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A Full-Length Play

# Frankenstein

by
ALDEN NOWLAN
and
WALTER LEARNING

From the novel
by Mary Shelley

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*To the memory of*

*Mary Shelley and to*

*Warwick Learning*

*and the memories*

*he will some day have.*

# INTRODUCTION

On a cool, rainy night in June 1816, three young men and a young woman crowd together in front of a blazing fireplace in a villa on the shore of Lac Leman, near Geneva, Switzerland, and read to one another from a book of German ghost stories.

All four of these young people will be remembered as having been physically beautiful, although the eldest of them (he is twenty-eight) was born with a deformed foot and it is rumored that he sleeps with his reddish brown hair in paper curlers. Not long ago Lord Byron was sought after by the hostess of each great house in London; more recently he was ostracized and then hounded out of England, because of his debts and dissipations. The others here frequently find his behavior disconcerting, perhaps because he is the only member of this group to possess a sense of humor.

The young woman and the thin, shrill-voiced young man who is her lover also fled England in disgrace, the young man having been expelled from university for "immorality and atheism" and disowned by his aristocratic parents. Percy Bysshe Shelley is twenty-two and Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin, who will become Mary Shelley, is nineteen. Of the four, she alone will not die young. Although she might laugh if we told her so this evening, she is destined to achieve fame as a writer, like the young man with the limp and the young man with the high-pitched voice – both of them great poets and both of them afraid to go to sleep in the dark.

On the fringes of the group sits a twenty-year-old physician and aspirant writer, John William Polidori, whom the others patronize, snub or ridicule, depending on whether he is exercising his literary pretensions, picking a quarrel or biting his nails, all of which he is in the habit of doing. He is "the kind of person to whom, if he fell overboard, one would hold out a straw to know if the adage be true that drowning men catch at straws," Byron will write of him. Five years from now he

will kill himself; and when the time comes for Mary Shelley to describe this evening in the preface to the first edition of her most famous novel she will not even recall that he was here.

By day, the English tourists watch the villa through telescopes in hope of seeing an orgy. Tonight by candlelight and firelight its inhabitants entertain themselves with *The History of the Inconstant Lover* "who, when he thought to clasp the bride to whom he had pledged his vows, found himself in the arms of the pale ghost of her whom he had deserted" and the tale of the sinful knight whose accursed ghost bestowed the kiss of death on his descendants. Then, "We will each write a ghost story," Byron says; and the others agree.

This, according to Mary Shelley, is how she came to write *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus,* which was first published two years later in 1818 and has been in print ever since.

> I busied myself to think of a story – a story to rival those which had excited us to this task. One which would speak to the mysterious fears of our nature, and awaken thrilling horror – one to make the reader dread to look round, to curdle the blood, and quicken the beatings of the heart. If I did not accomplish these things, my ghost story would be unworthy of its name. I thought and pondered – vainly. I felt that blank incapability of invention which is the greatest misery of authorship, when dull Nothing replies to our anxious invocations. *Have you thought of a story?* I was asked each morning, and each morning I was forced to reply with a mortifying negative.

Byron had scribbled a few pages and gone back to work on the third canto of *Childe Harold.* He was sufficiently distracted by his efforts to evict his importunate mistress, that "little

fiend," Mary's stepsister, Claire Clairmont, who had moved in with him and insisted on staying despite his pleas for her to "go, pray, go." Shelley had dashed off eight lines of doggerel about a Granny who "was as much afraid of ghosts as any." Only Mary and "Poor Polidori," as she called him, took the contest seriously.

He wrote a short story, *The Vampyre: A Tale,* which eventually was published and dramatized. An American scholar, James Rieger, in the Introduction to his annotated edition of *Frankenstein* (Bobbs-Merrill, 1974) writes, "Most later. fictional, dramatic and cinematic treatments of the vampire theme derive ultimately from this melodrama and thence from Polidori." Professor Rieger suggests that it was Polidori (rather than, as Mary Shelly tells us, Byron) who held "many and long" conversations with Shelley on "the nature of the principle of life, and whether there was any probability of its ever being discovered and communicated."

