

Name: _____ Class: _____

Excerpt from Frankenstein: The Creature's Request

By Mary Shelley
1818

Mary Shelley (1797-1851) was an English novelist, short story writer, and dramatist, best known for her gothic novel Frankenstein. In the novel, the brilliant scientist, Victor Frankenstein, succeeds in creating life in his laboratory, only to be horrified by his own creation. In this excerpt, the creature demands that Victor Frankenstein listen to what he has suffered through since he was created. As you read, take notes on what the creature wants, and how Frankenstein responds to his requests.

- [1] As I said this I suddenly beheld the figure of a man, at some distance, advancing towards me with superhuman speed. He bounded over the crevices in the ice, among which I had walked with caution; his stature, also, as he approached, seemed to exceed that of a man. I was troubled; a mist came over my eyes, and I felt a faintness seize me; but I was quickly restored by the cold gale of the mountains. I perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!)¹ that it was the wretch whom I had created. I trembled with rage and horror, resolving to wait his approach and then close with him in mortal combat.² He approached; his countenance³ bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain⁴ and malignity, while its unearthly ugliness rendered it almost too horrible for human eyes. But I scarcely observed this; rage and hatred had at first deprived me of utterance, and I recovered only to overwhelm him with words expressive of furious detestation and contempt.

"Devil," I exclaimed, "do you dare approach me? And do not you fear the fierce vengeance of my arm wreaked on your miserable head? Begone, vile insect! Or rather, stay that I may trample you to dust! And, oh! That I could, with the extinction of your miserable existence, restore those victims whom you have so diabolically murdered!"



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1. **Abhor (verb):** to regard with disgust and hatred
2. a fight that will result in the death of the loser
3. face or facial expression
4. **Disdain (noun):** the feeling that someone is unworthy of one's respect

"I expected this reception," said the daemon. "All men hate the wretched; how, then, must I be hated, who am miserable beyond all living things! Yet you, my creator, detest and spurn⁵ me, thy creature, to whom thou art bound by ties only dissoluble by the annihilation of one of us. You purpose to kill me. How dare you sport thus with life? Do your duty towards me, and I will do mine towards you and the rest of mankind. If you will comply with my conditions, I will leave them and you at peace; but if you refuse, I will glut the maw⁶ of death, until it be satiated with the blood of your remaining friends."

"Abhorred monster! Fiend that thou art! The tortures of hell are too mild a vengeance for thy crimes: Wretched devil! You reproach me with your creation; come on, then, that I may extinguish the spark which I so negligently⁷ bestowed."

- [5] My rage was without bounds; I sprang on him, impelled by all the feelings which can arm one being against the existence of another.

He easily eluded me and said, "Be calm! I entreat you to hear me before you give vent to your hatred on my devoted head. Have I not suffered enough, that you seek to increase my misery? Life, although it may only be an accumulation of anguish, is dear to me, and I will defend it. Remember, thou hast made me more powerful than thyself; my height is superior to thine, my joints more supple. But I will not be tempted to set myself in opposition to thee. I am thy creature, and I will be even mild and docile⁸ to my natural lord and king if thou wilt also perform thy part, the which thou owest me. Oh, Frankenstein, be not equitable⁹ to every other and trample upon me alone, to whom thy justice, and even thy clemency¹⁰ and affection, is most due. Remember that I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam,¹¹ but I am rather the fallen angel, whom thou drivest from joy for no misdeed. Everywhere I see bliss, from which I alone am irrevocably excluded. I was benevolent and good; misery made me a fiend. Make me happy, and I shall again be virtuous."

"Begone! I will not hear you. There can be no community between you and me; we are enemies. Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall."

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5. to reject with disdain
 6. the jaws or throat of a hungry animal
 7. **Negligent (adjective):** failing to take proper care in doing something
 8. submissive
 9. fair
 10. mercy; lenience
 11. referring to the first man that God created, according to Christianity

"How can I move thee? Will no entreaties¹² cause thee to turn a favourable eye upon thy creature, who implores thy goodness and compassion? Believe me, Frankenstein, I was benevolent; my soul glowed with love and humanity; but am I not alone, miserably alone? You, my creator, abhor me; what hope can I gather from your fellow creatures, who owe me nothing? They spurn and hate me. The desert mountains and dreary glaciers are my refuge. I have wandered here many days; the caves of ice, which I only do not fear, are a dwelling to me, and the only one which man does not grudge. These bleak skies I hail, for they are kinder to me than your fellow beings. If the multitude of mankind knew of my existence, they would do as you do, and arm themselves for my destruction. Shall I not then hate them who abhor me? I will keep no terms with my enemies. I am miserable, and they shall share my wretchedness. Yet it is in your power to recompense me, and deliver them from an evil which it only remains for you to make so great, that not only you and your family, but thousands of others, shall be swallowed up in the whirlwinds of its rage. Let your compassion be moved, and do not disdain me. Listen to my tale; when you have heard that, abandon or commiserate¹³ me, as you shall judge that I deserve. But hear me. The guilty are allowed, by human laws, bloody as they are, to speak in their own defence before they are condemned. Listen to me, Frankenstein. You accuse me of murder, and yet you would, with a satisfied conscience, destroy your own creature. Oh, praise the eternal justice of man! Yet I ask you not to spare me; listen to me, and then, if you can, and if you will, destroy the work of your hands."

