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## Creepy Crawlies

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## Creepy Crawlies

### Author Bio

Georgia is a first-year at Gettysburg College, who is struggling to make decisions other than what book to read next. She is an avid writer, tree-hugger, and dog enthusiast. Georgia's taking life day by day, with a paperback in one hand and a jar of peanut butter in the other.

## Creepy Crawlies

GEORGIA K. KIRKENDALL

Everyone has a phobia. Most common among them are the fear of the tiny: critters that skitter and jump. It's irrational to fear such a tiny, insignificant, squashable thing. No one's skin crawls at the reminder of interactions that could actually result in death. The mortality of a person is not thought to be at risk every single day in the car on the commute to work. You never see someone shriek at the sight of global warming statistics.

There is something just... sinister about the life of a tiny organism. The itch of its thin legs pricking at your skin, disturbing the fine hairs on your forearm. Spiders leap, termites bite. They could be anywhere. And anywhere almost always means they are on your body and they will get under your skin and crawl through your organs and infect your blood and and and oh god! Get it off!

This phobia isn't that irrational, after all. No one can recall why exactly these little critters cause such an itch, such unease, but there is an explanation for it. You see, creepy crawlies are on rare occasions lethal, as proven with the case of Jimmy Thompson.

Jimmy was the second-best member of his boy scout troop, Eagles 60012 of West Virginia, second only to Mark Raymore, who everyone agreed was just an awful, bullying scud with terrible acne. Booger-picker too, but with a wicked talent for sailor knots. So really, Jimmy was quite a high-ranking kid to hang around, and when Jimmy participated in camp-fire nights, it was sure to be a time not to miss.

The flimsy boys would scramble onto the creaky school bus outside Spring Mills Middle School, knobby elbows striking out and bony jaws jutting forward, chicken-fighting for the worn leather of the farthest-back seats. Lunch boxes tossed outside windows, playing hot potato with geeky Erik's shoe, until at last reaching what can only tentatively be called 'camp-ground,' 20 minutes outside town. Two nature preservation shacks quiver in the faint wind, and more beer cans cover the ground than grass. Yet! This is wilderness for troop 60012, and to set up camp in this wild, wild world, is to live like a true Eagle. Nay, a true Man. For this time, the very first time, the boy scout troop is camping alone, without troop leader Mr.

Havens, a balding middle-aged man who teaches math and picked up the troop gig to earn pocket money for his bi-weekly sixpacks.

“I call middle ground!” crows Mark, thrusting his rotund belly through the screaming bus doors, jabbing his sausage-fingers into the kid in front of him, who falls from the bus steps with a resounding flop into deep mud.

“No fair, you got middle ground last time! Mr. Havens said me and Erik get it this time, right Erik?” Skimpy Sam makes a meek attempt at rallying his tent-buddy, but Erik only shrinks into his *Star Wars* hoodie.

But Mark was already driving his tent poles into the soft earth of the coveted sleeping spot, relatively perfect ground with no anthills or roots that so often drive up into your spine.

“Aww, don’t mind that rugger, Sam. Raymore’s just a wimp. Won’t go near the woods, cause he ‘fraid the boogie man gonna catch him,” Jimmy pats Sam on the back, and helps the two underlings set up their sleeping ground in the only other available spot, along a ridge of trees and prickly bushes.

The Eagles participate in numerous enticing events during their camping trips, such as frog-catching and the subsequent dare-ya-to-kiss-the-frog activities. Most games involve little critters; the boys squat in the pungent mud, prodding at tadpoles and tearing slimy worms in half. But the greatest time to be had is at night, when the air drops and your skin chills, and nothing feels better than the half-hearted warming of a temperate fire crackling to life. The boys gather puny sticks and sappy leaves, and huddle in a circle too close to the flames, eyes watering from streams of smoke.

Troop 60012 was a relatively tame group of middle-school boys, Mark excluded. Being so, they generally allowed everyone a fair shot at telling a creepy story or leading a song whose pure amusement was born from the sheer number of profanities it included. Yet as the night wore on, the boy scouts became antsy, ready for the real show of the night.

Voicing the group’s shared wishes, and blatantly interrupting Erik’s tale of Han Solo destroying a death star (quite unoriginal, really), Bram, a kid with a free soul and permanent holder of *Most Trips to the Principal’s Office Award*, said, “Shut your trap, Erik! I wanna hear what Jimmy’s gotta say. Give us a scary story, ol’ Jim! Like the real good one last time, about the werewolves.”

Jimmy at first resisted, the most courteous little gentleman there ever was, but caved to the succession of pleas from his fellow troop members.

“I heard of a kid who was the nastiest kid around. He was so gross, people all throughout town could smell his stinky scent all day, every day. When he touched food, it rotted. His clothes were always slimy. No one knew why he was so nasty—his parents took him to many doctors, but they had no clue either.”