Her account continues:

> They talked of the experiments of Dr. Darwin (I speak not of what the Doctor really did, or said that he did, but, as more to my purpose, of what was then spoken of as having been done by him), who preserved a piece of vermicelli in a glass case, till by some extraordinary means it began to move with voluntary motion. Not thus, after all, would life be given. Perhaps a corpse would be re-animated; galvanism had given token of such things: perhaps the component parts of a creature might be manufactured, brought together, and endued with vital warmth.
>
> Night waned upon this talk, and even the witching hour had gone by, before we retired to rest. When I placed my head on my pillow, I did not sleep, nor could I be said to think. My imagination, unbidden, possessed and guided me, gifting the successive images that arose in my mind with a vividness far beyond the

usual bounds of reverie. I saw – with shut eyes, but acute mental vision – I saw the pale student of unhallowed arts kneeling beside the thing he had put together. I saw the hideous phantasm of a man stretched out, and then, on the working of some powerful engine, show signs of life, and stir with an uneasy, half vital motion. Frightful must it be; for supremely frightful would be the effect of any human endeavor to mock the stupendous mechanism of the Creator of the world. His success would terrify the artist; he would rush away from his odious handywork, horror-stricken. He would hope that, left to itself, the slight spark of life which he had communicated would fade; that this thing, which had received such imperfect animation, would subside into dead matter; and he might sleep in the belief that the silence of the grave would quench for ever the transient existence of the hideous corpse which he had looked upon as the cradle of life. He sleeps; but he is awakened; he opens his eyes; behold the horrid thing stands at his bedside, opening his curtains, and looking on him with yellow, watery, but speculative eyes.

I opened mine in terror. The idea so possessed my mind, that a thrill of fear ran through me, and I wished to exchange the ghastly image of my fancy for the realities around. I see them still; the very room, the dark parquet, the closed shutters, with the moonlight struggling through, and the sense I had that the glassy lake and white high Alps were beyond. I could not so easily get rid of my hideous phantom; still it haunted me. I must try to think of something else. I recurred to my ghost story, my tiresome unlucky ghost story! O! if I could only contrive one which would frighten my readers as I myself had been frightened that night!

Swift as light and as cheering was the idea that broke in upon me. "I have found it! What terrified me will

terrify others; and I need only describe the spectre which had haunted my midnight pillow" On the morrow I announced that I had *thought of a story.* I began that day with the words, *It was on a dreary night in November . . .*

Mary Shelley's novel is one of those works that so capture the imagination that in a sense they leave the realm of literature and enter that of folklore. Millions who have never read her book possess a vivid mental picture of the Creature she called her "hideous progeny." The Being created by the young Swiss scientist, Victor Frankenstein, from dismembered and stitched-together corpses, is nameless. But, not surprisingly in view of his overpowering effect on our sensibilities, popular mythology has long since given him his creator's name.

The first stage version, Richard Brinksley Peake's *Presumption, or, The Fate of Frankenstein,* opened at the London Opera House in 1823. Mary Shelley went to see it and reported that she "was much amused, and it seemed to excite a breathless eagerness in the audience." It was so successful that two other melodramas and three burlesques on the theme were produced in other London theatres later that same year. In the decades that followed it was an unusual season that did not see at least one rival or imitation of Peake and at mid-century there was a popular farce in which the Creature was made to dance about the stage in a tutu!

*Frankenstein* came to the screen as early as 1910, but the first serious attempt to adapt the myth to the new medium was James Whale's Frankenstein of 1931. Notable for Boris Karloff's first appearance as the Creature, and for its setting in a timeless world partly mediaeval and partly modern, it is still the best film treatment, and this despite the fact that the screenplay has next to no similarity to the novel. Mary Shelley's devastatingly articulate Being having been reduced by the film makers to whimpering speechlessness, Karloff had to depend for his effects on physical gestures and his magni-

ficently expressive eyes.

