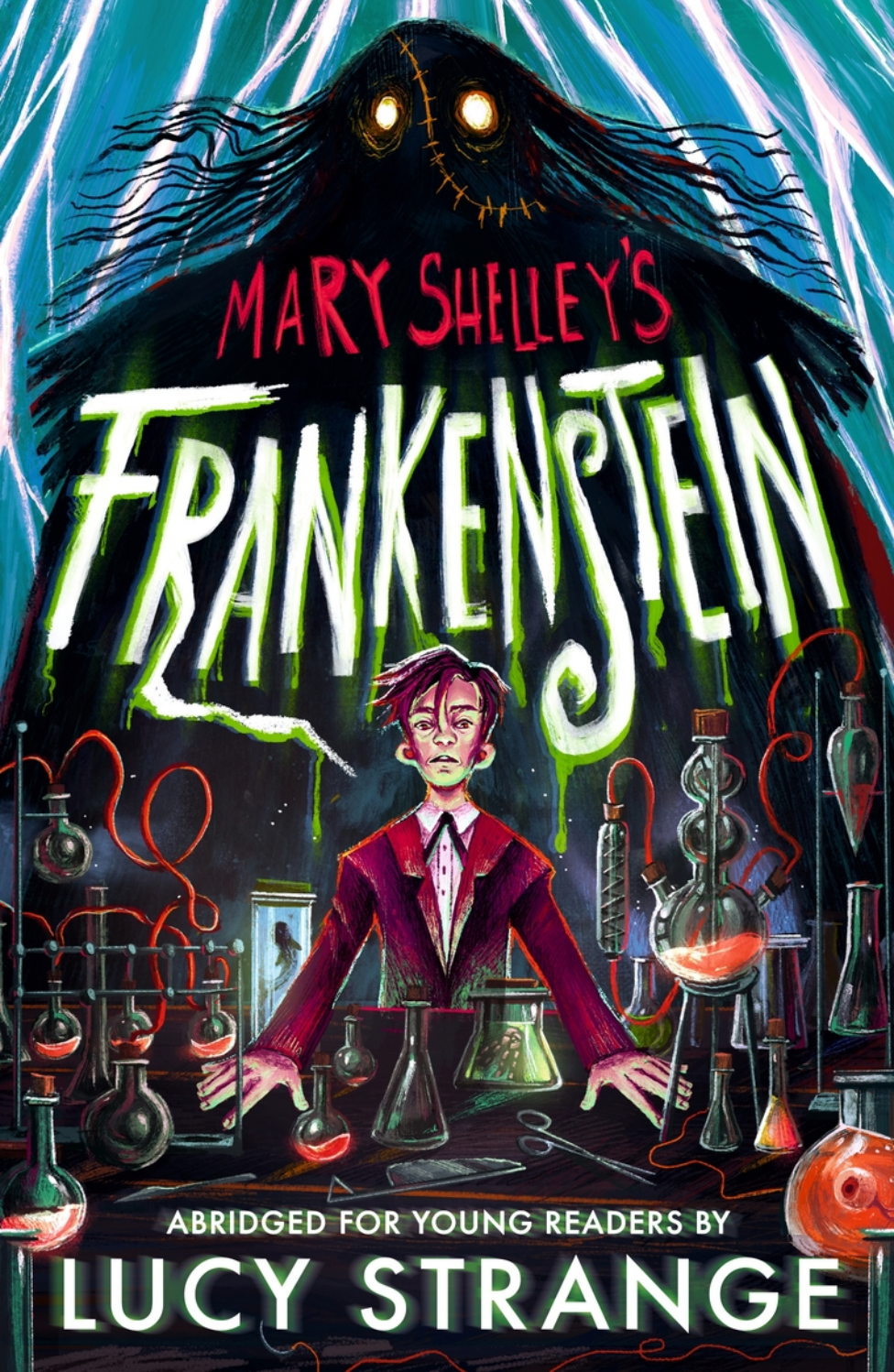




MARY SHELLEY'S

FRANKENSTEIN

ABRIDGED FOR YOUNG READERS BY

LUCY STRANGE

FRANKENSTEIN

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MARY SHELLEY'S
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LUCY STRANGE



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EU Authorized Representative: HackettFlynn Ltd, 36 Cloch Choirneal, Balrothery, Co. Dublin, K32 C942, Ireland. EU@walkerpublishinggroup.com

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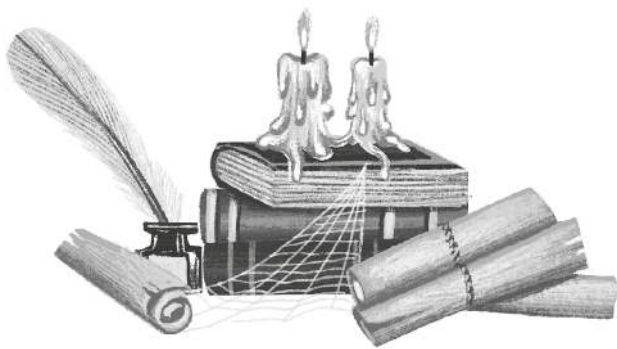
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INTRODUCTION

BY LUCY STRANGE

Hello, dear reader,

You are about to read Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* – a book that is considered to be a true classic of English literature. Its themes of ambition, abandonment, love, prejudice and responsibility are just as fresh and powerful now as they were when the story was written more than two hundred years ago.

