

Fiction at Work

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Issue #29

2 February 09

## *More of the Same*

by Robert Scotellaro

Evie was painting her toenails when Steve said, "Hell, I could use a few more of you. Have a ménage `a... How do you say "eight" in French?"

They were watching a program on cloning and he was already ruminating on some appealing applications. "They," he said, "could start at the top and bottom of yours truly and work their way to the middle".

She paused, the polish brush suspended just over her "Pretty in Pink" Tootsie toe dividers. "You tryin' to tell me something, Steve?"

"They'd all be you, hun," he reassured. "That's the best part."

"Well, I could use a few more of you too."

"You mean it?" he said.

"Sure."

He imagined what it would be like, (a bunch of Steves) ravaging her all at once. He could hardly wait for her nails to dry.

Evie figured four or five "Steves" was a good number. She'd have to get them all "fixed", of course, like she did their tomcat, Big Earl. It was hard enough keeping Steve in the holding pen most times. And gourmet meals would be a must. She'd send one off to culinary school, straight away. He'd be Charles. And Vic could be the handyman. The "Mr. Fix-it" Steve never was...

Steve stretched out on the couch. Hell, he thought, he might even have them get boob jobs in different sizes. And they could all wear wigs. He didn't care what color—blue, purple... Variety was what he was after.

He'd clear out his sock drawer (it was Evie who separated his socks from his briefs anyway)—stock it exclusively with sex toys and smelly lotions.

She'd need a gardener too, Evie decided—Chuck. He'd wear coveralls and carry tools in a green bucket. And a stand-in "cuddler"—she'd need one of them. Maurice would be for those cold nights when Steve, satisfied, turned from her, balled up on his end of the bed.

She'd keep them in the basement, she mused, (when they weren't set to their tasks) — could use a bell cord like those rich folks had in old movies. Three pulls of the cord, say, and Rico would come trotting up to rub her feet with his "tension-calming" techniques...

"So, you think it'd be great having a bunch of me around?" Steve said, edging closer. "You really meant that?"

"You bet."

He took a magazine from the coffee table and began fanning her feet, nearly clubbing her big toe.

"What are you doing, babe?"

"Helping them dry."

"That's alright," she said, dipping her brush back in the bottle. "I'm doing my fingernails now."

"Christ," he said and flung down the magazine. He grabbed the remote and began flipping through the channels.

Evie watched him for a long moment, then threw up her hands.

"What?" she said.

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Issue #30

9 February 09

## *Over in Five*

by Anne Brooke

### **Minute One:**

I enter the zoo gates with my son. Should have taken him to the match this afternoon, but couldn't get the tickets. Left it too late as usual. That's what Amanda always says. Maybe she's right. So the zoo this time and not the footie. Never mind. Amanda will be pleased it's educational. Once she finds out. She was in a rush this morning when I picked Danny up. Couldn't seem to get rid of us both fast enough. I was hoping to have a chat with her, maybe see if we can go out one evening this week. After all, we're not divorced yet. There's still time.

### **Minute Two:**

I've forgotten the smell of zoos. Or how expensive they are. Should have just taken Danny to McDonald's. Though I suppose the smell's the same. Only difference is one meat's dead and the other's alive. As far as I can tell. Though with some of these animals, I'm not so sure. Danny's enjoying it though – look at the expression on his face. At times like these, being a father's the greatest. Only wish we were a family again. What? Yeah, sure you can have an ice-cream, love. Just the one though – don't want to spoil your lunch.

### **Minute Three:**

Wonder if I can think up a decent excuse to ring Amanda? Sometimes I just want to hear her voice. If I say something light about Danny, she can't get cross. I'm trying my best after all. What? Yeah, the tigers are great. I haven't seen one before either. Well, not for a long time. That's right. Like cats but scarier. We're not frightened though, are we? No, mate, I thought not. You and me, we're two of a kind. Hey, I'm just going to give your mum a quick call. Let her know where we are. Hold onto my hand and I'll see if she answers. What's that? I ...

### **Minute Four:**

... Weird. I recognise that ring-tone. Sounds like your mother's, Danny. That's funny, isn't it? And at the same time as I was ringing too. Hey, I wonder if she's here. Is this where she was rushing off to this morning? Did she tell you? No? Never mind, she might have come here for a day out herself – after all, she thought we were due for the footie, but I never got to tell her. Let's see if we can see her. She can't be too far away.

### **Minute Five:**

At first, I don't know it's her. There's a woman. Long fair hair. Maroon raincoat. She's in the queue for the ice-cream van. Not just waiting either. She's kissing someone. Someone tall and slim. Wearing a Burberry jacket. Danny's fingers are cool in my palm and I cling to them tightly. Her phone's ringing but she's too engrossed to answer it. My skin feels cold and everything changes. Come on, Danny, I whisper. Let's look at the tigers again.

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Issue #31

16 February 09

## *Floating*

by Mike Hart

With each kick we climbed higher, closer to heaven. The wind roaring by as we flew through our pendular paths, we knew we'd eventually reach the atmosphere and drift, weightless, toward the stars.