All the boys in the troop were drawn into Jimmy’s story, leaning forward continuously throughout the speech that by now their knees dug into the dirt and their eyebrows were at serious risk of being singed by the campfire.

Jimmy continued in a whisper, “but there was a rumor that this kid was the descendant of the boogie man, and one day he would transform into a horrible monster that was even more nasty and... EAT EVERYONE UP!”

As one, Jimmy’s attentive listeners collapsed in fright at his shout. Erik, who practically fell into the fire pit, yipped when his hoodie sleeve started smoking, on which Sam dumped the dregs of his Hawaiian Punch.

There was a brief period of stunned silence, broken by the guffaw of Mark Raymore. He hefted himself from the ground and wiped his hands on his already filthy jeans.

“You posies so stupid as to fall for that? That ain’t no story- no such thing as boogie man. What a stupid lot you all are. Tell ‘em, Jimmy. Tell them how you just are a big fat liar, and there’s no boogie man. No b-boogie man.” Mark’s voice stuttered, his body slouched, sweeping his gaze behind him, into the deep forest repetitively.

Jimmy shrugged, a slight smirk on the corner of his lips. He was enjoying Mark’s unease and wasn’t about to put the big bully’s mind at ease. “S’far I’m concerned, Mark, it is true. Apparently, the boogie man is alive today—there’s been sightings on this very campground.”

Mark visually shook, his head sweeping back and forth now with increasing violence. “N-noo. That’s n-n-not true. Shut your trap, Jimmy! Just shut up!”

Jimmy’s eyes were alight, his demeanor demon-like. “Oh, yes, I can assure you, Mark, it’s real. And do you know what the boogie man likes to eat the most? Do you, Mark?”

The screws had come apart in Mark’s joints, and in the dark night he seemed to crumble and shudder. He moaned through his hands, covering his face, “Pleaseeeee, noooooo.”

Jimmy was ready to pounce, fully grinning now. “Jimmy, maybe you shouldn’t—” Sam started to talk, but Jimmy ignored him, triggering Mark with his final tease.

“It eats fat booger-eating bullies JUST LIKE YOU!”

At this, Mark collapsed to the hard ground, convulsing. The boys looked on, entranced and frozen in shock. “Mark?” Bram whispered, scooting away from the tumbling shadow, “Are you alright?”

Mark gave no response, except for a deep moan that seemed un-human, unnatural. His breath staggered, and the hairs on the arms of the troop rose in union upon the faintly audible sounds of popping. Ppp-pwap-pwapsh.

In the faint flicker of the campfire, the boys witnessed their minds playing tricks on them. For that couldn't be really happening, could it? Mark's skin couldn't be bruising from the inside out, and there definitely wasn't anything pushing up from within his pudgy body, was there?

But the longer they watched, mouths agape, the less able they were to convince themselves that what they were seeing was just some sort of trick of light. For something was happening to Mark, oh yes it was, and whatever it was, it was really, really bad.

Before the troop had time to react—to break from their deer-in-headlight syndrome—the body writhing on the ground (the body that used to be Mark but couldn't be called a name anymore, it was so unnatural and foreign) tore back its neck and released an ear-piercing scream. Simultaneously, the bruises that mysteriously formed on its body bulged even more so, until the skin tore apart in a sickening squelch, letting loose white, globous masses. They squirmed like massive worms or lice, building in frenzy with each passing second.

Finally, adrenaline kicked in and the boys launched to their feet, backing away as the smell of rotting flesh met their noses. The scream that was so gut-wrenching a moment before turned even more horrendous as it quieted, replaced with the sound of suffocated gurgling. Sludge oozed from the mouth of the beast, its eyes rolling back into whiteness and bleeding green tears.

Again, troop 60012 was captivated by the scene, watching this real-life horror film coming to life before their very eyes. In terror, they watched as the body trembled, more blob than person now, and steadily rose in height. The white forms flailed, green and brown muck constantly secreting from the holes which they emerged, until the appalling thing towered above the boys, seeing them with no eyes, sensing them with no senses, preying on them with no mercy.

Here, here it was! The boys exchanged frantic glances, realizing it at the same time. This was the boogie man!

The boys scattered. They fled into the forest, screams trailing in the

air behind them. It was pitch-black by now—it was almost comedic how the troop members hit trees head-on and bonked into one another, acting like headless chickens. Except it wasn't very funny, not in the broad daylight of the next day.

For when the school bus came to pick up the boy scout troop, there were no boys to fill its seats. The wind rasped through the torn plastic of collapsed tents, spotted with insect guts and human blood.

The next time you feel the hairs on your arms being disturbed, or a slight itch against your scalp, my suggestion to you is to scrub yourself raw with soap and burn your clothes, or risk the fate of Mark Raymore and Troop 60012.