

## The Cave of Fancy

### *Chap I*

Ye who expect constancy where every thing is changing, and peace in the midst of tumult, attend to the voice of experience, and mark in time the footsteps of disappointment, or life will be lost in desultory wishes, and death arrive before the dawn of wisdom.

In a sequestered valley, surrounded by rocky mountains that intercepted many of the passing clouds, though sun-beams variegated their ample sides, lived a sage, to whom nature had unlocked her most hidden secrets. His hollow eyes, sunk in their orbits, retired from the view of vulgar objects, and turned inwards, overleaped the boundary pre-scribed to human knowledge. Intense thinking during fourscore and ten years, had whitened the scattered locks on his head, which, like the summit of the distant mountain, appeared to be bound by an eternal frost.

On the sandy waste behind the mountains, the track of ferocious beasts might be traced, and sometimes the mangled limbs which they left, attracted a hovering flight of birds of prey. An extensive wood the sage had forced to rear its head in a soil by no means congenial, and the firm trunks of the trees seemed to frown with defiance on time; though the spoils of innumerable summers covered the roots, which resembled fangs; so closely did they cling to the unfriendly sand, where serpents hissed, and snakes, rolling out their vast folds, inhaled the noxious vapours. The ravens and owls who inhabited the solitude, gave also a thicker gloom to the everlasting twilight, and the croak-ing of the former a monotony, in unison with the gloom; whilst lions and tygers, shunning even this faint semblance of day, sought the dark caverns, and at night, when they shook off sleep, their roaring would make the whole valley resound, confounded with the screechings of the bird of night.

One mountain rose sublime, towering above all, on the craggy sides of which a few sea-weeds grew, washed by the ocean, that with tumultuous roar rushed to assault, and even undermine, the huge barrier that stopped its progress; and ever and anon a ponderous mass, loosened from the cliff, to which it scarcely seemed to adhere, always threatening to fall, fell into the flood, rebounding as it fell, and the sound was re-echoed from rock to rock. Look where you would, all was without form, as if nature, suddenly stopping her hand, had left chaos a retreat.

Close to the most remote side of it was the sage's abode. It was a rude hut, formed of stumps of trees and matted twigs, to secure him from the inclemency of the weather; only through small apertures crossed with rushes, the wind entered in wild murmurs, modulated by these obstructions. A clear spring broke out of the middle of the adjacent

rock, which, dropping slowly into a cavity it had hollowed, soon overflowed, and then ran, struggling to free itself from the cumbrous fragments, till, become a deep, silent stream, it escaped through reeds, and roots of trees, whose blasted tops overhung and darkened the current.

One side of the but was supported by the rock, and at midnight, when the sage struck the inclosed part, it yawned wide, and admitted him into a cavern in the very bowels of the earth, where never human foot before had trod; and the various spirits, which inhabit the different regions of nature, were here obedient to his potent word. The cavern had been formed by the great inundation of waters, when the approach of a comet forced them from their source; then, when the fountains of the great deep were broken up, a stream rushed out of the centre of the earth, where the spirits, who have lived on it, are confined to purify themselves from the dross contracted in their first stage of existence; and it flowed in black waves, for ever bubbling along the cave, the extent of which had never been explored. From the sides and top, water dis-tilled, and, petrifying as it fell, took fantastic shapes, that soon divided it into apartments, if so they might be called. In the foam, a wearied spirit would sometimes rise, to catch the most distant glimpse of light, or taste the vagrant breeze, which the yawning of the rock admitted, when Sagestus, for that was the name of the hoary sage, entered. Some, who were refined and almost cleared from vicious spots, he would allow to leave, for a limited time, their dark prison-house; and, flying on the winds across the bleak northern ocean, or rising in an exhalation till they reached a sun-beam, they thus re-visited the haunts of men. These were the guardian angels, who in soft whispers restrain the vicious, and animate the wavering wretch who stands suspended between virtue and vice.

