



by Scott Topping

Last week, Colette's feet ran away. Since their departure, she has been following their indolent so-called adventures on TV.

Her friends told her she should have expected her feet to leave her as much as she ignored them.

"You watch too much TV," they tell her. And they spit out other clichéd criticisms—enough to form a spray, like a warm, wet shield to protect themselves from deserved insults that should be coming their way. "You're getting fat and lazy," her sister said. Can you believe someone actually said that? Especially her. Sad, lonely woman. She's always on the go, but where the hell does she go? To the same places, meeting the same man different body over and over again, some of them not even courteous enough to have a different name than the one they replace.

Movement is overrated.

But not for feet. Frankly, Colette didn't even notice at first that her feet were missing. If she didn't have to get to work and to the bathroom, she wouldn't even mind. Colette's stubs are cold. She lies on the couch in a flattened j shape, held partially upright by her left elbow, and covered like a banana with an afghan peel. The afghan is black like the one on Roseanne. The afghan has also been off the air for years. She watches her feet on TV signing autographs in Tucson. She's to blame for that one. After seeing a show about an artist who had lost her arms, she practiced writing with her feet for a week or so. The experiment lasted longer than her forays into juggling, sign language, crochet, and sword eating, mostly because she seemed to have a knack for foot writing. Now her feet are taking all the glory. Feet are so vain. Colette is angry at her feet for embarrassing her on

TV, more than for leaving her. The phone rings. It is her mother. "Do you see your feet on the TV?" "Yes, Ma." "They look so pretty. Much better than when they were with you." "Yes, Ma." "You know what people are saying." "What people?" Colette suspects that "people" is her mother. "They say that if you would have used them more, you know, paid a little attention to them, they wouldn't have left." "I'm fat and lazy." "I didn't say that. Why do you always have to be so sarcastic." Her mother inhales and exhales loudly, as if trying to calm herself down, or as if trying to ignite an entire cigarette in one breath. "All I'm saying, I mean, is . . ." "I told you so?" "You should really get out more. Now your feet are doing it themselves." Colette thinks about how her mother watches at least 15 hours of TV a day and never goes anywhere. She also thinks that only her mother would take her feet's side over hers. Her whole body is tense. Had she been the Hulk, her thigh muscles would have ripped through the afghan. "Yes, Ma. It's kinda hard now. With no feet." "Did you hear about your sister's new car?" The foot topic is gone. The channel in her mother's head had been changed by god's clicker. The next several minutes are spent explaining the beauty and wisdom of her sister's latest purchases and decisions. Colette flicks through the channels herself, but on an actual TV, remembering to make a noise every so often when her mother's voice rises or stops.

The next day Colette's feet are in Idaho promoting potato appreciation week. They are dirty this time and seem proud of being dirty (as much as one can tell from a foot's posture). The TV announcer says that the feet are heading further west and should be in California by week's end. Rumors of a movie deal float about like a dog-shaped cloud about to rain. A tabloid reports that her feet are planning to divorce her. Celebrity lawyers debate the ramifications of such a precedent for twenty-four hours on the twenty-four hour news channels.

"What if my head wanted to get up and leave?" one of them asks rhetorically.

Colette wonders as she watches if she should have gone more places. She scripts an O. Henry scenario in her head about getting active now, stomping from place to place with her two pegs like a twice unfortunate pirate. Maybe she would get on TV. But the twist ending, the satisfying irony of a woman who loses her feet and then begins to travel, is not to be. Simple couch reverie and nothing more.


In a moment of self-pity, she decides that everyone is right about her: she is lazy, and her life has been wasted. These are her falling asleep thoughts that fortunately begin to speak less clearly and audibly than the voices on her TV, programmed to run for an hour after she goes to bed. Her anxiety turns to a peaceful laugh track. "If your life is a waste, what isn't a waste?" the laughs tell her in their secret language. By morning, she rationalizes that her way of life is satisfying. To hell with others. She will do what she does and nothing more. She has always felt some guilt, she thinks, because of the urge to go someplace; not having the feet around will leave her less conflicted, more peaceful. Besides, doing nothing in one place is certainly more efficient than doing nothing in many places. Movement, as they say (or at least I said earlier), is overrated. I repeat the expression now simply to inform you that Colette shares my opinion.

She fantasizes about her feet coming home, knocking, kicking at the door, and how she will turn them away. "Find a new body," she would say. "You're not welcome here." And she knows they will come home. They always do. She smiles when she thinks about the expression "getting a foot in the door," then she makes herself comfortable on the couch.

On the TV, her feet have suffered a rusty nail injury in Washington and have been rushed to the hospital. The announcer urges viewers to pray for the feet. "They are in our prayers," says a woman in pink, holding vigil outside the hospital. "God bless those feet. They are living all of our dreams." "That's what you get for walking," Colette says to the TV. She turns the channel and ignores the ringing phone. Her stubs are quite comfy, tucked firmly in the black afghan.

Scott Topping's website, uglycousin.com, is on hiatus until his hands return. Until then, you can find him on [Facebook](#).

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