As the horrors unfold, we can't help asking ourselves whether Frankenstein's creature is the one to blame, or if his creator is the true monster...

Here are five cool facts about Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*:

- 1** Mary Shelley was just EIGHTEEN YEARS OLD when she started writing this brilliant book!
- 2** *Frankenstein* was written for a gothic story competition between Mary Shelley and her

poet friends when they were on holiday in Switzerland in 1816.

- 3** 1816 was known as “the year without a summer” due to the eruption of a massive volcano in Indonesia which filled the skies with thick clouds of volcanic ash – so the weather was cold, dark and stormy!
- 4** In addition to its gothic flavour, *Frankenstein* is also considered one of the earliest works of science fiction. This story has inspired a wealth of books, films and TV shows.
- 5** Shelley never describes Frankenstein’s creature as having bolts through his neck! This version of the monster actually comes from a 1931 film adaptation of *Frankenstein* starring Boris Karloff.

If you enjoy this novel and the ideas within it, here are some *Frankenstein*-inspired stories you might also like to read: *Clay* by David Almond; *Stitch* by Pádraig Kenny; *Following Frankenstein* by Catherine Bruton; *Strange Star* by Emma Carroll; and *The Undying Of Obedience Wellrest* by Nicholas Bowling.

Or maybe, and particularly if the weather is a bit cold, dark and stormy, you might just be inspired to create a gothic story of your very own...

But right now, my friends, it’s time to pack your bags for an extraordinary journey. Are you ready?





CAPTAIN ROBERT WALTON



Pursuit

I found myself in an extra-ordinary place. The light was beautiful and quite other-worldly; the sun never set – it only skimmed the horizon, diffusing its perpetual glow.

What miracles will I find in this place? I said to myself. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light?

I thought perhaps I might discover the wondrous power which attracts the compass needle. I would satisfy my curiosity with the sight of a land never before visited by mankind. I imagined that my footprints would be the very first to mark these snowy plains...

These were the things that enticed me, and they were enough to conquer all fear of danger or death. This expedition to the North Pole had been my dream since I was a child. But I was finding the journey long and

hard. Time passed very slowly on the ship – saturated by the peculiar light, lost in a world of endless white. I had hired a good vessel and engaged men on whom I knew I could depend. Men, no doubt, possessed of great strength and dauntless courage. But I had no true friend on the voyage: no single person in whom I might confide my innermost thoughts. And I felt the absence of such a friend bitterly. If this expedition were to succeed, there would be none to participate in my joy; if it ended in disappointment, I would have no one to comfort me in my dejection.

Well, these are useless complaints, I thought. I shall certainly find no friend on the wide ocean. But then something strange and terrible happened...

The ice was closing in on the ship from all sides. Our situation was treacherous, especially as we were surrounded by an impenetrable fog. We had no choice but to sit and wait and hope for the ice to break up so that we might continue our journey north.

At last, the fog began to lift, and we saw, stretched out in every direction, vast and irregular sheets of ice, which seemed to go on for ever. Some of the men groaned, and my own mind grew anxious, when an extraordinary sight suddenly attracted our attention and distracted us from our peril.

We saw a sledge being drawn by dogs. It was heading north across the icy plains and, although it was



some distance away, we could see the figure driving the sledge quite clearly. It was the shape of a man, but apparently a man of gigantic stature. We watched the rapid progress of the traveller with our telescopes until he was lost among the distant shapes of ice and snow.

We were all rendered speechless by this surreal sight. The only possible conclusion was that we were not as far from land or from civilization as we had supposed; and yet, according to my calculations, we were many hundreds of miles away from any human habitation. I was tempted to follow the tracks of this giant creature – to discover where he had come from, and where he was heading to – but of course it would have been impossible on those treacherous sheets of ice.

That night, the plains of ice began to crack and break up, freeing our vessel to move once more. As soon as it was light, I went up on deck, and found all the sailors busy on one side of the ship, apparently talking to someone in the sea.

When I peered over, I saw a sledge, much like the one we had seen the day before. It appeared to have drifted towards us in the night on a large fragment of ice. Only one of the sled dogs remained alive, and there was a single passenger whom the sailors were persuading to climb aboard our vessel.

I had assumed the giant traveller we had seen

the day before to be an inhabitant of some remote, undiscovered island, and imagined this second man to be the same, but I was quite wrong. He was a European, and spoke English to us.