Sagestus had spent a night in the cavern, as he often did, and he left the silent vestibule of the grave, just as the sun, emerging from the ocean, dispersed the clouds, which were not half so dense as those he had left. All that was human in him rejoiced at the sight of reviving life, and he viewed with pleasure the mounting sap rising to expand the herbs, which grew spontaneously in this wild — when, turning his eyes towards the sea, he found that death had been at work during his absence, and terrific marks of a furious storm still spread horror around. Though the day was serene, and threw bright rays on eyes for ever shut, it dawned not for the wretches who hung pendent on the craggy rocks, or were stretched lifeless on the sand. Some, struggling, had dug themselves a grave; others had resigned their breath before the impetuous surge whirled them on shore. A few, in whom the vital spark was not so soon dislodged, had clung to loose fragments; it was the grasp of death; embracing the stone, they stiffened; and the head, no longer erect, rested on the mass which the arms encircled. It felt not the agonizing gripe, nor heard the sigh that broke the heart in twain.

Resting his chin on an oaken club, the sage looked on every side, to see if he could discern any who yet breathed. He drew nearer, and thought he saw, at the first glance, the unclosed eyes glare; but soon perceived that they were a mere glassy substance, mute as the tongue; the jaws were fallen, and, in some of the tangled locks, hands were clinched; nay, even the nails had entered sharpened by despair. The blood flew rapidly to his heart; it was flesh; he felt he was still a man, and the big tear paced down his iron cheeks, whose muscles had not for a long time been relaxed by such humane emotions. A moment he breathed quick, then heaved a sigh, and his wonted calm returned with an unaccustomed glow of tenderness; for the ways of heaven were not hid from him; he lifted up his eyes to the common Father of nature, and all was as still in his bosom, as the smooth deep, after having closed over the huge vessel from which the wretches had fled.

Turning round a part of the rock that jutted out, meditating on the ways of Providence, a weak infantine voice reached his ears; it was lisping out the name of mother. He looked, and beheld a blooming child leaning over, and kissing with eager fondness, lips that were insensible to the warm pressure. Starting at the sight of the sage, she fixed her eyes on him, "Wake her, ah! wake her," she cried, "or the sea will catch us." Again he felt compassion, for he saw that the mother slept the sleep of death. He stretched out his hand, and, smoothing his brow, invited her to approach; but she still intreated him to wake her mother, whom she continued to call, with an impatient tremulous voice. To detach her from the body by persuasion would not have been very easy. Sagestus had a quicker method to effect his purpose; he took out a box which contained a soporific powder, and as soon as the fumes reached her brain, the powers of life were suspended. He carried her directly to his hut, and left her sleeping profoundly on his rushy couch.

## *CHAP. II.*

Again Sagestus approached the dead, to view them with a more scrutinizing eye. He was perfectly acquainted with the construction of the human body, knew the traces that virtue or vice leaves on the whole frame; they were now indelibly fixed by death; nay more, he knew by the shape of the solid structure, how far the spirit could range, and saw the barrier beyond which it could not pass: the mazes of fancy he explored, measured the stretch of thought, and, weighing all in an even balance, could tell whom nature had stamped an hero, a poet, or philosopher.

By their appearance, at a transient glance, he knew that the vessel must have contained many passengers, and that some of them were above the vulgar, with respect to fortune and education; he then walked leisurely among the dead, and narrowly observed their pallid features.

His eye first rested on a form in which proportion reigned, and, stroking back the hair, a spacious forehead met his view; warm fancy had revelled there, and her airy dance had left vestiges, scarcely visible to a mortal eye. Some perpendicular lines pointed out that melancholy had predominated in his constitution; yet the straggling hairs of his eye-brows showed that anger had often shook his frame; indeed, the four temperatures, like the four elements, had resided in this little world, and produced harmony. The whole visage was bony, and an energetic frown had knit the flexible skin of his brow; the kingdom within had been extensive; and the wild creations of fancy had there "a local habitation and a name." So exquisite was his sensibility, so quick his comprehension, that he perceived various combinations in an instant; he caught truth as she darted towards him, saw all her fair proportion at a glance, and the flash of his eye spoke the quick senses which conveyed intelligence to his mind; the sensorium indeed was capacious, and the sage imagined he saw the lucid beam, sparkling with love or ambition, in characters of fire, which a graceful curve of the upper eyelid shaded. The lips were a little deranged by contempt; and a mixture of vanity and self-complacency formed a few irregular lines round them. The chin had suffered from sensuality, yet there were still great marks of vigour in it, as if advanced with stern dignity. The hand accustomed to command, and even tyrannize, was unnerved; but its appearance convinced Sagestus, that he had oftener wielded a thought than a weapon; and that he had silenced, by irresistible conviction, the superficial disputant, and the being, who doubted because he had not strength to believe, who, wavering between different borrowed opinions, first caught at one straw, then at another, unable to settle into any consistency of character. After gazing a few moments, Sagestus turned away exclaiming, How are the stately oaks torn up by a tempest, and the bow unstrung, that could force the arrow beyond the ken of the eye!

