

Bourne
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creative writing
workshops

Recoil

by Saffron Swansborough

I keep a diary because I'm losing track of time, and I need to remember what I do at night. During the day, I'm serving life in prison. When I fall asleep, I become a leech, with complete freedom of movement in the outside world. As soon as I enter my stretchy limbless body, I'm moving, because I'm trying to locate my daughter, who was five when I last saw her. I hunt living prey that can advance me across marshes to the village where we lived. I've sucked through fetid rats' weeping sores, the anuses of stray dogs, even tried to puncture the soft flesh beneath flying cockroach wings. Once I've landed on it, I'm in. When paws try to dislodge me, my rear sucker bears down and my teeth sink in harder.

This parasite is my vessel, my only hope of seeing my girl again.

But I fear what I will do when I find her.

After many months, I'm carried into civilisation clinging to a sparrow's thigh. As I roll my bulging scarlet gut to the bottom of a ditch, smells assault me. The velvet texture of humanity. New blood infused with tastes I have forgotten: wine, fish, cooked meat, spring water, fruits, cheeses. Spices. Perfumes. Sweetmeats. Through all of this though, I smell my child.

Before my arrival, I had direction - a straight line to the village. But now I'm here, I have no way of knowing how to trace my baby. It takes a week to plan what to do. But actually, there is only one way - and that's to burrow into, and be carried by, other children.

Toddling babies cry when I pierce them but they can't tell anyone what's wrong, so I go for them first and manage to cover some distance, but it's not enough. Her smell is fading. I need to risk being brushed off by bigger infants. I wait in a puddle and eventually latch onto a boy in school uniform, tunnelling down his sock. He's running while trying to unprise me. A bell rings. He stops. Everything goes bright. I'm whacked and sent flying across a room that smells of crayons.

Stronger than that is the scent of my daughter.

Turning to her smell, I see a girl with a teacher and I'm aiming for her like a bodiless crimson finger on the tip of a fired arrowhead. My teeth are splayed along my whole body ready to grab her and not let go. At the moment of impact she screams and something tries to tear me off her cheek. I bite harder. I know an ear is near. If I get in they won't find me. I won't lose her again. Whack. I'm half crushed, yet still I impale her face. Then... searing heat. I release and land on an outstretched palm. It's the teacher's hand. I know her smell. We shared a body. She's my daughter. She pincers me with tweezers and flicks the lighter open.