

Mary's Monster

A play by Maggie Lou Rader

“Beware; for I am fearless, and therefore powerful.”

— Mary Wollstonecraft Shelley

Maggie Lou Rader

3926 Zinsle Ave.

Cincinnati, OH 45213

816-729-9783

maggierader@live.com

www.maggielourader.com

(Bell strikes 9:00pm, MARY is digging. She is dirty, her clothes are torn, her face is filthy)

MARY:

The veil is thin, between this world and the next. Spirits walk with us, in our minds and dreams rendering us utterly... crowded. They speak to us in whispers and stand in shadows waiting for a glance, a moment to connect. They are patient, mostly kind, and absolutely, ever, increasingly, (*child's laughter heard and light DL flickers*) present. So where have *you* been?

(MARY pauses her digging and pulls out a roll of cloth. During the next few moments, she unrolls it, unveiling tiny bundles, a few letters, a manuscript, and one larger object wrapped in paper. She sets them around the hole strategically. They're standing ready)

Time is short (*winces from pain in her head*), but today, it's fleeting, well, for me at least. However, hours *can* contain a lifetime, if they must, for the dead don't carry timepieces, and Death has been my only *constant* companion in this life. Following me into my home, my bed, and now my mind, channeling itself through me to all I've touched in this world.

I have suffered great and unparalleled misfortunes. I had determined, once, that the memory of those evils should die with me; however, now choosing to alter that determination, I find myself with the high hopes their relation might bring us together again. I do not know if the knowledge of my misfortunes will be helpful to you, yet, if you are inclined and able, hear me. And if you hear me, will you speak? I believe that these strange incidents connect us and may enlarge your faculties for understanding. You will hear of powers and occurrences many believe impossible, but doubt not, my tale conveys truth. But you already knew that.

(Low thunder draws MARY's attention, the thunder turns into a spoiled, dramatized scream of a childish tantrum)

Fanny

"What could be the catastrophe today?" I'd ask you upon hearing our stepsister Jane's daily tantrum. "I'm guessing she put her shoes on the wrong feet." "Oh, I don't know. Or maybe there wasn't enough lace added to her stockings." "Or maybe she cleaned her mirror only to discover that *is* the actual size of her nose." I could always count on you, my darling sister, for a tiny chuckle at our wicked stepsister, Jane's, expense. Inevitably, we'd hear Jane's trivial cause for alarm, "My stockings have no fluff!" "I owe you a two pence, Fanny."

When Father married Jane's mother, the Widow Clermont, I began sneaking out *every* day to visit our mother for some respite from their violent tempers and daily screaming. I say "Widow Clermont," but when you lie about multiple, dead fake husbands to protect your own image, that makes you more of the Bitch of Clermont, doesn't it? We could always retreat to each other for solace from the whirlwind that was our new step family, couldn't we Fanny dear?

As angry as I was with Father for bringing the Clermonts into our lives, I couldn't help but respect his unending dedication to our mother, reading us her journals before bed, keeping her portrait up in his study for all to see, raising you as his own daughter without a second thought.

I used to ask Father endless questions about our mother, to which I already knew the answer. "Father, did Mother Mary like to write stories?" And he would say she did. And I would ask, "Father, did Mother Mary like telling people what to do?" And he would say she did. And I would ask, "Father, why did you name me after Mother Mary?" And he'd say things like, "Because you're intelligent like her." "Why else?" "Because you're inquisitive like her." "Why else?" "Because your humor cuts like her." "My humor doesn't cut." "It's cutting dear." "It's NOT cutting!" "I say it's cutting." "Well if it's cutting, it's only cutting because yours is so frightfully dull!" Father was right about so many things.

Like the fact that you were always more of a lady, but I was more of an adventure. "Fanny, where do you want to go most in the world?" You see, I'd ask *you* all sorts of questions, trying to stir *some* sense of desire in you. "Um, I'm not sure... The Tower of London?" "The Tower of London?!? The Tower of London is practically in our own backyard! Where in the *whole wide world?!?!?*" "Ummm... maybe Kensington?" "You've missed the point Sister, dear."

I learned that you worked hard to forget our mother, Fanny. I hated you for that as a child, no even when we were grown. For you had *real* memories with her and I had to imagine a history that encompassed our whole ten days together before she passed from this world into the next. I imagined her cradling me, knowing I would continue her writing legacy. That she'd whispered the secrets of her brilliance in my tiny ear and that I need only focus very hard and I'd suddenly remember. Though only ten days had passed, I would be preserved with enough of her knowledge and presence to navigate my way through life.

