

Bloody Toe

by S.H. Gall

Owen had never seen his boyfriend cry, but while he was in the bathroom having a cigarette through the open window, he heard Devin sniffing and coughing back tears. A bit shocked, he decided not to confront Devin or acknowledge that he had heard. Italian men could be very sensitive to this perceived compromise of manhood. Owen knew this much.

Slightly before his clandestine cigarette, he had been picking apart the skin on his right big toe. He had fully soaked one paper towel, one wet towelette, and a third of a Kleenex with blood. He was seriously considering somehow transforming these vibrant red fibers into art objects, or at least Found Objects. He felt that ripping up that much skin probably constituted an artistic act.

Settling in with his second romantic comedy of the evening and nursing his 12th screwdriver, he contemplated his surroundings. What made Devin cry? Owen had changed the cat litter, washed dishes, and swept down the stair. It couldn't be him, unless it was about the shoes he had ordered. Devin really couldn't be that upset about gorgeous trainers from Spain that were 75% off.

It then occurred to Owen that someone may have died. Devin was caretaker to an aunt and an old friend in a nursing home, and was not all that young himself. It would be just like an Italian man of a certain age to neglect disclosure of such an event; he had paid visits to both convalescents that afternoon. Owen thought a fatality unlikely, though. The drama would be too much to suppress, for a Calabrian man.

After a calming half hour of movie treacle, Owen peered down to find his foot in a pool of blood. He hadn't eaten all day, due to heartburn caused by an antihistimine for a persistent rash, and his

blood had thinned to the point where he probably should have used at least the last 2/3 of the Kleenex. He slipped upon rising and smashed his head on the air purifier, hence losing his life.

Owen passed without ever knowing the cause of Devin's grief.

