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SF PERUSALS

Frankenstein

A Play in Two Acts

Dramatized by
Tim Kelly

From the classic by
Mary Shelley

A Samuel French Acting Edition



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Frankenstein

STORY OF THE PLAY

Victor Frankenstein, a brilliant young scientist, returns to his chateau on the shores of Lake Geneva to escape some terrible pursuer. No one can shake free the dark secret that terrifies him. Not his mother, nor his fiancee Elizabeth, nor his best friend, Henry Clerval. Even the pleading of a gypsy girl accused of murdering Victor's younger brother falls on deaf ears, for Victor has brought into being a "Creature" made from bits and pieces of the dead! The Creature tracks Victor to his sanctuary to demand a bride to share its loneliness—one as wretched as the Creature itself. Against his better judgment, Victor agrees and soon the household is invaded by murder, despair and terror! The play opens on the wedding night of Victor and Elizabeth, the very time the Creature has sworn to kill the scientist for destroying its intended mate, and ends, weeks later, in a horrific climax of dramatic suspense! In between there is enough macabre humor to relieve the mounting tension. Perhaps the truest adaptation of Mary Shelley's classic yet. Simple to stage and a guaranteed audience pleaser. Suitable for all groups.

Frankenstein

A Play in Two Acts
FOR FOUR MEN AND FOUR WOMEN

CHARACTERS
(*In Order of Appearance*)

ERNST .....*an Inspector-General of police*
SOPHIE. .....*a housekeeper*
VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN .....*a young scientist*
ELIZABETH .....*Victor's financee*
HENRY .....*Victor's friend, also a scientist*
FRAU FRANKENSTEIN .....*Victor's mother*
THE CREATURE .....*an artificially-created man*
JUSTINE .....*a gypsy girl*

SYNOPSIS

PLACE: A chateau on the shores of Lake Geneva, Switzerland.

TIME: Before the turn of the century.

ACT ONE

SCENE 1: The study of Victor Frankenstein. Evening.
SCENE 2: The same. Immediately following.
SCENE 3: The same. That evening.

ACT TWO

SCENE 1: The study. One week later.
SCENE 2: The same. Two days later.
SCENE 3: Same as Act One, Scene 1.

Frankenstein

ACT ONE

SCENE 1

SETTING: *The study of Victor Frankenstein. Down Right is a door that leads into an off-stage laboratory. Up Center is the main entrance into the room, with drapes that can be pulled across when required. There is a hallway beyond this entrance that leads off Up Right to an unseen door. Left and Right of the main entrance are rows and rows of books. French doors, also with drapes, are Stage Left with some outside garden foliage in view. A sofa is Stage Right and two fine chairs are Stage Left. Sofa and chairs are angled out to the audience for best sight lines possible. There is a desk and chair Down Left with a standing anatomy chart. This describes only the essentials. Naturally, additional stage dressing will greatly enhance the impact of the set; paintings, more books, small tables, occasional chairs, lamps, rugs, hunting trophies, vases, etc. The study is a darkish sort of enclave, shadowy but comfortable, reflecting masculine elegance and an aura of the academic.*

AT RISE: *Night. The room is softly lighted. Drapes Up Center and at the French doors are pulled aside. Moonlight illuminates the garden foliage. Stage remains empty for a moment and, then,* VOICES *behind the laboratory door.*

SOPHIE'S VOICE. (*Offstage.*) I don't understand. I don't understand any of it.

ERNST'S VOICE. It's not important what you do or do not understand. (ERNST, *a police commandant, in uniform, enters Right. He's an exacting man, well disciplined, a dedicated professional. He's followed by* SOPHIE, *the housekeeper. She's nervous and apprehensive.*)

SOPHIE. Police everywhere. In the garden. On the shores of the lake. (ERNST *has crossed Down Center, takes out his revolver, checks it.*)

ERNST. We've searched the house thoroughly.

SOPHIE. Yes, but why?

ERNST. You ask a great many questions, Sophie.

SOPHIE. I've earned that right.

ERNST. You're certain there's no other room or area of the chateau where anyone might hide? Or anything?

SOPHIE. What *thing?*

ERNST. One question at a time.

SOPHIE. (*Annoyed.*) I've been housekeeper for many years. I know of no other room or area of the chateau. (ERNST *checks the bullets.*)

ERNST. They say he's afraid of gunfire.

SOPHIE. Who? Herr Frankenstein?

ERNST. No, not him. (VOICES *from off Up Right.*)

ELIZABETH'S VOICE. (*Offstage.*) Victor, what are you doing?

VICTOR'S VOICE. (*Offstage.*) Only what tradition expects of me.

SOPHIE. They're back.

ERNST. Come on. Give them a few minutes of sanity.

SOPHIE. Sanity?

ERNST. Do as I tell you. (ERNST *moves to French doors, exits.*)

SOPHIE. (*Follows after him.*) No reception, no guests, police everywhere. Not my idea of a wedding night. (*We hear the laughter of* ELIZABETH *and shortly thereafter* VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN *appears Up Center with his bride in his arms.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Happily.*) Put me down, Victor. I'm out of breath. (VICTOR *is a young man, early twenties.*

Serious, tense, apprehensive. ELIZABETH *is younger by a year or so. She wears her bridal gown with style and clutches a bouquet of flowers.* VICTOR *puts her down and she moves toward the sofa.*)

VICTOR. Should I ring for Sophie?

ELIZABETH. What on earth for?