"Why do you call to my remembrance," I rejoined, "circumstances of which I shudder to reflect, that I have been the miserable origin and author? Cursed be the day, abhorred devil, in which you first saw light! Cursed (although I curse myself) be the hands that formed you! You have made me wretched beyond expression. You have left me no power to consider whether I am just to you or not. Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form."

- [10] "Thus I relieve thee, my creator," he said, and placed his hated hands before my eyes, which I flung from me with violence; "thus I take from thee a sight which you abhor. Still thou canst listen to me and grant me thy compassion. By the virtues that I once possessed, I demand this from you. Hear my tale; it is long and strange, and the temperature of this place is not fitting to your fine sensations; come to the hut upon the mountain. The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends to hide itself behind your snowy precipices and illuminate another world, you will have heard my story and can decide. On you it rests, whether I quit forever the neighbourhood of man and lead a harmless life, or become the scourge¹⁴ of your fellow creatures and the author of your own speedy ruin."

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12. an earnest request

13. **Commiserate (verb):** to express or feel sympathy

14. **Scourge (noun):** a person or thing that causes great suffering

Text-Dependent Questions

Directions: For the following questions, choose the best answer or respond in complete sentences.

1. PART A: What is the meaning of “dissoluble” as it is used in paragraph 3 of the passage?
 - A. obtainable
 - B. impossible
 - C. reasonable
 - D. breakable

2. PART B: Which phrase in paragraph 3 supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. “miserable beyond all living things!”
 - B. “detest and spurn me”
 - C. “bound by ties”
 - D. “comply with my conditions”

3. PART A: What is the meaning of “recompense” as it is used in paragraph 8 of the passage?
 - A. make amends to
 - B. pay tribute to
 - C. bring shame on
 - D. show understanding of

4. PART B: Which phrase from paragraph 8 supports the answer to Part A?
 - A. “I will keep no terms with my enemies.”
 - B. “Let your compassion be moved”
 - C. “they shall share my wretchedness.”
 - D. “I ask you not to spare me”

5. PART A: What primary tone is established by the words Dr. Frankenstein’s creature uses?
 - A. emotional distress
 - B. stern disapproval
 - C. taunting mockery
 - D. callous indifference

6. PART B: Of the following seven phrases from the passage, select THREE that convey the tone identified in Part A.
- A. "detest and spurn me" (Paragraph 3)
 - B. "If you will comply with my conditions" (Paragraph 3)
 - C. "I will defend it" (Paragraph 6)
 - D. "whom thou drivest from joy" (Paragraph 6)
 - E. "How can I move thee?" (Paragraph 8)
 - F. "caves of ice" (Paragraph 8)
 - G. "The sun is yet high in the heavens" (Paragraph 10)
7. PART A: How does the interaction between the characters advance the plot in the passage?
- A. The emotions each character displays create an opportunity for a flashback to show the reason Dr. Frankenstein created the man.
 - B. The verbal dispute between the characters gives the man the opportunity to explain his experiences to Dr. Frankenstein.
 - C. The fear expressed by the characters establishes the reasons for their conflicts.
 - D. The threats each makes against the other initiate rising action.
8. PART B: Which phrase from the passage supports the answer to Part A?
- A. "I perceived, as the shape came nearer (sight tremendous and abhorred!) that it was the wretch whom I had created." (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "Begone, or let us try our strength in a fight, in which one must fall." (Paragraph 7)
 - C. "The sun is yet high in the heavens; before it descends to hide itself behind your snowy precipices and illuminate another world, you will have heard my story and can decide." (Paragraph 10)
 - D. "become the scourge of your fellow creatures and the author of your own speedy ruin." (Paragraph 10)
9. PART A: Which interaction is most like the one between Dr. Frankenstein and his creature?
- A. A parent tries to reason with a child who continues to disobey him.
 - B. A judge dismisses someone who continues to make a plea.
 - C. A detective questions a suspect who offers only evasive answers.
 - D. A person trusts someone who goes on to betray him repeatedly.
10. PART B: Which TWO phrases or sentences support the answer to Part A?
- A. "I was troubled" (Paragraph 1)
 - B. "He approached; his countenance bespoke bitter anguish, combined with disdain and malignity" (Paragraph 1)
 - C. "I expected this reception" (Paragraph 3)
 - D. "I entreat you to hear me" (Paragraph 6)
 - E. "Oh, praise the eternal justice of man!" (Paragraph 8)
 - F. "Begone! Relieve me from the sight of your detested form." (Paragraph 9)

Discussion Questions

Directions: Brainstorm your answers to the following questions in the space provided. Be prepared to share your original ideas in a class discussion.

1. Why do you think humans have rejected the creature? How have his interactions with humans corrupted his originally kind character?
2. In the context of the text, how does this excerpt from *Frankenstein* explore the limits of what humans can and should create? What should humans avoid attempting to control or create? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
3. Did Frankenstein overstep certain ethical boundaries as a scientist? Why or why not? Can you think of any real world examples where scientists take part in questionable research or experiments? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.
4. Why does Frankenstein's creature feel lonely? How has mankind contributed to the creature's feelings of loneliness? Have you ever felt lonely like the creature? Cite examples from the text, your own experience, and other literature, art, or history in your answer.