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It's deadly serious. There's a hole in the boy's chest, and the life leaking out of him. The man looks. The man makes a plan. A decision. Thunder. Distant laughter.

The man puts his hands on the boy, not near the hole. Under his arms. And begins to tickle him. Stop, says the boy. Please stop. He wheezes, sprays. Don't. Don't do dat. Cut it out. And starts to laugh. Can't help it. Laughs, and goo bumbles from the hole. Please stop. The man does not stop. He tickles mercilessly. The boy howls.

Uproarious. Goo.

Stop, or it'll happen.

The man does not stop.

It will happen. You know.

Laughter. Goo.

It happens. The boy's foot, his left foot, unfurls, flings off its Irish brogue and its Spanish sock and snakes away from his body at a rate of knots, maintaining its connection to the rest of him by means of an increasingly rubbery leg.

The boy, in between gusts of helpless hilarity: oh no!

The man cacks himself, wets his pants, cries out of tight creased eyes, cascades of snot crashing over his upper lip.

Oh no, oh no. Stop it. Stop my foot. Stop it getting away.

The foot reaches the skirting board, and footles around, looking for where to go next. It swings itself up, balancing on the tip of its heel, and the big toe sniffs the air. To the left. To the right. The foot tilts to one side then nods, satisfied, topples over onto its instep with a flomp and scoots along the floorboards through the plaster dust.

The man is laughing so hard that it is really quite difficult for him to keep up the tickling. But he manages to. Actually what he notices is that the boy's underarms are in fact getting a bit resistant to his attentions, they're becoming tickle-tired. He must retarget his attentions, or the subject will become sore and invulnerable due to pain and expectation, and his plan will be ruined. He retracts his hands, a virtuoso mid-symphony -

—the boy's face relaxes from its rictus, the goo stops lava-ing from the hole—

—the foot's perambulations are halted just as it reaches the window sill -

—and into this frozen moment, from out of frame, the man's hands dive, dive, dive, screeching like a pair of Stukas down towards the pyjama-panted thighs of the boy which lie there trembling as his body registers the trauma of his injury but remain otherwise immobile and thus sitting ducks for the great hams. And, as they hit, the boy's face again stretches into helpless, protesting laughter, which still manages to outstrip the messages being Stawell-gifted along his body about what it means, that hole in his chest.

The foot grins and hops out the window.

Arr, screams the boy with rage as his left leg ribbons out in a curve, then the strip of flesh is pulled down tight against the spiky splintered window ledge. Ow he yells.

Arr, that doesn't really hurt says the man, as he plays the boy's thighs like a baby grand, though obviously he has less to work with on the left thigh, much of that flesh being parlayed into the belaying-line for the foot. You're only crying cause it looks like it should hurt. Stop whining.

Stuff you, dad.

Language.

Tickle. Laughter. Goo.

The foot plumb-bobs down past the unbroken ground floor window. The foot twists slightly like a body on a rope. Lower, lower. It can smell the grass, and twinkles its toes, which brush the thin green stalks who answer in kind, flitting it back with a springy appreciation. It's a reunion, and a happy one at that. The foot takes a moment to suspend itself amongst the tips of the grass, hanging there like a glad hovercraft, before placing its full weight on the ground. Places to be. People to see. And not much time. Clearly.

It moonwalks towards the path, mostly for its own amusement, though this does raise a chuckle from the rhododendron. Dragging itself up onto the path by its three smaller toes, it determines the lay of the land. Glass shards decorate the tectonic, concrete surface, evidence of some earlier civilisation. Five feet to the fence. Time of the essence. One Titanic effort the go.

It leaps! And flies, flies, astonishing a passing mosquito who, compound eyes notwithstanding, whacks into a snapdragon and ends up arse over tit on a brown-dotted petal, nursing a crook limb.

The foot lands with a tremendous thump. It can hear faint cracks, and zings, and from up above, laughter that is weak now.

What does the sign say? Asks the man, who has by now resorted to tickling the base of the one foot he has access to. Foot tickling, the bottom of the barrel. Most obvious of choices. His victim is long since injured to this angle of attack, of course, the boy's spat and ragged breaths bear witness to that. But what can he do? Can't turn the boy over, go for the no-fail buttocks. The goo'll fall out like from an upended topping bottle.

What does the sign say?

No no no.

Yes. What does the sign say?

There is nng

Yes?

There is no signn.

Very good. What does it say?

Nn.

Come on. Bloody hell, what does it say?

It does not say.

Yes?

Nng. Nn.

It does not say?

It does not say, Do not play. Agnnn.

Good lad. Good lad. That is what it does not say, yes. Off you go. Off you go my love.

The foot looks at the gates, slightly ajar, and the small pile of brown rice next to the brown bush there by the fence. It smiles at them all winningly and flops over.

*Adapted for performance by Barbara Campbell from a story by Bernard Caleo.*