



DEAR READER,

My name is Kris Waldherr and I'm delighted to share my latest novel *Unnatural Creatures: A Novel of the Frankenstein Women* with you.

Unnatural Creatures will be published on October 4, 2022. It's been a true labor of love that's taken me three years to author. My intent in writing *Unnatural Creatures* was to reveal the untold stories of the three women closest to Victor Frankenstein—his bride Elizabeth Lavenza, mother Caroline Frankenstein, and servant Justine Moritz—while incorporating the historical events of the era. In this way, I hope *Unnatural Creatures* might be considered a companion piece to Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* in the same manner in which Jo Baker's *Longbourn* is to *Pride and Prejudice* and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *Jane Eyre*: novels that offer the other side of the story.

To add further depth to *Unnatural Creatures*, I even traveled to the locations where *Frankenstein* takes place: Geneva, the Mer de Glace, Chêne, Belrive (now known as Belle Rive), and Mont Blanc. I also visited the grounds of the Villa Diodati, where Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* on a dark and stormy night in June 1816 as a result of a ghost story competition.

Elements of Mary Shelley's life—her experiences with natal loss, her tumultuous relationship with Percy Shelley, her complicated history with her parents—also served to enrich *Unnatural Creatures*. I particularly believe Mary Shelley's writing of *Frankenstein* was influenced by the absence of her mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who died days after giving birth to her, as well as the death of Mary Shelley's first child, a daughter born premature in 1815. Soon after, Shelley wrote in her journal of a dream where “my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived.”

Enclosed is information about myself and *Unnatural Creatures: A Novel of the Frankenstein Women*. Please feel free to reach out to me at Kris@KrisWaldherrBooks.com or Publicity@ReadMuse.com—I'd love to hear from you!

All the best,

ReadMuse.com

ABOUT KRIS WALDHERR

Kris Waldherr is an award-winning author, illustrator, and designer whose many books for adults and children include *The Book of Goddesses*, *Bad Princess*, and *Doomed Queens*, which *The New Yorker* praised as “utterly satisfying.” Her debut novel *The Lost History of Dreams* received a starred *Kirkus* review and was named a CrimeReads best book of the year. Waldherr's fiction has won fellowships from the Virginia Center of the Creative Arts and a work-in-progress reading grant from Poets & Writers.



As a visual artist, she has had her illustrations exhibited in the Ruskin Library, the Mazza Museum of International Art from Picture Books, and the National Museum of Women in the Arts. She is also the creator of the Goddess Tarot, which has over a quarter of a million copies in print, and teaches the tarot to writers and other creatives.

Kris Waldherr works and lives in Brooklyn in a Victorian-era home with her family and cats. In her spare time, she enjoys travel, theater, and music. Learn more at KrisWaldherrBooks.com.

~ * ~

A NOTE FROM KRIS WALDHERR ABOUT
UNNATURAL CREATURES
A NOVEL OF THE FRANKENSTEIN WOMEN

SOON AFTER MARY SHELLEY’S 1823 return to England from living abroad, she wrote to a friend, “Lo & behold! I found myself famous!” The cause of Shelley’s surprised outburst: her 1818 novel *Frankenstein, or The Modern Prometheus*, had been transformed by Richard Brinsley Peake into a rapturously successful London play entitled *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* without her knowledge or permission. Luckily for the playwright, Shelley attended the play on the eve of her twenty-sixth birthday and proclaimed herself to be “much amused.”

Luckily for Shelley, the popularity of the play ensured continuing book sales for *Frankenstein*, which helped to keep her and her son solvent after the drowning death of her husband Percy Shelley a year earlier. *Presumption, or the Fate of Frankenstein* was soon moved to a larger theater in London to accommodate audience demand. By the end of 1823, it had inspired five different thespian versions of Shelley’s cautionary tale of hubris on other London stages.

While Peake's play is the first known instance of *Frankenstein* inspiring a work of art, it was far from the last—and now, over two centuries later, here I am with my own novel inspired by Shelley's gothic masterpiece.

Unnatural Creatures has incubated inside me ever since my first reading of *Frankenstein* as a child of twelve. Even now, I can recall how viscerally *Frankenstein* affected me: the seductive appeal of the creature and his melancholy account of parental abandonment; my shock upon realizing Victor Frankenstein's wedding night would not go as planned; the tears shed during the creature's last lament at the conclusion of Shelley's novel. Since then, I've reread *Frankenstein* more times than I can count, most recently during the writing of *Unnatural Creatures*, when I visited Geneva, the Mer de Glace, Chêne, Belrive (now known as Belle Rive), Mont Blanc, and the grounds of the Villa Diodati, where Shelley began writing *Frankenstein* on a stormy night in June 1816 as a result of a literary competition to write a ghost story between herself, Percy Shelley, Lord Byron, and Dr. John Polidori.



