

CHAPTER 7

The First Murder!

One warm May morning, Henry and I had just returned from an invigorating, glorious walk in the countryside, when a letter from my father was delivered to me. I had been expecting it, for I was planning to visit my family in Geneva after my two years away.

I opened it eagerly and read:

Geneva, May 12

My dear son,

It is with sadness and tears that I call you back home. But first, I must prepare

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you for some terrible news before your arrival. Your darling little brother William is dead! That gentle, innocent child has been murdered!

I will not try to console you, but I will simply tell you what happened, as we know it.

Last Thursday evening, Elizabeth, your two brothers, and I went for a walk in the woods at Plainpalais, the park where you loved to run and play as a child. William and Ernest had been running ahead of us, playing hide and seek.

When it started getting dark, Elizabeth and I sat down on a bench to wait for the boys. In a while, Ernest returned, asking if we had seen William, who had gone to hide but had not returned.

We jumped up and immediately began to search. By nightfall, we hadn't found him, and Elizabeth returned home to alert our neighbors and get some torches to continue

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our search for William.

At five o'clock in the morning, I made the gruesome discovery. I found William's cold, lifeless body in the grass, with the murderer's fingermarks still on his throat!

I tearfully carried him home and laid him on his bed. When Elizabeth bent over his lifeless body and saw his neck, she cried out, "Oh, God! I have murdered my darling child!" And she fainted in my arms.

When we revived her, she tearfully explained that earlier that day, William had begged to be allowed to wear her chain and locket, the one that belonged to your dear, dead mother and contained her picture. Elizabeth loved William so much, she couldn't refuse him anything.

When she discovered the locket missing from his neck, she assumed that robbery was the reason for his murder.

We have no trace of the murderer as yet. Elizabeth cannot stop crying and blames

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herself for William's death. We need you here, Victor, not to avenge the murder, but to help us heal our grieving hearts.

Your loving father,
Alphonse Frankenstein

I threw the letter on the table, covered my face with my hands, and began to cry uncontrollably.

Henry put his arm around my shoulders and asked, "My dear friend, what's wrong? What has happened to make you cry so bitterly?"

I couldn't speak and was barely able to catch my breath. In between sobs, I managed to point to the letter on the table.

Henry picked it up and began to read. He gasped, then tears gushed from his eyes as he, too, read the terrible news.

CHAPTER 8

Sighting the Monster

I hired a horse and carriage, and left immediately for Geneva. It was a sad journey, with my thoughts full of memories of my sweet, innocent brother and the horror my grieving family were all suffering.

As night came and I approached Geneva, gloom and fear replaced my sadness. It was after ten o'clock when I drove up to the gates of the city. In my grief, I had forgotten that the gates closed at ten. Since I couldn't enter the city until the next morning, I rented a room for the night at an inn in a nearby

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village on Lake Geneva.

I was too nervous to sleep, so I decided to rent a boat and sail across the lake. The woods of Plainpalais were on the other side, and I somehow needed to see the place where my brother was murdered.

A lightning storm was approaching over the mountains, and by the time I reached the shore, a heavy rain had begun to fall. Thunder burst with a deafening crash, and eerie flashes of lightning lit up the lake as if it were on fire.

No sooner had I pulled my boat up on shore than I caught sight of a figure on a gloomy mountainside. As the figure moved out from behind a thick clump of trees, I froze in my tracks and stared into the darkness.

The next flash of lightning lit up the figure. Its gigantic, hideous shape only confirmed my fears! It was the monster!

What was he doing here after all this time? Then I shuddered at another thought! I asked

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myself, "Could he have had anything to do with my brother's murder?"

No sooner did that question occur to me than I knew the answer. Yes! I knew for certain that only such a horrible monster could murder an innocent child!

My teeth began to chatter and my knees went weak. I leaned against a tree to keep from falling.

A moment later when I looked up, I saw the figure hurrying away. I started to follow him, but the next flash of lightning showed him climbing the steep rocks on the side of the mountain. Then he was gone, disappeared over the top.

I stood frozen against the tree, thinking back to the night two years ago when I had given life to this creature. I was filled with guilt as I now asked myself, "Did I turn a monster loose in the world so he could kill? And what other terrible crimes has he committed?"

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I spent the night, cold and wet, on that hillside, agonizing on the horror I had created. When day dawned, I made my way to Geneva and to my father's house.

I considered alerting the police so that the monster could be tracked down. But what kind of story could I tell? Could I say that I, a university student, had created a monster and given life to it two years ago, then had seen that very monster on the side of the mountain just last night? Besides, who would believe such a strange tale from the lips of a man who had spent many months with a fever that was close to madness?

I knew that if someone came to *me* with such a story, I would say it was the ravings of a madman! Besides, what human could hope to stop or even catch a creature who was capable of climbing the sides of a mountain as the monster had done? . . . I had no answers, so I decided to remain silent.

A Sad Homecoming

It was five o'clock in the morning when I entered my father's house. I went straight to the library, telling the servants not to wake the family. I stood before the mantle-piece and gazed at the portrait of my dear mother, then below it, at one of William.