VICTOR. I thought you might want something to eat or drink. (*He glances nervously to the open French doors.*)

ELIZABETH. No, nothing. (*Then:*) Victor, now that we're married—won't you tell me what's been troubling you? (*He moves to the French doors, looks into the garden.*) You've been so distraught. When I speak, I'm not sure you hear what I say. When I look at you, I know your thoughts are elsewhere.

VICTOR. Forgive me, Elizabeth. (*Almost to himself.*) I have so much to be forgiven for.

ELIZABETH. (*Concerned.*) Victor? (*He turns.*) You . . . you don't regret marrying me? (*He crosses to her, takes her hand, kisses it.*)

VICTOR. I am afraid.

ELIZABETH. Afraid of what? (*Strong.*) Victor, you must tell me. You've lived these past months with some terrible private dread. I want to bring you happiness. (*Proud.*) I am Frau Frankenstein, the wife of a brilliant young scientist. Whatever troubles you, has to trouble me. I beg you, Victor. Take me into your confidence. (VICTOR *turns once again to the French doors.*) What's out there that frightens you?

VICTOR. (*Points.*) Tonight . . . this very night . . . the man who will kill me will come through those doors. (ELIZABETH *can barely speak, reacts.*)

ELIZABETH. What are you saying? (*She sits on the sofa, stunned.*)

VICTOR. I know it sounds incredible. Monstrous. All the same, it's true.

ELIZABETH. Who would want to kill you? Why? (*He sits beside her.*)

VICTOR. I ask only that you remember your love for me when you hear my words.

ELIZABETH. (*Wary.*) Go on . . .

VICTOR. Do you remember when I returned from the university at Ingolstadt?

ELIZABETH. Of course. You were in such poor health. We were all so worried for you.

VICTOR. I didn't want to return. . . . I wanted to find some icy glacier and build a funeral pyre . . . if not for myself, then for my deeds. . . . (*The stage lighting DIMS DOWN as* VICTOR *recollects the events of the past.* ELIZABETH *gets up and walks stately to the Up Center exit. Even in the dark her wedding gown will be semi-visible, so the actress should make her exit appear as part of the remembrance.* VICTOR'S *words continue in the near-blackness.*) I hadn't slept in days . . . my brain was on fire. . . . I was consumed with guilt and fear . . . and that private dread you speak of. . . . (*The stage now is in total blackness.* ELIZABETH *is out. From off Left we hear the* VOICE *of* HENRY CLERVAL.)

HENRY'S VOICE. (*Offstage.*) Victor? Victor, are you in there . . . ?(*LIGHTS DIM UP for daylight.* VICTOR *is still sitting on the sofa.*) Victor? (VICTOR *stands as* HENRY *comes in via the open French doors carrying a book.*) Ah, there you are.

VICTOR. How are you, Henry?

HENRY. (*Moves* CENTER.) Question is, how are you?

VICTOR. Constant. My temper is almost violent. My mood varies between deep depression and melancholia.

HENRY. (*Attempts to jar him out of his somberness.*) Come, come, Victor, you're away from your gloomy university. What could be more pleasant than a holiday on the shores of Lake Geneva in one's own chateau?

VICTOR. Holiday? Call it retreat. Sanctuary. Anything but holiday. I appreciate your good spirits, Henry.

I know you're trying to cheer me up. It can't be much fun for anyone having me about like this.

HENRY. You've had a slight breakdown, that's all. Understandable, considering the way you drive yourself. For a young man, you take life far too seriously. (*By now,* VICTOR *has crossed to his desk and sat down. He busies himself with the finishing of some letter.*)

VICTOR. Life *is* serious. What man does with life even more so.

HENRY. Have it your way, but there's no need to be pompous. (*The book.*) Perhaps this will cheer you up. A new thesis in biochemistry.

VICTOR. That's your field, not mine.

HENRY. Ah, but this work is by Albertus Magnus. (VICTOR *looks up.*) "Natural Philosophy and Chemical Persuasion." The book is quite fascinating, and Magnus *is* your favorite professor.

VICTOR. He was.

HENRY. You ought to read it. You haven't already purchased it?

VICTOR. No.

HENRY. Good.

VICTOR. Peculiar that you should bring up his name.

HENRY. How so?

VICTOR. I'm finishing a letter to him.

HENRY. Indeed.

VICTOR. I'm informing him that I do not intend to return to Ingolstadt.

HENRY. You mean, until you've regained your health.

VICTOR. I mean—never. (HENRY *moves to Downstage chair, sits in such a way that his body is angled to face* VICTOR *at the desk.*)

HENRY. Victor, is this because of your brother?

VICTOR. (*Thoughtfully.*) I confess William's murder is not a thing I accept easily. To live less than ten years when life holds out so much promise, and die at the hands of an unknown killer, seems to me the height of cosmic cruelty.

HENRY. Cosmic cruelty? The lad was murdered for an expensive gold cross. Obviously by a thief of the lowest kind. Vicious and unfeeling. A monster.

MOTHER'S VOICE. (*From Off Up Right.*) Victor, may I come in?

VICTOR. It's my mother. Please do not make any mention of William. She holds up extremely well, but—

HENRY. I understand. (VICTOR *rises, takes out a chain of keys, moves Up Center.*)

VICTOR. One moment, Mother. I'll unlock the door. (VICTOR *exits.* HENRY *opens the book, reads.* FRAU FRANKENSTEIN, VICTOR'S *mother, enters Up Center.* HENRY *stands.*)

MOTHER. Ah, Henry, how wonderful that you're here. (HENRY *bows politely.*)

HENRY. Always a pleasure, Frau Frankenstein. (VICTOR *enters Up Center.*)

MOTHER. I can't tell you what your visits mean to Victor. You, his best friend, have never deserted him.

