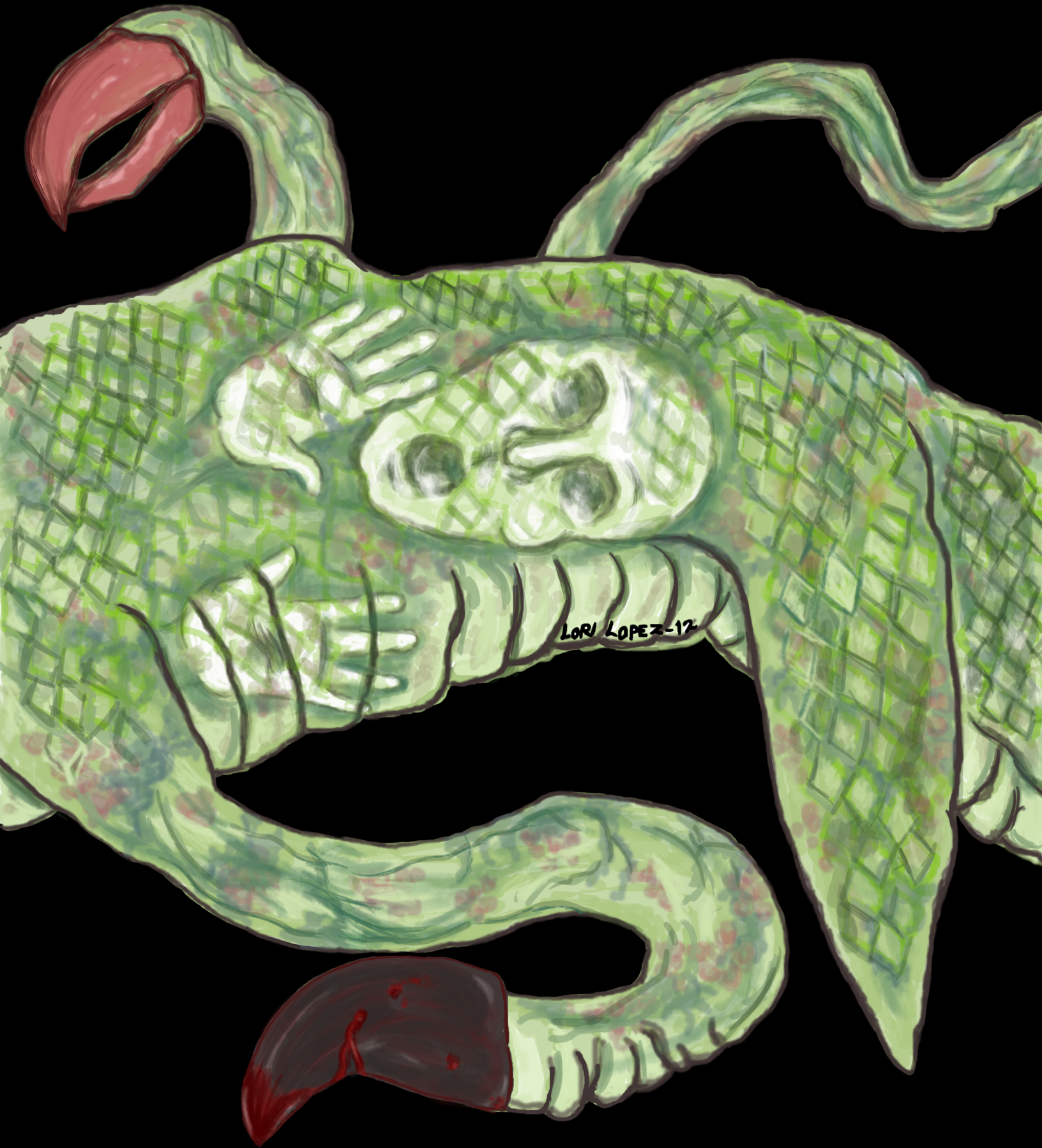


CREEP



LORI R. LOPEZ

Creep

by Lori R. Lopez

Fairy Fly Entertainment

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E-Book Edition

What terror lurks behind the fence in an ordinary neighborhood? What manner of monster will you see if you peek through a knothole? Something ugly. Something angry. Something with a very large appetite. Take a peek, go ahead. And then run back the way you came!!! You do not want to reach the end of the fence . . .

