

# ***Marie Celeste***

**Beatrice Redpath**

**Illustrated by**

**E. J. Dinsmore**

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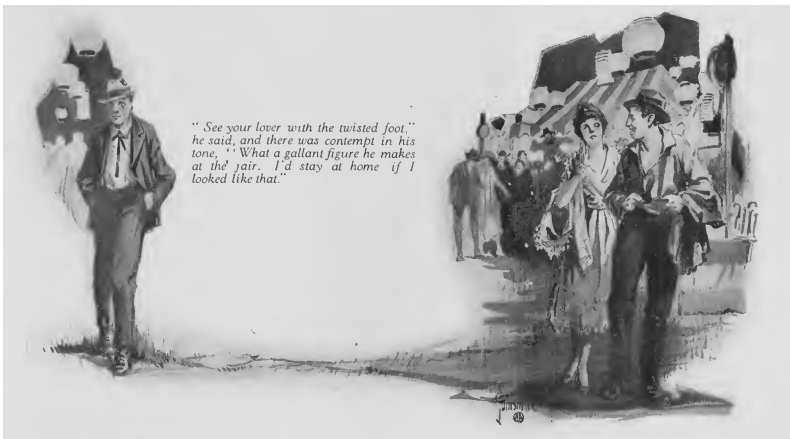
# MARIE CELESTE

BY BEATRICE REDPATH

*Illustrated by E. J. Dinsmore*

**E**ver since she had awakened that spring morning, Marie Celeste had felt a curious, indescribable sensation of sadness. She had decided that it was the spring that was sad. The clear sharp sparkle of winter was gone. Instead, the air was like a soft sigh whispering over the bare fields; the trees were gaunt black skeletons; there was only a flicker of green in the hedges, and there was little warmth in the sunshine. Oh, it was surely the spring that was sad!

And it conveyed its sadness to her, who had so much reason to be gay. To be young, to be pretty, to be loved! Three good reasons to be glad. And she had finally made up her mind to tell Phillipe Baptiste that she would marry him in June. He had waited a long time for his answer, although she had known all along, as well as everyone else knew, that Phillipe Baptiste was the man that she would marry. It had always been intended so, as long as she could remember. But she had hung back from saying the final word. Once said, it was her honour pledged. She loved her freedom as the birds loved theirs. She liked things as they were; but older, graver minds said that the time had come for her to settle in life. She supposed that it were so. She could not remain always just Marie Celeste, care-free and gay, thoughtless of to-morrow. Life was not just a happy tune. It became serious as one grew older. She felt a slight tremor run through her when she thought of the importance of what she would tell Phillipe Baptiste that night at the country fair.



She had promised, however, that Joe should drive her to the fair. Poor Joe, with his twisted foot! He had so little fun at the fair which was the event of the year to the whole country-side. He could not join in the dances; he could only wander about, generally by himself, and watch the gayety of the others as they whirled about to the sound of the merry tunes.

Once she was there, she knew that Phillippe would claim her for every dance. He had such a way of pushing aside all the others who asked her to dance, of taking complete possession of her. She loved this forcefulness, this bold manner of courting, as she loved his eager black eyes and crisp curling hair.

She was still busy putting the last touches to her crisp pink muslin when she heard Joe's voice downstairs. It was a wonderful evening for a drive, but as she stood for a second at the open window before going downstairs, she felt again that same sensation of sadness as she looked out on the quiet fields, where the earth was changing to a dull red colour in the afterglow of the sunset.

With a feeling of impatience at her own stupidity, she ran downstairs, determined to enjoy herself. Seated behind the old plodding horse, with Joe talking in his quiet friendly tones, she felt more like herself again, the gay, happy Marie Celeste. The thought of the fair was exciting. She loved the crowd that would be there, the jostling friendly crowd, the ribbon decked booths, the merry music, the bags of pop corn, the tall glasses of pink lemonade.

"Oh, it is fun, the fair!" she exclaimed, "the dancing is so gay. I wish that you could dance, Joe."

He smiled contentedly.

“I have my fun in watching the rest,” he said. “One sees a lot looking on. I am glad that Phillipe will be there to dance with you. He’s the best dancer in the whole country-side. So they say.”

