

Madame Frankenstein



CARLTON HOLDER

MADAME FRANKENSTEIN

a short story

by

Carlton Holder

based on characters from

Mary Shelley's

FRANKENSTEIN

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A Short Story by Carlton Holder

From the final letter written by Victor Frankenstein:

September 10th, 17—

Dearest Brother,

I have instructed the noble sea captain - who did rescue me from the ice and to whom I have transcribed my sad story - to send you the resulting manuscript so that you may know what became of our once happy family. I will pay for my role soon enough as I lay on what most certainly is my death bed here on the ship. I have also given Captain Walton this sealed letter for you as well with instructions that you open it only after you have read the manuscript.

So by now you know all that I have done.

This letter is the finale to my sordid tale.

I left this piece of the story out of my confession to the captain. I fear what such a conscience-driven soul as he may choose to do with this knowledge, for there is another whom I seek to protect, as you will soon find out. However, I do not care to take

this secret to my grave without one other person knowing the truth—in case I am wrong. Read now beloved brother, the confession of my final sin - if that it be - against the community of mankind.

Weeks after the horror that had been my wedding day, brought to ruin by the machinations of true evil, I had, for lack of a better word, a mental breakdown. My days and nights were full of darkness and chaos. Servants cared for me. After a fashion, I came out of my delirium in stages. When by chance I occasioned to look upon my face in the lavatory mirror, I was repelled by the hollow man who did look back at me. I had become my own ghost, shallow and pale—gaunt. My clothes now ill-fit my skeletal frame. The only appetite I had left was for the spirits that temporarily numbed my grief. But upon each morning's sobering, remembrance of the horror returned as quickly as the rising sun. I belonged in the family mausoleum where our dear brother, along with fair Justine, our beloved father, and enchanting Elizabeth now resided, all, in one way or another, victims of my appetite for grandeur, my damn selfish need to play God. I belonged in the finely polished silver casket that awaited me in that tomb beside Elizabeth.

It called out to me. I craved it.

Only I was still of the living.

And with the exception of you, my last surviving sibling, whom I have sent far far away to live with distant relatives, I was the last Frankenstein. The only true emotions I felt now beyond my eternal regret, were hatred and vengeance. For the monster. My monster.

At a local tavern by the dock with a high legend for ill-repute, I hired a tracker; a man with the reputation for being able to hunt another living creature, man or beast, through the wildest jungles, the most barren deserts, or the harshest arctic. To accompany him, I also bought the hire of the stoutest league of mercenaries, men of war, I could find. For the price of gold, these six individuals together would hunt the daemon down for me. I do not truly know if any of these rogues believed me or my description of a monster nearly eight feet tall with a face from the grave and long, unruly black locks. More likely they believed me mad. But they believed in my money and would therefore do as I commanded. In addition, I offered a large bounty for finding the creature. They had the strictest instructions not to approach or attempt to kill it. The *coupe de grâce* would be mine. My intent was to make the fiend suffer to its last; alas, suffering for suffering.

While I awaited word from these rough men, I spent more and more time in the family crypt. It was now the only place where I was not alone, that I considered home. I stifled the stench of death with strong incense, scented candles, and refreshed bouquets of flowers. In our family tomb, I would embrace and lay with the cold dead form of my sweet Elizabeth in her coffin. Her vacant eyes would stare right through me as I stroked her hair, and my heart would break all over again, every single time. The crypt was so silent I could hear my own heartbeat. It was the only sound there was, at first. Then, little by little, a new sound did travel in on the wind. I could not understand what it was saying at first, but after a fashion it became clearer and clearer to me as its echo bounced off stone walls—‘*You can bring her back.*’

The thought quickened my breath as it simultaneously terrified and excited me. Oh to have my sweet innocent Elizabeth back would be more than I deserved. I had refused to create a bride for my monster, ripping to pieces the half-finished work I had begun in earnest. I feared their progeny, far superior to man in physical strength and treachery, would one day endanger the survival of the human species and make the name Victor Frankenstein cursed throughout all eternity.

But Elizabeth could be different—*would* be different. I had not pieced her together with the spare parts of morgue cadavers. She was whole. Pure. The only damage done to Elizabeth's delicate frame was to her throat. When the creature strangled the life out of her, he had crushed Elizabeth's larynx. But this could be replaced with money and a nocturnal trip to a medical college to procure the undamaged female larynx of the recently deceased.

My Elizabeth would not be a monster. With the spark of life returned to her mortal frame and breath once more coursing through her, fresh blood pumping through her via a beating heart, I had to believe her soul would find its way back to this pure, gentle vessel of flesh and bone. Back to me.

I acquitted all the servants with healthy severance pay. And when there were no witnesses to my impending crime, I swept my wife's corpse from the mausoleum to the workshop I had constructed for this very purpose up in the sprawling attic of our manor.

