

EXCERPT FROM *FRANKENSTEIN A
LIFE BEYOND* BY PETE PLANISEK

CHAPTER 2
GENEVA

**

23 September 1809

I was beyond the city walls by the time the sun caught up with the world. Sleep had been only a notion, so rather than indulge my hours in worthless wile; I abandoned further pretenses and tried to focus my mind on what was to come.

I plan to remain a day or so, alone, at the house. I call it a house, but to me, it is no more than an extension of a vast tomb; one which houses memory, time, and the lost hope of my family and friends. I have seen the worst of humankind in my travels, spent untold hours in the cemetery where Quinn Tierney now sleeps, and in my journeys, faced my own death untold times, but the thought of entering the house made my spirit tremble and my senses dull. Fearful that my resolve would fail me, I dressed and roused the innkeeper to pay my bill. The cool darkness of the slumbering city revived me.

The blackness provided a sense of anonymity, and for a few precious moments, I was unshackled, and my mind replayed the vast star fields I witnessed in the night sky during my years at sea. Strange how such an unyielding environment can harbor such beautiful treasures. Some nights the cold comfort of the stars has been my only solace; the only calm place of order in a life of chaos; their mystic fires burning undisturbed by the passions of our brief existence.

Though I left Geneva early, I did not manage to arrive at my home until quite late. I deliberately traveled a winding path, one which over the course of the day, afforded me long forgotten views of the ancient peaks of the Juras chain to the north; of Mount Selve, on the city's southern boarder, and of the towering Alps of the Savoy. The majestic, frigid heights of "the white lady," Mount Blanc, held me transfixed for some time.

I walked through a land of shadows: the rock where my mother once gave me an early reading lesson, the trail to the boat docks near Cologny, the field in Plainpalais where William's shattered body was discovered. The image of my brother's blue eyes and curled hair passes unbidden before my eyes. We'd been at play, some sort of hiding game, when he vanished. We parted vowing that neither would ever find the other. And that was the last time I ever saw him alive. After a lengthy search, Father discovered him, and then bore his body to the house early the next morning. Though the land is now clearly in autumn's withering embrace, my mind only replayed

that summer day so long ago, and all I could smell were wildflowers.

When I finally arrived at the house, we silently regarded the changes to one another. Windows were broken or patched, decaying curtains hung asunder, an assortment of ivy, weeds, and grasses choked the lawn, as well as Mother's once prized flower beds. The deplorable sight of my once safe and familiar home holds little emotion for me now. It is an empty shell. As I feel I have been for most of my life. My only interests in it lie in using it to secure the financial future of my family. It is ancillary to the true purpose of my visit. I turned my back to it and made for a small, gated plot of land near the woods.

The graves stood in long shadows as the fading light cast them into gloom. The headstones, or what I could see of them beneath the heavy growth, stood as silent sentinels adhering to their macabre duty. They have remained faithful. I have not. The corrupting effects that time worked upon the stones portended to what it has done to those at rest in the soft earth below. There, alone in the shadows, I, the last living Frankenstein, tended to the dead.

One by one, I cleared the stones of the decaying, encroaching debris, and allowed my heart to embrace each name my efforts revealed: Caroline Frankenstein, Alphonso Frankenstein, William Frankenstein, and Elizabeth Frankenstein. I paused a long time before clearing the fifth and final remaining grave. I could not even bring myself to look upon the name etched into that stone. I have never approved

of its inclusion and its occupant still arouses painfully intense feelings of love, anguish, and shame within me. Befittingly, briar rose bushes have encamped themselves nearby, ensuring that my hands were pricked and bloodied by the time I finished my grim task.

The light was vanishing rapidly now. I knelt before the graves, my surging emotions blending with a silent prayer. My senses turned inward to a rush of images, sounds, smells, and sensations richly preserved in long buried memories. All the people who had made my life real, who'd shaped and created my sense of purpose in the days of my youth, lay massacred beneath me. Here, before them, the silence was deafening. Tears mingled with blood as I passed my hands over my face. The man before them bares little resemblance to the boy who failed them, and fled so long ago. Do they know that I died and have been resurrected by your mother's love? And what of Victor? Has his destiny been fulfilled in a frozen Artic wasteland as Walton contends? Or is he here, alive, hidden for some as yet unknown purpose? I crave your mother's gentle spirit for no answers can come from the dead. Still I hope that my pilgrimage will allow them to relinquish their grasp on me.

The stress and fatigue of the day finally overwhelmed me. With the last muted hints of daylight, I returned to the house, and stole a quick glance at the family crest above the entry. The door was locked, but that formality had apparently been overcome many times. Inside, the dust lay as thick as snow in some places, while others attested to the recent presence of

both man and beast in the house. I managed to locate an odd candle or two and began to explore the dark, musty chambers.

