



STORYLAB

PRESENTS



MARY SHELLEY'S

# Frankenstein

## WHAT YOU NEED TO KNOW

# Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*



In Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*, a science experiment becomes a matter of life and death.

**O**ur story begins with Victor Frankenstein. Victor is a genius student who stays up working all night. But Victor is not trying to build the perfect robot. No, Victor is obsessing on something far more disturbing. He wants to bring dead things back to life.

Victor spends years taking apart dead bodies or corpses. He studies how bodies decay and learns every detail about

corpses. Working alone in his lab, Victor stitches together body parts from different corpses.

Finally, he creates something almost human. That is, if humans were eight feet tall and built like nightmares. When Victor zaps his creation to life, he immediately realizes he has made a huge mistake. Victor runs, leaving his creation behind.

The creature is left alone and clueless about the world. It has to figure out everything by itself. It learns to speak by watching people through windows. It teaches itself to read and discovers that it is very smart. But there is one thing the creature can't learn: how to make people less scared.

Everyone who looks at the creature either runs away or tries to attack. Eventually, the creature tracks down Victor. "Listen," it says, "You made me, so you owe me. Create another one like me, so I can have a friend." When Victor refuses, the creature goes into full revenge mode. It starts killing everyone Victor cares about. It kills his little brother and his best friend. The creature even kills Victor's wife on their wedding night.

Now it is Victor's turn to seek revenge. He chases his creation to the ends of the earth, literally. They end up in the Arctic, where Victor finally dies from exhaustion. When the creature finds Victor's dead body, it breaks down with grief. The creature tells a ship captain he plans to kill himself. Then, it walks into the frozen darkness.



## The Monster Lives!

It was on a dreary night of November that I beheld the accomplishment of my work. It was already one in the morning, and my candle was nearly burnt out. When, by the glimmer of the half-burned candle, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open. It breathed hard, and a jerky motion shook its limbs


How can I describe my emotions at this disaster? How can I describe the wretch whom with such pains and care I had tried to create?

I had worked hard for years to put life into a lifeless body. For this I had deprived myself of rest and health. But now that I had finished, the beauty of the dream vanished. A breathless horror and disgust filled my heart.

Unable to stand the being I had created, I rushed out of the room. I continued a long time pacing back and forth across my bedroom. I was unable to calm my mind for sleep.

At last, weariness overcame me. I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, attempting to seek a few moments of forgetfulness. But it was in vain; I slept, indeed, but I was disturbed by the wildest dreams.

I started from my sleep with horror! A cold dew covered my forehead. My teeth chattered, and every limb began shaking uncontrollably. When, by the dim light of the moon through the window, I beheld the wretch. I saw the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed. His eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me. His jaws opened. He muttered some unclear sounds, while a grin wrinkled his cheeks. He might have spoken, but I did not hear. One hand was stretched out, seemingly to hold me. But I escaped and rushed downstairs.



"I beheld the wretch—the miserable monster whom I had created. He held up the curtain of the bed; and his eyes, if eyes they may be called, were fixed on me."

## ABOUT THE AUTHOR

# How Mary Shelley Came to Write *Frankenstein*

Imagine being only eighteen years old and writing one of the most famous horror stories of all time. That's exactly what Mary Shelley did when she created *Frankenstein* in 1816.

Mary wasn't your typical teenager. Her parents were famous writers, and she grew up surrounded by books and radical ideas. When she was sixteen, she ran away to Europe with Percy Shelley. He was a married poet who was six years older. This caused a scandal for a young woman in the 1800s. But Mary didn't care about society's rules.

The story of how *Frankenstein* was born is almost as strange as the novel itself. In the summer of 1816, Mary and Percy were in Switzerland. They were staying with the



Mary Shelley

famous poet Lord Byron. The weather was terrible. Dark clouds and rain trapped them indoors for days. To pass the time, Byron suggested they each write a ghost story.

Mary struggled at first with an idea. Then one night, she had a terrifying dream. She saw a scientist who had built a creature from dead body parts. When the scientist fell asleep, the creature came alive and stood over him.

Mary woke up scared but excited. She had found her story! What started as a short tale for the competition grew into a full novel. She spent the next year writing and rewriting. At times, Percy helped her edit.

When *Frankenstein* was published in 1818, many people assumed Percy had written it. They couldn't believe a young woman could create something so frightening. But Mary had both imagination and talent.