Judging from Dennis Gilfford's book, *Karloff, the Man, the Monster, the Movies* (Curtiss Books, 1973), the actor (who played the Creature in two subsequent films, *The Bride of Frankenstein* in 1935, and *Son of Frankenstein* in 1939), could have given an even more memorable performance had the producers shared his understanding of the role and been less intent on making a Monster Movie.

"Whale and I both saw the character as an innocent one," Karloff said. "Within the heavy restrictions of my make-up I tried to play it that way. This was a pathetic creature who, like us all, had neither wish nor say in his creation, and certainly did not wish upon itself the hideous image which automatically terrified humans whom it tried to befriend. The most heartrending aspect of the creature's life, for us, was his ultimate desertion by his creator. It was as though man, in his blundering, searching attempts to improve himself, was to find himself deserted by his God."

The role lived on in films after Karloff abandoned it, being played by Lon Chaney Jr., Glenn Strange and Bela Lugosi, among others, but, as Karloff had predicted, the Creature soon degenerated into "an oafish prop," destined in time to meet Abbott and Costello, lumber through Charles Addams cartoons, undergo the further indignity of being transformed into television's Herman Munster, and then to be revived to dance again, figuratively, in a tutu at the behest of Andy Warhol and Mel Brooks. Meanwhile, he was appearing in a series of straight melodramas, entertaining to horror buffs but generally undistinguished, produced by Hammer Films and featuring Peter Cushing: *The Curse of Frankenstein* (1957), *The Revenge of Frankenstein* (1958), *The Evil of Frankenstein* (1964) and *The Horror of Frankenstein* (1970).

Ranking next to the first Karloff film in terms of memorable qualities is *Frankenstein: The True Story*, written for television by Christopher Isherwood and Don Bachardy and first produced in 1973. However, despite its title, this treat-

ment bears even less relationship to the novel. The authors' most effective device is to have the Creature (played by Michael Sarrazin) brought to life as a beautiful young man who then, to his creator's disgust, becomes very slowly, at first almost imperceptively, hideous. "Poor Polidori" is unfairly treated again, this time posthumously, by being introduced into the story as the chief villain.

The Creature portrayed in the *Frankenstein Monster* comic books (Marvel Comics Group), questing victim rather than homicidal automaton, is closer to the original than any of his cinematic counterparts.

Our play, produced one hundred and fifty-six years after the novel reached the public, is nevertheless the first dramatic version faithful in design and spirit to the book. It is a Victorian melodrama written in the 1970's. Naturally, as opening night approached we began to wonder if contemporary audiences could be persuaded to take it seriously. It turned out that they could be, not only that night in Fredericton but at every subsequent performance from St. John's to Vancouver. For the first few minutes there was laughter: many people had come expecting another spoof; then, briefly, there was perplexity ("Hey, maybe this isn't supposed to be funny?"); after that came almost unanimous acceptance. People believed.

He lives! While our play was being presented at Montreal's Centaur Theatre, Andy Warhol's *Frankenstein* was being shown at one nearby motion-picture house and Mel Brooks' *Young Frankenstein* at another. At about that same time in 1974, Brian W. Aldiss published his novel *Frankenstein Unbound* (Random House), in which the narrator travels back through time from the twentieth century to a world where the Shelleys, Byron, Polidori, Victor Frankenstein and the Creature are equally real. There followed in 1975, a novel by Robert T. Myers, *The Cross of Frankenstein* (J.B. Lippincott), in which the Creature fails to carry out his resolution to burn himself alive and instead goes to America where he establishes an ungodly cult and encounters Victor Franken-

stein's illegitimate son. Both novels are respectable variations on the theme, and both miss an essential point of this great fantasy by presenting the Creature as totally evil and bent only on the annihilation of the human race.