What a different face next met his view! The forehead was short, yet well set together; the nose small, but a little turned up at the end; and a draw-down at the sides of his mouth, proved that he had been a humourist, who minded the main chance, and could joke with his acquaintance, while he eagerly devoured a dainty which he was not to pay for. His lips shut like a box whose hinges had often been mended; and the muscles, which display the soft emotion of the heart on the cheeks, were grown quite rigid, so that, the vessels that should have moistened them not having much communication with the grand source of passions, the fine volatile fluid had evaporated, and they became mere dry fibres, which might be pulled by any misfortune that threatened himself, but were not sufficiently elastic to be moved by the miseries of others. His joints were inserted compactly, and with celerity they had performed all the animal functions, without any of the grace which results from the imagination mixing with the senses.

A huge form was stretched near him, that exhibited marks of overgrown infancy; every part was relaxed; all appeared imperfect. Yet, some undulating lines on the puffed-out cheeks, displayed signs of timid, servile good nature; and the skin of the forehead had been so often drawn up by wonder, that the few hairs of the eyebrows were fixed in a sharp arch, whilst an ample chin rested in lobes of flesh on his protuberant breast.

By his side was a body that had scarcely ever much life in it — sympathy seemed to have drawn them together — every feature and limb was round and fleshy, and, if a kind of brutal cunning had not marked the face, it might have been mistaken for an automaton, so unmixed was the phlegmatic fluid. The vital spark was buried deep in a soft mass of matter, resembling the pith in young elder, which, when found, is so equivocal, that it only appears a moister part of the same body.

Another part of the beach was covered with sailors, whose bodies exhibited marks of strength and brutal courage. — Their characters were all different, though of the same class; Sagestus did not stay to discriminate them, satisfied with a rough sketch. He saw indolence roused by a love of humour, or rather bodily fun; sensuality and prodigality with a vein of generosity running through it; a contempt of danger with gross superstition; supine senses, only to be kept alive by noisy, tumultuous pleasures, or that kind of novelty which borders on absurdity: this formed the common outline, and the rest were rather dabs than shades.

Sagestus paused, and remembered it had been said by an earthly wit, that "many a flower is born to blush unseen, and waste its sweetness on the desert air." How little, he exclaimed, did that poet know of the ways of heaven! And yet, in this respect, they are direct; the hands before me, were designed to pull a rope, knock down a sheep, or perform the servile offices of life; no "mute, inglorious poet" rests amongst them, and he who is superior to his fellow, does not rise above mediocrity. The genius that sprouts from a dunghil soon shakes off the heterogenous mass; those only grovel, who have not power to fly.

He turned his step towards the mother of the orphan: another female was at some distance; and a man who, by his garb, might have been the husband, or brother, of the former, was not far off.

Him the sage surveyed with an attentive eye, and bowed with respect to the inanimate clay, that lately had been the dwelling of a most benevolent spirit. The head was square, though the features were not very prominent; but there was a great harmony in every part, and the turn of the nostrils and lips evinced, that the soul must have had taste, to which they had served as organs. Penetration and judgment were seated on the brows that overhung the eye. Fixed as it was, Sagestus quickly discerned the expression it must

have had; dark and pensive, rather from slowness of comprehension than melancholy, it seemed to absorb the light of knowledge, to drink it in ray by ray; nay, a new one was not allowed to enter his head till the last was arranged: an opinion was thus cautiously received, and maturely weighed, before it was added to the general stock. As nature led him to mount from a part to the whole, he was most conversant with the beautiful, and rarely comprehended the sublime; yet, said Sagestus, with a softened tone, he was all heart, full of forbearance, and desirous to please every fellow-creature; but from a nobler motive than a love of admiration; the fumes of vanity never mounted to cloud his brain, or tarnish his beneficence. The fluid in which those placid eyes swam, is now congealed; how often has tenderness given them the finest water! Some torn parts of the child's dress hung round his arm, which led the sage to conclude, that he had saved the child; every line in his face confirmed the conjecture; benevolence indeed strung the nerves that naturally were not very firm; it was the great knot that tied together the scattered qualities, and gave the distinct stamp to the character.