For weeks, as I received reports from couriers on the hunt for the fiend, I endeavored to bring my sweet beautiful Elizabeth home. I now had a reason to go on, to get out of bed every day,

indeed to live. I began to consume food and drink again, the sustenance necessary to give me the strength and mental vitality to carry out my gruesome task. I carefully cut open my late wife's delicate throat, replaced her larynx with an undamaged one and closed it using the smallest stitches I could manage. I drained the congealed blood from her corpse so that I could pump fresh blood through her body with a pump of my own design. Fortunately, my love and I shared a common blood type. Over the course of time it took to ready her for reanimation, I syphoned off a small amount of my own blood each day, refrigerating it for later use. As I was preparing Elizabeth, I kept her body in cold temperature and slowed the decay of her flesh with an array of chemical injections. I worked the joints of Elizabeth's body to prevent rigor mortis from setting in. I pumped my blood into her veins.

Then, finally, I ignited the spark of life in pretty Elizabeth that I had lit in the monster. It took several moments for her eyes to open. I waited with bated breath.

Was this my Elizabeth come home to me?

Slowly the entity (I say entity because I not yet knew what I had before me) writhed to a sitting position. I could not tell if the soul now residing within this shell was my Elizabeth or some ghastly creature come calling up from the nether regions. The eyes did not hold her brace of innocence. This soul did not wear the face of Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein the way my betrothed had—tenderly, kind-heartedly.

I waited. Wanting to know, yet not wanting to know. Finally, it - she - spoke, "*Victor—*" Her voice was different now,

huskier, no doubt due to the replaced larynx within, I conjectured. I hoped.

My eyes were like a great damn brimming over with a flood of tears of joy. Ecstasy. Later, when I replayed this moment in my head, it sounded almost like a question when she spoke my name; as if she was not entirely sure. But at the time, I had missed that subtle clue. I rushed to her, embraced her. Elizabeth embraced me back with arms five times stronger than that of my beloved's.

"Elizabeth," I croaked, my throat choked with emotion, my body racked with pain from her clutch.

She must have realized she was hurting me, because she let go quickly. Elizabeth tried to talk further, but I could see it was a strain. I could see she was disoriented from her recent reanimation.

"Save your strength, my forever love," I said. "I will see to you while you gather your wits."

That night I bathed Elizabeth and attended to her with every bit of tenderness I could muster. She lay back vacantly and allowed me to do so. I propped her up in bed with satin sheets and goose feathered pillows. Elizabeth appeared to enjoy the feel of these luxuries more than she ever had before. It seemed so sensual, the pleasure she derived from her sense of touch.

I rushed to the kitchen and prepared a feast for her as best my culinary skills would allow, and served her dinner in bed. Elizabeth ate with a ravenous appetite and uncouth manners, which I overlooked instantly. Of course, she must have been greatly hungered having so recently been brought back from the dead. But deep down inside of me, I suspected there was more to it.

That stormy eve - initiated by Elizabeth - we finally consummated our marriage; the night we had dreamed of since our teenage days. Only it was unlike anything I had imagined in all my years of contemplation and fantasizing of this night. Elizabeth's sexual appetites were unseemly for a woman of virtue and societal upbringing. The love-making was savage and lust-filled. Finally, impatient with my tenderness, my wife pushed me onto my back, straddled me, and wailed like a beast of the wild as she rode herself to climax.

When lightning outside the window flashed and thunder boomed, I looked up. Her skin, which had always been a warm olive, owing to her half Italian heritage, was now an ever-swirling combination of marble white, tinted with faint yellow and green hues. It did not make her any less enchanting. It just added an alien appeal to her beauty; nothing a little powder could not cover for the eyes of the general public.

Even in the dark, I could already see the purple bruises rising on my shoulders and arms where she held me in her vice-like grip.

Hours later, troubled and unable to sleep, I sat in the den on a plush couch in front of a roaring fire, contemplating the recent events as I drank finely aged brandy.

My thoughts ran thus: this was Elizabeth. It was no new soul. She knew me. She remembered this house. She understood language. Looking back, I had supposed it would be one way or the other. That Elizabeth would return to her mortal coil or an entirely different spirit would. But what if the truth was

somewhere in the middle? This was my Elizabeth, but it was not. What if something vile and corrupt had attached itself to her soul when she returned to me? What if something dark from the land of death had hitched a ride back to the world of the living? What if the black veil of death had tainted her soul with something foul and otherworldly?

Before I could speculate any further, I looked up to find Elizabeth standing before me. Her perfect form was completely naked, like the statue of some Greek goddess come to life. She stood unashamed, unembarrassed. The shadows of the fire danced deliciously across her marble flesh. Elizabeth noticed my own embarrassment. This seemed to both surprise and amuse her. *Had we not made love - the most intimate act there is between two beings - a short while earlier?* I could read these thoughts on her face.