“Before I come on board your vessel,” the stranger said, “will you have the kindness to inform me where you are going?”

I was astonished. Here was a man who appeared to be at the very brink of death; I should have assumed the lucky appearance of my ship would have been the answer to all his prayers, and yet he seemed more interested in our destination than in his own rescue.

I replied that we were on a voyage of discovery towards the North Pole.

Upon hearing this he appeared satisfied and consented to come on board. Good God! The state of this poor fellow... His limbs were nearly frozen, and his body was dreadfully emaciated by fatigue and suffering. I never saw a man in so wretched a condition. We carried him into the cabin, but as soon as he had quitted the fresh air he fainted. We brought him back to the deck and restored him to life by rubbing him with brandy and encouraging him to swallow a small quantity. As soon as he regained consciousness, we wrapped him up in blankets and placed him near the chimney of the kitchen stove. By slow degrees he recovered and ate a little soup,



which restored him wonderfully. At first, I feared that the stranger's sufferings might have deprived him of all understanding, but he was soon able to speak coherently. He was a most interesting man; his eyes had an expression of wildness, and even madness, but there were moments when, if anyone performed an act of kindness towards him, his whole face shone with warmth and humanity. Most of the time, though, he was melancholy and despairing. Sometimes he gnashed his teeth, as if impatient of the weight of woes that oppressed him.

The crew wished to ask him a thousand questions, of course; but he was so weak, I could not allow him to be tormented by their idle curiosity. Once, however, the lieutenant asked why he had come so far upon the ice in so strange a vehicle.

The stranger's face instantly assumed an aspect of the deepest gloom, and he replied, "To seek one who fled from me."

"And did the man whom you pursued travel in the same fashion?" the lieutenant asked, his eyes briefly meeting my own.

"Yes."

"Then ... I believe we have seen him. For the day before we picked you up, we saw some dogs drawing a sledge, with a gigantic man in it, across the ice."

This aroused the stranger's attention. He was alert

at once and asked a multitude of questions concerning the route which the demon, as he called him, had taken. He asked if I thought that the breaking up of the ice might have destroyed the other sledge. I replied that I could not answer with any degree of certainty, for the ice had not broken until near midnight, and the traveller might well have arrived at a place of safety before that time; but of this I could not judge.

From this time, the stranger became animated with tremendous energy and a fierce determination. He was eager to be upon deck, to watch for the demon's sledge; but I persuaded him to remain in the cabin, for he was far too fragile to sustain the rawness of the air here. I promised that someone should keep watch for him and tell him immediately if any new object should appear in sight.

With each day that passed, I found myself growing more and more fond of Victor Frankenstein – for that was the stranger's name. I began to love him as a brother, and his constant grief filled me with sympathy and compassion. He was so gentle, yet so wise; his mind was cultivated, and when he spoke, his words flowed with rapidity and great eloquence.

After he had recovered his strength, he was continually on the deck, apparently watching for the sledge that preceded his own. Yet, although unhappy, he troubled himself to take an interest in others.