I brought you to our mother one day, Sister dear. I grabbed your hand to weave us in between the stones. “Hurry up; this way!” Ugh, you were like pulling lead. “God, Fanny, you can be such a Clermont...” “Where are we going?” “To my most secret and favorite place.” I dragged you, bobbing from tree to tree constantly shushing your questions since a service was happening just a few yards away and the mourners in black began turning to see who could be making such a racket. “Here we are!” “Why did you bring me here?” “Because it’s as close to Mother Mary as we could possibly be, isn’t it grand?” “It’s unfortunate,” you said as you hurried home, never looking back.

---- *(MARY hears something close by and turns quickly to see if she’s not alone.)*

Words can haunt just as strongly as spirits, you, my darling sister knew that too well. Words are the lasting legacy of the dead, living on long after we’re laid to rest. They can raise us, cut us, but they can seduce us too. God... Percy, your words cut to my innermost soul.

Percy

“Whose is the love that, gleaming through the world,
Wards off the poisonous arrow of its scorn?
Whose is the warm and partial praise,
Virtue’s most sweet reward?”

Your recital was the first sound I heard as I walked through the door of our home that autumn, upon returning from a summer in Scotland. I had gathered a few things. First, that you, the “glorious Percy Shelley” had endeared yourself to my Father by flattering his mind, and even better, the publications of my mother. Secondly that you were an up-and-coming poet with quite a bit of promise, as well as a reputation for being somewhat of a trouble-maker. And lastly, that my wicked stepmother had insisted you visit... to try you on for size for Jane, I assumed.

“A thing of beauty is a joy forever: it will never pass into nothingness.” “Ah... Keats. Is it not, Mr. Shelley?” “Good ear.” “You romantics’ and your focus on beauty has been the downfall of my sex, for, if ‘taught from infancy that beauty is woman’s scepter, the mind shapes itself to the body, and roaming round its gilt cage, only seeks to adorn its prison.’” Recognition, a laugh. “Your mother *was* brilliant. I’ve often said she was to philosophy what Keats is to poetry. You speak of cages, but us

'Romantics,' only seek to empower the voices who call for freedom and liberty." "Yes, freedom and liberty for men, Mr. Shelley. Or, do prove me wrong and please recite me the words of an equally famous *female* Romantic." Stunned and silence. "Women are well cared for in our world, for *tenderness* is the name for a lover's most exquisite sensation; *protection* is his most generous and heart-thrilling impulse." "You speak of freedom for your voice and protection for mine. 'Children, I grant, should be innocent; but when the epithet is applied to men, or women, it is but a civil term for weakness.' Do you find me weak, Mr. Shelley?" "No," you said, eyes alive, "No, I do not Mary."

I escaped to my father's study to find my breath. Looking upon the portrait of my mother hanging above his desk, I was filled with gratitude for her words that had served both as my sword and armor just moments before in an intoxicating battle with your mind, Percy. Then, I heard the door crack open and without turning around, I muttered, "Meet me in the garden tonight." A quick hush fell, before the door softly closed.

Every nerve bouncing with anticipation, I paced in my room waiting for Father's, then Fanny's, and finally Jane's doors to close for the night. I swept down the stairs without a sound and waited in the garden for you to arrive. A short eternity passed as I began to doubt, "What if it hadn't been you in the study? What if you'd decided not to meet me? What if I was completely losing my mind and the door hadn't opened at all and I began questioning every power in the universe as to what has possessed me to be so foolish in the first place, when I felt your hand touch mine. "Follow me."

I took you through the dark, along the path I'd followed every day of my youth, leading you to the grave of my mother. "Why did you bring me here?" "Because this is where I'm most alive in this world," I whispered as I slowly began exploring your chest with my hands. Life was before us and we rushed into possession. Our fates were sealed then, Percy.

That night we put in motion events that would mold the rest of our lives. Come 5:00 in the morning, we would sneak out together, catch a ship, and set sail for France, together, never looking back.

I couldn't contain my excitement, walking on tiptoe back into the house, anxious for morning to arrive. I had just stepped into my room, when the door, unaided by my hand, swung shut behind me. I turned around to see Jane. "Hello sister," she smirked. "What are you doing, Jane?" I asked, trying to encourage her to lower her damn voice. "Just coming for a chat. You see, I saw you sneak out and

decided to follow you.” “What did you see Jane?” “Oh, please. I know exactly what you’ve done.” What I’d done? Percy, I came alive that night! “What do you want?” “For you and Percy to take me to France.” “You can’t be serious, you human doorstop!” “Oh I’m serious because this doorstop could awaken the house and tell your father what you’re up to, but most importantly, this doorstop knows French.” The doorstop had a point and joined us the next morning on the ship. Did you mind her company, Percy?

Six weeks of hope, glory, love, and words carried us through the beautiful French countryside. Blameless ambition was our guide, and our souls knew no dread. It was then my writing took on a mind of its own. Words poured from my pen as I created as if possessed by a fever. And Percy, it wasn’t you necessarily, but your faith in my mind as a creator. Isn’t it amazing how impressive we become when others *expect* our brilliance? You put me on a pedestal held up by the works of my mother and father and set me going. I loved you for that. I loved you for that, then. Remember that day we passed the little chapel near Lyon? You asked me, “Shall I make an honest authoress out of you?” “I’d rather you help make me a successful one.” We decided that day that, for us, marriage was a matter of the heart and not the law.

