

# IT'S A ZINE!

The SCIENCE FICTION & FANTASY LIT CLUB'S 3<sup>RD</sup> annual zine  
dedicated to THE 200<sup>TH</sup> ANNIVERSARY of MARY SHELLEY'S *FRANKENSTEIN*



Illustration by Hannah Portelle

The Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature Club's 3<sup>rd</sup> Annual Zine

## ***IT'S A ZINE!***

Released at the Villa Diodati at the Pollak Library  
for the Frankenstein Meme Exhibit

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Thank you to Science Fiction and Fantasy Writers of America and the CSUF English Department for throwing funds into the void and trusting us to catch them.

Thanks especially to Patricia Prestinary, protector of the rare jewels of Special Collections, who is so kind and so willing to bring these treasures to light – and always, to our advisor, Dr. David Sandner, who continues to dedicate his teaching to the speculative arts and who always pushes his students – wide-eyed from gazing into the sublime abyss– to pursue creative or otherwise innovative means of knowing the world.

Tell me why you  
deemed my  
flesh inadequate  
when you were the  
One to dig up  
every piece  
of me that  
might have  
been flowers.





Alex Clark

## Progeny of the Storm

By K.C. Aegis

The breath of life filled Mary's lungs, drawing her from sleep as if reviving a corpse. She took several rattling breaths, trying to remember where she was. Rain pelted against glass, and an oil lamp flickered from the bedside table.

She had been having a nightmare—one of those inescapable affairs that lacked form or reason. In the dream, she had been standing on the shore of a lake much like that of Lake Geneva only a stroll away. The waters swirled around her ankles as she gazed into the lake's murky abyss. As she watched, a white apparition bobbed near the surface. Mary laughed, knowing very well that it must only be Percy playing a trick. But her amusement swiftly turned to horror when the creature breached the surface. It was Percy, Mary knew for certain, but his face was bloated and disintegrating like a sodden loaf of bread.

Now the nightmare had ended, but the storm harbored new fears.

A flash of lightning drenched the world in brilliant contrasts. The shadows seemed to grow darker—reach *further* into the room. Tendrils of night grasped at forest sketched walls and a chandelier swaying like a man on the gallows.

"Percy?" she whispered. Percy did not answer. The only response came in the booming roar of thunder just outside the glass. Mary reached across the bed, her hands slipping over the down comforter and finding no trace of him.

She slid out of bed and draped a wool blanket over her nightgown. In the gloom, Mary found her baby's basinet. She wanted to brush her hand across his back and assuage her own fears with the comforting rhythm of his small, beating heart. But her fingers found no such comfort. The basinet was empty.

*William! My child! Where is he? Who has taken my baby at this hour?* A frenzy of possibilities raced and collided in her mind. She prayed that he was with his father. *Yes, that must be it. Our son was stirring and Percy has taken him out to comfort him.*

These thoughts were still in Mary's mind when another burst of lightning illuminated the previously unseen figure standing in the doorway. The flash cloaked the man in a white haze while casting a wide shadow onto the tapestry behind him. This had the sublime effect of making him appear to be twice the size of a normal man.

"Mary?" said the newcomer uneasily. "Are you really here?"

*The sound of his voice, although strange in this setting, was reassuring in its familiarity.*

"Poli?" She squinted. It was John Polidori, Lord Byron's physician. The two of them had rented out this incredible retreat, the *Villa Diodati*, for the summer.

"It's me, Mary." His voice sounded grave as if he was on the brink of unbearable news.

"John! Why are you here? Has something happened to Percy—or to *William*?"

"Your children are not here, Mary. The proprietors don't have any interest in our progeny... just us."

"What are you talking about?" Mary felt an unease flickering along the back of her neck. "Proprietors? Do you mean Percy and Byron? And what do you mean by *children*? I have only William, unless you mean..." Mary couldn't believe that this man would invoke the memory of her dead daughter *here in the middle of the night*.

"Your children are not here, Mary. They have never been here, praise God. I'm not even sure where or what *here* is exactly."

The lightning flashed again, its light casting the man's visage in terrible clarity. An uneasy grin split his otherwise handsome features. Through blood-red lips, his teeth, or rather, his *canines* glowed starry white in the blaze. They were elongated and hung from the roof of his mouth like pointed stalactites. The sight forced a shudder through Mary's extremities.

"You're not making sense, John. Have you been drinking?"