“Yes, he is,” said Marie Celeste, glad to hear Phillipe praised, especially by Joe for she valued his opinion. “Do you like him, Joe?” she asked suddenly.

“Why of course I like him,” he responded. “I think he’s a fine fellow. He’s clever too. He’ll be a rich man one of these days. He knows how to work as well as how to play. Phillipe Baptiste is all right.”

Marie Celeste felt grateful to Joe. She knew all this herself, but she liked to hear Phillipe’s praises sung. It was generous of Joe to be so enthusiastic, for he had every reason to know that Phillipe Baptiste was a rather serious rival in Marie Celeste’s affections. She wondered if he would like him so well when he knew that she was to marry him in June. And then she was ashamed of thinking such a thing. Joe was not that kind. He would only be glad for her that she was marrying a man like Phillipe Baptiste. If there were any hurt to himself, Joe would keep it hidden. He would only have words of praise for his successful rival. She knew Joe. She could almost hear him saying in his slow tones. “Well, it’s the best man wins.” She had so often heard him say it over a game of cards.

Suddenly she made up her mind to tell Joe of her decision. She wanted to say it and have it over. She dreaded the idea that it would hurt him.

“I’m glad you like him,” she said, “because . . . oh, because . . . I am going to tell him to-night . . . that I will marry him in the summer.”

Joe did not answer. He flapped the reins on the horse’s back. The wheels sank into a puddle and Joe glanced over the side to see that they were not sinking too deep into the thick mud. Marie Celeste wished that he would say something. She felt nervously unhappy. She knew that she had hurt him. She twisted her hands together in her lap and wished that he would speak.

At length he cleared his throat and forced a smile into his grave eyes.

“That’s news indeed, little Marie,” he said, “big news. Phillipe Baptiste is a lucky man. And you are getting a good husband. He’ll be a rich man someday, but what is better than that, I’m sure he’ll make you happy.”

Marie Celeste nodded her head.

“They have always intended me to marry him,” she said. “And it is time now that I should be getting more serious.”

Joe smiled and put his big hand over one of hers.

“Never grow serious, little Marie,” he said, “there are plenty of serious people in this old world. Never forget how to laugh . . . how to be gay. Never forget to be just Marie Celeste.”

The tears started in Marie Celeste’s eyes. What a miserable business it was to have to grow older and make these decisions. She sat back with her eyes fixed on the sky that was melting from primrose colour to a pale toneless shade. She could hear the crickets in the fields piping their curious shrill song. It seemed to pierce through her strangely. How unkind it was to have to hurt someone so good, so true as Joe. Joe had been her friend for so long. She had never thought of him as a lover, although she knew that he loved her. He had never said so, and she knew that he never would until some time, perhaps, when she had grown quite old and had ceased to care for dancing. Then, if she were not married . . . then, she felt that he would come and ask her to share the remainder of his life. A husband with a twisted foot! Oh, she knew that he thought that that was no husband for Marie Celeste, who was so quick-footed, who loved so to dance and run and romp. Would he always be as much her friend as he was now? That was what she was wondering. She felt a lump come up in her throat. She could not do without Joe. Phillippe for her husband . . . but Joe for her friend . . . always . . . always her friend.

“Yes, he will make me a good husband,” she said at length, “but somehow, Joe, I don’t feel very gay to-night. Life is not quite simple after all. It seems like this . . . if you get one thing then something else is taken from you. Life hoards its gifts like a miser hoards his gold.”

“It is strange for you to talk like that, Marie Celeste,” Joe said, “life has not been miserly to you.”

“We can’t live just in our own happiness,” Marie said thoughtfully, “No matter how happy we are ourselves, if someone we care for is not happy . . . then there is no happiness at all.”

Joe was silent for a moment, with a furrowed brow.

“I suppose I know what you mean,” he said, “but I want you to know, little Marie, that I would not have cared to see you married to a man with a twisted foot. I want better for you than that. Don’t think of me as unhappy. What more can I ask than to look on at your happiness. It is like looking on

at your dancing . . . that is the same for me as though I danced. To see you happy . . . then I am happy. Phillipe is a fine boy. I am content.”

She put her hand gently on his rough sleeve.