Father wasn’t so convinced, however, for when we arrived home, we found his doors shut to us until we found ourselves, “respectfully married.” Isn’t it funny how liberally men preach their progressive ideals to everyone but their own daughters?

We found out something else after arriving home. Moments after disembarking the ship, I vomited all over the dock, and luckily, Jane’s new French suede shoes. I’d been seasick before, this was different. Oh, my god, how life had changed. I was a prolific writer in love with a genius, now with a child on the way. If time is relative, those moments contained eons.

We had one intoxicating month together at home before *her* letter arrived:

“Dear Percy,

I find myself in my fourth month and utterly alone. I felt it only right to let you know you are to be a father.

Sincerely,

-Harriet”

(Pause.) I had questions. So I asked you, darling, calmly and collectively, “Who the fuck is Harriet?!?” “Harriet... is my wife.” *(Pause.)* I had more questions. “I met the unfortunate girl when she was living with her abusive father; I only married her to free her from the maniac. We have no passion; *she* has no thirst for conversation, no drive for knowledge.” “No, no, this is unforgivable Percy; you’re an adulterer!” “Well so is she. I had wanted to save her reputation, but I was not the first to step outside our bonds of marriage, Mary.” You assured me the relationship was quite over, and after much scolding, I forgave you and insisted we see to it the child be provided for. “Of course, Mary. Of course we will.”

---- *(MARY sees her wedding ring and comes back to reality. She slips off the ring and looks at it.)*

Promises are always meant, but in the end they are only emphatic intentions. And even if they are kept, sometimes you wish they weren’t. Promises can give a fleeting peace, but maybe that’s enough. *(She drops the ring in the grave.)* Percy gave me many things, some of which he promised, one of which he didn’t. He gave me joy, support, heartache, but most importantly, he gave me motherhood. For never having dreamt of ever having a child myself, I reveled in wonder as my body slowly transformed into something I didn’t recognize, growing with distinct purpose. I will forever be thankful to Percy, for without him, I’d never have had you.

----- *(MARY winces from pain in her head. The pain moves to her abdomen.)*

Clara

AAAAaaah!! You tore into this world with a jolt. I cried out for your father as I was being thrust into the experience of motherhood in a painful rush of light. I felt your weight shift and sway and sit back too, too far. But I fought with every fiber of my being and muscle in my body to help you cling to life for that brief moment of existence. I could never explain the powers which bore me onwards. Life and death appeared to me ideal bounds, me, breaking through to push your torrent of light into this dark world.

And what a light you were, my darling girl. As I held your tiny, wiggling, bubbly figure, I felt the complete power and awe of bringing your tiny personhood into being. And Clara, I know the word ‘perfect’ is used all too frequently when describing newborns, but I can think of no other word that would bring you justice. You were the perfect manifestation of any collected goodness between your father and me.

On your tenth night on this earth, around three in the morning, I stopped in your room for a feeding, but you were so peacefully sleeping, I dared not awaken your dear heart.

“She’s gone,” were the first words I heard the next morning. “She’s gone, she’s gone, my dear, she’s gone!” Your father’s voice slowly sank into my waking ears. I shoved him aside and scrambled and clawed my way out of bed and pulled myself through the hall. My limbs, numb with sleep, could not keep pace with the terror that drove me to move. I finally grappled my way into your room and saw that Clara, you looked just as you had the night before, angelic and peaceful as ever. I scooped you up in my arms, expecting you’d wake or cry or scream or absolutely anything! But you didn’t flinch. Your skin was cold and fixed. In that moment, my joy forever ceased, for it was in that moment that I knew, the light which I had willed and forced into this world, was out.

Your color never faded as I laid you in the ground. I took one last look at your porcelain face, half expecting your little eyes to flash open at any moment. I thought, with what little effort it might take to bring your rosy cheeks back to the world of the living. The guilt I felt laying your tiny body in the ground has never left me. For Clara, you’ve haunted my dreams ever since. I dream, even now, that you had only been very cold and that I rubbed your little feet by the fire and you came back to us, living, bright as ever. I think about you, my precious little girl all of my days.

---- (*MARY is back to the present.*)

The pain of losing a one and only child is awful. Grief is obstinate and the heart can freshly break a hundred times a day with every passing memory. But of course, death is near to everyone, and why should I describe a pain which all have felt? I didn’t know then what I know now. The dead *can* come back to us; they don’t always come back nice. (*MARY unwraps a lock of Clara’s hair.*) Would a monster for a daughter be better than no daughter at all? (*MARY drops the lock of hair into the grave*) I’ll keep Clara in my dreams. (*A pain in her head as thunder rolls overhead*) It was you who taught me

what real horrors the dead bring back with them. For it was you, Victor Frankenstein, who taught me how our own creations bring our downfall.