Rats and field mice have picked the kitchen clean. Some rooms are ransacked, while others remain as pristine as the day I abandoned them. At some point (I'm guessing French soldiers) used one of the larger fireplaces as a privy. Fortunately, the only occupant I found was a raccoon, though I've heard bats flapping about in the darkness around me. I discovered my old room was basically intact, and sank mercifully onto my rank smelling bed. It shifted to the left and broke almost immediately. I tried to sleep on the floor, but incessant insect bites, most likely fleas, made this a rather uncomfortable option. Finally, I returned to the listing bed and became one with the darkness.

Dawn was grey, and brought no comfort. I set about the task of assessing my property. Perhaps it was the unresolved matter of Victor, or maybe the nearness of my family's graves, but as I moved from empty room to empty room, I became aware of a presence — watching me. I tried ignoring it, confronting it, and finally with no evidence that it was anything more real than my imagination, simply banished it from my thoughts. This task I must to complete is for you and your mother. I will not allow phantoms to deter me; at least, none from the present.

As I encountered them though, certain objects and spaces took on a life of their own. My father's writing desk still smells of amoretto flavored pipe tobacco, and the top left-hand drawer still contained his journal. A journal he will never

write in again. He'd been doing so when Victor returned with Elizabeth's body. I turned to the final entry and noticed how the last words trailed off, as the small sense of normality we'd fought so hard to regain was obliterated in that horrible moment. I left the room and took his journal with me, though I doubt I'll ever be able to bring myself to read it.

My mother's spirit still resides in the small bedroom, at the back of the house, where she passed, quietly of scarlet fever. The bed she died in was never used again and oddly enough it was one of the few rooms uncorrupted by either thievery or time. The floorboards near the bed still creak and the dried flowers that Elizabeth brought her remain on the nightstand. My mother died while far too young, and left all but her oldest child, with a loss we could never recover from. All of us mourned her, except Victor, who left for university in Ingolstadt not long after her death and immersed himself in study. He rarely returned or corresponded until William's death brought him home. It was as if we did not exist to him all those years. He never saw how the loss of Mother affected the rest of us. And he seemed mostly indifferent to the fact that his prolonged absence from our lives caused additional sorrows; though in the end, his own return resulted in nothing but heartache and death.

With William, I feel the strongest connections either when I am outside or among the myriad of hiding places we used over the years; my poor, dear brother who never had a chance to grow up. He would have been brilliant and his stubbornness

unrivaled, except perhaps by Victor's. Thank God for Elizabeth's maternal presence. I don't think Father and I could have handled William by ourselves.

The library was by far the coldest room I entered. When I tried to draw back the curtains and allow the scant daylight into the room, it resulted in the final disintegration of the aged, decorative cloth. It was here that I felt the strongest connection to Elizabeth. She spent untold hours here, immersed in the minds of Dante, Milton, Plato, and Virgil. She was raised as my sister, though no blood tie existed. Her romantic nature flourished among the pages she read, and it was she who finished my schooling. Her gentleness, love, and strength of spirit kept our family going through the dark years after Mother's death. And it was Elizabeth's loss that shattered the Frankenstein household forever.

When I realized that the daylight would be gone soon and I'd brought little in the way of food I decided to save my survey of the outer buildings until tomorrow. Three rooms remain for me to visit here in the house also, but I must admit, I dread the demons each of these might hold. Still, they wait for me, and despite my misgivings, I know they too will be visited tomorrow. With limited options, I headed for the nearest residence I could remember.

The LaShalls were once close to my parents, but grew more distant after the death of my mother. So it was no great shock when they found my purported identity more than a little ostentatious. In the end, we passed a pleasant, but equally

awkward evening together. I left knowing they did not believe that Ernest Frankenstein had come to visit. They both well knew that he and everyone else in that cursed family were long since dead. But at least they were willing to feed me. I think the money I paid them for the food helped.

I returned to my mirthless estate, and attempted to pen a letter to your mother in the murky surroundings. Were it not for the light of the full moon and flicking candles keeping the shades at bay, it would not be hard to imagine that I've joined my family in the grave. Dark thoughts tend me in those lonely hours and I ponder how this house ever felt inviting. Several times noises have cried out from the dark, unseen corners of the house. I dismiss these as best I can, though with a growing sense of unease.

Man's worst enemy is often his own imagination, and as such, only nightmares found me last night. I remember few of them, but one image fixes itself to my mind, as it has often done for many years. The most repugnant aspect of this image is that it once greeted me in life, before it crossed into the realm of nightmare. I witnessed it in my youth. The image of Justine Moritz's eyes, before the gallows's door opened beneath her feet. Right before she was hung for the murder of my dear brother, William. She is the first woman I ever loved, and the final grave I uncovered in my family's cemetery.