As we reached our apex, we hung there for a moment, our heads tilted up toward the sky, our bodies parallel to the ground, in some suspended animation. Our eyes wide with all the promise of the future, our mouths agape as if to draw in the elixir of the summer night. Our souls, drawing from the vigor of our youth, leapt up, tickling our bellies as they crept out momentarily. A blur in the moonlight.

But then gravity, with the watchful eye of a mother, pulled us, first reaching to our chest, then embracing us in whole, saying, "That's quite far enough."

And we descended back toward the earth, the groaning of metal singing through the neighborhood as the chains pulled taut with our weight. Our feet dangled as we flew backward, quickly returning to an ascent. The seats under us pulled away as we began to float again, and we held tighter to the chains, because on the backswing, our heads facing down, we couldn't be sure what might await us if we lifted and drifted away. But, as always, the world kept us honest, and it again pulled us back into reality, our legs always outstretched on the return as we anticipated the next climb. Another reach for the stars.

Sometimes, when we grew tired or reconciled with the fact that we couldn't pull ourselves any higher and allowed ourselves to slow to the gentle rock of a cradle, we reached for the fortitude for one last drive. Just at the moment that we streamed so high we secretly worried we would flip over and tumble head-down toward the earth, we launched. Limbs flailing, we braced ourselves, not for the landing, but for the moment in which we would become Peter Pan. Perhaps that's why, our legs uneven and swimming, we touched down with the grace of a dictionary dropping from the very top shelf and the ground sent lightning through our heels and into our ankles. We winced, and held it long after the sparks had withdrawn. We would try again the next night.

It continued on like this, even as the neighborhood transformed, green giving way to gold, the chill of the night reaching into the day. Until our parents called us home or the first fall of snow beckoned us to the nearest hill with sleds in tow.

Throughout the winter, as we trudged through the snow, we forgot our aspirations for flight, our airport becoming a relic of another lost season of our youth. We passed it daily, saw it buried in little white hills, the peaks of its towers still visible, like the fossil of an elephant resting in a dune. We hardly noticed it during the cold months.

I touched it once, during an especially frigid January. The sky was as pale blue as the raised veins on my grandmother's hands and the wind felt like sandpaper upon my cheeks, and I had, for the first time, lamented the past summer for reasons beyond wishing for a break from school. I approached it as if it were an open coffin, and I stood there for a few moments wondering why it had drawn me in. I looked around, scanned the landscape for anyone who might catch me in the act, as if I were about to dip my

hand into a basin of holy water at church. When I felt safe, I withdrew my mittens and reached out. My hand approached the pole with steady deliberation. I investigated the nuances of the steel as my hand crept closer, realizing the speckles on its shell — charcoal, silver and slate. My hand trembled slightly as it drew within an inch, the bitter wind tearing at my revealed skin and the electricity of the beam lashing out, licking my fingertips until, finally, I embraced it, wrapping my hand around it like the grip of a bicycle handle bar. The wintry metal stung my skin, but I didn't retreat. I waited until I was certain. Until I knew it was frozen. Until I knew it was lifeless. I staggered back home, not really certain what had occurred.

When the snow melted and the brilliant radiance of the sun once again heated the seats, we returned, as we had many seasons prior. This time, however, we dove and soared through the air without any qualms against gravity. Our dream of flight subsided.

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Issue #32

23 February 09

## *Between the Lines*

by Gavin Broom

and when I come up for air, it must look like I'm bursting out of the ocean or I'm in a shampoo commercial or something but Paul doesn't notice because as soon as I rise, he greedily takes my place and hoovers up what I've left behind and while he's doing this, someone starts pounding and kicking on the cubicle door, yelling at us to hurry up, and all I can do is laugh as I imagine the poor guy hopping around with his hand pinching the ass of his jeans and so I yell at him to hold it in or use the sink or one of the urinals but this just makes him kick the door harder and I can't think of any other advice I can give him so I kick and punch back but I stop when I realize I've taken a splinter out of the door and the exposed wood against the white paint looks like a monk, kneeling and praying, and this freaks me out, maybe because monks make me think of death, and then I start to worry about where the splinter went if it's not part of the door any longer because I can't see it on the blue floor and it would stand out no matter which side it landed on, so the only other place I can think it went is into me and into my bloodstream and isn't there lead in paint and isn't lead poisonous and I don't want to die and I really don't want to die from a stupid monk-shaped splinter of wood from a cubicle door in a skanky nightclub and the cubicle suddenly feels very small and very hot and the chopping noise that Paul is making below me seems very loud and I start to panic as I search my knuckles for a cut or tear and although the knuckles are red from punching the door, there's no damage and my hands look fine except that my fingers and wrists look fatter than I thought they were, but anyway, I manage to calm down and I even manage to laugh, partly from relief, partly because of my reaction, but mostly because the guy who needs to get in here is still banging on the door and I start to think that he can't be that desperate otherwise it'd be in his shoes by now and then Paul stands up and looks at me with his white moustache and twitching nose and I'm about to say something when I realize what we're doing and it's Sunday for Chrissakes, or maybe it's tripped into Monday, and I'm wiping my lip and wishing I'd stayed clean tonight because although it feels impossible right now, experience says I'm going to feel dead until at least Thursday and I've got an interview on Tuesday morning, but then Paul passes back my rolled-up twenty and offers me another bump and I decide it's pointless turning him down now, so