The year 1975 also saw the publication of an adventure in scholarship, Radu Florescu's *In Search of Frankenstein* (New York Graphic Society, Ltd.). A diligent researcher, possessed of a bold and informed imagination, Professor Florescu finds "more-than-coincidental parallels" between the story of Victor Frankenstein, as told by Mary Shelley, and the life of a seventeenth-century alchemist, Konrad Dippel, who was born at a real Castle Frankenstein, which still perches on the summit of a mountain overlooking the plains of the Rhine.

Each of us has at some time experienced the despair that accompanies absolute and seemingly irremediable estrangement from every other being. Like Pascal, we have been terrified by the silence of those infinite spaces. Even Christ, in his anguish on the cross, cried, "My God, my God, why hast Thou forsaken me?" The Creature differs from us in that for him such despair and terror are constant and his god has, in fact, willfully rejected him.

However horrible in their effects, his acts are motivated by a determination to retain some shreds of dignity. He possesses a Promethean nobility of spirit. "I will not be an abject slave," he warns his creator. In many ways the resemblance between Prometheus and the Creature is greater than the resemblance between Prometheus and Victor Frankenstein. Mary Shelley constantly reminds us that the Creature is an abomination, an obscenity, a devil, and that Victor is wise, gentle, generous, "like a celestial spirit that has a halo around him." There are so many paeans to Victor in the unabridged version of the novel that the reader begins to feel that the author realizes she is not convincing him and is probably having difficulty in convincing herself.

Northrop Frye has called *Frankenstein* a "precursor of the

existential thriller." The Creature is not a monster; he is Man.

Alden Nowlan
Walter Learning

*Frankenstein* was first performed on July 17, 1974, by Theatre New Brunswick at The Playhouse, Fredericton, New Brunswick, under the direction of Timothy Bond.

Sets by Doug Robinson
Lighting by Don MacKenzie
Stage Managed by Paul Hanna

Cast in order of appearance:

ROBERT WALTON. . . . . .Gregory Wanless
MR. WILLIAMSON. . . . . James Timmins
FIRST SEAMAN. . . . . Stephen Foster
VICTOR VON FRANKENSTEIN. . . . . Peter Jobin
SECOND SEAMAN. . . . . .Leo Leyden
THIRD SEAMAN . . . . . Stan Lesk
FRITZ . . . . . Claude Rae
CONRAD . . . . . Stan Lesk
ELIZABETH LAVENZA . . . . . Nuala FitzGerald
HENRY CLERVAL. . . . . Larry Aubrey
HANS. . . . . Paul Bradley
LOUISE . . . . . .Vinetta Strombergs
WILLIAM VON FRANKENSTEIN. . . . . .Warwick Learning
THE CREATURE . . . . . .David Brown
DE LACEY . . . . . .Leo Leyden
FELIX . . . . . Stephen Foster

# FRANKENSTEIN

*A Full-Length Play*

For Two Women and Fourteen Men

## CHARACTERS

Robert Walton . . . . . *captain of a sailing ship*
Mr. Williamson . . . . . *his mate*
First Seaman . . . . . *seaman*
Second Seaman . . . . . *seaman*
Third Seaman . . . . . *seaman*
Victor Von Frankenstein . . . . . *creator of the Creature*
Fritz . . . . . *his assistant*
Elizabeth . . . . . *his fiancee*
William Von Frankenstein . . . . . *his brother*
Henry Clerval . . . . . *a friend*
Conrad . . . . . *a servant*
Hans . . . . . *a servant*
Louise . . . . . *a servant*
De Lacey . . . . . *a peasant*
Felix . . . . . *his son*
The Creature . . . . . *itself*

## ACT ONE

## SCENE ONE

SCENE: The Great Hall of Castle Frankenstein. A prominent feature is the staircase leading up to Victor's laboratory.

AT RISE OF CURTAIN: There is a vigorous knocking off R.

CLERVAL (shouting from outside). Come along! Come along! (Another knock. We hear the sound of rain and thunder.)

