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### The Other Brother

The midwife lowered Mary into the water, practicing breaths with her as the contractions worsened. Peter's hand grasped hers, soothing her shaking with strokes of his thumb. She had opted for the birth to happen in their two-story, suburban home; she was safer here. The house on the East side of Toronto, where Mary blew out the three-and-five-shaped candles and prayed for the impossible. All the preparations leading up to the birth of her babies happened here. Lying on the examination table, she watched in awe as the doctor slid the cold diaphragm of the stethoscope over her swollen abdomen and announced the beating of two hearts placed by the Divine Creator Himself. He *had* listened to her.

At every checkup, Mary and Peter waited with bouncing knees for the doctor to translate the results of the documents. "All is clear and well here!" became Mary's six favourite words to hear. Just after the beginning of her second trimester, the couple was told that their twins were, in fact, identical boys! Mary cried of joy. Peter could not wait to pick out names and clothing. Despite their past miscarriages, the young couple did not lose hope, trusting in God to watch over and bless them one day. Uprooting their life in Frankfurt for another chance paid off. She laughed at the thought of her having to run and clean after three men now; she would not have it any other way. The first four appointments were a dream, but she woke up at the fifth one.

The examination room was chillier than usual as she undressed and slipped into the hospital gown. Dr. Mönch entered the room and greeted them with his usual jolly voice, “Let’s see how those artichokes are doing in there. That’s how big they are now, size of artichokes!” He slid his glasses up his plump snout, breathing heavily as he moved around the room. Dr. Mönch placed the stethoscope's ear tips in and listened closely. After a few minutes, he began to turn to Mary. “All is cle—,” Dr. Mönch’s words halted in his throat and he squinted. He looked at his watch, continuing to listen to a spot well below her naval. Dr. Mönch moved the instrument back and forth between the space of her stomach.

“Is... something wrong, doctor?” Peter asked from behind Mary’s head.

“It appears... I believe one of the baby’s heart is slightly off beat,” Dr. Mönch pointed to the bottom of Mary’s uterus, outlining a circle indicating where the baby’s heart was, “I’ll run some additional blood tests just to be safe and have those results in a jiffy.” Mary nodded and tried unknitting her eyebrows. Peter extended his free hand to hers, rubbing her knuckles.

Mary and Peter sat and prayed in silence for hours or minutes, listening to the ticks that came from the clock on the dark wall. Mary’s eyes twitched as her baby’s moved around their space. She opened her eyes briefly and placed a clammy hand under her belly. Mary looked at Peter, who had his eyes closed and held her other hand between his, then folded her free hand out to grasp the tubing of the stethoscope. Moving slowly, so not to disturb Peter, she plugged the ear tips in and moved the diaphragm to the spot on her stomach where she watched Dr. Mönch place it. She listened to the loud slosh of fluid; the baby on top was moving. Mary wondered if the twins were whispering to one another.

“You should leave that to Dr. Mönch,” Mary jumped slightly at Peter’s tired voice. She placed the instrument back on its hanger. Dr. Mönch entered moments later with a file folder and a grim look. “I have good and bad news, Mr. and Mrs. Lichtungsbank.” Her babies were healthy, for the most part. They would enter the world the same as every other, wailing and slimy with placenta. Mary and Peter would be woken up at the early hours of morning to feed one, or both, until they slept again. The doctor chuckled, the couple did not. They would watch their first steps, hear their first words, send them off to school. The doctor’s words were fuzzy with static after that. Peter’s hand grazed Mary’s a few times and she saw his eyes swivel in her direction and back to the doctor. Mary willed her tears to wait. With the right care, one baby would grow like all other babies do. His heart would beat normally, and he would see his father’s scruff and hear his mother’s song-like voice clearly. “The fetus here,” Dr. Mönch pointed to the bottom of her belly, “There are markers in his blood test that usually...” The doctor rubbed the beads of sweat from his forehead with a handkerchief. “I believe he may have mongolism.” Mary held her breath, her tears slid down her cheeks. Dr. Mönch gave them a list of symptoms they should expect, as well as ideal next steps. Peter shook his head for a long time and said nothing. The fetuses were identical, apart from their number of chromosomes. That extra copy of the 21<sup>st</sup> chromosome. It was what threw Mary down the stairs two weeks later, what forced her to drink lemon water and herbal concoctions for months. It was why Peter argued with her to leave the baby in the hospital, where it would be taken to the proper facility. The devil disguised as a mutation. Mary wished she could have skipped the fifth checkup, and that the extra copy never existed.

