

PERUSAL SCRIPT

Frankenstein

by

Matthew Ivan Bennett

based on the novel by Mary Shelley

Episode 7 in the **RADIO HOUR** Series



Newport, Maine

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FRANKENSTEIN

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CAST OF CHARACTERS (15m 1f can be doubled to 4 Males; 1 Female SEE BELOW)

Frankenstein	Monster	Elizabeth(f)	Walton
Lieutenant	Sailor	Alphonse	William
Clerval	Waldman	Krempe	DeLacey
Felix	Safie(f)	Kirwin	Fisherman
Judge			
Crowd, Mob			
F/X			

Suggested Doubling of Actors:

Male 1: Frankenstein

Male 2: Monster /Lieutenant/Alphonse/Fisherman

Male 3: Walton/Clerval/Waldman/Felix/Kirwin

Male 4: Krempe/Judge/F/X

Female: Elizabeth/Sailor/DeLacey/Safie/William

*Crowd and Mob performed with all available cast

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FRANKENSTEIN RADIO HOUR Episode 3 — by Matthew Ivan Bennett. 4m 1f with doubling. (54 minutes) Mary Shelley's horror classic Frankenstein - adapted for radio. Shelley's 1818 novel was originally subtitled 'The Modern Prometheus,' intended to be a sort of morality tale based on the ancient Greek myth of the titan who was tortured for giving fire to humankind. Accordingly, in this radio adaptation, special focus is given to the 'torture' of Dr. Frankenstein after creating life from death. A great Halloween offering! RADIO HOUR is a co-production between Salt Lake City's Plan-B Theatre Company and the University of Utah's Public Radio station KUER's Radio West. **ORDER #3237**

MATTHEW IVAN BENNETT is a resident of Plan-B Theatre, listed by American Theater magazine as one of 14 companies nationwide exemplifying social action and civic engagement. At Plan-B, he's premiered several stage and radio plays, including an adaptation of "*Frankenstein*" that won a Utah Broadcasters Association award, and "*Eric(a)*" — which won Best Drama at the United Solo festival in New York. He received the Holland New Voices award from the Great Plains Theatre Commons, has twice been a finalist in screenwriting at Austin Film Festival, and in 2016 was an O'Neill finalist. His short plays have appeared at Chicago's Circle Theatre, Rising Sun in New York, Monkeyman in Toronto, and the Source Festival in DC. Matt is a member of the Dramatists' Guild

Frankenstein

PART 1

INTRODUCTION

MUSIC

MONSTER: (*reading, to himself*) “Did I request thee, Maker, from my clay to mold me man, did I solicit thee from darkness to promote me?” Paradise Lost.

SCENE 1

F/X: Sail; water; wind.

LIEUTENANT: (*from above*) Cap'n! A sledge approaches!

SAILORS: (*Russian accents*) —On the ice! ... Vot is that? ... Starboard!

WALTON: A sledge? We are hundreds of miles from land, Lieutenant.

LIEUTENANT: A telescope for the Cap'n, quick! The man's movin' fast! Starboard side, Cap'n!

SAILORS: (*various voices*) Telescope for the Cap'n!/On the double!/ Vot is that?/Here you are, Cap'n.

F/X: Telescope protracting.

WALTON: Oh yes, I see it! The driver is enormous.

LIEUTENANT: Looks eight bloody feet!—All hands!

SAILORS: All hands!/Stations!/You heard him!

WALTON: How the devil did he get here?—Hullo!

LIEUTENANT: (*to the SAILORS*) Bring 'er about, mates!

SAILORS: Yes, sir.

LIEUTENANT: Let's rescue this loony before he gets hisself killed! The ice'll be breaking—!

WALTON: —No! No, it's useless! We stay where we are! I will not be wrecked on the ice for the sake of a foolish traveler!

MUSIC

SCENE 2

F/X: Pencil and pad.