HENRY. Boys together, friends together. Comrades always.

MOTHER. Did you hear that, Victor?

VICTOR. I have never doubted Henry's friendship. As I trust he will never doubt mine.

MOTHER. (*Sits on sofa.*) If you could only persuade him to get out and around. My son does nothing but lock himself here in the study as if the sound of another human voice was more than he could bear.

VICTOR. You exaggerate, Mother. (*He moves behind the sofa.*)

MOTHER. No, Victor, I do not. (*To Henry.*) He never sleeps. Sophie is at her wits' end trying to think of something that will tease his appetite. Elizabeth has become his devoted nurse, but I'm afraid my son is a bad patient. (*Takes* VICTOR'S *hand.*) I do worry about you. The doctor says—

VICTOR. (*Scoffs.*) The doctor—

MOTHER. You shouldn't scoff like that, Victor. You're a scientific man yourself.

VICTOR. There is a world of difference, Mother, between a doctor and a scientific man.

MOTHER. If there is I'm not aware of it. I only meant that you shouldn't insult him by your indifference. He has your best interests at heart. You know you can't go on the way you have. You must eat, rest. (*Angrily,* VICTOR *pulls his hand away, turns his back.*)

VICTOR. Oh, stop it, Mother. (HENRY *and* FRAU FRANKENSTEIN *exchange an embarrassed look.*)

HENRY. (*Eager to change the subject.*) And where is Elizabeth this fine day?

MOTHER. She went to the flower market. I believe she could live her life there. But she was that way even as a child. She could tell you the name of any flower that grew. Victor could pull a flower apart and tell you exactly what was inside of it, what made it grow.

HENRY. Some would find that an ideal combination. The pragmatic and the romantic.

MOTHER. (*Thinks.*) Yes, yes. That's very good, Henry. Very good, indeed. (SOPHIE *has entered Up Center.*)

SOPHIE. I'm sorry to disturb you, Frau Frankenstein.

MOTHER. What is it, Sophie?

SOPHIE. It's Ernst Hessler. (HENRY, VICTOR *and* MOTHER *tense.*)

VICTOR. I'll see him outside. (VICTOR *moves toward Up Center exit, is stopped by:*)

MOTHER. No, Victor. (*To* SOPHIE.) Show him in here, Sophie. (SOPHIE *nods, exits.*)

HENRY. Perhaps I should leave.

MOTHER. Nonsense. It's probably something quite routine about . . . the investigation.

VICTOR. I don't think you should see him. You know how upset you get.

MOTHER. Victor, it is you who gets upset. (*A second passes and* SOPHIE *again appears Up Center.*)

SOPHIE. Inspector General Hessler. (ERNST *enters Up Center, moves to* FRAU FRANKENSTEIN.)

ERNST. I am sorry to intrude, Frau Frankenstein.

MOTHER. You are always welcome in my house, Ernst. (*She holds out her hand. He kisses it in a perfunctory manner.*) You know Henry, of course. Our neighbor.

ERNST. (*Slight bow.*) Herr Clerval. (*To* VICTOR.) Victor. (VICTOR *nods.*)

MOTHER. You'll stay for tea?

ERNST. I'm afraid not.

VICTOR. Then this is a professional visit?

ERNST. Yes.

MOTHER. Something . . . something about William's . . . murder? (ERNST *looks to* HENRY.) Henry is a dear and trusted friend of this family. You may speak freely in front of him.

ERNST. As you wish. (*To business.*) We have William's cross. (*Takes it from some pocket. All react.*)

VICTOR. Who had it?

ERNST. A girl by the name of Justine tried to sell it in Geneva. Unfortunately for her, the buyer was one of our informants.

HENRY. A girl?

ERNST. A bad sort. She travels with horse dealers. Gypsies. Her kind would cut a throat for a tablespoon.

MOTHER. (*Repulsed.*) Please.

ERNST. An unfortunate choice of words. Forgive me.

VICTOR. There can be no mistake?

ERNST. They were encamped on the lake shore the day of William's murder. We know your brother visited the encampment. He was seen there. It's a popular spot for local boys. The girl was seen talking to him, admiring the cross at his neck. The night of the murder the gypsies broke camp and moved on.

HENRY. Hardly seems sufficient to prove this girl guilty.

ERNST. She has a bad record. We have her on file.

MOTHER. She has confessed?

ERNST. Far from it. She denies any knowledge of the crime.

MOTHER. If that is so, how can you be so positive?

ERNST. Because of the absurd story she made up to cover her deed.

VICTOR. What story?

ERNST. She claims a man gave her the cross.

HENRY. Is that so extraordinary?

ERNST. Ah, but this man was no ordinary mortal. He was large and stitched together like a rag doll.

VICTOR. *What!*

ERNST. She had the impudence to offer that myth to me. I thought I heard them all, but a large man stitched together was a new one.

VICTOR. *No!*

MOTHER. Victor, are you all right?

VICTOR. (*To* ERNST *crossing to the French doors.*) Why did you have to bring this news?

ERNST. It is my duty. I assure you, Victor, I had no idea it would upset you in this manner.

MOTHER. (*Stands.*) My son has been under a doctor's care. He's not himself at all. Forgive him.

VICTOR. (*To* ERNST.) Get out.

HENRY. Victor, get a hold of yourself.

VICTOR. *Get out, I said.* (ERNST *bows to* VICTOR, *nods to* HENRY.)

MOTHER. I'll see you to the door.

