

Making Cake With Frankenstein

by David Cirillo

The Frankenstein Archive: A Historical Perspective

Frankenstein's biographers have sifted through archives of dust covered books, ancient parchments, and scientific notes, and the results of their research are quite conclusive: There is no record of Frankenstein making cake.

This is not to say he did not make cake. With so few details about Big Green's daily activities, absolute conclusions cannot be reached. However, scrupulous notes were found on stitching techniques, twitch response in muscle, the life and death of skin cells, the rigidity of tendons, and the sensitivity of nerves. So when no records even mention the matter of Frankenstein making cake, it seems unlikely that he did.

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"Being married to Miles is like making cake with Frankenstein."

So said Joy Bennett to her best friend, Hannah, as they drank wine on a Saturday afternoon. It was a thing they did often, gathering for an hour or two on the weekend to catch up.

Immediately, she felt guilty. It sounded like such harsh condemnation. Had she said making cake with Picasso or Betty Crocker, it would have sounded nicer. Maybe been less accurate but still...nicer.

Hannah smiled at what Joy said. "What does that even mean? I knew you weren't thrilled with your marriage, but cake and Frankenstein? What does that mean?"

Joy and Miles had been married for five years, no kids. High school sweethearts, they got married at 23. Joy had a job managing in customer service, Miles did financial planning. They had what everyone would describe as a "comfortable life."

"I don't know what it means," Joy answered. Her head felt a little light; she was almost through her second glass of Pinot Noir. "It's not like I'm miserable or anything like that."

"Then what is it like?"

A twinge of guilt hit Joy. The two women were sitting on black-cushioned stools in Joy's kitchen, a humble space with white cabinets and a rectangular, faux-granite island. It seemed wrong to badmouth her husband in *their* home.

"I can't explain it, but I know I got it right. This marriage is like making cake with Frankenstein. Our love feels thin; our lives feel thin."

"Thin? And what does that have to do with the big, green guy?"

Joy laughed, "I've been drinking, okay? I'm going to explain this to you another day, I promise! But I'm telling you, I'm right! One hundred percent! Cake. Frankenstein. It's real!"

The two let the topic go and continued to drink wine and eat crackers, sharp cheddar, and Havarti. But Joy was troubled. She had been keeping things hidden, keeping Hannah and others unaware of her general discontent. The blurting confession had released the cat from the bag, or more appropriately, the monster from beneath the bed. Clearly, something about her marriage bothered her, and the explanation for her anxiety was simple: she didn't know the exact reason, or reasons, for her saltless marriage.

The Frankenstein Archive: A Patchwork Theory

It's well-documented that Frankenstein (the monster) came into being through a rather patchwork process. Bits of skull and bone, skin and tendon, vein and organ had been harnessed, then "patchworked" together to give the creature his identity, his "Frankenstein-ness." Scholars used this same "Patchwork Theory" to posit a hypothesis about his cake making.

They postulated that a cake is also patchworked together. Ingredients are gathered, mixed, and baked, and from the process emerges an edible, delicious dessert. It made sense to scholars that Frankenstein might well have engaged in processes that mimicked his own creation. He might have been drawn to the disparate mixing of items to help produce a thing better in its collective than its individual parts.

Far too many scholars have taken the "Patchwork Theory" seriously in trying to prove Big Green made cake. It's like saying a bear had a keen interest in gastrointestinal surgery because he slashed open the guts of a deer.

Joy and Hannah went to Appleby's the next week. Going out was always nice; no one had to cook or clean. Also, since Miles would be at home working and Hannah's husband, Nick, had some friends over to watch the game, girl-time at Appleby's made sense.

The two were working on their second drink, having already scarfed a meatball appetizer, when Hannah said, "I've been thinking about what you said, that being married to Miles is like making cake with Frankenstein."

"Yeah, I've been thinking about it, too."

"My thought is pretty simple," Hannah said. "If it bakes like Frankenstein and cakes like Frankenstein..."

