Silver Feet

By

Beatrice Redpath

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Silver Feet

Being the love story of a girl who knew what she wanted and a lover who didn't.

By Beatrice Redpath

Mrs. Aldous was a widow, one of those large, kindly women who naturally overflow with maternal feelings, and her one small son did not give her sufficient scope for their expression. Hence when Mary-Lee Dodge, the child of a dear friend, lost both parents in a motor accident, Mrs. Aldous with a large and simple gesture did exactly what might have been expected. She hugged Mary-Lee, who was visiting her at the time of the tragedy and was then aged ten, to her very maternal bosom, exclaiming with a mixture of sorrow and satisfaction, "You precious infant, you'll go on living with us, that's all."

And thus it was simply arranged. Mrs. Aldous, like many women, had an abhorrence of anything in the shape of legal forms or documents, so Mary-Lee was never legally adopted into the Aldous family; she merely went on living with them.

At the time it happened, Jimmie Aldous was thirteen and on the point of departing for boarding-school, therefore fairly contemptuous of girls of ten. He suffered the entrance of Mary-Lee into the family with the remark that she didn't seem a bad sort of kid. "But I don't want her chasing around after me," he added, with an anxious furrow on his young brow; "girls spoil everything."

"She's a sensible little girl," Mrs. Aldous said, refraining from telling him what she really thought of Mary-Lee, wise enough to know he would think more of her, were he to discover it for himself.

"Oh, girls," with heavy scorn: "they can't help making a nuisance of themselves."

But even he had to admit that this was something Mary-Lee did not do. When he came home for the holidays she watched him with a wide-eyed wonder that was intensely flattering. Moreover, she listened breathlessly to his accounts of the triumphs of his school hockey team, which pleased Jimmie considerably, since he had never found anyone who showed such a passionate interest in the affairs nearest his heart.

"She's a decent enough little kid," he at length remarked, with his recently acquired air of superiority, "but still, of course, she's only a kid."

When Mary-Lee was fifteen Jimmie was eighteen and had entered the Royal Military College. He returned for the holidays, presenting a dazzling figure to Mary-Lee's admiring eyes; erect and dashing, a military cape swinging from his shoulders, chin high, and a suggestion of a swagger in his walk. Mary-Lee did not for a moment expect such a glamorous creature to pay much attention to mere fifteen. When, during his spare moments, he volunteered to take her skiing, forcing her down hills which might have shaken the courage of anyone, she was so uplifted by worship that fear was an unknown quantity. She did what her young god told her, and grew hot at his least word of commendation.

Occasionally he spent a morning with her at the Winter Club, teaching her all he knew about inside and outside edges and more complicated figures, which Mary-Lee would practise with phenomenal patience, taking terrific falls with a gay young laugh, indomitably determined to master her skates. And during the summer months at the Aldous' country-place at Senneville, Jimmie would sometimes take an hour off from more absorbing pastimes to teach her the Australian crawl, a new overhand serve at tennis, or how to follow through her drive.

"Not bad for a kid," was the habitual comment, and this remark made Mary-Lee's eyes shine like stars.

By the time she was sixteen she was delicately slim, with auburn hair that tied itself into tight little curls all over her head, while she had very big black eyes; and those eyes when they were fixed upon Jimmie expressed a devotion anyone might have noticed, had they not been so used to it that it escaped attention.

"Just like brother and sister," kindly Mrs. Aldous would explain, at that time actually believing it to be so. She would have been astonished, not to say startled, had anyone informed her of the true state of affairs, although under pressure she might have admitted that she had made plans for a vague and distant future. But then, of course, she would have added, there was ample time for all that sort of thing, for she had overlooked the fact that at nineteen a boy considers himself even more of man than he is likely to do later on, and is rather prone to fall in love, if only by way of an experiment.

That winter Jimmie commenced to take Mary-Lee more fully into his confidence, for he imagined himself to be in love. Mary-Lee listened to

these confidences with the same flattering interest she had always shown in his affairs, a smile on her lips, but an aching desolation in her eyes. Fortunately, or perhaps unfortunately, Jimmie only perceived the smile which was sympathetic and encouraging. At any rate, had he happened to see those eyes he would never have conjectured the truth, for it would not have occurred to him that "the kid" was experiencing anything of what he was feeling.