(CONRAD enters L and crosses to R to answer the door. FRITZ comes down the stairs.)

FRITZ. Conrad, why aren't you with young Master William?
CONRAD (stopping). He's just finishing his bath, sir. There's someone at the door. (Knock.)
FRITZ (crossing R). I'm aware of that. You shouldn't leave him alone. Get back and see him to bed. I'll answer the door. (He hands CONRAD a stained cloth.)
CONRAD. Yes, sir. (Knock.)
FRITZ. I'm sure it's Mr. Clerval again. (FRITZ exits R.)
CLERVAL (offstage). Come along. Come along. (CONRAD remains left of C trying to see who FRITZ is talking to. By this time the thunder is a low rumble and the rain has begun to fade.)

FRITZ (offstage). Mr. Clerval, I've told you time and again that the Baron cannot be disturbed. (CONRAD exits.)
ELIZABETH (offstage). Nonsense, Fritz.

(ELIZABETH enters, pulling FRITZ on after her.)

FRITZ. Countess Elizabeth! What are you doing here?
ELIZABETH (laughing). Good heavens, Fritz. You wouldn't leave us all night in the rain!

(CLERVAL enters, crosses L, removes his gloves.)

CLERVAL (lightly). Yes, Fritz, where are your manners?
FRITZ. My apologies, Countess.

(HANS and LOUISE enter carrying luggage.)

HANS (dropping a piece of luggage on his toes). Ah! Ouch, Jesus!
ELIZABETH (to the SERVANTS). Hans, you and Louise take the bags to the lower west suite. You know the way.
HANS and LOUISE. Yes, ma'am. (They cross L.)
FRITZ (guardedly). Countess, you aren't planning to stay!
CLERVAL. No, Fritz, we've just come for tea.
FRITZ (crossing to the SERVANTS). Put those down! (He turns to CLERVAL.) Excuse me, sir, but the master is not expecting you.
CLERVAL (losing control). Damn it, man, I've been trying to deliver the Countess Elizabeth's message for weeks, but you wouldn't let me inside the door.
ELIZABETH (stepping between them). Henry! Henry! If you shouted at me like that I wouldn't let you inside the door, either.
CLERVAL (somewhat calmed). But, damn it, Elizabeth,

enough is enough! How can I perform my functions as best man if I'm not allowed to see the groom?

FRITZ (stubbornly). I'm sorry, sir, but the Baron forbade me to allow anyone to interrupt him. He is coming to the conclusion of years of work.

CLERVAL. I don't give a damn about his work! (ELIZABETH signals the SERVANTS. They exit L with bags.)

ELIZABETH. Now, Fritz, I know you were doing exactly what the Baron asked you, but with no replies to my letters for almost three months, you must admit I have some cause for concern. If the wedding is to take place as planned, we must interrupt the Baron's work – even if only for a very short time. Believe me, I have no desire to impede his progress. I know how important his work is.

FRITZ. Oh, very well. (He exits L.)

CLERVAL. Elizabeth, nothing that Victor is doing in that Godforsaken laboratory of his can justify the way he has ignored his friends, to say nothing of how he has treated you.

ELIZABETH (crossing UL and sitting). Henry, when will you realize the contributions the new science is making? Would you put your personal convenience ahead of a vaccine that would eliminate smallpox and benefit all mankind?

(VICTOR appears at the head of the stairs. He wears a smock and carries a pair of forceps.)

VICTOR (descending stairs). Fritz, I need you. Come here at once. It's almost time.

ELIZABETH (rising). Hello, Victor.

VICTOR (unpleasantly surprised). Elizabeth! Henry! (He backs away.)

ELIZABETH. Victor, darling. What is it? (She turns to

CLERVAL.) Henry, see how pale he is!

CLERVAL. We've been worried about you, old friend.

VICTOR. Fritz, I told you, I don't want to be disturbed!

(FRITZ enters.)

FRITZ. I'm sorry, sir; they're planning to stay with us.