The female whom he next approached, and supposed to be an attendant on the other, was below the middle size, and her legs were so disproportionably short, that, when she moved, she must have waddled along; her elbows were drawn in to touch her long taper, waist, and the air of her whole body was an affectation of gentility. Death could not alter the rigid hang of her limbs, or efface the simper that had stretched her mouth; the lips were thin, as if nature intended she should mince her words; her nose was small, and sharp at the end; and the forehead, unmarked by eyebrows, was wrinkled by the discontent that had sunk her cheeks, on which Sagestus still discerned faint traces of tenderness; and fierce good-nature, he perceived had sometimes animated the little spark of an eye that anger had oftener lighted. The same thought occurred to him that the sight of the sailors had suggest-ed, Men and women are all in their proper places — this female was intended to fold up linen and nurse the sick.

Anxious to observe the mother of his charge, he turned to the lily that had been so rudely snapped, and, carefully observing it, traced every fine line to its source. There was a delicacy in her form, so truly feminine, that an involuntary desire to cherish such a being, made the sage again feel the almost forgotten sensations of his nature. On observing her more closely, he discovered that her natural delicacy had been increased by an improper education, to a degree that took away all vigour from her faculties. And its baneful influence had had such an effect on her mind, that few traces of the exertions of it appeared on her face, though the fine finish of her features, and particularly the form of the forehead, convinced the sage that her under-standing might have risen considerably above mediocrity, had the wheels ever been put in motion; but, clogged by prejudices, they never turned quite round, and, whenever she considered a subject, she stopped before

she came to a conclusion. Assuming a mask of propriety, she had banished nature; yet its tendency was only to be diverted, not stifled. Some lines, which took from the symmetry of the mouth, not very obvious to a superficial observer, struck Sagestus, and they appeared to him characters of indolent obstinacy. Not having courage to form an opinion of her own, she adhered, with blind partiality, to those she adopted, which she received in the lump, and, as they always remained unopened, of course she only saw the even gloss on the outside. Vestiges of anger were visible on her brow, and the sage concluded, that she had often been offended with, and indeed would scarcely make any allowance for, those who did not coincide with her in opinion, as things always appear self-evident that have never been examined; yet her very weakness gave a charm-ing timidity to her countenance; goodness and tenderness pervaded every lineament, and melted in her dark blue eyes. The compassion that wanted activity, was sincere, though it only embellished her face, or produced casual acts of charity when a moderate alms could relieve present distress. Unacquainted with life, fictitious, unnatural dis-tress drew the tears that were not shed for real misery. In its own shape, human wretchedness excites a little disgust in the mind that has indulged sickly refinement. Perhaps the sage gave way to a little conjecture in drawing the last conclusion; but his conjectures generally arose from dis-tinct ideas, and a dawn of light allowed him to see a great way farther than common mortals.

He was now convinced that the orphan was not very unfortunate in having lost such a mother. The parent that inspires fond affection without respect, is seldom an useful one; and they only are respectable, who consider right and wrong abstracted from local forms and accidental modifications.

Determined to adopt the child, he named it after him-self, Sagesta, and retired to the but where the innocent slept, to think of the best method of educating this child, whom the angry deep had spared.

[The last branch of the education of Sagesta, consisted of a variety of characters and stories presented to her in the Cave of Fancy, of which the following is a specimen.]

#### *CHAP.*

A form now approached that particularly struck and interested Sagesta. The sage, observing what passed in her mind, bade her ever trust to the first impression. In life, he continued, try to remember the effect the first appearance of a stranger has on your mind; and, in proportion to your sensibility, you may decide on the character. Intelligence glances from eyes that have the same pursuits, and a benevolent heart soon traces the marks of benevolence on the countenance of an unknown fellow-creature; and not only the countenance, but the gestures, the voice, loudly speak truth to the unprejudiced mind.

