

his Gin Rickey. Eventually, he left us at the bar for some rest. He had hoped that morning would bring some relief.

Rising the next day, Sluggo's worst fears were realized. The rash had spread to a variety of locations on his body and each movement caused retching pain. He looked as though he had spent the night in a rock tumbler. As I lead him down the garden path to meet the taxi, crowds would separate and stare, apparently horrified and rarely sympathetic. The taxi was waiting and we had already indicated that we needed to go to the hospital. With one look at Sluggo the driver began to tell us about a doctor he knew on the other side of the island. He was certain that the doctor could help Sluggo. Sluggo would need to be naked and suspended by palm ropes above a smoldering pit of coals. The doctor would then exorcise the badness from Sluggo's body with Conch shells that were affixed to long wooden staffs. Sluggo appeared interested but declined the offer.

Flame trees lined the hospital grounds and tropic birds sailed overhead. The pleasant appearances ended there. Upon his return from inside the building, Sluggo said that the doctors placed his samples and specimens in the same refrigerator that housed the hospital staff's lunches, that they had absolutely no idea what was wrong with him, and that he was certain that he would die in this place. "Easy Slug", I said, "lets take your prescription to the chemist".

Sluggo spent the remainder of his time on Rorotonga in bed and in pain. I would bring food at each meal and make sure that his breathing had not stopped. I felt bad for him but could be of little comfort.

Meanwhile Bob and Debbi had grown to hate one another. One day they picked me up for a drive around the island. Bob had rented a small Suzuki jeep that had a center console that could hold 12 beers and plenty of ice. Bob was the perfect, belligerent American tourist, especially behind the wheel of an automobile. Swerving around scooters and pigs, we darted in and out of banana fields, dirt roads and mangroves. I was nearly catapulted from the back seat when he executed an abrupt U-turn after passing the Liquor Barn, a discount warehouse selling beer, wine and spirits. Debbi's sun hat ejected during the turn but Bob could not be bothered with such

trivialities in light of the prospects of finding Bombay Gin at the Liquor Barn. Debbi was livid. While fetching her bonnet from the road, she was stung by a paper wasp. "You're going to kill all of us!", she scolded Bob. "You should be more careful, you twit!" Bob quickly replied.

Because flights left the island for Hawaii only once a week, Sluggo had no choice but to count the days until he could escape from his hell in paradise. He painstakingly packed his things two days prior to our scheduled departure. On departure day, Sluggo did not take well the news of our flight's 10 hour delay. The Space Shuttle had jettisoned its fuel tanks in our area and all air traffic was halted. Being an opportunist, Bob took advantage of his extension on the island by visiting a beach bar where, the night before, a squabble had developed between some German beer goons and several locals. Sluggo simply waited, staring at the Northern sky, looking for the spark of the plane's running lights.

Sluggo later told me that he was simply not intended for the tropics, but he planned to one day return to the Cook Islands. He wishes to return to the slug-laden lagoons and mutilate as many of them as possible. Occasionally he unsheathes the special bronze hunting knife that he intends to take with him on his return. He believes that the slugs poisoned him and at the same time pretended to hold him in high regard. Although his physical recovery took only a month, his mental anguish obviously continues to this day.

We have lost track of Bob. If he is alive, he is no doubt pissing someone off at this very moment. I would like to think that someday I will find him in another part of the world, happily clutching a bottle of gin in one hand, and a briefcase of sensitive documents in the other.

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