VICTOR. No. You can't stay, Elizabeth. You shouldn't have brought her here, Henry. My work has reached a critical point: I can't afford to stop now.

ELIZABETH. I made Henry bring me, Victor. Was that really so dreadful of me? After all, the wedding arrangements have to be made sometime.

VICTOR (sharply). Tomorrow, Elizabeth. (He turns and goes upstairs.) You can stay with Henry's parents tonight. We'll talk tomorrow. Quickly, Fritz.

ELIZABETH. Victor!

VICTOR. You must excuse me, Elizabeth. I have work to do. (He turns and exits; FRITZ follows.)

CLERVAL (distastefully). That was disgraceful.

ELIZABETH (protectively). Don't be ridiculous, Henry. You know that was not our Victor speaking. He must be under some terrible strain to act that way.

CLERVAL. I love him, too. But he's behaving like an absolute ass.

ELIZABETH. He's a scientist. He's not like other men.

CLERVAL (laughing). Not like other men; you sound like a stupid Jane Austin heroine defending the honor of her gentleman. Elizabeth, that is the most ridiculous statement I have ever heard you make.

ELIZABETH (cheering). That's much better, Henry. Anger doesn't suit you. It's the wrong color; it doesn't match your eyes. (She laughs.)

(FRITZ comes down the stairs.)

FRITZ. Excuse me, Countess, the Baron would like you and Mr. Clerval to wait. He has something he must finish and will join you in a few moments.

ELIZABETH. Thank you, Fritz. Would you please tell Conrad there *will* be guests for dinner.

FRITZ. Whatever you say, ma'am. (He exits L.)

CLERVAL. I've known Victor ever since we were children, but there have been times lately when I've wondered if I really know him at all.

ELIZABETH (enthusiastically). We're living in a new age, Henry.

CLERVAL (sighing). For God's sake, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH (going right on). Men like Victor are transforming the world. Thanks to science, nothing will ever be the same again.

CLERVAL (crossing up to chair and sitting). Elizabeth, please don't give me another sermon about progress and the perfectibility of man. (With mock weariness.) I've heard it all before, and I'm no nearer to being converted.

ELIZABETH. Doesn't it make you happy to see the old superstitions withering away?

CLERVAL. I prefer the old ones. Incense smells better than coal smoke.

(VICTOR enters.)

CLERVAL (standing). The dragon frightens me far less than the locomotive. (VICTOR stands beside Elizabeth's chair; CLERVAL turns and sees him.) Ah! Our gracious host.

VICTOR. Darling, I was very rude to you. Forgive me. (He kisses her hand.)

ELIZABETH. There's nothing to forgive.

CLERVAL. Oh! (VICTOR crosses to CLERVAL, shakes his hand.)

VICTOR. Henry, please accept my apologies. I'm afraid I've been working too hard, although, of course, that's no excuse. You must stay. However, I'm afraid I can't entertain you as I would like. I'll have to spend a good deal of time in the laboratory.

CLERVAL (scoldingly). You ought to get out of that damned laboratory and into the sunshine. You look like a ghost. What I prescribe for you, Doctor Frankenstein, is a long cruise on the lake, starting right after breakfast tomorrow.

ELIZABETH. Oh, yes!

VICTOR. I'd love that, Henry. But it's impossible. I have things to do that can't wait.

ELIZABETH (slightly hurt). We understand perfectly, darling. At the moment your work is more important than anything else.

CLERVAL. Speak for yourself, Elizabeth. You may understand perfectly. I don't understand at all. (He sits.)

VICTOR (laughing). Henry, you're the only literate man in Christendom who still insists that the sun goes around the earth.

CLERVAL. I've no curiosity about the sun. I'm content to let it – (Pause; smile.) – shine on me. You know all about the sun and yet you're too busy to allow it to touch you. It seems to me that my ignorance is more profitable than your knowledge.