Whenever a stranger advances towards you with a tripping step, receives you with broad smiles, and a profusion of compliments, and yet you find yourself embarrassed and unable to return the salutation with equal cordiality, be assured that such a person is affected, and endeavours to maintain a very good character in the eyes of the world, without really practising the social virtues which dress the face in looks of unfeigned complacency. Kindred minds are drawn to each other by expressions which elude description; and, like the calm breeze that plays on a smooth lake, they are rather felt than seen. Beware of a man who always appears in good humour; a selfish design too frequently lurks in the smiles the heart never curved; or there is an affectation of candour that destroys all strength of character, by blending truth and falsehood into an unmeaning mass. The mouth, in fact, seems to be the feature where you may trace every kind of dissimulation, from the simper of vanity, to the fixed smile of the designing villain. Perhaps, the modulations of the voice will still more quickly give a key to the character than even the turns of the mouth, or the words that issue from it; often do the tones of unpractised dissemblers give the lie to their assertions. Many people never speak in an unnatural voice, but when they are insincere: the phrases not corresponding with the dictates of the heart, have nothing to keep them in tune. In the course of an argument however, you may easily discover whether vanity or conviction stimulates the disputant, though his inflated countenance may be turned from you, and you may not see the gestures which mark self-sufficiency. He stopped, and the spirit began.

I have wandered through the cave; and, as soon as I have taught you a useful lesson, I shall take my flight where my tears will cease to flow, and where mine eyes will no more be shocked with the sight of guilt and sorrow. Before many moons have changed, thou wilt enter, O mortal! into that world I have lately left. Listen to my warning voice, and trust not too much to the goodness which I perceive resides in thy breast. Let it be reined in by principles, lest thy very virtue sharpen the sting of remorse, which as naturally follows disorder in the moral world, as pain attends on intemperance in the physical. But my history will afford you more instruction than mere advice. Sagestus concurred in opinion with her, observing that the senses of children should be the first object of improvement; then their passions worked on; and judgment the fruit, must be the acquirement of the being itself, when out of leading-strings. The spirit bowed assent, and, without any further prelude, entered on her history.

My mother was a most respectable character, but she was yoked to a man whose follies and vices made her ever feel the weight of her chains. The first sensation I recollect, was pity; for I have seen her weep over me and the rest of her babes, lamenting that the extravagance of a father would throw us destitute on the world. But, though my father was extravagant, and seldom thought of any thing but his own pleasures, our education was

not neglected. In solitude, this employment was my mother's only solace; and my father's pride made him procure us masters; nay, sometimes he was so gratified by our improvement, that he would embrace us with tenderness, and intreat my mother to forgive him, with marks of real contrition. But the affection his penitence gave rise to, only served to expose her to continual disappointments, and keep hope alive merely to torment her. After a violent debauch he would let his beard grow, and the sadness that reigned in the house I shall never forget; he was ashamed to meet even the eyes of his children. This is so contrary to the nature of things, it gave me exquisite pain; I used, at those times, to show him extreme respect. I could not bear to see my parent humble himself before me. However neither his constitution, nor fortune could long bear the constant waste. He had, I have observed, a childish affection for his children, which was displayed in caresses that gratified him for the moment, yet never restrained the headlong fury of his appetites; his momentary repentance wrung his heart, without influencing his conduct; and he died, leaving an encumbered wreck of a good estate.

As we had always lived in splendid poverty, rather than in affluence, the shock was not so great; and my mother repressed her anguish, and concealed some circumstances, that she might not shed a destructive mildew over the gaiety of youth.

So fondly did I doat on this dear parent, that she engrossed all my tenderness; her sorrows had knit me firmly to her, and my chief care was to give her proofs of affection. The gallantry that afforded my companions, the few young people my mother forced me to mix with, so much pleasure, I despised; I wished more to be loved than admired, for I could love. I adored virtue; and my imagination, chasing a chimerical object, overlooked the common pleasures of life; they were not sufficient for my happiness. A latent fire made me burn to rise superior to my contemporaries in wisdom and virtue; and tears of joy and emulation filled my eyes when I read an account of a great action — I felt admiration, not astonishment.

