

A Good Anvil Does Not Fear the Hammer

MARY is in a small, earthy cemetery, kneeling in front of a grave. This meeting is relaxed, casual, natural, and whole, like a picnic lunch on a grassy hill with a long-lost friend.

MARY:

Here I am again.

Here I am, because you've called me -

And I think a lot of people would agree that I'm a very obedient and polite sort of girl.

She laughs.

Hmm. I don't know that you HAVE called me, this time. Or even whispered. Maybe you've just seen me, and that was enough. You have seen and heard and felt everything I've told you and now - you'll have the most informed opinion.

Well. I guess there's no purpose in withholding information - I can't really expect extortion from someone who's dead.

Well -

Percy and I, and Claire and Byron, you know - LORD Byron, forgive me - that arrogant, pretentious - hmm.

...We spent that summer in Switzerland - a cold and cloudy summer - and as we sat on Lake Geneva -

I thought, ungrateful girl that I am -

I thought -

I had much rather be here in the winter.

I want to feel the taloned grip of the cold on my exposed cheeks and

See the crystal blue sky sparkle and defy the freezing wind and

Watch the waves rock and shake the foundations of the world, like Hephaestus himself is hammering at his anvil in silence at the bottom of the cold dark lake.

- Which I understand is irrational and absurd.

I wanted to DO something - we all did. We wanted to write until our fingers bled - to create something worthwhile and haunting and austere and beautiful. That ethereal countryside demanded more than idle respect. It deserved - it necessitated! - something other. And the others offered up their little sacrifices on the temple fire every day. And I searched within myself, searched deep, for something I could give too.

But nothing came. I stared out at the placid lake and

Nothing came.

I cut fresh onions in the bright yellow kitchen and

Nothing came.

I watched the golden morning subside into bright blue day into lavender twilight into bitter dusk.
And nothing came.

So I just had to accept that we weren't there for winter, we were there for a rainy summer, and an unproductive one at that, and I was going to make the best of it and enjoy a peaceful holiday with my friends.

Then I saw him.

A man -

But not a man, a perversion of a man -

Hideous, grotesque, deformed -

Without a family, without a love.

Without a child.

But instead of resenting him, or fearing him or - or - hating him without any cause besides a general fear of the unknown, you -

You love him.

You would do anything to give him what he wants - what he deserves - what everyone deserves.

A home.

And the tragedy comes when you realize, all at once, that you can't. Nobody can set aside their foolish rationality and give this - beast - what he wants - the human right to kindness and empathy and a sense of belonging - because even though he is a man in theory, he is something else in practice.

He is something far less.

Or far more.

Something other.

You love him because he has - a clean spirit, an innocence unmarred by society, a love for learning and working and becoming good. And you love him even when he realizes what you've known all along - that he will never have what he craves earnestly. You love him when he exacts revenge. You love him, you love him even when he is gone. You may love him even more, then. He is the man, the demon, the deity, the - other - at the bottom of the lake, pounding his fists in rage and frustration because no one can perceive his heart - and the world you know rocks, and shakes, and collapses.

And in that moment, your idols crumble

And scales fall from your cruel, resentful eyes

And you understand why God loves everything He made

Why He says that it is good - even when it kills, or destroys, or lies -

Why He watches evil men start a raging fire

And He loves and forgives them anyway,

As His kingdom burns to the ground.

And because you understand - you understand! -

You forgive God in return.

It terrifies me, Mother, that I ever thought of such a thing.

It worries me when Percy goes through and marks things in pen -

Is he correcting a modifier?

Or is he collecting evidence?

Does he see himself?

Or worse - more to the point, I suppose -

Does he see me?

I have half a mind twice a day to throw the manuscript into the fire and watch it burn up, until it's all only a black wisp muttering grim secrets to the bricks of the hearth.

I - I suppose I don't really know why I am here, or what I'm meant to say.

