

The Creeper

Pete Johnson

Random House Children's Books

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About the Author

Also by Pete Johnson

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About the Book

Remember, you may not see me, but I shall be there ... watching. You cannot hide from the Creeper ...

Lucy is delighted when she spots the old audio tape in a second-hand bookshop: a spooky story, perfect for listening to on Halloween.

But then she and her friend Jack listen to the tape, and Lucy is suddenly really scared. For the story tells the frightening tale of the Creeper, a horrific monster formed from the ashes of a murdered man and bent on revenge against all wrongdoers. And Lucy has just done something truly terrible to her best friend.

Now the Creeper is loose - and he has a new victim ...

THE CREEPER

Pete Johnson

Illustrated by David Wyatt



CORGI YEARLING BOOKS



Chapter One

IT WAS HORRIBLE.

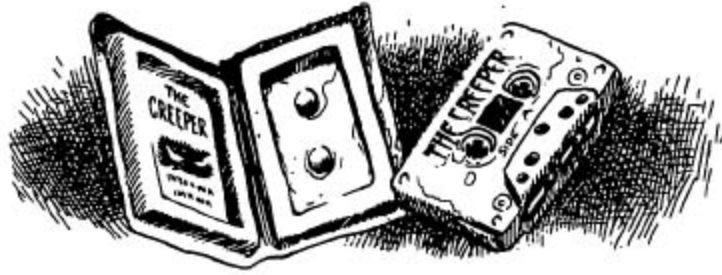
But I couldn't just walk past it. Somehow, that terrible hand seemed to reach right out of the shop window and pull me closer to it. I stared upwards.

All the skin on the hand had peeled away while its fingertips were cracked and burnt and bent over like a claw.

A truly weird picture.

Below it were two words in shivery, orange writing: *The Creeper*. Then, in much smaller lettering: LISTEN - IF YOU DARE - TO A CLASSIC TALE OF HORROR.

I dared. Especially as it was Halloween next Thursday and Amy, my best friend, was sleeping over. My mum had planned a special Halloween meal, but she drew the line at letting us watch horror videos. She and Amy's mum had ganged up together: they went on and on about how most videos just weren't suitable for our age-group. Still, *The Creeper* was a cassette tape so that was all right. I wasn't sure if Mum would agree.



Even so, I decided to buy it quickly while Mum and Dad were across the road looking at some old prints.

Inside the secondhand bookshop a man with a bushy, ginger beard sat at a table, a tray of tea and biscuits beside him. When I asked about *The Creeper* he took a massive gulp of tea, then ambled over to the window.

He picked up the tape, then wiped it on his jacket. I wondered how long it had been in that window. Six months? A year? Ten years? Now I was getting silly. But I liked the idea of *The Creeper* waiting patiently for ages and ages until I came along.

‘Sure you want this one?’ he asked doubtfully.

I nodded furiously. I just had to have that tape, even if it used up all my spending money. But in the end he only charged me two pounds for it – said it was in the sale.

As I was leaving he called after me, ‘Don’t listen to that tape on your own, will you?’ I think he was trying to be funny.

Outside, to my horror, I bumped straight into Mum. ‘Bought something good, Lucy?’ She beamed at me.

‘I think so.’

Mum undid the paper bag (which the man had carefully sellotaped). ‘Oh, Lucy, what’s this?’

‘It’s called a tape, Mum. Haven’t you seen one before? They’re quite common now.’

Mum groaned. ‘We bring you to London, let you browse around some of the best secondhand bookshops in the country and you buy this trash.’

‘You don’t know it’s trash.’ I was indignant.

‘Yes I do. Well, you can take it right back.’

‘I can’t do that,’ I said quietly, sulkily. ‘I’ve got to have something spooky for next Thursday. You’ve banned me from watching videos—’

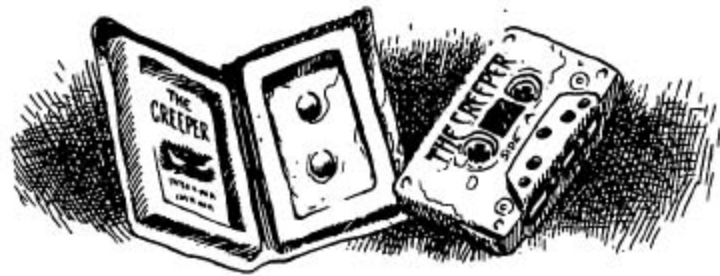
‘I haven’t banned you,’ interrupted Mum.

‘Yes you have. Now you’re banning me from listening to tapes. I’m surprised you don’t keep me inside all day with a paper bag over my head.’

‘Now, that’s not fair,’ began Mum. Then Dad came over. Mum thrust the tape at him. ‘Will you look at what Lucy’s just bought?’

He gave a chuckle. ‘Well, that hand’s well and truly cooked.’ Then he read the back and whispered to Mum, ‘I don’t think you need worry. Look.’

I couldn’t make out what he was pointing at. But it seemed to calm Mum down instantly. A smile slowly formed as she murmured, ‘Before even our time,’ and handed the tape back to me. ‘I suppose it’s harmless enough, despite its lurid cover.’



Now I was the one who was worried. It wasn’t until I was back at my uncle and aunt’s house (where we were staying for the weekend) that I spotted what my dad had seen. It was tucked away right in the corner: FROM THE GOLDEN AGE OF RADIO COLLECTION. FIRST BROADCAST IN 1956.

1956.