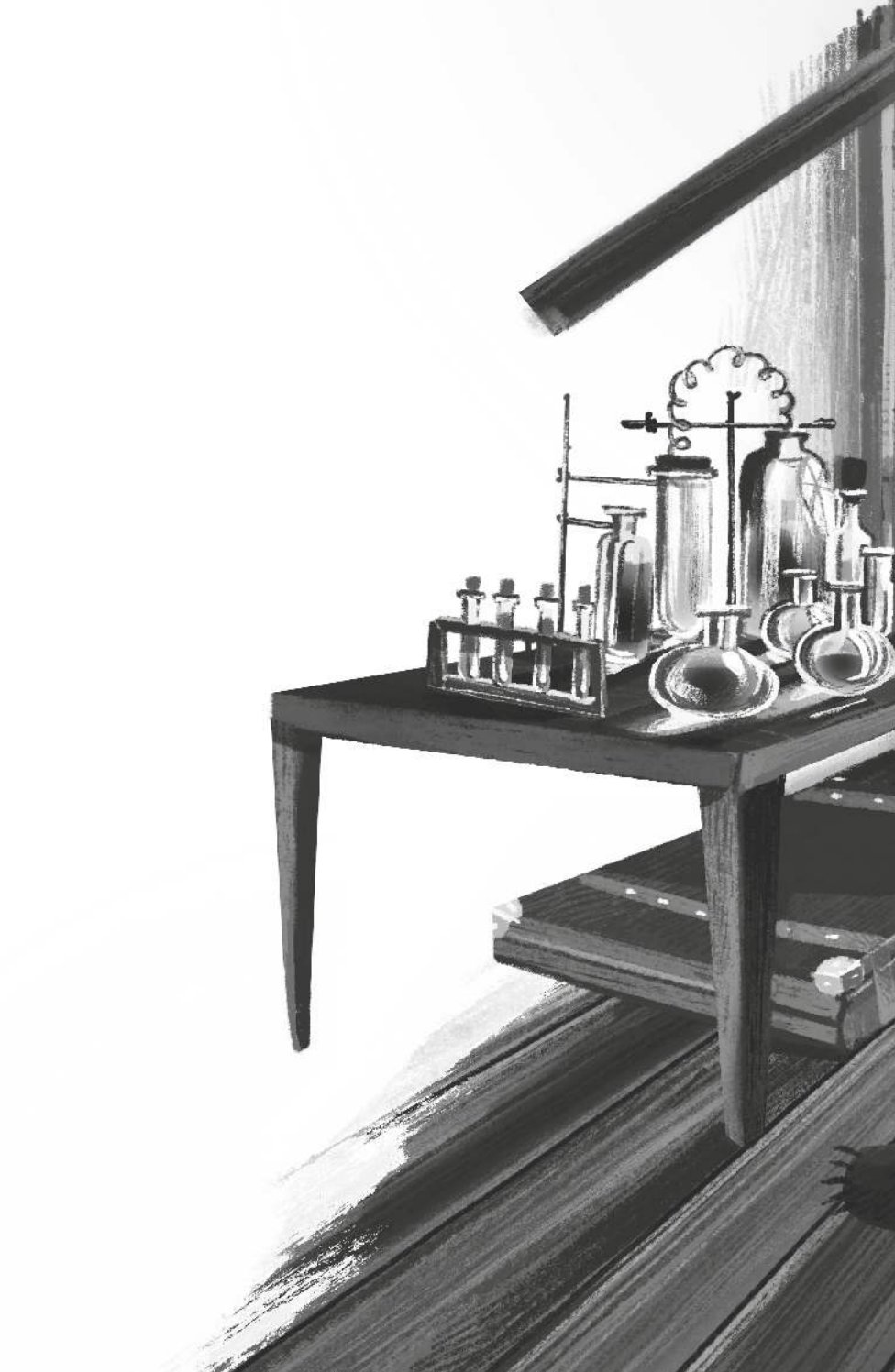


He asked me about my own life and this expedition, and I found myself being quite honest with him, laying bare the burning ardour of my soul and sharing how gladly I would sacrifice my fortune, my existence, my every hope, to fulfil my ambitions as an explorer.

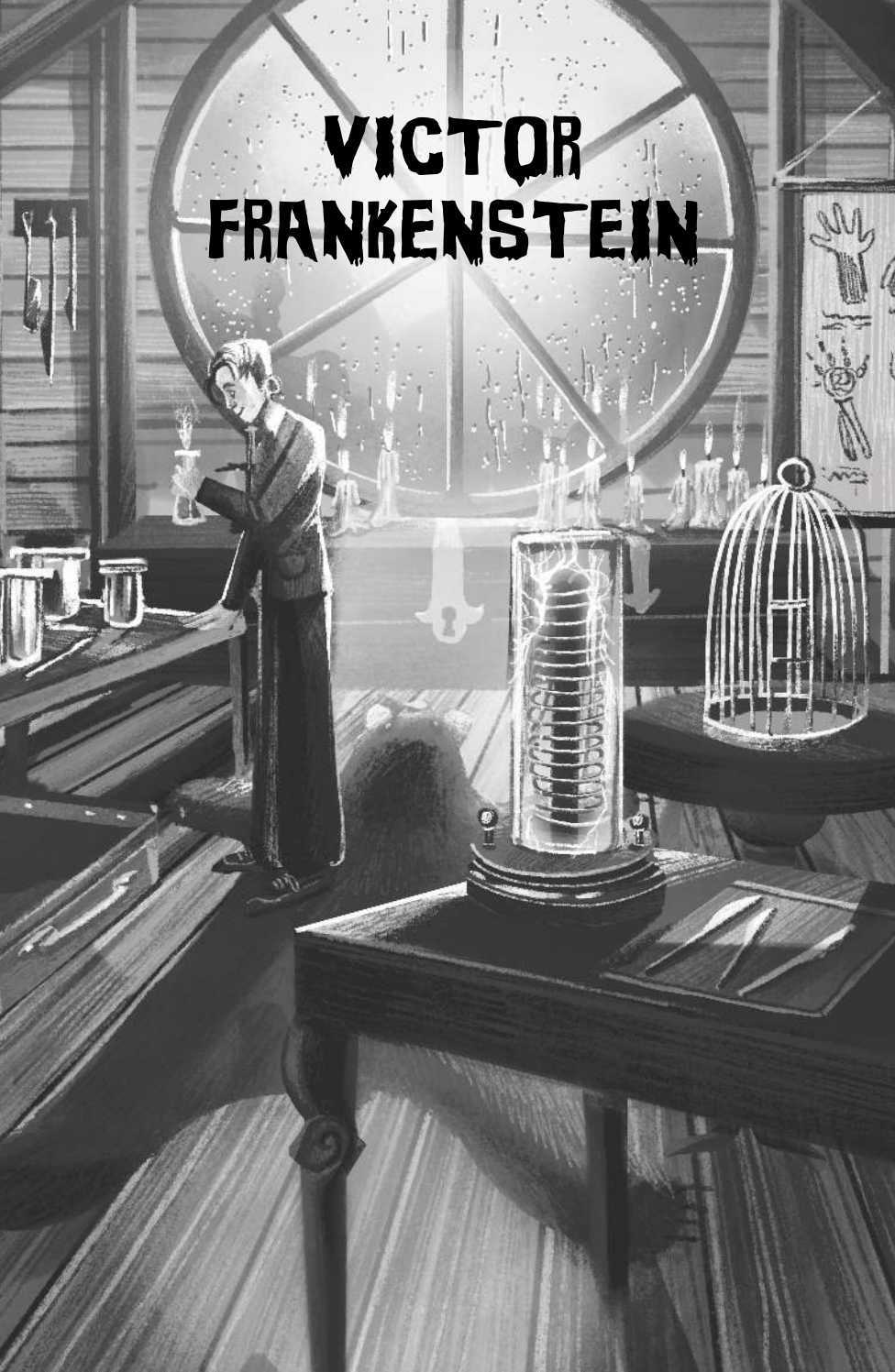
As I spoke, a dark gloom spread over my listener's countenance. "Unhappy man!" he said, and I was startled to see the sudden tears in his eyes. "Do you share my madness? Have you drunk also of the intoxicating draught of ambition? Hear me; let me reveal my tale, and you will dash the cup from your lips! I – I have lost everything and cannot begin life anew. My life is all but over. I wait for one event, and then I shall repose in peace. But you, my friend – you still have hope, and all the world before you.