"She's a peach," he said, alluding to a Sally Evans who was the object of his affections. "She's got eyes black as pansies. You never saw such eyes—" looking into eyes black as pansies as he spoke—"and she's such a sport. Never saw a girl could ski like her—went down that big drop behind the mountain five times without falling. What do you think of that?"

Mary-Lee showed what she thought of it by starting out the next morning with her skis and taking the same breath-snatching drop five times without falling, coming home fairly well satisfied. She mentioned it casually to Jimmie a day or so later and he listened without much apparent interest.

"Not bad for a kid."

"But I thought you said . . ." protested Mary-Lee. "You *did* say—"

"What did I say?"

"Oh—nothing."

She had to listen to a great deal more about Sally Evans and more and more it exasperated her, knowing as she did that Sally was none of the things Jimmie thought her. Then one day coming home she met Sally and an Ada Phillips sauntering leisurely up the street, both of them apparently in the grip of overwhelming mirth. They would pause and appear to hold one another up while laughter rocked them. Their unrestrained joy could be heard almost half a block away. Mary-Lee paused in front of them, with a pleasurable curiosity for what they were finding so intensely amusing. "Whatever is the joke? You might tell me."

Another gale of laughter shook Ada while Sally made an attempt to explain.

"Oh—oh," she gasped, "I've just been telling Ada some of the screaming things Jimmie said to me last night. Poor nut—poor boob—he does make an ass of himself. He's so madly in love with me that—He said—he said—oh, tell her, Ada. Do. I simply can't." And Sally was shaken with renewed laughter.

There was the sharp and sudden impact of a small gloved hand against a soft pink face. An outcry, and Sally Evans with one side of her face a much deeper pink than the other and with mirth suddenly quenched, stared at Mary-Lee with fury.

"You little devil—oh, you little brat. How dare you?"

"How dare you laugh at Jimmie?"

"I'll laugh at him as much as I like."

"Oh, will you? We'll see about that."

"I never in all my life—positively never—" cried Sally furiously while Ada stood looking on with startled astonishment.

"You leave Jimmie alone after this," Mary-Lee cried angrily. "If I ever see you skating with him I'll trip you up—I'll run you down on your skis—"

"Don't be such a little fool," Sally retorted, but in a slightly anxious tone.

"You'll see. If I hear of you skating with him again, the first thing you'll know you'll be lying flat on the ice, and if I hear of you going out skiing, I'll follow you and then you'll see what will happen."

"You wouldn't dare."

"I'd dare anything."

"I'll tell Jimmie."

"Oh, no you won't. If you do I'll get young Alexander after you. He'll snowball you every time you go down the street. He'll climb in your window and douche you with cold water when you're asleep. He'll do anything I tell him to. He cut a man's face open last week with a chunk of ice because the man had only—oh, I wouldn't want to have Alexander laying for me. He'll scare the wits out of you." Apparently the threat of Alexander was alarming but Sally attempted a laugh.

"I've never heard anything so silly. Do you think I'm frightened of a little child?"

At that instant, a few doors away a small boy shot down the steps with the whoop of a wild Indian and darted up the street, gathering a handful of snow as he ran and flinging it against the window of a passing taxi.

"There's Alexander now," Mary-Lee remarked; "that's the taxi-driver who ran over his dog last week. Alexander will get him yet."

A woman appeared in the doorway of the house from which the small violent figure had issued. "Alexander, Alexander," echoed up the street. "Oh, Alexander, come in this very instant."

A little smile crossed Mary-Lee's face. "That's his governess," she explained obligingly; "she had hysterics the other day. Alexander put a live lizard in her bed. Alexander has quite a number of ideas—for a little child," she added, still smiling.

Growing anxiety expressed itself in Sally's face as she caught Ada by the arm. "Come on," she said, "oh, for goodness sake come along."

The threat of Alexander appeared to suffice, for Sally's name dropped from Jimmie's conversation.

But Mary-Lee's joy was short-lived, for in what appeared to her amazingly rapid succession came the names of other girls. It was true none of these affairs was alarmingly serious, none lasted over a very prolonged period. Mary-Lee during this time frequently explained to Mrs. Aldous that Jimmie was neither as fickle nor susceptible as he seemed.