The midwife shouted to her young assistant for towels. Peter peered over Mary’s head and into the reddening water of the small pool, then put his head into her shoulder. Mary let out

screeches with each electric shock of pain that ruptured her body. One splash, the midwife lifted the first wailing boy, Francis. Mary gasped at the grey skin of her first son. “One more, liebe,” Peter’s voice was high pitch with glee. Mary nodded and pushed, giving a final battle cry; the second splash followed. The second baby, Vincent, wailed with bass. Mary threw her head back onto the pool edge and Peter wiped her sweat. The midwife and her assistant rinsed both boys, then placed one after another into Mary’s arms.

Blue eyes, dirty blonde hair, and pale skin, just like their father. Vincent weighed seven and a half pounds, average for their family. Francis’ eyes were slanted upward. Vincent’s tiny mouth came up into a pucker, like his mother’s. Francis’ features were flat on his round face. Vincent’s cheeks were full and rosy, sitting high on his face and giving him a mature look. Francis’ neck was short. Mary breathed hard through her nose as she looked back and forth between the boys, and a lump formed in her throat. She swallowed, loosening her left shoulder in its socket ever so slightly. “Oh, nein! You must support his head. Here,” the midwife said as she rushed over and gently pushed Francis’ tiny head back into Mary’s elbow.

Once they were swaddled, Peter sat on the wooden rocking chair in the corner of the living room and held Vincent, cooing to him and stroking his cheek with a thumb. It was the first time he had smiled in weeks. That boy will be the death of his money and time, Mary confirmed to herself with upturned corners of her lips. She watched their harmonious movements from the couch; Peter was a natural father. Mary was pulled from her thoughts by the infant fidgeting in her arms. She closed her eyes. She had tried and failed to breastfeed Francis for a little over an hour and a half. “These Mongols are a bit harder,” the midwife had told her, sticking her pinky in his mouth, “Try this just before you go again. To help him adjust.”

Mary gingerly raised her pinky and pressed it to the child's mouth. His slanted eyes were half open, and he raised a short arm up to steal her finger. Mary pulled back and groaned quietly. She lifted her left breast out of her robe and maneuvered the child's unproportioned face to it. "Come now," she whispered to Francis. He heard her and latched, but bit down instead of sucking. Mary yelled and Peter's head sprung up. Vincent whimpered.

"What happened?" Peter hissed from across the room.

Mary sniffled and shuffled with Francis' head. "He... he bit me."

"He latched, though. Keep trying. Maybe in the bedroom," Peter spoke slowly as he bounced Vincent back to sleep.

Mary followed her son's head go up and down with Peter's hands, then lifted Francis to her shoulder and stood slowly. Every step she took was painful for her legs and heart, painful to be further from Vincent's precious face. The blue nursery room was tidy and smelled of fresh linen. Two white cribs braced either sky-painted wall, while the window in the middle let the sun flood in. A matching rocking chair was tucked into a corner, and Mary lowered herself in with her free hand. Francis gurgled and spit up on her shoulder. She sighed deeply and cleaned his face with her rag. Mary gazed around the room as she tried to place her nipple into the infant's mouth again. The clouds on the wall looked so fluffy they could be mistaken for cotton. She looked at the crucifix in the middle of the room, just above the square window. She stopped rocking. Mary looked down at Francis, her mouth contorted into a pout. She recalled Proverbs3:5, she recited it to the child, "Trust in the Lord... with all your heart," her voice was cracked, "and do not lean on your own understanding." The child blinked. She looked into his blue eyes, Peter and Vincent's blue eyes, and leaned in close to kiss his cheek. The child opened

its mouth and Mary quickly placed her breast to its lips. He latched and sucked. Mary's shoulders shook as she cried, watching the child nourish itself.