A creature has emerged from the sewer, mean and deformed, an anomaly. Experience the chills and chuckles of another offbeat tale by an author who loves to weave intricate weird tapestries. Watch your step the next time you leave your home. A creep could be slithering through your neighborhood!

There was something on the other side of a wooden fence. He could hear it move beside him, keeping pace with a sweeping rustle. The boy's gait slowed and he listened, ear pressed to a rough plank. The noise halted as well. Holding his breath, he ducked down to peep through a hole in the board. A circular eye startled him, staring back. He jerked away in fear. It wasn't a normal eye. The pupil was vertical. Like a cat.

Or a reptile. Retreating, scooting crablike, he paused a safe distance and shoved to his feet then fled. He was racing along the fence. That was his initial mistake. His second: stopping to gape in terror when the fence ran out and the thing confronted him.

He was just a kid. A random victim. It wasn't personal. An appendage flew forth, wrapping around his neck. Yanked toward jaws that seemed jacked impossibly wide, he was gulped within headfirst and pinned by fangs, as its gullet mashed his upper half to a soft consistency.

Sometimes we have no chance for regrets.

A dweeb, that's how his peers perceived him. Mainly because he was scrawny and smart and had buckteeth. Oh yeah, and he carried a telescope everywhere. They called him Star Geek too. But one day a planet would be named after him, and then they would respect him. He'd be famous. The town would hold a parade in his honor, and everyone who teased him now would wave and smile and think he was awesome. Dreaming of that moment, he stubbed his toe on a crack in the sidewalk and pitched flat, pivoting his head at the last instant to avoid impact. His left cheek connected hard. The telescope broke his fall, fracturing a rib. His glasses had sailed. Near blinded by pain and close-sightedness, he squinted at a shape next to the cement, thinking he must be hallucinating. Nothing could look like that!

Mismatched limbs sprouted haphazardly from a puffy cylindrical form. The head was scaly and lumpen, as if swollen with whopping bug bites. Surely it must be his imagination! Or his eyesight was worse than he thought! The boy gasped just before a nightmarish critter — wow, could it be from an uncharted galaxy? — scrambled to latch onto his skull with a monstrous bite. He was too amazed at being swallowed by an alien to be afraid.

The neighborhood grouch, dubbed Mister Snotty behind his back for his habit of dabbing his nose with a handkerchief, hesitated on his morning stroll to lean across the rim of a low brick wall. What was that in the flowerbed? Colorful petals bobbed, leaves and stems swaying. He almost believed he had caught a glimpse of a thick sinewy essence writhing underneath. *Nahhh*. He shook his head. Probably a cat. Straightening, he was about to continue his jaunt but detected a slight popping sound. He bent forward again and received a whiff of foul odor reminiscent of sewage. Gagging, pressing hanky to nostrils, he wondered what kind of fertilizer these people were using! He should complain to the Board Of Health. It was likely toxic and should be banned! It smelled like Hell, like rotten sulphuric eggs, and the most disgusting gas expelled by somebody with a very dire case of dysentery!

Fanning air, he peered in horror as the source of the stench flared a multitude of dissimilar arms. A few wildly flapping tentacles seized him. He thrashed to extricate himself to no avail. Sniffles were no longer his biggest problem. The man was wrenched apart in blood-spouting chunks, crammed into a rearing mouth piece by piece and reduced to mush, then glugged to a gorged expansive belly.

Mister Snotty was no more.

Her daughter was on her case again, harping to get some exercise, it would be good for her circulation. “You stay home too much, Ma. You have to get outside. Breathe fresh air. Stretch your legs. I worry about you, cooped up in here like some hermit, like a recluse! It isn’t healthy!”