Joy giggled, "Are you saying my husband is a patchwork monster?"

"It's not me saying it, but are you?"

As she swigged down more wine, Joy said, "Of course, not. Miles is no monster."

"Maybe not, but is he a good husband? Or should I ask, is it a good marriage?"

"I don't know," Joy said, her green eyes tearing up. Wine made her emotional, as did her marriage. "I think we're good together. At least I thought we were. But now, I just don't know."

Hannah reached over and rubbed her friend's elbow and flashed a calming smile. "I'm not trying to upset you, sweetie, and really, I'm just playing amateur psychobabbler. I want you to be happy, and you know me and puzzles. I gotta find all your broken pieces and then put them back together. Even if it drives you crazy."

"On that front, you're aces!" Joy said.

"I know, I know! It's the intentions that count, though, right?"

Joy shook her head, "No one has ever said those words and believed them."

Hannah nodded.

The two had a few more sips of wine and picked at the appetizers. Then Hannah said, "Hey, I have an idea. Something fun to take your mind off things."

"I'd be up for that."

Hannah looked at Joy, her eyes turned down, her shoulders bent, the pose of a troubled woman. She reached down for her purse, a white pouch decorated with a blue peacock and pink and yellow flowers, and removed a small, yellow legal pad and a blue pen.

"Not a list," Joy said. "I'm not in the mood for this."

"Yes a list!" Hannah said. "Lists solve all life's problems. It's medically proven. You can't argue with research, sweetie."

Joy smiled, "What list are we making? You said this was going to take my mind off of things."

"We're going to make a Frankenstein Husband list."

"And what's that?"

"We're going to list all the positives and negative traits about being married to Big Green."

"To what end?" Joy asked.

Hannah answered, "A very simple end. I want to know if Frankenstein is marriage material."

"For real?"

"I've never been more for real in my entire life."

Joy sighed. "Fine, I'll do it. But I can only do this with more food and booze."

"Say no more, my friend."

They waived down the waitress and ordered wine, meatballs, and loaded baked potatoes. When the waitress delivered it all, Hannah clicked her pen, drew a line down the center of the page, and said, "Let's do this."

And so they did. When it was time to leave, they had finished their list.

Big Green as Marriage Material: Good protector, strong, sincere and direct, the intellect of a simpleton, probably won't ever win an argument, never again will a jar lid be stuck, should make good money in construction or as a body guard.

Frankenstein as Marriage Trash: Bad skin, high probability of becoming a serial killer, menacing, might be a little too dumb, clothing costs will be outrageous, not the best conversationalist, will certainly not be emotionally available.

Right before they left, two Ubers waiting for them out front, Hannah pushed the list at Joy and said, "Now you tell me. Who's the better husband?"

Frankenstein or Miles?"

Hannah laughed, kissed her friend on the cheek, and left, but a few minutes later, Joy answered the question, even though she knew Hannah meant it as a joke: "The better husband? To be honest, it's a toss-up."

Making Cake With Frankenstein: The TV Show

At one time, there was talk in Hollywood. A new TV Show called *Making Cake With Frankenstein*. Researchers found a sample script on the desk of a famous producer. It is said serious consideration was given to developing the show.

PILOT EPISODE: He is, quite literally, 7' 6". His green hue and patchwork features frighten the cameras. He thuds out into the middle of a Hollywood set—a spacious, modern kitchen—and bows rigidly as the audience applauds his entrance. A grisly smile slides across his face, and with two fingers, large and partially webbed, he sends out a hopeful peace sign.

"Today me make cake," he says. [The crowd cheers.]

Frankenstein waves to the cameras. He ambles behind the kitchen counter; it's made of concrete. In the background are several stoves and ovens, along with a sink, a fridge, some cabinets, and more counters. The cabinets are stuffed with ingredients and utensils.