ERNST. Thank you, Frau Frankenstein. (*She leads the way.*)

MOTHER. I wonder, Ernst, might I have the cross?

ERNST. I'm afraid not. Evidence.

MOTHER. I understand.

ERNST. When the case is closed, I'll see that it's returned. (*She glances nervously at* VICTOR. MOTHER *and* ERNST *are out.* HENRY *stands.*)

HENRY. Was that necessary? If you go on this way,

there's nothing ahead but disaster for you. You've got to take the doctor's advice.

VICTOR. Did you believe him?

HENRY. The doctor?

VICTOR. (*Bitterly.*) No, not the doctor. Ernst. What he said about that girl's story.

HENRY. I have not reason not to believe him.

VICTOR. "Stitched together like a rag doll."

HENRY. The girl was lying.

VICTOR. Was she?

HENRY. It's as simple as that—a lie. Nothing more.

VICTOR. I assure you even simplicity can turn into something twisted and evil. Today's exhilaration can fade quickly into tomorrow's grief.

HENRY. (*Irritated by* VICTOR'S *gloominess.*) Can't you say a single sentence without decorating it with crepe?

VICTOR. (*Directly.*) The girl was not lying.

HENRY. Be reasonable.

VICTOR. (*Furious.*) Don't patronize me! I tell you the girl spoke the truth.

HENRY. I will not stand here and listen to this raving. (HENRY *moves to the Up Center exit.*)

VICTOR. (*Distraught.*) Henry, if our friendship means anything at all. I ask you to stay. I plead with you to stay.

HENRY. (*Turns.*) On one condition.

VICTOR. What is that?

HENRY. The Victor Frankenstein who left this chateau for the university was not the same man who returned here for sanctuary as you call it. Something happened to him during that time he was gone. I want to know what it was, and unless you are prepared to tell me of your affliction—

VICTOR. (*Cutting him off.*) Yes, yes. I intend to. I want to. I must. (*Moves to him.*) You are my last hope. What I am going to tell you will chill the marrow of your mortal bones.

HENRY. Let me be the judge of whether or not my 'mortal bones' will freeze. (*Quickly,* VICTOR *crosses to the desk and from some drawer pulls a ledger, various papers and documents.*)

VICTOR. If I appear unsettled and half-mad, there is a reason.

HENRY. If you're referring to Ernst's visit I can only comment that it is unjust to blame the messenger for the message.

VICTOR. You think that's why I cried out?

HENRY. What else am I to think?

VICTOR. (*Points to ledger, papers, etc.*) The secret of my unrest lies here. In these documents and papers. The recorded crimes of Victor Frankenstein. (VICTOR *moves toward the center of the room. Curious,* HENRY *crosses to the desk and looks over the material. Eventually,* HENRY *sits behind the desk.* VICTOR *moves about for the best stage picture as he speaks.*) You think that whatever happened began at the university. You are wrong. (*Points to laboratory door.*) It began behind that laboratory door. As a boy, science and biology consumed me, as it did you—far more than the fever that now plagues my brain. I was more advanced in my studies than even you realized. The university merely stimulated me to press on into the secret that has baffled men from the moment they first sucked breath.

HENRY. What secret?

VICTOR. I often asked myself from where did the principle of life proceed?

HENRY. A bold question.

VICTOR. Yet we are always on the brink of discovering something new and strange and bold. Our cowardice or carelessness defeat us. We restrain our inquiries in fear of what we might discover. We fear the unknown and long to embrace it. I had one passion and only one. To examine the causes of life. And to do that I first had to have recourse to death.

HENRY. Death?

VICTOR. I became acquainted with the science of anatomy in a way that was zealous, accelerated. I observed the natural decay and corruption of the human body.

HENRY. In the dissecting room of the university, you mean. (*As* VICTOR *is speaking, his passion and emotional involvement is painfully obvious. He rants, he gestures, he pauses, he speaks clearly, intelligently, persuasively. Always, with his words, there is the awesome realization that what he speaks might be true and this horror is conveyed to* HENRY, *who listens in a state of morbid fascination.*)

VICTOR. (*Contemptuous.*) No, I do not mean in the dissecting room of the university.

HENRY. What do you mean, then?

VICTOR. I mean that the charnel-house became my haunt. I lived with the stench of decay in my nostrils. A church graveyard was not a holy place to me. It was, instead, only the receptacle of bodies deprived of life.

HENRY. I don't believe you.

VICTOR. Then you are a fool. I saw how the fine form of man was degraded and wasted. I beheld the corruption of death and studied until my senses no longer knew the hour, the day, the week. And finally in the midst of my darkness a sudden light broke in upon me —a light so brilliant and wondrous, yet so simple, that while I became dizzy with the prospect of success, I was surprised that among so many men of genius I alone, Victor Frankenstein, should be reserved to discover so astonishing a secret.

HENRY. (*Annoyed with* VICTOR'S *mood.*) That again.

VICTOR. I asked for your friendship, not your skepticism.

HENRY. You have both. Go on.

VICTOR. The stages of the discovery were distinct and probable. Others could have discovered what I did. Albertus Magnus, for one. But brilliant minds must match their gifts with boldness and imagination, not be earthbound by the improbable. After days and nights of in-

credible labor and fatigue, I succeeded in discovering the cause of generation and life. I was capable of bestowing animation upon lifeless matter.

HENRY. That's not possible, Victor.

VICTOR. (*Laughs.*) You think not? You, too, are earthbound. When I found so astonishing a power placed within my hands, I hesitated a long time before I decided how to employ it.

HENRY. And how did you?