"No," he said forcefully. "Mary, you must listen to me. This place—"

"I must find Percy," she interrupted as she slipped past the sharp-toothed physician. "Where is he?"

"Mary, wait!" He called after her—pulled the blanket from her shoulders—as she raced through a shadowed corridor. She reached the lobby and could hear men's voices coming from the parlor.

"Percy?" She stepped toward the voices but stopped suddenly when a cold hand enclosed around her wrist.

It was John, panting. The fear in his eyes was enough to stall Mary's movements.

"Don't go in there," he said. "Those men...they aren't what you remember."

"Nonsense."

"Mary, you have to listen to me. We aren't really here. This place...the proprietors..." He took a deep breath, clearly struggling for the right words. "This is all happening inside a machine."

"A what?"

"A machine that dreams. I know how it must sound, but believe me—the proprietors—they dug up our bones after we died. Collected Percy's calcified heart from your son's grave. Through some sort of mechanical trickery, they reanimated our souls—our *memories* and put us in this place."

Mary held out her arms and examined their corporeality. "Are you suggesting that I am not living?"

"Yes. This place is an illusion—made by their thinking machines inside an artificial dream."

Mary had heard enough. "That's very clever, Mr. Polidori, but I must see Percy at once." She stepped toward the murmuring voices coming from the parlor.

"Wait! I haven't told you the worst part." And despite everything, Mary's morbid curiosity slowed her progress. She had always harbored an infatuation for the macabre. And she wanted to know, what could be worse than being dead? Perhaps this was John's attempt to revisit their story-telling session from the other night. He must have desired to prove himself as a storyteller. In the presence of Percy and Byron, Mary suspected, any man would feel inferior.

He must have seen these thoughts in her eyes because he pleaded, "It isn't a story. I've been here longer than any of you and I've learned a lot from the proprietors. They visit this place sometimes. They're like tourists—traveling here in the skin of the dead."

"Who?"

"The proprietors—in the place where they live, they buy and sell the souls of the dead as if they were a common currency. *We*—you, me, Percy, and Byron—we are valuable commodities in their world. I think it has something to do with the stories we told each other during the storm."

"You mean this storm." Mary gestured towards the windows, the glass panes rattling against the raging tempest.

"This storm," said John, exasperated. "It's been raining incessantly since I arrived."

"And when was that?"

His eyes lost their focus. "I don't know," he admitted. "Time is fickle here—more malleable than it was during life. But if I were to usher a guess, I'd say it's been years since I first arrived."

Mary couldn't deny there was something provocative about the physician's tale, but it wasn't enough to quell her unease.

"John, this is all very interesting, but I simply must find Per—"

A loud cry from outside halted Mary's thoughts. She listened with growing anxiety, believing at first that she had imagined it. She had nearly convinced herself of this when the cry, a *grown man's* wail penetrated the foyer a second time—it was a lonely utterance framed in thunder.

"There's a man outside," said Mary. "In this storm! He'll catch his death!" Mary reached for the door, but John pulled her back.

"That's Sam!" he said. "The proprietors purchased him soon after me. But he's not all there."

"Of course he's there. I can hear him."

"No, Mary. Please try to understand. We—our *souls*—we are their *property*—bought and sold. Sometimes, the souls are broken up—part of one soul going to a museum while another part goes to a private collector. I heard them talking about it—the *Soul Market*, they say. We can't escape." He shook his head. "In any case, the part of Sam they brought here is not enough to form a complete man. What's left is a hideous sight and his brain is an addled mess." He paused before adding, "It was the same way with Byron and Percy. They—"

"What about Percy?" Mary snapped.

"They weren't complete...the museum that owned them refused to part with them entirely. They kept a portion. So, the proprietors only managed to purchase parts of them—not enough to form full entities like you and me."

"I don't understand."

"They stitched them together, forming a composite creature. Part of Lord Byron, part of Percy Shelley, and a touch of the poet, John Keats. The proprietors believed Keats' sensitivity could temper Byron's cruelty and Percy's selfishness." This last part was finally too much for Mary. It was one thing to hear this man's absurd fantasy, but his insults toward Percy were something else entirely.

"That's quite enough," she said curtly. The lonely voice cried out in the storm, and Mary peeled her wrist from John's hold. She was pleasantly amused by the look of horror on the man's face as she gripped the brass knob and flung the doors wide, exposing the foyer to the violent deluge outside.