WALTON: (*writing a letter*) To Mrs. Margaret Saville. England. 5 August. My dear sister, so strange an accident has happened to us that I cannot forbear recording it. On the vast and irregular plains of ice common to the north, we perceived a low carriage. A being, which had the shape of a man, but

apparently of gigantic stature, perhaps some savage inhabitant of—

F/X: Knocking.

LIEUTENANT: *(off)* Cap'n, another one's come! A second ledge. Right to us.

F/X: Pencil and pad.

WALTON: *(the letter to his sister)* I went up on deck Margaret and found the sailors talking to someone in the sea.

SAILORS: We are not pirates, come on up./The ice is going to give./We will not harm you.

WALTON: *(narrating)* On the side of our vessel there was a second sledge, like we had seen before; it had drifted toward us in the night on a fragment of ice. Only one dog remained alive, and the man's face was blue with frost. He was not, as the other traveler seemed to be, a savage; he was European. The sailors were trying to persuade the man to climb aboard, but he stood stubbornly still until I approached.

F/X: Sail; water; wind.

LIEUTENANT: Here is our cap'n, stranger, and he will not allow you to perish on the open sea.

FRANKENSTEIN: *(weak)* You are the captain?

WALTON: I am. Why do you refuse to come up?

FRANKENSTEIN: —Will you have the kindness to inform me whither you are bound?

WALTON: Whither I am bound? Sir, you're on the brink of destruction; I believe my vessel, wherever bound, is your only salvation.

FRANKENSTEIN: Where do you sail?

F/X: Sled dog whining.

WALTON: This is a voyage of discovery. We sail for the north pole.

FRANKENSTEIN: Excellent. I consent to come up.

F/X: Rustling bags, gear.

WALTON: You consent? Your sledge here has only one sick dog, your limbs are nearly frozen you are dreadfully emaciated; I never saw a man in so wretched a condition. Sailor, help him up.

SAILOR: Yes, Captain.

LIEUTENANT: *(aside to the CAPTAIN)* Jus' look at 'im, he's wobblin' like a top.

FRANKENSTEIN: I need no one's help. I can climb up by my—by mys—

SAILORS: There he goes./Catch him!/Grab a hold, sir./Catch him!

F/X: Thunk.

MUSIC

SCENE 3

F/X: Fire; match; pull on a pipe.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*moan, awakening*) ...How long have I been asleep?

WALTON: (*smoking a pipe*) Ah. He stirs. Welcome aboard the Prometheus.

FRANKENSTEIN: How long?

WALTON: Two days, in and out of fever. Why did you come so far up on the ice?

FRANKENSTEIN: —Two days?!

WALTON: Yes.

FRANKENSTEIN: Dammit!

WALTON: Why did you come so far?

FRANKENSTEIN: To seek one who fled from me. One who flees again thanks to—! (*a sigh*) Pardon my rudeness. I should thank you, sir, for bringing me aboard—for saving me. Please forgive the tone I took. Without the warmth of your stove I would be dead.

WALTON: So the other man traveling by sledge, you were pursuing him?

FRANKENSTEIN: —You saw him?

WALTON: Indeed.

FRANKENSTEIN: Do you think the breaking of the ice destroyed him?

WALTON: I cannot say with any certainty. The ice broke at midnight. So this fellow—?

FRANKENSTEIN: —Blast. And I gather your men have not seen him. You are sailing north, correct?

WALTON: At the moment we are anchored due to the ice, but yes. As I told you, we are voyagers. We seek the north pole, the land of eternal light, the power that attracts the needle, dominion over the elemental foes of our—

FRANKENSTEIN: (*laughing*) Oh, unhappy man!

WALTON: Unhappy?

FRANKENSTEIN: From only a few words I hear it. You share my madness, do you not?

WALTON: Do I?

FRANKENSTEIN: You have drunk the intoxicating draft.

WALTON: Which is?