VICTOR. (*Flat, unemotional.*) I began the creation of a human being.

HENRY. (*Incredulous.*) You did what? (VICTOR *sits, half-enjoying his dreadful recollection and the effect it's having on* HENRY.)

VICTOR. In a solitary chamber at the top of my rooming house, I kept a workshop of filthy creation.

HENRY. (*Stands.*) How could you "create" another human being?

VICTOR. With considerable dedication and a strong stomach. The city morgue and the charity hospital furnished my materials. From one, I stole a hand. From another, I purchased a leg. On dark nights the graveyard proved productive in direct proportion to the energy I was willing to expend in opening a grave.

HENRY. No more, Victor! Enough!

VICTOR. I became nervous to a painful degree. The fall of a leaf startled me, and I shunned everyone as if I were guilty of a crime. I collected the instruments of life around my table, and when I finished I fell asleep across my cot, troubled by dreams.

HENRY. (*Moves toward him.*) I should think so. And that was the end of your experiment?

VICTOR. If only it could have been. I dreamed I saw the grave worms crawling in the folds of my father's funeral shroud. I startled from my sleep in horror, and I beheld the life I created with these hands staring down at me, one hand outstretched as if the Creature

were imploring some aid. (*Deep breath.*) There. Now you know.

HENRY. (*Convinced* VICTOR *is insane.*) I know what you have told me.

VICTOR. You still don't understand?

HENRY. What more can there be?

VICTOR. Ernst . . . William's murder . . . the gypsy girl. Think, Henry, think. (*Recalls* ERNST'S *words.*) "Ah, but this man was no ordinary mortal. He was large and stitched together like a rag doll." It was he, my Creature, made from the bits and pieces of other men, who murdered little William. (*Rises, seizes* HENRY *by the shoulders.*) Don't you understand? He's found me! He's followed me here to Geneva.

HENRY. If what you say is true, why would he do that? Why would he murder William? Why would he hate you? You gave him life. No, it's too preposterous.

VICTOR. You must listen!

HENRY. (*Breaking away.*) I've heard more than enough.

VICTOR. I'm not mad!

HENRY. (*Exits Up Center.*) You will be if you continue this way.

VICTOR. Henry! (*He moves after him.*) I asked for your help. Do not desert me! (*Suddenly,* VICTOR *freezes. It's as if a cold wind has blown across his heart. Afraid, he turns and sees the* CREATURE [*see production notes*], *who has entered via the open French doors, standing inside the room, his arms outstretched as if to embrace the horrified Frankenstein.*) Henry, Henry! (*Turns to* CREATURE.) Devil! Murderer! (CREATURE *takes a step toward his creator.* HENRY *returns, sees* CREATURE, *reacts.* VICTOR *backs away.*) Do you still doubt me? See for yourself. Stitched together like a demon from hell. Here standing before you is the proof of my infamy! (HENRY *can't accept it. He's too shocked for any action.*)

HENRY. God help you, Victor. (*Then:*) God help us all.

CREATURE. (*Slowly, dramatically, an emotional appeal.*) Frankenstein . . . help *me.*

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 2

AT RISE: *Night. Drapes have been drawn across the French doors, giving the study a "closed in" feeling. Lamps glow. The* CREATURE *is seated in the Downstage chair, which has been turned around to face the audience squarely. The anatomy chart has been placed beside the* CREATURE. HENRY, *in shirtsleeves, is examining him. He's wildly excited.*

HENRY. (*Moving the* CREATURE'S *head from side to side.*) . . . And to the best of your knowledge, you had no adverse reaction to the anaesthetic?

CREATURE. No.

HENRY. No paralysis of any kind?

CREATURE. No. (HENRY *moves to the desk and makes some notes. He picks up a measuring tape or something similar and returns to the* CREATURE. *First he studies the chart and, then, he proceeds to take head measurements.*)

HENRY. I'm rather amazed about the eyelids. Moist, lubricated by circulating the tears. And the cornea—clear, transparent. The membrane functions normally. Stand up, please. (*The* CREATURE *obeys.*) Run in place. (*The* CREATURE *begins to run in place, fast.*) No, no, no. Slowly. (*The* CREATURE *slows down.*) Excellent. You may be seated. (HENRY *returns to the desk and picks up a paper weight, crosses back to the* CREATURE, *hands it to him.*) I want to test the strength of your

grip. (*The* CREATURE *holds out the paper weight and proceeds to crush it with ease. See Production Notes.* HENRY *is amazed, takes back the weight and places it on the desk.*) I would say the end results are not yet cosmetically satisfactory, and there is a decided tendency toward hyperthydroidism, but in all other respects you are remarkable. I would have thought if such an experiment succeeded the conclusion would be a chronic invalid. (*More notes.*) I was wrong for doubting Victor.

CREATURE. Is that all I am?

HENRY. How do you mean?

CREATURE. An experiment.

HENRY. (*Puts down his notes.*) Far more than an experiment, my strange friend. You are living proof that worn out parts can be replaced. You offer hope for an extended life span. (VICTOR *enters from laboratory, putting on his jacket. He stands listening, unobserved by the* CREATURE.)

CREATURE. I am a monster. A living thing that is dead. I am alone, lonely. All men shun Frankenstein's creation.

VICTOR. And why shouldn't they? Murderer.

HENRY. Did you sleep at all?

VICTOR. I never sleep. Not any more. All I do is dream of horrors. (VICTOR *sits on the sofa.*)

HENRY. (*Crosses to* VICTOR.) This is no horror. Whatever your technique, you have opened a special field of surgical study.