I guess -

I just wanted you to know -

I want to be my own person. I want to make you proud - or make someone proud, anyone -

I want respect - from others, from myself -

I want to live.

I want to honor the person who gave me life.

But maybe I can't do it, after all, no matter how much I want it.

He couldn't.

Research (if you're interested!)

CONCEPT:

- Mary Shelley amidst the frenzied, rushed writing of *Frankenstein* OR in the slow, tedious edits after it before publication. (After doing research, I think a good time could actually be completely separated from the writing *Frankenstein* at all: when Percy Shelley was cheating on her with Claire Clairmont)
- Ostensibly about her writing the book, actually about:
- Underlying problems with her husband/infidelity
- Relatability to the monster; feels ugly, insufficient, misunderstood
- Some reference to feminism? I want the audience to find out she is at her mother's grave, telling her about all this → kind of venting but also kind of for approval

RESEARCH:

- Hephaestus lore/myths/symbols
 - <https://greekgodsandgoddesses.net/gods/hephaestus/>
 - <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hephaestus>
- Mary Shelley history
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Shelley (the TEA in this one! OMG)
- Mary Wollstonecraft history/early feminism (Shelley's mother)
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/A_Vindication_of_the_Rights_of_Woman
 - <https://www.goodreads.com/work/quotes/1938850-a-vindication-of-the-rights-of-woman>
 - https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Mary_Wollstonecraft
- Etymology of "forged by fire" phrase
 - <https://answers.yahoo.com/question/index?qid=20060806062507AAjBhA1>

COMPARISONS:

- Alternate title of *Frankenstein* was *The Modern Prometheus* → acknowledging Greek influence (AND! The fire Prometheus gave to humans, he stole from Hephaestus's forge)
- Parents were an anarchist and feminist - new ideas but at the heart of them equality, justice, and love (Hephaestus was smart and crafty but also considered very kind)
- Shelley had a rich, extensive education - Hephaestus instrumental in teaching humans craftsmanship and even created Pandora and her box

- Got into her relationship with Shelley by helping him cheat on his then-wife, later karma = he did the same thing to her (Aphrodite/Ares/Hephaestus triangle that led to Heph trying to fill the void with other women)
- Ostracism, debt, rejected by family because of a social “lameness” in pregnancy out of wedlock, cheating, leaving home, etc. - Hephaestus rejected by family due to physical lameness OR due to social lameness of being a feminist legend and defending Hera from Zeus
- **Frankenstein’s Monster:** Ugly, rejected, deemed incapable of love (no monster wife), producing life (no monster babies! No adoption into a family @ the farmer family he burns up), being intelligent (even though he casually taught himself to speak and read through *Paradise Lost* in like 3 days, whatever). Both Mary AND Hephaestus can seriously relate to this:
 - **Mary:** felt ugly/unwanted as she was being cheated on/passed around by Shelley to his friends not necessarily with her consent/participation. Rejected by her father for eloping, even though he was originally for free love, so she always thought he was just BSing because he didn’t like her - genuine confusion, unexpected loss. Couldn’t have children and had three stillbirths/short-lived babies before her fourth and only living child. No one took her seriously as a writer for a long time because she was a woman; couldn’t get a formal education; couldn’t even publish *Frankenstein* without Percy making a bunch of (lowkey unnecessary and bad) edits
 - **Hephaestus:** felt unwanted BECAUSE he was ugly - tossed to earth and it got made worse. Deformities also due to/in the fashion of blacksmiths who worked with arsenic/lead. Used as a throwaway husband for Aphrodite just to establish peace so all the hot gods wouldn’t fight over her; Zeus doesn’t see him as ever able to attain love so he is a good middle ground. Could produce life (and did! Hella mortal partners!) but no children with Aphrodite, his wife, even though she had some with Ares :-(. Excluded from his own family even though he makes everything for them. Extremely smart and taught humans a lot but outshined by Athena because she is more open, beautiful, brazen, warlike while he is timid and peaceful.