"No!" cried John, but Mary ignored him. Her eyes were fixed on the figure standing erect in the coursing rain. Mary could only see the man's profile, his bearded face turned toward the thundering storm. She recognized the man at once. Even in the rain and his uncharacteristically unkempt visage, Mary would never forget the face of the man who had often visited her father's home during her youth. Samuel Taylor Coleridge. His fantastic tales had equally delighted and haunted her childhood. But what was he doing here?

"Mr. Coleridge," Mary called out into the storm. Beside her, John made a whimpering noise. A moment later, Mary understood why.

Coleridge turned to face them, his drenched clothes sloshing as he staggered through the mud. The left side of his face, from temple to chin had been hacked away. Pieces of jaw and cracked teeth jutted through a ragged clump of bloody flesh. And now that he was facing them, Mary noticed the large white bird, chained around his neck like a crucifix.

He lurched forward. The speed of his movements showed a great strength not reflected in his deathly appearance.

John stepped between him and Mary, pushing her back. Coleridge stopped and peered with glittering orbs into the physician's eyes.

"Has the wedding begun already?" asked the Coleridge thing, its voice rustling like dead leaves.

"There's no wedding tonight, Wretch!" said John.

"Yes," Coleridge hissed. His glittering eyes darted over Mary. "Tonight, there will be a wedding."

"Leave her alone," said John.

"Of course. I have not come for the bride. My interest is in you, wedding guest." At these words, the air shimmered around the Wretch, and John's entire body grew unnaturally rigid as if he had suddenly turned to stone.

"You must hear my tale..." said Coleridge.

Mary tugged on John's jacket, but he would not be shaken from the trance. Coleridge's words squirmed beneath her nightgown, making her want to scream.

*I need help.* She spun away from the two men—the physician with sharpened fangs and the Wretch with glittering eyes—and raced for the parlor.

"Percy!" she cried. "Percy! Byron! Please help."

Inside the parlor, a modest flame flickered in the fireplace. Its glow cast disorienting shadows along the floor and ceiling. Before the fire, residing in a nest of shadows, a crimson armchair sat with its back to her. Mary approached slowly, the urgency of the moment struggling against a mounting trepidation.

"Percy, is that you?"

The chair creaked as the massive figure shifted, then began to rise into view. The broad neck and shoulders confounded Mary. It was simply too large to be a man.

"No," she whispered, backing away from the rising creature—a giant in stature. His grotesque face revolved into view—a patchwork of stitched flesh and bone. Percy's ear and brow. Byron's lips and piercing gaze. Mary had considered both men handsome, but not now. Their mismatched features, fused with string and another man's parts, destroyed her ability to think.

The thing took a laborious step toward her. Its limp was distinctly Byron's. And when it spoke, it seemed as if his lungs were channeling the storm's deep thunder.

"Mary," it said. "I've been waiting for you a long time."

"No," she whispered.

Lightning flashed again, painting the creature in demonic brilliance. The trailing thunder burrowed deep into Mary's pounding heart.

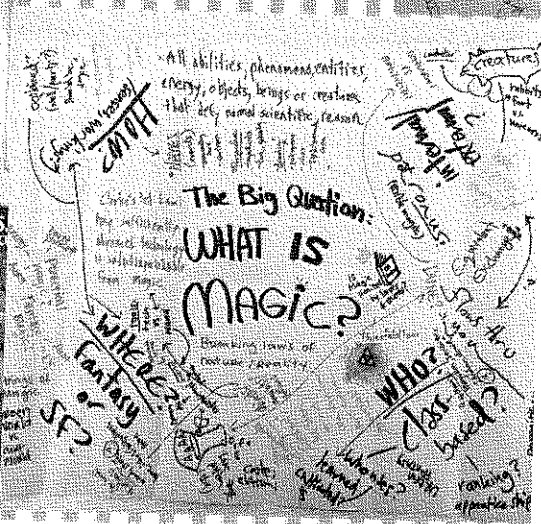
"You hear that?" the creature said. "The storm plays our wedding bells."

Mary turned to leave, finding only a pair of sealed doors. And as she struggled in vain to pull open the latch, the creature's shadow fell on her like a shroud.

Outside, the storm raged on.



# Sf/Fantasy Lit Club Activities



This zine was conceived, birthed, and released into the world irresponsibly and with unknown consequences by the following officers and members of the Science Fiction & Fantasy Literature Club:

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...and everyone else who expressed excitement and therefore played a hand in imagining this monster.