“Dear Joe,” she said, “we will always be friends. Will we not? Good friends. Always.”

Marie Celeste’s spirits rose as they came close to the fair grounds. They could hear the music, the shouts and the laughter. Marie’s little slippered feet beat in rhythm to the gay tunes. She was eager now to be out of the buggy and to be whirling round and round in the dance. A platform had been erected at the far end of the grounds and she could see the couples in the distance.

Phillipe Baptiste was on the look out for her and joined them almost the moment they entered the grounds. Marie’s cheeks burned with excitement and her eyes shone as she stared around her at the slow moving crowds, the booths, the lights, the gayety. She wanted to penetrate into the mystery of a big tent, but Phillipe put her hand through his arm and led her away to the dancing pavilion.

It was thrilling to be there on the slippery boards with Phillipe’s arm strongly held about her waist. He was whispering compliments to her as they whirled round and round. He looked very splendid, she thought, his eyes were so black, his teeth so white and shining. There was no one there who spun round with the same agility and grace. He swept her completely off her feet several times, and she clung to him desperately to regain her footing. She felt proud to be seen with him as they stepped off the platform for a few moments in the cooler air beyond. She turned in the direction of where they had left Joe, but he tried to urge her to go in the other direction.

“Oh, you don’t want to go back there,” he said, “Come off here where there aren’t so many people.”

But Marie Celeste shook her head and wondered at her own contrariness. She had come with the definite idea of giving Phillipe his answer, and yet now that the moment had come she longed to postpone it from one moment to the next.

“Let us look at the booths,” she said, “they are so gay.”

They strolled in and out of the crowd, and Marie Celeste knew that people cast glances at them both. Phillipe Baptiste always attracted attention; his loud laugh always made him conspicuous. As they came out of one of the tents she saw Joe passing. He looked tired, she thought, for he

went slowly, and his foot seemed to drag more than usual. Something like a sharp little shaft seemed to pierce into her heart.

Phillipe Baptiste too saw Joe and he broke into a loud laugh.

“See, your lover with the twisted foot!” he said, and there was contempt in his tone. “What a gallant figure he makes at the fair. I’d stay at home if I looked like that.”

Marie Celeste stood quite still. Her hands clenched at her sides; her eyes narrowed. She felt rigid, stiff with a sudden overwhelming sensation of passionate anger. She felt that she could have turned and struck Phillipe Baptiste with her little fists. She waited to speak until the angry passion died and left her cold and contemptuous.

“Yes,” she said, “It is true . . . Joe has a twisted foot . . . but it is you, Phillipe Baptiste . . . it is you who have the twisted soul . . . I am glad . . . very glad, that you have shown it to me to-night.”

In a flash she had left him and had crossed to where Joe was slowly making his way through the crowds. She slipped her hand through his arm and he turned to her in some surprise.

“I didn’t expect to see you again,” he said.

“Take me home, Joe,” Marie Celeste said, “I don’t like the fair. I like better to drive with you under the stars.”

He frowned, puzzled, and looking up saw in the distance Phillipe Baptiste scowling as he watched them. Then with a shrug Phillipe turned and went into one of the tents.

Marie Celeste was very silent as they drove through the soft spring night. The air was like a caress on her burning cheeks. The stars were very bright and there was a smell of running sap and moist earth. At length she spoke.

“I have decided differently. I shall not marry Phillipe Baptiste.”

“Why is that?” Joe asked.

“Because . . . for an instant he . . . showed me his soul . . . and it was an ugly twisted thing. I did not care for the look of it. To dance well . . . what is that, when you have a soul like his?”

She threw back her head and looked up at the glittering sky. She felt deeply happy, deeply content. She was no longer burdened with a sensation of sadness. Now she knew the cause of it. How foolish she had been. She



had made up her mind, and something deep within her had shrunk from her decision. It had cast a veil of sadness over her. Now in her mind as well as in her heart, she knew where her true happiness lay. She took a long breath of the soft sweet air.

“Oh, the spring, Joe dear,” she said, “How sweet and glad is the spring of the year.”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

A cover was created for this ebook which is placed in the public domain.

[The end of *Marie Celeste* by Beatrice Redpath]