

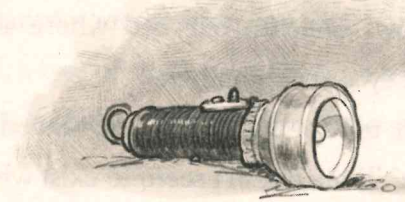
THE CREAKERS

Lucy looked up from the harmonica and stared into the blackness of the shadowy gap beneath her bed, but the watching eyes had gone.

Her heart was racing – no, *sprinting* – in her chest. Had she imagined it? Or had there *really* been a pair of shiny eyes looking at her from underneath the bed?

Lucy wanted to stand up, but she couldn't. She was frozen to the spot, frozen with fear. She was completely on her own in her dark bedroom, in her quiet house, in the middle of the night, with a creature lurking under her bed.

And things were about to get even weirder . . .



CHAPTER FIVE THE FIRST CREAKER

Have you ever been so scared that you couldn't move? So utterly terrified that you're just frozen, helplessly waiting for something nasty to come and get you in the night? Praying for the sun to come up and make everything OK again?

That's how Lucy was feeling.

She was sitting on her bedroom floor, trembling with fear, wrapped in her dad's stinky rubbish-collecting coat, her sweat-soaked hair sticking to her forehead and her heart beating like a drum in her chest, and she was completely unable to move. Paralysed with fear.

She tried to say *Hello?* But she barely even managed

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the *H*, let alone the *ello*! So she just sat there, staring into the shadows beneath her bed where she'd seen those two dark eyes watching her.

She couldn't tell for how long she stayed frozen – minutes, hours? Time doesn't seem to exist when you're that scared. However long it was, after what felt like forever of staring into the darkness, somehow Lucy drifted off to sleep.

Now I know what you're thinking: *How can you fall asleep if you're that scared?* Well, *that's* just the thing . . . You can't!

Not unless a Creaker is there.

What's a Creaker? Don't tell me you've never heard of the Creakers!

Well, it's the name of this book for starters. Haven't you been paying any attention?

Have you ever heard noises in your house when you're in bed at night? *That* is a Creaker.

Have you ever felt as though there's something else with you in your bedroom? *That's* a Creaker too.

Have you ever found a sack of presents by the fireplace on Christmas Day? *Wait*, that's not a Creaker – that's Santa.

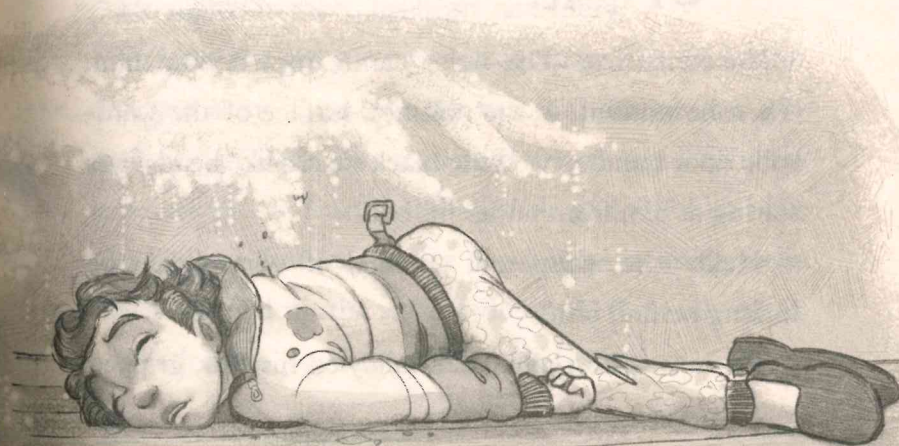
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Have you ever managed to fall asleep, even when you were so scared it seemed impossible? That's definitely a Creaker! It's one of their naughty little tricks, and that's exactly what this creepy little Creaker used on Lucy that night.

She didn't notice anything at all, but from under the bed came a gust of hot air. It was the reeking breath of the Creaker as he blew a clawful of something golden and crumbly into her bedroom, which silently drifted into her eyes and settled there without Lucy suspecting a thing.

Ten minutes later she was fast a-snooze, leaving the Creaker to creep out of his hiding place.

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In his bedroom on the other side of Clutter Avenue, Norman Quirk was in his favourite Transformers PJs, busy ironing.

'Creases, creases, creases!' he huffed as he ran the hot iron over his Scout uniform for the fifth time that night. The trousers were always the hardest part, and without his dad there to help he just couldn't get them as neatly pressed as he thought was acceptable for a young Scout.

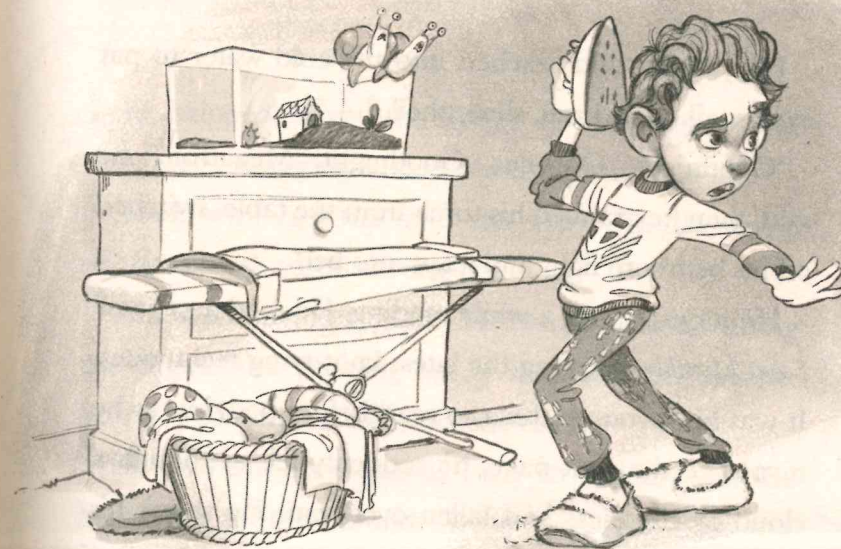
'Hmph, I'm afraid that'll have to do.' He sighed, shaking his tired head as he examined each trouser leg through his magnifying glass. He slid them on to a hanger, which he hung on the silver handle of his wardrobe door, ready for the morning.