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Mary crouched in front of Vincent's shirt and fastened the buttons, glancing at Francis through her peripheral on occasion to see him watching her, attempting to mimic her by fiddling with his own. His blonde hair stood straight up on his head, and his laces were untied, waiting to earn him a scraped knee. Mary gave Vincent one more look-over as he played with his bowtie. "Nein, Vinny. Don't ruin it," Mary pulled his hands away and kissed his cheek. She stood up and Francis inched towards her waist. She flattened his hair and gave a stern look, "Didn't I just fix this?" She pulled his shirt together and slipped the buttons into the holes with a twist of her hand. The boy rubbed his eyes with the back of his hand and waited after she finished, so she nudged his bottom, "Hurry before we miss the bus."

Peter stood in front of the small television, watching the black and white images of the opening of Toronto's new City Hall frame by frame. He hummed a Beatles tune, *She Loves You*, as he knotted his tie, turning to the boys playing tag as they entered. Francis' laces flopped around as he chased Vincent. "Hey," he shouted, scrambling Vincent up into his arms and tickling him. Francis held his knee on the ground. Vincent giggled and punched his father's arms, while Francis hopped up and down. Mary leaned on the beam of the open door, watching with folded arms at her husband. "Liebe, he has to go." Peter had Vincent slung over his shoulder like a log of wood. Francis appeared at Mary's apron, tracing its purple flowers with his short index finger. She grabbed it and he flinched. She stooped down to his bleeding knee and wiped it with her apron, then tied his shoes and kissed his forehead. "Come Vincent, let's get your backpack on." Mary took Vincent's hand and he took Francis' wrist.

Peter kissed Mary and Vincent, then towered over Francis, “I don’t want any calls from work today about you, hear me?” He raised his small head with his hand and swiped his tears with his thumb, “Stop crying. It’s time to be a man now...” Mary watched a small finch swoop down from its nest in a nearby oak tree and peck at leaves aimlessly for food, then turned back to Peter finishing his speech. “... be more like Vincent.” Mary tugged gently at Vincent’s hand and started to walk. She peered back to them when Vincent pulled, seeing him carefully guiding Francis on the uneven sidewalk. They arrived at the stop where the yellow bus of rambunctious children waited. She helped both boys in and smiled politely to the driver. Mary said a silent prayer for her boys as she watched the bus pull away.

Vincent traced his letters quietly next to his brother in class, glancing over to make sure that he was staying in the lines. He struggled with the ligature letter’s curves, so Vincent nudged his elbow and slid his paper closer, going slowly so he could follow. “Like this, see Franky?” Francis nodded and copied his brother’s movement, then held the paper up with a grin. The boy in front of them turned and curled his lip at Francis. “That’s not how it looks, Mongol,” He held his own up proudly. Vincent showed his teeth, “Shut it, Paul. He did it right—”

“Not on his own. Why don’t you let him do it himself?” The children around them giggled and laughed. Vincent began to rise from his chair, kicking it back and balling his fists.

Francis grabbed his arm, “Nein, Vinny—”

“Francis!” Mrs. Hexe barked at the boy, “Let go of him. He has to finish his tracing. Do you want me to call your father *again*?” She shook the desks as she stomped over, and the rest of the class giggled into their hands. Francis sunk into his seat and his breath quickened. Vincent shook his head and put an arm in front of Francis’ chest, “Nein, Mrs. Hexe. I was just—”

She shushed him with a finger to her lip, “Vincent, you don't have to help every time,” She narrowed her eyes at Francis and spat, “Even if he is a *dummkopf*—” A knock at the door interrupted her, and a woman entered. She reminded Vincent of his mother, but had darker hair and skin, stretched with lines. “See now. You were doing Mrs. Siedlung’s job!”

