



# Haunting Coincidences:

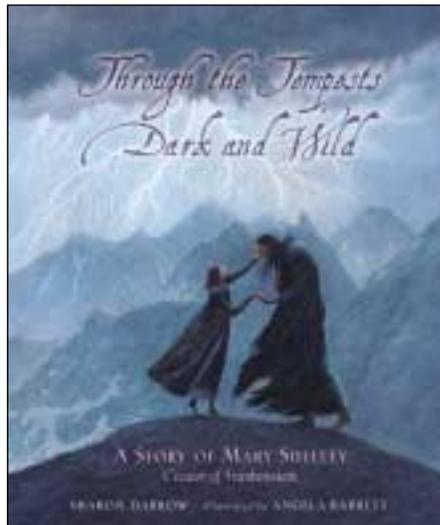
## Sharon Darrow and Angela Barrett

### Bring the Author of *Frankenstein* to Life

Nearly two centuries ago, at the age of nineteen, Mary Shelley wrote and anonymously published *Frankenstein*, a Gothic tale that would become one of the most resonant horror stories of our time. Perhaps it's only fitting, then, that a book about young Mary Shelley—known for her haunting writings, her scandalous marriage to Romantic poet Percy Bysshe Shelley, and her tragic personal losses—should be inspired by eerie coincidences and serendipitous events.

"One morning I awoke from a dream that persisted into my waking life," recalls Sharon Darrow, author of *Through the Tempests Dark and Wild: A Story of Mary Shelley, Creator of Frankenstein*. In this dream, she came upon a book-filled alcove in an old house lined with stucco walls and blue wainscoting. There a woman named Mary was searching for a book, and Sharon Darrow began to help. When Sharon pulled down a volume marked with faded letters—"M. Wo...l...craft" was all she could make out—the mysterious Mary told her, "Pay attention to that. It's important." Sharon Darrow woke with the name "Mary Shelley" in her mind, for reasons she didn't understand.

Slowly, the threads began to weave together. Research at the library revealed a biography of the progressive eighteenth-century writer Mary Wollstonecraft—the name on the book in her dream, Sharon Darrow realized—and the startling discovery that Mary Wollstonecraft was in fact Mary Shelley's mother, who had died shortly after childbirth. Months later, at a conference, an editor from Candlewick Press encouraged Sharon Darrow to write about Mary Shelley's life. But it wasn't until Sharon Darrow visited New York Library's bicentennial exhibit on Mary Wollstonecraft and Mary Shelley that the author truly felt her subject come alive. "When I saw a lock of Mary Shelley's bright auburn hair, I knew I could finally write about a real young woman," Sharon Darrow recalls. "I wanted nothing more than to spend time with her, learning what her life had been like before the more famous events propelled her into the realm of the mythic."



And so Sharon Darrow began, spinning fiction from fact to tell the moving story of a formative time in young Mary Shelley's life, a time when some say the tale of *Frankenstein* took root. When the story was almost finished, it was time for author and editor to find an artist who could capture the book's evocative mood. "I don't remember the first examples we looked at," Sharon Darrow says, "just the last—Angela Barrett's art in *Beware, Beware*. I opened the book and immediately got chills. It was an illustration of a room in an old house whose walls were stucco with wainscoting in faded blue, just like the house of my original dream. The woman in the picture had bright auburn hair,

just like Mary Shelley. And Angela Barrett's sensibility in creating a strangely gothic forest full of eyes and beasts and goblins seemed perfect for the atmospheric art needed in telling Mary Shelley's story."

Serendipitously, Angela Barrett was already scheduled to illustrate a book with Candlewick Press, but had not been assigned a title. The illustrator was sent the manuscript for Sharon Darrow's story of Mary Shelley, and it was then that another coincidence emerged. It turns out that Angela Barrett, who lives in London, often strolls through the nearby St. Pancras churchyard where (unbeknownst to her) Mary Wollstonecraft is buried. It's the same churchyard where Mary Shelley as a child would learn to spell her name by gazing at her mother's headstone, and where a teenaged Mary Shelley and Percy Bysshe Shelley met secretly in the first days of their romance. Angela Barrett also lives near to Skinner Street, the street where Mary Shelley once lived above her father's publishing house. For author Sharon Darrow, these last coincidences, and still others that have occurred before and since, are simply par for what she believes now was a fated course.

"It seems to me," says Sharon Darrow of the strange story behind *Through the Tempests Dark and Wild*, "that sometime around the two hundredth year after Mary Shelley's birth, something stirred from a long dream—and awoke ready to reenter the world."

