

Shipmates search for The Creature. Frantic. Panicked.

Me. Calm. Quiet. slip into secluded area.

Lantern sways on hook. sickly dim light flame weary. Reach pocket. Rat, small, still. Looks dead.

But know better.

Know what lies *within*.

Stroke one. Kill rat. Stroke two. Slice throattobelly

Inside –

Worm. Exposed. Undulates. Violent.

Me. Alive. New host

Worm latches hand bare flesh *burrows skin*

No screaming.

Instead, begin reciting.

Words of Beast ritual.

Soon, I will be not fully It. I will be not fully Self.

I will be something utterly, gloriously new

– wriggling protrusion under skin – forearm, bicep, collarbone, neck, soon brain –

Words of ritual spill forth, steady, sun-wounded salt-chapped lips

final word spoken protrusion disappears –

Wait.

Now is the time for screaming

agony

spine extends new vertebrae populate
skin stretching torture – sudden elastic benevolence
column extrudes four new arachnid legs, twitching prescient

acid blood in veins searing completeness

human eyelids. *Blink*.

new membranes. *Blink blink*.

teeth, once smooth weak square small plaque-covered loose decaying

now steady jagged elongated power . lips curl
sniff air

yes, new, and delight in newfound

but something familiar, only now amplified. Stronger

uncontrollable undeniable

hunger

wonder where shipmates went...