

1993 Brookie & D. K. Brown Fiction Contest Moonstone Winner

THE GLEDHILL FOOT AND THE REFLEXOLOGIST

By Pauline Mortensen

YES, THE FOOT IN THE SHAPE OF THE BODY. Everything corresponds. Don't I know it. I get a little head cold and it's all over my feet. Hay fever, stomachache, spine. I get a tooth that needs to be pulled, foot starts giving me fits right there. You can't tell me anything I don't already know about my feet.

You want me to put my sandals here on your rug? Nice rug. I've seen these before at the flea market. One of them Persian kind. I hear they let their goats root around on them. Makes them look antique for the tourists. Nice rug, though. I'll put my bag right here on top of my shoes.

Go ahead with what you were saying. The foot in the shape of the body. Everything corresponds. Don't I know it. Big toe corresponds to the head. Heel to pelvis. Horizontal and lateral lines all over the place.

You know, the chart is one thing, but fortunetelling is something else. A little bit of this leads to that. A little bit of that leads to something else. First thing you know some guy wants to predict your future by feeling around for the bumps on your head. Works his way up your leg right into the middle of next week. You get my drift. Nothing fishy. I'm a Mormon and I have my own beliefs. Just good, bona fide reflexology is all I ask.

One of the doctors I've been to before said he could read my history in my feet. Powerful vibrations he said I had. An ancient spirit, a noble soul. A little fringy, don't you think? I take it with a grain of salt. You can go ahead and have a look for yourself. I have all kinds of history.

Frankly, I like to keep an open mind, but I don't put too much stock in palm reading, Tarot cards, or astrology. Things like that. I don't believe in anything unless it's scientific. I just want you to take a look at my feet and see what you can do about this aching spot I got right above my left hip. Other problems as well, but I suppose you will be able to find that out for yourself.

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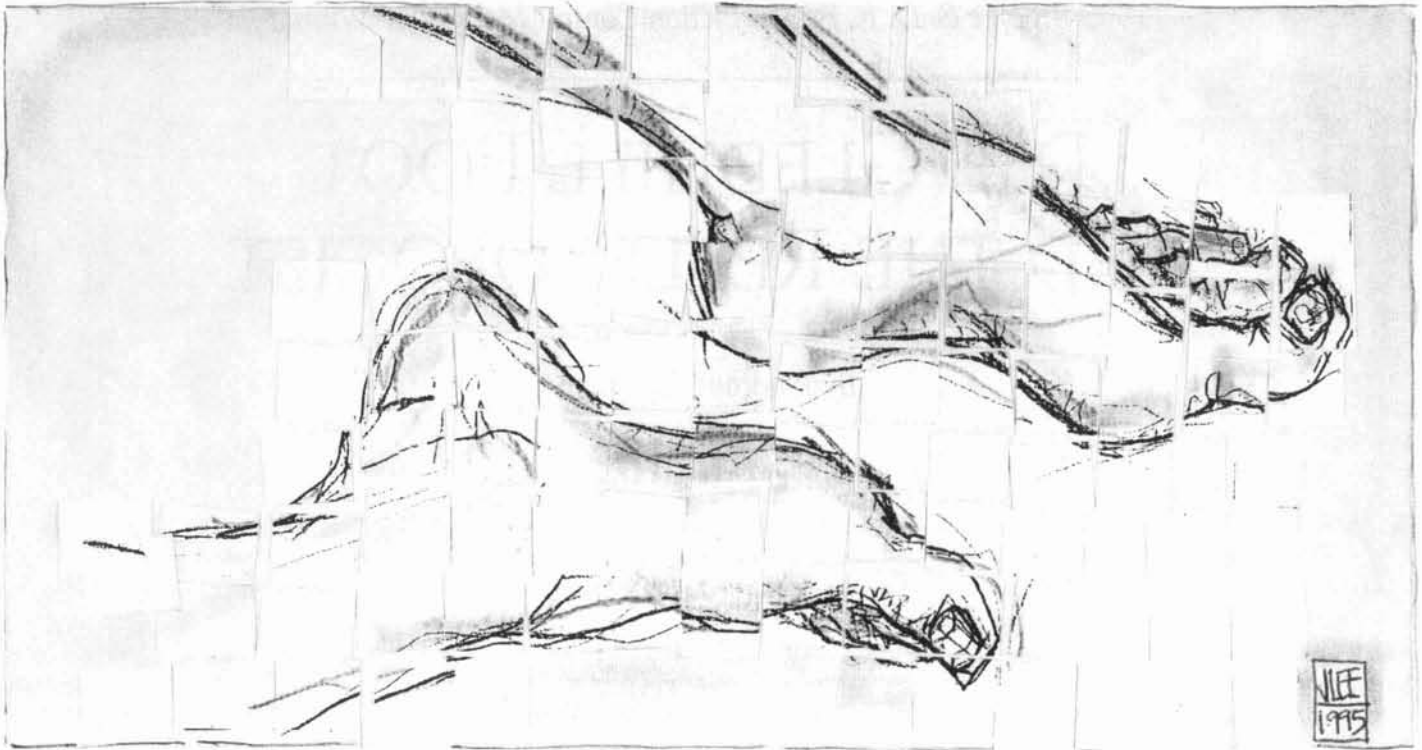
The water is fine. A little hot, maybe. The herbal cream I could get used to. Nice hands.

