

Nicole Roberts

Cold Feet

He pointed to my feet. "If you're too hot you could always take your shoes off."

He clearly did not understand a thing about me. "I know." I looked down in the general direction of my feet. My right foot was perched on the front tire of my wheelchair, a comfortable and familiar place for it.

"Do you want to?" He sat across from me on the floor. "No, that's OK." It was quite warm in his little apartment, but still -- I'm crazy to be here anyway. I didn't even know this guy and here I was in his apartment. He had to drag my wheelchair up a flight of stairs to have me here with him. Nothing casual. He isn't a strong man. He must like me.

I invited myself to his house.

"Are you nervous?"

"No, I'm OK."

"Are you aware that you're frantically rubbing your fingers together?" He squinted at me. Deep lines under his eyes accentuated his unruly eyebrows.

I smiled a little. My fingers immediately tripled in size. I struggled to keep them under control.

"You sure you don't want your shoes off? It's much nicer without them. See?" He wiggled his bare toes for me.

"No, I don't think so." I glanced around the room trying to find an idea for a new subject. Statues, bells, incense, a moose horn: everything was foreign to me. A weight filled my head and blurred my thoughts and vision.

"Why not?"

"I just don't want to...I'm fine, really...I'm not very hot anyway." He stared at me as though I hadn't spoken. "I have ugly feet."

"Ugly feet?" He seemed amused.

"Yeah." Ugly was an understatement, of course. I couldn't tell him I have profoundly deformed feet, bluish purple, shrivelled up and half-dead feet. I didn't tell anybody that.

"All women think they have ugly feet. It's ridiculous."

"Yes, but they're just saying that mine really are ugly. Really ugly."

He laughed. "Oh, really?"

"Yes." I was far from a normal woman and what I told him was absolute truth. I hate normal women.

"They all think the same way you do! They all think they have the ugliest body parts."

"They don't know what really ugly can be." I was scared of my own language.

"Can I see them?"

I had seen my own feet only once before. I was thirteen and home alone. I drove into my sister's bedroom and sat in front of her full-length mirror. I found my toes were grayish, pudgy and wrinkled. They were lopsided, crooked and crumpled, each overlapping the other. What was supposed to be my little toe was larger than the one next to it. My feet were small and twisted. The skin was purplish, or may reddish, I couldn't remember exactly, I only knew it struck me as the colour of a corpse. Along the bottom and near my ankles, a yellow scab coated my dead-person skin.

My heels were skinny and knobby. I turned slightly sideways. The bones in my feet shown clearly, as if the gaunt, bluish purple skin were the only thing between my insides and the outside world.

I could not bear the grotesqueness. I left the mirror, and have never gone back. I was not prepared for them to be that bad. From the inside, they felt like regular feet, yet they looked so unlike they were a part of me. They looked like something dead. Nothing alive. Nothing vital. Certainly not part of a woman.

He stared at me.

"What?"

"I want to see your feet."

"Why?"

"Because I doubt they're as bad as you think."

"They are."

"You probably need a second opinion."

He was crazy. He thought he knew everything, but he never saw feet like mine, let alone the rest of my deformed body. "Fine." Let him be sorry he asked.

"Really?"

"Yeah, fine, go ahead."

"You don't sound very convincing."

"No one ever looks at my feet. I'm telling you, they're gross."

"OK, let's see these gross feet of yours." He scooted along the floor and sat cross-legged with his knees touching my front tires. He looked up at me and waited.

"What?" A drop of sweat left my neck and torturously made its way down my back.

"Can't you take off your shoes or should I?" His voice and body radiated softness.

"I can't do it. You have to." My tone was abruptly harsh. I smiled to try and compensate.

"Are you ready?"

I nodded. What was I doing? This was insane. Very deliberately he moved his hands towards my right foot. Warm fingers wrapped around my encased heel. He held my ankle in his other hand and gradually the bottom of my foot lifted from the sole of the shoe. My toes curled as they always did when released from the shoe's hard embrace. He placed the shoe on the floor next to him. "How's that?" The whites of his eyes were lucent.

I nodded. I was afraid of what my words might be. He looked down at my naked foot. Horror oozed from my forehead. My attention was glued to the swirl of thinning hair on his crown.

He inspected my foot from a variety of positions. "It's not bad. Not bad at all." He didn't look up. "It's cold though. How can you have cold feet when it's so hot?"

"Bad circulation." I heard myself quiver but he didn't seem to notice.

"They need to be warmed up." His soft fingers firmly grasped the sides of my foot. Slowly, he moved them around, gliding gently over the bluish purple skin. The wrinkleness, the twistedness, the yellow scab: he touched them all.

My breath became easier with each caress. The warmth of his hands melted my bones.

He held my foot in the palm of his hand and pressed his lips to the top of it. "Can I see your other foot?" He spoke straight to my heart. The lines of his face were smooth and his eyes were open and sparkling.

"Yes."