"Prepare to hear of occurrences which are usually deemed marvellous. Were we among the tamer scenes of nature I might fear to encounter your unbelief, perhaps even your ridicule; but many things will appear possible in these wild and deathly regions."

And so, the stranger told me his extraordinary story...



VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN





love

My family is from Geneva, in Switzerland. For generations, we had occupied the most distinguished positions within that republic. The Frankensteins who came before me were counsellors, government officials, politicians and diplomats. My father had filled several public offices with honour and reputation. He was respected by all who knew him for his integrity and his dedication to public business.

My mother, Caroline Beaufort, came from an altogether different background, yet she possessed an uncommonly brilliant mind. Her formative years were plagued by grief and poverty, but she met these hardships with strength and courage, and it was, perhaps, these qualities that caused my father to fall in love with her.

There was a considerable difference between the



ages of my parents, but this seemed to unite them only closer in their bonds of devoted affection. My father's greatest desire was to compensate Mother for the sorrows of her childhood. He strove to shelter her, as an exotic flower is sheltered by the gardener, from every rough wind. Her health, and even the tranquillity of her spirit, had been deeply shaken by her years of suffering, and so, soon after their marriage, my parents travelled to Italy. Their tour through that land of wonders proved to be greatly restoring for my mother's weakened frame.

I was born at Naples, and my early years were spent accompanying my parents on their rambles around Europe. They adored each other; but their love, it seemed, was inexhaustible, for they adored me too. My childhood was a uniquely happy one. My very first memories are of my mother's tender caresses and my father's kindly smile. They idolized me. They saw me as a gift from heaven, and were profoundly conscious of their responsibility as parents: they sought always to shepherd me towards a life of fulfilment and happiness. This, along with the natural warmth and kindness of their own characters, meant that I was guided always by the silken cord of their love.

For a long time I was their only care. My mother had much desired to have a daughter, but I continued their single offspring. When I was about five years old,



my parents passed a week on the shores of Lake Como. Their charitable compassion often led them to visit the cottages of the poor. This, to my mother, was more than a duty; it was a passion. Remembering what she had suffered in her own childhood, she wished to take her turn as guardian angel to the afflicted.

During one such visit, my mother found a peasant and his wife distributing a meagre meal to five hungry children. Among these, there was one which captivated my mother's attention. The girl's hair was the brightest gold, and despite the poverty of her clothing, there seemed a crown of distinction upon her head. Her brow was broad and clear, her blue eyes cloudless, and her lips and the moulding of her face so cherub-like and sweet that she seemed heaven-sent.

The peasant woman, perceiving that my mother's eyes filled with wonder at the sight of this little girl, eagerly told her story. She was not *her* child, but the daughter of a Milanese nobleman and his German wife. The infant's mother had died on giving birth, so she had been placed with these good people to nurse. Not long after, the girl's father had disappeared – perhaps killed fighting for the liberty of his country, perhaps a prisoner in some foreign dungeon. His property was confiscated, and thus his child became an orphan and a beggar. The family loved her as one of their own, and she had bloomed among them, fair as a garden rose.