"It's because he's so awfully nice to everyone," she explained, with her wise little air; "and he looks at a girl in such a dreadfully flattering way. All the time he's only talking about hockey or golf he seems to be telling her that she's the most beautiful thing he's ever seen. And it makes the girl crazy about him. Then she goes after him, cleverly, so he won't realize what she's doing, and all the time he has no notion of being in love at all. He's the same to everyone. He can't help looking at a girl like that."

"Absurd at his age, isn't it?" smiled Mrs. Aldous.

"Oh, Jimmie isn't *young*," cried Mary-Lee. "He's old enough to fall in love."

"Well, when he does, my dear child, I hope it will be with someone much nearer home."

For a moment Mary-Lee appeared to find difficulty in getting her breath. Her heart raced and the color swam into her face; there was a startled expression in the black eyes. "Oh, you don't mean me, dearest? Jimmie never notices me. He never even sees me." And she became all at once tremendously interested in the trifles of ivory and jade and crystal upon Mrs. Aldous' dressing-table while Mrs. Aldous watched the lovely fluttering hands. They seemed to tell her everything she wanted to know.

"Not see you," Mrs. Aldous echoed vaguely; "that would be rather impossible, wouldn't it?"

"I'm like any piece of furniture around the house that he's accustomed to —" and Mary-Lee lifted the top off an ivory pot and very carefully replaced it. "He doesn't see this dressing-table unless he stumbles into it. That's the way it is. He's so used to seeing me around that he doesn't notice me."

"I suppose a prophet has no honor," put in Mrs. Aldous, "but still, child, I've always thought, always hoped—"

She didn't become any more explicit about her hopes, for unwillingly she recognized the reason in Mary-Lee's remark. Propinquity is dangerously close to familiarity, which is one of the dullest things in the world when you are young; only in the middle years do familiar things become dear and cherishable. Youth with its vague and undecipherable longings must have something new.

Mrs. Aldous was too wise ever to allude to Mary-Lee in any way which might indicate to Jimmie her desire. But it seemed as if everyone must surely see how Mary-Lee felt. It was as though she had pinned a white placard upon herself announcing: "This piece is sold."

Of course she was indifferent to the opposite sex, mainly because she was so much interested in it individually.

She went to dances, for she could not escape them; parties of every description, and laughed and talked and was gay as all her set were gay. There were always partners in spite of the white placard, for Mary-Lee those days was like something that had walked straight out of a dream. The black eyes had a wonderfully unlived expression; her mouth, lovely, with the unutterable sweetness of a child's mouth. And even when she touched it delicately with a lip-stick it still incongruously kept its look of unkissedness. There was a look about Mary-Lee that made tired men stare at her on the street, and sigh a little and then smile, remembering their own youth.

It was the summer after Jimmie had started to work in a broker's office that Brenda Tait appeared on the horizon. She was a guest of the Bethunes whose country-place adjoined the Aldous', and Jimmie met her at a dance at the Golf Club to which Mary-Lee had not gone. From the beginning she had a presentiment that this time it was to be the real thing.

"Wait until you see her," Jimmie said to Mary-Lee the morning after the dance. It was a Sunday morning and Jimmie having breakfasted late had

come out on the verandah in search of Mary-Lee, eager to tell her about the dance—and Brenda Tait. He took a cigarette from his case, and lit it as he leaned against the railing, while the expression on his face gave Mary-Lee a pang as she looked up at him with attentive eyes.

"Tell me about her. What's she like? Who is she?"

"She's a cousin of Mrs. Bethune's," he responded, answering the easier question first of all. "Why," and he laughed self-consciously, which was a bad sign, "I don't know that I can describe her. She's a peach, that's all." But what he actually was saying was that she was a beautiful, mysterious creature, midway between phantasy and dream; that the sun had colored the corn silk of her hair; the seas had painted her eyes; that her flying grace drew men in pursuit of her as the voices of the sirens entrapped men of old; that she was white fire and moonlight. Her words—they were bright jewels. But standing there with the sunlight full on his young face, blowing puffs of blue smoke carelessly into the shining air, he repeated only his terse sentence of appreciation, "she's a perfect peach."

