

Lori R. Lopez



Horrendus

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Horrendus

by Lori R. Lopez

Fairy Fly Entertainment

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A demonic entity will return at Midnight on All Hallows' Eve to claim the lives of a child from each family. A young woman scoffs at the legend and invokes the monster's rage. She must face the truth, that he is real, and stand up to him alone to save her village.

Luwynda is the only person brave enough to laugh in the face of the legendary monster who arrives to collect kids instead of candy one Halloween Night. Defying prophecy, the brash girl finds herself confronting Horrendus in a hopeless effort to thwart his wicked toll. She knows a thing or two about bullies. But can she end the curse or is her village damned? From *The Macabre Mind Of Lori R. Lopez*, a collection of thirteen chillers.

“’T WAS THE EVENTIDE of an autumn day, the merchants closing shop, families gathered to sup ere shuttering eyelids for the night. Hens began a ruckus, clamoring as if some demon were amongst them. And, indeed, one was.”

The Storykeeper paused for a drag on his pipe and a slurp of his drink. Villagers huddled around him, adults and children alike, waiting as if entranced. They knew the legend well, yet each word was a drop of nectar to parched ears hungering for excitement.

“Out from the gritty tarrish depth of the forest he came, the accursed heathen conceived of a devil’s dark unsavory spite. He was so awful, so disgusting, the town called the wretch Horrendus and feared him like nothing else that ever walked.

“The monster’s first meal was a grizzled codger like myself, singing, weaving a trail to his door from visiting a friend. He cried out at the common, passing the cheer-lit windows of his neighbors. They’d find what was left in a field, devoured and spat out in disgust by no beast that any could name — until they gave him a title.”

The teller of tales swigged from a tankard then puffed heavily, cheeks expelling a ball of somber gray smoke about his head. Sagist Rogan cleared his throat harshly.

“The second was a maiden, a lovely girl fair and ripe, and they felt her loss profoundly.

“The folk knew it was no random act. The village had been marked for desecration. A hunting band set out to slay the miscreant. ’Twas their solitary hope. Stout brave men, the eleven did not return. Thirteen heads were tossed from the fog in fury. Heroic bodies lay shredded, their pieces scattered all directions.

“This town’s doom had been sealed.

“Livestock and horses vanished the next night. Ground was matted with scraps of hide and feathers. A day later, more or less, every woodland animal for miles was taken. Birds flew off in trepidation. Then crops were spoiled, trampled or uprooted.

“The frightened populace was willing to forsake their creed for a darklord in order to survive.

“‘Horrendus!’ they wept, as if a prayer, ‘what have we done to deserve your vile unyielding wrath? How can we serve you, Master?’

“The ogre bade like peals of thunder, ‘You must spread my name, father to son, so all will hear of me. It is a simple task but if you neglect to comply, the consequence shall be dire. I will destroy your village as if it never stood. All that is asked beyond this, the life of one boy or girl from every bloodline in your midst on each centennial of my nascence. Do not begrudge me. And do not beg. I have no mercy, for I have no heart.’

“And so it is that the demon reappears to collect his due — a sample of every family’s young on his Hundredth Anniversaries. We must not forget lest we incur his rancor and another famine strike. Or this town be swept from the very soil on which it was built!”

Here the story typically ended, with a note of warning delivered like a familiar moral, a stock religious lesson. The audience sighed, relishing its conclusion.

This time, however, the harbinger sucked his pipe decisively then leaned forward to declare, “Those alive today have grown complacent, gone back to olden ways. Heed my words, the date of reckoning is upon us! At the stroke of Twelve he will resurrect, arriving like the sough of the wind to claim his chosen desserts!”

People gasped. They had never heard this version of the tale. Some were afraid, others enraged. Only one believed it a jest.

Her voice rang out. “You are all fools if you credit his nonsense! How many times has he regaled us in this manner, spouting these preposterous notions, and yet who can honestly say they saw the beast or knows of any who did? It is a myth, a tale for All Hallows to spook the children. Monsters do not exist, just men who gnash their molars and grope at greater power! Every death can be explained by some genuine cause. Wisen up, the lot of you! Else, like a mob of starved Moor-Hounds you may tear at each other!”

Silence greeted the scornful pronouncement. Eyes pinned her to the rear of the hall, lantern light gilding her complexion between raven tresses. She met the stares, her features bold.

The Storykeep’s face had paled. His smoldering pipe had fallen. His mug spilled its dregs. “Sacrilege!” Rogan shouted, lips trembling. He had performed his duty, sounded the alarm, exactly as his forefathers had done for generations. Who was this child to cast doubt like a stone of public condemnation?

“Do you worship devils, then?”

The crowd was mortified.

