

Just Desserts

By Aparna B.

Victoria sighed. Time to feed the Cyclops again. She could hear the creature stomping his feet and whining in the basement.

Victoria began preparing the “meal.” She hoisted the kitchen trash can and lugged it to the stove. She reached inside the cabinet and took out a wide pot. Victoria filled it up halfway with water, set it on the stove to boil. She sighed again. She rested her elbows on the granite counter, the soft sound of bubbling water filling the room. There she was, lonely in the woods, alone with her thoughts.

Almost alone. There was, of course, the Cyclops to consider. The crustyeyed, drylipped, beigeskinned creature had been dumped on Victoria seventeen years ago, when she was seven. She had always dreamed of a pet monster, but the Cyclops had proved grim.

The monster companion Victoria wanted had swirled in her thoughts every day. She was unlike her classmates; she did not fear monsters, but loved them. She lived in her own little world, imagining that supernatural creatures would cherish her as their own child.

“I wish,” she had said, that I will have a monster friend.” Victoria had dreamed that the creature would protect her from the bullies who teased her because of her pale skin, her bony arms and legs, and worst of all, her imaginary monster friend. Victoria had spoken to and “played” with the nonexistent Cyclops, believing that it would shield her from the malicious taunts that surrounded her.

Someone took pity and gave this poor girl a Cyclops because this someone was so very annoyed that she was wishing for this Cyclops so much. The girl's parents soon found out about the Cyclops-it's not easy to hide such a thing--and were horrified. They decided that they didn't want a girl who was closely connected to a hulking monster. They ditched her with the Cyclops in a little cabin in the woods, and Victoria had watched in utter shock as the battered old car disappeared behind the horizon.

After a few weeks of denial, Victoria tried to contact someone, but her parents had chosen her drop-off place wisely, so she was unable to reach anyone at all. Victoria was sentenced to a life in the small cabin in the woods with the Cyclops.

You may wonder why she took care of the Cyclops if she hated it so much. The truth is, Victoria was afraid. The creature may have an IQ lower than a rug, but it was immense and muscular. The girl had feared that if she didn't feed the thing, it would go into a rampage and kill her. She despised the Cyclops, but she was forced to nurture it and care for it forever.

The bubbling noises grew louder and Victoria walked over to stir the water. While she was stirring, she dropped the contents of the huge, reeking trash can into the giant vessel. An uproarious hiss emitted from the water, and thick billows of steam erupted from the pot. Victoria kept stirring, until the trash had turned the water a nauseating green. She grabbed the large trash can lid and poured the pot's steaming load into the top of the trash can, and carefully walked the concoction to the basement door.

Victoria lifted a quavering hand to the faded silver door knob while she forced herself to take a deep breath and slowly turned the knob. She heard a small *hum* of contentment from

Crassus (what she had named him), acknowledging the scent of both human and freshly boiled rubbish. Victoria daintily made her way down the steps, careful not to trip and spill the food. As she stepped off the final stair, Victoria saw the Cyclops who had terrorized her once, but he had now become an ally of sorts.

The most menacing feature was the huge blood red eye which seemed to follow Victoria's every movement, carefully scrutinizing her actions as a whole. The eye made Victoria creepy, and whenever she entered the basement, she wanted to leave immediately, as there was always a cold, evil aura in the room.

Crassus moved slowly and that huge eye danced around in its socket seeming to take mental notes. Victoria shut her eyes tightly, and held out the makeshift platter. She felt it snatched from her, and she heard the revolting noise of Crassus dumping his meal into his gargantuan mouth and gnashing it in his open mouth. Not a pretty sight to behold.

When the sounds receded, Victoria wrenched open her eyes to see the mess that was left after the Cyclops ate-green blotches splattered on the floor, the walls, and a little on the ceiling. But Victoria couldn't help but notice that there wasn't much mess. And whenever there was less mess than usual, it meant that Crassus wanted something more....

"You want dessert, don't you?" Victoria cried. Crassus nodded hungrily, and when it noticed Victoria's indecisiveness, his eyes narrowed. Victoria gulped. "I'll do it! Don't you worry, Crassus," she stammered.

Victoria hadn't given Crassus dessert in a long time, so she had a pretty good idea of which one the Cyclops had in mind.

She knew every ingredient in Deluxe Cyclops dessert, but she couldn't help but think that she had forgotten one. She crossed over to the dusty kitchen counters and picked up the only book in the house: *The Ultimate Guide to Cyclops Cooking*. Victoria gingerly opened the aged leather cover and tenderly flipped through the stale yellowed pages to the page labeled, "Traditional Deluxe Cyclops Dessert". She quickly skimmed through the small words, passing over the ingredients she knew, until she finally reached the last one. She gasped.

One human, it read.

Suddenly, sharp raps could be heard at her door. A visitor? She had never gotten a visitor in the seventeen years she had lived in her cabin in the woods. Slowly, she strode towards the door and twisted open the rusty doorknob.

