

## Frankenstein's Children Audition Pieces

ANNE

*(storms in)* Mother I've made the most astounding discovery...Hello Lady Porter, how do you do, isn't Bentham fine?...Mother, that mouse I trapped, I cut it open. What a strange and fascinating world was beholden to my gaze. Webs and trails of tubes and wires, murky bags and bones. A pattern of veins across the brain exactly the form of a tree in winter. I looked at it and thought: This is the enlightenment! This mouse is a machine! And we too are machines. Much more complex than a steam train I would say, much more interesting. Do you think anyone has ever thought like this before?

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MRS. HARE

You lie in bed and press yourself up against that warm body. You trace with your finger down every little crack and wrinkle and you know it like a map of a town you've always lived in. You think there's plenty of time, too much time, because half of it you're hating, because he grizzles and screams and mopes like a baby. Then suddenly it's all too fast and you haven't prepared for any of it. You just want a simple thing, like holding hands, it's silly, isn't it. But it's all gone. Cold. Dead. You wonder where it went. What's the meaning of this big cold lump you used to love and hate so much. It's a mystery.

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POLLY

Used to be a lot of ghosts in the graveyard, when I was a kid. We'd come up to visit our dead grandma. You could feel them watching you. Every step you took. When you looked you couldn't see them, but you knew they were there. It was very scary. You felt they had a power over you. That's what I don't like about your science, doctor. The feeling that I'm being watched. I feel like I'm an object. Feel my heart. The beats are strange, aren't they. Your Dr. Astley's very interested in me because I'm a freak. He can't wait to cut me up and have a look.

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BRANSBY

I say all poor relief and charity should be abolished. It only prolongs an artificial state of misery. Don't you agree? My vision is of shady groves. Mothers in the workhouse, who have too many unwanted babies, shall give them up. They will be placed in a chamber which utilises the surreptitious invasion of a gas which contains not the element of life. It is a theory of painless extinction. To thank the mothers for their help in controlling the surplus population, we shall plant memorial groves of shady trees.

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WILLIAM

Mother, I'm home. No problem. They didn't ask a single question. Eight pounds fifty this time. I bought some eggs and cheese. Eight pounds fifty! That's the best so far. What's that, nine now – or ten? I don't think that surgeon even cares where they come from. No scruples. Is that what they are called? I think we should be more careful though, Mother, with the neighbours. They've seen us several times with people coming in. They must wonder why they never see anybody going out. You know what I think is the cleverest thing. The tea. No-one ever dreams of it, because you can't taste the laudanum.

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SIR ASTLEY

Gentlemen all, as you know, the Anatomy Act is now law. A new era dawns. From the chaos behind us we look forward to order. I am proud today to open my museum and present to you two of my finest exhibits. A woman's heart, strange in itself but this one stranger beyond belief, deformed and twisted. A man's brain, perfect, but taken from the body of a woman. These exhibits and many more like them lay the foundations for the knowledge of tomorrow. One day so much will be discovered, we will seem but children, savages. Think then, how much understanding will be extracted from these jars. Welcome, gentlemen. With hope, and with arms outstretched to embrace the future, I welcome you all to the House of Reason!

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LADY PORTER

It seems these bodysnatcher people make absolutely no discrimination. Lord Alford's uncle they dug up last week – from the family vault! Dragged him off to God knows where. Ruined the vault completely. Oh it's so awfully unfair. You know, honestly I don't think the lower classes feel so sensitive about these things as we. I don't think some of them would even notice or feel a thing to be dissected. It's a wicked thing to say, but the way some of them behave you really start to wonder. It's the new industrial life; it's had a degenerative effect upon the race. They're heading back the way of savages and animals. And now they want the vote! With no respect for property! How can they possibly contribute to rational government?

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JAMES

I must be getting back.  
It's a relief actually that someone knows.

POLLY

Don't you have any friends?

JAMES

No, I have colleagues. One doesn't talk about –

POLLY

One's body.

JAMES

*(blushes)* In any case it's been very nice.

POLLY

To meet me.

JAMES

Yes.

POLLY

Do you know what I do for a living?

*Short Pause.*

JAMES

Yes.

POLLY

*(without any bitterness)* I have this one man who kneels behind me and shouts "I want to penetrate to the heart of the most secret mysteries of nature!" He's a doctor just like you.

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PENNY

Broadsheets! Penny-gaffs! Reality greater than romance. A burglar bitten by a skeleton! Truth stranger than fiction. Fatal case of elephant teasing! Stern facts triumphant over the products of imagination. Wife driven insane by

husband tickling her feet! Every word is true, and just a penny.  
(to James) Your turn.

JAMES People of the city, I appeal to your rational minds –

PENNY Boring! You've lost them already! Got to catch them with the first word.

JAMES First word.

PENNY Yeah.

JAMES Bequests! I want bequests please!

PENNY No, more like this: Guts and gizzards! Sign up now. Allow us to cut you open and take apart your insides!

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WILLIAM We are poor again, mother.

MRS. HARE I know.

WILLIAM There's no change left in the tin.

MRS. HARE I know.

WILLIAM What shall we eat for supper?

MRS. HARE I don't know.

WILLIAM Seven pounds and seven shillings. I thought that would last forever.

MRS. HARE It was your drinking.

WILLIAM It was your Dickens. We have to think rational.

MRS. HARE What's rational?

WILLIAM It's a word, Mother. It means if we are more rational, we will end up with more rations. I have a plan. You remember what he said. He wants more bodies. I met a man today who works in the graveyard up the hill. He said it's easy. He'll be there if we go tonight.

MRS. HARE Tonight? Us? Snatching bodies up from their graves?

WILLIAM Yes.

MRS. HARE No.

WILLIAM Yes.

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SIR ASTLEY James you appear distracted. We hear rumours of your late-night gallivanting, perhaps you need –

JAMES                                 Where did you get this body?

SIR ASTLEY                             Oh, the usual I expect.

JAMES                                 Where?

SIR ASTLEY                             I don't remember.

JAMES                                 This woman was murdered!

SIR ASTLEY                             Don't be absurd, James. Where's the mortal wound, the poison frothing at her lips?

JAMES                                 There are bruises on her face.

SIR ASTLEY                             What does that prove? She fell down some stairs.

JAMES                                 But you don't know that. We might be accessories to murder.

SIR ASTLEY                             I think that would be difficult to prove in a court of law.

JAMES                                 I became a surgeon to save lives, not take them.

SIR ASTLEY                             I became a surgeon to extend the bounds of human knowledge. I'm not interested in politics.