“Healthier than the crud they’re pumping into the air these days!” she protested. “Healthier than being shot at or run down by a dope fiend or drunk!”

“Mom, you always exaggerate!” Her daughter adopted the eye-rolling expression. “You worry too much!”

“The world is a dangerous place!” she would remind.

“You can’t be afraid just because something happened to Dad. It was a freak accident. People don’t get crushed by stone Gargoyles falling off buildings every day. You need to get some sun!”

Sure, sure, fine! She grudgingly commenced a trek around the block just to shut Chloe’s yap. Children were not supposed to nag their parents! She was a grown woman, in her sixties for crying out loud! She could decide what she needed or not.

Since her husband passed, she didn’t feel like doing the things they used to do together. She was still in mourning after two years. Depression, according to her doctor. The aches and weakness would diminish if she were more active, he claimed. Her heart would quit hurting, literally and otherwise. That was the prognosis. Here she was, hitting the pavement for the sake of living longer. Bunch of hooey! She preferred the couch. And the silence. She could no longer bear to watch T.V. or listen to music. Too many memories. She read books, the latest bestsellers and anything else that captured her fancy, shipped to her door from various book clubs. She joined them all in a vain attempt to stave off solitude and despair.

Some days a cleaning frenzy overwhelmed her. But most of the time it was all she could do to fetch groceries once a week.

Emerging from her shell, the Bookworm clomped on sluggish legs. Surprising how rusty they felt. She’d taken them for granted her entire life, expected them to function. She figured the stiffness would quickly dispel. It generally did on the jaunts to market. Perhaps she was finally getting old. Perish the thought! The heck she would! Though the woman’s hair was silver, had been for years, her face was virtually unlined. No way was she going to submit to becoming “elderly” without a fight!

Her strides lengthened. She wasn’t ready to give up the ghost, she determined. And that’s why she was braced for battle when the thing behind the fence reached out to reel her in. Its darting squeeze happened with a whoosh. The lady who had just made up her mind to re-embrace life found herself in the long arm of Death. Raking fingernails, punching, she resisted the muscular grip suffocating her. The woman’s final thought as she was engulfed by an abomination was that this was so typical!

Nobody chooses to be a Door-To-Door Salesman. No person in their right mind struggles through the rigors of an education, overcomes the growing pings and slings of a callous world, only to wind up ringing bells bearing a plastic grin and a suitcase full of vacuum parts or beauty products. It was never his dream, that was for certain.

But life had a way of handing you what you least expected or wanted when you made the mistake of expecting too much. That was his crassly jaundiced perspective on reality.

His aspiration? Like so many others, to be in a band. Not a Rock Group. A Polka Band. Only, he had never learned to play an instrument and he couldn't sing. Squawking was a more apt term for his feeble efforts. So there went all chance of that. He was just another guy who entertained fantasies which had no hope of ever coming true. A dour hapless fellow who drifted into a career he didn't care for, so he could pay a mortgage on a house he lived in with a spouse he seldom saw, and barely paid heed of when he did.

Feet aching (and it was still early), the perspiring man in a cheap suit hauled his wares to the stoop of a modest two-story residence. No answer. Just his luck. He labored seven days a week to make ends meet because the cost of living kept rising while his career kept sliding down the tubes! Glumly traipsing back to a public sidewalk, he crossed the street to canvas the opposite row of dwellings. It was the weekend! Shouldn't someone be home? There were, of course, those who peeked out and pretended they weren't.

Sighing heavily, the man looked forward to an evening of relaxing in his chair oblivious of his surroundings, staring at a box with moving pictures and feigning attention so the wife wouldn't yak . . . So he could go over and over in his brain what hadn't happened yet, but was bound to sooner or later if he didn't give up. He was waiting to meet the right woman.

When he was younger, he blissfully circled employment ads in the Help Wanted section of a newspaper he had only subscribed to for the Comics and Classifieds. Weeknights he went straight to bed after a few beers at a tavern then a cold dinner left on the table. It wasn't much of a life. It still wasn't, except for those random vivid encounters that stood out — that stayed and replayed in his head.