FRANKENSTEIN: (*laughing harder*) You are like a mirror to me. Your every expression is—
(*a coughing fit*)

WALTON: I fail to see what is funny. I have come here in the service of science; the boon of our expedition could be—

FRANKENSTEIN: (*a chuckle*) Yes, you have drunk deeply of the chalice.

WALTON: Meaning?

FRANKENSTEIN: (*a turn*) Hear me, Captain. Let me reveal my tale and, I promise you, you will dash fame's cup from your lips and turn back this boat.

MUSIC

SCENE 4

FRANKENSTEIN: (*narrating*) I am by birth a Swiss, and my family is one of the most distinguished of our country. My parents were patient, charitable, encouraged an ardent love of learning—a love that, alas, would become a grim passion for me. I was five years old when my mother rescued an orphan of Milan from a filthy shack to be my playmate, and eventually, my bride. Her hair was the brightest living gold, her blue eyes cloudless, and the molding of her face so expressive of sensibility and sweetness. Elizabeth... Years later a cherubic little brother would come too: William. The world was a playground; a secret I wished to divine. I was raised, you see, to be curious, inquisitive, driven.

F/X: Rain; a door opens and closes.

ELIZABETH: (*as a teenager*) Victor Frankenstein: always reading.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*as a teenager*) Well, as long as we are confined by the weather, I might as well read.

ELIZABETH: Might as well? You cannot imagine a more thrilling occupation of the senses on a rainy day?

FRANKENSTEIN: (*lowly*) Elizabeth. Shh.

ELIZABETH: Do not shush me.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*lowly*) Father is sitting over there. He can hear.

ELIZABETH: So? He knows. I told him we held hands. And I am adopted.

FRANKENSTEIN: Still.

ELIZABETH: If we were to embrace, Father would not flinch. Come sit by me.

F/X: Soft thunder.

FRANKENSTEIN: Elizabeth, please.

ELIZABETH: Shut your boring, musty book and sit by me.

FRANKENSTEIN: Cornelius Agrippa is not boring.

ELIZABETH: Come listen to the thunder with me.

FRANKENSTEIN: He was a pioneer, after the elixir of life.

ELIZABETH: Life is sitting right here, Victor.

ALPHONSE: (*from across the room*) —Victor, what is that you are reading? Did I hear “Cornelius Agrippa?”

FRANKENSTEIN: Yes, Father.

ALPHONSE: (*a chuckle*) My dear Victor, do not waste your time with that sad trash. You ought to find your friend Clerval. Mother says he wants you and Lizzy to put on a play of his.

F/X: Thunder.

MUSIC

SCENE 5

FRANKENSTEIN: (*narrating, heated*) If, instead of dismissiveness, my father had taken pains to explain to me that the principles of Agrippa had been debunked, and that a modern system of science had been introduced, I would have certainly thrown Agrippa aside. But the casual waving off of it assured me that my father was by no means acquainted with the contents of the book. So I continued to read it with great eagerness and my mind began to bend entirely upon the elixir of life. I dreamed of banishing disease, of rendering man invulnerable, saving us all from our infirmities. I vowed to uncover it.

F/X: Howling wind.

(*narrating*) A clue to it came when I was fifteen. I witnessed a terrible thunderstorm, advancing from the mountains of Jura.

F/X: Lightning.

(*narrating*) I beheld a stream of fire striking an oak. Nothing remained but a blasted stump.

ELIZABETH: (*in the storm*) Victor! What in the world are you doing? Come inside, you are drenched.

FRANKENSTEIN: Electricity, Elizabeth.

ELIZABETH: What of it? Come inside.

FRANKENSTEIN: Electricity! Look at the oak tree, Lizzy! This is the work of electricity.

ELIZABETH: Yes, I am aware. Now please come in before it repeats its work on you.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*glee*) Electricity. Electricity. Electricity!

MUSIC

(*narrating*) I became a student at the University of Ingolstadt. Before leaving my mother died of scarlet fever, which enticed me almost to stay, but in the end I saw in her extinguishment a challenge. I would continue the sacred struggle of ancient alchemy. I would vindicate Agrippa. I would conquer Death.