Of course, everyone tells me I have interesting feet. My ex-boyfriend, for instance. Good symmetry. Graceful arch. Delicate lines. Which accounts for my even disposition and winning smile. But I just say back, "You don't have to live with them." Gledhill feet on my mother's side. The curse of the family, if you know what I mean. Goes way back. High instep. Weak ankles. Brittle bones. My great-great-grandmother was one of the only members of the Mormon pioneers who rode all the way to Utah. A vibrant woman, nevertheless. Had thirteen children by three different husbands. Polygamists all. Survived everyone of them. My line comes directly through the first husband, second child. That was my mother's mother's mother. A direct line.

You always wash everybody's feet that way? Good idea. Nice strong soap. Herbal cream. You just can't be too careful now days. You never know when somebody is going to come in here and be contagious. Reminds me of the Last Supper. You know that picture. Nice cream. I'll just lay my other foot right here on this towel. It goes way back, you know. Gledhill foot on my grandmother's side? Grandmother Gledhill brought it in back in 1850-something. It's genetically transmitted through the women, you know. Like baldness. But it only affects the women. It is the burden we all have to bear. One time, just after they came to Utah, settled down there near Cedar City—cemetery there is full of Gledhills—they got surprised by Indians. Men out slapping together adobe. Indians come up by surprise. And there Great-Great-Grandmother Gledhill was, all alone and defenseless, sewing lace on a bureau scarf when one of them comes right through her door. One mean looking Indian with murder on his mind. He took one glance at the Gledhill foot and that's how the Indian blood came to be in our line. She brought that in too.

Yes, right there. Right there. You feel it? You feel my pain? I could tell you stories.

My aunt Darnella was the same way. Even after she put on weight, she'd just show a little bit of her ankle, and she had men all over her. Only woman I know who could wear cheap thongs and get away with it. Most women wouldn't dare. But I



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suppose you've seen all kinds. Good feet. Bad feet. All kinds.

It's none of my business, but do you always start with the big toe like that? Sometimes they start with the little one and work across. I was just wondering. Everybody's different. I had this one guy who liked to thump my foot with a mallet. You're not going to do any of that are you? I didn't think so.

So that's where I get all my pain. Direct from my Grandmother Gledhill on my mother's side. Did I mention that it skips a generation? It skipped my mother. Left her with two flat feet and a chest to match. I'm only kidding about the chest. All of us Gledhills are well endowed, don't you think?

Mother had the flat feet. Big flat feet. She could haul water for a half a mile and never get a blister. Not delicate like mine, temperamental. The only thing she ever wore was a laced up leather oxford. Big flat sole with chicken manure in the crease. Course I can wear shoes she never dreamed of. Heels or flat. Peek-a-boo or full form. I pay for it though, with my pain and all. But with my ankle it's worth the pain. Most women wouldn't dare wear the shoes that I wear. It's a matter of style. And style on some women doesn't mean a thing. Take sandals. I look real good in a sandal. You know those Mexican huaraches? Some women try to wear those. But they can't. They simply can't. But me, I can wear anything. Sandals, huaraches. Anything. A little piece of leather between. Sling backs. Toeless. Peasant.

Now if you're interested in pain, try that place just in slightly from my little toe. You can tell how much I've suffered

there. Yes, right there. I just got canned from my last job. It wasn't much of a job. Working for relatives. You know how that goes. They say they want you for one thing, and you end up doing something else. Aunt just older than me on my father's side. One of the skipped-over generation when it comes to feet. You ought to see her battleships. Strictly combat boot material. I never seen her in anything but a loafer. Job didn't pay much either. Piddling salary. No benefits. Glad it's over. So I can get on with the rest of my life.

