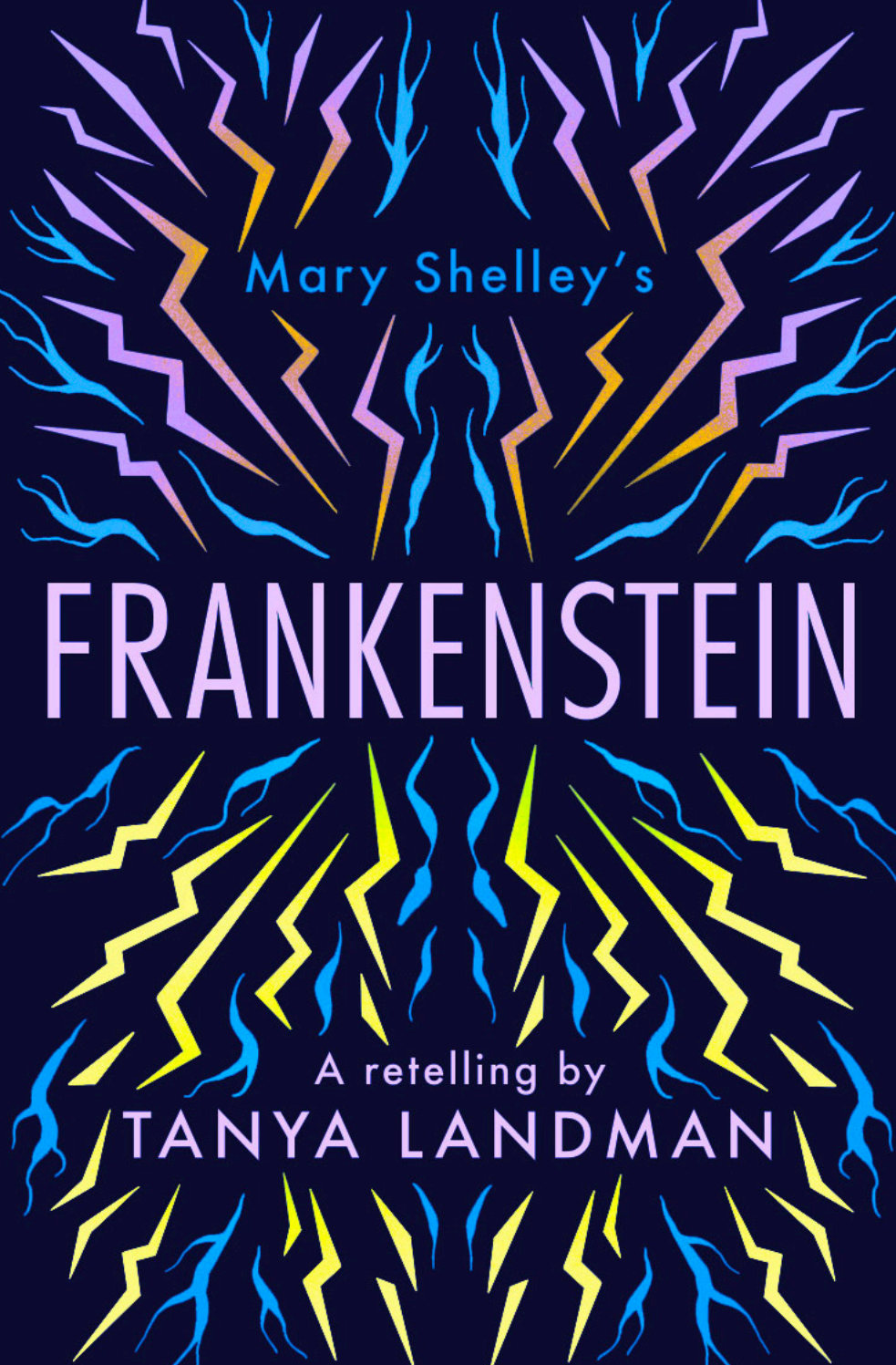

Mary Shelley's
FRANKENSTEIN
A retelling by
TANYA LANDMAN



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Barrington Stoke

ALSO BY TANYA LANDMAN

Passing for White

One Shot

Jane Eyre: A Retelling

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For Isaac and Jack: a version
without "all the rest"

CAPTAIN WALTON

Such a strange thing has happened!

