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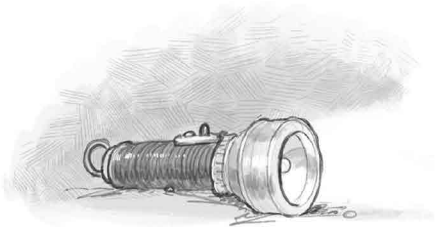
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Shhhh. . . here's a creepy extract from The Creakers to read by torchlight at your Spooky Sleepover . . .



Chapter Seven
FOUR CREAKERS

Lucy jumped into bed that night faster than she'd ever done before. She was so fearful that something might grab her ankles from underneath the bed as she climbed up that she literally leapt from the floorboards to the mattress and pulled her bedcovers up and over her head. She didn't even bother to take off her dungarees, brush her teeth or tidy the house! She left it all messy and grubby.

And what a grubby mess it was!

There was all sorts of rubbish and litter scattered here, there and everywhere from the piles of children who had been in and out of her house over the last couple of days. So many crumbs of breakfast cereal had been trodden into the carpet that it felt more like walking on sand. She'd been so busy confiscating dangerous items from wally-chops children today that, unlike yesterday, she hadn't washed the dishes, emptied the rubbish bins or done any washing whatsoever.

The house was, quite simply, Dis-Gus-Ting.

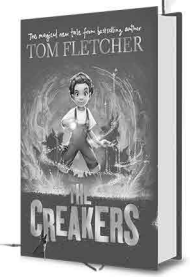
But Lucy didn't care about that right now. Her breathing was heavy and the warmth of her breath soon filled up the small space under her duvet, making it hot and sticky. She tried to be as still and as quiet as she could, listening out for any strange sounds, any sign of that creature with those black eyes. But she was so scared and nervous that all she could hear was the sound of her own blood pumping around her body, beating in her eardrums like a persistent drummer who won't shut up when you're trying to think.

As the night wore on and the children of Whiffington grew sleepy from the second day of grown-up-less chaos, the noises from out in the streets began to settle. Soon everything was still. Everything was calm.

That is always when the weirdest things happen.

Welcome to the world under your bed

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Lucy heard it.

Her heart stopped.

She recognized it instantly.

She'd walked across her bedroom thousands and thousands of times and she knew that sound better than anyone: the unmistakable creak of the old wooden floorboards right next to her bed. The floorboards that only ever creaked when someone . . . or some*thing* . . . stepped on them.

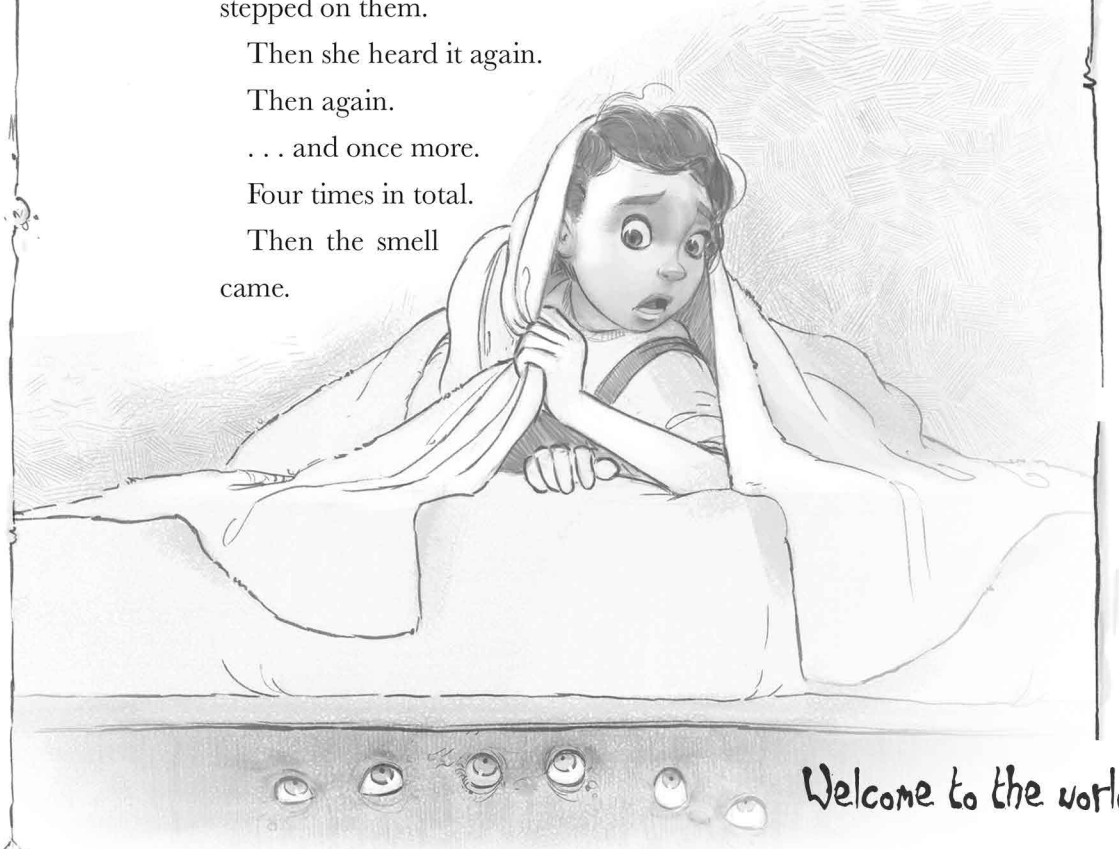
Then she heard it again.