Mary-Lee understood what was implied as though he had said it all, and she blinked rapidly and tried not to look at him because of the tremendous vividness of his face that still reflected the vision of loveliness he had so lately looked upon. Her tone when she spoke was casual and impersonal and even faintly uninterested.

"That's dreadfully indefinite, isn't it? Couldn't you do better than that?"

And Jimmie laughed for the pure joy of speaking about this siren.

"I might try," he said, his self-consciousness showing in the expression of his very young mouth, "but I guess I won't succeed;" meaning by that that absolute loveliness had never yet been adequately described and never would. "She's a little thing. She'd barely come up to your shoulder. And her hair, it's fair. She's light as a feather. And a sport—a great little sport. She can swim like a streak, and has cups, dozens of them for tennis and golf. And she can dance—well, I'll say she can dance."

Mary-Lee could do all of that herself, so she was not immensely impressed by this recital. She was still less impressed when she met Brenda Tait, summing her up instantly as belonging to the feline tribe and hating her thoroughly, which after all was only what might have been expected.

The following weeks did nothing to dispel that hatred. It was plain that Jimmie was ridiculously in love. Mary-Lee could not have said for how

many hours she listened to his rapt soliloquies on the subject of Brenda Tait, a sober smile on her lips, a grave enquiry in her eyes. That enquiry could have been translated into such words as: "Can you really care about such a sly puss of a person?" "Hasn't all your experience of girls taught you anything at all?" Apparently it hadn't.

"You should have seen Brenda drive this morning," Jimmie would remark, his face alight; "it must have been close on two hundred yards. You would never believe that a little thing like that—"

And again it would be; "You should have been over at the tennis courts this evening. Brenda had it all over that big Sloane woman. Beat her a love set—"

And yet again: "You should have been down at the pier yesterday to see Brenda swim. Why don't you come down this afternoon? We're going in about three."

"I will," Mary-Lee responded promptly to this last query. "Did you say three o'clock? I'll be there."

And she *was* there. Before she went, she slipped into her own one-piece green bathing suit which made her look like a woodland dryad, but there was in her eyes the look of a person who contemplates some sort of victory, even if only a very minor one.

She found Jimmie and Brenda sunning themselves on one end of the pier, so preoccupied with one another that they did not hear the gentle patter of her bare feet until she was close up beside them. Then Jimmie glanced up in surprise. "Hello. I didn't know you were coming down!" his tone telling her that the interruption was not at all welcome.

"But you asked me down to see Brenda swim."

"So I did," and he smiled intimately at Brenda. "You've got to give us an exhibition, it seems."

There was so much preamble that Mary-Lee began to look thoroughly weary of waiting for this much vaunted performance to take place. Brenda had to be coaxed, pleaded with, entreated, before she would even rise to her feet. Mary-Lee stood waiting, watching, and listening with a growing impatience. "Idiot," she breathed, while Brenda continued to delay interminably. At length after further cajolery from Jimmie Brenda dived, clumsily, awkwardly "Belly-flapper," again Mary-Lee breathed, with an expression of mingled amusement and satisfaction. But the expression died

as her eyes fell upon Jimmie's face. Actually, he appeared to be admiring this very amateur performance—Jimmie, who had always had such a critical appreciation for real merit in sport.

It was not by way of competition, for there was no competition possible; it was more with the immediate requirement of soothing her irritation that Mary-Lee ran up to the highest point of the diving-tower, balanced there for an instant, then sprang. Deftly somersaulting before straightening out she struck the water with an almost inappreciable splash.

The surface remained undisturbed as though Mary-Lee had vanished forever. Then out, far out, a small dark head appeared above the surface, the ripples coming concentrically away from it like skilfully blown smoke rings.

Brenda, who had climbed back to the pier stood watching as did also Jimmie, with an air of pride; but so clearly was this a pride in the performance rather than in the performer that even Brenda was quick to recognize it. And it was for this reason that when Mary-Lee came dripping up the ladder Brenda was able to exclaim with a patronizing affability, "You swim very well indeed. Doesn't she, Jimmie?" insisting, even demanding that he should agree with her.

"Not bad for a kid at all," Jimmie remarked in his offhand manner, which brought twin sparks to Mary-Lee's eyes. But her rage was against herself because she could have been so foolish as to suppose that Jimmie could ever see that she excelled in anyway whatever.