Creak.

Norman froze. The noise came from behind him. Then he noticed, in the polished surface of the wardrobe door handle, two little black specks like beady eyes staring at him from under his bed.

'Hello?' he whispered, terrified of what might be lurking behind him.

There was no reply. He swallowed his fear, gripped



the iron and whipped round in a flash, but there was nothing. No beady black eyes. Just shelves lined with his Transformers collection.

He sighed in relief, his heart pounding.

'At least I've got you here for company!' he said as he dropped some food into the fish tank for his two pet underwater snails. (Norman used to have a goldfish, but it ran away – at least that's what his dad told him.) He watched as what looked like two bogeys wearing shells slowly slurped up the side of the tank, their oily black bodies leaving a trail on the inside of the glass.

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He yawned and reached into the cold water to pat each snail on its hard, slimy shell.

'Goodnight, Optimus. Goodnight, Megatron,' he said, then he grabbed his torch from the table, switched off his bedroom light and leapt into bed.

He stayed up for a while reading. He read a page of *Scout Monthly*, learning the latest knot-tying techniques. It was his favourite thing to read before bed, but as he turned to the next page, he suddenly felt as though a cloud of tiredness had fallen over him. He shook his head, rubbed his eyes and began reading the first line when ...

CREAK!

'H-hello?' Norman croaked, now feeling weak and floppy. He was sure he'd heard someone in his room, but sleep was just ... too ... tempting.

His eyes closed automatically and his head fell back on to his fluffy pillow as he drifted into a strange dream about slimy black creatures with oily skin making creaking noises under his bed.

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Lucy skipped along the street in her baggy blue dungarees, dragging a black plastic sack behind her.

'Dad, you forgot this one!' she called over the sound of the rubbish truck starting up.

'Ah, well done, Lucypops!' Mr Dungston said, cutting the engine and stepping out of his enormous vehicle. 'Are you coming to work with me today?'

He held out his hands as Lucy struggled to lift the heavy bag off the ground. 'What the jiggins have you got in there?' he said, giving her a hand.



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'Just rubbish,' Lucy said.

'Just rubbish?' Mr Dungston echoed in disbelief. '*JUST* rubbish? My little Lucypops, it's far more than *just rubbish!* It's glorious, wonderful, stinking, rotten rubbish!' He lifted Lucy and the bin bag and spun them round. 'And it's this wonderfully stinky stuff that puts food on our backs and clothes on the table.'

Lucy laughed.

'Dad, you mean, *clothes on our backs and food on the table!*'

'Do I? Oh yes, I suppose I do,' he teased. 'Right, throw it in then.' He lifted Lucy up high so she could drop the bag of rubbish into the back of the truck.

'Lovely throw, my Lucypops. Now off you trot back to your mum and I'll see if I can turn that bag of rubbish into a nice pie for dinner.'

He popped Lucy back on the ground, pushed her fringe to one side and kissed her forehead before she turned and ran to her mum, who was standing in the doorway.

'Have a good day, Larry!' Mrs Dungston called.

'Full of rotten goodness as always, my dear,' he said as he swung himself up into his truck and slammed the door shut with a

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BANG!

Lucy woke up from her dream in a startled panic.

How did I fall asleep?! she asked herself and quickly looked around. There was an orange glow from her window as the first bit of sunlight poked through the curtains and began filling her room. The last thing she remembered was staring into the shadows beneath her bed and the next moment she was waking up!

She blinked and felt something in the corners of her eyes. She rubbed them, and tiny clumps of sleep fell out.

Lucy wasn't sure why, but now that the sun had come up she wasn't as scared any more. Funny how sunlight does that, isn't it? You can be scared stiff during the night, but as soon as it's daytime you feel fine again. Like we all somehow know that strange things only happen at night.

Lucy stood up, took off her dad's grubby coat,

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returned it to its hiding place and opened the curtains, allowing the sunlight to fill her room to the brim.

Then she lay flat on the bed and carefully lowered her head over the edge to get a good look underneath. There was a nice gap under her bed, big enough for Lucy to fit if she ever wanted to. Big enough for her to be able to see right to the other side. To her relief, there was nothing there. No scary little eyes staring back at her, just her creaky old floorboards gathering dust.

She sighed a big, fat sigh.

I must have imagined it, she thought.

Was it all in my head? she wondered.

Must have been a nightmare, she hoped. *A very realistic nightmare!*

But very soon Lucy was going to find out that it *wasn't* all in her head. Before long, Lucy was going to see those little black eyes again . . . and next time the Creaker would not be alone.

Blimey! How are you doing? That was a bit intense, wasn't it? Eyes under the bed. Creaks in the dark! Well, I wish I could tell you that it all gets better from here, that the rest of the book is full of pretty winged ponies galloping across rainbows, scattering jelly beans from their hooves as they fly, but I'm afraid it isn't. It only gets worse. A lot worse. What's worse than a Creaker . . . ?

You'll see . . .