My mother had two particular friends, who endeavoured to settle her affairs; one was a middle-aged man, a merchant; the human breast never enshrined a more benevolent heart. His manners were rather rough, and he bluntly spoke his thoughts without observing the pain it gave; yet he possessed extreme tenderness, as far as his discernment went. Men do not make sufficient distinction, said she, digressing from her story to address Sagestus, between tenderness and sensibility.

To give the shortest definition of sensibility, replied the sage, I should say that it is the result of acute senses, finely fashioned nerves, which vibrate at the slightest touch, and convey such clear intelligence to the brain, that it does not require to be arranged by the judgment. Such persons instantly enter into the characters of others, and instinctively

discern what will give pain to every human being; their own feelings are so varied that they seem to contain in themselves, not only all the passions of the species, but their various modifications. Exquisite pain and pleasure is their portion; nature wears for them a different aspect than is displayed to common mortals. One moment it is a paradise; all is beautiful: a cloud arises, an emotion receives a sudden damp; darkness invades the sky, and the world is an unweeded garden; — but go on with your narrative, said Sagestus, recollecting himself.

She proceeded. The man I am describing was humanity itself; but frequently he did not understand me; many of my feelings were not to be analyzed by his common sense. His friendships, for he had many friends, gave him pleasure unmixed with pain; his religion was coldly reasonable, because he wanted fancy, and he did not feel the necessity of finding, or creating, a perfect object, to answer the one engraved on his heart: the sketch there was faint. He went with the stream, and rather caught a character from the society he lived in, than spread one around him. In my mind many opinions were graven with a pen of brass, which he thought chimerical: but time could not erase them, and I now recognize them as the seeds of eternal happiness: they will soon expand in those realms where I shall enjoy the bliss adapted to my nature; this is all we need ask of the Supreme Being; happiness must follow the completion of his designs. He however could live quietly, without giving a preponderancy to many important opinions that continually obtruded on my mind; not having an enthusiastic affection for his fellow creatures, he did them good, without suffering from their follies. He was particularly attached to me, and I felt for him all the affection of a daughter; often, when he had been interesting himself to promote my welfare, have I lamented that he was not my father; lamented that the vices of mine had dried up one source of pure affection.

The other friend I have already alluded to, was of a very different character; greatness of mind, and those combinations of feeling which are so difficult to describe, raised him above the throng, that bustle their hour out, lie down to sleep, and are forgotten. But I shall soon see him, she exclaimed, as much superior to his former self, as he then rose in my eyes above his fellow creatures! As she spoke, a glow of delight animated each feature; her countenance appeared transparent; and she silently anticipated the happiness she should enjoy, when she entered those mansions, where death-divided friends should meet, to part no more; where human weakness could not damp their bliss, or poison the cup of joy that, on earth, drops from the lips as soon as tasted, or, if some daring mortal snatches a hasty draught, what was sweet to the taste becomes a root of bitterness.

He was unfortunate, had many cares to struggle with, and I marked on his cheeks traces of the same sorrows that sunk my own. He was unhappy I say, and perhaps pity might first have awoke my tenderness; for, early in life, an artful woman worked on his compassionate soul, and he united his fate to a being made up of such jarring elements, that he was still alone. The discovery did not extinguish that propensity to love, a high sense of virtue fed. I saw him sick and unhappy, without a friend to sooth the hours languor made heavy; often did I sit a long winter's evening by his side, railing at the swift wings of time, and terming my love, humanity.

Two years passed in this manner, silently rooting my affection; and it might have continued calm, if a fever had not brought him to the very verge of the grave. Though still deceived, I was miserable that the customs of the world did not allow me to watch by him; when sleep forsook his pillow, my wearied eyes were not closed, and my anxious spirit hovered round his bed. I saw him, before he had recovered his strength; and, when his hand touched mine, life almost retired, or flew to meet the touch. The first look found a ready way to my heart, and thrilled through every vein. We were left alone, and insensibly began to talk of the immortality of the soul; I declared that I could not live without this conviction. In the ardour of conversation he pressed my hand to his heart; it rested there a moment, and my emotions gave weight to my opinion, for the affection we felt was not of a perishable nature. — A silence ensued, I know not how long; he then threw my hand from him, as if it had been a serpent; formally complained of the weather, and adverted to twenty other uninteresting subjects. Vain efforts! Our hearts had already spoken to each other.