Mrs. Hexe moved Francis to the circular back table with Mrs. Siedlung, and Vincent to the front. Vincent put his head down on his arms and faced the back, watching Francis rock back and forth in his chair as he looked at Mrs. Siedlung, the two spoke in quiet voices. Mrs. Hexe smacked a ruler to her blackboard, “Eyes front, Vincent.” Vincent waited for his brother at the door when the children were released for recess, but Francis remained seated with Mrs. Siedlung, who shook her head at Vincent. “We are still working on some lettering, Vincent. He’ll come play another time.”

But Francis stayed inside on most days. Vincent spent most of his time kicking a ball to a wall by himself, waiting for the door to swing open and for Francis to come running. He caught the stray balls from Paul’s game and kicked them back to him. Paul and the other kids asked Vincent to play soccer, but only because they need another player. Vincent would refuse, still annoyed at how they treated his brother. Though the more Francis stayed inside, the more Vincent grew bored, and the more fun soccer looked. Vincent crept to the window of the classroom and watched Mrs. Siedlung read with Francis, going carefully and pointing at pictures, clapping when he said words without help. Vincent pressed his face to the glass, hoping it would liquify and let him in. Eventually, Francis stopped coming outside, and Vincent stopped waiting at the door. Eventually, Vincent began to carry the stray balls over to the other children, enough times that he stayed and became their goalkeeper.

It took less than a year for Vincent and Paul to become team captains; they joined their school team and won intramural games together. Vincent saw Francis at a few of the games, sitting by Mrs. Siedlung and waving at him if he ever caught Vincent's eye. Vincent would swat at an invisible fly from his face and get back to the game. Their teachers awarded Paul and Vincent with trophies and plaques both for "Most Valuable Player". Vincent and Paul took turns leading Easter prayers in the dewy mornings. Vincent and Paul were competitors, but they were also best friends. They did projects on the saints together and played parts in the nativity play during Christmas. When they were old enough, they directed the younger kids in the same plays. Each teacher and student knew and loved their names and faces.

Mary stood watching the yellow bus pull away for years, then watched Vincent and Francis run after the bus on their own. Eventually, she watched them get into the small red Plymouth that Peter gifted Vincent for his fifteenth birthday. They could not have been prouder of all Vincent had accomplished. Peter was especially eager to tell everyone about his star son; He spilled his beer as he boasted loudly to his friends at the Little Bavaria diner, claiming how brilliant his son was because he was raised *right*. The women of St. Bonafide church gushed over how handsome Vincent was, introducing a different shy daughter every Sunday. Vincent's face would light up like a stop light as he laughed nervously, escaping to his position in alter service. Paul's father became close to Peter as well, and the two went golfing frequently, taking their teenage boys along during the summer breaks. A blooming man of God, he was.

Francis preferred to read at home or go to school to tutor with Mrs. Siedlung. Mary told Francis it would be best if he stayed and helped her around the house. Not because Peter would scowl and groan whenever he asked if he could come, but because Mary could not be alone in that house, and Francis was better than nothing. Mary became so accustomed to him that she

could mistake him for a coat rack. As she swept the floor of the boys' room one sunny morning when the men had gone to work and school, her broom got caught under Francis' bed. She knelt and pulled the sheets up, spying a thick book tucked in the corner. She pulled it out with pursed lips. The textbook had a bare tree with many branches under the title "The Theory of Evolution". Mary recoiled and it fell with a smack. She looked up at the crucifix on the wall, closed her eyes for a moment, then kicked the book all the way to the living room and used her broom to place it on the table. Then Mary sat on the couch, crossed her ankles and flipped the television channel to *All in the Family*, waiting for the boy to arrive home.

Vincent entered first, his blonde hair flattened by a backwards baseball cap and his school uniform was disheveled. He kissed his mother's head then skipped the stairs. Francis waddled in and locked the door behind him. His large glasses sat on his flat nose supported by a string that wrapped around his cropped hair. His face was red from the June sun. He stopped at the sight of his mother, waiting for her to call him. She turned off the television and stared into his eyes from across the room.