To relieve me from the burden of my discomfort, Elizabeth leaned down, drew a fine white bearskin rug off the floor in front of the fireplace and draped it around herself. Now she looked like the luscious barbarian queen of some feral tribe out of time. Her attention was drawn to the brandy in my hand.

I rose, led her over to the couch beside me, and poured her a brandy as well. Elizabeth drained the vessel in one sip. She waited for several seconds as the alcohol washed through her. The warm mind-numbing sensation made her laugh haughtily.

“I never drank brandy before. I thought it unladylike,” she said looking at the empty glass in her hand. “I quite like it.”

I refilled her glass. “It’s best experienced, my beloved, if you sip it slowly.”

Elizabeth did as I suggested. I could see her thinking. A cloud came over her face as she touched a hand to her throat and said, “The creature, the one who killed me—was he not a man?”

“No. He was not a man,” I confirmed solemnly. “He was my creation.”

“Like me?”

This alarmed me greatly. I turned to my Elizabeth, “*No. Not like you.*”

She took comfort in my alarm. Then waited patiently for me to continue.

“In my great hubris, I deemed myself God and created life solely for the purpose of achieving it. I would be world-renowned for my genius and honored throughout history ad infinitum. But I was repulsed by what I had created. Seeing this, the fiend turned on me, vowing to kill all I held dear in my heart.”

“It yet lives?”

“Not for much longer. I have received word that the men I have hired to track the monster, have found it. A courier even now heads to our abode to fetch me.”

“You are leaving me?” Elizabeth said with an edge of alarm to her voice.

No sooner had she uttered these words, there was a knocking on the door. I answered and was favored by a visit from one of my soldiers of fortune. He was a big, hearty man you would not have supposed to be afraid of anything. Yet he had a look of stark terror shining in the black orbs of his eyes. The mercenary looked from me to Elizabeth, who remained covered on the couch, clad in her fur. He cleared his throat and started thus, “Excuse my

late arrival. We'd thought you half-mad, guv'nor. The creature you described, we knew no such thing could exist."

"And what do you know now?"

"Your tracker had picked up the trail of such a beast sure enough. As we got closer, we collected numerous accounts of a monster raiding small fishing villages for food and supplies. The creature had continued beyond the last remnants of civilization onto the ice that led to no land. The fishermen of these hamlets that he had plagued, figured him for a dead man, saying he would surely succumb to the elements or fall through the ice."

"Did he?" Half of me prayed he did. The other half wished he had not. I did not want to be robbed of my vengeance.

"One night, as we set up camp where land ended and an ocean of ice began, he - it - came into our camp. Lord, he was eight foot tall, jus' like you said. He held us at gunpoint although it was likely he could have beaten us altogether in an outright fight. Just to make a point, he choose our biggest, toughest mate and tore him limb from limb right in front of us. God help me, I had been a soldier, thought I had seen every horrible thing imaginable. But I never saw anything like this. Finally, he turned the poor man's head completely around. And that ghastly smile on his face as he went about the business."

"What happened then?"

"He gave us a message, for you. The creature said he was waiting for you," replied the hired man. "Beyond the land, far out on the ice, he has set up camp in an ice cave. The daemon has a sled, a team of dogs, and provisions."

“We will leave at once,” I said, forgetting all else, and went to claim my coat from the rack. I wanted to go with haste. But I could already see the hesitation in my man’s face. “I’ll double your pay.”

The man winced. It was a lot of money. “Aye, I’ll take you back, gov. But where the land ends, so do I.”

“Agreed.”

In my excitement, I had almost forgotten about Elizabeth. When I turned and drank in the sight of my beautiful wife on the couch, I bid the man give me a moment. He waited outside by the carriage as I went back over to Elizabeth.

“My dearest, part of me wants to turn my back on this reckless expedition and to stay holed up behind these walls with you forever. But we would never be safe. I would always be waiting for the other shoe to fall. The monster is my responsibility and I must kill it. But my destination is fraught with peril—and if I should not come back, I want you to leave these hallowed halls forever more. My late father saw to it that your family inheritance was restored to you by the Austrian government. This inheritance includes a villa on the shores of Como in Italy which you now own. Villa Lavenza. Word of your death has been kept confidential. My men will wait for me for one week at the edge of land as I pursue the creature over ice. If I do not come back, word will be delivered to you. Go to Italy. Claim your inheritance. I wish you peace and happiness, my beloved. You are the only true good I have done in this life. I love you always, be it in this world— or the next. We will be reunited in one or the other.”

And with that said, I left. You know the rest. The writing of this letter has taken every ounce of my remaining strength. I leave the decision of what to do with the manuscript and this letter up to you. But it is my strong hope that you burn both, bury this secret deep in your heart, and live a long and joyous life free of nightmares and monsters.