---- (*Lighting flashes.*)

Victor Frankenstein

“Reanimation,” Byron said, “is the matter at hand. Is galvanism possible? (I don’t know) Can technology bring the dead back to life?” It was the year without a summer in Lake Geneva and I was holed up in a cabin with Percy, Lord George Byron, Byron’s new plaything, everyone’s favorite doorstop, Jane, and though I didn’t know it yet, your shadow loomed overhead, Victor.

An incessant rain often confined us to the house for days, reading stories aloud in front of the fire. Our fare soon turned from dark to darker, giving way to the mood of the weather and ghost stories became our nightly entertainment. The cottage soon grew too small for Byron’s ego as he grew tired of the “droll hacks” of Bavaria. Byron who never respected my integrity as a writer nearly as much as my “perfectly proportioned bosom,” proposed a challenge to the group. “Let us each retire from his *droll* collection-” see, it was so cute when he learned a new word, “and, if you’re up to it,” he said, looking squarely in my direction, “write a ghost story to be shared with the group. And please don’t mistake my convivial demeanor, this *is* a competition.”

I couldn’t care less. Only months had passed since Clara’s death and my heart and mind were dull to the whetstone of inspiration. Percy’s affection grew cold. He had fallen in love with a thriving genius, not a depressed, fruitless writer. My only happiness was in the recurring dream of Clara’s reanimation in front of the fire. She lived on, but only in those precious, brief moments of sleep. “Have your thought of a story yet, Mary dear?” Byron would ask every morning as I woke from slumber. And, every morning, I’d continue our new mortifying ritual by replying, “No, Byron, not yet.”

Weeks passed and the air around me began to feel full of energy, hungry. (*The low sound of static is heard.*) A high-pitched, practically silent, power, like the charge before a lightning strike, vibrated somewhere between my ears and the skin of my arms. This, electric... “Static” filled our cottage as my companions seemed able to harness bits and pieces of it and ghost stories poured from their minds. I,

however, only felt your presence slowly beginning to break through the veil and tap into my world. But, the night you finally emerged in my dreams was the most terrifying of my life.

(During her dream, we hear the low static and rolling thunder.)

I saw you, a pale student of the unhallowed arts, kneeling beside the hideous phantasm of a man, or rather, pieces of a man that had been unholily connected, stretched before you on a table. And then, with the connection of some powerful engine, the creature was given a jolt, a force making it jump and shake, flailing in ungodly directions. But even when the engine shut off, the creature stirred with an uneasy, half vital motion, standing on its own volition. A flash of lightning illuminated the object, and discovered its shape plainly. Its gigantic stature, and the deformity of its shape, more hideous than could belong to humanity, stood before you. Frightful it was, both the image of the wretch and your ungodly power, mocking the Creator of the world.

I tore through the night scraping, writing, sketching, giving bones to the vision you had wracked my sleeping brain withal. Your life began to take shape, and the horror grew with every page. I created straight through until morning. When I emerged and was greeted with Byron's smug, "Have your thought of story yet, Mary dear?" Gleefully I able to reply, "Why yes George; yes I have, why don't you take a seat?" and I read to them the short story of you, Victor Frankenstein and your creation. God! It's delicious to see men of ample words have none.

Percy pulled me up the stairs and, for the first time in months, looked at me with those same bright electric eyes, bringing me back to our first night together in the graveyard. He took me in his arms, held me close, and whispered in my ear, "You're not done, Mary dear." And he was right. Our journey was just beginning, Victor.

----- *(Lightning strikes. bringing MARY back to reality.)*

God, time is dense and memories conflate, running side by side dragging, cutting steaks in the mind leaving you wondering when time passed. And people who had always been by your side, are suddenly gone. And once gone, they only come back on their own terms. The dead linger in the moment of their death forever. They don't age, they can't learn, and they *never, ever*, forgive. Not yet, anyway.

Fanny

My dearest Fanny,

I have another favor to ask of you dearest Sister. As if you weren't already saving my life by caring for the children during this busy time, could you bring Mother's journals when you come? I'm a bit stuck with the book and could use a nudge from her brilliance.

You arrived the day I learned that, if left unattended, in the time it took for me to answer the door, a toddler could eat half of a candle and manage to cover the entire left side of her body in black ink. In just a few short years the voices of two small and loved children filled our house with more life and noise and love than I had previously thought possible. Percy and I were beside ourselves with joy! My little William was born on the brightest day the world had ever known. Our daughter, Clara Everina, who carried the namesake of our first born, arrived just a bit over a year later. She had a strength and stubborn streak that, though I knew would serve her well in this male-dominated world, sure made it hard to keep her in *any* clothing, much less a petticoat. I called on you, my darling sister, to be an extra set of hands as I tried to play the role of brilliant authoress with two small children in tow.