She swung herself down on the pier a short distance away from them, listening in a half-hearted fashion to their conversation which ranged all the way from a dance which was taking place that week down to a discussion of ideas and opinions. Mary-Lee was thinking intently, her mind concentrated on an idea which made her eyes very intense as she gazed down at the water slipping and slopping up against the slimy boards of the pier. The other two appeared to have forgotten her completely, but their absorption in themselves was helpful in the problem she was attempting to solve. Her face suddenly cleared. "Jimmie," she broke in upon them, "I do wish you'd ask Phil Foley down for a week or so. We're awfully hard up for men."

"Who's Phil Foley?" immediately inquired Brenda's sharp little voice.

"Oh, don't you know old Phil?" and Mary-Lee seemed surprised, almost aghast as she drew herself deftly along the pier toward them. "Phil, the heart-breaker. I thought most every girl had had a try for him at some time or other."

Brenda's small nose tilted in an expression indicative of contempt.

"I hope I'll never have to *try* for a man," she remarked; "I sincerely hope not."

"But Phil's worth trying for," Mary-Lee explained earnestly; "you don't find many like Phil. Do you, Jimmie?"

"Never saw anything about Phil to rave over."

"You wouldn't. But girls all do. I'm going to have a try for him myself. If I don't get him—I'll scream."

"You'd better start screaming at once then," Jimmie put in with a good-natured grin.

Mary-Lee ignored the crudity of this remark. "I've always pined—oh, simply pined—to marry a professional heart-breaker," she cried.

"Is he a heart-breaker?" and Brenda addressed her question to Jimmie.

"Don't ask me. The kid seems to know more about him than I do."

"There are literally dozens of girls aching to marry him, of course," Mary-Lee explained, "Oh—" rapturously— "think of the deliciousness of having every girl you know burst right out crying when your engagement was announced. That's how lucky the girl will be who marries Phil."

"Is he good-looking?"

"Oh, it isn't his *looks*. I don't suppose I'll have much luck—there's so much competition. But he's worth trying for anyway," and Mary-Lee got leisurely to her feet, smiling down at the back of Brenda's head. "Don't tell him, will you. That would spoil my chances."

"You haven't got any," grinned Jimmie; "you're too much of a kid."

"No harm trying."

Phil Foley arrived that week, a slim fair youth exhibiting all the airs of someone who has been overmuch sought after and is thoroughly bored with it all. His conversation indicated that he was difficult to please, while he criticized the girls of his acquaintance with an incredible frankness. Mary-Lee did not seem to be making much headway or even attempting to ingratiate this very discriminating young man. No one would have credited her with trying for him; instead she kept aloof from the others; was to be heard singing snatches of a gay little tune; appeared at other times to be held

in the grip of some secret enjoyment. But while her spirits were light, Jimmie's had taken a decided drop. The reason for this Mary-Lee pointed out to Mrs. Aldous one afternoon as she swung to and fro in the hammock on the upper balcony.

"There they are again," as two figures appeared in the middle distance. "You'd really think they'd get sick of one another, wouldn't you?"

"Who are you talking about, dear?" and Mrs. Aldous looked up from her fine embroidery to peer through the high trellis-work.

"That dub of a Phil Foley and Brenda, of course. It's going beautifully." There was the satisfaction of a stage manager looking on at a new production in her fresh young voice. "I thought it would. Both of them, dubs. But it's kept me busy dropping remarks all the time."

Mrs. Aldous smiled, but it was a perplexed smile. "Why, dear, I thought —" "Look at them! look at them! For goodness sake, look at them! I believe he's going to kiss her right out there in front of everyone." And Mary-Lee leaned far out of the hammock so as not to miss anything that might be seen from this safe vantage.

"You see," she went on excitedly, "I told him only this morning that Brenda had almost made up her mind to marry a man I knew. It's plain to see she has. The poor dub never imagined I meant himself," and she gurgled her satisfaction.

"But," said Mrs. Aldous, "I thought you—"

"Oh, look! Look at them now! I think I've managed it fairly well, don't you. He was the harder of the two. He thinks he's so dreadfully precious that he just hated to think of giving himself to any girl. He had to be awfully sure that she really was—oh, quite, quite, the best to be had anywhere. I had a fearful time over him. But this morning after I had been talking to him, he went right to the telephone. And now—Oh, look at the silly fools!"