I am truly sorry.

Farewell, my dearest brother

Several weeks later, Elizabeth, dressed in the heaviest of furs for the harsh climate, arrived at the edge of the arctic circle. Her stride was sure and confident, unlike the timid steps of other women of the era. Her boots crushed the ice and snow beneath them. Elizabeth was met by the man who had collected her husband from the manor on the day of her rebirth.

“You waited. How good of you,” Elizabeth said to the man.

“The money you mentioned?”

“Of course.” Elizabeth paid the man from her purse.

“If you do not mind my saying, milady, this is no place for a woman. Most men can scarcely stand such a bitter climate during the day. And the temperature drops vastly at night.”

Elizabeth discarded the man’s concern, “But you have done as I have asked?” Elizabeth was worried the man had not done what they had agreed he would do.

“Yes. Against my better judgement. But beware, that monster has no heart. I’m sure he has already claimed the life of your husband. And I’m the only one left alive from the damned

expedition your husband funded. It killed them all, ma'am." He hesitated before adding, "And I fear this monster would be most uncivil to a lady. You should really rethink—"

"Thank you, kind sir, but all I need is to be pointed in the right direction and given charge of the provisions, sled, and team of dogs I have paid for."

"The sled is over there," the man pointed. The dogs are fresh and strong. And as for the direction, that's easy. The path to the monster is strewn with the body parts of my dead comrades. It was the trail he left for your husband. Follow those and they will lead you right to the creature. Only God can help you then."

The team of dogs, moving at a furious pace over the ice, driven by the whip Elizabeth cracked when necessary, approached a smoldering artificer. Elizabeth pulled back on the reins, slowing the dogs, until finally they stopped a couple of yards away.

The remains of a man too large to be a man leaned back atop a bed of wood that jutted up at an angle. The area stank heavily of burnt flesh and gasoline. True to his word, Frankenstein's monster, seeking to end his tenancy here on earth, had burned himself alive on a funeral pyre. He was blackened almost to ash, his molten skin peeling and flaking off, carried away by the harsh wind.

Elizabeth stood before this sight for a long time. Then suddenly, the corpse opened its eyes. It was beyond belief, but the creature still lived.

"You," it said in complete bewilderment.

Elizabeth, unafraid, curious, continued to watch as the creature processed the information. Finally, understanding crept into the monster's eyes.

“You are like me—” Frankenstein's monster said, unsure.

“Better,” Elizabeth replied with a smile made of pure devilry. “Is he dead?”

“Yes,” the monster's teeth shined out from under charred flesh. “But not by my hand. He was rescued by a ship itself stranded in the ice. But succumbed to illness from the elements.”

Elizabeth nodded at the news. She had prepared herself for this. Still, confirmation of Victor's death made her blood run cold in a way the elements had not been able to.

Through agonizing pain, the creature said, “I mourn him as well.”

Elizabeth could see truth in the monster's eyes. She also saw his great pain. Elizabeth stepped back, drew a shotgun from her sled and fired into the ice at the creature's feet.

There was a terrific cracking sound. Then a sheet of ice collapsed under the monster. As the fiend slowly sank into the ocean, steam rising off its super-heated flesh as the water kissed it, it flashed a horrific smile and made one final ominous pronouncement, “Victor and I await you in Hell.”

Then Frankenstein's monster was gone.

Elizabeth, stood there until she was satisfied he would not bob back up to the surface, then climbed onto her sled. She turned around and headed back to civilization without looking back.

Elizabeth looked forward to the new life that awaited her.

Villa Lavenza

Como, Italy—1938

The villa was old, but meticulously maintained. It sat on a hill overlooking the endless, winding lake and was flanked by marble pillars and the statue of a goddess out of antiquity. The estate was nestled among lush green trees. The water below was blue and sparkled. A near flawless reflection of the villa sat quietly upon it. The sun was about to set over this picturesque scene. There was nothing but wilderness around the exquisite edifice for as far as the eye could see.

The boots of the Nazi *Schutzstaffel* officers - the infamous SS - echoed off the wide shallow stone steps that led up to the spacious deck of the villa where Elizabeth waited to receive them. There were six of them. She could see the two black military jeeps that the men had arrived in, sitting below.

For a woman well over two hundred years old, Elizabeth didn't look a day over forty. No longer in her youth, she had a different type of beauty now. It was a mature allure. Her features were sharper and although slightly harder than in her youth, this, combined with her ivory white skin, made her appear like a living statue that had just stepped down off its pedestal. The minute application of make-up concealed her slight yellow-green hue. Elizabeth wore a white blouse and blue skirt which went down to her knees. The blouse had the wide square-shoulders of the fashion of the time. The woman wore her hair loose, a slight breeze lifting

it now and again. It didn't flow luxuriously down Elizabeth's back like it did in her youth, stopping instead at her shoulders.

