

Alphonse Frankenstein was a wealthy, distinguished man of Geneva, Switzerland. He was a highly respected member of the Swiss government known for his integrity and tireless devotion to public service. Because he was so single-minded in this devotion, he married late in life. His wife, Caroline, was much younger than he, but they dearly loved each other. Alphonse revered Caroline for her goodness and loved to please and protect her. In 1772, they had their first child, Victor.

Victor was an extremely happy child who adored his doting parents. When he was five, his parents adopted a four-year-old orphan named Elizabeth. A slender, beautiful child, she had fair skin, golden hair, bright blue eyes, a high forehead, and perfectly formed features. Her voice was soft and melodious. Her gentle smile shed radiance.

From the beginning, Victor loved Elizabeth. In all his occupations and pleasures, Elizabeth was his adored companion. Victor and Elizabeth were in perfect harmony. Whereas she was calm, sweet, and artistic—a lover of poetry and natural beauty—he was passionate, quick-tempered, and eager to obtain scientific knowledge.

Victor was a private person, indifferent to most of his schoolmates, but he formed a close friendship with one of them, Henry Clerval, the son of a businessman. Henry had singular talent and imagination. He loved adventure, danger, and books of chivalry and romance. He wrote songs and tales about enchantment and knightly adventure. He led Victor and other boys in acting out plays about knights. Thoughtful, kind, generous, and high-spirited, Henry wanted to be a hero and great benefactor of humankind. Whereas Victor was interested in science, Henry loved languages and literature.

In 1787, when Victor was fifteen, his brother William was born. That same year, his mother caught scarlet fever from a poor family whom she had assisted out of charity. As she lay dying, she put Victor's hand into Elizabeth's and said, "My children, I've always hoped that you would marry. Such a union would greatly console your father. Elizabeth, my love, be a mother to William. I hate to leave all of you. I've been so

happy and loved. But I expect to see all of you again in Heaven.” She died calmly, with her face expressing love.

Three years later, Victor prepared to depart for the University of Ingolstadt, in Germany. The evening before Victor’s departure, Henry came to the Frankensteins’ house to say good-bye. He wished that he, too, could attend a university. But his narrow-minded father wouldn’t permit it. Victor and Henry sat up late, finding it hard to part company. At last, they went to bed.

At dawn, when Victor went down to the carriage, his father, Henry, and Elizabeth were there waiting for him. His father blessed him, Henry pressed his hand, and Elizabeth begged him to write often. In misery, Victor entered the carriage, which set off for Ingolstadt.

Having always been surrounded by loving companions, Victor suddenly was alone, soon to be among strangers. Only one thought lifted his spirits: he would be acquiring new knowledge.

The journey was long and tiring. Finally Victor saw the high, white steeple of Ingolstadt’s church.

Victor spent his first few days at Ingolstadt becoming acquainted with the town and the residents in his dormitory, in which he had an apartment of several rooms.

The first lecture he attended was given by

Franz Waldman, a professor of physiology. Waldman was about fifty. He had a kind face. His hair was gray at his temples but otherwise black. He was short but straight-postured. Waldman began his lecture with a brief history of physiology, enthusiastically recounting great discoveries. He then explained many of physiology's basic terms and gave an overview of modern physiology. "Great physiologists peer into nature's hiding places and uncover its secrets," he said. "They have discovered how we breathe and how the blood circulates."

"So much has been done," Victor thought, "but I'll do more. I'll discover great things."

The next day, Victor went to see Waldman at his home. The professor welcomed him warmly. Victor said how much he had appreciated Waldman's lecture and asked the professor to recommend books that he should read.

"I'm happy to have a student such as you," Waldman said. "If you're as hardworking as you are capable, I have no doubt that you'll succeed. If your wish is to become a genuine scientist, not merely a petty experimenter, I advise you to study mathematics and every branch of science."

Waldman took Victor into his laboratory and explained the uses of his various scientific instruments. He also gave Victor the book list that he had requested.

From that day on, science—especially physiology—was Victor’s obsession. He eagerly read science books, attended all the science lectures that he could, cultivated the acquaintance of the university’s scientists, and sometimes studied and experimented until dawn.

