parrots a phrase of Mary's, or repeats an argument, pretending that it is her own.

Mary unpacks her books and puts them by the bed, stroking each one before she puts it down. Books do not alter. They do not remarry like Papa or suddenly sprout, like her own body, changing shape and bleeding each month. The pages of books remain reassuringly the same, the words unchanging. She opens her mother's most famous work: *A Vindication of the Rights of Woman*. Perhaps she could just stay in the cabin and read for the whole of the journey. The thought makes her feel a little less anxious.

She is deep in the book when the motion of the boat changes as it enters the open sea, beginning to heave in rhythm with the waves. At first Mary merely feels a little dizzy, but then the real sickness begins. She rushes for the door, desperate for air.

Up on the deck she clings to the ship's rails hoping her chaperone might reappear.

'Hello!' says a man. He is her father's age and dressed in much the same manner. Mary smiles weakly, afraid of being thought impolite. 'Feel sick, do you?' he asks kindly. She nods, holding on tight to the rail, her stomach rising and falling with the waves. 'Try putting your head down,' he suggests. Grateful, she rests her head upon the cold rails, frightened she might be sick in front of this stranger. When she looks up he is gone.

Slowly she stumbles back to her cabin. She cannot move, but only lie and groan in between bouts of the heaving, gut-wrenching sickness, longing for the familiar feel of her own bed and the safety of home. She empties her stomach and for a while feels well enough to sit up. Perhaps she might go up on deck and try to get help. The thought is excruciating. She does not know who to ask and her profound shyness outside of home makes her awkward.

‘My own mamma took a boat to France to bear witness to the Revolution, so surely I can go up on deck and find help,’ she whispers firmly to herself. She stands up. Good; she can stand without feeling too faint. She reaches for her purse, perhaps she might be able to purchase some medicine to help.

Her fingers find empty space. Her purse is not there. For a moment all sickness is forgotten. Perhaps she put it down? No, it is not on the tiny bedside table. Or tangled up in the bed. It is nowhere in the cabin. She searches her clothes, hoping against hope that it will be caught up in the folds of her skirt. She has no more money. All of it was tied to her, and if she cannot find it then she has nothing.

It takes half an hour of frantic searching before she can bring herself to believe that it is truly gone. She sinks to the bed, a dreadful understanding coming to her: it must have been the man she thought so kind; he must have taken it when he suggested she put her head down. What a fool she is. What a little idiot. How can she ever hope to match her mother who travelled alone across a whole continent when she cannot even successfully catch a ferry to Dundee? Again the sickness overtakes her. It is almost a relief to give in to it, to be too ill to think.

The sickness lasts until the *Osnaburgh* enters the harbour at Dundee. Mary hears a fierce knocking on the cabin door.

‘We’ve arrived, miss!’