“Welcome my dearest Fanny!” I exclaimed, throwing my arms around you. “The children are going to love you! and I can't thank you enough for coming! and do please let me know if you need anything while you're here! and oh! were you able to bring Mother's journals? I am dying to dive in!” I sensed I was overwhelming. Children have a way of speeding up your tempo. “I'm sorry Mary, the journals slipped my mind, but I'll write to Father and they'll arrive soon.” “Of course! Well, make yourself at home, my love.”

Oh Fanny you were a godsend. The children adored their auntie from day one and I was finally able to focus on the book for more than five minutes at a time. Victor's story took shape, the children thrived, your once timid little voice found strength and your shy heart grew strong. When William told you his favorite food was “Steak and Nail Pie,” you let out the heartiest laugh, nearly taking my breath away from the realization it had come from you, my shy, sweet sister. I do hope those are the memories you carry.

A few weeks passed and I hit another sticky place in the book. “Do you know when Mother's journals may be arriving Fanny?” Your smile faded. “Father was delayed in sending them off. They should

arrive soon.” Another week passed, and soon it was two, finally a month of flimsy excuses went by and I sensed I wasn’t receiving the whole truth from you. I should have been patient with you dear, but the pressure to release the story was backing up in my mind. “Fanny, I understand a delay in such things, especially when dealing with Father, but I’m sensing something else is afoot, so I must ask frankly, are Mother’s journals on their way or no?” Your face turned white, “No.” (*She begins to simmer.*) “Why not?” “Because they’re gone.” “Gone, gone, what do you mean gone? Gone where?” “They’re gone. Destroyed. I burned them a few years ago, after you left with Percy.” My blood boiling, I began shouting words I hadn’t yet formed in my thoughts, “What is wrong with you, you ungrateful, hateful woman!” You tried to calm my rage. “Mary, I had to, you don’t understand.” “No, you’re right, I don’t understand Fanny. I don’t understand how you could be the first product of the most marvelous and magnificent mind ever born to a woman and yet, you live your life trying to forget her. You’ve spent your entire, lonely, godforsaken life trying to shove her memory under the rug of your own mediocrity for fear of remembering the greatest gift this world ever gave you!”

Blind to your tears and deaf to explanation, I threw all of your things into your travel case. Your small frame followed in my wake of rage. I heard bits and pieces of your tearful pleas, that timid little voice back, and I found pleasure in towering over you. I was cruel to you that day Fanny; I knew it then but didn’t care. I threw your bag in the lawn, pushing you through the threshold, staring, straight into your tear stained face to say, “The wrong Wollstonecraft woman died and it’s the world that has suffered for it, not I.”

I did read your letters pleading for reconciliation, I did, but I chose not to reply. I wanted to hurt you as much as possible. Finally the letter arrived, postmarked from an inn in Wales, that I couldn’t ignore:

My dearest Mary,

I have departed immediately to the spot from which I hope never to be removed.

-Fanny

The moment I read your letter, I was instantly filled with remorse and immediately sent Percy to find you. Pacing in our house for days, I imagined any and every action your words could have implied,

waiting for any word from Percy as to what he had found. I thought of every scenario of him finding you, conveying my apologies, and bringing you back safely to my arms.

But I never anticipated the horror that he found. Along with the keeper of the inn, Percy broke down your door to find you on the bed. Eyes wide, covered in your own sick, hideously mangled in death, with enough laudenum in your body to kill ten men. Beside you he found two notes, the first of which read:

I have long determined that the best thing I could do was to put an end to the existence of a being whose birth was unfortunate, and whose life has only been a source of pain to those she loved.

-Fanny

If possible, the second hit me even harder than the first, not for the shocking nature of its contents, no, but for the penmanship. For I'd recognize our mother's hand anywhere.

Dear Gilbert,

Were I to give you an account of all my misfortunes, and vexations, I should write a volume instead of a letter. I am an unfortunate and deserted creature and look around to see no relation or friend upon earth.

Please care for my--(pause) Please care for my unfortunate Fanny. It cannot be helped.

Goodbye forever.

-Mary Wollstonecraft

I had known of our mother's relationship to your father and how little he cared for her. I had *not* realized she'd tried to take her own life because of it. I had always envied your memories with our Mother and it wasn't until your death that I realized, it was those memories that haunted you. You had tried every way to distance yourself from her legacy, and I suppose you finally did, for *you* measured the laudanum correctly.

Fearing a scandal, Father elected to leave your body unclaimed in Wales, doomed to be given a pauper's grave, lying for the rest of his life to anyone who asked about the fate of the "shy, quiet one."