The highest ranking soldier, a captain, approached with a smile. A leather satchel hung around his head and shoulder by a strap. The man took out a cigarette and lit it with a gold lighter. He had silver hair, short on the sides, longer and slicked back on top so tightly it revealed the shape of his skull. The momentary flame of the lighter reflected off the silver double lightning bolt pin (the insignia of the infamous SS) on the lapel of the man's uniform. He held the open cigarette case out to Elizabeth. She shook her head politely.

"To what do I owe the honor of a visit from the Third Reich?" Elizabeth said. There was no fear or intimidation in her tenor or expression.

The captain, accustomed to instilling abject fear in civilians by virtue of his mere presence, was slightly taken aback. He also couldn't tell if there was an edge of sarcasm in the woman's query.

"Greetings, Madame Lavenza," the soldier began. "I am Kurt Riefenstahl, a captain of the Führer's elite secret guard. I congratulate you on the condition of your villa. It is impeccably maintained for something so old."

"Thank you, Herr captain. But I'm sure you didn't travel all this way to congratulate me on the condition of my villa. Are you on holiday here? Italy is a great place for it. Don't you think?" Elizabeth said coyly.

Holiday? The whole planet was in the midst of the most horrific world war it had ever seen; a war that reached just about every corner of the globe. *Was she making fun of the man?* Captain

Riefenstahl wasn't sure. He decided the woman wasn't. After all, who would be so foolhardy as to court the ire of the Third Reich.

“Not at all, Madame. On the contrary, at Prime Minister Mussolini's gracious invitation, we are here in Italy on a mission of dire personal importance to Adolf Hitler. However, it is getting late and I fear we will not reach our destination before dark. This being the only residence for over twenty kilometers, might I impose upon you to put myself and my men up for the night?”

Elizabeth studied the man before answering. She read in his face the fact that he wasn't really asking, “Of course, Herr captain. As you can see, I have plenty of space. I'll have the servants set you and your men up so you are comfortable.”

The captain smiled. This was more like it. He was used to the little people bowing and scraping to him and his soldiers. Even if they happened to be aristocrats who owned villas. They knew what would happen if they didn't acquiesce. Everyone did.

“You and your men will have to, of course, dine with me this evening. I live alone and don't get very many guests out here in the country. In my seclusion I am quite ignorant of current world affairs. Therefore I would like to take advantage of the opportunity for lively conversation with someone other than peasants. I see you are well-spoken and educated, Herr captain.”

“I was a professor of history at the Humboldt University of Berlin before the war.”

“Wonderful. Then you and your men will be tonight's entertainment. I heartily look forward to it.” With that, Elizabeth turned and headed inside, even as servants hurried out to greet the soldiers, fetch their bags, and escort them to their quarters.

Captain Riefenstahl continued to watch Elizabeth as she disappeared into the villa. There was something about the way the woman said entertainment that gave the SS officer a momentary cold shiver down his spine. He shook this off arrogantly.

The dining hall was magnificent. A long, sturdy hard wood table that could seat twenty was its centerpiece. At the head of the room, in a huge fireplace roared a blaze whose flame seemed to lash out wildly every so often on a whim. The fire's light shimmered and sparkled off the beautifully ornamented candelabras, silverware and goblets on the table, all made of pure gold and silver. Above the fireplace hung a perfect portrait of Elizabeth. In the painting, she smiled and seemed to be looking out from the portrait. The artist had captured her likeness astonishingly well. Fine matching oriental rugs and runners covered the marble floor in and around the dining hall. Thick red drapes hung lavishly from narrow windows that rose nearly the height of a vaulted ceiling three stories high.

Captain Riefenstahl and his men were escorted in by a female servant to find Elizabeth already seated at the head of the table, a glass of red wine in a delicate hand that sparkled with diamond-studded bracelets and rings. Elizabeth's hair was pinned up, exposing a beautiful neck that even the faintest scar of Victor Frankenstein's long ago incision couldn't mar. As the captain was led over to the seat on Elizabeth's right hand, she stood up, revealing a velvet gown that was so crimson it looked as if it had been bathed in blood. The entire vision of the woman was one of unnatural, unearthly beauty.

Even as he kissed the hand she held out to him, the captain said, “Please, sit, Madame Lavenza.”

Riefenstahl removed the satchel from around his head and shoulder and placed it on the floor at his feet as the two of them sat down. The other soldiers were shown to places at the table. Then the servants began to carry in a feast, everything from glazed duck to roasted pheasant. Caviar, baked bread, wine and stronger spirits were readily distributed to the soldiers by the Italian servants who anticipated their every desire.

Elizabeth watched the men, seeming to enjoy their hearty indulgences. Some of these soldiers were already eyeing the younger female servants with unconcealed lust. The women looked away, trying to hide both disgust and fear. Elizabeth missed none of this. Even the fact that captain Riefenstahl was studying her quietly out the corner of his eye.