MUSIC

F/X: Horses; carriage under load.

CLERVAL: God, how fortunate you are, Victor. You fly for Ingolstadt and I remain chained to details of commerce. Instead of Clerval the Actor, I am Clerval the Mercantile.

FRANKENSTEIN: Your father is still inflexible?

CLERVAL: He has debarred me from the hope of a liberal education. My books shall be account ledgers. No poetry, no plays.

ELIZABETH: (*tearful*) You will write me often, Victor?

FRANKENSTEIN: Absolutely.

ELIZABETH: I have a promise?

FRANKENSTEIN: Yes, again, yes. Now cheer yourselves, both: my journey has a return. (a kiss)

F/X: Horses clopping.

(riding off) Remember this old familiar face! Some day you shall see it on a statue!

MUSIC

SCENE 6

FRANKENSTEIN: *(narrating)* Within a week at Ingolstadt I met Professor Waldman, a progressive man very unlike his uppish colleagues. The other teachers, like Professor Krempe, scolded me for my study of alchemy.

F/X: Papers drop.

KREMPE: *(gruff)* Good God! in what desert land have you lived, where no one was kind enough to inform you that these fancies are a thousand years old!

FRANKENSTEIN: *(narrating)* But Professor Waldman was different. He appeared about fifty years of age; a few gray hairs covering his temples, but those at the back nearly raven. He was a short man but remarkably regal; and his voice the sweetest I had ever heard.

WALDMAN: *(lecturing)* The ancient teachers promised impossibilities and performed nothing. The modern masters promise very little, but they penetrate into the recesses of nature, and show how She works in her hiding places. They ascend into the heavens, perform miracles, and mock the invisible world with their power.

F/X: Class bell rings.

CROWD: *(various voices)* The man's brilliant!/Do you really think so?/Could the brain really be electric?

FRANKENSTEIN: *(present time)* Professor Waldman!

WALDMAN: Yes.

FRANKENSTEIN: May I walk with you?

WALDMAN: If you like.

FRANKENSTEIN: Your lecture just now. It was magnificent. I am already your disciple!

WALDMAN: After only course overview?

FRANKENSTEIN: So what do you really think of the ancients? Albertus Magnus, Paracelsus, Agrippa? I sensed an openness.

WALDMAN: *(a chuckle)* They were wrong in the application of their wisdom, but their efforts have been a benefit to us all.

FRANKENSTEIN: Yes! I feel similarly. Also, I was hoping to hear what further books you think I should procure.

WALDMAN: Study every branch of natural philosophy.

F/X: Laboratory.

SCENE 7

FRANKENSTEIN: (*narrating*) Professor Waldman took me into his laboratory and explained to me the uses of every machine, and offered me access to them. Natural philosophy, algebra, chemistry, anatomy, became like food to me. I forgot my family.

MUSIC

ELIZABETH: (*a letter*) Dearest Victor, no matter how I busy my mind it tends to think about the day you first moved my hair out of my face, tends to wonder what your lips feel like. Please write. Yours for life. Elizabeth Lavenza.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*narrating*) My progress was rapid. My drive was the astonishment of the students, my proficiency that of the masters. Two years passed. I never visited home.

MUSIC

F/X: Pencil and pad.

ELIZABETH: (*a letter*) Dear Victor, little William is growing like a vine. We flew kites today. He asks about you. You really should see your brother before he is as big as you. My heart is in your hands. Elizabeth.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*narrating*) I never wrote back. I was enrapt. With every moonrise I asked myself, From where does the principle of life proceed? Where is the root of the tree? Where is the fountain that feeds the root?

F/X: Shoveling dirt; meat; laboratory.