I cannot express my regret to you Fanny. Though death has plagued me all my days, yours I feel lies solely on my shoulders. You cried out for help time and time again, but I couldn't forgive you, all the while never understanding that your time with our mother, though being what I most envied, was your curse.

---- *(DR lights flicker as we hear a woman cry. MARY drops the letters by the grave, bringing her back to now. She digs feverously.)*

Sometimes work is the only path forward. Work focuses the mind, allowing us an outlet from the tragedy that lingers in our past. Work occupies the mind and the hands leaving us too exhausted to think about what we've lost. But sometimes, unbeknownst to us, it takes away what precious little time we have left.

Clara and William

"A change of scenery can jump start the mind and heart," Your father told me, which is why Daddy and I packed up our lives and brought the both of you to Italy, in the hopes I would finally finish Victor's story. Your life and laughter which delightfully filled our English home, quickly overpowered our small Italian cottage, and I couldn't hear myself think. I asked your father, "Please allow me this time; I just need to finish this book and then all will be well, and life can finally return to normal," He understood and played the role of both Mummy and Daddy while I gave the entirety of my focus to the book.

I saw you both, William and Clara Everina, in my periphery each day, as if you only existed in the outskirts of my writing. It was a month into our venture when you first became ill, Clara Everina. "She's got a terrible case of the sniffles, could you take a look?" Your father asked me one night before bed. "This house is terribly dusty; I'm sure it's just the air." "Yes, I'll give her room a good clean tomorrow, but I still think-" "Percy, you're her father; you don't always need me to make every decision. I give you full permission to figure this out on your own."

It wasn't until you collapsed one evening that I saw your illness for what it was, my darling Clara Everina. We tried everything to revive you, smelling salts, a gentle stirring, even a slap across your face, nothing worked. I ran out in the pouring rain, going door to door, using my broken Italian to try and find any physician willing to come to your aid. God why do we English only learn our own bloody

language?! Finally I found a gentle old physician willing to follow me the two miles back to your bedside.

We finally arrived to find a wailing William and a despondent Percy. Fearing the worst, I ran to your bedroom, only to see you lying peacefully in bed, eyes finally open. “Darling, darling, you’re going to be alright!” But your hand was chilled. “Clara Everina, Clara!” I shook your shoulders, but your eyes never moved from their fixed mark above. My heart shattered. You were gone. No. No, no no no no! It was as if you’d slipped through my grasp and disappeared into the ground beneath my feet.

(Mary pulls out a lock of Clara Everina’s hair.)

I had learned from your loss, Clara Everina, I promise. *(Mary drops it in the grave.)* And William, I wasn’t about to let you slip away like I had your sister. I watched you like a hawk, never letting you out of my sight, only allowing myself to write while you slept, and even then, checking on you every hour to make sure you were well.

Do you remember that day we were playing soldiers? You had just knocked the horse out from under my general when you looked up at me with that infectious little laugh that always filled our house. It was in that moment, William, your gaze shifted behind me, and your joy turned to terror, your laughter to screams of fright. I quickly turned, only to find an empty room. When I turned back, you began gasping between screams, backing away from me on the floor. The source of your fear still present, I had no idea what to do! I scooped you up to rush you outside. Finally, when your fear subsided, I asked, “What frightened you so my little Wilmouse?” “It was Clara Everina,” you told me, “Clara Everina was behind you but her eyes weren’t right.” “What do you mean, my sweet?” “Her eyes,” God, you struggled so for the words, “Her eyes were big and white and shiny and they followed me no matter where I went.” Your tears coming back as you recounted the vision, I held you as tightly as I could, tears soaking my neck and shoulder, “Shhhh, my dear. It’s just your imagination. You need only some rest.” Please know that mommies and daddies don’t *mean* to lie my sweet.

It was that night you fell ill with some ungodly sickness, but I wasted no time. I called on every doctor I could to find a cure, but they all failed to find any earthly cause for your illness, and therefore no remedy could be found. *(Low static looms overhead.)* I felt as if I was fighting a looming, electrically charged darkness in a battle over you, my sweet boy. I could feel it slowly, steadily, sneaking in,

enveloping you in a fog. But I would grab you back, demanding your focus stay with me, forcing you into the light for as long as I could.

But the day came when Clara Everina wouldn't leave your sight. "She's laughing, pointing at me Mummy! She's covered in blood; Mummy she's coming!" God, you were so scared. I tried to fight her away, my own dead daughter, swinging my fists, clubs, knives, anything to try and kill her image, but she only existed in the world of the dark, which was quickly swallowing you from all sides. I can still see your sweaty brow, hear your screams, feel your nails scratching my skin as you wildly swung at anyone and everything that neared your tiny body. *(The static stops.)*

That night, in a terrible fright, and a great amount of pain, in the middle of one blood curdling scream, you slipped into a world beyond my own. *(MARY pulls out a lock of William's hair.)* I'm so sorry my little Will. I'm so sorry your last moments were filled with fear and pain and there was nothing I could do to save you from it. *(MARY drops the lock of William's hair into the grave. Thunder rumbles and she experiences head pain.)*

---- *(MARY turns, ready for battle. Static fades in.)*

Victor Frankenstein

That brings me back to you. After the deaths of my children I cut out everyone else. It was only you and I, Victor. "*All men hate the wretched; how then must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things!*" I locked us in together inside my study, and the misery of those hours was beyond calculation. For a few days Percy tried to break through, only for me to push him away, finally allowing Jane to comfort him in the most carnal way possible. I didn't care.