My mother and father spoke to the child's foster parents. The foster parents consulted the village priest. At last, it was decided. Little Elizabeth Lavenza would come to live with us. Her foster family were distraught to let her go, but felt it would be cruel to keep the child in poverty when Providence had stepped in to offer her such protection.

Elizabeth became my beautiful and adored companion. When my parents brought her home for the first time, my mother said playfully, "I have a pretty present for my Victor!" And I, with childish seriousness, interpreted her words literally. I looked upon Elizabeth as *mine* – mine to cherish, love and protect. We called each other familiarly by the name of cousin, though no word, no expression, could describe what she truly meant to me. All I knew was that she was mine.

And so she would be, till death.



Lightning

Elizabeth and I were brought up together; there was not quite a year difference in our ages. Harmony was the soul of our companionship, despite the contrast in our characters. Elizabeth's nature was calm, while I, with all my ardour, was capable of a more intense application and was more deeply smitten with a thirst for knowledge. Elizabeth immersed herself in poetry, and in the majestic and wondrous scenes which surrounded our Swiss home. She loved the sublime shapes of the mountains, the changes of the seasons: tempest and calm, the silence of winter, and the serenity of our Alpine summers. While she contemplated the beauty of things, I delighted in investigating their causes: the world was to me a secret which I desired to divine.

When I was seven years old, my parents were



blessed with a second son, Ernest, and they gave up their wandering life to fix themselves back home in Switzerland. Later they were to have a third son – little William whom we all doted upon. We had a property in the city of Geneva, but spent most of our time in a country house on the eastern shore of the lake. Perhaps it was this quiet way of life that shaped my disposition: I was inclined always to avoid crowds and was indifferent, therefore, to my schoolfellows in general. Instead, I became firm friends with just one among them.

Henry Clerval was the son of a merchant of Geneva. He was a boy of singular talent and fancy. He read books of chivalry and romance. He composed heroic songs and wrote tales of enchantment and adventure. He persuaded us to act plays, to pretend that we were heroes of Roncesvalles, or the knights of King Arthur's Round Table.

No human being could have passed a happier childhood than myself. My parents were all kindness and indulgence. They were never tyrants ruling our lot according to their own selfish whims; rather, they were creators of delight. When I mingled with other families, I realized how peculiarly lucky I was, and gratitude made me love my parents all the more. My temper was sometimes hot, and my passions extreme; but this fierce energy in me found its outlet in an eager



desire to learn. I was fascinated by the secrets of heaven and earth: the very substance of things, the inner spirit of nature, and the mysteries of the human soul...

Meanwhile Clerval occupied himself with studying the virtues of heroes: the morals and actions of great men. His dream was to become one such hero – for his name to be recorded as a great and gallant adventurer.

And growing alongside us was the pure soul of Elizabeth. She shone like a holy light in our peaceful home. Her sympathy was ours; her smile, her soft voice, the sweet glance of her celestial eyes, were ever there to bless us. She was the living spirit of love. If I ever grew sullen – struggling with my studies – she was always there to comfort me. And Clerval – noble spirited Clerval! Elizabeth's sweet nature influenced him too. He might not have been so humane, so thoughtful, so full of kindness amidst his passion for adventure, had it not been for Elizabeth.

It gives me immense pleasure to lose myself in the memories of this blissful childhood, but it also allows me to identify those events which led, by small, insensible steps, to the misery that has followed. For when I examine the birth of that passion which altered my destiny – that torrential river which has swept away all hope and joy from my life – I can see the source of it in my youth, like a faraway, forgotten spring.

I followed the education of my school in Geneva,

but I was, to a great degree, self-taught with regard to my favourite studies. I read the wild fancies of ancient natural philosophers, whose works had long since been dismissed by modern science, yet whose ideas appeared to me as mystical treasures. My father was not scientific, so I was left to struggle with a child's blindness, added to a student's thirst for knowledge. A dangerous combination, perhaps. I entered with the greatest diligence into researching such mysteries as the philosopher's stone and the elixir of life; but it was the latter that gained my undivided attention. What glory would attend the discovery if I could banish disease from the human frame and render mankind invulnerable!

