

Frame Narrative by Emily Sheehan

Extract from Scene 1

Angelica Thorne (40s) sits at her writing desk. Elsa Müller (20s) stands, a leather satchel slung over her shoulder. Elsa takes a notebook from her satchel and flicks to find the right page.

ELSA: First question, why an adaptation? Why this departure for you?

ANGELICA: Why not?

ELSA: But why now? Why not something original.

ANGELICA: There was a point, early on, where I made very diaristic work. But these days my world feels more open creatively.

Elsa nods. Makes a scribble in her notebook.

ELSA: Second question. This line, in the film, is the only direct quote from the original text. (*Quoting Frankenstein by Mary Shelley*) "Adam had come forth from the hands of God a perfect creature, happy and prosperous, guarded by the especial care of his Creator."

ANGELICA: You've done your homework.

ELSA: "I am thy creature; I ought to be thy Adam. Yet you, my Creator, detest and spurn me." Why this passage?

ANGELICA: The Creature is envious of Adam and Eve. The originals. And their relationship with their maker. By comparison, the Creature is a pale imitation.

ELSA: But unlike most modern interpretations, your film's point of view resists sympathising with the Creature. Why?

ANGELICA: I don't like to be so heavy handed.

ELSA: (*Reading from her notebook*) "I am thy creature; you are my maker."

ANGELICA: You feel for him?

ELSA: I do.

ANGELICA: We mustn't feel for, and over-psychologize, monstrous men.

ELSA: We're all our worst selves when we're rejected.

ANGELICA: We don't all go on a murder spree.

ELSA: But it's Victor's fault, don't you think? The original sin was his. Anything his Creature does, Victor has to take responsibility.

ANGELICA: Playing God is hardly a sin by today's standards.

ELSA: When Victor is creating the Creature – when he is pregnant with the idea – he is full of excitement and anticipation. But as soon as it's born, he hates it. And he hates himself for creating it.

ANGELICA: Must we love everything we create?

ELSA: Don't you?

ANGELICA: *(Shrugging)* Hmph.

ELSA: Then why make it?

ANGELICA: Why does anyone make anything? The driving force is God-like. But the results we cannot control.

ELSA: Are you happy with the results?

ANGELICA: It's not what I imagined, but it's an interesting attempt at something.

ELSA: An attempt to reveal something about yourself, perhaps?

ANGELICA: Perhaps.

ELSA: A secret?

ANGELICA: A different part of me. A part that's been... *(Correcting)* An aesthetic I haven't had access to. *(Switching)* But like I said, that doesn't mean I control or even like the results.

ELSA: *Well I like your films.* I'm a big fan. There's a group of us. We deconstruct your stories. Pour over the minutia. Together we feel part of the narrative.

ANGELICA: Well that's... I'm glad you feel something for the art.

ELSA: *For you.*

ANGELICA: I'm no one.

ELSA: You're the maker. *(Beat).* Do you see yourself in Victor?

ANGELICA: Not particularly.

ELSA: You don't long to create life?

Angelica gives her a look, 'Really?'

ELSA: I just mean to say the passages you quote, the visual motifs; they're about motherhood aren't they?

ANGELICA: I get into the mindset of all of my characters. Even for an adaptation. I still have to find a point of entry; my own empathy or parallels.

ELSA: But something's changed. Your films used to be about sex. (*Flicking through her notes*) But now they're about mother nature, maternal yearning. You're obsessed with it.

ANGELICA: (*Making a 'no' sound*) Mmmm.

ELSA: You don't think so?

ANGELICA: You're trying to see something that isn't there.

ELSA: What am I trying to see?

ANGELICA: I'm not doing that.

ELSA: Doing what?

ANGELICA: Audiences always project aspects of themselves onto a story. It's part of the artistic exchange. A good storyteller will allow space for it.

ELSA: You're saying I'm the one projecting these things?

ANGELICA: Could be. Are you riddled with 'maternal yearning'?

ELSA: *You can't deny your work has changed.*

ANGELICA: Perhaps it's you who's changed. And now different aspects speak to you.

ELSA: So the film wasn't art imitating life?

ANGELICA: No, it's art imitating itself.

ELSA: I think you're lying.

ANGELICA: That's very narrow minded of you, you know? 'Men write about ideas. Women write about their personal life.' I've heard it all before.

ELSA: But you've hidden Easter eggs across your whole body of work. Props in the background of shots, the lyrics in the soundtracks, the costume choices.

ANGELICA: (*Sarcastic*) Mmmm, *secret messages*.

ELSA: In your first film, the young ingénue, who is well-known to be based on yourself, wears a small, gold, fig leaf pendant. In this film, Victor wears the same necklace.

ANGELICA: (*Beat*) You've done your homework.

ELSA: Fig leaves. Adam and Eve. Garden of Eden. Paradise Lost. Frankenstein. Everything tumbles into itself.

ANGELICA: Art imitating art.

ELSA: Mise en abyme.

ANGELICA: A picture within a picture.

ELSA: I believe you are still making films about your life, but in a veiled way.

ANGELICA: This one is fiction. It's more than fiction, it's an adaptation. It's not even original.

ELSA: (*Realising*) Oh gosh! It's so clever that your most personal work yet could be an adaptation.

ANGELICA: ...

ELSA: What you're pouring into it; ambition, the drive to create. Joy and anticipation followed by the true horror of regret. It's confessional.

ANGELICA: And what am I confessing?

ELSA: ...

ANGELICA: Go on.

ELSA: There are rumours you had a child.

Silence.

Then, Angelica begins laughing.

ELSA: You're laughing?

ANGELICA: It's funny.

ELSA: Are you nervous?

ANGELICA: It's so predictable.

ELSA: I know these are personal questions. It must be quite emotional to have to clarify these things.

ANGELICA: A successful, talented, woman makes films that deal with real world themes, like sex and creation, and we project onto it. *That must be her life. Those must be her traumas.* There must be a harrowing backstory to explain why it feels so true.

ELSA: What's the cost of admitting it? Off the record.

ANGELICA: I think that's our time.

ELSA: So you deny the child's existence or you decline to comment?

ANGELICA: Why don't you take your notebook and your theories and get the hell out of my house.