“Giving credence to this rubbish is no different,” the girl accused. “You give power to Darkness and invite it to step through the door.”

“What would you have us do, Luwynda Maundrell?” the wife of a farmer demanded. “If you’re so clever, tell us how we’re to stop him — whether man or monster — from taking our children!”

Voices crescendoed in agreement.

“If he should come,” she humored, “like any bully he would covet respect, timorous admiration. Take that away, ignore him, and you’ll deprive him of strength. Your *monster* will evaporate, I promise.” Luwynda strode to the portal, turning heads in her wake.

The same heads began to nod. Her words made sense. They desperately wanted to believe there was hope.

Solely the augur was left shaking his noggin.

Villagers bustled to their hearths, mothers clutching babes a little tighter, daring to dream that by disregarding the fear they could subdue it.

All Hallows’ Eve would expire like any other night. No bonfire. Absent most of the annual rituals to ward off foul revenants. They had only to pretend it wasn’t The Deadline.

But contrary to their fervent desires, the girl’s disbelief and their general attitude of indifference would summon the ghoul before the hour of his birth.

Shrieking with antagonism, aching for revenge, he crept from the shadows of the timber to convince a pack of faithless folk he was no idle superstition.

When his ghastly screams were discerned, they knew at once though they had never heard such despicable cries. Families filled the common, jabbering.

“You were wrong!” they verbally accosted, words and gazes hurled like lances.

“Anger has made him stronger!”

“And fetches him sooner!”

“Perhaps this time he will take us all!”

“No,” the girl stated quietly. “It is me that he wishes. I shall go to him and put an end to this terror.”

“What can you do that our heroes could not?” The Teller gruffly disdained.

“I can outsmart him!” Luwynda replied with brash confidence and a wink. “In my experience, bullies are not very bright.”

The girl marched forth, bearing no weapon or shield, with merely her wits and steely assurance for protection.

The villagers flocked into the hall and barricaded its entrance with wood tables and chairs then hunkered to wait, sheltered from the onslaught of the monster’s enmity. Not one fragment of reliance endured that the girl was anything but insane for imagining she might defeat the beast alone and unarmed. Yet none of them would join the fey female on her mission of madness.

A cold wind rattled branches. The gust stirred crisp embers of an orange carpet that crackled like flames beneath her boots.

“What are you doing?” she muttered to herself, attempting to tread softly, grasping her cloak as if chilled. “You’re not even dressed proper for a fight.” She peered down at her long skirt. “You could’ve at least borrowed a pair of britches!”

Luwynda faltered as a swirl of fog parted and the cretin became clear out of the blackness surrounding him. He had reached the end of the grass at the edge of the village. On the summit of a gentle slope a row of carved and flickering gourds grimaced, a flimsy line of defense. The Sagist’s work, she assumed, a ridiculous tradition! What good did it do except draw attention — show the barbarity precisely where to come?

The girl steadied her gait, sauntering past the pumpkins — her skirt and cloak cinched — advancing till she was near enough for a chat.

Horrendus met her approach with a snarl of derision: “You must be the mocker.”

“And what if I am?”

“You will die first,” the animus stated.

“But shouldn’t you save the best for last?” challenged the girl.

“Hmm, you might have a point.” A ruminative interval. “If I wanted your opinion!” The fiend nastily swung a forelimb to deal a crushing blow.

The girl lithely ducked, then sprang from a crouch through the Daemon-Troll’s massive trunken legs.

A nimble somersault, rendered awkward by her attire. She leapt up behind and gave him a shove. Caught off balance, the heavy lout pitched to sprawl clumsily on a hideous oversized countenance.

He straightened to a towering height of brawn, sinews rippling, morbid expression irate. Shambling in a semicircle to confront his foe, pocked writhing flesh seeming to crawl, he spewed a blast of dust like dragon breath.

Luwynda blinked. Wiping a hand over her visage, she calmly flicked the dirt aside. “You don’t have to be rude!” she chided.

“You’ve got it reversed. I don’t have to be polite!” the uncouth villain hawed, gloatishly smirking.

He frowned. “Why do you not fear me?”

“I don’t believe in you,” shrugged Luwynda.

Incredulous he grilled, "You doubt your own eyes?"

"I doubt myself constantly. Eyes, ears, nostrils, tongue. Even my knees. And my brain above all," the girl retorted.

"What you believe is of no matter. I am fact," Horrendus rumbled.

Aware she was no match for him physically, Luwynda spread her bare hands. "I guess we should get on with it," she invited. "Here I am."

With a greedy triumphant grin, the beast took a step forward. Suspicion clouded his aspect. Hesitant, he glowered at his diminutive opponent. "What's the trick?" he queried, actually sounding concerned.

