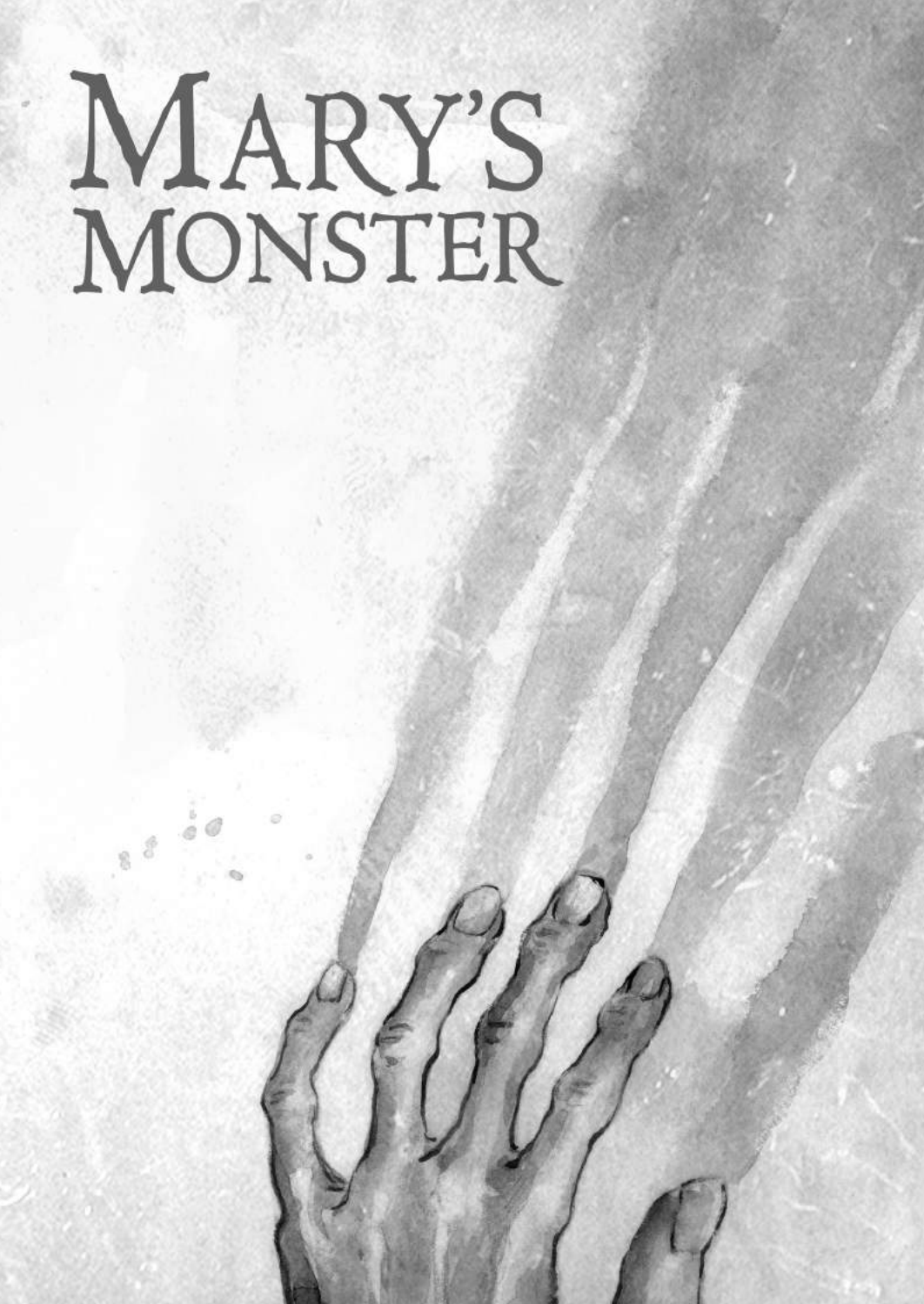
