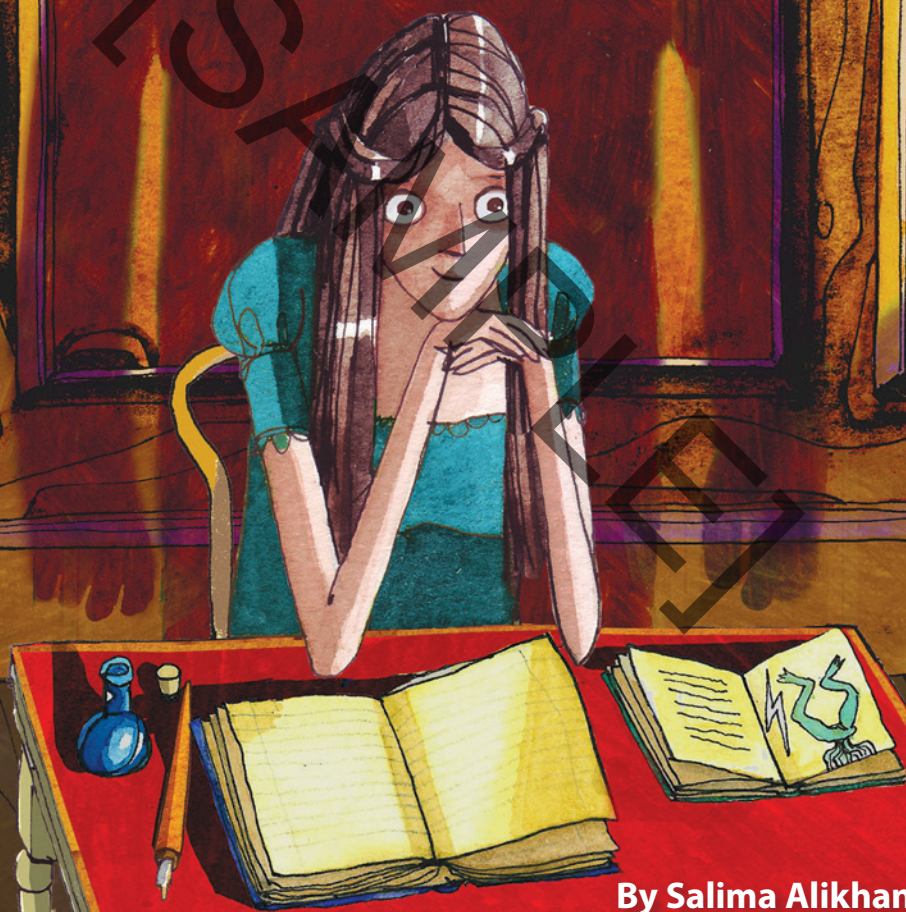


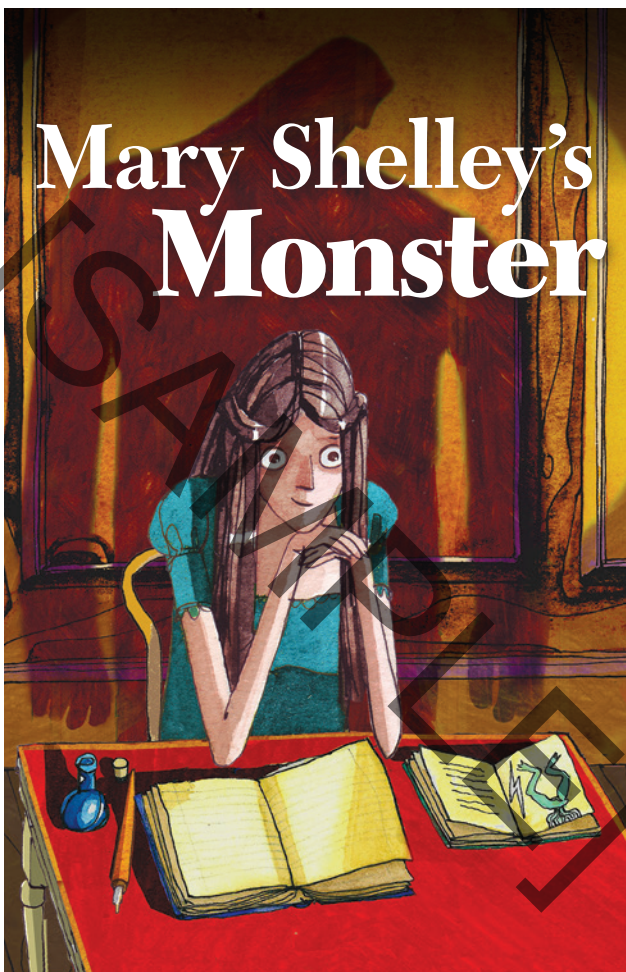
# Mary Shelley's Monster



By Salima Alikhan

Illustrated by Peter Cottrill

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## CHAPTER ONE



### Born to Daydream

My name is Mary Shelley, and I'm a writer. It is the stormy summer of 1816—the summer that will inspire me to create one of the most famous fictional monsters in the world.