"Why does there have to be a trick?" Luwynda parried.

"No one offers something for nothing," the ghoul derived. "For every treat there must be a trick!"

"Some gifts are freely given," disputed his plucky adversary, whose odds of winning this battle were as slim as her frame.

The creature reacted startled for an instant. The tenet was devoutly ingrained. He lacked any sense of trust other than in the world's corruption, and the slightest thread of optimism. His character was as bleak and barren, as bitter as a pool of tar.

Then he laughed, his body quaking with hilarity, the chortles booming and breaking. Luwynda had to cover her ears.

Abruptly sober, Horrendus venomously oathed, "On this occasion *my* rule applies!"

The decree knocked Luwynda to the ground.

Scrambling to her feet, the girl shook dead leaves and grass from her cloak. "No deception was meant," she stated, "but if you must have a trick, I shall do my utmost to oblige!"

Horrendus gave a satisfied snort.

The girl folded her arms.

Impatience swiftly overcame the beast. "WELL???" he bayed.

"There's a degree of surprise necessary in trickery," construed Luwynda. "It won't be easy to dupe you if you expect me to, now will it?"

"I suppose not," the monster granted.

He wavered in befuddlement, of which the girl seized full advantage. Agile and tough from toiling in the field, the female proceeded to venture halfway around her combatant, forcing him to follow. She then pushed him back several paces by twisting his arm, yanking his chin hairs, poking his belly, and boxing his snoot.

Each stunt provoked him until his ire roiled like broth in a kettle. Although sharper than she had estimated, this made him less astute and he literally fell for her prank, tripping in a shallow rut and crashing to the earth.

He lay stunned. The feeble ploy irked him further and he rose more immense, more imposing. He was so ravenous with rage he drooled.

"I'll enjoy crunching your bones in my teeth!" pledged the brute.

Gulping audibly, Luwynda bombarded the ogre with Jack-O-Lanterns — conceding they were a bit useful after all.

Horrendus flung off pumpkin shards and wax. A candle flame ignited his beard. He spun smacking his jaw, stumbling in retreat. The blaze abated and he observed his ankles tethered by sturdy grass, fettered with vines.

Luwynda threw her mantle upon him as a net then kicked his bulky thrashing form. The ruse delayed him sufficiently for the girl, overcome by dubious dread, to disappear.

When Horrendus peeled the cape away and wrenched his feet loose, she was gone. A roar emerged from deep in his soul.

“You cannot escape!” he growled. “I was forged by the ills and evils your kind harbor within and conceal behind their doors! You will not be rid of me unless you purge yourselves of your vices and flaws! I shall hunt you down as you deserve for this betrayal!”

The monster stalked the village, pondering where to begin.

Squatting in an alley between cottages, Luwynda strained to revive her courage. She had to halt him or the village would pay for her mistakes. Yet this was no average thug. He was big and loathsome, a dozen ruffians rolled into one.

Bullies tended not to see the harm they did, or failed to consider how they would feel in their victim’s shoes. Some were victims themselves and those were the dumbest, she contemned, because they should know better.

A vision plagued her mind of a small girl being tormented by another girl a couple years older. The larger child gripped her sister’s arm and sneered, “You mealy-mouthed leech-lipped tagalong! I hate you! Everyone thinks you’re so pretty and perfect. Let’s see if they like you coated in mud!” She shoved the girl into a puddle.

An earlier vision haunted her. A second pair of sisters, similar ages and features, beheld their images perched on the bank of a pond.

“Why do the fishies have to stay in the lake?” the cuter child asked.

The older sibling rolled her eyes. “Luwynda, you dolt, how many times do I have to explain? They can’t breathe the air no more than we can breathe water!”

“Why don’t they learn?”

“Because they’re too stupid like you! I swear, you must’ve been birthed without a thought in your skull!” Luwynda’s big sis elbowed her in the ribs.

“Ow!” Hugging herself, Luwynda’s foot slid on wet ground and she splashed. Arms and legs flailed. She hadn’t been taught to swim. She glimpsed her sister cackling. Instead of rescuing her, the eldest sibling fled. Clinging tree roots that projected below the surface, extending out of the shore, Luwynda hauled herself from the pond gasping and choking.

Blinking in the Present, she warmed with shame over how cruel she had been to her own little sister. She blushed, too, at the spectacle she had made of herself by boasting that she could save her town. Why did she have to blurt trumpety like the village idiot? She was as stupid as her other sister used to say she was!

Belatedly, hunched like a coward, she realized it took an entire village to stand against oppression. They needed to quit arguing and finding fault amidst themselves to recognize what was truly intolerable — that which threatened their young.

