

BUG MULDOON

AND THE KILLER IN THE RAIN



Bug Muldoon is a beetle detective and he's on a mission. He's determined to track down the killer in the rain, even if it means a trip to the dreaded House where the Humans live. But he has to get across the Garden first—preferably alive.

Death isn't fussy. It comes in lots of shapes and sizes in a Garden like this. Sometimes it's the beak of a hungry bird, sometimes the boot that descends from the skies. Sometimes it wears the delicate threads of a lurking spider. And sometimes good old Death has no pride and rolls up in the shape of a big, warty old toad.

That's how it was today, just crouching over there in the shade.

The toad's golden eyes didn't blink. It was acting cool, as if it hadn't noticed me. Only its pinpoint nostrils moved. It seemed unaware of everything.

Yeah, right.

I wasn't fooled. Its bulgy eyes were tracking me. That deadly tongue was just biding its time inside a mouth that stretched right across the toad's ugly mug. Just waiting for yours truly to move into range. Then that lethal weapon of a tongue would flick out and scoop me up with its sticky coating. It would whip me back into that pit of a mouth. And then all the toad had to do was swallow.

Well, it could try. Call me a dreamer, but I had other plans for how the exchange would go.

Right now I just concentrated on playing my part—acted like I was the tastiest beetle in the Garden. It wasn't hard. I've had plenty of practice dodging things that want to eat me. That's the way life is in this Garden of ours—you deal with it, or you end up as a light snack for something nasty.

Me, I'm nobody's light snack—not if I can help it. The name is Bug—Bug Muldoon. I'm a private investigator, and this nightmare of a Garden is the place I call home.

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I'll tell you something about garden toads. They eat any kind of insect or worm they can get their tongues on, and they feed up to four times on a summer night. It gets worse—they have no teeth, which means they just swallow their prey whole. Nice, huh?

So you'd still be alive 'n' kicking as you slid down that pitch-black gullet. You'd just be sittin' in that belly as the digestive juices began to rain down on you. Thanks, but no thanks.

I stopped. This was close enough. Now it was all a matter of timing. If I got it wrong, then I'd be relaxing in that nice warm acid bath in the thing's gut.

I didn't need to worry. The toad wasn't lighting up the Garden with its blazing intelligence, and I played it like the sucker it was.

I inched forward and braced myself. An instant later the toad's tongue snaked out towards me like a bolt of pink lightning. I was ready. I ducked and rolled left.

