

Size Matters

The vengeful machinations of a small boy

The school bus stopped a few houses away from Tich's house. It was the third week back at school, and there were new kids on the bus, one of them who already had a nickname. Steamer, it was. A name that expressed his looks, a round, roly-poly figure, big and heavy like a steamroller. He was easily twice the size of Tich, and pretty much his opposite. Tich was small for his age (hence his nickname), thin and runt-like, the nostrils of his nose showing from beneath a flattened nose, not unlike a pig's. Thankfully, though, the kids did not call him "piggy," a name that would be far worse than Tich. For his part, Steamer lumbered along as though he were pushing against a mountain of sand, his wide stumpy legs forcing his body to turn with each step. He ran with difficulty, gravity holding him upright, his arms pulling at the air as though he were swimming.

They stepped down from the bus and immediately Tich ran forward, but Steamer held him back, his big round face, eyes almost closed shut from his enormously fat cheeks, grinning with glee. "No you don't!" he warned.

"Let go of me!" cried Tich, trying to twist his arm out of Steamer's vice-like grip.

Three weeks earlier.

Now in grade 8, the new school year had got off to a rocky start for Tich, all because of the school bus, actually, not the bus, but the presence of the new kid, Steamer. At first he had almost liked him, because he seemed to be a jovial kid, his being fat and all, and laughing all the time, even when there was nothing to laugh at. So on that first day, when Steamer grabbed him as soon as they got off the bus and started pulling him along, laughing and calling out, "you're with me! You're with me! Let's have fun! Let's have fun!" Tich took it all in good humor, going along with it, not trying to twist his way free, allowing himself to be dragged along the street. But then, when they came to his house, Steamer did not let go, and pulled him along, his grip tightening until it hurt.

"Let go of me!" cried Tich, "this is my house!"

"Come on! We're going to my house! Friends are friends!"

laughed Steamer.

And so it went. Every day, they got off the bus, Steamer grabbed Tich, and dragged him past his house all the way to his own house, almost a block away. Tich even tried pretending he was happy to go along and then hope that Steamer would let go of him, but he never did. Steamer thought this was great fun. Tich had become his compliant slave.

Tich's dad was away at work every day until quite late. He had a well-equipped work bench in a shed at the back of his garage, and it was there that Tich hoped to find a solution. His mum was pleased that he was working away there and never asked what he was doing. It was enough for her that he was occupied and not whining or complaining that he had nothing to do. His first idea was to make a ring with a spike sticking out that he could plunge into Steamer when he grabbed him. He had found an old ring, a key ring maybe, to which he tried to affix an old gramophone needle. But it proved impossible, with no way to make the spike stay firm, and besides the electrical tape he found, stretched and did not do the job.

He then sneaked a knife from the kitchen, but this would not do either. It was a regular bread and butter knife, with a curved end, so it would not be easy to jab it into Steamer's fat hand, or anywhere on his body for that matter. And he could not take the carving knife, because that would be noticed immediately, and besides, how could he hide it in his school bag, and what if he were caught with it. No, that would not do either.

There were containers of nails, but Tich could not think of any way to use them to advantage. He did bang some nails through a thin piece of wood, but then the problem still remained, how could he explain the weapon, if a teacher found it in his bag, and probably worse, Steamer would quickly spy it in his bag anyway, and then he could imagine Steamer taking it off him and using it against him. Frustrated, he threw down the hammer and nails and retreated to the front of the house, and stood out front, bouncing a tennis ball on the newly laid concrete footpath. This he always enjoyed when he got fed up, especially as there were millions of ants scurrying about and he could aim his bouncing ball to kill as many of them as he could, though there seemed to

be an endless supply of them. And there, slowly, each evening in the twilight, a solution to his problem came to him.

Today.

The bus slowly passed the line of modest houses of the new suburb of Norlane, most of them “commission” houses, public housing that is, and drew to a stop at the corner of Melbourne and Sparks roads. Steamer with his big grin and fat cheeks, positioned himself on the step at the bus’s door. Tich positioned himself behind a couple of other kids, one of them a girl, and managed to slip out without Steamer grabbing him. He ran a little forward, looking back to see whether Steamer would chase him. And chase him Steamer did.

Now, Steamer, for all his weight, was not that strong a runner, but nevertheless, because he was twice Tich’s size, could probably catch him in a short run, so long as Tich did not run out of breath, and so long as Tich could quickly put on a spurt at the start. So on this day he got a little ahead of him, seeing that Steamer was set to catch him up. He looked back and cried, taunted really, “Ha! Ha! You can’t catch me!” and ran as fast as he could, making sure he was just out of reach.

Now came the *coup de grâce*.

It was difficult for Tich to keep up a fast pace, at the same time looking back to see exactly where Steamer was. It was essential that they both were at their peak speeds. Timing was the essence. A miscalculation and Tich would be beaten to a pulp, or at least that was what he imagined. And now, Steamer was practically on top of him, Tich running as fast as he could. He took a quick glimpse back over his shoulder, then suddenly bobbed down, crouching into a ball, ducking his head into his arms, squatting head down on to the concrete footpath, feeling its hardness on his knuckles that shielded his face and head.

He felt a slight bump at his back, but nothing else. Then a scream and thump as Steamer sailed over Tich’s crouching body, and fell straight ahead of him, arms sprawled out, unable to protect his landing, his fat face banging into the concrete, his legs kicking well past Tich, his knees deeply grazed by the rough concrete surface.

Tich rose up, and looked down at the prostrate body of his

nemesis. “It serves you right! Leave me alone!” he cried, with some satisfaction, but mixed with fear, fear that Steamer might lose his temper and really come after him. He stood briefly looking down at Steamer, a moment that would remain with him forever. There sat Steamer examining his cuts and bruises, feeling the blood run down his face from a horrible graze on his forehead.

“You’ll pay for this!!” growled Steamer. “You just wait!” Tich rushed home, not looking back.

The next day, Tich tried to fake an illness so he wouldn’t have to go to school and face up to Steamer. But his mum would have nothing of it. So he was prepared for the worst. Well, not really prepared. He had not thought much of what might happen after he pulled off his stunt. He had hardly slept last night, so pleased he was and excited that his solution had really done the trick. But now, what if Steamer came after him like he was sure he would. And although he only had time to glimpse the result of his handy work, it looked as though Steamer was pretty banged up.

On that day, he looked out for Steamer at school and on the bus coming home. But Steamer was not on the school bus, not for a whole week. And the day he showed up, Tich pursed his lips, looked with some fear at the scars on his face and elbows and knees, trying to hide his satisfaction. He was about to say he was sorry. But Steamer didn’t look at him. They got off the bus together, and Tich expected he worst. But it did not come. Steamer never mentioned it, and they rarely spoke to each other. Each walked at their own pace, several steps apart, to their own house, Tich hanging back, preferring to follow rather than lead.

Moral: *Courage, though foolish, is the counter of tyranny.*