A servant brought a box of cigars over to Elizabeth. She took one. The servant cut and lit the cigar for her. As she inhaled and blew out a cloud of smoke, Elizabeth nodded towards the box the servant now held out for Riefenstahl.

“Captain?”

“Thank you,” the captain replied as he selected a cigar that was promptly cut and lit for him. After a few puffs, he exclaimed, “Excellent brand. Rare to find a woman with a taste for cigars.”

“I’m a rare woman, Herr captain.”

“That I am beginning to see.”

Elizabeth’s eyes sparkled as she shrugged indifferently at the compliment. “Now tell me, captain, what of this world war that goes on and on. Is there any end in sight?”

The captain seemed to have a patent answer for just such occasions. “The world is a savage, unruly place. The Third Reich seeks to make order from disorder. It is both our birthright and our duty as the Aryan race to take our rightful place as masters of the world. Only then can there be true peace.”

“The only peace this world will ever know is after the last man dies.”

Captain Riefenstahl smiled in amusement. “You judge mankind harshly, Madame. Animals kill.”

“Animals kill for survival, food, Herr captain. Man is the only animal that kills for lust, greed, power.”

“And all of those things lead to survival.”

Elizabeth laughed. “I can see this is going to be a lively night of conversation indeed.”

The captain smiled thinly and nodded. After a moment’s reflection, he queried, “If you don’t mind my changing the subject for a moment - you are an attractive woman. Why are you not married?”

“I’m a widow. My husband died many years ago at sea,” Elizabeth replied offhandedly. “Courtship and marriage no longer strike my fancy. I enjoy my solitude and my indulgences,” Elizabeth said as she smoked her cigar and drained her wine. A servant immediately replenished her goblet as she smiled and continued, “Now if you don’t mind *my* changing the subject, what could possibly be of any interest to the Third Reich way out here?”

The captain nodded now. He had been expecting the question. “It may surprise you to know that the Third Reich has a

great deal of interest in the acquisition of things both rare and exotic.”

“Such as?”

Captain Riefenstahl exhaled smoke as he sat back and began, the professor of history within him rising to the surface. “Well, for instance, Heinrich Himmler, head of the Schutzstaffel, has dispatched a unit of elite soldiers on a great archeological expedition to find the lost civilization of Atlantis.”

“They seek to find a myth?”

“One of our greatest German minds begs to differ. He believes the Aryan race was descended from survivors of that once great republic who escaped when it was swallowed up by the ocean. Atlantis is our *Ahnenerbe*—our culture heritage. Once we have recovered proof of this civilization, which long ago was more advanced than all other empires until now, it will be the start of a new religion, one which will replace Christianity across the globe.”

“Grand dreams, Herr captain. But your stories fascinate me. Tell me more.”

“Another team has retrieved the *Spear of Destiny*, also known as the ‘Hofburg Spear’ from Austria. And yet another expedition is in Tibet questing to find the *Holy Grail*. We believe these artifacts to be sources of great power.”

“Supernatural?”

“Metaphysical,” Captain Riefenstahl corrected.

“Your leader chases fairytales,” Elizabeth said without thinking, her lips loosened by the wine.

The captain became very still at her comment, “Have a care, Madame Lavenza. All you have, you can lose. I speak as a friend.”

Elizabeth fell quiet. The air of the room suddenly became rich with tension. Captain Riefenstahl seemed to enjoy her intimidation. *That’s more like it*, he thought. *He had broken the wild mare*. This emboldened the captain as he continued, “We even have a facility in Thuringia for exceptional individuals whom we have chanced to come across. It is located at Camp Mittelbrau-Dora. We call it *Sektor Dreizehn* or Sector Thirteen.”

“Exceptional individuals, Herr captain?” Elizabeth inquired in a tamed tone, her eyes cast down.

“Yes. We study them in the hopes of unlocking their secrets, which we can then use as weapons against our enemies,” Captain Riefenstahl bragged flatly. “We will win this war.”

“Those willing to utilize abject ruthlessness usually do.”

The captain’s nostrils flared. “I have a confession to make, Madame Lavenza.”

“Oh?”

“We weren’t merely passing on the way to another location,” captain Riefenstahl revealed. He waved his hands, indicating the villa itself. “This was our destination, Madame Lavenza. Or should I say Madame Frankenstein.”

Elizabeth was still for a long moment. Finally she replied, “You have me mistaken, Herr captain.”

“I think not.” Captain Riefenstahl reached down and opened up his satchel. From it he pulled out a thick dossier. In it was Victor Frankenstein’s manuscript as transcribed by the ship

captain. The Nazi officer laid it down on the table. He placed Victor's letter on top of it as if dealing the winning hand in poker.