(*narrating*) I soon saw that the answer was not in a book or in a glass jar. I realized that to know life, one must know the stink of death. And so I turned to the many churchyards of Ingolstadt. Maggots writhed on the pages of my journal as I traced the pathways of nerves and drew the wrinkles of brain stems. I saw how the worm inherited the wonders of the eye and brain. And then, a sudden light broke in upon me. After days and nights of labor and fatigue, I bestowed animation upon lifeless matter. The shriveled arms of a vivisected toad shuddered and stretched into life again. It limped to the edge of the table and leapt away. ... It lives. It lives. It lives!

F/X: Big thunder.

MUSIC

SCENE 8

FRANKENSTEIN: (*heavy breath; narrating*) I began the creation of a human being, a man of gigantic stature. Smaller bodies slowed me down, so to keep my knife moving I settled upon building a giant. I occupied a solitary room on the top floor. I tortured living animals in order to learn.

F/X: Shing of a knife; screaming sow.

(*narrating*) My cheeks grew pale, my ribs protruded, my eyeballs started from their sockets, and often my human nature turned with loathing from the pungent rot.

(heaving)

F/X: *Vomit in a bucket.*

(narrating) But on a dreary night of November I beheld the accomplishment of my toils. The rain pattered dismally against the panes, when, by the glimmer of the half-extinguished light, I saw the dull yellow eye of the creature open.

MUSIC

(MONSTER gives a hard gasp, convulsing)

(narrating) How can I describe my emotions at this catastrophe?

(MONSTER choking on phlegm)

(narrating, panic) His limbs were in proportion, his hair a flowing lustrous black, his teeth of a pearly whiteness; but these fine features only formed a more horrid contrast with his watery eyes. The eyes that seemed the same color as the dun white sockets in which they were set, framed by a shriveled complexion and thin black lips.

(MONSTER infantile crying)

F/X: *Splashing; crashing.*

(narrating) He flailed...smashing the instruments of his birth, struggling to adjust his sallow eyes to the candlelight...denting the metal basin that was his womb as he kicked... Stitches were popping, black blood oozed. I rushed out of the room. I threw myself on the bed in my clothes, seeking forgetfulness.

MUSIC

(narrating) I was numb, full of denial. I left...it...in the laboratory, hoping it would stutter back into stillness without my midwifery. I slept. I thought I saw my sweet, soft Elizabeth in the bloom of health. I kissed her, but her lips became livid with the hue of death. She became my mother, her corpse shrouded, grave-worms crawling in the folds of the flannel.

MUSIC

(scream; narrating) I woke.

(MONSTER inarticulate cooing)

(narrating) The wretch stood over me. His jaws opened, a grin wrinkled his cheeks.

(in the present, in the scene) No, you keep away!

(MONSTER a grotesque baby babble)

—No! I said keep away from me! No!

F/X: *Chair turning over; punching.*

(MONSTER a painful wail, crying)

F/X: *Door slams.*

SCENE 9

FRANKENSTEIN: (narrating) I ran. I ran through the barren dim streets of Ingolstadt until my feet were throbbing and raw, until a fever forced me onto the steps of a church.

F/X: Church bells; birds chirping.

CLERVAL: Victor? Victor Frankenstein?

FRANKENSTEIN: (*startling; waking*) ...Clerval?

CLERVAL: It is you!—My dear Frankenstein, what are you doing here in the street? You look a fright.

FRANKENSTEIN: Clerval. You're here.

CLERVAL: Yes, my father relented at last. My voyage of discovery to the land of knowledge begins. Are you all right?

FRANKENSTEIN: It gives me the greatest delight to see you. How is my father?

CLERVAL: He's well. Happy. A little uneasy that he hears from you so seldom. Why are you on the street?

FRANKENSTEIN: —And my brother? My sister? Elizabeth? Tell me that she's all right.

CLERVAL: She's healthy, why?

FRANKENSTEIN: She is? She isn't rotting? Gray? Maggots—?

CLERVAL: Victor, sit back down, you are ill. I'm going for a doctor.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*dizzy*) —My sister, my wife, my mother, she—

F/X: Falls on the steps.