Feebly did I afterwards combat an affection, which seemed twisted in every fibre of my heart. The world stood still when I thought of him; it moved heavily at best, with one whose very constitution seemed to mark her out for misery. But I will not dwell on the passion I too fondly nursed. One only refuge had I on earth; I could not resolutely desolate the scene my fancy flew to, when worldly cares, when a knowledge of mankind, which my circumstances forced on me, rendered every other insipid. I was afraid of the unmarked vacuity of common life; yet, though I supinely indulged myself in fairy-land, when I ought to have been more actively employed, virtue was still the first mover of my actions; she dressed my love in such enchanting colours, and spread the net I could never break. Our corresponding feelings confounded our very souls; and in many conversations we almost intuitively discerned each other's sentiments; the heart opened itself, not chilled by reserve, nor afraid of misconstruction. But, if virtue inspired love, love gave new energy to virtue, and absorbed every selfish passion. Never did even a wish escape me, that my lover should not fulfil the hard duties which fate had imposed on him. I only dissembled with him in one particular; I endeavoured to soften his wife's too conspicuous follies, and

extenuated her failings in an indirect manner. To this I was prompted by a loftiness of spirit; I should have broken the band of life, had I ceased to respect myself. But I will hasten to an important change in my circumstances.

My mother, who had concealed the real state of her affairs from me, was now impelled to make me her confidant, that I might assist to discharge her mighty debt of gratitude. The merchant, my more than father, had privately assisted her: but a fatal civil-war reduced his large property to a bare competency; and an inflammation in his eyes, that arose from a cold he had caught at a wreck, which he watched during a stormy night to keep off the lawless colliers, almost deprived him of sight. His life had been spent in society, and he scarcely knew how to fill the void; for his spirit would not allow him to mix with his former equals as an humble companion; he who had been treated with uncommon respect, could not brook their insulting pity. From the resource of solitude, reading, the complaint in his eyes cut him off, and he became our constant visitor.

Actuated by the sincerest affection, I used to read to him, and he mistook my tenderness for love. How could I undeceive him, when every circumstance frowned on him! Too soon I found that I was his only comfort; I, who rejected his hand when fortune smiled, could not now second her blow; and, in a moment of enthusiastic gratitude and tender compassion, I offered him my hand. — It was received with pleasure; transport was not made for his soul; nor did he discover that nature had separated us, by making me alive to such different sensations. My mother was to live with us, and I dwelt on this circumstance to banish cruel recollections, when the bent bow returned to its former state.

With a bursting heart and a firm voice, I named the day when I was to seal my promise. It came, in spite of my regret; I had been previously preparing myself for the awful ceremony, and answered the solemn question with a resolute tone, that would silence the dictates of my heart; it was a forced, unvaried one; had nature modulated it, my secret would have escaped. My active spirit was painfully on the watch to repress every tender emotion. The joy in my venerable parent's countenance, the tenderness of my husband, as he conducted me home, for I really had a sincere affection for him, the congratulations of my mind, when I thought that this sacrifice was heroic, all tended to deceive me; but the joy of victory over the resigned, pallid look of my lover, haunted my imagination, and fixed itself in the centre of my brain. — Still I imagined, that his spirit was near me, that he only felt sorrow for my loss, and without complaint resigned me to my duty.

I was left alone a moment; my two elbows rested on a table to support my chin. Ten thousand thoughts darted with astonishing velocity through my mind. My eyes were dry; I was on the brink of madness. At this moment a strange association was made by my

imagination; I thought of Gallileo, who when he left the inquisition, looked upwards, and cried out, "Yet it moves." A shower of tears, like the refreshing drops of heaven, relieved my parched sockets; they fell disregarded on the table; and, stamping with my foot, in an agony I exclaimed, "Yet I love." My husband entered before I had calmed these tumultuous emotions, and tenderly took my hand. I snatched it from him; grief and surprise were marked on his countenance; I hastily stretched it out again. My heart smote me, and I removed the transient mist by an unfeigned endeavour to please him.

