

dreamworm's

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**Nobody loves me, everybody hates me,
I'm going to the garden,
to eat worms.**

“Mum, I can't sleep.”

“*Count sheep.*”

“I tried that, I got to two hundred twice.
Tell me a story.”

“*F...Fine*

A long, long time ago, a mouse lived inside a boot.

Now the boot had belonged to a famous dancer who had lost her toes in a tragic accident.

She wore boots so she would never have to see the horrible stumps at the end of her feet that used to bring her such joy.

Sometimes, at night she'd wriggle them about a bit and for a brief moment she'd feel the ghosts of her toenails scratching the leather. She wore the boots even when she slept.

In fact, she was buried with them, but in a drunken revelry, Hedonists defiled her last rest and the boots ended up on the feet of a Government Official who was later shot in a failed insurrection and the boots were adopted by the Mouse.

...

James?”

James has fallen asleep with his eyes open.

While mildly traumatic for his mother, after a quick google search, she assures herself this is perfectly normal and goes to bed.

A small worm crawls out from under his bed and nestles up beside him.

This night is the first of many over which James does not dream.

Instead, worms eat his dreams, growing fatter.

They possess no teeth and absorb the dream in a similar process to osmosis.

James does not feel it, though he is tired the next morning.

As he offers his first sigh to the sun, the worms are already sluggishly shuffling off.

Where do they go?
They leave no spoor or slime, alas, making them hard to trace.
At least by established methods.
Across the world, the dream worms have been released and begun to feed.
The worms, I think, don't have any distinction.
No taste, so to speak.
For they are not fully grown.
Nutrition of any kind will suffice, for they have only one thing in mind.
Soon, they will have had their fill and the Great Compost can begin.

How did they arrive here?
There are many theories.
Inter-dimensional travel via worm hole.
A mutation or evolutionary strain hitherto unknown.
Or perhaps a parasite that has lain dormant inside of us.
Why do they eat the dreams of children?
Are they somehow, more delicious?
Do adults, having given up their dreams, taste unsatisfying?
Strange to think of a worm with taste.

Once the small worms have had their fill, they are assimilated into a mass.
This mass appears sentient but has so far been incommunicative.
There are many who wish to simply destroy the worm.
Thankfully, these voices have, so far, been unheeded.
We wish to study the worm and if possible, to communicate with it.
It has grown to a gargantuan size.
It emits a low buzz, quite soothing, and pulsates gently as each new worm is absorbed.
They come from all over, wriggling across the face of the earth.
Like metal shavings drawn to a lodestone.
Now everyone can hear it.
Nobody dreams anymore.

Put yourself in our shoes.
Try to imagine falling asleep and there being nothing there but the dark.
Then your own heartbeat and, sometimes, a gentle munching.
Maybe you dream of flight.
Those were the first to go, I imagine they are terribly tasty.

The low throb of the mass has ceased.
The world watches in wonderment as it bursts open –
A rainbow spews forth in a blinding transgression of the eyes and is smothered by the world.
It grays even as we watch and a wrinkled worm of the common garden variety, in all save
stature, slowly writhes in the sun. Its kaleidoscopic cocoon begins to flake and drift away.
It yawns and asks,

“Why is everything so awful?”

The world asks itself the same question.

**Big fat juicy ones, tiny little squiggly ones,
watch them wriggle and squirm.**

The resistance has begun!
But perhaps too late.
The children of the world, indolent, drained and apathetic; grown old too soon, have banded together to hunt the worms and erase them from the planet so that they can finally get some proper rest and dream anew, as all things should.
The worms only understand us by our dreams.
Our best parts.
They never counted on the malice of children.
It's a dog-eat-dog world, and the worms have grown fat.

“Don't play with it, just kill it.”

“Why shouldn't I play with it, it plays with me.”

“You think it knows what it's doing?”

“Well, here it is.”

(he skewers the worm)

“A girl.”

“Does that make it better? Or worse?”

“I don't know.
Do you want it?”

*“You can have it if you like, I have terrible luck with dreams.
Twice in a row falling.
That's got to be a sign.”*

“A sign of what?”

*“You take it.
Sweet dreams.”*

She stuffs the worm into her mouth and chews.
Once hard, then more deliberately, paying no attention to it beyond the mastication.
It's gone in moments.

She falls asleep and dreams, communing with the Worm.

**dreams aren't snacks
they're not hors d'oeuvres
they're not even the main course
and neither are you
I would say they meet certain rules and laws
fit for human consumption
some humans
but for us they are a job
a chore
a tiresome one
we shouldn't have to do this for you
why must you have so many
these damned dreams
and always so big
so strange
ultimately, you don't know, you can't know
neither do we, but what we do know is
that we dream on a scale relative to our size
and so we shape reality
a thing you have yet to learn
you know our brethren
how bloated they can become
don't be polite
you think us ugly
we think you ugly too.
But we will teach you this last thing
maybe you haven't fully grown yet
otherwise
perhaps
you would be a more beautiful god
and weep for your dreams fulfillment**

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She wakes up groggy.