"Me get flour," Frankenstein says. He bends down and puts a 100-pound bag of flour on the counter. He lifts it with one hand. [The crowd cheers.] He puts a mammoth, ceramic stirring bowl on the counter, too.

"Flour go in pot," he says.

Big F (this is what he likes to be called) tears the top from the bag, lifts it, and swings it over his head like a baton. Flour goes everywhere. He rams the sack into the ceramic bowl, hurling it across the set. It smashes into a camera and shatters. Big F is covered in flour, surrounded by a cloud of white.

"Me make pot go break." [The crowd laughs.]

An assistant enters with a fully made cake batter and a cake mold.

Frankenstein says, "When I young, Mom tell me value lesson. She tell, 'Better to cook than be cooked.'" [The crowd giggles and claps.]

Frankenstein goes to the fridge and brings forth a carton of eggs and a half gallon of milk. He rips the lid off the milk and pours it into the bowl.

Producers are telling him he doesn't need to do that; the cake batter is ready. He only needs to pour it into the mold. Big F doesn't seem to understand.

"Me have special gift for audience. Special thank you." [The crowd claps.]

"You ready?" [More clapping.]

He opens the carton of eggs.

"Egg salad!"

He begins to throw eggs at the crowd. People are fleeing, screaming, falling like war wounded. Yolk and egg white and shells are everywhere. Frankenstein turns on an oven and sticks his head in. His synthetic black hair catches fire.

Big F removes his head from the oven and slams a few eggs into his forehead. Then he announces, "Me kill everyone! Big F no like cook."

A dozen security members rush the set. They shoot tranquilizers at him. He goes down; they tie him up.

"Join next week. I try cook meatloaf!" he says. [The crowd—those left—stands and applauds.]

"Thank for watching," he says.

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It would be two weeks before the women would meet again. They went to Hannah's this time, and Nick knew it best for him to be gone. He and his wife had a short talk earlier in the week.

Hannah asked, "Do you think Joy and Miles make a good couple?"

"I'm not getting involved," he said.

"You will if you want some sugar tonight."

He smiled, "Even so, I'm going to plead the fifth! Seriously, we've only been out with them a handful of times. He seems nice enough, but I can't say if they're a good couple. I don't have enough evidence."

"I knew it," Hannah said, reading between the lines. "You don't think they're right together."

"I said he was nice enough."

"Exactly. Might as well call a divorce lawyer. What if someone asked me about you, and I said, 'He's nice enough'?"

“Good point,” Nick said.

When Joy arrived, Nick was already gone, and Hannah had poured the wine. She also had a few appetizers out. Chips and homemade guacamole. A cheese ball made from cream cheese, cheddar, and chives. Crackers would help that down.

“Are you trying to make me fat?” Joy asked.

“Sure, Twiggy. Like this will make a dent in you.”

They didn’t rush into serious conversation. Hannah told Joy about fixes she wanted for the kitchen. No more oak cabinets but blue ones—she loved colors. Get rid of the gray tile and add some light wood floors—she loved bright.

“And I want a Moen faucet,” Hannah said.

“Why a Moen?”

“Because it’s the best. I’m sick of this cheap stuff the builder put in the house. It drips day and night. I also want granite countertops.”

“Is Nick getting a second job to pay for all this?”

“You’re darn right he is!”

After they sipped wine and nibbled at the snacks, a solemn look fell on Hannah’s face.

“So listen to me, sweetie,” Hannah said. “I’ve been thinking about you and Miles and Frankenstein.”

“Him again?” she laughed.

“Yes, mostly Big Green.”

“Of course.”

“So here’s what I came up with. I think we’ve been approaching your analogy from the wrong angle. It’s not about what makes a good or bad husband or if Miles is a monster or what deep psychosis you have comparing your husband to a hideous beast.”

“Hey!”

Hannah continued, “What we need to talk about is so obvious, so simple, you’re going to smack yourself in the forehead when I tell you.”

“I’m all ears.”

“This whole time we should have been talking about making cakes.”