It was clear that the two figures were unaware of any curious eyes watching their movements. Mary-Lee continued to gaze at them for a moment more with increasing satisfaction while Mrs. Aldous' eyes rested on them with bewilderment. Then Mary-Lee's attention wandered from the interesting figures and she looked at Mrs. Aldous with an air that was almost one of apology.

"I couldn't let her marry Jimmie. You can see she's the worst sort of little purring animal. He'll get over things a lot faster this way. If he had married her—well, that's something he'd never have got over."

Mrs. Aldous gave Mary-Lee a quick enquiring look which had in it the elements of surprise. The surprise waxed to astonishment when Mary-Lee added, "And now I've got to go away."

"Whatever do you mean, child. *Go away?*"

"It's too easy," and Mary-Lee's eyes wandered back to the figures in the distance. "I've done it before—Sally Evans, you know. I'll probably do it again if I stay."

"But Mary-Lee—"

"Don't stop me, dearest. Don't even try to. I'm glad I did it—just as I was glad about that little Sally Evans. But I can't go on interfering—and I mightn't be able to help it next time either."

"But where—how—oh, goodness, child," cried the distracted Mrs. Aldous; "I won't listen to such a thing. I'm sure that Jimmie—if you'll only give him time."

Mary-Lee shook her curly head. "It will never be different. I've got to go away and forget about him and fall in love with someone else. It doesn't seem to be very hard when you look at those two out there. Ten days for them—I should be able to manage it in ten months."

This began an argument which lasted for weeks. It was only when Mary-Lee came up to Mrs. Aldous' room one morning with the newspaper in her hand and read aloud an item of news concerning the engagement of Miss Brenda Tait to Mr. Philip Foley, son of Senator Foley, the marriage to take place almost immediately, that Mrs. Aldous saw from Mary-Lee's face that she would have to withdraw her objections.

"If you really feel you must, dear child—"

"I know I must. I'll go down to New York and take a ducky little apartment and study something or other. You'll come down and we'll have delicious times together, and, and—" Mary-Lee's voice gave out at that point, so she attempted a laugh instead, but as the laugh sounded cracked and queer she fled from the room.

She left some days later and started out to forget Jimmie by placing a photograph of him in a silver frame in the centre of her dressing-table.

The huge arena in Montreal was packed to the rafters, literally to the rafters as many young and venturesome spirits swarmed along them so

as to get a clear view of the ice. Early in the week all the reserved seats had been sold out and by eight o'clock the bleachers were a black mass of humanity, the faces merely fading blurs.

Flags and bunting hung in loops from the joists while shields and thousands of little fluttering flags decorated the columns otherwise so bare. A large Stars and Stripes in honor of the visiting skaters from the St. Nicholas rink in New York, was crossed with a Union Jack of similar dimensions in front of the vice-regal box.

A continuous murmur came from the bleachers, composed of shouts, stamping of feet, testifying impatience or a desire to keep warm during the long wait; horns broke out with raucous notes; someone would shout a greeting; then the band would start up, drowning out lesser sounds.

To the Foley box came a gay and spirited party. They appeared at the far entrance and had to make their way along the crowded aisle almost the entire length of the rink.

A shrill young person in a mink coat, scrambled nimbly into one of the front seats from where she immediately commenced to make sprightly comments to Jimmie Aldous, seated behind her, upon the costumes of the skaters who swung slowly around the great sheet of ice in the grand march past.

A seemingly never-ending stream of skaters swarmed out from one end of the rink and solemnly circled the ice in groups of six or eight. Flower girls; ballet girls; harlequins; veiled maidens; dashing Valentinos; giant policemen; courtiers and court ladies, powdered and beruffed; a set of Mother Goose; every imaginable costume appeared to be there contributing to that swaying, moving mass of color. There were critical comments from the Foley party; friends were recognized and dismissed with praise or showered with caustic remarks.

At last the great mass of skaters withdrew and a set of eight, the star performers from the Winter Club began a minuet to the strains of Beethoven. As they left the ice the arc lights here and there began to fade out, the far side of the rink becoming blurred, as only a couple of lights at either end remained lit.

