

THE GOLDEN CRICKET

Jon enters the diner and surveys the patrons. There's an elderly couple eating pie in a booth and a group of teenagers talking loudly in the back corner. A lone woman at the bar sits with her head slumped down hanging low over a cup of coffee. An untouched plate of eggs and toast sits on the counter beside her. Jon grunts to himself and reasserts his determination.

Crossing the floor and sidling up to the stool next to the woman, Jon sits down with lots of deliberate weight. He slumps and sighed, trying to draw her attention. The woman just stares into her coffee as if it were a book.

JON

You, uh... Gonna eat those eggs?

The woman does not look up. The woman does not move. The woman's lips part slightly and a thin voice leaks out.

WOMAN

Give me what I want.

Jon swallows hard. The waitress fills the cup in front of him with a pot of stale brown fluid. Jon taps a sugar packet into the cup with his index finger.

JON

I don't...

With a move like lightning, the woman springs, uncoils and lashes out, catching Jon by the throat and pushing him backwards off of his stool. Gripping him tightly by the cartilage in his neck the woman drives him to the floor.

WOMAN

Give me what I want (whispering)

Jon tried to say something but nothing can escape his compressed throat. The woman releases Jon with the same velocity as she had grabbed him and stands up straight with her hand held out, palms spread with the expectation of collecting something of value.

Jon's hands scrambled as he fishes in his pocket, producing a small jar with a golden cricket inside. Wiping the blood from his lips with one hand as the other offers up the jar. He cringes as the woman closes her confident grip over the item.

Carefully, almost lovingly, she brings it up to her face, looking closely at the shiny insect within. She speaks to the cricket in a strange tongue which makes the little bug cower in fear, and Jon, from the ground, appears to regret his surrendering, forming his body into a rigid coil, tightening his fists.

Sensing his resolve, the woman stands suddenly defensive, and without hesitation, she lashes out a pointed toe into Jon's temple and his body spins from the force, driving him back down to the floor.

He struggles to roll clear and gain his balance, but the woman is already gone. Moving with confidence and force, she walks out of the diner to a red mini cooper parked on the other side of the road. Climbing in, she fastens the golden bug into a slot on the dashboard, which enfolds the jar in a protective shell. She puts on sunglasses as Jon burst from the diner in pursuit. She turns the mini into him, colliding and sending his body over the windshield and out of the way.

Landing hard on the asphalt, Jon looks after the speeding mini. Fixing on the license plate, Jon knows he has to get back to the others and tell them that the plan had worked. He smiles through bloody lips.