This summer happens to be the coldest and wettest one that Europe has seen in a long time. Percy and I have

left our home country of England to travel through Europe.

*Neigh, snort.* The horses whinny and grunt as their muscular legs work. They're pulling our carriage through the winding Jura Mountains, which will take us out of France and into Switzerland.

"Look at the landscape, Mary." Percy peeks over my shoulder. He points out the window at the snowy Swiss Alps looming in the distance. "Switzerland will be beautiful—the perfect place to write!"

I agree. It is nice to get out of England for a while. Percy is a poet. We are on our way to Lake Geneva to meet another English poet, Lord Byron. He has invited us to his house in Switzerland, and it promises to be an adventure.

"What do you think your mother would have thought about our trip?" Percy asks me as we rumble along.

My mother, Mary Wollstonecraft,

died 11 days after I was born. I never got to know her, but I like to think she's proud of the woman I am—even if I'm only 18 years old.

I smile. “She would have been proud of us.”

Like Percy and me, my mother was a radical. She was one of the very first feminist writers, and she worked hard to promote the rights of women. Many people don't think women deserve the same rights as men. But I believe the same thing my mother believed: that women should decide their own fates.

“What do you think the Swiss people will be like?” Percy asks.

I know he is worried that the Swiss will treat us the same way some English people do. In England, we get in trouble for our nontraditional beliefs. Percy's writing and poetry criticize our country's government.

“We'll find other people who believe in the same things we do,” I say.

Percy and I both return to looking

out the window. I'm glad we have each other. We don't believe that the wealthy should have so much control. We think that the wealthy should help the poor and that everyone should be able to enjoy the world.

"What are you writing?" Percy asks as I take out my journal.

"I want to describe this landscape," I tell him. "It's haunting and beautiful."



Writing and daydreaming are my favorite things to do. I've been writing stories ever since I was a little girl. I thoughtfully describe this bizarre landscape in my journal: There are jagged mountains, snow, and bare trees. It's a desolate, ghostly place. I imagine it's the kind of place monsters might live. Sometimes, all I have to do is look at a landscape and I start to imagine the



odd, sometimes otherworldly creatures and people that *could* live there.

When I was younger, I lived in Scotland for a while. There, I spent hours looking out over a harbor. I imagined the kinds of creatures that would haunt Scotland's cold waters, high mountains, and deep lakes.

I blink, and I'm back to staring at the bleak, lonely Swiss landscape.

"I wonder what kinds of strange creatures would live here," I whisper as our carriage rumbles closer to Lake Geneva.

I have a feeling monsters roam these mountains.

Finally, we arrive at Lake Geneva. Its water is a brilliant sky blue, and it's surrounded by steep mountains.

The dashing, dark-haired Lord Byron and another man stride out of the house to meet us.

"I'm so happy to meet you," Lord Byron says. "Please meet my personal doctor, Dr. Polidori." He introduces us

to the young man with him.

Right away, we learn that we all have a lot in common. Lord Byron is also a rebel. Just like Percy and me, he believes that society needs a drastic change. We are all willing to speak out about that, even if it means we must live as exiles, away from our homes.

Before long, we notice a storm gathering over the lake. Deep-gray clouds roll in over the darkening water. Spatters of rain hit the earth.

We rush to the villa just as the rain picks up, and we make it inside just as thunder booms loudly above us.



*Galvanism*

## CHAPTER TWO



### Life and Death

We light candles all over the house. We had planned to hike in the mountains and sail out on the lake. But now, it looks like we might not be going anywhere.

Silver sheets of rain slap at the big windows. Lightning forks over the water, making the sky glow and flash.

The lightning dances over the lake and looks like long, burning ropes. It's impressive and terrifying. There is something about its power that scares and thrills me at the same time.

“Have you heard of the theories of galvanism?” I ask Lord Byron. “This lightning makes me think of it. Percy and I have been reading about it.”

