

We're in the bath. We're both naked. He's strapped to a chair, and I'm stood behind him.

We've cleaned the bathroom the best we can, but you can only get things so clean. The tiles are spotless, but the rough grout between them remains a dull beige. The exposed wall where tiles have been smashed off—by either the initial impact or later frustrated scavengers—was impossible to clean.

I loved him the moment I saw him. His hair was long and beautiful—black curls that flowed down over his shoulders and cascaded down his back like a tar waterfall.

The first time he saw me he shot me. I was only looking for food, but he didn't know that. I could have been anyone, so he shot me. But then he fell in love with me, too. It makes me feel safe, knowing he'll shoot anyone who comes near us.

He told me about the worms in this same bathroom, when he was pulling the bullet from my leg. How they're inside our heads. How they control what we think. How they stop us being free. They come from space, he says.

He flaps his arm out behind him, slapping at my leg with a limp hand. He's telling me he's ready. We read in some old books that you're meant to only numb the part that you're cutting into, but we've not been able to master it. The best we can do is numb the entire top half—we numb the head, and the numbness always carries down to the chest and the fingertips.

I tell him I love him, reach over, and squeeze his thigh so he can feel it. He stumbles through a vocal mush that doesn't sound like "I love you too" but it's what he means.

His head is already shaved. I fish the razorblade from the salt and alcohol solution—we couldn't decide which was better, salt or alcohol, so we used both—and I cut into his head.

I pull the blade toward me, vertically bisecting his scalp. Bright red blood quickly pools and starts dribbling down both sides. I pour bottled water on the wound to clean it. Then I pull the blade across his head, right to left. It catches for a second when it reaches the first cut—pulling the wound open slightly, and for a moment I see skull. I drop the razor back into the alcoholic saline solution.

Now his scalp has been sliced into four right angled flaps, just like the book showed us. I put my nail under the corner of one of them and try to peel it up. As I do, it makes wet noises. It's more stuck down by blood and pressure than I expect. When the flap is fully peeled back I twist a screw through its point to weigh it down, holding the wound open. I do the same three more times.

I've opened him up. He looks like an orchid. Of all of his books, the ones about flowers were always my favourites. I've never seen a real flower before. I love him more than ever.

I pour water on his skull and the red surface turns a brilliant cleaned-tile white!

I grab the hammer.

The whole room smells like rust. I've got to be careful now not to slip over—the floor of the bath is slick with blood and brain-jelly, and I'm covered head to toe too. There was skin around his brain, but I just tore through it with my nails. Now I can see his brain and it's beautiful.

For a moment I'm overcome. I love him. I rest the pad of my tongue against his parietal lobe. It's warm and I can feel his heartbeat. It tastes like raw meat. His neck twitches and his head moves beneath me. He slaps at my leg. He's right, I should focus.

Down the middle, that's what he said. I fish the razor out once again and do as i was told. Then I grab the pliers with one hand, and push the two halves of his mind slightly apart with the other.

I don't see anything. There's no worm. There's nothing here but brain. Stupid ugly brain! I'm scared and confused and I start crying. A tear runs down my face, along to the tip of my nose, and drops. It lands on his corpus callosum like acid rain.

Then, from one of the walls of the cerebral canyon, it pops its little white head out: that needle-thin parasite.

I crush the worm's head between the pliers' jaws! I hate it! I hate it for what its kind did to the world! I crush its head as hard as I can, and then I pull. The more I pull the longer it gets. Until finally it's out.

I hold the worm at arms length and its tail touches the floor of the bath, painting little shapes in the thin layer of gore. It's long. I show it to him. He tries to smile, but he's too numb—he only manages a dead man's rictus grin.

I carefully put the worm into a plastic bottle and then secure the top tight. I even melt the lid to the lip with a lighter.

Then I get the metal plate from the bowl of salted alcohol and place it over where his skull used to be. I curl his fleshy petals back over and sew him up.

So he was right. We do have worms in our heads.

He can't walk yet, but he says now that he feels liberated, like he can think for the first time in years. He's been reading to me every night, and he's been telling me of his plans for the future. He says he's going to build me a garden. We're going to go out and find seeds, and clean earth, and good water, and we'll bring them back home and grow a forest of gigantic orchids.

But first he needs to remove my worm. As soon as he gets his strength back.