“Victor Frankenstein's story and final confession. His brother could never bring himself to burn the items. It was stumbled across in an attic by a descendent nearly two hundred years later. The descendent was a degenerate—a junkie and a gambler. He sold these artifacts. Of course you knew about the manuscript and the letter. You didn't learn of them until decades later, when, by pure chance, you ran into the sea captain who had rescued Victor from the ice. On several occasions throughout the decades, you tried to track down the brother. But he had moved many times and no longer went by the name Frankenstein. Perhaps he knew you were out there somewhere, and feared you.”

Elizabeth started to say something, but hesitated.

The captain waved it away, “There is no need to feign innocence. All has been confirmed through photographs and paintings.” Riefenstahl pointed to the painting above the fireplace. “A similar painting hung in Castle Frankenstein, until we acquired it.”

“And what is your supposition, Herr captain?”

“After the creature killed you, Victor Frankenstein brought you back.”

“Even if this wild story of yours was true, of what possible interest could this be to Adolf Hitler?”

“You are approximately two hundred and fifty years old. Yet you don't look a day over forty.”

Elizabeth's eyebrow raised at the number forty.

“A young forty, Madame Frankenstein. If you are not immortal, then you have a greatly expanded life expectancy. At this rate, a hundred years from now, you will only appear to be fifty.” Riefenstahl’s eyes gleamed now. “And in prolonged life, Adolf Hitler has a great deal of interest in. He has created an empire that will last a thousand years. He sees no reason why he should not be at its helm for every moment of those thousand years.”

“And what do you plan to do with me, Herr captain?”

“It took a long time, but we have recovered many of Victor’s journals he kept when creating the monster. It is fascinating all he accomplished so long ago, when science was still in its infancy. But there are gaps, pages missing, passages faded and illegible. Our scientists believe with you, they can fill in those gaps. If you do not resist, you will be made comfortable during the examinations and experiments.”

“Experiments?” Elizabeth’s voice quivered. “I do not know much about the medical sciences, Herr captain, but Victor did teach me that ultimately, to learn all the secrets, the subject must, in the end of the tests, be dissected.”

“I regret the fatality of one so comely. But you will have the honor of knowing you served the greater good. Besides, even Victor doubted you were truly his Elizabeth come back to life. More likely you’re some foul demon who found a vacant vessel to inhabit. Unfortunately it was that of a frail woman and not a man.”

Elizabeth shook her head as she finally raised it. Only now there was a gleam in her eyes and a cruel smile on her lips. “Do you know why your thousand year empire won’t last five more years?”

The captain, insulted, looked at the woman with impending violence on his face, “Why?”

“Because Hitler’s arrogance is passed down the food chain. You assume that Frankenstein’s monster was strong because Victor made him eight feet tall and a man. You assume that since he didn’t stitch me together from body parts and I’m a woman, that I couldn’t be strong like the monster. But the creature’s strength didn’t come from his musculature or stature, Herr captain.” Elizabeth stood and began to pace about the room.

“Where did the monster’s strength come from then, Madame Frankenstein?”

Elizabeth now stood on the other side of the table from the captain as she continued, “I had these same questions one hundred years ago. It’s the spark of life used to resurrect us. Imagine a light bulb. Normal humans are a forty watt bulb. Frankenstein’s monster was and I am at least a two hundred watt bulb. That’s why I live longer.”

The captain’s eyes wandered to one of the windows in time to see all of the servants at the foot of the wide staircase in the distance. They were getting into arriving vehicles and leaving. Male servants climbed into each of the German jeeps. Seconds later, they started them and drove off.

“What the hell?” The captain exclaimed as he jumped to his feet. “Where are they going with our vehicles?”

“My servants are a bit squeamish. They don’t want to be here for what happens next.”

“THEY’RE TAKING THE JEEPS! STOP THEM!” Captain Riefenstahl looked from one soldier to the next. Three of

his men remained seated, in a stupor. Drool hung from the three men's mouths. The other two soldiers ran out, drawing their weapons, trying to intercept the vehicles.

"Victor Frankenstein gave us more life. We shine brighter. We're stronger. We last longer," Elizabeth exclaimed. She was now standing behind one of the captain's incapacitated soldiers on the other side of the table from the captain.

"What's going on here?" The captain shook a soldier near him. The man did not move. Riefenstahl looked at Elizabeth pointing an accusing finger. "What did you do to them?"

"Did you know the pufferfish that your men have been enjoying is quite poisonous? But very tasty. Japanese master chefs prepare it as a delicacy. If they don't prepare it just right, the customer dies a horrible death. I've been to Japan. Have you?"

"No. I have not." The captain appeared to be weighing his options.

"Now the poison of a pufferfish, which has no antidote, kills by paralyzing the diaphragm, causing suffocation. Its poison is over a thousand times more poisonous than cyanide."

