Worms

By John Gatehouse

**1**

Jeremy loved worms.

He loved to hold their juicy, fat, slimy bodies in the palm of his hand.

Sometimes he would twine one around his index fingers and then slowly pull in opposite directions until its body ripped in two.

“Uggh! That’s gross!” screamed his sister, Annabel, when Jeremy showed her his latest trick. “You really are weird, Jeremy.”

Jeremy didn’t care what his sister thought. Or what anyone else thought for that matter.

In his bedroom, Jeremy kept a large glass tank which was filled with his collection of worms. He would watch for hours as they tunnelled through the earth of his worm-farm.

And, when they grew large enough, he would take them out of the tank and put them in his lunchbox and sneak them into school. Jeremy’s favourite trick was to wait until the class was quiet and everyone was working. Then he would take a worm out of his lunchbox and drop it down the neck of a girl in front of him. Their shrieks and screams made the boring school day more fun than a trip to the circus.

Of course, Jeremy’s tricks made sure he was always in trouble with the teachers, but this didn’t worry him.

Jeremy didn’t like people. He liked worms.

But the worms didn’t like Jeremy.

**2**

“I bet you wouldn’t!” said Andrew, sneering.

“I bet I would!” said Jeremy.

He was standing in the school playing field, surrounded by a group of boys from his class. Between his fingers he held a big, fat worm.

“All right. I bet you this bag of sweets that you won’t eat that worm!” Andrew said.

Jeremy smiled. A hush had fallen over the group. He knew that they were all thinking: *He won’t do it!*

But Jeremy would.

And he did.

He put one end of the worm between his fat lips and sucked.

“Yuck! That’s disgusting!” cried Kamal as the other boys ran off. Andrew threw the bag of sweets at Jeremy.

Jeremy waited until the boys were out of sight, then he spat out the worm that he had hidden under his tongue. *That’ll teach them not to believe me,* Jeremy thought.

And just because he wanted to, he stamped his foot hard on the worm before running off to rinse his mouth.

On the ground, dozens of worms burrowed up to the surface of the playing field.

They all lifted their heads in the direction of Jeremy.

When school ended, Jeremy walked home. One by one, the worms followed him through the grass.

**3**

That night. Jeremy dreamt that he had turned into a worm.
Not a small, common or garden worm, but a great big fat slug of a worm, the size of Jeremy himself.

This didn’t surprise him. He had read a lot of books about worms and knew that some of them in Australia could reach the size of three metres. Compared to them, he was tiny.

He couldn’t tell which end was his head and which was his feet, not that he had feet anymore because he was a worm.
Jeremy wasn’t sure he liked being a worm.

He found himself burrowing down into the earth, eating the mud and soil. *I’m eating mud!* he cried to himself, not liking it one bit.

Suddenly, the ground shook, and he felt himself being lifted up into the sunlight.

He crashed onto the grass, wriggling madly about, trying to escape. Looking up, he could see a giant-sized human child standing over him, holding a spade.

The child smiled the sort of smile that Jeremy smiled before he pulled a worm in two. The child brought the spade down on Jeremy’s worm body just as Jeremy woke up with a scream.

*It was only a nightmare!* He told himself, before pulling back his covers to cool down.

He looked down at his legs in his bedsheets.

They were covered in mud.

**4**

Jeremy was in a bad mood the next morning. After his dream, he’d been too scared to go back to sleep. It was the mud on his legs that had upset him. *Where had it come from?*

I must have got mud on my feet on the way home, he told himself. But he couldn’t remember seeing any mud on his shoes.

He stared at his worm farm. They were pressed against the glass, almost as if they were looking at him.

“LEAVE ME ALONE!” Jeremy screamed at the worms. And he ran out of his room.

At school, Jeremy didn’t feel like working, so he sat quietly in class staring out at the playing fields.

“Jeremy! Stop daydreaming!” said his teacher sternly. “Get out your books and get on with your work.”

Muttering to himself, Jeremy reached into his school bag and grabbed hold of something wet and squishy. He pulled his hand out quickly, as it he had been burnt. He found himself holding a handful of big, fat worms.

**5**

Jeremy’s screams made all the children jump in fright.

“Jeremy! What’s the matter?” demanded his teacher. Jeremy couldn’t speak. He kept looking at the worms he had dropped on the floor. They were wiggling all over his shoes.