Then, when I was about fifteen years old, we witnessed a most violent thunderstorm. It advanced from behind the mountains of Jura, and the thunder burst at once with frightful loudness from all quarters of the heavens. I stood at the door, watching the progress of the storm – enrapt by its fearsome power. Suddenly, I beheld a stream of fire rise up from the old and beautiful oak tree which stood about twenty yards from our house. The fire met with a lightning bolt from above and, as soon as the dazzling lightning vanished, I saw that the oak had disappeared too. Nothing remained but a blasted stump. When we visited it the next morning, we found the ancient, mighty tree had

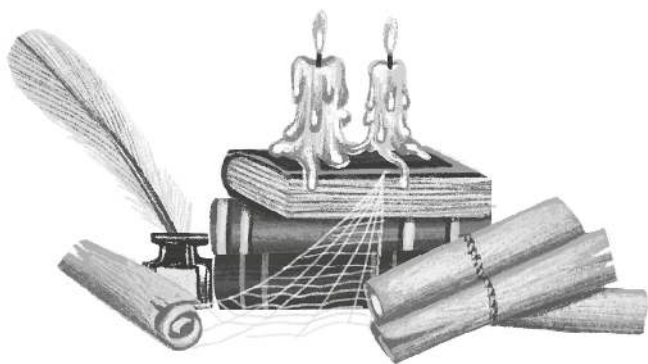


been shattered – reduced to mere ribbons of wood. I never beheld anything so utterly destroyed.

A guest was staying with us at the lakeside house, and his explanation of lightning and the science of electricity was a revelation to me. His words made a nonsense of my previous studies. All those mystical ideas that had so long engaged my attention suddenly seemed childish and contemptible. I saw natural philosophy through new eyes: as a would-be science which could never step within the threshold of real knowledge. It seemed at once a deformed creation, and I turned my back upon it. From that point, I devoted myself to mathematics and the branches of science that were built upon secure foundations. And, as I changed the focus of my studies, I observed a change within myself too: I became happier.

When I look back, it seems to me as if this miraculous change of direction was the work of some guardian angel – a desperate effort to avert the storm that was even then hanging in the stars, ready to envelop me.

But, alas, destiny was too potent: my destruction was inevitable.



Ambition

When I was seventeen my parents decided that I should become a student at the university of Ingolstadt in Germany. My father thought it necessary for the completion of my education that I should live and study somewhere other than my own native country. I was eager to begin and my departure was fixed; but before the day arrived, the first great tragedy of my life occurred – an omen, as it were, of my future misery.

Elizabeth had caught the scarlet fever. Her illness was severe, and she was in the greatest danger. Yet, due to my mother's own frail health, we urged her not to visit poor Elizabeth. At first, she yielded to our entreaties, but when she heard that Elizabeth's life was in danger, Mother could stay away no longer. She nursed and cared for Elizabeth, and her watchful attentions triumphed over the disease. Elizabeth was saved,



but my mother sickened. Her fever was accompanied by the most alarming symptoms. The serious faces of the doctors foretold her fate.

On Mother's deathbed, her strength and kindness did not desert her. She joined the hands of Elizabeth and myself. "My children," she said, "I always dreamt that the two of you might marry. The very thought of it fills my heart with happiness even now. Alas! I cannot bear to leave you all! But I will meet my end peacefully. I hope to meet you in another world."

She died calmly, her expression one of purest love.

I need not describe the feelings that followed, only that death seemed to me the most irreparable evil. I struggled to understand that Mother had truly gone – gone for ever, leaving a void in our hearts and lives. How impossible it seemed that the brightness of a beloved eye had been extinguished; that the sound of a voice so familiar and dear had been hushed, never to be heard again. These were the reflections of the first days; but when at last the reality of the evil settled, then the bitterness of grief began.

All of us will, at some point in our lives, experience the cruel grief of losing one we love. It is not necessary for me to describe those emotions that we all must feel. Only know that, at last, the time arrives when grief does not consume us so wholly; and we find we are able to smile once more. My mother was dead, but we



still had duties to perform, lives to live while we were spared. I was reluctant to rush back into the thick of life, but it was at length agreed that I should depart for Ingolstadt as planned.

It was terribly hard to say goodbye to those I held so dear: my darling Elizabeth, who had been pure sunshine for us all in our grief; my good friend Clerval, who was desperate to accompany me to university, but whose narrow-minded father would not permit it. They were both there the morning the carriage arrived – and my father too, to bless me and wish me well. I climbed into the carriage and was filled with a momentary despair: for the first time in my life, I would be alone. Away at university, I must be my own protector. But as the journey proceeded, my spirits rose. What I longed for most was the acquisition of knowledge. I had often, when at home, felt cooped up and frustrated. I dreamt of entering the world and taking my station among other human beings. This, then, was my chance.

The journey to Ingolstadt was long and tiring, but at last the high white steeples of the town met my eyes, and the next chapter of my life began. Perhaps it was pure chance, or perhaps it was some angel of destruction, but the very first person I met at the university was a professor of natural philosophy called Monsieur Krempe.



Krempe was a little squat man with a gruff voice and a repulsive countenance. He was far from charming, but he was vastly knowledgeable when it came to the secrets of his science. He dismissed as “nonsense” the work of those ancient alchemists which had so long been the subject of my studies.

“Every instant that you have wasted on those books is utterly and entirely lost!” he exclaimed. “My dear sir, you must begin your studies entirely anew.” So saying, he wrote down a list of several books I ought to read. He invited me to his course of natural philosophy lectures and mentioned that Professor Waldman would be holding chemistry lectures on alternate days.