Fists clenched, uncrimping her legs, she drifted to the center of the common. Horrendus was sniffing doors, seeking the smell of fright and sweat, listening for the hollow thud of hearts. He was almost at the hall.

She raised her voice: “I cannot do it alone! I can’t thwart this tyranny without your help! A monster is at your door and I am responsible, yes, but so are you! We’ve allowed him to exist with our weakness and excess! He embodies the sins of our society — the hatred and envy and avarice. There *are* such monsters, created from the darkness we embrace. His malice is a reflection of us. Let us oppose him together! It is the only way to finish this!”

Horrendus glared briefly and continued snuffling. Outside the doorway of the hall his search culminated. Like a sentry the beast posed in anticipation. He hoped her impassioned plea would lure them.

Witnessing the scheme, Luwynda moaned, “I’m leading them into a trap!”

She was on the verge of yelling for the townsfolk to remain in the building when columns of people filed from either flank of the structure. They had climbed through a window.

Equipped with clubs pried or split from tables and seats, whatever else they could convert or had brought as a weapon, the villagers assembled a human wall and promptly ringed the intruder.

Horrendus revolved to meet their eyes. He saw disapproval. A spirit of unity and purpose. They were determined to protect the children, their homes. What he didn’t see were panic and awe.

The creature mentally debated. His gut yearned to be fed. His body had no cravence for a beating. Fear won. He charged at the throng, burst past them and speedily stomped to the refuge of trees and tomb.

The crowd rejoiced. They celebrated freedom, a new era, with music and food and revelry until Dawn.

Luwynda danced and frolicked. Her parents were deceased. Her sisters and she rarely conversed, despite sharing the same quarters. She had felt isolated. Now she was part of something. She had earned respect. A place in the community.

At Sunrise, as friends prepared to sleep, the girl blissfully roamed. She had never been so happy and couldn’t settle down, couldn’t contain her exhilaration. She didn’t want her siblings to ruin the mood. Perhaps even they would accept and appreciate her! But she didn’t care to risk. Giggling, she skipped across a meadow. And discovered herself in the forest.

Immediately the atmosphere flipped. Light was dimmed. A comfortable glow became a dank shiver that penetrated to her marrow. Luwynda heard a branch rustle. The snap of a bird’s wings bolting into flight. A furtive step on dried leaves and sticks. The girl’s head jerked right and left. Her chest echoed.

And then she was racing, clawed and slapped by needled boughs, skirt and retrieved cape snagging as she hurtled a maze of shaded corridors.

He moved in a blur of fluid menace like a gang of wolves. For True Evil there were no boundaries. He was still coming.

An anxious sob and she sat up, safe in her bed. It was a dream, she panted. Just a dream.

Her cheek stung. Lifting fingertips, she traced a scratch. The wound was bleeding.

He separated from a corner, sullen and horrid, his neck arched to fit under the ceiling.

Bending at the waist, his wicked teeth nigh brushing her nose, he uttered a single proclamation: “Mend thy neighbors like a broken fence . . . or within two lifetimes, I will snatch your descendant and theirs!”

Appalled, her lids slammed shut and reopened. He had departed with an odorous exhalation. Yet she knew, defying every rational objection or law, a century hence the monster would return.

It seemed inevitable.

About the author and artist

As a devoted Horror Fan her entire life (as far as she can tell), Lori R. Lopez has never shied from creepy things, monsters, or bullies. In fact, she confronted older and taller bullies as a child and stood her ground. She learned to fight to defend herself. In “Horrendus” a monster of a bully comes to town, wanting to devour children. The author drew on personal experience and created a female Protagonist willing to defend her town against this brute.

Lori was also very adept at standing on her head while she was young and would do so anywhere, even on a blacktop-covered playground during school Recesses. This probably gave her a unique perspective on the world, which she endeavors to share in her poems and tales. But she wouldn’t advise taking this stance when meeting a bully or monster or combination of the two. Then it is best to be on your feet and either ready to run or standing up against meanies. There is a time to fight for what is right and a time to avoid battles. In most cases except the most extreme, it is highly recommended to use words of peace rather than fists or weapons or any sort of violent measures.

DISCLAIMER: Do not try this at home. If you happen to possess a Magic Wand, better to zap yourself out of the situation than turn someone into a frog. Bunnies are nice. Or squirrels. The world could always use more of them. Frogs, if they pile up, tend to be rather annoying with their ribbits and croaks. Otherwise, they are also very nice. Always be kind to animals, at home and everywhere you go. But beware of pumpkins because on Halloween they like to make evil faces and roll after the unsuspecting!



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Look for the author's [horror collection](#) *The Macabre Mind Of Lori R. Lopez*, containing "Horrendus"!

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