VICTOR (earnestly). Be serious, Henry. We've been privileged to be born at the beginning of a new phase in human history. Think about the steam engine.

CLERVAL (flippant). You think about it, my dear Victor. The thought of it huffing and puffing away makes me quite sick.

ELIZABETH. But it has made it possible for us to travel

faster than human beings ever traveled before.

VICTOR. Yes!

CLERVAL. So! (He proceeds as though speaking before a large, adoring audience.) What can we perceive traveling at thirty miles an hour? Within ten years some damn fool will invent a machine that will travel even faster – and one day people will travel so fast that if they blink when they're passing through Switzerland, they'll miss it altogether. The world will be smaller, but so will the minds of its inhabitants. The age of science will be the age of boredom. (ELIZABETH and VICTOR applaud approvingly.) Thank you!

VICTOR (laughing). It is good to see you, Henry. I need your old-fashioned nonsense to keep me from becoming too pompous.

CLERVAL (honestly). And it is good to see you, Victor. (Rising.) But now I'll leave you two alone. I'll go and assist Conrad in choosing the wines for dinner. (He crosses L.)

ELIZABETH. Tonight we must have champagne.

VICTOR. Yes.

CLERVAL. Then I'll make certain that it's the very best champagne, the kind that butlers and footmen usually reserve for themselves. (He exits. VICTOR takes ELIZABETH out of her chair; they embrace and kiss.)

VICTOR. Elizabeth, the last time I saw you, I thought I loved you as much as it was possible for one human being to love another – and yet tonight I find that I love you even more. (They kiss again.)

ELIZABETH. Oh, Victor! Darling, you'll think I'm being foolish interrupting your work this way, but I'd been so worried.

VICTOR. Worried?

ELIZABETH. Worried about you, about us.

VICTOR. Oh, Elizabeth!

ELIZABETH. Now I see that nothing has changed. I need only worry about my rival, your mistress!

VICTOR. My mistress?

ELIZABETH. Science.

VICTOR (laughing). You have no rival, not even science. Oh, Elizabeth. (They kiss.)

ELIZABETH (tentatively). Victor, this work you're doing; is it very dangerous?

VICTOR (turning away). Everything worth doing involves an element of risk.

ELIZABETH. Can you tell me about it?

VICTOR (excited). Oh, Elizabeth! I feel as Balboa must have felt when he first looked out at the Pacific Ocean. (ELIZABETH is just as excited as he.) I'm like an explorer about to pass through the gates of a lost city that he's been searching for all his life. If old Professor Waldman could see me now! He used to say that the ancient teachers of science promised impossibilities and performed nothing, while the modern masters promise very little, but they indeed have performed miracles. (Arrogantly.) Well, by God, tonight Victor Frankenstein will perform one of those miracles. (He turns faint and becomes unsteady on his feet. ELIZABETH reaches out and seats him.)

ELIZABETH. Victor, darling, what's wrong?

VICTOR (recovering). Nothing. I'm just a little tired.

ELIZABETH (maternally). You've probably been working day and night, and half the time you've been forgetting to eat.

(CLERVAL and FRITZ enter.)

CLERVAL. Well, tonight you will eat. Fritz has done very well by us. The cook is preparing quail and salmon.

ELIZABETH. Oh!

FRITZ. Excellency, I trust that will be satisfactory.

VICTOR. That sounds very satisfactory indeed. Thank you, Fritz.

ELIZABETH (crossing to CLERVAL). Henry, I was just asking Victor about his latest experiment.

VICTOR. It has to do with electricity. (Sound of thunder.) Listen. The ancients called that the Hammer of Thor, but we know better. (More thunder.) Ah! Nothing else in the universe has a power to compare with that.

CLERVAL. My dear Victor, you talk about it as if it were God.

VICTOR. In a sense it is God. It is the source of life.

CLERVAL (sitting). Now you're the one who's not being serious.

VICTOR. Yes, I am! Galvani suspected as much.