Joy laughed, but Hannah just raised her eyebrows. She was being serious.

"I don't get it," Joy said.

"Stick with me. So let's pretend that right now, at this very second, you and Miles are going to make a cake. Okay? It's just you and him, at home, and it's baking time. What happens? Who does what? Come on. Talk to me."

Joy laughed again, thinking this some joke. When she saw Hannah was seriously serious, she figured she'd play along. Maybe Hannah was onto something.

"Fine," Joy said. "Well first thing, we'd need to decide what kind of cake."

"Good. So who makes that decision?"

Joy rubbed her chin. "I would ask Miles what he wanted, he would say, 'Whatever you want.'"

"So you would choose?"

"Sooner or later, yes."

"And what would you choose?"

"I'd want to say a black forest cake. I remember my grandma made me one way back when—so delicious. But with Miles, I'd choose basic chocolate."

Hannah shrugged knowingly. Joy asked what she meant by it.

"So you wouldn't do what you want to do," she said. "To keep Miles happy."

Joy got defensive, "I don't know if it's like that. A black forest cake is intense, and Miles isn't much of a cook. So going with chocolate, it gives us a chance to have fun."

"Fair enough," Hannah said. "So chocolate cake. What next?"

"I'm going to assume," Joy said, "we have all the ingredients at home, and of course, we're using store-made icing rather than homemade. That was my call, so no judging Miles!"

"Okay. Ingredients bought, fake icing. Got it."

"I'd read the ingredients, and Miles would run around and get them. Of course," she laughed, "he wouldn't know where half of it was, but for fun, and to teach him, I would direct him around the kitchen."

Hannah put her hands on her hips, her head tilted, her eyes calling foul.

"What?" Joy asked.

"So far this making cake doesn't sound so bad. It's almost...playful."

"Give it a second," Joy said.

“Okay, okay. So tell me about the ingredients.”

“I’d list them. Flour, sugar, baking powder. Cocoa, salt, buttermilk. Oil, eggs, vanilla extract. Go, go, go! Get to it, Miles! We don’t have all day! Don’t forget the tub of icing, and get that oven cranked to three-fifty. Pronto!”

“You’re a regular drill sergeant, sweetie. You worry me a little.”

They both paused for a long swig of wine. Hannah noticed them getting low and refilled with a toasty Cabernet. They clicked glasses and enjoyed another guzzle.

“So what next?” Hannah asked.

“This is when the trouble begins,” Joy said, her energy cut in half. Her eyes drooped, her mind pictured the cake-making scene.

“Likely, things would start spilling here and there. You know how it is. Flour goes all over. Sugar dribbles out. Maybe an egg gets broken. Not to mention all the dishes. The bowls, spoons, measuring cups. Miles would start grunting...like Frankenstein. ‘Me no like. Me want maid. Me want store bought cake.’”

“He sounds more like a Neanderthal, but that’s okay.”

Joy moved from the barstool to the kitchen table. Hannah joined her, sitting across. A deep sadness fell over Joy.

“I don’t like talking about him like this. But...”

“Go on.”

“It’s likely his phone would ring. Something with work. He seems to be on call twenty-four seven. He’d excuse himself, tell me it would only be a minute.”

“What would you do?” Hannah asked.

“I’d keep cooking. Ingredients are out, no sense slowing down. I’d mix flour and sugar, pour in the buttermilk.”

“And Miles?”

“He’d pop in ten minutes later. Apologize. Tell me the call’s important. He’d tell me he loves me and that he’ll be done as soon as he can. He’d probably return as the cake was cooling.”

The kitchen filled with silence. Joy slumped down in her chair like a slug. It seemed she would become one with the chair.

“The worse part is,” Joy said, “he’d probably have a bite or two, and that’s it. He’s not big on sweets.”

More silence. Both women were deep in thought, though their thoughts went in different directions.

“So,” Hannah said, “let me get this straight. He would agree to make the cake even though he didn’t want it?”