Another strike of lightning, and the hair on the back of my neck stands up. It seems as though Lord Byron is affected also; his cheeks flush with color and there's something brewing behind his eyes. Was he reacting to the storm raging outside or the mention of the word *galvanism*?

You see, a lot of people are afraid of its potential, but I feel hopeful that Lord Byron may be excited to talk about it.

Galvanism is a popular scientific practice of our day. It involves the belief that electricity can be used to bring dead bodies back to life. Many

doctors and scientists of the late 1700s and early 1800s have already conducted experiments to test this theory.

But that's exactly why people are afraid of it. What would happen if people found a way to better control electricity? Could electricity—from lightning for example—be used to bring dead creatures and people back to life?

Percy draws his chair closer, eager to hear what Lord Byron has to say.

“Whoever can do that,” says Lord Byron, “would be the most powerful person in the world.”

He pauses and his face turns serious.

“Sounds like a job for a poet!” He lets out a squeal at his own joke.

He then takes a big, silly bow. We all laugh as lightning strikes outside. Dr. Polidori joins in the conversation, answering some of our medical questions.

I listen eagerly while Percy and Lord Byron wonder about the meaning of life. I've often wondered about it

myself. To me, those ideas relate to how people treat each other. I have always wanted all people to be treated equally. I think of the people who hold the power in England. Many of them do not have respect for all people's lives.

How can we grow as a society when people take advantage of power? And what if people gain the power to create life with electricity?

I ponder these questions as I stare into the candles' dancing flames.

## CHAPTER THREE



### The Competition

The weather outside grows even darker and stormier. Now lightning strikes the lake every few seconds, and thunder rattles the windows. The candles flicker. I shiver; it's the spookiest atmosphere I've ever been in.

"It's the perfect night for ghost stories!" Lord Byron declares and

brings out a large book of German horror stories. He lays the heavy book down in front of us with a flourish. It has a long title—*Fantasmagoriana*.

We take turns reading the ghost stories by the light of the candles, while thunder shakes the mountainside. I've never read ghost stories like this in my life! I wrap myself tighter into a blanket, shuddering.



One of the stories is about a man who thought he was dancing with his bride but instead realized he was dancing with the ghost of a woman he had abandoned. When I read the story, I feel this man's horror as though it's mine. There is another story about a ghost who has to curse all the children in his family. The thought of being haunted makes me shiver.



The night continues, none of us able to stop reading. One terrifying story follows another, and we are all stuck in a world between fascination and anticipation. The walls flicker with ominous shadows.

Lord Byron has an idea.

“I set a competition,” he says with excitement, “to see which one of us can write the most terrifying ghost story!”

“I don’t know whether I can do it,” I say nervously.

Percy and Lord Byron are two of the most brilliant poets of our time. I’m intimidated by their talent. I feel less experienced as an author, and I don’t know whether I can write as well as they can. Maybe it’s the spooky setting, because suddenly something inspires me to throw my hands in the air and agree to give it a shot.

No sooner are the words out of my mouth than I’m met with a feeling of nervousness. At first, I can’t write a thing. I have a lofty goal forming in

my mind: I know that I want to write a story that is every bit as scary as the German ghost stories we just read. I want people to have the same reaction in their bodies that I did when I read *Fantasmagoriana*. I want my story to be thrilling and terrifying. I want it to make people's hearts race and tremble. And I want it to make people think about life and death.

The only thing I don't know is what my story should be about. What's terrifying *enough* to win a competition against two great minds like Percy and Lord Byron?

I set such enormous goals for myself that it's hard to begin writing at all; I'm afraid to fail. I sit with my quill and stare into the light of a candle, trying to think of a story to tell—but nothing comes to me. I'm extremely frustrated.

This sometimes happens to writers. We search our minds for ideas, but we can't find any right away. Sometimes, we know the ideas are there in the

backs of our minds, lurking. But we can't grasp a hold of them.

I get up, pace the room, and listen to the rain pelting outside. I think of the German tales we read. Yet still, I can't think of what to write.

I listen to the others' ideas for ghost stories. Dr. Polidori plans to write a story about a skull-headed lady, which doesn't sound very interesting to me—but I don't tell him that.

After a while, even Lord Byron and Percy give up on the project. I'm surprised. But I haven't given up. I'm determined to write a story. My mind spins like a whirlwind.

