

Toe Tyrants

By Mitchell Scott

YOU'D THINK A PERSON would have an amicable, mutually beneficial relationship with their toes. "I'll help you out if you help me out. Together we can go far. Deal?" You would hope the toes would concede an affirmative "deal" in response, no questions or protests or asterisks. You would hope.

Really, they have no choice. The toes-brain relationship is sacred. Toes are important. The body knows this. Like tires on a bike. Claws to the squirrel. Toes are crucial. They let you rip. I love all 10 of them — or at least I thought I did. Problem with my toes, though, is they treat me like shit, with their continual uprisings of rotting displeasure.

So I say, "Damn you toes. Why do you have to be all up in my face? (Metaphorically speaking, of course). I mean you *are* borderline accessories. I can do without you. If I have to. Sure, I might not be able to moonwalk or go on the pro mogul tour, which is a super bummer, but I'm still going to live."

But the toes don't respond to such unsubstantiated threats. They just keep on growing fungus, bunions, blisters, ingrown toenails, and they stink, sweat, segue in odd directions and otherwise piss me off.

So I ramble on, "Sorry to call you "accessories," you toes, but really, when it comes down to it, what's your problem? You do get a fair pile of leisure time, say, compared to your closest associates, the fingers. The fingers never stop. Like bustling, independent entrepreneurs, fingers make it happen, as teams, as individuals — the works. No scratchies or itchies, ever. You guys — you cursed toes — just bitch and complain."

For my many digits, it's a labour-union style work schedule down there in toeland. Sure, when they're running, standing, skiing, dancing or rope walking, they're on. It's super on. But when it's off, it's totally off. If you sit and sleep a lot, like I do, the toes got it good. Right now, for example, I'm asking very little of my toes. In fact, they are doing nothing. That's when I think, if fingers were backhoes then toes would be dump trucks. And that's when I say to myself, my toes are beat up dump trucks that don't drive too nice and make a lot of noise.

Aside from the lower back, which I would call the official opposition, the toes complain the most. Case in point: It's a temperate day, the whole body is comfortable, no one is complaining, not even the opposition, which is rare. Yet, way down at the end, as far away from the brain as you can get, the toes (and their subversive partners, the feet) are sweating buckets. Even in sandals they gush. Soiling socks and shoes. No, they're never quite happy. Of course, the toe sweat is in cahoots with the fungus. Gross.

On the rest of my body, there's been the odd, nasty skin invasion, but nothing out of the ordinary. Nothing it couldn't vanquish. The toes, though. Oh, those toes. From their discomfort festers a disconcerting complacency. They just let the enemy set up shop. Athlete's foot continually moves in across the border. The fungus is entrenched for months, sometimes years. No matter what powder or ointment bomb I send their way, it just crumbles onto rocky outcrops of shadowed flesh. The toes just sit in their bunkers and laugh at it all.

Then there's the dreaded Toe Taliban, dug in, all yellow and distorted. A war-ravaged land that flips the rest of me the middle finger every day. Toenail fungus, or onychomycosis, is a real devil and camps out in one out of every 10 adults worldwide. The toe does nothing to battle this foe. It even lets it travel from toe to toe with minimal resistance.

As I stare upon them now, all indignant and awful-looking, I can't help but wonder if their days are numbered. How many humans, like me, are battling their southern digits? Who knows, maybe in a few hundred years we'll shed the baby toe. Aren't their blessed souls out there with webbed feet? Could my skirmish be a sign that the toes and the rest of the body are officially at war?

In the end, maybe the contest between my toes and me is an indicator of natural selection, of digit and limb realizing they don't need each other any more. And I'm caught in the middle. Ten little bastards. Ten sentries of change. And a world of distorted and discoloured stink in between.