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Adapted from *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus*

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BIG DOG PUBLISHING
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Mary Shelley's
FRANKENSTEIN

CLASSIC HORROR. Adapted from the novel by Mary Shelley. Victor Frankenstein is obsessed with discovering the secret of life, so he spends several months fashioning a man out of dead body parts. When Victor brings the Creature to life, the sight of his creation horrifies him. Saddened at being rejected by his creator, the Creature ventures out into the world only to be shunned by others due to his grotesque appearance. Lonely and alienated, the Creature begs Victor to create a female for him who can serve as his companion. At first, Victor agrees, but horrified at the prospect of the two creatures procreating, Victor destroys the Creature's female companion. Enraged, the Creature seeks revenge on Victor by destroying everyone who is dear to him. A stunning, unforgettable stage experience!

Performance time: Approximately 90-120 minutes.

FRANKENSTEIN

4



Portrait of Mary Shelley
by Richard Rothwell

ABOUT THE STORY

English author Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin Shelley (1797-1851) published her most famous novel *Frankenstein: or, The Modern Prometheus* anonymously in 1818. As a Gothic horror novel, *Frankenstein* is now considered to be one of the first examples of science fiction. Shelley wrote the story while visiting the English Romantic poet Lord Byron in Lake Geneva, Switzerland in the summer of 1816. Byron proposed that each of his guests write a ghost story. Shelley reportedly based her story on a dream she had about a scientist who created life and was horrified at his creation. Originally intended to be a short story, Shelley expanded it into a novel at the urging of English Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, who later became her husband. Today, many mistake the name Frankenstein as referring to the monster, but Frankenstein actually refers to Victor Frankenstein, the ambitious scientist who creates a man from the body parts of corpses. In the novel, Victor Frankenstein never names his creation and only refers to it as a monster, creature, devil, fiend, wretch, and demon.

CHARACTERS

(4 M, 3 F)

VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN: Distinguished Genovese nobleman and scientist who is obsessed with discovering the secret of life; male.

CREATURE: A man created by Victor Frankenstein from the body parts of corpses; intelligent and sensitive, he tries to integrate into society but is rejected due to his hideous appearance and seeks revenge; tall, grotesque-looking, wears rags/coarse clothing; male.

ELIZABETH LAVENZA: Victor's fiancée, a young woman who was adopted by the Frankenstein family at a young age and raised as Victor's sister; female.

HENRY CLERVAL: Victor's best friend since childhood; male.

JUSTINE: The Frankenstein family's longtime domestic servant, who was taken in by the family at a young age; she is wrongly accused of strangling Victor's youngest brother, William; female.

FELIX DE LACEY: Poor, blind man who lives with his daughter on the outskirts of Geneva; he is capable of recognizing the Creature's goodness and teaches the Creature how to speak and interact with humans; male.

AGATHA DE LACEY: Felix's daughter, a single mother who has been exiled from France; female.

SETTING

1792-93, Geneva, Switzerland, and the Arctic Circle.

SETS

Sets can be as simple or elaborate as your budget allows. Set suggestions are listed below.

Frankenstein estate. The Frankenstein estate exudes history and old wealth. At the stage level, two rooms are evident: the drawing room and Victor's bedroom. Victor's laboratory is depicted above Victor's bedroom and is connected by a staircase.

Drawing room. The drawing room at SL occupies roughly two-thirds of the stage. Furniture includes a settee and several chairs and tables. Two arched doorways lead into and out of the drawing room. Through the opening USL can be seen a partial view of the front entrance and foyer area. The USR archway leads into the kitchen and work areas. A fireplace stands between the two openings.

Victor's bedroom. At SR, Victor's bedroom occupies roughly one-third of the playing space and is separated from the drawing room by a door, hinged on the upstage side and opening into the bedroom. There is a bed, a wardrobe, a night table, a chair or two, and possibly a desk. On the upstage wall of the room hangs a large French tapestry. A couple of floor-to-ceiling windows are evident on the SR wall, covered with heavy draperies. In the USR corner of the room, a spiral staircase leads to the laboratory, its only access.

Victor's laboratory. The laboratory is visible above Victor's room and should appear Gothic and mysterious. . [Note: The laboratory can span the entire length of the stage if the

De Lacey cottage is played as a floor unit, or it can extend only partially if the De Laceys are also situated on the second level.] The lab is dominated by a large work table in the center, on which rest specimens of dissected "frogs." Several elementary cathode ray tubes connected to the frog specimens connect to a pair of galvanic troughs. A large conical device hangs directly over the work table. Attached to this device are four flexible steel tubes with electrodes. Elsewhere, two microscopes, several Leyden jars, various electric coils, an air pump, and a plasma ion generator are evident. Various switches, pulleys, and generators are off to one side. Several floor-to-ceiling windows are present on the upstage wall.

The De Laceys' cottage. The interior is rustic. There are two stools, a wooden cradle, and a fireplace with stacked wood next to it. Two options are described below. The quickest and least obtrusive set should be used.