Riefenstahl looked at his men again.

"They're not dead. And they can see and hear everything. Don't worry. I'm not a sadist. I'll kill them quickly." In an instant, Elizabeth picked up a carving knife. She cut the throat of the soldier in front of her as if she was playing a violin. She buried the knife in the back of the next soldier's head.

Riefenstahl cried out in horror as he fumbled to draw his gun. He aimed it squarely at Elizabeth.

“What would your Führer think if you kill his best chance at immortality?”

“They can just as easily dissect your corpse.” Enraged, Riefenstahl pulled the trigger. Nothing happened.

“My servants removed the bullets while you and your men were sleeping. You snore by the way.”

Elizabeth leapt up onto the table, then over it. Riefenstahl scrambled away. The woman took notice of the soldier she now stood next to. She smiled at Riefenstahl as she turned the man’s head around. There was a crack as the man’s neck broke. Then he was facing the captain lifelessly.

“Now, where were we, Herr captain? Oh, I remember—the spark of life. Victor Frankenstein gave us more life.”

The captain’s two soldiers returned. Confused, they looked to their commander for instructions.

“Restrain the woman. If she gives you any trouble, use your daggers.”

As the men came at Elizabeth, she tensed. The first soldier struck the woman several times. She kicked him ten feet across the room into the huge fireplace. The man’s screams echoed through the hall as he burned alive.

The last soldier drew his knife. He slashed at Elizabeth twice. The third time she caught his hand and disemboweled the soldier even as he still hung on to his weapon. Captain Riefenstahl looked on in horror as the soldier’s guts spilled out onto the floor. The Soldier looked down at his entrails briefly before collapsing.

Elizabeth looked up at a mortified Riefenstahl, “And now for you.”

Before he could even take one step backwards, with great speed Elizabeth was on him. She held Riefenstahl's face in both her hands. Intimately Elizabeth whispered, "I grant you absolution, Herr captain."

She lifted him up off his feet and began squeezing the man's head as he kicked and screamed bloody murder. It was like being in a vice grip. Within seconds, his brain exploded out the top of his head and oozed out of his ears and mouth. When it was over, she dropped the man's body.

Elizabeth crossed to the table. She wiped her hands off with a tablecloth, poured herself a goblet of wine, and prepared a fresh cigar. She sat down in her chair, took a puff of her cigar, then sat back and enjoyed her wine.

When the servants returned at dawn, Elizabeth stood on the deck. She now wore pants, a sweater and a leather jacket. One of the Nazis' machine guns hung from her shoulder.

"There's a mess that needs cleaning up inside," Elizabeth said to the male servants.

"Yes, ma'am," one of them said as they headed inside to dispose of the bodies.

Elizabeth looked at the female servants, "Eventually others will come looking for them. We'll have to leave here for the duration of the war."

One of the younger servant girls spoke up, "My brother is a member of a group of freedom fighters in the mountains."

Elizabeth looked back once at Villa Lavenza wistfully as she nodded. "Then that's where we're headed."

Other works by Carlton Holder:

The Black Album: *A Hollywood Horror Story* (novel)

Spook: *Confessions of a Psychic Spy* (novel series)

The Moonbeam Rider (novel trilogy)

Midnite Review of the Freak King (novella series)

The Black Album: Book One (three part serial)

If you enjoyed this book, please leave a review at Amazon or in the comments section of my website.

And come hang out with us at www.brooklynapache.com for all kinds of extras, free stories and cool swag.

This is not the story you think it is. Upon reading the above title, images of Victor Frankenstein manically sewing together the body parts of corpses to make a mate for his monster spring to mind. But this is far from that. In Mary Shelley's novel, a guilt-ridden Victor never completes this grizzly task. It was left to Hollywood to bring a female monster to life.

That's not what this story is about. I've written the first part as a missing chapter to Shelley's original work. It takes place after the events of Victor's wedding night during which the vengeful monster strangles his bride Elizabeth Lavenza. It takes place before Victor goes to the ends of the earth seeking to destroy his creature at the Arctic Circle.

My story is about Victor's successful attempt to bring his wife back from the dead. Well, you can judge for yourself if it's successful or not. The woman returns to the realm of the living. But is she the same Elizabeth? Did Elizabeth's soul return to her mortal vessel? Or did something else come back? Something with unnatural strength, prolonged life, and unseemly appetites.

The rest of this story takes place over a hundred years later. Elizabeth Lavenza Frankenstein has returned to her family villa in Italy to live in seclusion. The year is 1938. Adolf Hitler, obsessed with the supernatural, has dispatched soldiers throughout the world to hunt such treasures. One day an SS officer shows up on Madame Frankenstein's doorstep with a squad of Nazi soldiers. And he seems to know her secret.

But just who is the hunter and who is the prey?

Read on and find out.

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