"Hallo mama—"

Francis' arms went up to his face as the book crashed into the wall to his left. He stayed with his arms up for a minute, shaking, after it dropped. "Lord, I've *tried!* How dare you bring this—another abomination into my house!" She screeched. Francis peered down at the book that laid with its pages open. He breathed in deeply. Mary turned away, waiting for him to get out of her sight. Peter would surely flip the house on its head, but she knew what she had to do.

Vincent helped his mother set the table for dinner later than evening. He told her about how the novel they were reading in class, *One Flew Over the Cuckoo's Nest*, was being released

as a film that fall. She chimed in with amusement occasionally but focused on her roast beef and the clock. Peter entered with his briefcase and coat in hand, placing his fedora on the table with his keys. She turned to her son, who was blabbing about Bruce Springsteen, “Go get Francis down for dinner, liebe.” Vincent jogged and skipped the stairs to his shared room; He had been up there all afternoon. Vincent knocked once before opening the door, then stopped in his tracks. Francis’ side of the room was stripped bare. His clothes and backpack were gone, his pillow, his stack of books on his nightstand... Vincent noticed the open screen of the window as he called for his parents. Francis was gone.

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Vincent tapped the microphone of his podium, silencing the auditorium of students. His cheeks relaxed from his grin as he scanned the room of young adults; one was already snoring, another doodled on their notebook. Vincent pushed a hand through his newly thinning hair and cleared his throat. Then he turned the overhead projector on, beginning his planned presentation about missionaries and evangelists of the 14<sup>th</sup> century. The one-hour lecture felt more like three, even he could admit, but Vincent packed it to the brim with information to ensure his students did not leave class with feeling like they missed anything. Vincent always left enough room for questions, even extending his time past lectures if need be. He nodded to his reflection in the mirror as he straightened his tie in the morning, knowing that he was doing a great justice to their education, especially the students who were lost or slow in class work. Not just because it was an obligation, but because he *wanted* to. University was tough; the least he could do was make their lives a little easier by fulfilling lectures to the fullest.

Just as Vincent was wrapping up, a raised hand at the back of the room caught his peripheral attention and he turned with surprise. Someone with interest, he thought cheerfully,

then cleared his throat and squinted. “Yes, sir, you in the—” Vincent’s words stuck to his throat and his eyes widened. His legs turned gelatinous as he looked at their rounded and flat face, with blue eyes standing out against slight red cheeks. His glasses wrapped around his buzzed, blonde hair. The students looked between the two like a tennis match. Vincent rubbed his eyes. The students face stretched out and his bushy eyebrows were raised. “Uh Professor, did you hear—”

“I did not! Sorry, could you repeat that for me?” Vincent gave a nervous chuckle in the direction of the embarrassed freshman, now standing to repeat his question.

Vincent’s week was filled with strange moments as such, each one entrancing him in a disorienting state of confusion and fear. That face. *His* face. It had been eighteen years since Vincent had seen Francis, yet when he appeared in Vincent’s lecture hall, or his office, or the backseat of his car while he drove on the freeway at night, his face was always as clear as Vincent could remember it. After swerving to avoid the road’s shoulder, Vincent swung around to see an empty backseat. Maybe it was the “Missing Down Syndrome Teen” posters that he and his parents had posted for weeks after Francis had run away that kept his memory so vivid. Or having to explain Francis’ features to several detectives, navigating them to their old schools and the soccer field, where he could have been hiding out. He couldn’t decide if the look on Francis’ face was a snarl or whimper each time, or if it were contorting between both. It was after the fifth night of Vincent’s paranoia and hallucinations, when he awoke in a pool of his own sweat and thought he saw his lost brother climbing through his and his wife’s bedroom window, that Vincent decided he had had enough.

“I’ll be home late tonight. Meeting with a friend,” Vincent said to his wife at breakfast that morning. He kissed his wife’s forehead and knelt to her swollen stomach. He looked at it for

a minute, rubbing it with his palm, savouring it, then leaned in to kiss it. His wife giggled and tapped the top of his head and he was out the door.