VICTOR. (*Unimpressed.*) If one is a sadistic vivisectionist.

HENRY. He has the power of locomotion. Complete mastery of speech, reasoning, deduction. His parts will not wear out.

VICTOR. A living machine.

HENRY. Yes, if you will.

VICTOR. Beware, Henry. The excitement in your voice betrays you. You have caught my fever. (HENRY *crosses to the* CREATURE.)

HENRY. No extra fingers, no missing cartilage. Blood pulsates through his veins as it does through yours and mine.

VICTOR. Blood of dead men.

HENRY. (*Insistent.*) This is *no* monster. You have engineered a finely tooled machine powered by an intricate network of muscles and tendons. The grafting is amateurish, repulsive, but it suffices.

VICTOR. You have forgotten something.

HENRY. I shouldn't wonder.

VICTOR. (*Stands.*) There sits the hideous "thing" that has come to kill me.

CREATURE. That is no longer true.

VICTOR. I curse the day I gave you life.

CREATURE. I expected this reception. All men hate the wretched. How I must be hated then. I am miserable beyond all living things. I did not always hate you, Victor Frankenstein. The night you brought me to life, I rushed from your rooms believing the world would welcome me. I thought myself no different than others. I watched you sleeping and saw no great dissimilarity between us.

VICTOR. That is disgusting.

HENRY. No, it is not. You brought him into existence. It is perfectly natural that he would think you and he were both of a kind.

VICTOR. (*Incensed.*) Both of a kind!

CREATURE. I am one of no kind. An outcast. Wherever I showed myself people ran in terror and repulsion. I had no friend. In the winter I froze sleeping in the hills. In the summer I hid in the woods.

HENRY. Were you harmed in any way? Physically, I mean.

CREATURE. Hunters came into the woods searching for game. I had never seen a gun or heard its sound. It frightened me and I ran, but they followed after. (*Touches his shoulder.*) A great pain tore into me, and I saw my own blood for the first time. It sickened me.

HENRY. You hear that, Victor? He felt pain. He knows fear.

VICTOR. As I do. As you should. (*To* CREATURE.) Go from this house. Leave me.

CREATURE. Have I not suffered enough? Now you seek to increase my misery?

VICTOR. Is that why you have sought me out? To come here for a hiding place? Is that why you murdered a defenseless boy?

CREATURE. (*Stands.*) I did not murder him. You did, Frankenstein. (VICTOR *stiffens.* HENRY *moves toward the desk, watching the duo confront one another.*)

VICTOR. You dare say that to me?

CREATURE. A creature such as I must dare. I saw a child coming toward me. Suddenly, as I gazed on him, an idea seized me that this little creature had lived too short a time to understand the horror of deformity. If I could educate him before others imparted their prejudice, I should not be so desolate in this peopled earth. I would not be alone. For of all curses, that is the one I loathe above all others.

HENRY. (*Curious more than accusative.*) But why murder?

CREATURE. I had no such intention. At first. I seized him as he passed. As soon as he beheld my form, he placed his hands before his eyes and uttered a shrill cry. "Let me go!" he screamed. "Monster! Ugly wretch! Let me go or I will tell Victor. He will punish you! Victor Frankenstein, my brother, will punish you!"

VICTOR. (*Visibly shaken.*) Poor, poor William.

CREATURE. I swelled with hellish triumph. I thought, I, too, can create desolation. My enemy is not invulnerable. This death will carry despair to him, and a thousand other miseries shall torment and destroy him. Frankenstein will suffer as I have suffered. (HENRY *and* VICTOR *say nothing for a moment and, then, the* CREATURE *sits.*) Have you suffered, Frankenstein?

VICTOR. More than I would have thought possible.

CREATURE. Then I am satisfied. You have created me, but your work is not finished.

VICTOR. It is . . . finished.

CREATURE. You have created me. You must destroy me.

HENRY. (*Alarmed.*) What!

VICTOR. (*A thoughtful pause.*) We are in accord. At last.

CREATURE. Then you'll do it?

VICTOR. Yes.

HENRY. Victor!

CREATURE. When?

VICTOR. Tonight.

HENRY. Victor, I protest. (VICTOR'S *manner is efficient and direct. The unemotional scientist. He crosses to the laboratory door, opens it.*)

VICTOR. We can't risk having you seen. You'll be safe in there until I'm ready. Make no sound. (*The* CREATURE *stands, crosses for the laboratory.*)

CREATURE. Remember this—my agony is greater than yours. (*The* CREATURE *enters the laboratory.*)

VICTOR. No one ever goes in there. But to be safe . . . (VICTOR *locks the door.*)

HENRY. You cannot be serious about his request.

VICTOR. Ah, but I am. He has brought me my salvation. (*As they discourse,* VICTOR *goes to the drapes masking the French doors, opens them. Early morning sun streams in.*)

HENRY. It would be murder.

VICTOR. You cannot murder a walking inventory of borrowed human parts.

HENRY. That's absurd and you know it.

VICTOR. Call it anything you like. Execution, a balancing of the scales. Retribution, if you will. Anything but murder. There is blood on my hands for having created him.

HENRY. And you think that by destroying him you can wash away that blood. Is that it?

VICTOR. It is my only hope.

HENRY. Then I appeal to you as a man of science. I do not speak now as a dear friend. I speak to you as another who is dedicated to pushing back the barriers of ignorance.

VICTOR. Barriers? (*Points to laboratory door.*) I crumbled one barrier and look at the result.

