

FRANKENSTEIN

Mary Shelley

FRANKENSTEIN

 TIMELESS CLASSICS





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| Opening Letter |

To: Mrs. Saville, England

August 5, 17__

Dear Sister,

First, I want to tell you that I am alive and well. My dream of traveling to the North Pole seems closer than ever to being fulfilled. But second, I want to tell you a strange story about what has been happening.

Our ship is nearly closed in by ice and fog. Now and then the seas churn, and huge chunks of ice break up. The other day, I stood looking out over the vast plains of ice. Suddenly, about half a mile away, I saw a dog sled going north. The figure in the carriage had the shape of a man, but it was the size of a giant. He was gone before I could see more.

The next morning, we came upon a second sled. Only one dog remained alive. There was a man, nearly frozen, in the sled. We got him on board and carried him to my cabin. I never saw

a man in so wretched a condition. Two days passed before he was able to speak. We have become friends. He is a kind, intelligent, gentle, and well-educated man. I am very fond of him. Something, however, is troubling him deeply.

Last night, he told me that he has a story to tell me. Tomorrow, he will begin it. I plan to write it down in his own words as much as possible.

*Your loving brother,
R. Walton*

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Frankenstein Begins His Story

My name is Victor Frankenstein. I grew up in Geneva, Switzerland. My family is one of the best-known families there. For a long time I was my parents' only child. But that changed when I was about five years old.

My parents passed a week at Lake Como in Italy. My mother was always interested in helping the poor. One day, they visited a poor farmer who had five hungry children.

One of the children, a little girl named Elizabeth, attracted my mother more than the others. She wasn't like the other children in looks or in personality. The farmer's wife told my mother about the girl. She was not their child, but the daughter of a nobleman. The girl's mother had died, and her father had put her in the farmer's care. The father then went off to war

and had not been heard from since. Since then, hard times had come to the farmer. He had very little money and four children of his own.

My mother had always wanted a little girl. She asked the farmer if she and my father could adopt the girl. Although the farmer and his wife loved the child, they knew she would have a much happier life with my family. So they let my parents take Elizabeth.

Soon Elizabeth Lavenza became more than my sister. She became the beautiful and adored companion of my childhood. We called each other “cousin” and shared a deep love until the day she died.

When I was seven years old, my brother Ernest was born. At that time my parents gave up their travels and stayed home. We had a house in Geneva. We also had a place in the country, on the shore of a lake, where we stayed most of the time. It was here that my brother William was born.

Our family did not know a lot of people. I had one close friend, Henry Clerval, the son of a Geneva merchant. Henry, Elizabeth, and I were like three parts of one person. Elizabeth

was the soul, Henry was the heart, and I was the mind. Henry told stories of heroes and great adventurers. Elizabeth had her art. And I began to study science.

When I was 13, my father found me reading one of the books in his library. “Ah, you’re reading *this*?” he said. “My dear Victor, do not waste your time. This is sad trash.” If only my father had explained that no one believed in these books anymore, everything might have been different. Science had already proved that these ideas were silly, but I didn’t know this. I was angry. My father thought the books I liked were trash! Instead of taking his advice, I found more books like them.

Looking back on it, I know that I was foolish. I tried using spells to change lead into gold. I tried to raise ghosts. Of course, none of these spells worked. I might have gone on this way for years, but then an accident happened that changed my life.

When I was about 15 years old, we were at our country house. A violent and terrible storm came up. As I stood at the door, I saw lightning hit an old and beautiful oak. As soon as the light

vanished, the oak had disappeared. Nothing remained but a blasted stump. The next morning, I saw that the tree was reduced to thin ribbons of wood. I never saw anything so completely destroyed.

A friend of my father's was visiting us that day. He was a scientist. He explained a theory of his on the subject of electricity. This was new and astonishing to me. What he said made my earlier studies seem foolish. It seemed to me as if nothing would or could ever be known. So I gave up the study of science and immediately began to study mathematics.

When I look back, it seems to me that this change of attitude was caused by a guardian angel. It was perhaps the last effort of that angel to save my life.

It was a strong effort of the spirit of good, but it did no good. Destiny was too strong. Her laws had already sealed my terrible fate.

Frankenstein Learns the Secret of Life

When I was 17, my parents said that I should begin my studies at a university in Germany. But before I could leave, the first sorrow of my life came. It was an omen of my future misery.

My mother became ill with scarlet fever. On her deathbed, she called Elizabeth and me to her side. “My children,” she said, “I have always wanted you to be married one day. This hope will now be a comfort to your father. I regret that I am being taken from you. I pray that we will meet in another world.”

She died calmly. We were all grief-stricken. I stayed home for a few more weeks. Finally, it was time for me to leave. My friend Henry spent the last evening with Elizabeth and me. The three of us had never felt closer. None of us

knew that we would never be as happy again. I left the next day.

After a long, hard trip, I arrived in Germany. The next day I went to the university and met one of my professors, Dr. Krempe. He was a rude man, but he knew a lot about science. He asked me what science books I had read. I mentioned the books about magic spells. "Have you really spent your time studying such nonsense?" he said. "You'll have to start your studies all over again."

About a week later, I stopped by the lecture hall to meet Dr. Waldman, the chemistry professor. He was about 50, a kindly man. He was everything Krempe was not. His voice was the sweetest I had ever heard. And he was a good teacher. He started off with a history of chemistry:

"The old masters promised things they could not do: turn lead into gold, stay young forever. These were all empty dreams. Scientists today are different. They don't promise much, but look at what they have done! We know how the blood moves through our bodies. We know what makes up the air we breathe. Who