- 1.) The cottage may appear at the same level as Victor's laboratory. A downstage façade on the upper level could be slid to the left or right, depending on which setting is being used, the lab or the cottage. When the lab is visible, the façade could be in front of the cottage. When the cottage is used, the façade would be in front of the lab.
- 2.) The cottage could appear at ground level. A small unit could roll in from the DSL or DSR playing area.

SYNOPSIS OF SCENES

Act I

Prologue: An ice floe, Arctic Ocean.

Scene 1: Frankenstein estate, Geneva, Switzerland, 1792, early fall, evening.

Scene 2: Victor's laboratory.

Scene 3: The De Lacey's cottage in the woods outside Geneva, a few days later.

Scene 4: Drawing room of the Frankenstein estate, early spring, evening.

Intermission

Act II

Scene 1: Drawing room, several days later, morning.

Scene 2: Victor's laboratory, several days later.

Scene 3: Drawing room, summer, early evening.

Scene 4: Victor's bedroom, fall, early evening.

Epilogue: An ice floe, Arctic Ocean.

PROPS

Nightshirt, for Victor	Wooden bucket
Dissected frogs (plastic)	Kettle
Lab notebook	Ladle
Pen	2 Soup bowls
Serving tray with tea and biscuits	2 Spoons
Vials	Strip of cloth
Flasks filled with colored liquid	Copy of Milton's <i>Paradise Lost</i>
Dissected (plastic) frog with electrodes connected to it	Flintlock musket (replica/toy)
Sheet	Embroidery and needle
Torch	Small travel bag
Canvas bag	Oil lamp
Work gloves, for Victor	Human rib (plastic)
Hat, for Victor	Tea service
Work clothes, for Victor	Locket with pictures of Caroline and Alphonse Frankenstein
Long overcoat, for Victor	Key
Severed hand bloodied at the wrist	Female form (mannequin) covered with a sheet
Scalpel	Bandages
Thread	Kettle of water
Wire	Wedding suit, for Victor
Needles	Wedding dress, for Elizabeth
4 Leather straps to bind Creature to table	Flintlock pistol (replica/toy gun)
Generator with lever	Long winter coat, for Victor
Lantern	Fake beard with snow/icicles, for Victor
Nightgown, for Elizabeth	Wood forming a funeral pyre
Guitar	
Baby doll	
Book by C.F. Volney, <i>The Ruins of Empires</i>	

SPECIAL EFFECTS

Thunder
Lightning
Child's cry
Sound of rain
Glass breaking
Stage blood
Gothic horror music
Sound of heavy rain
Whirring sound

Electrodes buzzing
Sound of bubbling liquid
Gunshot
Recording of De Lacey
 playing his guitar
Sound of door opening
Howling wind
Blowing snow

"...I WILL PIONEER A NEW WAY,
EXPLORE UNKNOWN POWERS,
AND UNFOLD TO THE WORLD
THE DEEPEST MYSTERIES
OF CREATION."

—VICTOR

ACT I
PROLOGUE

(Arctic Ocean, late 18th century. Creature appears on an ice floe DSC. Long pause. He focuses on a spot at the back center of the audience.)

CREATURE: *(To an unseen Victor Frankenstein, reciting from "Paradise Lost.")*

“Did I request thee, Maker, from my Clay
To mold me Man, did I solicit thee
From darkness to promote me, or here place
In this delicious Garden?”

Remember that I am thy creature. I ought to be thy Adam, but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery has made me a fiend. All men hate the wretched. How, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things. Even you, my creator, detest and spurn me, thy creation, to whom thou art bound by ties dissoluble only by the annihilation of one of us.

(Tremendous booms of thunder and spectacular bolts of lighting. Blackout.)

SCENE 1

(AT RISE: Frankenstein estate, Geneva, Switzerland, 1792. Early fall, evening. In a laboratory, the figure of Victor Frankenstein is illuminated against a large upstage window. Clad in a nightshirt and with his back to us, Victor is watching the storm outside with fascination.)

VICTOR: *(Voiceover.)* More and more, I have retreated to this solitary chamber, or rather cell, at the top of the house, isolated from all the other apartments and accessible only by the staircase in the corner of my room. I have witnessed this evening a most violent and terrible storm, the thunder bursting at once with frightful loudness from various quarters of the heavens. As I watched with curiosity and delight, all of a sudden, I beheld a stream of fire issue from an old and beautiful oak, which stood about 20 yards from our house. So soon as the dazzling light vanished, the oak had disappeared. Nothing remained but a blasted stump.

(The laboratory becomes visible. It is dominated by a large worktable in the center, on which currently rest some specimens of dissected frogs. Several elementary cathode ray tubes connected to the frog specimens connect to a pair of galvanic troughs. A large conical device, presently in an elevated position, hangs directly over the worktable. Attached to this device are four flexible steel tubes with electrodes. Elsewhere, two microscopes, several Leyden jars, various electric coils, an air pump, and a plasma ion generator are evident. Various switches, pulleys, and generators are off to one side. The lab as a whole should appear highly used, Gothic, and mysterious. Victor moves to his laboratory desk and records his impressions. Justine enters from the drawing room arch SR and goes to Victor's room. She knocks lightly.)

