

The Nightmare of Frankenstein

Adapted by
Edward J. Walsh
and Robert Thomas Noll
from the novel by Mary Shelley

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STORY OF THE PLAY

The House of Frankenstein is in turmoil. Victor Frankenstein, engaged to a woman he deeply loves, has fallen into a fit of despair. The cause of Victor's behavior is, in fact, a Creature he brought to life. Contrary to what Victor intended, however, his Creature is hideous to look upon. So much so, that the Creature has covered his face so he won't have to see his own reflection.

Desperate, the forlorn Creature strikes a bargain with Victor: If the young scientist will create a suitable bride for him, the Creature will retire with her to the cold and distant Arctic, never to be seen again.

When Agatha, a blind housemaid, senses the "faintest pulse of life" and tries to touch the bride's body still being created, the Creature pushes the maid away, accidentally killing her. A furious Victor shouts, "The life of your bride for Agatha's!" and destroys the Creature's unfinished mate.

The Creature vows a terrible revenge and Victor must set out to destroy the very life he created.

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CAST OF CHARACTERS
(2 m, 2 w, 4 flexible)

MALE ROLES:

DR. VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN: A physician.
THE CREATURE

FEMALE ROLES:

AGATHA: Young, blind servant.
ELIZABETH: Victor's fiancée.

FLEXIBLE ROLES:

FRITZ/ FRIDA: A servant.
DR. HENRY/HARRIET CLERVAL: A physician.
POLICE OFFICER
WALTON/WINNIFRED: A sea captain.

SETTING

Inside the chateau of Victor Frankenstein in Geneva,
Switzerland, in the late 1880s and a sea captain's cabin
onboard a ship in the North Sea.

*"Did I request thee, Maker, from the clay
To mould me man?
Did I solicit thee From darkness to promote me?"
-- Paradise Lost (X. 743-5)*

Scene 1

(AT RISE: In front and inside Frankenstein's laboratory. Middle of the night. FX: Lightning and thunder. From the darkness appears FRITZ arranging trunks and boxes. FRITZ notices audience members and begins to speak to them.)

FRITZ: This old back tells me that these two months of dragging and pushing are shortening my life by half. So much clanking and banging about at night. A body can't sleep without a dose of something to calm the nerves. *(Takes a flask from his pocket and drinks.)* A spot of port works wonders. *(Drinks.)* It's gotten so these old eyes see what isn't there and don't see what is there. *(Confidentially.)* With what's been going on about this place, it's what I don't see that frightens me. There is more to this house of Frankenstein than meets the eye. Much more, I say. There is a stranger among us. Believe it. A stranger who casts a shadow three times my own. The very thought of what I saw runs my blood cold. *(Drinks.)*

The night of the last full moon, it was. Wind howling and windows rattling like they would shatter. My missus (mister) was tossing and turning so—poor pet—I left our room to fetch her/him a snifter of something calming. And naturally I needed something myself against the evening chill. I was taking a small libation in the parlor. I had sat myself down for a moment with my back to the window, moonlight came through it so that the room seemed all silvery. I had just poured myself a second snifter when I beheld what I didn't believe. *(Pause.)* A shadow. But such a shadow as I never saw before or want to see again. It appeared suddenly. Stretched the length of the room and upwards the wall opposite me. A man's shadow...but large.

My first thought was to leap from the unseen place where I sat and attack that man. Only a sudden sharp pain in my poor back prevented it. If not, I'd have been at the intruder's throat. By the time my attack subsided, he fled. Quick and silent as a cat, I might add.

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FRITZ: *(Cont'd.)* Two nights ago after a heavy rain I was on my way to the stable. What did I find? *(Pause.)* A footprint. By the light of my torch I saw a footprint that measured twice my own. I tell you there is a stranger among us.

(SFX: OFFSTAGE screams from VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN.)

FRITZ: And that screaming. That's the Baron again, Doctor Victor Frankenstein. Lord only knows what ails him. Perhaps Doctor Clerval, an old friend of the family, can provide the answer.

(DOCTOR CLERVAL enters and moves to FRITZ.)

CLERVAL: Please tell Doctor Frankenstein, I'm here.

FRITZ: He's worse than ever, Doctor. I hope you can help.

CLERVAL: I wouldn't have come this far this fast if I did not believe that I might find it in my power to help Victor.

(FRITZ exits.)

CLERVAL: *(To audience.)* As soon as I received the message about Victor's illness from his fiancée, I dropped everything and rushed here. But there was a delay changing trains...and this storm. His late father was one of my dearest and closest friends. His father was the man I admired more than any other.

(VICTOR enters.)

VICTOR: I asked you not to come.

CLERVAL: I'm here to help.

VICTOR: Please leave.

CLERVAL: I'm your friend, Victor. Here to help you.

VICTOR: I don't want your help. Get out!

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(CLERVAL takes out pocket watch from pocket and begins to swing it rhythmically.)

CLERVAL: Remember how we used to talk? How you, your father and I would spend days in the mountains, just the three of us?

VICTOR: Of course, I remember.

CLERVAL: Think back. At night in our cabin we'd talk for hours about science and medicine. Sometimes we'd talk until the sun came up.

VICTOR: Yes, we would talk.

CLERVAL: Those were wonderful times, Victor, remember?

VICTOR: I—

CLERVAL: Remember?

VICTOR: I—I—

CLERVAL: Yes, Victor?

VICTOR: I remember.

CLERVAL: Yes...very good. Now what do you remember?

VICTOR: I remember...a trip in the mountains. We were near Mount Blanc...a thunderstorm struck. We rushed towards our cabin—the three of us. We saw a bolt of lightning strike a towering tree. It hit like a finger of fire...in an instant the tree became a charred mass. Do you remember that, Henry?

CLERVAL: How could one forget?

VICTOR: I didn't! I never forgot.

CLERVAL: Victor, it was nature unleashing its energy. I remember it so vividly.

VICTOR: And so do I because it gave me the first inkling of what man might do if he could harness that awesome energy.

CLERVAL: Go on, Victor.

VICTOR: He might do the greatest good or the greatest evil. If he could summon the pure power of energy to do his will, he could use it for destruction or for creation, for death or for life.

CLERVAL: Yes, destruction and creation are the two great mysteries men of science will never fully understand.

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