

BLOB OF JELLY, SHRIMP IN MY BELLY

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On the lemonade-soaked streets of the fair, we ignore vendors hawking fried dough and cheap jewelry. Just yesterday, we'd planned to eat funnel cakes, maybe shoot water into the mouths of clowns. Now Rob and I are barely speaking because this question mark hangs between us. Head to tail, it's apparently about two centimeters:

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Blob of jelly, shrimp in my belly. Mushroom bloom, yolk and plume. The haphazard jam band on the makeshift stage is so loud it's hard to think. It's hard to think, anyway, which has nothing to do with the band. Rob keeps taking my hand. He asks if I want an ice cream, a stuffed dolphin, a pair of plastic earrings.

"I don't know," I say. I don't know. I don't know.

We pass a popcorn stand, and he steers me into the alley. By the dumpster, he presses a diamond of dubious value into my palm. I say thanks, either out loud or in my head. The ring won't fit over the second knuckle. Looks absurd sitting in the middle of my finger.

"I'm very confused," I say.

Rob sinks to his knees, brushes his lips against the growing knot in my stomach. He draws a breath, looks at me, and says "I want to get married. I want to marry you. I do."

I imagine myself in the future: nine weeks, nine months, nine years. Even then, the knot's still growing.