

One murky night in 1816, on the shores of Lake Geneva, Lord Byron, famed English poet, challenged his friends to a contest--to write a ghost story. The assembled group included the poet Percy Bysshe Shelley; his lover (and future wife) Mary Wollstonecraft Godwin; Mary's stepsister Claire Clairmont; and Byron's physician, John William Polidori. The famous result was Mary Shelley's Frankenstein, a work that has retained its hold on the popular imagination for almost two centuries. Less well-known was the curious Polidori's contribution: the first vampire novel. And the evening begat a curse, too: Within a few years of Frankenstein's publication, nearly all of those involved met untimely deaths. Drawing upon letters, rarely tapped archives, and their own magisterial rereading of Frankenstein itself, Dorothy and Thomas Hoobler have crafted a rip-roaring tale of obsession and creation.

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