Vincent sat at his office's mahogany desk after his lectures later that afternoon, sipping a coffee and skimming the small writing of the yellow page phonebook in front of him. He dragged his finger down names starting with "Si", stopping at his target. Vincent dialed the number and a warm voice answered. He packed his things into his briefcase and hurried to his car to beat rush hour. He drove out of the campus' maze of streets and followed the address the lady had given him over the phone to a gated complex. An elderly couple sat on the bench outside; they reminded him of his parents. The man tipped his fedora to Vincent as he walked through the revolving doors, and he raised a hand.

Vincent was escorted to a seating area with a fireplace and tables with board games; it smelled of dried roses and cough syrup. He removed a handkerchief from his pocket and wiped mildew off the frame of a window he stood by. The toffee coloured furniture reminded him of his parents' in his childhood house. He swallowed the lump that formed in his throat. Both must be seated on loveseats like these right now, Vincent thought as he looked up and chuckled.

"Sorry to keep you waiting, Vincent." A crisp voice said from behind him. Mrs. Siedlung placed her cane in front of her and wobbly stepped one foot at a time. Vincent quickly rushed to her elbow and held it until she was on the couch safely.

"Oh, don't look at me like that, boy. I don't *feel* that old," The woman cackled and placed a silver strand of hair behind her ear with a prune-like hand. "It was the stroke that got me like this, I'm sure."

Vincent apologized. She asked him about his work, where he was living, if he had a family. Oh, of course he had a family, look at how handsome he was! Vincent chuckled and shielded his reddened cheeks by turning to the piano that remained in the corner of the room, in case Francis decided to show up and play a tune. She gave her late condolences for his parents, she heard the news through the grapevine. He accepted. Vincent was unfavourably aware of how alone the two were. He looked at the window, searched for its lock.

“Is there something... specific that you wanted?” Mrs. Siedlung finally asked.

Vincent turned back to her and asked, “Have you... seen Francis since he left?”

The retired caretaker cackled again, this time for longer and at a greater volume. “You make it seem like he went on a vacation! What, have you seen his ghost?”

The heat of Vincent’s face spread from his cheeks to his forehead like wildfire. He explained, in a small voice, what he had experienced for that week. Mrs. Siedlung’s eyes softened at his change in tone, and she tutted at him in a song-like voice for letting her teasing get to him. Then she lowered her chin. “Francis was... a brilliant little boy. For his condition, he excelled. Nobody gave him the credit he deserved. He read books and challenged his odds. While you all laughed at his features or the way he talked, I saw what was underneath.

I was a regular diary for him. I cared for him deeply, loved him as my own son by the time you both reached middle school. It hurt me to see you and the other children brush him off or cast him away. When I suggested I talk to you or the other children, he insisted it was fine. He couldn’t bear to burden you or your parents any more than he thought he did by just... existing. He loved *you* more than anything. Never stopped talking about you, never recovered from losing you. Still, he watched your games, stayed with your mother while you went to golf with your

father. But he cared too much about what you and your parents thought about him... that was his tragic flaw.”

Vincent released the breath he did not know he was holding. The caretaker scribbled on a scrap of paper; her reflection swam in his watery eyes. She handed him the note with an address and rubbed his knee, then used it to hoist herself up. “Tell him I say hallo.”

Vincent closed his Sunbird’s door and gazed at the worn-out building. It easily blended into the identical towers that filled the downtown junction, which is why he missed it so many times. The sun began to dip and the eyes of a group of homeless men huddled in a corner stained the back of Vincent’s suit. He kept his head down as he approached, holding his breath to reject the mixed smell of sewer and piss that seeped out of the cracks of the sidewalk. A line of women stood on either side of the tattered doors, holding picket signs and casually conversing with one another. A young girl wrapped herself around the women’s leg. Vincent quickened his pace and glanced, without turning his head, at a scribbled sign as he passed.

#### DISABLED BABIES HAVE HUMAN RIGHTS TOO!

Vincent gulped once, then skipped stairs to get inside. The building was cold and grey, the corridor was lined by tables with chairs attached by bars and buckets catching drips from the ceiling. The receptionist at the booth at the end of the short hall looked too young to care about who walked through that door, and smacked her lips while chewing gum, twirling her hair into space buns. She opened the small glass door, and Aaliyah’s catchy beat filled the empty space as *Back & Forth* blared on the portable boombox beside her.