A few months after, my mind grew calmer; and, if a treacherous imagination, if feelings many accidents revived, sometimes plunged me into melancholy, I often repeated with steady conviction, that virtue was not an empty name, and that, in following the dictates of duty, I had not bidden adieu to content.

In the course of a few years, the dear object of my fondest affection, said farewell, in dying accents. Thus left alone, my grief became dear; and I did not feel solitary, because I thought I might, without a crime, indulge a passion, that grew more ardent than ever when my imagination only presented him to my view, and restored my former activity of soul which the late calm had rendered torpid. I seemed to find myself again, to find the eccentric warmth that gave me identity of character. Reason had governed my conduct, but could not change my nature; this voluptuous sorrow was superior to every gratification of sense, and death more firmly united our hearts.

Alive to every human affection, I smoothed my mother's passage to eternity, and so often gave my husband sincere proofs of affection, he never supposed that I was actuated by a more fervent attachment. My melancholy, my uneven spirits, he attributed to my extreme sensibility, and loved me the better for possessing qualities he could not comprehend.

At the close of a summer's day, some years after, I wandered with careless steps over a pathless common; various anxieties had rendered the hours which the sun had enlightened heavy; sober evening came on; I wished to still "my mind, and woo lone quiet in her silent walk." The scene accorded with my feelings; it was wild and grand; and the spreading twilight had almost confounded the distant sea with the barren, blue hills that melted from my sight. I sat down on a rising ground; the rays of the departing sun illumined the horizon, but so indistinctly, that I anticipated their total extinction. The death of Nature led me to a still more interesting subject, that came home to my bosom, the death of him I loved. A village bell was tolling; I listened, and thought of the moment when I heard his interrupted breath, and felt the agonizing fear, that the same sound would never more reach my ears, and that the intelligence glanced from my eyes, would no more be felt. The spoiler had seized his prey; the sun was fled, what was this world to me! I wandered to

another, where death and darkness could not enter; I pursued the sun beyond the mountains, and the soul escaped from this vale of tears. My reflections were tinged with melancholy, but they were sublime. — I grasped a mighty whole, and smiled on the king of terrors; the tie which bound me to my friends he could not break; the same mysterious knot united me to the source of all goodness and happiness. I had seen the divinity reflected in a face I loved; I had read immortal characters displayed on a human countenance, and forgot myself whilst I gazed. I could not think of immortality, without recollecting the ecstasy I felt, when my heart first whispered to me that I was beloved; and again did I feel the sacred tie of mutual affection; fervently I prayed to the father of mercies; and rejoiced that he could see every turn of a heart, whose movements I could not perfectly understand. My passion seemed a pledge of immortality; I did not wish to hide it from the all-searching eye of heaven. Where indeed could I go from his presence? and, whilst it was dear to me, though darkness might reign during the night of life, joy would come when I awoke to life everlasting.

I now turned my step towards home, when the appearance of a girl, who stood weeping on the common, attracted my attention. I accosted her, and soon heard her simple tale; that her father was gone to sea, and her mother sick in bed. I followed her to their little dwelling, and relieved the sick wretch. I then again sought my own abode; but death did not now haunt my fancy. Contriving to give the poor creature I had left more effectual relief, I reached my own garden-gate very weary, and rested on it.

— Recollecting the turns of my mind during the walk, I exclaimed, Surely life may thus be enlivened by active benevolence, and the sleep of death, like that I am now disposed to fall into, may be sweet!

My life was now unmarked by any extraordinary change, and a few days ago I entered this cavern; for through it every mortal must pass; and here I have discovered, that I neglected many opportunities of being useful, whilst I fostered a devouring flame. Remorse has not reached me, because I firmly adhered to my principles, and I have also discovered that I saw through a false medium. Worthy as the mortal was I adored, I should not long have loved him with the ardour I did, had fate united us, and broken the delusion the imagination so artfully wove. His virtues, as they now do, would have extorted my esteem; but he who formed the human soul, only can fill it, and the chief happiness of an immortal being must arise from the same source as its existence. Earthly love leads to heavenly, and prepares us for a more exalted state; if it does not change its nature, and destroy itself, by trampling on the virtue, that constitutes its essence, and allies us to the Deity.

Mary Wollstonecraft 1787