We have been sailing north on a voyage of discovery for many weeks into waters that are unknown to man. A place unmapped, uncharted.

My ambition is to find out the secrets of the North Pole. I feel destined to make discoveries that will benefit all mankind.

It is summer. Yet last Monday our ship became almost totally enclosed by ice. This dangerous situation was made worse when a thick fog came down. There was nothing to be done but wait and hope for a change in the weather.

At about two o'clock the fog cleared, but to my dismay I saw vast plains of ice stretched out in every direction. The sailors groaned and I grew anxious. At that moment a peculiar sight attracted our attention.

A sled was passing by, half a mile or so away, drawn by dogs. That in itself was shocking. But the

stranger thing was that the man driving it was of an oddly gigantic size.

I used my telescope to watch this man's progress until he was lost amongst the distant ice.

His sudden appearance excited me. We were hundreds of miles from any land, or so I believed. But perhaps that was not so? This man looked as if he might be the savage inhabitant of some as yet undiscovered island. But our ship was shut in by the ice. It was impossible for us to follow him and discover the truth.

Just before nightfall the ice broke and the ship was freed. But we did not dare go on our way. Our fear was that we might strike an iceberg in the dark that would rip the hull apart.

I rested in my cabin and in the morning went on deck where I found all the sailors busy on one side of the vessel. They seemed to be talking to someone in the sea. Impossible! But when I looked, I saw a sled very like the one we'd seen the day before.

It had drifted towards us on a large fragment of ice during the night. The dogs that had pulled it were all dead. The man who had been driving the sled was a European who himself was now on the

very brink of destruction. The sailors were urging him to come aboard.

He should have been eager – desperate – to be rescued.

But the man asked, "Where are you bound?"

I told him that we were heading north. Only then did he agree to be brought on board.

Good God! I never saw a man in such poor condition. His limbs were near frozen, his body withered from hunger and exhaustion. We wrapped him in blankets and placed him near the stove. He managed to eat a little soup, but it was two days before he spoke again. His name was Victor Frankenstein. His only explanation of what had led him out on such a perilous journey was, "To seek one who fled from me."

Days passed. When I began this voyage, I did not expect to meet anyone who understood my desire to achieve something great. My only companions were common sailors, and I thought I would find no friend on the wide ocean. Yet I discovered that Victor Frankenstein not only understood but shared all my feelings. I saw in him the same thirst for knowledge. I recognised the same flame of ambition in his heart that burns

in mine. Yet in him the light has been dimmed by suffering.

Victor Frankenstein told me he was waiting for one event, after which he would die in peace. He has promised to reveal the nature of this event to me. Today, Victor Frankenstein will explain the reasons for his reckless pursuit of the gigantic creature across the ice.

I believe his tale will be strange and harrowing, and intend to record it in his own words.

He begins ...



VICTOR FRANKENSTEIN

1.

I was born to a wealthy and important family of Geneva. For some time I was the only child of parents who were devoted to each other. They loved to travel, and when I was about five years old, we stayed a while in a villa on the shores of Lake Como.

My father was away in Milan when my mother took the opportunity of visiting the poor in a nearby village. My mother was a charitable woman and liked to give help and comfort where she could.

In a shabby peasants' hovel she noticed a golden-haired girl who did not look as if she belonged there. My mother soon discovered the child was the orphaned daughter of a nobleman and decided to adopt her.

On the evening before my mother brought the girl home, she said playfully to me, "I have a pretty present for you, Victor – tomorrow you shall have it."

My father returned from Milan a few days later and found me playing in the hall of our villa with a girl who looked like an angel.

Elizabeth Lavanza was her name. A year younger than myself, she became the beautiful and adored companion of my childhood. We called each other "cousin", but no word can truly express everything that Elizabeth meant to me.

Everyone loved Elizabeth, and I took great pride in their adoration.

I was five years old. I had taken my mother's words literally when she had presented Elizabeth to me as her promised gift. Elizabeth was mine – mine to protect, love and cherish. Until death parted us, Elizabeth was to be only mine.