“And what were you going to do with those worms, Jeremy? Drop them down some poor child’s back to scare them again? You’re nothing but a bully. Go to the Headmaster’s office at once!”

“No, sir” Jeremy tried to say. But all the giggling faces around him and the stern look on his teacher’s face told him that nobody believed him. Jeremy took his bag and slouched all the way to the Headmaster’s office.

When the lunch bell sounded, Jeremy bolted to the head of the dinner queue and pushed a small girl away to get served.

“Potatoes, bacon and spaghetti” said Mrs Martin, the school dinner lady as she passed him a plate of food. Jeremy was happy as all the commotion from this morning had made him hungry. He hurried to sit down and when he looked at his plate, next to the potatoes were dozens of small, thin, wiggling worms.

**6**

Jeremey jumped backwards in fright, knocking over the dinner table in front of him and three chairs behind him. Everything crashed to the ground. His class teacher was in the dining hall.

“Worms again, Jeremy? You haven’t learnt your lesson have you?” But Jeremy was shaking too much to hear. “And just how could worms get on your plate unless YOU put them there?” demanded his teacher.

Jeremy was excluded for a week.

He was furious. Even if his sister had put the worms into his bag, who had put them on his dinner plate? And who put the mud into his bed? Jeremy couldn’t figure it out. When he got home, he stuck his hands deep into the flower beds at the side of his house and pulled out worm after worm. Throwing each one hard to the ground and stamping on them, Jeremy shouted “I HATE YOU! I HATE YOU!”

**7**

Jeremy’s mother was furious with him.

“Your headmaster has just phoned me,” she said looking as angry as Jeremy ever seen her. I don’t know why you played those stupid tricks, but you won’t get away with it!”

Jeremy pretended to listen while his mother scolded him. His mind was on other things, like how to get rid of the worms.

Jeremy was sent to his room by his mother, so he stormed upstairs and slammed the door. He stared darkly at the worms in the worm farm. They seemed to be laughing at him.

Jeremy grabbed the glass tank and carried it to his open window.

“Get lost!” he screamed and emptied the earth and worms onto the grass below.

Now that the worms were gone, Jeremy felt a little happier. He was tired from all the events of the day, so he decided to have an early night.

Outside, as evening grew darker, hundreds of worms crawled through the wet grass towards his bedroom window.

**8**

Jeremy was asleep.

He knew that because he was having another dream about the worms.

This time, he lay in his bed, unable to move, as hundreds of worms crawled all over his body. They moved across his legs and arms, slipping and sliding, and across his face and hair. Jeremy wanted to scream, but he was too scared to open his mouth in case a big fat worm crawled inside.

*Wake up!* Jeremy told himself. *It’s not real!*

He struggled to open his eyes, but when he did, he let out a gasp of relief. There were no worms on him. He couldn’t see a rotten worm anywhere in the room. It had only been a dream, and a horrible one at that. But Jeremy didn’t have to be afraid anymore. He had got rid of the worms. They couldn’t hurt him any more.

Under the covers, something moved across Jeremy’s feet.

Startled, he wrenched the covers onto the floor and looked down at the end of his bed.

The white sheet was lost beneath a pool of dirt-stained, wriggling brown bodies.

The worms had come home to Jeremy.

**9**

The worms slithered across Jeremey’s legs. They raised their heads as one, looking up at him.

Jeremy screamed and rolled out of bed. His head smacked the bedside and he landed with a thump on the floor.

Leaping to his feet and ignoring the pain in his head, he screamed again and again, slapping his legs with his hands in case there were any worms left on him. His mother, father and sister burst into the room, looking worried.

“Jeremy, what’s the matter?” demanded his father.

Then they saw the worms crawling all over the bed.

“Jeremy, I’ve told you before to get rid of those horrible creatures!” shouted his mother. “Look at the mess you’ve made! And why aren’t they in their tank?”

Jeremy tried to explain, but no one believed him. His mother told him that he would be going to the doctor the very next day. He needed something for his nerves, she said.

Jeremy watched numbly while his father collected up all the worms in a shoebox and took them outside. Jeremy was shaking. He started to cry.

“I never want to see another worm in my life,” Jeremy said.

In the garden, under the light of a full moon, the worms tunnelled their way deep down back into the earth.

There they would stay, waiting.

Waiting for another boy like Jeremy.