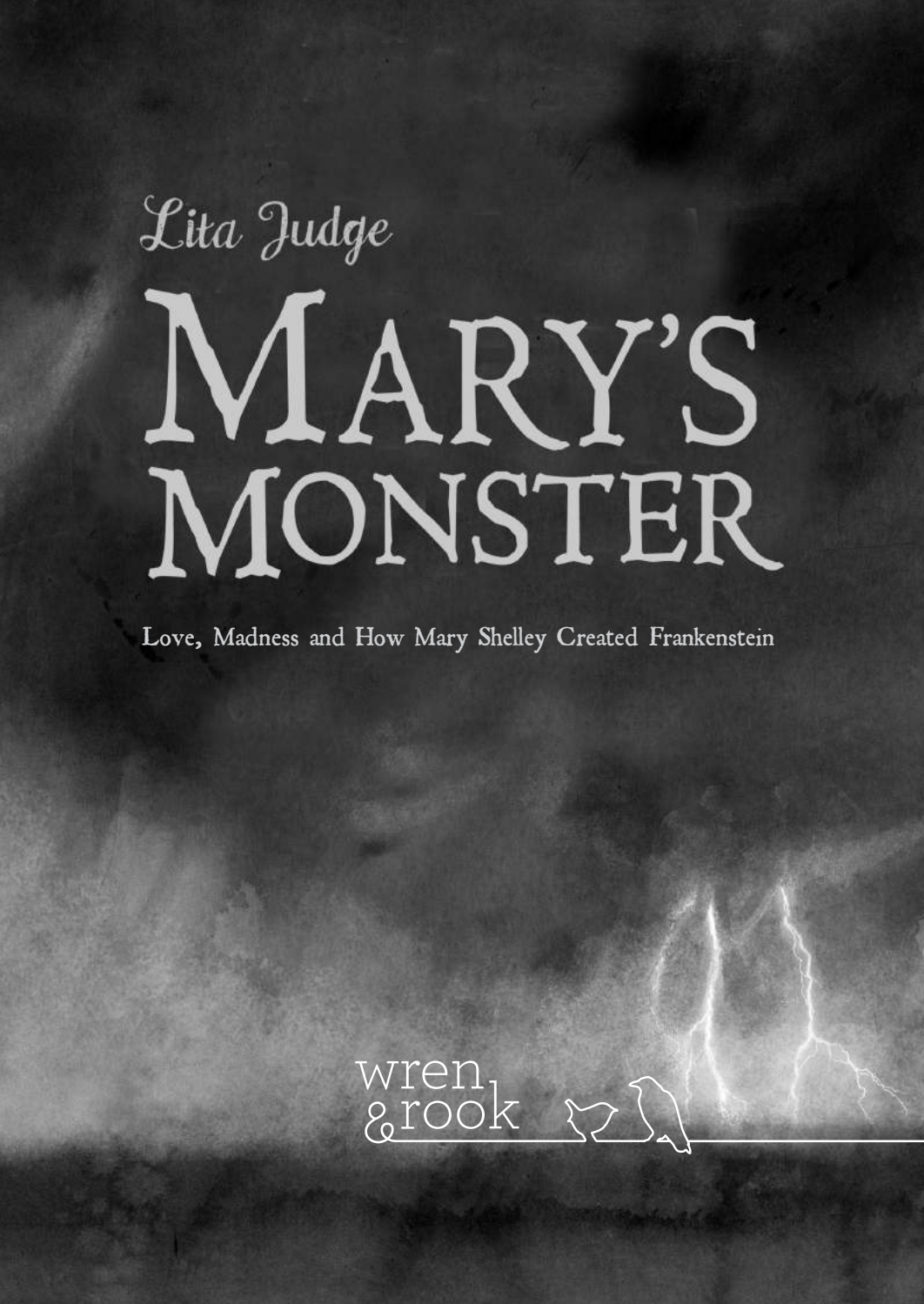
MARY'S MONSTER