*Frankenstein* was one of the first science fiction novels ever written. Mary Shelley showed that sometimes the best stories come from our most fearsome dreams. She turned a boring, rainy summer into literary history. She proved that great ideas can strike anyone, anywhere, at any age.



## TEXT CONNECTION

# How We Use *Frankenstein* Today

**W**hen people say the word “Frankenstein” today, they’re usually not talking about Mary Shelley’s novel. Instead, they’re using it to describe something that has gotten out of control. In particular, something that was created to help but ended up becoming dangerous or destructive.

This happens because most people get the story wrong. They think Frankenstein is the name of the monster. It is actually the name of the scientist who created the monster. Nevertheless, this mix-up has given us a powerful way to talk about modern problems. For example, a reporter might say that a company created a “Frankenstein” when a product causes unexpected problems.

The term is especially popular when talking about technology. People might call social media a “Frankenstein monster.” It was designed to connect people, but now it often spreads hate and false information. Similarly, artificial intelligence (AI) is often called a potential “Frankenstein.” Some people worry that super-smart computers might become too powerful to control. Video game designers and even plastic surgeons sometimes get the “Frankenstein” label when people think they’ve gone too far.

In sports, coaches and fans use “Frankenstein” to describe teams that are formed from players who don’t work well



A “Frankenstein team” is stitched together with different players—with horrible results.

together. Think about a basketball team that trades for several superstars but still can’t win games. They might be called a “Frankenstein team.”

The expression works because everyone understands the basic idea. When you try to create something perfect, it might turn into a nightmare. It’s a warning about the dangers of trying to control things that are too complex to fully understand.

This modern use of “Frankenstein” has made Mary Shelley’s story more relevant than ever. Her warning about the dangers of unchecked scientific progress is over 200 years old. But it feels very real in our world of cloning, AI, and genetic engineering.

## TEXT REFLECTION

# Are Modern Scientists Like Victor Frankenstein?

**W**hen people compare cloning and artificial intelligence to Victor Frankenstein's experiment, they're asking an important question. Are today's scientists making the same dangerous mistakes as Mary Shelley's fictional character?

The similarities are obvious. Victor Frankenstein created artificial life from dead tissue. Today, scientists clone animals by copying their genes. Tech companies build AI systems that can learn like humans. In both cases, humans are trying to create something that acts alive or intelligent.

But the differences are big. Frankenstein worked alone in secret, driven by his obsession. He never considered the results of his actions or what his creature might need.



Computers might be able to mimic human behavior. But they do not have feelings like Frankenstein's creation.

In contrast, modern scientists follow strict safety rules. They work in teams and publish their research. They think about the rights and wrongs of their work.

Furthermore, real cloning isn't about bringing dead things back to life. Scientists use cloning to help endangered species survive, develop medical treatments, and understand diseases. Cloned animals are born naturally and live normal lives. There's no stitching together of body parts!

Artificial intelligence is also different from Frankenstein's creation. AI systems are computer programs, not physical creatures. Frankenstein's creature experienced emotions, while today's computers only mimic human emotions.

However, the comparison isn't completely unfair. Like Victor Frankenstein, some modern scientists worry about losing control of their creations. AI researchers debate whether super-intelligent machines could become dangerous. These concerns echo Shelley's warning about the dangers of unchecked power.

The real lesson from Frankenstein is not that we should stop scientific progress. It's that we need to be responsible in how we use our power to create. Victor's biggest mistakes were in failing to consider the consequences of his creation while obsessively pursuing it and, then, abandoning what he had created. Modern scientists understand that with great power comes great responsibility. That's what separates real science from horror stories.



**What Is Science Fiction?** Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is considered a horror story, which is a type of science fiction. Science fiction writing consists of:

- stories that involve technology or scientific advancements;
- settings that may or may not feel possible; and
- characters that might have imaginary powers or unusual abilities.

**Keep Reading:** Want to read more of Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*?

- Visit: [Project Gutenberg](#)

**If you like *Frankenstein*,** then you might also like to read these science fiction texts:

- *A Wrinkle in Time* by Madeleine L'Engle
- *The Giver* by Lois Lowry
- *The Wild Robot* by Peter Brown

**Start Writing:** Inspired to write your own science fiction story? Consider this prompt to get started:

- If you built a creature in a secret lab and it came to life, then what would happen next?

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