"On you it rests, whether I quit for ever the neighbourhood of man, and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge of your fellow-creatures, and the author of your own speedy ruin."

I dedicated every hour to you and the demons that brought us together. I breathed and lived and existed only in the shadow of our mutual creation. "*Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall.*" I labored to carry you Victor, into a fully fleshed out being with your own mind and body and temper and fate. I brought you to life while my own stopped. "*Was I then a monster, a blot upon*

the earth, from which all men fled?" I worked. I struggled. I wrestled. I trudged and plowed, and created until...

'But soon,' he cried, with sad and solemn enthusiasm, 'I shall die, and what I now feel be no longer felt. Soon these burning miseries will be extinct. I shall ascend my funeral pyre triumphantly, and exult in the agony of the torturing flames.'

(The static fades out.) It was done. I had finished. I closed my eyes to breathe in the first dose of reality I'd had in months. However, when I opened them, I was struck by the vast emptiness that lay before me. The room that had once been filled with toys and noise now only contained you within the messy collection of words I'd lost everything to create. The world was cold in that moment. So simple and cold.

I descended from my tower and showed Percy the book. He loved it. He said it was brilliant, that I was brilliant, that King George himself would make me a bloody "lord-ess," but as Percy's praise grew, so did the bile in my stomach. While Percy was going through his third iteration of what would surely be my speech of honor from King bloody George himself, I stood up, turned around and walked out the door. I wandered for, oh what was it, three whole days? I did not eat. I did not sleep. I only walked with my mind hovering somewhere between reality and the horror we'd created, together. I came home three days later, filthy, frail, sunburned, and silent. "Where on earth have you been?" Percy asked, at least doing a decent job of feigning worry. The only explanation I could muster was, "I went for a walk."

Frankenstein was published anonymously, my only request. Percy's "brilliant" preface boosted sales. The book received praise and acclaim, probably because it was widely assumed to be Percy's "terrifying work of genius," for how could a woman bring forth such a brutal story of creation and loss? But Victor? *(MARY picks up a manuscript from beside the grave. She tears out pages one by one, letting them fall in the grave.)* You speak to me, even now. I dream of you kneeling beside the wretch twitching and flailing, even after the machine is switched off. You have become my legacy and my living curse. Do you know what the worst part is about being haunted by your own ideas? They outlive and outshine you. Ideas don't die and there is no grave that will hold your damn mouth shut.

----- *(MARY experiences a sharp pain in her head as lighting crashes.)*

God, It's exhausting! Carrying, remembering, hosting all of you! Digging through your shadows, wondering when you'll turn up, reeling from a lack of control. You've thrown me in your web, never knowing what beast might await me in the center. I fight and struggle, still knowing all the while, that no one makes it out alive.

Percy

"Please take me home; I want to go home." We had just arrived off the coast of Tuscany with our three year old son, Percy Florence. I felt uneasy, that same static feeling hitting me the moment we arrive. "Don't be silly Mary, the fresh air will do you, little Percy, and the baby good," you said, patting my stomach; I always hated it when you do that, by the way. "Please try to take it easy, for a few months." "A few months?!?" "Two months?" "One month." "Alright. One month. The *Don Juan* is a new boat and with a few tweaks, and I think I can finally beat that smug Byron in a race this summer!" "Alright. ONE month, Percy, but *only* if you promise to let me watch as you beat the bastard." "Promise." And it was decided. We would stay but a month.

Five days in, I was walking with our sweet young son along the coast, (*child's laughter is heard and a light DL flickers*) when I heard the laughter of a child. Seeing no one else along the shore, I was frightened the young one had wandered away and might get carried off in the current. I looked all around for who might have made the sound. Then I saw her. In the water, about 20 meters out. A child bobbing up and down, but she's not struggling to keep herself above the crests, no, she was hovering, her feet barely touching down on the waves; floating above the peaks. I gasped at the horrid manifestation of the unmistakable image I'd heard William describe just a few short years before. There, atop of the water, was our second daughter Clara Everina, looking very much as she had before she'd died, only with one big difference. Her eyes were not Clara's eyes. They looked like two large white saucers four or five sizes too large for her dainty little face. Her eyes followed my every step, as the apparition slowly, but steadily began pointing at and hovering toward us. "Come with Mommy, Little Percy, come quickly!" (*Child's laughter is heard and light DL flickers.*) Our stubborn little boy protested, wanting to play with the little girl. More laughter. The terror drawing nearer and nearer every second, I had no choice but to scoop up our son and run, far and fast away from the ghastly image. Her laughter following us as we ran. (*The laughter stops.*)