Waldman became a true friend. He was a frank, good-natured person and an excellent teacher.

Victor made rapid progress, astonishing both his teachers and his fellow students. He even made some discoveries regarding ways to improve scientific instruments. He became increasingly interested in the causes of life.

Victor had no religious beliefs. He thought that everything had a scientific explanation. To him, a graveyard was nothing more than a place where lifeless bodies are buried. He felt that to learn the causes of life, he must study death. So he examined the causes of decay, spending days and nights in burial vaults and charnel houses. He saw how a person’s eyes and brain became food for worms.

After many days and nights of intense labor and fatigue, Victor discovered how to create life from lifeless matter. He felt astonishment, then joy.

Victor wondered whether he should attempt to create a human or a simpler creature.

He decided to create a human. Because it would be easier to make large, crude muscles and veins than to fashion more-intricate parts, he decided to make a gigantic human, about eight feet tall.

For months, Victor gathered the necessary materials. He took body parts from slaughtered animals and human corpses.

He was thrilled. "A new race of humans will bless me as its creator," he thought. "Many happy, excellent beings will owe their existence to me. No father deserves his child's gratitude more than I'll deserve theirs. Perhaps, with time, I'll also be able to bring the dead back to life."

Pale and thin from too much work, he eagerly began assembling all the parts. His laboratory was in a solitary, top-floor room separated from all the other apartments by a hallway and staircase.

The summer passed. Victor paid no attention to nature's beauty and nearly forgot his absent loved ones. His father wrote, expressing concern at Victor's not having written in quite some time. But Victor couldn't tear himself from his experiment.

Another year passed the same way. Every night, Victor was feverish. He became extremely nervous. The fall of a leaf was enough to startle him. He shunned other people as if he were guilty of a crime. Sometimes his condition

alarmed him, but he was determined to finish his creation.

On a dreary November night, Victor beheld the results of his efforts. With sharp anxiety, he prepared to infuse the spark of life into the lifeless thing that lay on the table before him. It was 1 a.m. Rain pattered dismally against the windowpanes. His candle was nearly burned out.

Then, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, Victor saw the creature's dull yellow eyes open. The creature breathed hard. A convulsive motion agitated his limbs.

Victor had taken great pains to make the creature beautiful. The creature's hair was shiny black and flowing. His teeth were pearly white. However, by contrast, these features made his other features look more ghastly. The creature's skin was yellow and shriveled and scarcely covered the muscles and veins beneath. His eyes were watery and nearly the same brownish gray as their sockets. His lips were straight and black.

For nearly two years, Victor had worked with the goal of infusing life into an inanimate body. He had deprived himself of rest and health. Now he felt horror and disgust. Unable to endure the appearance of the being he had created, he hurried from the room and paced in his bedroom. Finally, exhaustion overcame him. Still dressed, he threw himself onto his bed and slept.

Victor had nightmares. He thought he saw Elizabeth, in the bloom of health, walking in Ingolstadt. Delighted and surprised, he embraced her. But as he kissed her lips, they took on a deathlike color. Her features changed, and Victor held his mother's corpse. It was draped in flannel; worms crawled in the folds.

Victor started from his sleep. A cold sweat covered his forehead. His teeth chattered. His limbs convulsed. The moon's dim, yellow light forced its way through the window shutters, and he beheld the creature he had created.

The creature held up the bed curtain. His eyes were fixed on Victor. His jaws opened, and he muttered some inarticulate sounds. A grin wrinkled his cheeks. He stretched out a hand, to touch Victor, but Victor fled downstairs.

Victor took refuge in the courtyard, where he remained the rest of the night, pacing, listening intently, fearing that every sound announced the creature's approach. "A mummy come to life couldn't be as hideous as that monster," he thought.

Victor passed the night wretchedly. Sometimes his heart beat so quickly and violently that he seemed to feel every artery pulsing. Sometimes he nearly sank to the ground from weakness and exhaustion. Along with horror, he felt bitter disappointment. His dream had

become a nightmare.