I clutched my sweet brother's picture to my heart and began to weep. At that moment, my brother Ernest entered the library and tearfully fell into my arms.

When we finally dried our eyes, I asked how my father and Elizabeth were bearing up.

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“Father is managing fairly well, but Elizabeth has been inconsolable. She had been blaming herself for William’s death until the real murderer was discovered—”

“The real murdered discovered!” I cried. “How can that be? I saw him just last night on the mountain, and he was still loose!”

“I don’t know what you mean, Victor,” replied my brother, looking puzzled. “The discovery of the murderer has just added to our misery, since it was our devoted servant girl, Justine Moritz.”

“Justine?” I gasped. “That’s impossible!”

“No one believed it at first. Elizabeth still doesn’t. And actually, the evidence is very confusing. It seems one of the servants found our mother’s locket in Justine’s apron pocket—the locket that was stolen when William was murdered. Without coming to us with the locket first, the servant went to the police. They immediately came and arrested Justine. Her trial begins tomorrow.”

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"I'm certain she's innocent," I argued, "because I know who the real murderer is."

At that moment, my father and Elizabeth joined us, so there was no chance for Ernest to question me about what I had said.

After greeting me warmly but sadly, my father added to Ernest's explanation. "We all wanted very much to believe in Justine's innocence, not only because of all the years she has been with our family, but also because of her devotion to your late mother and to William. I hope and pray she will be acquitted. We must trust in the fairness of our judges and our court system."

Elizabeth waited until my father had finished speaking, then she tearfully pleaded with me, "Victor, you must find a way to help prove Justine's innocence. I love that girl and I know she couldn't kill anyone, certainly not the darling little boy she practically raised."

CHAPTER 10

Justine Moritz—The Second Victim!

I went to the courthouse the next day with my father and Elizabeth. I wished more than anything that I could have confessed to the crime to avoid having Justine punished for it. But I had been in Germany at the time of the murder and anyone hearing my confession would probably think I was out of my mind.

The evidence against Justine was actually circumstantial—there was no real proof that she was guilty. She claimed that when she learned William was lost, she hurried to

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Plainpalais to help in the search for him. After many hours when she tried to return home, it was after ten o'clock and the city's gates were already closed. So she waited in a barn in a nearby village until daylight. She thinks she fell asleep for a few minutes until some footsteps woke her.

Justine had no idea how the locket from William's neck had gotten into the pocket of her apron. She could only guess that someone had put it there.

"But who?" she begged the court. "I don't have an enemy in the world! And if someone killed William just to steal the locket, why did the murderer leave it in my pocket?"

Elizabeth came forward to testify to Justine's good character and to plead with the court. But I saw from the angry looks on the judges' faces that it was no use. They were already convinced that she was guilty.

I ran out of the courtroom, unable to face my own guilt. I was responsible for creating the

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monster who had committed this horrible crime!

A short while later, Elizabeth and my father staggered out, their faces white.

“Oh, Victor,” sobbed Elizabeth, “it’s even worse than we expected.”

“Justine has confessed to the crime,” my father explained sadly.

“No!” I cried. “I don’t believe it!”

Just then, a court clerk came out and called to Elizabeth, “Oh, Miss Lavenza, the prisoner has asked to see you.”

Elizabeth turned to me. “I must see Justine, even though she has confessed. But I can’t go in alone. Please come with me.”

I was tortured at the very thought of facing Justine, but I couldn’t refuse.

We found the girl sitting on a pile of straw in her cell. Her hands were chained together and her head was resting on her knees. When she saw us, she threw herself at Elizabeth’s feet and wept bitterly.

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“Oh, Justine!” cried Elizabeth. “Why did you lie to us? I was so convinced of your innocence in spite of the evidence, but then I learned that you had confessed to the crime.”

“I did confess,” admitted Justine between sobs, “but the confession was a lie. I was forced to make the confession. They told me if I didn’t confess, I could never enter heaven after my death. I was so frightened that I did what they said. But now I’m miserable. I could never die with you believing I had murdered our dear, sweet child! I’ve told you the truth and now I can go to my death peacefully. You know... and God knows... I’m innocent.”

Seeing both women sobbing in each other’s arms, I groaned in agony. I was helpless to comfort either one of these women who were my dear, lifelong friends.

Even though Elizabeth and I both tried desperately to change the judges’ minds, it

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did no good. At dawn of the following day, Justine Moritz was taken to the town square and hung as a murderess!

With horror and despair, I now counted two of my loved ones as the victims of my blind ambition and my terrible creation!

“What’s the use of living?” I asked myself in desperation. “Suicide might be the answer for *me*, but how can I add more grief to the suffering Elizabeth and my father have been enduring?” Then, too, I didn’t know what else the fiendish monster might be planning against my family. I had to protect them.

I decided then that I had to shake off my depression and take action myself. I swore, “One day, I shall track down this monster and come face to face with him. Then I shall make him pay for his terrible crimes!”