This was why, though a man set in his ways, accustomed to routine, he reached the end of the fence where he was parked and didn't hesitate to explore the cause of a strange choking sound behind it. And what was that stink?

The Salesman was astonished to behold a loggish serpentine miscreant puking out a large ugly mass! Beyond that, he spied what appeared to be other mangled half-dissolved carcasses!

The beat-up brown sample case he had lugged for decades smacked the ground and spewed open. A sea of colorful scarves poured out, flowing to the grass in a current of silk. Yes, scarves. It used to be, the ladies could never have enough scarves. Like purses and shoes and shades of lipstick. Nowadays they didn't wear them as much. It was practically like peddling Bibles in a godless society! He tried switching to the glass globes old ladies seemed to accumulate on shelves and tables like dustballs under furniture. But the decorative orbs were heavier and didn't sell that well either. And the clicking and clacking as he ambled was driving him batty!

The white-haired codger should have retired, yet still carted the old case door to door, presenting cheap squares of silk crafted by Asian children in sweatshops as the finest fashions from Paris. On occasion a woman would invite him inside to display the rainbow array of slinky fabric. They could never pick just one pattern.

And sometimes he let them live. Accepted their money with a phony smile and strolled on out. They weren't his type.

But if the urge arose and a mantle of fury hooded his eyes, the solemn huckster's teeth gleamed in a charming smirk. His fingers draped a scarf around her throat then wrenched it tight. The lady's eyes would bulge, her tongue protrude. Until she winked no more. He'd remove the scarf and be on his way. Funny that he hadn't been caught or even questioned. They called him The Housewife Strangler, once the cops finally connected his victims. To be fair, the killings were several years apart, in different towns. No witnesses seemed to notice or remember a salesman, least of all one who sold scarves.

Before he could muster the strength to flee, the creature's jaws had chomped his ankle. A screech was cut off by the swatting cusp of a limb. The talon imbedded his brow. Meager resistance ceased and his body slumped — to be sucked into the thing and eventually spat out.

The Girl Scout trudged down a sidewalk, pulling a red wagon stacked with boxes of Thin Mints and Samoas, bringing orders to the customers on a prepaid list. She felt like such a cliché, delivering cookies on a Saturday when most of her friends were still in bed or having fun while here she was, learning responsibility! It was her mom's idea. Mom always knew what was best for her. But did the woman ever listen to what her daughter thought or felt or *wanted*? Maybe she felt ridiculous in a uniform, and didn't like belonging to a troop! Maybe she'd rather be free to simply hang out, minus all of the niceness and emphasis on merit badges! Could she wear those badges later in life when applying for a job or walking down the aisle or doing anything actually important? She failed to grasp that it wasn't the badges, it was the skills they represented that mattered. Alas, this preoccupied mental hissy-fit would cost her dearly.

The girl was vaguely aware that a cropped hedge beside her had depleted. Instead of manicured shrubbery, something grotesque stirred at the side of the pavement. Her head turned. Eyes bulged. Lips parted to scream. That was the moment her mind flashed ahead to the recognition of her mortality. Youngsters rarely take it seriously. They don't realize the years can advance in a blur, a chain of events that have hurtled past like the view from a spinning merry-go-round; the ups and downs of life processed as rapidly as a bumpy ride on a seesaw.

Well, she got it ever so briefly, in a burst of insight, before the thing slashed her with a razor whip. The lass's head rolled to the gutter, toppled into a storm drain. There was a remote *splloosh*. Meanwhile, her slender body was slid to a cavernous maw and ingested.