Dismal and wet, morning finally dawned. Victor's sleepless, aching eyes saw the clock in the church tower: 6 a.m. Victor went into the street, walking quickly. Every time he turned a street corner, he feared that he would see the creature. He didn't dare return to his apartment. He hurried on, drenched by the rain that poured from a black, comfortless sky.

Victor continued walking for some time, trying to ease his distress through exercise. He walked without any clear idea as to where he was or what he was doing. His heart pounded in fear.

Finally, he came to the inn at which coaches commonly stopped. He paused and watched a coach that was coming toward him. The coach stopped just where he was standing. When the door opened, he saw Henry Clerval.

Henry sprang out. "Victor!" he exclaimed. "I'm so glad to see you! How fortunate that you should be here at the very moment of my arrival!"

Victor was overjoyed to see Henry, whose presence brought back thoughts of Victor's father, Elizabeth, William, and all the scenes of home so dear to Victor's memory. Victor grasped Henry's hand and forgot his horror and misfortune. For the first time in many months, he felt peace and joy. He warmly welcomed his

friend, and the two walked toward Victor's dormitory.

"It gives me the greatest delight to see you," Victor said. "How are my father, William, and Elizabeth?"

"Well and happy, only a little worried that they hear from you so seldom." Henry stopped short and gazed at Victor's face. "You look ill and exhausted. You're pale and thin."

"Lately I've been so involved in a project that I haven't allowed myself much rest. I hope to return to other things now." Victor trembled, thinking of the previous night.

"I feel so lucky to be here," Henry said. "You can easily guess how hard it was for me to persuade my father that bookkeeping isn't the sum of all necessary knowledge. Finally, his affection for me overcame his distrust of intellectual pursuits, and he permitted me to journey to the land of knowledge."

As the two friends walked, Henry talked about mutual friends.

Victor, however, scarcely listened. With a shiver, he wondered if the creature was still in his apartment, alive and walking around. He dreaded to behold him, but he feared even more that Henry might see him.

Upon arriving at the dormitory, Victor asked Henry to remain at the bottom of the

stairs for a few minutes. Victor darted up to his room. Fearing what he would see, he threw open the door. Nothing unusual. Fearfully, he stepped in. With joy, he concluded that the creature must have fled.

Henry joined Victor in the apartment, and a servant brought them breakfast. Victor was so relieved that he was giddy. He jumped around, clapped his hands, and laughed loudly.

The wildness in his eyes, and his loud, unrestrained laughter alarmed Henry. "Victor," he said, "for God's sake, what's the matter with you? Why are you laughing like that? Are you ill?"

Victor's terror of the creature returned, and he fainted. For several months, he was bedridden with a nervous fever. Henry was his only nurse. Victor kept picturing the creature. He constantly raved concerning him. At first, Henry thought that Victor was delirious, but he soon became convinced that Victor's illness was the result of some strange and terrible event.

Slowly Victor got well. A beautiful spring greatly contributed to his recovery. Buds shot forth from the trees that shaded his window. His gloom disappeared. He became as cheerful as he had been before becoming obsessed with his experiment.

"Henry," he said. "You've been so good to me. This whole winter, instead of studying as

you had intended, you've been my nurse. How can I ever repay you? I'm so sorry for the disappointment that I've caused. Forgive me."

"You'll entirely repay me if you don't upset yourself. Get well as fast as you can. Since you appear to be in such good spirits, I'd like to speak to you about something."

Victor trembled. Was it possible that Henry knew about the creature?

Seeing Victor pale, Henry said, "Calm yourself, Victor. I just wanted to say that your father and Elizabeth would be very happy if they received a letter from you. They've been worried by your long silence."

"Is that all, Henry? Of course I'll write to them."

"Good. Here's a letter from Elizabeth."

In her letter, Elizabeth told Victor all the news from home. "You should see William," she wrote. "He's so sweet and loving. And he's a beautiful child, tall for his age. He has merry blue eyes, dark eyelashes, and curling hair. When he smiles, two dimples appear on each cheek, which are rosy with health." Elizabeth's letter concluded, "Your father and I have been worried that you're ill. He has wanted to travel to see you, but I've persuaded him not to, because he isn't strong anymore. Please let us hear from you."