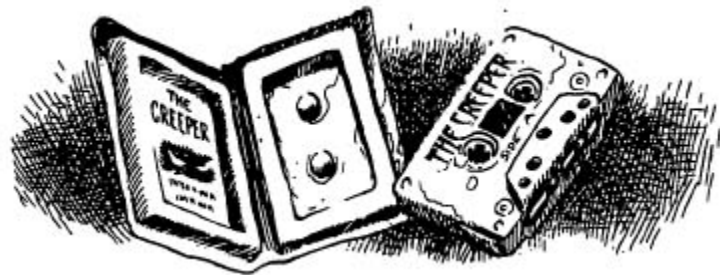
I knew the tape would be a few years old but this meant it was medieval, prehistoric. No wonder Mum and Dad

weren't bothered. *The Creeper* would probably sound really corny and dated now.

Next day, as soon as we got home, I rushed upstairs to my bedroom and played the start of *The Creeper*.

There was a lot of hissing and crackling at first and my heart began to sink. Then a bell tolled. After which this man started to speak. He sounded ancient.

Greetings and welcome to my horror feast. Tonight I bring another story to chill your spine. But it comes with a special warning: if you are of a nervous disposition or easily scared it is best we say goodbye now.



There was a slight pause while the crackling started up again. Then he returned.

Still here? How brave you must be. He gave a wheezy laugh. For this evening I am bringing you face to face with the King of Terror. I dare not say his name aloud. Come a little closer and I shall whisper it to you ... the Creeper.

A little chill crept down my spine.

Remember, you can't hide from the Creeper. Wherever you are he will find you. One night, when you are least expecting it, you will hear a tapping noise ... and it will be the Creeper.

At exactly that moment I heard a tapping sound. I nearly jumped out of my skin. Then my dad put his head round the door. 'Phone call for you, Lucy.' He paused. 'Are you all right, love?'

'Yes, fine,' I said hastily. I didn't want him thinking *The Creeper* was starting to scare me. I switched the tape off

and sprinted downstairs.

'It seems ages since I've spoken to you,' said Amy.

'A whole forty-eight hours,' I said.

We speak every night on the phone – even the days we're at school together, to my dad's amazement. 'What have you got left to tell each other?' he exclaimed once. But somehow we never run out of things to say.

'And I suppose,' said Amy, 'you've had a great time in London, while I've been stuck here watching puddles dry.'

'You haven't been out at all then?' I asked. My heart was starting to thump now.

'Well, yesterday the boiler burst, which was sort of exciting. So there's been chaos here ...'

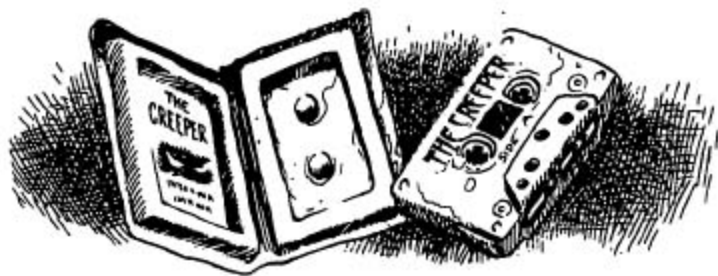
'But you haven't seen ...' I wanted to ask her if she'd seen Natalie, but I changed it to 'anyone'.

'No, because I've had to help my mum ...'

I heaved a sigh of relief. And before I go any further I want to explain something to you. I'm not one of those girls who think their best friend can only have one friend: herself. Truly, I'm not like that. If it was anyone else but Natalie. But I hate Natalie like poison.

She's rich and spoilt, and oh so sly. She used to have a slave – sorry, friend – named Carla. Natalie would boast away to her for hours and – don't ask me how she did it – but Carla could listen to it all without throwing up once. Then Carla moved away and ever since Natalie has been hunting for a new victim.

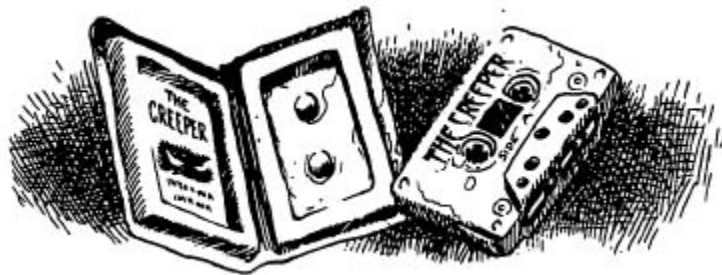
Now she's found one: Amy.



Lately she's started showering Amy with stupid little presents. And she makes a big deal of rushing over to Amy first with any news. (Natalie is the biggest gossip in my school.) She's always hanging about with us. But I know I'm surplus to her requirements. And she wants me off the scene so it's just her and Amy.

Yet I can't prove anything without sounding catty and neurotic. Especially as, on the surface, Natalie is nice and friendly to me.

It doesn't help either that I live in this tiny village, miles from anywhere (the average age of its inhabitants is ninety-four), and only see Amy outside school at weekends or on special occasions. While Amy lives quite near the school and so does Natalie. At night I often think about that, wondering if Natalie is round Amy's house now spreading false rumours about me, with a sweet smile on her face as she does so. And sometimes I just can't sleep for worrying. I tell myself I'm being pathetic but I still go on doing it.



Anyway, Amy hadn't seen Natalie that weekend so I heaved a sigh of relief and started telling her about *The Creeper*.

'So what exactly is the Creeper?' asked Amy. 'Is it just a hand?'

'I'm not sure exactly.'

'Maybe that hand scuttles about like a giant spider leaping off curtains at people when they're least expecting it.'

'Can you imagine being attacked by a hand?' I said.