Then again.

. . . and once more.

Four times in total.

Then the smell came.



It was foul and rotten, like a freshly pooped nappy, or off milk. It was so strong that Lucy could hardly even breathe. The thick duvet felt heavy as she hid beneath it, part of her wanting to stay covered, the other desperate to peek out and see what was creaking around her bedroom.

Then she heard something even more terrifying than a creak. She heard sniffing, followed by a delighted . . .

'Ahhhhhhhhh . . .'

It spoke!

Or at least it made a noise.

'This be the place!'

Yep, it definitely spoke. Although it didn't sound like you or me when we speak. This voice was croaky, creaky, disgusting.

'This be where *it* lives . . .' croaked the creature.

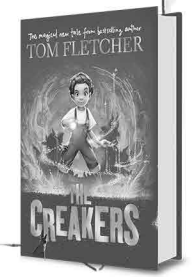
'Shhhhhh, the kidderling be hearin' you. It be hidin' just under the bedcovers,' squeaked another one.

'Shall we snatch it up?' scratched a different one, with a voice like nails running down a chalkboard. That was three separate creatures Lucy had counted.

THREE!

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There was a silence.

Snatch me up? Lucy thought. *Please don't snatch me up. Don't snatch me up. Don't snatch me up . . .*

'No . . . not this dark,' grunted a fourth voice. 'Let's just take what we be creakin' for and be gone back to the Woleb.'

The Woleb? thought Lucy. *Where on earth is the Woleb?* She'd certainly never heard of anywhere with a name like that.

Suddenly Lucy heard another creak – and then another, and another. These creaks were the sound of someone – or some*thing* – creeping across her bedroom, across the floorboards closer to her wardrobe.

They were followed by the sound of her wardrobe door opening.

'Well, where be it?' grunted the grunter.

'It be in 'ere somewhere! I saw the kidderling get it out last dark!' muttered the scratchy one.

They all started rummaging around. Lucy heard hangers clanging and drawers being opened and closed. These creatures weren't trying to be quiet, not tonight.

'It's good fun, innit, not 'avin' to creak around so quiet neemore, not since we snatched all 'em grown-ups,' blabbed the croaky one.

'Shut up, you dunglicker! We be Creakers, we still gotter creak!' huffed the grunter.

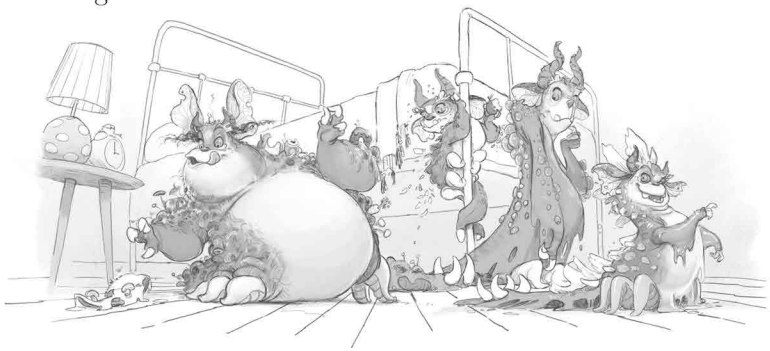
Creakers, Lucy thought. *So that's what they're called.* The word made her shudder and her skin crawl with creepiness.

'*It* might be earwiggin'!' added the grunter, and somehow Lucy felt these *Creakers* all looking in her direction on the other side of the duvet.

'So whats if it is. I don't care neemore,' screeched the scratcher.

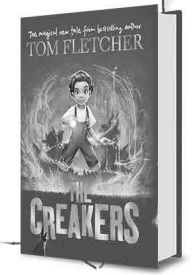
'Let's get that stinkerful green coat and be off,' whispered the squeaker.

Lucy suddenly realized what the Creakers were looking for.



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