A spotlight shot out at one end and danced up to the cave-like entrance to the rink. Then, as though this was a form of invitation, quick staccato steps resounded from the wooden floor, and with the long swoop of a bird a slight figure in short, black velvet skirts and wearing a curled white wig sailed on to the ice.

On one foot, bending gracefully forward, the figure glided toward the centre; a movement like the long drawn-out note of a violin. Arriving there, the glide changed to a curve of ever decreasing radius until she was spinning toplike, with arms extended like wings. On and on she spun, while slower and slower grew the gyrations. Like a flower wilting slowly on its stalk she drooped lower and lower, until at last, the short black skirts flaring out around her like velvet petals, she sank into a curtsey to the vice-regal box.

The band's long finale was lost in the thunder of sound that rose from the crowd like the roar of an angry sea. Megaphones, voices, horns—all mingled in a riot. Even the cynical Foley party to whom such skating was no novelty were impelled to clap madly.

"I wonder who she is," Brenda remarked curiously.

"Beautifully turned out," was the small shrill person's grudging comment; "such a relief after those other costumes."

"She's a Mrs. Meldrum Jones, New York," Phil read out from his programme. "Ever heard of her, Jimmie?"

But Jimmie hadn't even heard the question, so absorbed was he in watching for the next movement of that slim little figure on the enormous expanse of ice. With a movement reckless and joyful she had begun to glide about the ice to the brilliant jazz music played by the band. Like some mad fearless thing she swooped hither and thither, the spotlight following her dizzy erratic movements. Black skirts flaring, reckless and triumphant, leaping clear of the ice with a fierce and joyous abandon, arms high in air, fingers castaneting; then with swift little silver-winged feet flashing rhythmically, off again in the opposite direction, while vainly the spotlight tried to keep up with her. Spirit of recklessness, spirit of joy, spirit of unquenchable youth.

The magnetism of the moment inspired the band to greater efforts. The music, the darting spotlight, and that little vital figure were inextricably combining to give the spectators a sensation which they would not soon forget.

Then with a series of zigzagging runs she had disappeared into the black cavern at the far end. The spotlight wandered desolately for a moment over the bare ice and then it too vanished away and the lights overhead jumped into brilliancy.

The minutes went by and there was no abatement of the deep roar that almost fluttered the flags and bunting. It was obvious that the crowd would

not be satisfied until the little white-wigged figure returned.

An aide was seen to leave the vice-regal box, disappearing toward the exit. Then a voice shouted through the megaphone. "The last number will be repeated at His Excellency's special request." There was a deep stir of satisfaction while the crowd waited expectantly.

"She must be simply dead," expostulated Jimmie; "it isn't fair to bring her out again."

Brenda gave an odd little laugh. "She's married, Jimmie."

"Cheer up. Perhaps she's a gay widow," laughed Phil.

"Oh, shut up," brusquely retorted Jimmie, while there was a further giggle from Brenda.

The spotlight danced over the entrance as though beseeching her to reappear. Then she was there again, this time pirouetting mostly on the points of her skates like an expert dancer, her full circular skirts whirling out around her like those of a ballet costume. It was a difficult performance and a brief one. One or two swift glides and she was gone, and this time the clapping brought no response.

"Oh, for Heaven's sake," exclaimed Jimmie, as the clapping persisted, rising and falling in gusts of sound, "they might think of *her*. I don't know of anything so gluttonous as a crowd."

There was a chorus of laughs in the Foley box. Even the small lively person was amused. "I do believe he's fallen in love at first sight," she shouted to make herself heard, "without actually having seen the lady."

"Never known you to be so thoughtful, Jimmie," Phil remarked; "you'll meet her later on, so cheer up. We've been asked to the Ritz to supper to meet the New York crowd. But she probably won't come up to your expectations. That wig's deceptive. You can't tell what she looks like—"

The remainder of the carnival struck Jimmie as intolerably boring and he wondered why everyone else didn't think so; how they found it possible to applaud any of the skaters who followed. It was clear to everyone that he was glad when it was over. He felt curiously excited and elated without being able to explain this elation. But he showed it in his manner and it amused the Foley party considerably. They could not resist constantly alluding to Mrs. Meldrum Jones until Jimmie exclaimed furiously. "I suppose you all think you're being funny."

