

## My Friend, The Fly

I have a mole on my left thumb, and for almost sixteen years, I was convinced it was a dead fly.

I was around four or five years old when it happened. I was running at school one morning, for fun, when a fly shot past me. I looked down at my hands and witnessed the fly go under my thumb. I didn't feel anything. I just saw it go down, and my eyes followed it to the mole. I *swear*, I saw the fly twitching and wriggling under my skin, trying to escape!

Then, it stopped moving. As though it accepted defeat. The mole is even shaped like that. Not perfectly circular, but like a fat fly with its limbs stretching out. I couldn't tell if it was dead or resting. But as a child who couldn't quite grasp death beyond what she'd seen on tv, I assumed the latter. Also, I did *not* want to imagine a dead fly rotting under my skin. Who would?

It was up to me to save the fly. And, honestly, I was disgusted too.

For several years, for weeks at a time, I would pick at my mole with my nails, trying to drag the fly's body out of my skin. Flaky, peeled skin was constantly around my left thumb because of this. It was very painful, especially because my nails are long. Sometimes, I'd even use my teeth to scrape it up.

But, each day, I swore I saw a little more progress! The fly was a little closer to being out. Millimeter by millimeter, it was being moved. I got happier each day, certain that eventually, the fly would be close enough to my nail where it could shoot out on its own and fly far away.

Even now, it seems much farther up on my thumb than when I first saw it.

I asked my mother about the fly—she's a doctor, a general practitioner to be specific. I wanted to know if there was another way to get it out.

I don't remember exactly what she said. But, summarized, she didn't believe me. She even seemed confused when I explained it to her. I remember the lines of puzzlement on her face, her concerned yet disbelieving eyes. She told me multiple times that it was a mole and could not possibly be a fly.

I *promised* her I *saw* it! I did I did I did I did I did I did I did! I saw the fly go down so clearly, that I still have the image ingrained in my head all these years later.

But, she said I had something called an "overactive imagination". She was gentle in her delivery, yet unyielding in her response.

I eventually stopped bringing it up to her. I pretended to believe her. I remember vaguely telling several more people, though I can't remember who—probably adults, those unimaginative, unbelieving losers—and they all told me it wasn't true. There was no fly under my skin.

I decided to keep this to myself, since no one would believe me. I was frustrated, angry, and sad. I promised myself that no matter what, I would always believe.

As the weeks passed, I wondered if the fly had made itself at home in my thumb. What did it do all day? Did it sleep, like me? Watch Qubo, like me—*The Dinosaur Train*, *Sid the Science kid*, or *Martha Speaks*? Did it also have toys that it would play with? Did it have a family at home waiting for it?

I even named it. But all these years later, I can't remember what.

Throughout the years, my fly was with me for everything.

For playground shenanigans, awards ceremonies, holidays, swim lessons, long family drives, IKEA runs where I acted as a traveler, fearlessly venturing down dangerous aisles and tropical jungle paintings.

For when I studied for and took the SATs and APs, when I swam on the junior varsity swim team in high school, when COVID happened, when my high school friend group broke up, and when I got accepted to university.

To be fair, it's not like the fly had a choice. That would be like appreciating a hostage for never leaving your side. But still, it was with me, and I eventually accepted it. Maybe around late elementary school, I realized I would never get it out. It wasn't the most pleasant thought, but the same way I forced myself to eat disgusting bell peppers as a child, I swallowed my disgust and anxiety and got used to the fly. I was its home now. Its safe place. Its best friend.

I never called time of death on my belief. But it happened.

As I grew older, I began questioning myself. I mean, it sounds ridiculous. A fly living under my skin? First, it would be long dead by now. The rotting body surely would've caused an infection, or some other negative health consequence. And how would it even have gotten under my fingernail, especially without causing pain?

But, I forced myself to forget my doubts and keep believing. For her. That little girl who desperately wanted to be believed. Who told her story over and over again wishing that someone would trust her! I was her last hope. I made a promise to her. I couldn't break it. So, throughout my teen years, I still believed it was a dead fly.

It was sometime around my first or second year of university when I raised the white flag. I know it's not a fly. It's just a weirdly-shaped mole. Genetics. As a child, my overactive imagination devised a unique reason for it.

I feel strangely about it now. Where did all that innocence and imagination go? Did I misplace it somewhere? I've searched under my bed, in every drawer I have, and my closet twice. I want it back, badly. But I don't know where it went.

I'm an adult now. And everything has changed. I broke my promise. I committed the ultimate betrayal. I became an unimaginative, unbelieving loser.

But what was I thinking back then? It's ridiculous! Of course it wasn't a fly!

Yet, I kind of want to believe it again. To believe in spite of others. To imagine the unimaginable. To persist in the most creative ways.

I can't, though. That would be denying logic and reason. A child's imagination has no place in the real world. They die off, like the unicorns and dragons that once enchanted me.

Yet sometimes, I find myself picking at my mole. I'm not too rough, so it doesn't hurt anymore. It's a familiar, comforting sensation. I use my nails and my teeth to gently drag it up. The skin around my thumb becomes flaky and red.