“Hi, I’m looking for my—,” Vincent fidgeted with the paper in his hand, “Francis Lichtungsbank?”

The girl blew a bubble as she typed away uninterested on the keyboard. “Family relation?”

“Yes, we’re... brothers.”

She narrowed her eyes, “Says here a Francis Lich—whatever doesn’t have family.”

Vincent blinked, “Well... Here, I have a driver’s license,” Vincent fumbled for his wallet and slid the card into the rectangular space. The girl picked it up and looked between the card and Vincent, then rolled her eyes. “Whatever.” She pressed the intercom and paged for Francis. Then she said, “Have a seat,” grinning widely for less than a second.

Vincent waited for what felt like hours, but when he checked his watch, only five minutes had passed. This is what judgement in purgatory must feel like, he sighed to himself. At last, the steel door to the right of the booth opened, and Vincent rose from his seat. The man wore white scrubs, thick glasses, and a stringy beard that gave his flat face a more elongated look. His hair sat flat on his head, with a few spiked upward. His mouth was ajar as he looked down his nose at Vincent, even though they were the same height. He waddled with a slight limp; a jangling sound coming from his ankles with each step and Vincent saw a monitor attached to his left shoe. When he two feet away, Vincent stumbled back. Vincent’s brother cocked his head and scanned his face, staring longer at parts like his forehead and cheeks. Francis and Vincent lowered themselves. Vincent cleared his throat and tried to formulate what to say. An apology? A curse? A question? He sat under the flickering light, waiting for the words to pop up in his mind. Images flashed in his mind of them as boys chasing one another or dogpiling in the kitchen. He watched his twin brother’s eyes and knew the same was happening in his head. But then, the corner of Francis’ lips turned upward for a moment and his eyes glossed over.

“Hallo, Vinny.”

Ronda Robinson

Dr. Chris Koenig-Woodyard

ENG203H5 S

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The Other Brother: A Critical Analysis in Comparison to *Frankenstein* (4 pages)

The ostracism of the creature in Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* is analogous to the true and horrific institutionalization of physically and mentally disabled people in the 1960s—specially Down syndrome. My story draws on framing narrative, societal pressures, and family dynamics that are found in *Frankenstein*. I also add a third person narration to achieve a broader view of the characters' relationships and interactions and to allow the reader to make their own inferences based on observing characters and their actions, rather than relying on a character's word-of-mouth narration that can be filtered or false. Focusing on realistic and historically-accurate details and language to show how unfair the treatment of the creature was through the comparison of Francis, who is punished for being born with a genetic disorder, also lets the reader develop a relevant and modern perspective of *Frankenstein* which questions the creditability of the narrators. Thus, *The Other Brother* focuses on the cruel treatment of a disabled child, which parallels the treatment of the creature, and provokes the reader to think subjectively about Francis and the creature's experiences.

The framing narrative and multivocality of a story is the use of multiple stories or voices that give various perspectives of the same case of events. Like the creature's description by various perspectives in *Frankenstein*, there are different opinions of Francis by Mary, Vincent, and Mrs. Siedlung that are influenced by the narrator's beliefs and experiences, like Mary's

religious devotion or Vincent's hypocrisy as a professor. Similarly, Victor, Walton and the creature itself give their own accounts on the events leading up to when Victor meets Walton in the Arctic. These influences also affect the narrator's attention to specific moments given how biased their attention is. Although they may have motivating belief or desire, the narration is still detached from the characters, and only limited when each perspective is looked at individually. As a whole, the "limited" third person view creates an entire picture of Francis' experiences that are interpreted differently.

Unlike *Frankenstein*, I do not give Francis a "stand alone" perspective, only objectively stating his experiences through Mary and Vincent's perspectives as the boys grow up, which ostracize Francis. The third person voice focuses on a character's immediate observations, rather than internalized monologue that could be changed for their own benefit, like Victor's account to Walton. Given his lack of a narrative perspective, the preserved ambiguity of Francis permits the reader to form their own interpretations of and emotional connection with Francis rather than Francis giving his own explanation—like the creature. Coming to their own conclusions without the interference of voices that try to dismantle the claims of another narration also helps the reader make clearer decisions about the ethics of Francis' treatment.