“Yes.”

“He would be all in until business called—it always did?”

“Yes.”

“He would apologize, finish his business, then have a few bites when it was done?”

“You got it.”

“Baby,” Hannah said, “this isn’t nearly as bad as I thought. I get it, it’s not great. You’re both out of sync, that’s for sure. But damn, girl. The way you tell it, it sounds like...”

“What?”

“You actually love each other.”

Joy laughed out loud. “Shock of shock, I love my husband!”

“So tell me. Why did you say being married to him is like making cake with Frankenstein? Come on. Dig deep. Why’d you say it?”

A little smile flashed across Joy’s face. “It’s funny you ask, but I’ve been thinking about that myself. Frankenstein would be a menace in the kitchen, and the cake would probably be a nightmare. But with Miles, the cake would turn out fine because he’d only be there part of the time.”

“Go on, baby. I think you’re almost there.”

“The truth is, being married to Miles is *not* like making cake with Frankenstein.”

“Okay.”

Joy said, “But I wish it were.”

Hannah’s face exploded in surprise.

Joy said, “I want our marriage to be more odd and messy. Remarkably awkward but filled with fun.”

“All right. I see that.”

Joy wouldn’t stop, not yet. “I don’t care if Miles helps a client and makes us an extra few thousand dollars. I don’t care. I just want...I just want us to make cake, you know?”

“Oh, I know.”

A few tears began to stream down Joy's face. Frustration and relief. It felt good to say this, to get it out.

"The only problem I see with you two," Hannah said, "is that you're both buried in the mud, and you need a tow truck to pull you out. That's good news, sweetie!"

Joy wiped her face, looking at her friend through clear, crocodile tears.

"So why is being stuck in the mud good news?"

"Oh, babe," Hannah said, "because you know the owner of Hannah's Tow Truck Service!" Joy laughed. "I know how to get you out of the mud. You trust me, right?"

"Ninety percent."

"Good enough. You leave it up to me, got it? I got your tow. Until then, let's have some more wine and put a dent in that cheese ball. That thing looks like it wants to be eaten!"

The Frankenstein Archive: Views on Marriage

Researchers have dug deep into the void for documentation on Frankenstein's views on marriage. They found one short pamphlet credited to the monster (not doctor) Frankenstein, though it has not yet been authenticated. It may be the green monster penned it, it may not. No one may ever know.

The pamphlet starts with a brief introduction stating Frankenstein's basic views on marriage. In short, he believes marriage to be a grand institution that needs only the proper coaxing for it to be successful. After the intro is a picture of two green thumbs up; he seems to endorse marriage.

The rest of the pamphlet is presented as a simple Q&A. Marriage questions are posed; Frankenstein answers. The point of the pamphlet, allegedly, was to drum up business for a marriage counseling practice. Below is the Q&A content of the pamphlet.

Q: What if I can't stop fighting with my spouse?

A: Take heart, for fighting is the life source of all marriage.

Q: What if my spouse wishes to construct another spouse from the

pieces of other humans?

A: This should be viewed negatively and considered a gross act of infidelity.

Q: Is there ever a reason for divorcing and/or killing a spouse?

A: In most cases, there is not. Unless your spouse embarrassed you. Then there is.

Q: How can a couple revive a marriage?

A: A heavy dose of electricity will often supercharge a flailing relationship. The higher the voltage, the better.

Q: How can one spice things up in a marriage?

A: Oregano, thyme, and rosemary. Avoid garlic and cardamom.

Q: Is desire important to a marriage?

A: Desire is the heart of invention. It is also the heart of destruction.

Finally, the pamphlet closes with a disclaimer: "The advice offered forthwith is the sole property of Big Green Counseling. Reproduction, reuse, or repurposing of materials is strictly prohibited."

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Hannah showed up at Joy's house the following Saturday. As expected, Miles had to go to the office. Work called. *Work always calls*, Joy thought.