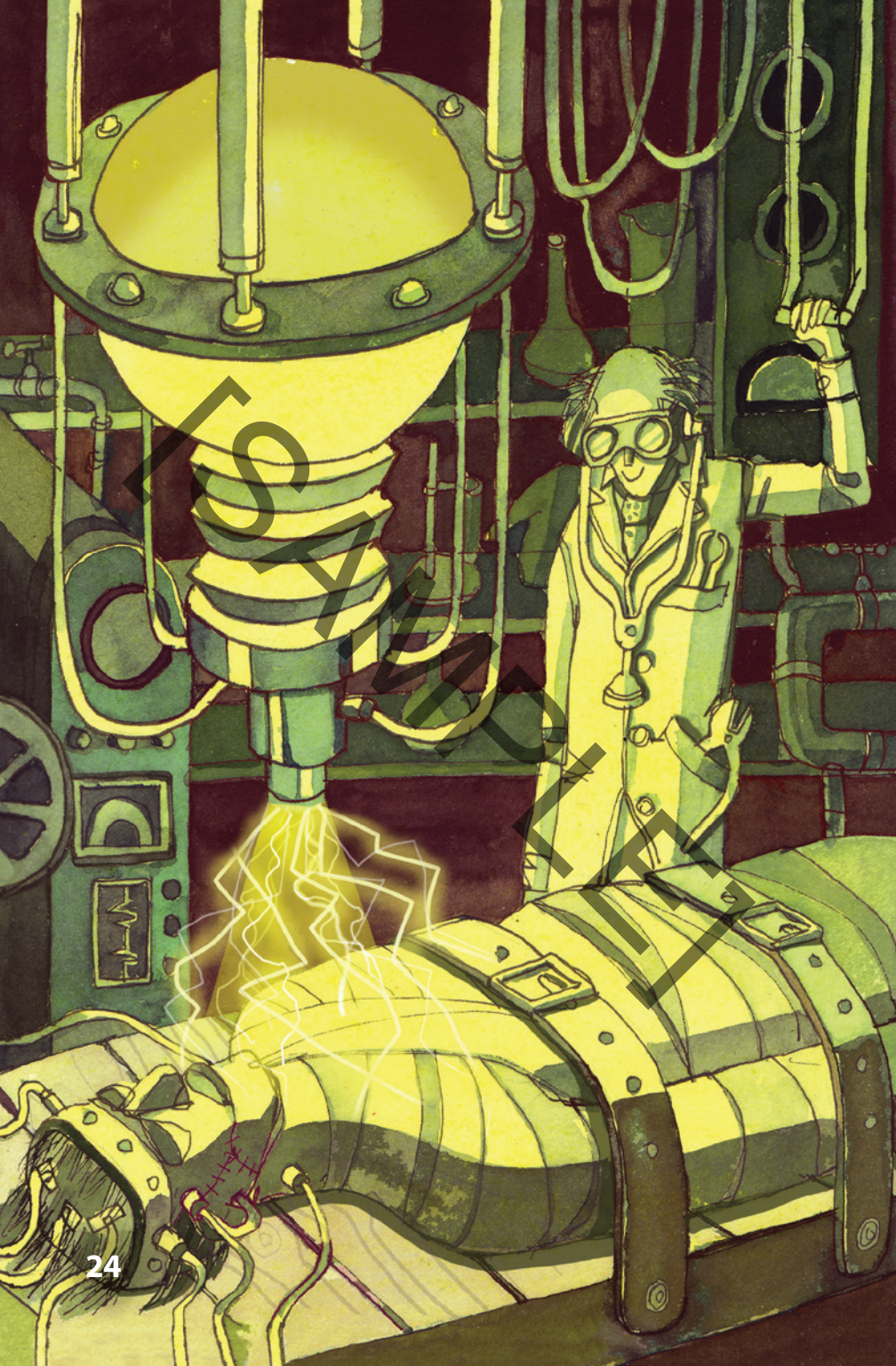
## CHAPTER FOUR



### A Dream of a Monster

That night, I struggle to sleep. I have a dream that feels even more real than the ones I had when I was a little girl.

I dream about a doctor who is working on something in his laboratory. There's a creature on the table in front of him, but I can't see exactly what it is. There's also a ton of equipment



and machinery in the room. A fierce lightning storm rages outside. The doctor is very excited—he's been experimenting all his life, and the moment is finally here. He rushes around his lab, waiting for the lightning to strike the machines. The machines will transmit electricity to the creature on the table. He wants to see whether the lightning will bring it to life.

But when lightning does bring it to life, the doctor realizes that it doesn't look beautiful, as he meant it to be. It looks scary. The doctor regrets what he has done.

