

Section III: Creative Writing

The Grub

Aislinn Grimley

“Get it out.”

You have nothing else to say; this is much harder than your mum made it seem. The woman raises her eyebrows at you over the desk, somehow staring you down from a stunted swivel chair. Eyes fixed on your belly, she oscillates in her seat, head unmoving and birdlike, atop a swivelling body. Remember when your mum bought those chickens to keep you busy? It’s the same look. She’s saying something. It’s too late to listen. Just nod; that usually works.

The movement of your head draws her eyes back onto your face. For a moment, your eyes lock; her vague disdain hardens into something much clearer, much purer. You shouldn’t have nodded like that. Look away. A stack of forms lies blithely on the desk between you, soft blue and full of blank spaces. Just take one and sit down somewhere.

Your hand has already lifted a powder-blue corner when hers comes down on the whole pile, pinning your form to the rest of the papers.

“I said don’t bother – at this point you’ll need a referral from your GP.”

Her words are slow, syrupy like the honey your mum used to give you to mask the taste of your pills. She knows. She knows he said no; you should've realised he was talking behind your back. She probably laughed when he told her, too. Don't cover your ears, it's true. Why wouldn't they? It's such elegant justice: get caught trying to hurt the parasite, then let it nibble you up from the inside out. It's already been chewing for months. If you were smart, you would've noticed it before the doctor did, somewhere without a plastic uterus staring down at you and your mum's hand, chubby and too sympathetic, on your shoulder.

Her eyes back on your belly, bird-woman almost imperceptibly tilts her head, coldly scrutinising the too-late bulge, its brazen self-declaration through your shirt. You need to get out; she's making it chew faster. Don't look at her. Just go home. You've embarrassed yourself enough as it is.

That's right, out the doors, onto the footpath. Just go home.

You force your chin up, hand resting over the lump, the tightly-curved grub glowing green just beneath your navel. You can tell it's green by the cool light it casts on your red insides; it radiates out in all directions, as far as it can reach, until gravity wins, and it trickles, defeated, in viscous, sickly drips down your abdomen and into your legs. You shouldn't worry about that, though. It's dribbling so slowly that it's only now sloshing in your ankles. It won't reach your knees until the grub is swollen to twice its size, and pushes for freedom in every direction but 'out'. Be grateful it's still small, plucking away, with its thousand needle-legs, at the seams that hold you together.

Put your hand down, people are staring.

The man across the road, propped up like a scarecrow on a wire fence, he's hiding his

smirk in a mess of yellow paper, chewing a stack of bread, meat, cheese, bread again, with a jaw that must be rusted. How many of those did you have to make each time you ran away, before giving up and slinking back to your mum's doorstep? How many more would you have to make to keep a grub alive? Hungry man clearly doesn't care. Through his laboured chewing, his eyes linger, like bird-woman's, on your belly, until he has to move his head to follow it. You catch his eye, and he suddenly becomes much more interested in the burger. A frown flits across his face as he searches too hard for a taste somewhere in his mouthful. He swallows before he can find it. That's your fault. You need to move faster; he can smell the grub and its green light, leaking from the puncture marks it's left in your belly. Put your hand down and keep walking. You're only a hundred metres from the house; the footpath, a porridge-grey stripe before you, shrinks with every step. If you walk quickly, you'll leave it behind behind before the man finishes searching for the flavour in his burger. He's already taken another bite; you're running out of time. You're ruining his meal. The grub is ruining his meal. Put your hand down.

When you reach the front doors, you can feel him in the distance, muttering curses into the burger you poisoned. He'll still be able to see you if you stay on your front veranda. You have to get inside. You're taking too long with the spare key, fumbling under the mat like a toddler. The door opens from the inside before you can get it yourself, and suddenly a fat pair of arms takes you in a crushing embrace, squeezing the grub between your bodies. You've barely begun to squeeze back when suddenly she stoops and rests her chubby hands over it, cooing in the singsong voice that you loved so much when you were little.

"I knew she'd keep you, precious."

Look, even she's on the grub's side. Look at her relief, that it's still wriggling inside you,

rather than in a steel dish. Listen to her voice. Not the words, just the voice. No matter how the sounds arrange themselves, you know what they're saying: here's a new grub, an easy grub, a simple grub. Maybe this one will be better. What a relief, to love the little lump and forget the cocoon. She's only singing to make it chew faster, to unpick your every fibre, to stretch you until you burst.

It's stupid, the way you cover your ears like that.