Joy noticed that Hannah was particularly cheerful and chatty, not to mention she behaved oddly. She showed up with a sweet red wine, but she told Joy she didn't want to open it till later. They had planned to cook Baked Ziti, but Hannah said they should talk first.

"Are you breaking up with me?" Joy asked. "You're acting weird."

"Never a break-up, dear. BFFs for life. I know there's a little redundancy in what I just said, but no break up."

"So what's up? I know something is up, so don't pretend it's not."

Hannah laughed. "Give it a minute."

A few moments later, the garage door opened. Joy crinkled her forehead. Then Miles walked through the door carrying several plastic bags filled with food and ingredients.

Miles looked like a scolded dog. His eyes wide, his mouth pursed in a goofy grin. He could barely make eye contact with either woman.

"Miles," Joy said. "What are you doing here? I thought you had to work."

He set the groceries on the counter. "Hannah made me tell you that. She has a scheme planned."

"You're darn right," she laughed. "Now both of you, give me your phones."

Miles handed it over without question. Joy, hardly knowing what she did, gave hers over, too.

"What is going on you two?" Joy asked. She had butterflies. Miles was free all day! He had a bag of groceries! Was he going to spend the day with her and Hannah? This excited her.

Miles answered her question, "Hannah called me this week. She told me I'd been working too much."

Hannah chirped in, "He said he knew."

"She told me I hadn't been spending quality time with you. That maybe I'd been ignoring you."

"He knew!"

"She told me I better listen to every word she said and do everything she said or else."

"He agreed."

Joy didn't know what to say. All she had was a question. "So what are we doing today? What's the plan?"

"We're not doing anything," Hannah said. "You two, however, are making cake. A black forest chocolate cake."

Joy's eyes got wide. Did Hannah tell him about Frankenstein? Hannah knew exactly what the surprised eyes meant; she shook her head—no, she hadn't mentioned it.

"Hannah texted me all the ingredients," Miles said. "She told me to buy them, then get back home by eleven. I'm a little late but only because the grocery store scares me. Do you know how many different kinds of flour there

are? And cherries?"

Joy laughed; she felt tears welling up. Why? Had she lost her mind? Or become sentimental?

Hannah looked to Miles. "So look, there're a couple rules you both need to follow. First, Miles, you do not talk or think about work. You got it."

"I got it. I need that."

"Also, you do whatever she tells you."

"I usually do."

Joy said, "It's true. If work doesn't interfere."

"It won't," he said.

"I'm serious," Hannah said. "If my girl tells you to beat an egg, you kill that egg. If she asks you to dump cherries on the floor and stomp them with your bare feet, you make cherry wine. If she tells you to burn down this kitchen, I better come back and find it smoldering."

Miles turned to Joy. "You're not going to ask me to burn the house down, are you?"

Hannah didn't let her answer, "If she does, you'll do it. Right?"

"Okay, fine."

"I'll return about three o'clock," Hannah said. "At that point, I'll return your phones. Until then, you make your cake and enjoy yourselves. Got it?"

They both nodded.

Before she left, she looked at Miles, her face serious, her eyes on fire.

"I'm not kidding Miles."

He nodded and said, "I know."

Hannah returned a little after three. She went to the front door and put her ear to it. Nothing. No sound, no noise. *They've killed each other. What have I done?*

She laughed, then slowly, gently opened the door. She tiptoed through the foyer, but before she got to the kitchen, she saw it. It was a nightmare.

Flour and cherries everywhere. Chocolate all over the counter. Dishes piled in the sink.

But there on the counter was a perfect Black Forest Cake. A real work of art.

"Damn," Hannah said. "She did it. She went and made a cake with Frankenstein."

She was about to yell out to them when she heard a noise from the other room. She noticed Joy's shirt and bra in the hallway leading back to their bedroom. The biggest smile pushed over her face. She put the phones on the counter and tip-toed off.

"We got the proof," she said as she drove off. "Frankenstein really does make cake."