Lita Judge
MARY'S MONSTER
Love, Madness and How Mary Shelley Created Frankenstein
wren &rook

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For Dave,
whose love
and faith
never fail

INTRODUCTION

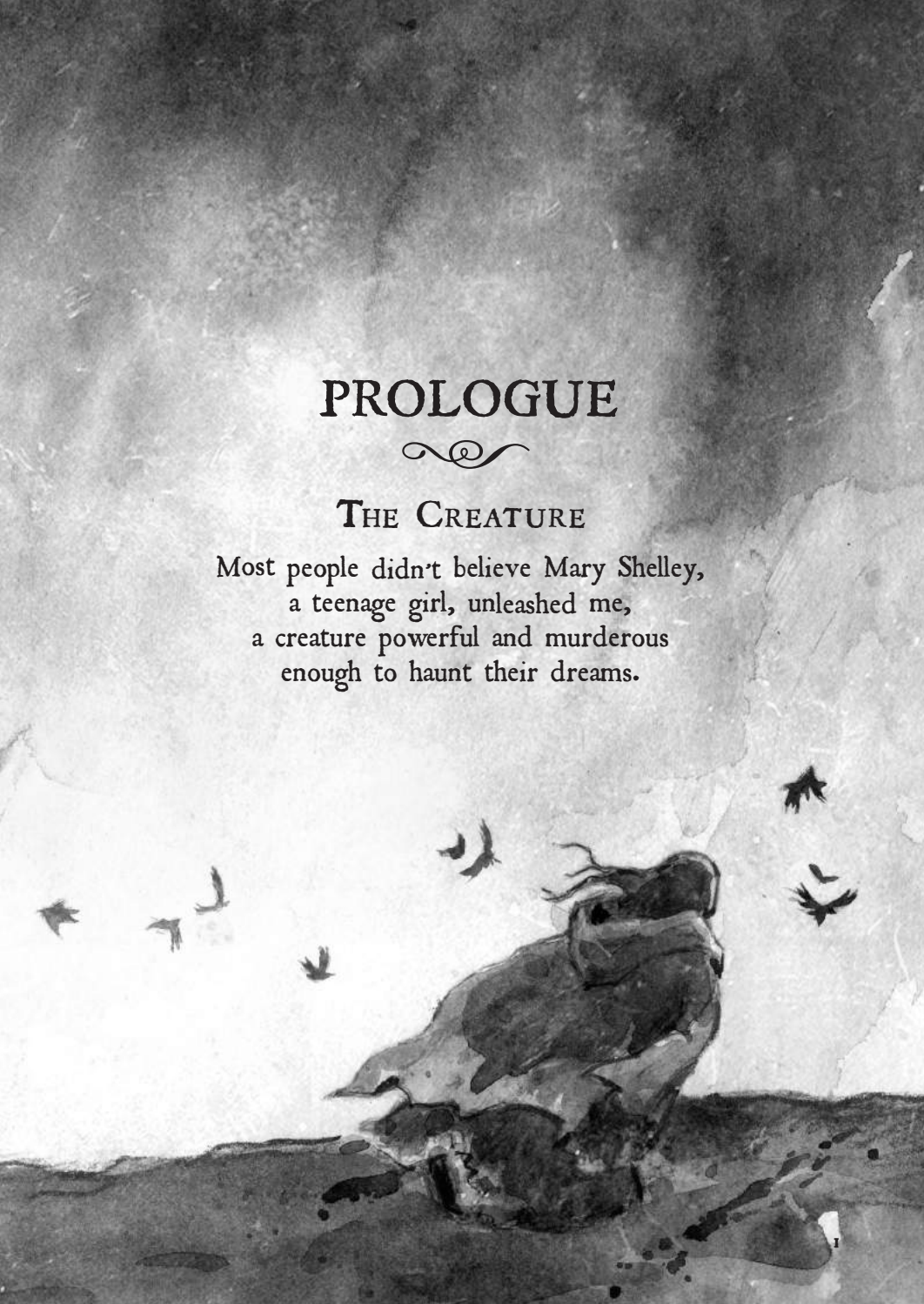
The novel *Frankenstein; or, The Modern Prometheus*, written by Mary Shelley and published in 1818, is one of the most famous and enduring works of the Romantic era. Nearly everyone has some knowledge of this book, but few know that its author was a pregnant teenage runaway rejected by her family and spurned by society.

In the story, Victor Frankenstein is a science student consumed by an ambition to bring the dead back to life. Using the assembled parts of human and animal cadavers, he succeeds in creating a man but instead of being thrilled, Frankenstein is repulsed by and rejects his creature with no compassion or sense of responsibility. The Creature is left to feel so miserable and alone, he turns monstrous. Mary's novel is a cautionary tale, warning readers of the horrible outcomes that can result when man attempts to conquer nature. It is also a radical social criticism.

Defying the restrictions of her day, Mary was brimming with ideas that women were equal to men and that all people were entitled to justice and freedom. She ran away with a married man, Percy Bysshe Shelley, who was a poet with radical political beliefs. Together the young couple fought against social conventions by daring to believe love and human reason could reform a tyrannical world. Mary also changed the course of literature. She invented the Industrial Age science fiction novel, sculpted the first mad-scientist archetype, and delivered the most iconic monster ever to have been created.

