

Underneath

by Erin Zulkoski

I awoke with a belly ache; a burning and stabbing sensation, like I had been shot in the gut by a flaming arrow. I grabbed at my stomach and groaned loudly, and stumbled into the bathroom to find my antacids.

I reached into the medicine cabinet and grabbed the bottle, flipped the lid open, and poured a handful into my palm, which I immediately popped into my mouth. I began crunching loudly, and my mouth became full of cherry-flavored chalk. I swallowed and went back to bed to lie down again, hoping more sleep would help quell the ache.

I couldn't sleep at first, the pain was so intense, but after a few minutes of tossing and turning, I fell into a deep sleep fraught with disturbing dreams. I don't know if it was the combo of over-dosing on antacids or the anguish in my belly, but I had a dream that a small creature had taken residence in my stomach and was trying to escape, using its small razor-like claws to scratch its way out of my abdomen, flaying my skin with its talons and burrowing its way out into the world.

I slowly returned to consciousness and immediately noticed the pain in my belly was gone...and that my bed sheets were wet with a sticky substance. Two things immediately came to mind: I'm a freak and my nightmare caused me to have a nocturnal emission, or I had a case of diarrhea in my sleep and had shit my bed.

I reached down with my hand to test the stuff, and brought my fingers up to my face, either expecting cum or shit on them.

It was neither.

Dark red blood.

I immediately started to panic, and sat upright in bed. I looked down and saw the front of me was doused in red, my shirt torn to shreds, a gaping hole in my belly.

Holy shit. Holy shit holy shit holy shit. I wasn't dreaming or crazy-- there had been something in my stomach, after all.

That is the LAST TIME I tell Ripley I'll help her on a goddamn space mission EVER AGAIN.