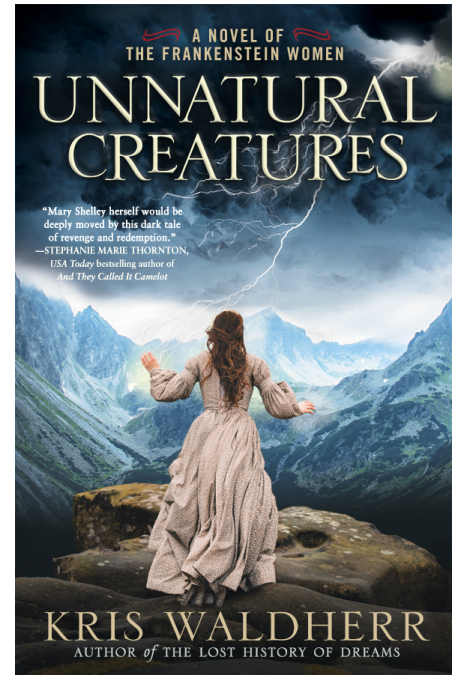
My intent in writing *Unnatural Creatures* was to reveal the untold stories of the three women closest to Victor Frankenstein—Justine Moritz, Elizabeth Lavenza, and Caroline Frankenstein—while incorporating the historical events that most likely coincided with Shelley's novel. In this way, I hope *Unnatural Creatures* might be considered a companion piece to Shelley's novel in the same manner in which Jo Baker's *Longbourn* is to *Pride and Prejudice*, and Jean Rhys's *Wide Sargasso Sea* to *Jane Eyre*—novels that offer the other side of the story.

For the most part, everything that occurs in *Unnatural Creatures* either supports the timeline of events offered in *Frankenstein*, or takes place during periods that are “off stage” from Victor Frankenstein's first person narrative or subject to his unreliable perspective. During my many readings of *Frankenstein*, I've always been struck by the plot point of Justine's aunt in Chêne, who serves as the maid's ineffectual alibi for the murder of William Frankenstein. Why didn't the aunt testify at Justine's trial? Why does Justine mention Chêne, a small village south of Geneva, so specifically?

When I learned Chêne was forced under French rule in 1792, I experienced a “Eureka!” moment that led me to notice the overlap between the tragic events described in *Frankenstein* and the historical events of revolutionary France and Geneva.

From there, I was stunned to learn Geneva had experienced several revolutions of its own. As I charted my way through the political events as they coincided with the timeline of Shelley's novel, I am particularly indebted to Frank V. Randel's paper "The Political Geography of Horror in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein*" and Janet Polasky's book *Revolutions Without Borders: The Call to Liberty in the Atlantic World*.

While I wrote *Unnatural Creatures*, I did my best to weave in Shelley's original language when possible, incorporating quotes and snippets of dialogue and description where they best fit the story I yearned to tell, sometimes retrofitting these inside alternate scenes. In addition, elements of Mary Shelley's life—her experiences with natal loss, her tumultuous relationship with Percy Shelley, her complicated history with her mother, father, and stepmother—served to enrich aspects of my novel. I particularly believe the writing of *Frankenstein* was influenced by the absence of Mary Shelley's mother, Mary Wollstonecraft, who died of puerperal fever days after giving birth to her daughter, as well as the death of Mary Shelley's first child, a daughter born premature in 1815. Soon after, Shelley wrote in her journal of a dream where "my little baby came to life again; that it had only been cold, and that we rubbed it before the fire, and it lived."



I read (and reread!) all editions of *Frankenstein* numerous times, from Shelley's 1816 handwritten manuscript draft to her final revised 1831 edition, as well as numerous critical essays, studies, and biographies of Shelley and her circle. Of these, Fiona Sampson's *In Search of Mary Shelley: The Girl Who Wrote Frankenstein* and Charlotte Gordon's *Romantic Outlaws: The Extraordinary Lives of Mary Wollstonecraft and Her Daughter Mary Shelley* were particularly helpful to my understanding of Shelley and her tumultuous circumstances.

Though all versions of *Frankenstein* served as basis for my characters and their travails in *Unnatural Creatures*, I drew most directly from the 1831 edition due to the description of Elizabeth Lavenza as an abandoned orphan unrelated to the Frankensteins. In the 1818 edition, Elizabeth is a blood cousin to Victor, which makes her integration into the Frankenstein household a matter of course rather than choice. By using the 1831 edition for Elizabeth's backstory, all three of my main characters—Elizabeth, Caroline, and Justine—are rendered as orphans without blood ties to the Frankenstein family.

###