My eyes fly open, my heart is pounding, but a smile breaks across my face. Finally, I've found the idea for my ghost story! It is definitely an idea that I'm sure will terrify others the same way it terrified me.

When I start writing, I can hardly write fast enough to keep up with my thoughts. It does me good to write about the horrifying vision I had; I get

it out of my mind and onto the paper. I write and write while the storm rages on outside.

The more I write, the more real the doctor's monster seems to me. When I'm finished, I've written a short piece that vividly describes the vision I had.

"This is so powerful that you should turn it into a novel," Percy says to me when I show it to him.

And so I do. I start adding to my manuscript, expanding it. I enjoy figuring out how to turn my short story into a full novel. It's exciting because I get to tell a whole tale. I get to imagine more characters, settings, and plot elements.

I keep thinking about what things people could do with the right technology. It's fun to write about this fantastical and monstrous creation brought to life by the doctor's scientific theories and experiment. But I don't want my story to just be about an imaginary scientific experiment.

## CHAPTER FIVE



### My Hideous Progeny

I take a break from writing and get so lost in my thoughts that they turn into another daydream. I see the lonely monster roaming the countryside, looking for help. Even though he looks frightening, he makes me sad too because he just wants the same thing all humans want: to belong.

I think about how I have always believed that all people should be treated equally—whether they are rich or poor, plain or beautiful. And I think about the way that powerful people often use their power for bad things, even when they don't mean to.

This helps me write the personality of the doctor in my story. I call the book my “hideous progeny” because that's how the doctor thinks of his progeny—like his child. I write that the doctor gets carried away with his own cleverness; he wants to be the first person to create life this way. But he doesn't think about how the monster will feel.

When the poor monster first wakes, he is kind and wants to help people. But because he looks hideous, people hurt him and run from him. He is left alone with no one to help him. The doctor doesn't want to take responsibility for helping the creature learn to live in the world. In this way, my book can teach others about being kind.

As I write, I drift into my thoughts about how difficult family can be. I miss my mother so much, even though I have no memories of her.

My father and I have a difficult relationship. He doesn't approve of many of my choices or beliefs. I've always thought my mother would have felt differently, if she were alive. I think she would have been proud of my decisions and my independence. I think I would have felt at home with her.

I think of the friends in Scotland that I visited when I was young, and I remember running through the Scottish hills with them. They were so kind to me and felt more like family than my real home did.

This also makes me understand the monster in my story. I see some of myself in him and feel sorry for him. I understand why he gets angry and why he gets sad. I know why he feels like he never belongs; he is always looking for a home and a family. I think of how

bleak some of these Swiss mountains are. They look the way my monster feels—lonely and unwanted.

When we return to England, I keep working on my story. In another daydream, I hear people in the story calling the doctor by his name, and I have found the name of my book: *Frankenstein!*

When I finish, I sit with the book in my lap, running my hands over the pages. I've worked so hard for more than a year. I'm very proud. I have poured everything I think and feel into this story.

I have so many hopes for my book. I hope it inspires people. It is a tale of horror, but it is a tale of humanity too. I want it to remind people that we are responsible for what we create. I want it to make us question what it is to be human and to remind us to be kind. We have all been like Dr. Frankenstein—so impressed with our own ideas that we forget to think about the consequences,

so eager to see how technology can change things. And we have all been like the monster—alone and worried about our places in the world.

I smile as I realize that sometimes a monster can make people remember what it is to be human.



# About Us

## The Author

Salima Alikhan has been a writer and illustrator for 14 years. She is a big fan of Mary Shelley, so writing about the great author was a perfect fit for her. She lives in Austin, Texas, where she writes and illustrates children's books. She also teaches creative writing at St. Edward's University and English at Austin Community College.

## The Illustrator

Peter Cottrill is from the city of Liverpool, England. His favorite place at school was the art room, where he always felt like he belonged. After earning a visual communication degree, he moved to London for work. He was able to publish a couple of picture books there, and he has been hooked on stories and image-making ever since.

## Book Club Questions

1. In Mary Shelley's day, what did some scientists believe electricity could do?
2. What are some of the things that inspired Mary Shelley to write *Frankenstein*?
3. Why weren't Percy and Mary Shelley accepted in traditional English society?
4. Why was Mary Shelley nervous before she started writing *Frankenstein*?
5. In chapter one, Mary Shelley describes the landscape. Describe what kinds of monsters might live in a place like that.
6. The last line of the book is "I smile as I realize that sometimes a monster can make people remember what it is to be human." What do you think the author means?

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