ELIZABETH. Victor, I know Galvani regarded electricity as a potential source of motive power, but surely not as the source of life.

VICTOR. He did, my darling, but he did not dare tell the world. (Crosses L.) Galvani learned more from applying electricity to the body of a frog than from a hundred tedious Greek and Latin treatises. God, what a man he was! But come. You must see for yourselves. (Starts them up the stairs. FRITZ intervenes.)

FRITZ (alarmed). Baron, are you sure that's wise?

VICTOR. Good old Fritz. Always the cautious one. I assure you that I know exactly what I'm doing. We need have no secrets from the Countess and Mr. Clerval. (FRITZ exits to the lab.) My dear Henry and my dearest Elizabeth, you are about to see something that you will remember for the rest of your lives. Come. (VICTOR and ELIZABETH walk around the ramp. CLERVAL holds back, then follows.) Newton said that he felt like a child gathering

pebbles on the seashore. The pebbles represented what he had learned and the sea symbolized all that there was to know. I feel like a child who has dived into the ocean and come up with a pearl.

(During this speech a transition is made from the Great Hall to the Laboratory. The lights on the forestage dim and the lights on ramp and in the lab come up so we see the three of them and all the lab equipment in the background. We see FRITZ already busy adjusting dials and knobs. As ELIZABETH, CLERVAL and VICTOR come down the ramp R, the lights in the lab and forestage come up.)

VICTOR. Well, Fritz, let's check the instruments.

CLERVAL (as they enter the lab). I feel like Ulysses entering the cave of Polyphemus.

ELIZABETH. Polyphemus, the Cyclops. (VICTOR takes the chairs from their Great Hall position and puts them side by side DL.)

CLERVAL. Your science is a cyclops, too, Victor. It looks at the world with only one eye. (He crosses L.)

ELIZABETH (crossing to console). Here is my rival. I am a little jealous of this room. (VICTOR crosses to console. FRITZ adjusts dials and checks readings.)

VICTOR. Yes. Fine. Very good indeed.

FRITZ. The storm could present a problem. But all the connections seem to be working perfectly.

VICTOR. Yes, everything seems to be in fine shape for our little demonstration.

ELIZABETH (crossing to CLERVAL). I feel as if I were about to witness the unveiling of a new painting by Leonardo.

CLERVAL (crossing to chair and sitting). It's more like a traveling magician getting ready to perform his act in the village square.

VICTOR. Watch out, Henry.

CLERVAL. Good heavens!

FRITZ. Excuse me, Mr. Clerval.

VICTOR (taking ELIZABETH and seating her). All right, Fritz, we're about to cure Mr. Clerval of his cynicism. Turn down the gas. (The lights dim to a low reading as FRITZ pulls large handle on control console.) The world has waited millions of years for what you're about to see. (He crosses UC and opens curtain on arch, revealing a silver coffin-like cabinet.)

CLERVAL (to ELIZABETH). These slight-of-hand artists always insist that the lamps be put out. Well, Victor, I'm waiting to be impressed.

ELIZABETH. Henry, you're not fooling anyone. The truth is you know you're going to be impressed, but you're determined not to admit it. (VICTOR opens the cabinet. It is too dark to see what it contains. The lights go out completely so the only illumination is the red light on the control console.)

VICTOR. Now, Fritz, the motor! (FRITZ throws power switch and grabs the large brake lever. A low frequency power hum is heard.) That's right, but not quite so fast. Good. Now, Henry, you doubting Thomas, watch carefully. (In the cabinet a small faint glow appears.)

ELIZABETH. Oh!

VICTOR. Keep your eyes on it now. (Very slowly the light swells and brightens; the hum continues.) The brake, Fritz. (FRITZ adjusts brake.) You're not saying anything, Henry. Could it be that you don't believe your eyes?

CLERVAL. I've yet to see anything, except a glimmer of light. (Gradually the light becomes bright enough so that we can discern that the cabinet contains a primitive electric light bulb. The hum increases in frequency and volume.)