A large man, with biceps that bulged through his thin black shirt, stood outside. His short brown hair shone in the woodland light. When he saw the much smaller frame of Victoria, he smiled a friendly grin. "Hey, Victoria," he greeted in a deep voice. "Remember me?"

Victoria's breath caught in her chest. *Ren Harvey*, she thought. This boy had been the worst of all her bullies. He had beaten her up, and threatened to do worse if she told on him. Victoria suddenly felt a rush of bold fury. She wanted to kill this man, for making her life so much more terrible than it already was, for being a twit who took out his anger on others. She closed the door a little, for she was anxious about what he was doing there, and what he was going to do to her.

"Ren...?" Victoria said softly, shrinking back. Ren seemed to realize how imposing his presence was, and hastily tried to explain.

“Hey, I’m not trying to hurt you or anything...” Ren trailed off. “So I could say sorry. I wanted to say sorry for what I did to you all those years ago! I was being such an idiot, and I didn’t know what I was doing... I was just so mad that I didn’t have any friends, so I decided to take it out on everyone else because they weren’t being my friends. And I hurt you, and I’m sorry!”

An insane idea shot through Victoria’s mind.

“Hey Ren, why don’t you come inside? I can fix us some...food,” Victoria stammered. She stepped out of the way and gestured inside, hoping this seemed welcoming enough. Ren stepped inside, taking in his surroundings. Victoria deftly double locked the door. Ren, oblivious to his entrapment, sat at one of the wooden chairs at the dining table, the timber splintering under his weight.

Victoria began swiftly gathering up all of the normal ingredients of the Deluxe Cyclops Dessert: sugar, lemons, flour, eggs, chocolate morsels, and...the secret ingredient.

“So, what’s the all-star cook making today?” Ren joked. Victoria chuckled. “Well, it’s a little something I call...” Victoria paused as she thought for the right name. “Supreme Cuisine,” she improvised.

“Sounds fancy! I’m getting hungry just thinking about it,” Ren whistled. Victoria laughed. As she was preparing the ingredients in her head, she halted.

Victoria whipped around and smiled nervously. “Oh, you know, I think I forgot an ingredient in the basement!” She threw out part of the truth. Ren stood up.

“How about I go get it for you? Just tell me what it looks like, I can go get it,” he offered.

Victoria's eyes flashed with alarm. "Oh no! It's fine! I can get it myself... I mean, you're the guest and everything. Don't spoil it with boring ol' work!" Victoria practically shoved Ren back into his seat, and the small chair almost broke.

Ren looked surprised, but didn't say anything but a perky, "Okie dokie."

She approached the scarred door that opened to the basement. Slowly, she turned the doorknob once again and silently willed the Cyclops to stay silent.

Her entreaty did not go unheard. Crassus understood. He should stay quiet until his dessert came. And he knew that the person upstairs would not be leaving. Crassus might have been dumb, but even he was smart enough to know that Victoria wanted the man dead. Crassus licked his chops. And he remained quiet.

Victoria proceeded down the creaky steps, and when Crassus came into view, she pressed a finger to her lips. Victoria snuck over to a small corner with several old wooden crates stacked up on top of each other. Victoria waddled on her hands and knees over to where the knife was hidden and grabbed the long, serrated blade.

She almost didn't hear the harsh creak of the basement door opening and closing, the groans of the rickety steps.

Ren was coming down.

Victoria became aware of this and slightly panicked, but then an eerie calm washed over her. She knew what to do. *It's time for Ren to get his just deserts*, Victoria thought evilly. Victoria could hear Ren's heavy footsteps come down as Crassus moved to block Ren's way to enter the basement, and Victoria's heart pounded so loudly she was sure Ren could hear it.

When Ren reached the bottom, she heard his loud cry. Crassus's size was frightening, she knew. Her grip on the knife tightened until her knuckles turned white and fierce thoughts raced through her head.

"Crassus. Out of the way," Victoria ordered, and the lumbering creature shuffled reluctantly into a corner. Victoria felt strength rush into her veins.

"Victoria? What's going on?" Ren stammered, and shakily tore himself away from the wall. "What was that thing? A... a Cyclops?"

Victoria laughed. "Well, use your head, Ren! It's got only one eye, and it's gigantic and scary.

Ren seemed more frightened by Victoria's change of personality, from a kind young woman to a psycho lady.

Victoria held up her thick blade, and it flashed menacingly. Ren visibly gulped.

"Why? I didn't mean to hurt you, it's just..." he trailed off, because they both knew very well that he clearly *had* meant to hurt her. Ren took a step closer to Victoria, ever so cautious, and tried to reason. "Please, I just wanted to say sorry! I just want to be friends!"

Victoria responded by pushing him against a wall. If he had tried, he could have easily pushed her away, but he was so paralyzed with fear that he didn't move a muscle, just stared down at the sharp knife Victoria wielded.

"Why do you want to do this so badly?" Ren whimpered as the blade drew closer. Behind Victoria, Crassus hummed happily, observing the scene and waiting for his dessert.

As she pressed the knife into his throat, beads of scarlet blood budded at his neck, and his eyes grew wild with pain.

She answered: “Oh, you know, Just dessert.”