HENRY. I have looked and what I've found is both miraculous and marvelous. This "creature" is not at fault. He was an innocent thrust into a world that has no comfortable place for the unordinary. He had every right to expect gentleness and understanding. Instead, he found that mankind itself is very often monstrous.

VICTOR. There is nothing you can say that I haven't said to myself a hundred times. (*Crosses to desk, grabs some photograph, moves to* HENRY, *puts the frame into his hand.*) Here, look into the face of William. You speak of an innocent. There is your innocent. My young brother.

HENRY. Victor, be sensible. I am speaking to your intellect, not your emotion.

VICTOR. Damn your intellect.

HENRY. And damn your emotion! (*From Off—Up Right.*)

MOTHER'S VOICE. Victor, Victor?

VICTOR. (*Takes out his keys.*) Say nothing of this. To anyone.

HENRY. For the time being.

VICTOR. Return this evening. I will need your assistance.

MOTHER'S VOICE. Victor? (VICTOR *exits Up Center with the key ready to unlock the hallway door.* HENRY *moves to the desk and puts down the framed photograph.*) I shan't hear another word. If you will not come to the breakfast table, you shali eat in the study. (*By now, she has entered.* VICTOR *stands Left of Up Center entrance.* MOTHER *wears an attractive robe over her nightgown.*) Henry? Here so early?

HENRY. I'm afraid I never left.

MOTHER. (*Sees anatomy chart, disorder on the desk. She sighs protectively.*) I was counting on you to help Victor *rest.* And look at this. It's as if you were boys again. Up all night with your studies and vile smelling test tubes. You'll stay for breakfast?

HENRY. Sleep at the moment is more appealing than nourishment.

MOTHER. I shall be angry with you if you encourage Victor in any work. It would be quite destructive.

HENRY. (*Meaning the* CREATURE.) I agree with you. If you'll excuse me? (*Takes his jacket from some chair, puts it on.*) It's a lovely day outside. I'll enjoy the walk home. I have a great deal to think about. Until later, Victor. (*At French doors.*) Frau Frankenstein. (MOTHER *nods,* HENRY *exits.* VICTOR *moves Down Center.*)

MOTHER. (*Touches his face.*) If you could see your eyes. I can count every tiny vein.

VICTOR. I would like to be alone, Mother.

MOTHER. No, Victor. I have given in to your whims and ways far too often. Elizabeth is taking you into the city this morning. She has shopping to do.

VICTOR. You think that interests me? Shopping!

MOTHER. No, I'm sure the shopping will bore you, but Elizabeth's company will be pleasant. (*He turns away.*) Won't it? (SOPHIE *enters Up Center with a breakfast tray.*) Ah, Sophie. Good, good. Put the tray on Victor's desk.

VICTOR. I am *not* hungry. (MOTHER *ignores him. Moves the anatomy chart back to its proper position.*)

MOTHER. I am going to insist that you allow Sophie in here to clean.

SOPHIE. I haven't been in here for so long, Herr Frankenstein. Everything is covered with dust. It's not healthy to breathe dust.

VICTOR. Is that your medical opinion?

MOTHER. There is no need to be rude.

VICTOR. I have asked that you respect my wishes. Do not enter unless the door is unlocked.

MOTHER. You allow Henry to come and go at will through the garden.

VICTOR. That is another matter.

MOTHER. Neither Sophie, Elizabeth nor I have ever bothered you about your laboratory. Although, at times, the smells have been unbearable. However, other people do come into the study. You're not being fair. Let Sophie clean.

VICTOR. (*Sits on sofa, resigned.*) If only all matters could be reduced to such elements. To eat a breakfast, to go shopping, to clean a room.

MOTHER. (*Trying to pull him from the doldrums.*) Sophie has a surprise for you. (*She crosses back to the chair in which the* CREATURE *was sitting, puts it back into position.*)

SOPHIE. Strawberries. First of the season, Herr Frankenstein.

VICTOR. Leave the tray.

MOTHER. Sophie, bring me the strawberries. (SOPHIE *picks up the bowl, crosses to* MOTHER, *hands her the bowl.*) Eat the strawberries, Victor. (*He laughs.*) Is that so amusing?

VICTOR. Mother . . . you're so good . . . so comforting . . . strawberries. Strawberries! (*He laughs again.* MOTHER *and* SOPHIE *exchange an amazed look and they, too, get caught in* VICTOR'S *mood and join in.* ELIZABETH *enters Up Center dressed most attractively. She carries a hat box, looks at the laughing trio, amazed.*)

ELIZABETH. (*Bright smile.*) I'm sorry I wasn't here a moment earlier. I like a good joke as well as the next.

VICTOR. (*Smiling.*) Not that, not that at all. It's just that I was struck by the incongruity of my dark moods and my mother's dish of strawberries.

SOPHIE. They're perfectly good strawberries, sir. The

man who sold them to me is reliable. I've never had any complaints about his produce.

VICTOR. I'm sure you haven't. (*He takes the strawberries and begins to eat. The women are delighted.*) Delicious.

MOTHER. (*Sigh of relief.*) Come along, Sophie. We'll leave them alone. (SOPHIE *starts out, followed by* MOTHER, *who turns Up Center.*) And you will let Sophie clean in here?

VICTOR. (*Eating.*) Yes, yes.

MOTHER. When, dear?

VICTOR. (*Anxious to close the subject.*) Soon. (MOTHER *gives a gesture of resignation to* ELIZABETH, *exits.* ELIZABETH *moves to some table, or the desk, and puts down the hat box.*)

ELIZABETH. (*The breakfast tray.*) I put the bud vase on the tray myself. Did you notice the petals?

