

Multicolored Bug Juice

Pai, Thailand

by Nick Mistretta

We slept a few hours then loaded the car and drove to the saloon for one last meal. I was still drunk and my foot was growing larger and more painful. Back on the road we pointed the car west and pushed her to Pai. It was a short three-hour drive through rolling hills dotted with vegetable stands and tiny villages. We got a room, then Seamus and I went to the hospital. I could no longer tolerate the pain. Pai is one of these tiny villages, and its hospital resembled a concrete MASH unit. We met a Canadian girl there with scrapes on her arm who barked incessantly about her slightest of injuries like she was about to drop dead at any moment. Oh, how I wished to trade injuries with her. Or at least shove my big, swollen foot into her mouth. If she was attractive, then it would have at least been tolerable. This doesn't look good, I thought, staring at my foot. There's no doubt about it, they'll have to amputate. I was chuckling nervously at the thought when ...

"If they don't know how to treat it," Seamus was saying. *No no, do not finish that thought.* "They'll just chop it off. *WHACK!*"

"You fuckin' Republican!"

The nurses were wearing the old school, white uniforms. One of them seemed to even understand me when I spoke. I remembered the eye drop incident then began thinking about club feet and plastic limbs, which led my mind to stray over to steely hooks for hands then that awful movie with Jennifer Love Hewitt. And of course after that my mind was ruled by sex until ...

"Mister Meesstraa ..."

"Yep, here," and I hop followed the nurse into some kind of huge surgery shed. Seamus came along. He enjoyed seeing me in pain. I climbed onto a table with the standard cloth sheet running down the center. Seamus was telling me how much this was going to hurt, just as the doctor, presumably a doctor, came in and began fondling my foot. She looked just like the nurse only in a different uniform. And she had plenty of time to change clothes. She said that my foot was badly infected. One of my blisters, she said. One of the blisters I got playing basketball with no socks. *SEAMUS!* She had a tray loaded with sharp instruments and a fabulous collection of needles. She smiled at me and really seemed to enjoy her work. Then she stabbed me between the toes two times with a syringe, while I squeezed my eyes shut and gripped the sides of the table. She left for ten minutes then came back in with more cutting devices. She draped a sheet over my legs with a hole positioned over the infected toe. Then she went to work on it.

My eyes were closed so tight I wondered if they would ever open again. I can't be sure, but I think the doctor was using a cheese grater on my toe. There was a lot of scraping and digging, like she was landscaping her yard. I lifted my head at one point and saw Seamus hunched over and squinting, half looking away with a sour, wincing look on his face. And he couldn't even see my toe clearly, just the crazy woman assaulting my foot and me writhing in obvious pain. I kept thinking, OK, just about done, that *has* to be it. But it never was. My mind was back on that mountain in India pushing the damn bike, an endless orgy of suffering with no end in sight.

Right before the doc dug into my toe, a huge green insect with a wingspan of at least 4 inches flew in an open window and began circling above me. The doc looked up and saw it then casually returned her attention to my toe. I looked at Seamus, and he shrugged. The two of us followed it around the room with our eyes, and that big, dumb bug flew right into a fan and sprayed out the other side. The wall was awash in multicolored bug juice. Orange and yellow and green pus dripping down the wall. I looked back at Seamus and his hands were grappling with his head. This was the precise moment that the doctor began torturing me.