SCENE 10

F/X: Distant gunshots; running.

(*MONSTER wheezing*)

MOB: (*distant; overlapping*) Head 'im off!/He's quick!/I see 'im!

F/X: Gunshot.

(*MONSTER screaming, he is shot*)

MUSIC

F/X: Water pouring.

CLERVAL: Drink this.

FRANKENSTEIN: (*sipping*) How very good you are to me, Clerval. This whole winter you could have been at study; instead you are bringing me broths and dabbing my brow.

CLERVAL: Yes, well, I expect to be repaid.

FRANKENSTEIN: I am undeserving of so true a friendship.

CLERVAL: Hush.

FRANKENSTEIN: I abandoned you. Elizabeth.

CLERVAL: Victor, really, you must make at least a symbolic effort to forgive yourself. The body is mending, so let the mind. Write to your sweetheart, your father; they weary of obtaining their news through me. Here, answer this; it arrived in the post this afternoon. From your father.

F/X: Letter opening.

ALPHONSE: *(a letter)* Victor, I know you have been very ill, but I must inflict a further pain upon you. William is dead!

MUSIC

(the letter) William, that sweet child, whose smiles delighted and warmed us—he has been murdered.

FRANKENSTEIN: Clerval?

CLERVAL: Yes?

FRANKENSTEIN: We must leave for Geneva.

CLERVAL: What is it? What has happened?

FRANKENSTEIN: Tonight. ...

(later; on a horse, a whistle)

Carry me home, my friend!

F/X: Horses galloping.

(narrating) Having read half of the letter I knew. They found William stretched on the grass in the woods, unhidden, blue and motionless, the print of the murderer's finger on his slender neck. Somehow, I knew: it was him. It. This thing I created. The road ran by the side of the lake, becoming narrow as I approached my native town. I wept as we galloped by the summit of Mount Blanc in the night. The familiar was no comfort to me; grief and fear towered over me. Then, as we came within a league of home, I perceived in the gloom a figure stealing from behind a clump of trees—it was the wretch! The filthy fiend. He was at Geneva. He had done it. The deformed demon survived and was the murderer of my baby brother.

SCENE 11

FRANKENSTEIN: *(narrating)* Our favorite servant, Justine, was tried for the murder. A picture of my mother, which William was known to have had at the time of his killing, was discovered among Justine's belongings. And yet I knew she was guiltless. We all knew. Elizabeth especially...

CROWD: *(various voices)* Ripped the boy's throat!/ Red-handed...

F/X: Gavel (slow)

JUDGE: *(cantankerous)* Order!

ELIZABETH: (*addressing the court*) Your honor, I am well acquainted with the accused. She nursed Madame Frankenstein, my mother, in her last with affection and care. Notwithstanding all the proof against her, I do not hesitate to say I believe and rely on her perfect innocence. As to the bauble on which the chief proof rests, if she had earnestly desired that picture, I should have given it to her; so much do I esteem her.

CROWD: (*various voices*) Pretty words do not prove a thing!/Let her hang!/The evidence is clear!

F/X: Gavel (fast).

FRANKENSTEIN: (*narrating*) Wasted eloquence. Justine was hanged.

MUSIC

(*narrating*) The fangs of remorse tore my bosom as I rushed away from the scaffolds. I bore a hell within me. I was the true murderer. William's end was worked by my thrice accursed hands. I wrought the monster and... But I could say nothing; as I could say nothing to Clerval as he cared for me in the feverish aftermath of my hubris. They would think me demented. So I bore it alone. For days after the hanging I sat by the lake with Elizabeth, lost in the hurt of her pale sky eyes, longing to tell her the truth and knowing I could never.

MUSIC

SCENES 12-14 OF PART 1, MAKE UP 5 PAGES TO THE END OF PART 1

PART 2 HAS 6 PAGES TO THE END OF THE PLAY