I did not take Krempe’s words to heart, for I had long abandoned those authors he so rudely dismissed. And yet, I had found very little in the work of modern scientists to excite my imagination and ambition in the way those ancient alchemists had. They pursued the magical and the monstrous; they sought great power, the ability to turn base metal to gold – they sought immortality itself! Such quests were futile, of course, but they were bewitching, boundless in the grandeur of their vision. In comparison, modern science seemed to me nothing more than a series of petty discoveries: tedious realities of little worth.

I could not bring myself to attend Krempe’s lectures, to go and hear that little conceited fellow

deliver sentences out of a pulpit, but I recollected what he had said of Professor Waldman. So, several days later, partly from curiosity and partly from idleness, I attended Waldman's chemistry lecture.

This professor was quite unlike Krempe. He appeared about fifty years of age; his hair was black, but for a few grey hairs covering his temples. He was short but stood quite straight, with a kindly face, and the sweetest voice I had ever heard.

He spoke of the history of chemistry, pronouncing with fervour the names of the most distinguished scholars, from ancient times through to the modern day. And he spoke the words which were to change my outlook on modern science completely.

"The ancient teachers," said Waldman, "promised impossibilities and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little in comparison; they know that metals cannot be transmuted into gold, and that the elixir of life is nothing but a chimera. But these philosophers, whose hands seem made only to dabble in dirt, and their eyes to pore over the microscope or crucible, have indeed performed miracles. They have penetrated the deepest secrets of nature. They have ascended into the heavens. They have discovered how blood circulates, and the nature of the air we breathe. They have acquired new and almost unlimited powers: they can command the thunders of heaven, mimic the



earthquake, and even mock the invisible world with its own shadows!”

These were the words that came to shape my fate. As Waldman spoke, chord after chord was sounded within me, and soon my mind was filled with one thought, one purpose.

This much has been done! my soul exclaimed. But more, far more, will I achieve. I, Victor Frankenstein, will pioneer a new way, explore unknown powers, and unfold to the world the deepest mysteries of creation.

I did not close my eyes that night.



Discovery

From that day, I immersed myself in the study of science. I read books, I attended lectures and cultivated the acquaintance of every scientist at the university. I even found Krempe to be a source of sound sense and information – no less valuable for the repulsive nature of his manner.

In Professor Waldman I found a true friend. He was gentle, frank and good-natured. In a thousand ways he smoothed for me the path of knowledge; with his support, I became a dedicated student. So eager and hard-working was I that the stars often disappeared in the light of morning whilst I was yet engaged in my laboratory. My passion was the astonishment of my fellow students, and my extraordinary progress that of the masters. Krempe often asked me, with a sly smile, how I was getting on with the alchemists of old, whilst



Waldman expressed the most heartfelt exultation in my achievements.

Two years passed in this manner, during which I did not return home to visit my family in Geneva, for I was engaged, heart and soul, in the pursuit of the discoveries I hoped to make. Only those who have experienced the enticements of science can understand how utterly immersed I was. Continual discovery! And continual wonder! At the end of two years, I made a significant discovery in the field of chemistry, which procured me great esteem and admiration at the university. I had reached the point where I now knew as much as any of the professors at Ingolstadt, and I began – at last – to consider returning to see those I loved in Geneva, when my studies took me in a different direction entirely.

One of the phenomena which had greatly attracted my attention was the nature of the human body, and, indeed, the body of any living creature. I asked myself this bold question: what was the substance of *life* itself, and from where did it come? I resolved to apply myself to this great mystery, and so – with an almost supernatural enthusiasm – I focused my studies on the human form. To examine the causes of life, we must first – of course – examine death. I had studied human anatomy, but this was not sufficient; I needed to observe the natural decay and corruption of the human body.

In my education, my father had always taken care to protect my mind from supernatural horrors. I do not ever remember trembling at a superstitious tale or ghost story. Darkness had no effect upon my imagination, and a churchyard was to me merely a place which held bodies now deprived of life. I was fascinated in this transformation: bodies which had once been beautiful, breathing and strong becoming nothing more than worm food.

I spent days and nights in vaults and tombs. I saw how the fine form of man gave way to the corruption of death; I saw how the worm devoured the wonders of the eye and brain. I examined every tiny detail, each factor that might play a part in the change from life to death until, from the midst of this darkness, a sudden light broke in upon me. It was a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that even while I was dizzy with the immensity of the idea, I was simultaneously surprised that not one of the many geniuses who had come before me had stumbled upon it. The astonishing discovery was mine, and mine alone.

Remember, I am not recording the vision of a madman. After days and nights of ceaseless labour and fatigue, I had indeed discovered the cause of life itself; nay, more – I was now capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter! What had been the study and desire of the wisest men since the creation

