

# Preserved In Amber

*by* S.H. Gall

After a couple years had passed, when the surprise of having lived into her thirties was well-faded, Eleanor Traum became deeply fascinated by her own corporeality. Had anyone in particular become aware of this, they would surely have called her obsessed, even OCD. But she kept her fascination a secret. She didn't need another diagnosis.

So no one ever caught sight of Eleanor picking her nose; besides, that wasn't what she was doing. The nostrils were her own, very private quarries, which she was methodically excavating. Any solid she managed to bring to light — mostly scabs and dried blood, occasionally a legitimate hunk of ossified mucus, went into amber prescription bottles. She drew the line at regular old snot, which somehow seemed not specific to her, and babyish.

Her boyfriend was the only one who knew anything about the accidentally self-inflicted wound sites scattered around her body, and he knew of only a couple that she couldn't realistically hide — her big toe, the backs of her hands. She hid the others under jeans and blouses, or towels wrapped around her after her bath. She wore a nightgown to bed, which fortunately her boyfriend found charming.

The right big toe was really her greatest achievement in the field of accidental self-mutilation. She had no idea how it came to be torn open — it didn't hurt at all, even though the nail was mostly ripped off and the skin beneath flayed. And, apart from being alarming in appearance, it didn't really affect her daily routine at all.

At night, the toe changed, seemed to develop some perverse autonomy. She had subliminally conditioned her bladder to need

release at three AM, give or take five minutes, every night without fail. And when she meandered barefoot and bleary into the bathroom, urgent with need, she seated herself, let it rip, and noticed that urine was far from the only thing gushing out of her. Her feet were planted in a very large pool of blood, blood which the hard bathroom tile chilled almost at once.

It was not blood alone. Some came out in long, clinging, gelatinous strands. She gathered the strands to dry on the sink — they were her most treasured additions to the amber bottles. Cleaning up the liquid counterpart was too much to ask at three in the morning; she always awoke before her boyfriend anyway. She would take care of it in the morning, using half a roll of paper towels, the water that dripped from her body after bathing, and the steam generated by the hot stream of the shower. At worst the floor looked vaguely pink, but she usually managed to get it back to normal. Her boyfriend never seemed to notice, or neglected to mention it.

At thirty-seven years old, she had accumulated five of the amber bottles filled with scab tissue, fingernails, dead skin, the blood jelly from her toe, any evidence that she was a physical entity. She was comforted by this, and considered the collection a harmless manifestation of her innate perversion. She knew if they were found, she might be deemed insane in some sense, so she made little attempt to actively hide them. She kept them with the myriad other amber bottles that contained the many types of pills she used to maintain her psychological functioning, in a drawer in the bedside table.