Some dudes were addicted to Video Games. Others to Comic Books or a specific movie franchise. There were those who waxed fanatic about doing tricks on skateboards or bikes. Lucas Harmon loved cookies. Chocolate-Chip to Peanut-Butter to Shortbread, he did not discriminate. All denominations, from Sugar Wafers to Gingersnaps and Circus-Animal Crackers (plain or frosted with sprinkles). He was cuckoo for cookies, no questions asked. So when he spotted a wagon stacked with Girl Scout Cookies, abandoned right in his path, what else could he do but rip them open and feast? Okay, he was supposed to be counting calories. And he hated being called Tubby by everyone, including his boss. But this was a sign, a gift from Heaven! Cookie crumbs flew as the thirtyish male dove into the pile of packages. Shiny wrappings tore. Plastic trays crinkled. A salad was not food! Rice Cakes were not a snack! A crunchy Granola Bar was not dessert! He was starved for cookies, the one thing that made being yelled at by his employer and mom and dad and granny fade from mind.

He was so thoroughly absorbed in this impromptu windfall banquet, he failed to register that a bizarre beast was sneaking up behind him. Until his left leg was lassoed. A lariat with teeth! “Ow, ow, ow!” he cried, unwinding the awful extension. He had no idea what it was attached to and didn’t care. Instinct compelled him to run. However, the cookies beckoned him to return and glom the wagon handle, then dash tugging his treasure. That was all he noticed.

Out of condition, yelling, he lumbered down the block. And could hear slappings and scrapings to indicate his assailant was in pursuit. Fortunately, the frightened guy was nearing home. He swerved across a yard, tripped on a row of Hydrangea Bushes, still awkwardly hauling the wagon. The huffing man climbed a grassy slope to the porch of a double-story house. He scooped an armload of boxes, deserted the wagon at the base of the steps. Panting, his chubby cheeks scarlet, heedful of slithering and thumps in his wake, he flung open a screen-door and charged inside as he hollered “MAAAAAAAAAAAAAAAA!!!”

His mother didn’t respond. Nobody was there but him.

Frantic, Lucas rushed upstairs to his bedroom and spilled the packages on his bed. He slammed and locked the door, shoved a chest of drawers in front of it. Nothing was going to prevent him from savoring the precious cookies he had managed to rescue!

It didn’t come from Outer Space. Didn’t emerge from the ocean. And didn’t exist undiscovered in some jungle or Tropical Rainforest for millennia. It crawled up out of the Sewer, and it was mad.

Once upon a time it had a name. It had a home and a family. But then Blinky went exploring, hunting, slipping into a wet basin, snooping down a tunnel where it wound up being whisked into a vast underground system of tubes and canals.

There — partially drowned, waterlogged and ill — it stubbornly thrived upon rats and waste, along with every chemical and biological hazard flushed via sinks and toilets, showers and tubs and storm drains to the sewers. Radioactive Elements tainted rain and soil from the many nuclear-reactor incidents that were seldom reported. Over the years, served a rich diet of contamination, it found itself transforming. Evolving to something else. Something new. A misshapen trunk; a bloated torso from which stemmed an array of flippers and feelers, tentacles and pincers. As if a cosmic designer had gone over the edge and sprung a leak simultaneously and it was the result. A hideous creation like no other.

The physical alterations required adapting, testing capabilities then practicing. But at its core, the mutant retained its true nature and viewed the world as it had always done. Except for the anger. The vile, seething, boiling fountain of rage that began when whatever it had become wriggled and flopped its way out of a drain by the edge of a field — returning to the surface after being in the dark for years, hoping to locate its family out of a misguided sense of loneliness — and a group of children with sticks and mean streaks prodded and kicked and beat the deformed anomaly to a bloody pulp.

That was the end of Blinky (the name had never made much sense, for snakes have no eyelids). The act of cruelty would mark the birth of a monster. What remained: a twisted hate-filled mass of flesh that was injured and oozing and seeing red.

Dragging itself back to the culvert, it waited for strength and healed with a vengeance.

Reclined on his bed, shoes and all, the man moodily eyed an empty glass case. He should really get rid of that one of these days. Being a procrastinator, he had never bothered to remove it after his snake escaped five years ago. Nor had he bothered to search for the missing pet. It was mistreatment and starvation that drove the serpent to take flight.

Lucas had spent the majority of his life, probably all of it, dodging liability. The guy refused to accept blame, shirked chores of any type, and prized cookies above even female companionship. His folks, concerned they had erred as parents and neglected to instill proper values, belatedly brought home a baby python to teach him to be responsible. Needless to say, it didn't work.