I should have told you, Percy, *then* of the image we'd seen, but you always fretted so about my health during pregnancy that I decided to keep the event secret, and push forward, hoping the month would pass without further incident. Foolish. That night I dreamed of our first child, Clara, as I had countless times before, but this dream was different. We were holding Clara, warming her by the fire, when her eyes opened with a start. We rejoiced at her revival, but then, her eyes began to grow into those same pale saucers I'd seen on the water the day before. I screamed and dropped the tiny thing to the floor, but as she fell, she grew and changed, transforming into a hideous beast. Her arms and legs broke backward in ungodly directions while her hands and feet warped into mangled fists supporting the weight of her body. Her body, then took on the shape of an animal that has been struck by a carriage, internally shattered. Her face though Percy, on my god, her face grew dark and wide, full of teeth and gleeful rage. I felt the floor beneath us begin to give way to a cold softness making nothing feel secure. As we slipped into the cold, gaping floor, we grasped onto each other for support. Then suddenly, the monster drew back, ready to strike. And, with a great smile of teeth and black, she gave a deafening roar, before lunging at us, darkness enveloping our world.

My screams woke the entire house. Percy, you tried to ease my fright, but I couldn't escape the feeling of the cold, soft floor giving way beneath my body. More screaming. You scrambled for a lamp as I grasped for something, anything solid to awaken me from my terror. Finally, as the room flooded with light, you saw the cause for my alarm, "Mary, look." The bed beneath my body wasn't cold or giving way, no, but rather it was wet, soaking wet, soaked with blood. My nightgown drenched, I could hear the drops of blood falling from my body onto the saturated red linens. My hands, pale as ivory, your face, white with terror at the wretched sight before you. "Percy, please help me." I begged, so simply, weak from the pain that was radiating from, I don't know everywhere. I had miscarried and needed help, immediately.

With doctors hours away from that god-forsaken coast and the blood still coming, never stopping, you thought quickly. "Lay down in the bath, Mary," you told me, covering, rather preserving me in ice, until help can arrive, ultimately saving my life. I lived, but the child was lost. It's a dark and hopeless place parents reach when the death of a child can be found as a relief.

More terror. A week later, it was your turn to awaken the sleeping house with midnight screams of fright. "I saw Clara Everina, bouncing above the water, laughing, with giant white eyes staring straight into my soul." You described my vision exactly, only this time, our daughter was covered in blood as

she hovered her way toward you, rendering you immobile on the shore. I still didn't tell you, I'd *lived* the dream mere days before.

"I'm at the end of my rope, Mary. I can't take much more of this." "More of what, Percy?" Silence. "More of what?" "Last night," you began. "Last night as I was walking home from the docks, I noticed a man standing in the shadows just a few paces ahead. He slowly emerged from the darkness, so I moved aside to make room, only for the man to step in front of me, blocking my way. I moved aside again, allowing room, only for him to block my path again. I finally looked up to meet the gaze of the man determined to block my passage, only to meet eyes that I knew very well. Mary, his face was my own. I was looking into the eyes of myself. My double slowly closed the distance between our identical persons, stood directly in front of me, looked me up and down, and then, with a dark grin, he asked me, 'How much longer do you mean to be content?' and without another word, he walked away." "Well that's terrifying." I said, attempting to lighten the mood. But it didn't work, for Percy, you turned, and I saw in your eyes a darkness that belonged to another world.

---- (*Low, rolling static is heard.*)

A week passed, and you prepared for your excursion with a diligent fervor. "Please, Percy, let's go home." But Percy, your countenance had slowly become unlike anything I'd ever seen, darker, focused. "No Mary," You barked. "You promised. One month." The blackness around us was building and the static felt hungry.

The day arrived for you to set sail. We stood on the shore, looking onto the water, storm brewing overhead, your eyes darker than ever. You took a step into the water. Then another. Just when you'd nearly reached the boat, I shouted, "Percy stop!" I rushed into the waves. "Please don't go. I can feel the world on its head and you simply can't go. There is something following, hunting us in this world that we can't explain and I don't know what beast that sea holds but it's hungry for you. No, shut up Percy! I have lost. And I've loved. And I've *lost* and my heart and my body have created so much life only to lose it all, so let's just go. You and me and our son, let's go home and forget the ghosts and the pain and the monsters and the teeth and the black and the blood and let's MOVE ON, the three of us. But Percy, Percy my dear, it all starts with you, turning around right now, and coming back to me."