"We know you are," they chorused back.

He could not rid himself of the sight of that white-wigged figure, haunted all the time by a vague memory that troubled him, and it was only when they entered the dining room at the Ritz that the haunting sensation was explained, for there, with the white wig laid aside, sat Mary-Lee.

There were cries, shouts and exclamations from the entire Foley party as they gathered around her, all talking at once, each trying to make themselves heard in the uproar. They were amazed, their accents declared; they were astounded; and, if truth be told, they were immensely disappointed. Only Mary-Lee, after all their interest and excitement. What a let down for Jimmie! What a cruel disappointment!

"My dear!" they shouted vociferously, "why on earth—and to think it was only you after all. Isn't it screaming? Isn't it simply colossal? Isn't it absurd? You've no idea how excited we were about you."

Mary-Lee did not attempt to make herself heard above this babel. She sat and smiled first at one, then at another, while her eyes sought out Jimmie, standing a little back from the others, silent and unsmiling.

"Mrs. Meldrum Jones," he was repeating to himself. "Great Heavens, Mrs. Meldrum Jones!"

Someone dragged him off to the far end of the long table, chattering intolerably the while.

He scarcely touched the salad course, ignoring the sweet that an obliging waiter put before him, wholly occupied as he was in staring down the length of the long table. The lights, the tables, the waiters, the beautifully dressed women and well-groomed men, the music, the chatter, the taste of food and smell of wine all combined merely to form a background for one small figure in black velvet.

Lovely, Mary-Lee appeared to him, indescribably lovely. He was not aware, of course, that as far as he was concerned it was positively her first appearance. He would have explained it otherwise, probably declaring that the kid had suddenly grown up. But he was beyond explaining anything, even to himself. Sitting there, staring, staring, the fact that she was married throbbed through him like the throb of a wound. And he wondered how you bore things that were not possible of bearing; wondered if after a long time you ever grew dull and uncaring; otherwise how could you survive at all? She was a miracle that had come too late. And he watched her every movement, and it was like watching a stranger, and yet again it was like watching someone who had always been near to his heart.

It seemed to him that ages passed before anyone around that long table showed signs of rising. He was among the first on his feet. And somehow he managed to get close enough to Mary-Lee to suggest that he should drive her home to see Mrs. Aldous.

"I didn't even have time to telephone," Mary-Lee explained; "the train got in so late. I'm dying to see her. I wish I had thought of wiring her to be sure to come to-night. I'll never forgive myself."

As he followed her into the taxi he turned upon her accusingly.

"Why didn't you tell mother when she was in New York a couple of weeks ago?"

"But I didn't know."

"You didn't know," he repeated in quick astonishment, "two weeks ago! I must say that's pretty rapid work."

"It had to be."

"Of course you never thought how I'd take it," and there was bitter reproach in his tone.

"I don't see how it could affect you, Jimmie."

"Oh, you don't," he said belligerently, for it was a relief to allow himself to be angry; "you think then that when a man has been all his life—has only cared for one girl always—it's pleasant to find she's married without even —"

There was a gasp from Mary-Lee and she turned quite around to see him. "Whatever are you talking about?"

He laughed sardonically. "Funny, isn't it? It would make a cat laugh."

"But Jimmie—"

"Who is this blighter Jones, anyway. He must be a blighter to marry you without even—"

"Oh, Jimmie, you must be crazy," cried Mary-Lee, her voice high with excitement and bewilderment. "I'm not married."

He looked at her unbelievingly. "You were down on the programme as Mrs. Meldrum Jones."

"Of course. Oh, of course. I substituted. Mrs. Jones got flu at the last moment. How silly! How frightfully ridiculous! And you thought—oh, Jimmie, you thought—"

It didn't matter any more what he had thought, for the careless rocking taxi was suddenly filled with magic, clear white magic, warm soft magic, and could anyone hold quite so much happiness in one small slim body? She didn't believe they could but she was going to try to, for he was saying incredible things to her and among them was: "Didn't you know that it was ever since the first time—when you were nothing but a little kid—the first time I ever saw you?"

And because of the magic she didn't bother to tell him that this was the first time he had ever seen her. Oh, positively her first appearance.

TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Misspelled 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.

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[The end of *Silver Feet* by Beatrice Redpath]