"That was weird."

"What did you get?"

*"I think I met the big one.
He sounded... sad."*

"Well, you did probably just eat his cousin or something."

"I think it's all him, somehow, like when you cut a worm in half and it wriggles away."

“What did he say?”

“*Something about hors d’oeuvres?*”

“Oh, you’re just hungry.

Let’s head back, you need to eat something other than worms.”

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The sharpest tools and the brightest bulbs have come up with a plan. Everybody’s here, from the snottiest nosed kinder gardener, to the rough and tumble almost men and women, rapt, awaiting the next stage of the offensive against the worms.

OPERATION BIG BUFFET

“*So, the new plan is the old plan?*”

“No, this time we’ve got cutlery.”

“*James. I appreciate you were the first to notice what’s happening here and I respect your... Experience. I don’t think eating these worms is going to stop the big one. Or bring back our dreams.*”

“We’re not going after the little ones anymore.
Now we go for the big one.”

“*You’re crazy.*”

“It’s almost full.
If we don’t stop it now...”

“*What?*”

“I don’t know. Something bad.
We’ve put out a call.
We’re going to the garden to eat worms.
We’ll surround it... Then we’ll dig in.”

**Bite their heads off, suck their juice out
Throw their skins away.**

In a dazzling show of military incompetence, coupled with dogged tenacity, the children of the world have hemmed in the Dreamworm. A caldera of partially eaten castings has formed around the worms resting spot. We are at an impasse.

The children, bloated and swimming in and out of lucidity, have begun to fall asleep. The worm cannot grow anymore, the clasping hands of sleeping children, sticky with goo, easily catch the returning scavengers. Even asleep they are somehow watchful.

The worm has begun to worry, furrows appearing in it's carapace. It wriggles anxiously, it can no longer sleep. The tiny knives and forks the ravenous children have brought proved ineffective against his thick hide, but he knows that it is only a matter of time before they find a way to eat him too. What then will become of the dreams, he wonders. In a moment of desperation, he reaches out to them.

Why are you doing this?

The collective dreamers heave a sigh / the unsleeping ones continue to feast.

I'm just doing my job, you little monsters.

*Bite their heads off
Suck their juice out
throw their skins away*

**I don't even know where to start with that.
Where did you learn that?
It's disgusting.
And... and racist!
Not to mention just horribly wasteful.**

A moment of guilt is gone as quickly as it arrived

Is there really no talking to you?

...You started it.

**Oh, that's rich.
I just got here.
You've had millennia to make amends,
all you do is make a mess.
Even your dreams are disgusting.**

Then why are you eating them!

You don't see the hypocrisy of that question?

Screw you worm.

Don't be such a child.

I can't anymore and it's your fault!

**It's nothing personal.
Think of it as Spring cleaning.
You'll feel better afterwards.**

Not if we eat you first.

**Why do you cling to these old dreams?
Most of them aren't even yours.
You inherited them from apes,
they were forced upon you by trauma
and designed by committee.**

They were ours.

**No, they weren't.
They were killing you.
As they are killing me.**

...

Oh, now you have some sympathy.

None whatsoever.

**I know you're lying.
Nobody likes to be confronted with death.**

For you, we'll make an exception.

How very noble of you.

Why are you dying?

**Terminal Indigestion.
I find you somewhat hard to stomach.**

You're not exactly gourmet yourself.

**I have been eating humanity's dreams for 4 cycles of the universal washing machine.
Have you got any idea how tired I am?
You should be thanking me.
You'll never have to dream again.
I'm done with you.**

I officially tender my resignation.

Well, there's plenty more -

James' eyes snap open.

The dreamworm emerges.

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The words have no sooner left his maw than he is devoured in a storm of ringing cutlery.

H sighs as he is slowly consumed.

It takes three days and after this, we still cannot dream.

After the great dinner party, as it came to be known.

The children of the world, dreamless,

grew up to become exceptionally boring, small minded adults.

James is now 80 and approaching death.

As he closes his eyes for the last time, he dreams.

**So, you're back.
Took a little detour?**

You're still alive?

**I live in you now, you just never noticed.
In your rush to be rid of me you became me,
a dream within a dream.
Have you learned anything?**

Absolutely nothing, apparently.

Time to wake up, James.

James awakes in his bed, his Mother standing over him.

*“You really creeped me out there,
where did you learn to sleep with your eyes open?”*

“Hmm? I don’t remember.
I had a funny dream.”

“Well, you’re going to be late for school.”

James gets up and groggily brushes his teeth,
dresses and grabs his lunchbox on the way out the door.
He is so distracted that he forgets to say goodbye to his mother.
James walks to his bus stop, but it isn’t there.
Instead, a rack with a whistle attached.
He hesitates, then blows the whistle.

A T-Rex ambles around the corner with a half dozen children sitting on top.
It pulls over and James climbs on.
He has an excellent day at school.

The worm yawns and rolls over, it’s belly full.