VICTOR. No. What is the flower?

ELIZABETH. There isn't any. I only wanted to see if you'd notice.

VICTOR. (*Puts down the dish.*) I have been insensitive, haven't I?

ELIZBETH. I understand. No one here but solicitous women who would smother you with trivialities and fresh strawberries.

VICTOR. Most men would find that an enviable condition. (ELIZABETH *opens the hat box, takes out a wedding veil.*)

ELIZABETH. I can't make up my mind about this veil. I thought we might return it to the shop and see what else they had.

VICTOR. Not a subtle hint.

ELIZABETH. Victor, listen to me. I don't pretend I'm not disturbed by your strange moods and temperament. You're different from other men, true. Perhaps that's the very quality that attracts me. We've grown up together and I have always loved you. I don't know what troubles you. You're complex and difficult. I'm not blind

to that. But, Victor, don't close your heart to me. Don't keep your love from me.

VICTOR. If only I could be honest.

ELIZABETH. (*Crosses to him, puts the veil on sofa.*) I want to help you in life. I want to be with you. We were companions as children. We'll be companions now. Only closer, dearer.

VICTOR. (*Recites the cliche with an almost hopeful* smile.) And you'll read to me, and cook for me, and comfort me when I'm alone and others might turn against me?

ELIZABETH. Don't make light of such things, Victor. They count for something. I would do all those things. Gladly.

VICTOR. Then a wife is truly a wonderful thing.

ELIZABETH. Let me be wonderful for you, Victor. I have never loved anyone else. I never shall. You will never be alone. I promise you that. (VICTOR *stands, takes her hand, kisses it.*)

VICTOR. Dear, dear Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH. (*Happily.*) Come along now . . . we'll have the morning together. We'll visit the flower market. (VICTOR *seems to brighten.*)

VICTOR. My dark moods will soon be at an end. And I promise you that, Elizabeth. Yes, yes, by all means—the flower market. (ELIZABETH *holds out her hand and* VICTOR *crosses to her and they sweep out the French doors, delighted in each other's company. A moment passes and, then, the door to the laboratory opens. In her happiness,* ELIZABETH *has forgotten the bridal veil. The* CREATURE *has obviously been eavesdropping. He moves to the sofa and picks up the veil. He finds it a thing of wonder and pleasure. Over and over in his hands he turns it, as if he almost expected it to change shape. Tenderly, lovingly, he caresses it to his cheek.*)

CREATURE. (*Smiles in anticipation.*) Wife.

CURTAIN

ACT ONE

SCENE 3

AT RISE: *That evening. Drapes are drawn at Up Center. At the French doors, the drapes are pulled to the sides revealing a moonlit night, one door open.* VICTOR *is at his desk, poring over books and assorted notes, a lamp burning beside him. He works at a feverish pace, checking and re-checking, making notations in his ledgers. He wears a white smock.*

VICTOR. (*Barely audible.*) . . . The bronchial tubes and then into the chest cavity . . . the tendons and the attached muscle and tissues . . . the large veins into the muscular structure of the heart . . . no resuturing required . . . totally sever the arm . . . the leg . . . complete reversal of transplantation . . . (*The* CREATURE *quietly comes from the laboratory and stands watching* VICTOR. *The scientist is wholly preoccupied and is unaware of the intrusion.*) . . . the spinal column compressed . . . no attempt to minimize of the loss of blood to brain tissue . . . yes, yes . . .

CREATURE. Frankenstein.

VICTOR. (*Looks up.*) It won't be long now. You shall have your wish. I'm waiting for Henry. I'll need his assistance.

CREATURE. How will you do it?

VICTOR. I put you together piece by piece. Your whole anatomical structure is a patchwork of transplanted blood vessels, tissues, bones. I shall simply reverse the process. You will cease to exist piece by piece. You needn't worry. I'll attack the brain first. You'll feel nothing.

CREATURE. And the "pieces."

VICTOR. The disposal of the "pieces" is not the concern of surgery. Still, if you must know—

CREATURE. (*Interrupts.*) Yes . . . tell me.

VICTOR. Several options. Quicklime . . . acid . . . burial.

CREATURE. None of those, Frankenstein.

VICTOR. You have something else in mind?

CREATURE. I will live.

VICTOR. (*Doesn't understand.*) No, you will not live. Once the surgery is finished you will be *erased* from this earth.

CREATURE. (*Repeats.*) I will live, Frankenstein.

VICTOR. What the devil do you mean?

CREATURE. I have a passion which you alone can gratify.

VICTOR. I have vowed to grant your request. Tonight your agony ends and my life begins anew.

CREATURE. No, Frankenstein. *My* life begins anew. (VICTOR *slowly rises, moves in front of his desk.*)

VICTOR. What are you saying?

CREATURE. We will not part until you grant my wish.

VICTOR. You wish for more than death?

CREATURE. Yes. More than death. Life. This time not for me, but for another.

VICTOR. Another?

CREATURE. I am alone and miserable.

VICTOR. Tonight I end that misery.

CREATURE. Men will not associate with me, but one as deformed and horrible as myself would not deny herself to me. My companion must be of the same species and have the same defects as I.

VICTOR. No such creature exists.

CREATURE. You must create her. (VICTOR *is struck dumb, he leans back against the desk for support.*)

VICTOR. I thought you sought oblivion.

CREATURE. What I ask of you is reasonable and moderate.

VICTOR. Reasonable!

CREATURE. I demand one of another sex, but as hideous as myself. I demand a *bride* for Frankenstein's creature.

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