

# Creeper (Excerpt)

By

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A sky devoid of stars or moon pressed down on San Francisco. A steady drizzle dampened the already chilled night air. Both the street lights and the headlights of cars cast eerie glows across the cityscape. Cars sped along the streets, spraying oil-slicked gutter water into the air. People with and without umbrellas hurried about their business, eager to get out of the foul weather. No one paid much attention to the wailing sirens in the distance. But most did notice the wild-looking man with the blood-smeared face and hands that shrieked like a hurt animal and ran with wild abandon amongst them. Brandishing a bloody knife, the stranger struck out like a viper, cutting and shoving those in his way, the wounded people falling and crying out in shock, pain, and fear as they hit the rain-slicked pavement.

Detective Nick Street followed this wild man in hot pursuit. God, how he hated Halloween; every year, all the crazies came out—this Halloween was no different—and the perp he now chased was by far the craziest he'd ever seen. Heart pounding, almost out of breath, the detective ran around or hurdled over fallen, wounded civilians that were left in the perp's wake. His shoes slapped through puddles and pounded on wet pavement as he picked

up speed and narrowed the gap. His .38 Chief's Special remained holstered for now, for there were too many civilians in the line of fire. But he would pull it when the time came; he wasn't about to let this perp get away.

No matter what.

Not after what he and his partner Stephanie Staple had seen back at the crime scene—where she remained at least long enough to hurry back to their car and call in for backup before following. Even as Nick gave chase—with Stephanie surely not far behind—he couldn't wipe the horrible carnage of the crime scene from his mind's eye. After fifteen years as a police officer and supposedly hardened to the core, he had never seen or smelled anything quite like it:

The female victim's throat had been ripped open as if by a rabid animal, blood spurting into the air and mixing with the rain like some kind of macabre cocktail. The woman had also been sliced open breast to pubis. Her organs—drenched in body fluids, blood, and rain—spilled out of her as she convulsed and shuddered on the wet pavement. Worse, the perp Nick now chased had been bent over his victim on hands and knees, reminding Nick of a dog at its food bowl. The man growled too as he ravaged the poor woman's insides. Nick had jumped from the car and yelled at the perp to stop. The man had immediately jumped up and started running, body organs still hanging from his bloody mouth.

At the sight, Stephanie had stopped to hurl her bean burrito she'd eaten for dinner. Then, after wiping slick remnants from her mouth, she had yelled, "I'm calling for backup."

Nick wanted to barf his Carne Asada burrito too as he took off after

the perp but more from the caustic odor of the slaughter bombarding him rather than the sight of it. Somehow, though he had forced the vile discharge back down his throat and began pursuit.

Now, blocks away from the scene and with the perp just ahead, the horrible stench still hid within Nick's nostrils. His stomach still churned. His Mexican dinner still threatened to charge up his throat. But somehow he held it down and picked up speed just as the perp turned a sharp corner between two tall buildings. Nick followed but stopped short just around the corner.

Breathing hard, heart racing, Nick pulled his revolver. Rotten garbage accosted him, and he again felt as though he might upchuck. Choking the burning bile back down, he wiped rain from his face and pushed rain-slicked, blond hair from his eyes, straining to see. The narrow alleyway that stretched out before him was dimly lit due to lights coming through several windows from both buildings. Mostly, however, the lighted windows were too high up, and even those had shades drawn. As a result, Nick couldn't see much and had no idea if the alley was a dead end or not. He knew the perp had stopped running, though, because the slap of his footsteps had fallen silent. In fact, the alley was dead quiet except for the patter of rain and a low growl emanating from somewhere within the surrounding dark. It was no animal that growled, though; Nick was sure of that.

The perp was somewhere close.

But where?

Nick pulled a small flashlight from the inside breast pocket of his jacket. He aimed the flashlight with one hand and the revolver with the other as he inched his way through the rain and dark, down the alley. At the

alley's end, he found his perp.

The wild man crouched low to the ground, half hidden by wooden crates and garbage cans. The knife he held out, threatening attack. The low growl Nick had heard earlier—just as he had suspected—rumbled in the perp's throat.

“Don't move, fuck-wad,” Nick warned, inching closer. He shone the narrow flashlight beam onto the perp's face. At the sight, he couldn't stifle a gasp.

The perp sneered, baring bloody teeth that were caked with human flesh and tissue. The knife's blade too revealed remnants of the victim. But it wasn't the carnage or the growl that had caused Nick to gasp. It was the perp's eyes; they were orbs, as black as obsidian, reflecting both light and evil.

After again gulping half-digested chunks of burrito back down, Nick repeated the warning. “Don't move.”

At that, the perp replaced his growl with incoherent mumblings, whisperings that almost sounded like hissing snakes.

Nick strained to hear, to understand.

“No ... yes,” the perp hissed. He glanced furtively about as he spoke. “Can't do it. Want to. Need to. No. Can't. Won't. Can. Deserves it. Yes. No. Shut up.” He grabbed his head with his free hand and pulled at his wild hair as if trying to rip it out. The other hand still brandished the knife.

*He's arguing with himself*, Nick thought. He kept both the light and gun trained on the target.

“Fucker deserves what he gets,” the perp continued, still pulling at his

hair with one hand and waving the knife about with the other. “Shut up. No. Tired. Can’t. Won’t. Yes. Will. Must. No. Shut up.”

Nick knew he needed to take control of the situation; the guy was definitely insane. “Put the knife down,” he commanded. “No one else needs to get hurt.”

The perp let go of his hair. He chuckled—wicked, devilish. “No one else hurt.” He chuckled again. “Shit.” He gave furtive side-long glances to his side as if someone crouched next to him. “No one else hurt,” he repeated to his invisible friend as if relaying a joke. “Shit. No one else hurt.”

“Put the damn knife down,” Nick shouted this time.

His mind shouted, *Where’s Stephanie?*

“I will shoot,” he warned.

“Deserves it. Told you. Must. Yes. Will. Deserves it. Definitely. Fucker deserves all it gets.”

One side of the argument suddenly seemed to be winning ... and not the good side.

He needed to act quickly. Nick shouted, “Put the—”

The perp’s guttural growl cut Nick’s words off. He lunged, the blade of the knife swiping the air as he attacked.

Nick pulled the trigger without hesitation. The report resounded through the alley. Nick’s ears rang. Gun smoke burned his nostrils.

The perp hit the pavement hard, collapsing face down into a rain puddle that quickly turned red with blood. He didn’t move or utter another sound.

Still aiming both his flashlight and revolver, Nick inched forward. He

kicked the knife away and nudged the perp with the toe of his shoe. Getting no reaction, he used his foot to flip the perp onto his back. He shone the light onto the man's face; the once black orbs were now dim and lifeless. He turned off the flashlight, pocketed it, and just to be sure knelt down to check for a pulse. None.

Nick stood. Held breath rushed out of him. He felt soaked and exhausted. His athletic body and taught muscles relaxed. His gun hand hung at his side, the revolver's muzzle warm against his wet pants leg.

Not for the first time he thought, *Where in the hell is Stephanie?*

Nick stared at the crazy, dead man lying at his feet.

Blood seeped from the guy's chest wound, and a steady stream of water and blood trickled along the alley.

Nick was glad the monster lying at his feet was dead. At the same time, he was sorry he had had to be the one to do the killing; he got no satisfaction out of ending a life, no matter how evil that life had been.

He was about to holster his revolver when he saw it ... or at least thought he saw it. Reflexively, he took a step back but strained to see. Something that looked like black oil oozed from the dead man's mouth, nose, eyes, and ears.

Read the rest of the story in

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