Mary's Creature has inspired writers, filmmakers and theatre producers for the past two hundred years. Say 'Frankenstein' and most people will conjure a vision of the monster. He has been altered in later adaptations, devolving from an articulate and intelligent soul to a groaning, lobotomised version of himself. Even the way he is referred to has morphed from namelessness to a being with the surname of his fictional creator, Frankenstein. But the themes in Mary's story remain, and it is a testament to her creative genius that she developed a creature so indelible, he lives on eternally.

PROLOGUE

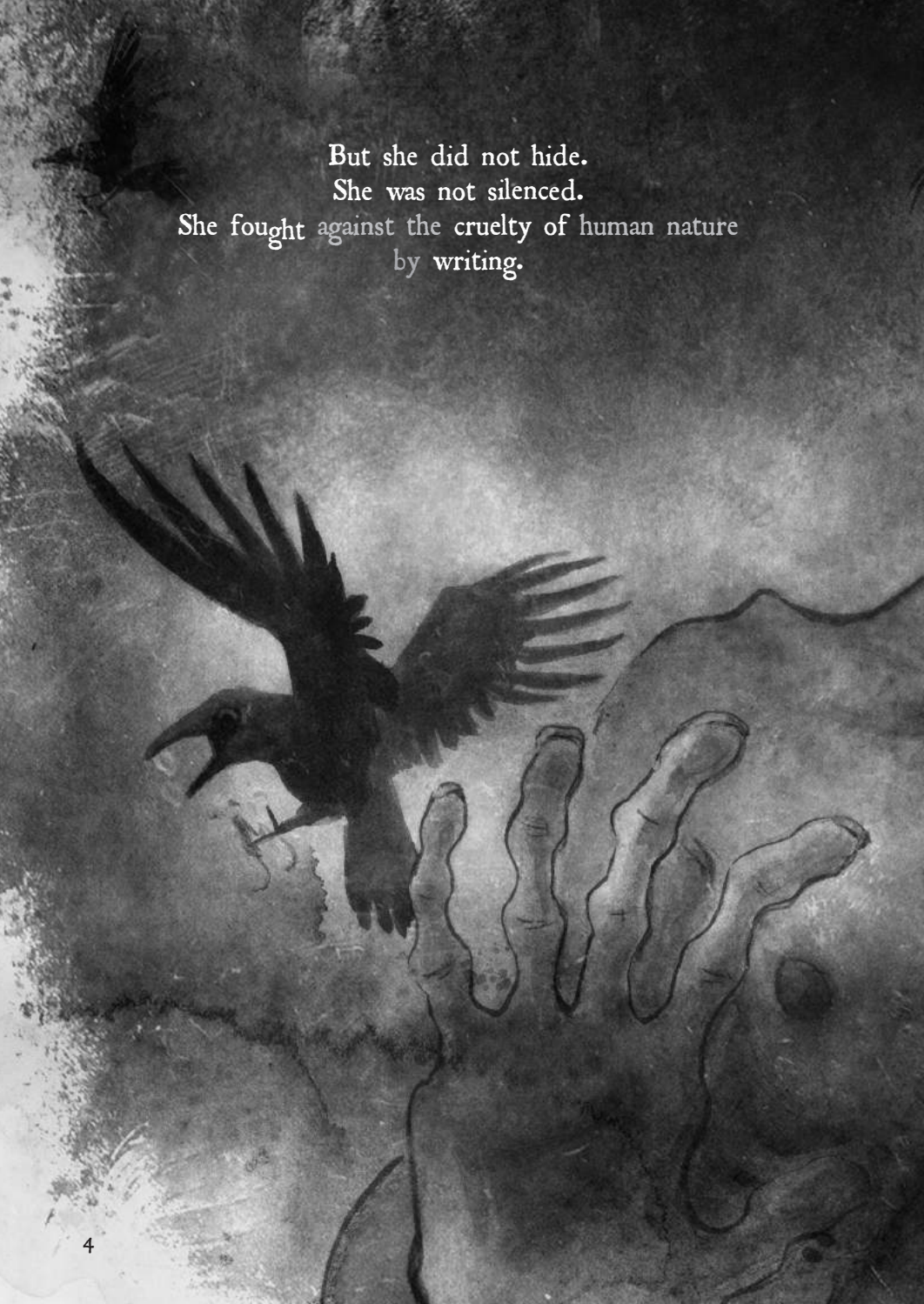


The Creature

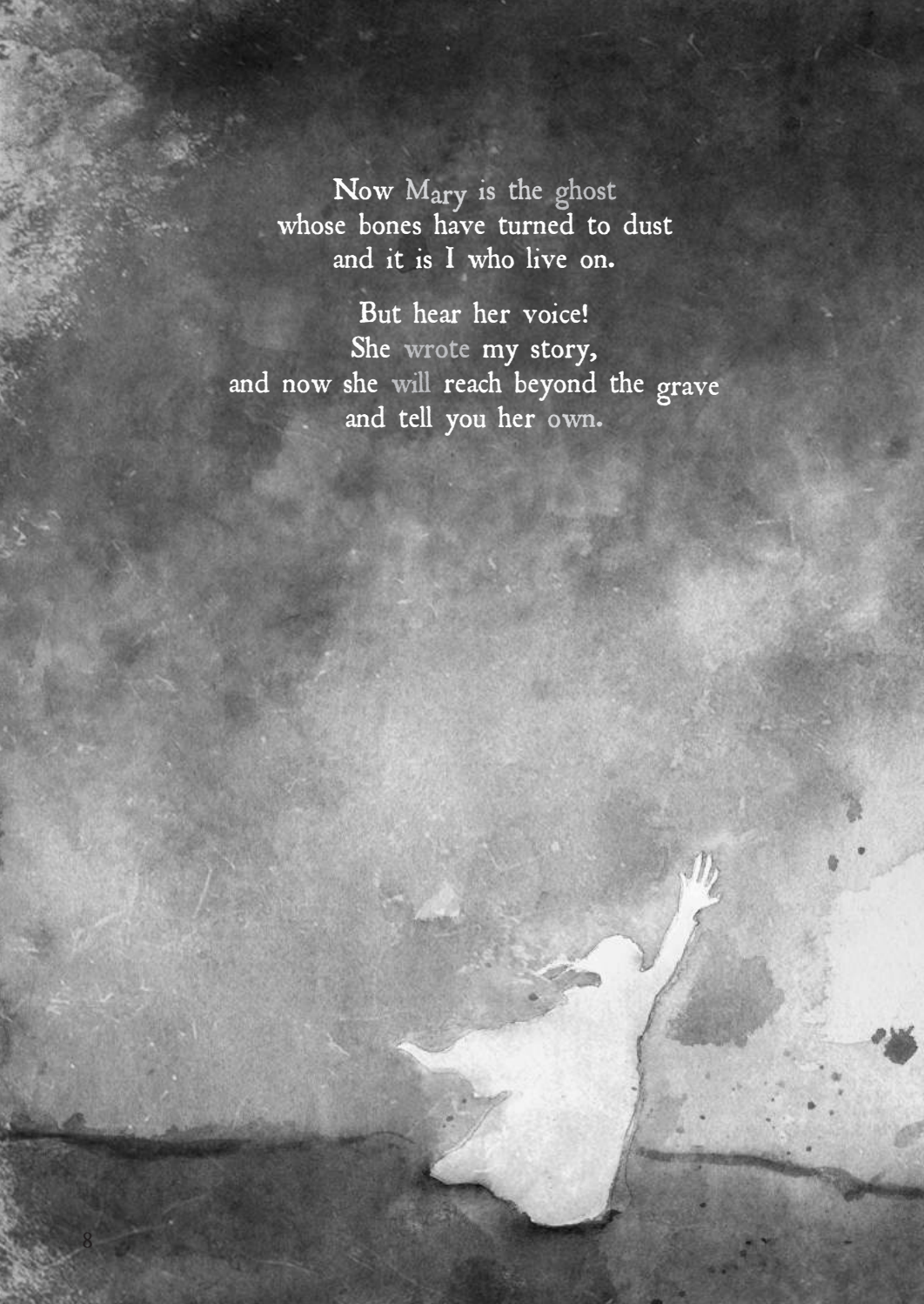
Most people didn't believe Mary Shelley,
a teenage girl, unleashed me,
a creature powerful and murderous
enough to haunt their dreams.

They expected girls to be nice
and obey the rules.
They expected girls to be silent
and swallow punishment and pain.

She was cast out from society
because she loved a married man.
Her friends reviled her.
Her father banished her from his home.


But she did not hide.
She was not silenced.
She fought against the cruelty of human nature
by writing.

She conceived me.
I took shape like an infant,
not in her body, but in her heart,
growing from her imagination
till I was bold enough to climb out of the page
and into your mind.


Now Mary is the ghost
whose bones have turned to dust
and it is I who live on.

But hear her voice!
She wrote my story,
and now she will reach beyond the grave
and tell you her own.