

Frankenstein (or, The Modern Prometheus)

By Mary Wollstonecraft (Godwin) Shelley (Copyright 1818)

Letter 1

To Mrs. Saville, England.

St. Petersburg, Dec. 11th, 17—.

You will rejoice to hear that no disaster has accompanied the commencement of an enterprise which you have regarded with such evil forebodings. I arrived here yesterday, and my first task is to assure my dear sister of my welfare and increasing confidence in the success of my undertaking.

I am already far north of London, and as I walk in the streets of Petersburg, I feel a cold northern breeze play upon my cheeks, which braces my nerves and fills me with delight. Do you understand this feeling? This breeze, which has travelled from the regions towards which I am advancing, gives me a foretaste of those icy climes. Inspirited by this wind of promise, my daydreams become more fervent and vivid. I try in vain to be persuaded that the pole is the seat of frost and desolation; it ever presents itself to my imagination as the region of beauty and delight. There, Margaret, the sun is forever visible, its broad disk just skirting the horizon and diffusing a perpetual splendour. There—for with your leave, my sister, I will put some trust in preceding navigators—there snow and frost are banished; and, sailing over a calm sea, we may be wafted to a land surpassing in wonders and in beauty every region hitherto discovered on the habitable globe. Its productions and features may be without example, as the phenomena of the heavenly bodies undoubtedly are in those undiscovered solitudes. What may not be expected in a country of eternal light? I may there discover the wondrous power which attracts the needle and may regulate a thousand celestial observations that require only

312 this voyage to render their seeming eccentricities consistent for ever. I shall satiate my
330 ardent curiosity with the sight of a part of the world never before visited, and may tread a
346 land never before imprinted by the foot of man. These are my enticements, and they are
362 sufficient to conquer all fear of danger or death and to induce me to commence this
379 laborious voyage with the joy a child feels when he embarks in a little boat, with his
394 holiday mates, on an expedition of discovery up his native river. But supposing all these
409 conjectures to be false, you cannot contest the inestimable benefit which I shall confer on
424 all mankind, to the last generation, by discovering a passage near the pole to those
439 countries, to reach which at present so many months are requisite; or by ascertaining the
455 secret of the magnet, which, if at all possible, can only be effected by an undertaking
458 such as mine.