

# Tiny Slimy Writhing Thing

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**H**iding behind the gravy boat, between the sweet potatoes and the flower vase, the tiny creature lay writhing, unnoticed. It had crawled unobtrusively out of the sour cream dish and plopped down on the table screaming in pain, though virtually inaudible. It was Christmas Eve, and the Newman family was just sitting down to dinner, unaware of their hideous guest.

Mr. Newman, as always, sat at the head of the table preparing to attack the turkey in front of him. A small stream of saliva seeped from the corner of his mouth. Bill and Enid, both twelve years of age, sat opposite each other launching candied yams back and forth whenever their father looked away. Mrs. Newman was just coming in from the kitchen carrying the bowl of rice she'd burned and a bottle of ketchup, while Ol' Shep crouched outside in the cold, whining.

Everything was ready now, and the Newmans commenced their annual ravenous assault on the seasonal culinary foe before them. Soon the room echoed with the sound of slurps and sticky tongues as the family's ritual of repugnant mastication reached a feverish pitch, everyone oblivious to the writhing creature in their midst until Bill reached for the sour cream.

At first Bill didn't know what to make of it, this tiny thing that wriggled on the tablecloth. It looked sort of like a caterpillar, but wasn't. It was slimy like a slug, but too round. There were no antennas or feet, just a tiny orifice at one end of the body which opened and closed rhythmically as it squirmed.

Bill stared at the creature, silent. No one else noticed. Ol' Shep whined outside.

"God damned mutt," Mr. Newman cursed, a waterfall of peas and milk spewing from his mouth as he spoke. "Someone go out and kick him!"

"I'll do it. I'll do it," Enid shouted, leaping up, only to be pulled back by the strong arm of her mother.

"No you won't young lady. You'll eat your supper." She paused. "It's my turn to kick him anyway."

Mrs. Newman left the table to silence Ol' Shep as Enid raised her middle finger in salute, withdrawing it just ahead of Mr. Newman's scowling glance. From outside, a yelp was heard

and the whining ceased. With a grin on her face, Mrs. Newman returned and sat down again to continue her meal. Enid picked at her braces as she noticed Bill.

"Hey, what're you looking at?"

Bill looked up, then down again. "I'm not sure what it is," he mumbled.

In unison the entire Newman family leaned across the table and hovered over the writhing being.

"What the hell is that!?! " Mr. Newman blurted, spitting his beets.

"I don't know," Bill answered.

Enid moved her face closer. "It looks like a worm."

"Naw, it's not a worm," Bill said. "It doesn't . . . "

"Is it a slug?" asked Mrs. Newman.

"Too round for that," Mr. Newman declared, wiping his chin. "Looks sorta like a caterpillar, but it's too shiny."

"Yeah, it's real shiny," Enid agreed.

"Slimy," Bill corrected.

"Yeah," Mrs. Newman chimed, "it's real slimy. And wriggly. Look at it squirm."

The family crowded closer, clearing the center of the table for an unobstructed view. The little creature writhed steadily under the scrutiny of its new-found captors.

"Where d'ya think it came from?" Bill asked. No one said a word. All eyes were fixed on the unexpected intruder as it rolled slowly on the linen tablecloth. Bill snickered.

"What's so funny?" his mother asked, starting to smile herself.

"I bet if I threw it at the mirror it'd stick," the boy replied, howling with laughter now. Everyone joined in.

"No, no," Mrs. Newman interjected, still smiling, "not the mirror. I don't want to chance breaking it." She handed Bill a fork. "Poke it and see what it does."

Bill took the fork and prodded the squirming being while the family beamed with delight. The creature writhed more rapidly now, and the boy ceased the prodding.

"He didn't like that one bit. Not one bit," Mr. Newman declared, grinning profusely.

"No, he sure didn't," Bill agreed. "Not one bit."

"I have an idea," Mrs. Newman blurted as she grabbed the salt shaker and proceeded to cover the tiny creature with the white granules. Everyone watched as it secreted an oozing green liquid, crying out in pain as the family roared with laughter.

"He sure as hell didn't like that," Mr. Newman bellowed. "Not one single solitary bit!"

"Not one bit," Enid echoed, laughing with her father as he put his hand on her shoulder. The creature writhed prodigiously

now, squirming out of the green, bubbling pool, coming to a halt beside it, pulsating.

"Let's burn it," Enid cackled.

"No, no," Bill pleaded, "not yet. You got any bleach, Mom?"

"I sure do." Mrs. Newman darted off.

Enid picked up a cornholder and pinned the little creature to the table. Mr. Newman sprinkled it with pepper. Bill started to spit on it but was stopped by his dad.

"Not here, son. Let's not get carried away."

Mrs. Newman returned with a cap full of bleach which she carefully poured on the tiny, slimy thing. The family fell silent. The creature lay still for a moment, then screamed out; a scream barely audible, but discernable in the silence.

"You hear that?" Enid asked, cocking her head.

"Yeah," said Bill. "Sounds like it's in pain."

Everyone moved in closer, cupping their ears.

"It's hurtin' all right," Mr. Newman laughed.

"Yeah," his wife agreed, "it's hurtin'. It's hurtin' good!"

"Yeah."

"Real good!"

The dining room erupted in mayhem as shrieks of laughter peeled off into the air. Mr. Newman grabbed his belly as it shook with his giggling, and the children danced about the table with glee, falling to the floor, screaming with festive jubilation.

Meanwhile, the creature went through a series of violent contortions, providing its captors with unending amusement. Each member of the family shook violently with laughter. Faces turned red. Throats became hoarse. Mrs. Newman began to cough.

As if to put an end to the family's jocular torment, Bill picked up his knife and cut the creature in half. The tiny thing twisted and turned, then stopped moving altogether. The Newmans crowded around it again and watched, catching their breath. The creature did not move again.

"Well," Mr. Newman declared after wiping the sweat from his face, "that was the damndest thing I've ever seen."

"My gut hurts," Mrs. Newman said, tears of laughter running down her face.

Bill and Enid still shrieked with delight, but stopped as they realized the show was over. The family fell silent once more, panting as their eyes darted from face to face. Bill poked the tiny creature, hoping to get a response, but it lay still.

"Dang," Bill hissed as he tossed the fork back on the table.

The house was now quiet, except for the sound of Ol' Shep whining outside. In all the commotion, his whining had gone unheard. But now, in the silence, the dog's cries could be heard distinctly, and as each member of the family became aware of

it, each face broke into a fiendish grin. Eyes darted. Heads turned. Mouths opened, and, as if jolted by the same burst of electricity, everyone scrambled for the back door in a frenzied rush.

"It's my turn. It's my turn," Enid screamed as she ran.

"I get him first," Bill cried, right behind his sister.

"We'll all get him," Mrs. Newman shouted, laughing hysterically as she ran, mouth wide open.

"We'll get him good," Mr. Newman shrieked as he lurched for the knob. "We'll get him real good. It'll be the best Christmas Eve ever. Ever!"

"Yeah, ever, ever," Enid echoed with delight.

"Ever."