Mom and Dad deplored that they had created a monster. "A Cookie Monster," quipped Lucas.

He had no clue that what was ascending the staircase, waddling on fin-like stumps to the barricaded door of his inner sanctum, was none other than his long-lost pet. The door rattled as the creature's snout impatiently nudged. Lucas ignored it, secure in his refuge, feeding his face. Crumbs cascaded onto his chest. The banging grew more aggressive.

"Get lost!" growled Lucas.

This incensed the creature and it launched an attack, hurling itself repeatedly at the barrier.

Suddenly wood splintered, axed by a claw-pointed appendage. The door was torn off its hinges, then smashed to shards as the tentacle flailed to release itself.

Lucas sat up straight, a cookie dangling from his lips. The Thin Mint descended to his lap.

With a savage bellow of anguish and spite, a greenish-gray wretch entered the room, tipping the drawers, shambling like a sea lion.

Eyes narrowed in disbelief, Lucas uttered a single word: “Blinky?” It wasn’t that he knew. He somehow intuited that this ungodly beast had been the snake he shunned through indifference. As it scuttled in his direction, their eyes locked and a message was conveyed. That look of sheer loathing for humans, particularly this specimen of inhumanity, seared into the slacker’s brain like a red-hot poker. He had been judged and condemned in the space of several blinks, yet the creature’s accusative gaze was unwavering.

Lucas threw boxes of cookies. His sole defense, they harmlessly bounced off.

The mutant lashed out with its claw and nailed his pillow as he lurched aside. The talon stabbed the mattress, shaking off the pillow. Lucas dropped to the floor and squirmed below his bed. The avenger raised it with several limbs, tossed it wrathfully against a wall, and surged to corner the creep who had been a miserable master — providing dead rats laced with poison, glass fragments, nails and screws. The man had sought to dispose of a nuisance. But Blinky endured, regurgitating the bad.

Eyeing him malevolently, it cast tentacles to coil or pinch his arms. A second pair of limbs shot out to skewer him with spikes. The agitated creature chopped him down the center, flicking another tentacle. The halves were discarded in gestures of contempt. It was a hollow victory. It didn’t change things. Couldn’t make a sad life better.

More than one monster had been slain. The survivor shuffled away . . . to spend the rest of its days in darkness.

The asylum of the abhorrent soul.

About the author and artist

Growing up in a small storybook Wisconsin town, Lori R. Lopez would hike a good distance to and from school passing many a fence. Her imagination might tend to wander with her, and wonder what lay on the other side, coming up with strange answers. At times she actually encountered something or other, such as a wee shivering bat hanging upside-down, which she stopped to warm in her hands and worry over. At times her walks to school were epic battles against the elements: up a tall hill coated with ice; along frozen glazed sidewalks that caused injuries to her knees when she slipped and fell. At times she experienced bullying of one sort and another. Lori walked her dog, walked to the Library, walked to South Woods when little with a paper sack of Stuffed Animals to run away . . . Once she walked down to the edge of a lake and thought she saw a Sea Monster. Then there were the times that she rode a bike.

Through it all, she had monsters on her brain, lurking in her head. They couldn't catch up to her bike, except when she had an accident and broke her front teeth in Second Grade. That day, a monster blocked the road, she is certain. (Hindsight means making things up in retrospect, because a monster is a much better excuse than a big tree branch. Then again, maybe the bough was deliberately dropped by an evil tree spirit!) Nonetheless, the worst monsters she met as a child were human, and they didn't necessarily hide behind a fence. She herself has been hiding behind fences for years, along with some very fine company — two sons and an assortment of semi-feral cats they adopted. Not all fences are frightful, so please do not develop a complex after reading this creepy tale.





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Look for the author's [horror collection](#) *The Macabre Mind Of Lori R. Lopez*, containing "Creep"!

Lori and her talented sons have a creative company at fairyflyentertainment.com.
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