JUSTINE: Master Frankenstein?

(Victor does not hear her. She quietly opens the door, calling a second time. Finding Victor's bed empty, she goes to the nightstand and sees an untouched tray of tea and biscuits. She tentatively approaches the staircase. Lightning and thunder. A child's cry is heard from an interior room. Justine collects the tray from the bedside table and exits to the drawing room. During this, Victor has been writing in his notebook.)

VICTOR: *(Voiceover, as he writes.)* "My years at Ingolstadt, aborted though they were, have instilled in me a desperate desire to learn the secrets of heaven and earth. I am deeply smitten with a thirst for knowledge. The world is a secret, which I desire to divine. Whether the outward substance of things or the inner spirit of nature and the mysterious soul of man, still my inquiries have now been directed to the metaphysical secrets of the world, provoked even more urgently with the death of my father. How I long to penetrate the secrets of nature."

(Victor continues writing. By this time, Justine has crossed from his room to the drawing room, carrying the empty tray. She is met by Elizabeth Lavenza, who enters from the drawing room arch SL.)

JUSTINE: Mademoiselle Elizabeth! You are up so late...

ELIZABETH: It's William. The storms frighten him so, especially the lightning.

JUSTINE: Yes. It's dreadful.

ELIZABETH: *(Indicating the untouched tray Justine is holding.)*
He had none of it?

JUSTINE: No, my lady.

ELIZABETH: *(Sighs.)* How shall he ever regain his health, Justine?

JUSTINE: He just needs more time, ma'am.

ELIZABETH: More time, yes. But time to rest, not to spend in that laboratory. *(Pause.)* I'm sorry. Forgive me.

JUSTINE: No matter, ma'am. It's patience we need. It's only been two weeks now.

ELIZABETH: Will you sit for a while with me, Justine?

(Justine sets the tray down.)

JUSTINE: Of course.

ELIZABETH: I don't know what to do, Justine...how to help him. I'm quite worried.

JUSTINE: It's a difficult time, ma'am.

ELIZABETH: Yes. One parent's death sent him away. Another's brought him back.

JUSTINE: Master Frankenstein was a very good man...like a father to me.

ELIZABETH: And to me.

JUSTINE: I shall never forget his kindnesses.

ELIZABETH: Were it not for Alphonse, I should have remained in Italy forever...a poor little orphan girl, destitute and abandoned.

JUSTINE: I cannot remember a time, ma'am, when you were not a beloved member of the family. Alphonse and Caroline loved you so, both of them. They treated you as one of their own. And, of course, Victor.

ELIZABETH: On her deathbed, Caroline joined our hands together...Victor's and mine. "My children," she said. "My firmest hopes of future happiness were placed on the prospect of your union. This expectation will now be the consolation of your father." I can still see her...hear her voice, though it's been nearly two years now.

JUSTINE: Oh, ma'am.

ELIZABETH: "Elizabeth, my love," she said. "You must supply my place to the child. He'll miss me so, and it is so hard to quit you all."

JUSTINE: And so you have, Mademoiselle Elizabeth. William looks upon you as much his mother as Lady Caroline was.

ELIZABETH: Perhaps. But what of Victor?

JUSTINE: He loves you, ma'am. Surely, you must know that by now.

ELIZABETH: I knew it once, Justine, two years ago, before he left for university.

JUSTINE: Oh, ma'am...still he does.

ELIZABETH: A change has come over him. It's futile to pretend he's the same as when he left.

(Justine places her hands over those of Elizabeth's. Still at his desk in his lab, Victor continues writing in his notebook.)

VICTOR: *(Voiceover, writing.)* "I'm not the same as when I left. I know that. I have set down natural history as a deformed and abortive creation. A would-be science can never step within the threshold of real knowledge."

ELIZABETH: *(To Justine.)* Not really knowing what to do...what course to take, even as I watch him fading more each day.

VICTOR: *(Voiceover, writing.)* "Cornelius Agrippa, Paracelsus, Albertus Magnus...my years in Germany have exploded their systems all. I strive to release from my memory those useless names and theories and begin anew."

JUSTINE: *(To Elizabeth.)* You must begin again, ma'am. Start over, then.

ELIZABETH: Start over? With no foundation to build upon? It is as if he has no memory whatsoever of those earlier times. He says he loves me still. But you've seen. And he is worse now than when he first returned.

JUSTINE: It's his father, ma'am. He's worn out, exhausted physically and mentally as well. You can see it in his eyes.

ELIZABETH: Windows to the soul, are they not? But they are hidden to me, Justine. They are rather recesses of his soul.

[END OF FREEVIEW]