The family dynamic of my story wrestles with the characters' relationships and experiences with respect to nature versus nurture, which is the interaction of the effects of genetics and development on a child. Francis and the creature both come into the world with predetermined conditions which are rejected by their family figures, leading to their abandonment and attachment issues. The maternal relationship also merges elements of Shelley's own tragic life into the plot—such as her miscarriages—as opposed to the paternal relationship in *Frankenstein*. Francis running away instead of being abandoned like the creature creates

mystery and leaves room for the reader to interpret why. Peter and Mary favour the near-perfect Vincent over Francis and accordingly, Mary's limited and positive focus on Vincent is evident by the end when each perspectives is accounted for. Mary and Peter are ultimately "failed" parents to Francis like Victor is to the creature, and Mrs. Siedlung serves provide an alternative perspective of Francis for the reader, similar to the creature's story to Walton. Therefore, the characters' relationships affect how their interactions with Francis is narrated and can be used by the reader when concluding their opinions on each character and Francis' upbringing.

The criteria for what entails whether a person or event is "unjust" or "unacceptable" changes with the time period's sensitivity and response to a dispute due to changes in social climate. The creature and Francis do not fit into their common societal expectations of a "human being", facing blatant discrimination. Peter and Vincent are both stereotypical middle class, educated men who underestimate Francis due to his disability, like Victor with the creature. However, the characters' reactions to or participation in the discrimination can change depending on their understanding of Francis and the creature, as seen when Victor visits Justine or Vincent visiting Mrs. Siedlung and Francis. While Shelley's novel was written between the Enlightenment and Romantic periods, my story is set in a transitional period for the stigma around disabilities in the justice system. Vincent hallucinates Francis "stalking" him like the creature stalks Victor, which a reader can relate back to a psychosis or a manifestation of his guilt. Mary's postpartum depression symptoms can be identified by her detachment from Francis, breastfeeding issues, and accusing her appointment for her attempts of reversing Francis' disorder. Disability rights continues to be a topic of discussion, making it a suitable analogy for a reader to relate to the less apparent arguments about society proposed in *Frankenstein*. Thus, the shared discrimination that the creature and Francis face helps the reader's understanding of

*Frankenstein's* opinions of justice and societal expectations by comparing it to the more familiar controversies surrounding mental and physical health.

Additionally, it is important to me, as an author, to be respectful of the experiences of someone who has been oppressed for having a disability like Down syndrome, so I relied heavily on the accuracy of language and details. The history and advocacy of Down syndrome has impacted the movement for disability rights, but comes from a dark past that once used derogatory terms such as “mongol” for Down syndrome patients, and was revised in the 1970s. The Lichtungsbank family also geographically connects to *Frankenstein's* German roots. “Little Germany” is a community in Scarborough that includes the church and restaurant in the story. I use German expressions—such as “liebe”, which means “love” —and many of the names are directly linked to the names in *Frankenstein*; “Lichtungsbank” alludes to Shelley, which both translate to “glade bank” in their respective languages. Similarly, Siedlung translates to “settlement”, which is the part of the translation of De Lacey, meaning “place for settlement”.

At large, my story urges the reader to reconsider *Frankenstein's* view of what entails a human being, from its creation to its rights, by applying relevant views on disabilities. The Other Brother engages with reader's ability to make revised inferences of the *Frankenstein's* sequence of events with a new lens of a genetic disorder in place of “monstrosity”. The modernization of these themes and narration clarifies the reader's judgment of the true nature of *Frankenstein's* events and what is factual, while still inquiring how or why a character might be motivated to act in a specific way. Relations and social roles are a two of many aspects that significantly influence each character's perspectives, and the reader's understanding of a character or event, which also depends on the reader's personal knowledge and experience with that specific aspect.