Yes, right there. Breathe in with the pain you say. You can feel it, can't you? All the trouble I been through. Yes, it was bad. Very bad. The bitch wanted me to clean everything in her house. Pardon my French. Was it my fault I couldn't spend all of my time on my feet? Take a look at that foot. Is that a foot that can be abused? Is that a foot that can go around scrubbing floors and dragging a vacuum cleaner up and down three flights of stairs? I'll say it isn't. Not many people around who can understand what I go through. And there she was, working on her so-called book while her house went to hell. She's writing this book that no one in the world is ever going to read. Don't ask me why. It makes you sick where she gets off. Been to college, but for all of that do you think she can run the VCR? I had her on that one. She didn't know what De-layed Programming was. Turned on the set and nothing happened. She threw such a fit I thought she was going to give birth. Afterward, when I showed her how to set the timer, she recorded "Hill Street Blues" over "Monday Night Football,"

and there was hell to pay over that, let me tell you. I smelled divorce, so I got out of there.

The way it works is that if you are going to have THE BEST of everything, you ought to at least know how to run the thing. She didn't even know what a grapefruit knife was for. Straightened out the bend in the tip. You couldn't slice a banana with it.

Plus the fact that she wanted me to change my whole way of life. I mean I volunteered to rearrange her kitchen for her. I was the one going to have to cook in it, you'd think I could have things a little bit my way. But I moved one little butter dish and her face turned purple. Course I don't think she ever will find her turkey platter. Big turkey platter with gold leaf. I doubt she ever will find it behind those cleaning bottles underneath the sink. Come Thanksgiving she'll go crazy looking for it. I can just hear her now. Blankety-blank this. Blankety-blank that. That woman had one foul mouth. Not at all what you'd expect from a Christian woman, and a Mormon to boot. Women have to be more careful with what they say, don't you think? With kids and all? She tried to open a window in the baby's room, and I thought the millennium had come. She said it stunk in there. Well, what was I supposed to do about it? Get yourself some stick-ups, I said. You know those little deodorant things you can tack up just about anywhere? But no. She's the kind of woman that doesn't believe in spending hard-earned money on "extras." Extras, she says. Like if she buys one little thing that will make my life easier, it will kill her. And that's just what I told her. Only I was nice about it. I didn't want to cause problems in the family. But the truth be known, her whole house needed fumigating. I could have cleaned forever and never got down to the bone. She didn't have baking soda in her refrigerator either. Milk tasted like Brussels sprouts.

Visualize you say. Visualize. Now what am I supposed to visualize when all I see is red? When I see cloud nine all I get is a picture of a baby Dumbo dropping through. Okay. I got it. I'm getting *Little House on the Prairie* now. Two little girls coming into the house in those high-top button shoes.

Oh, you discovered the problem I've been having with my back. Work that in good there. Without my back, how will I get along? No man around to take care of me, that's for sure. Not that I haven't had offers. It's been the curse of my life. All the good ones are already taken. Take my sister and her husband. Divorced now. They never did get along. Not even from the first. He told me right after she got pregnant with their third child. Another boy. She denied him, you know. That's how you get boys. He said I was the one he would have picked if he had met me first. But Lena was oldest. She always got the best of everything. Sometimes I think about what it would have been like with me and Freddy. It could have been me with all those kids. Only I think mine would have all been girls, don't you?

Yes, my vertical zones. I know that. But what do you think about my ankle right there? Does that look normal to you? I didn't think so. Like I told my *aunt*. A person in my condition has got to look out for herself. It's been that way my whole life.

I don't go looking for trouble. It comes after me.

What I needed was my own TV. That would have been the answer. But what did she expect every night while she's upstairs working on *The Book*, which no one in this world is ever going to read, and her husband and me downstairs watching "Dallas" and "Knots Landing" and passing the TV guide back and forth. We could have had something going there, but like I say, I never start anything. Trouble comes after me. And she didn't say one word, but I knew what she was thinking. About me, being a single woman and all.

I just let that past. But this is a fact. For all the work I did around there I could have been the wife. I was the one who knew where everything was. And it was me the husband came to ask when he needed his calculator. I was the one who knew where that was. And, you know, his reading light, one of those little ones you clamp on the book. I found that, too. I am very organized. Can't stand anything out of place. Because I can't be walking around looking for it with my feet. "A place for everything and everything in its place." Like my grandmother always said.

Yes, I'm getting relaxed. Don't you worry about me. Do that finger-thing down the front of my foot again. Feels like feathers. I could learn to live with that. Did I tell you you have a very nice way with your hands? I'm floating in a hot tub now. How's that?

Anyway, back to my feet. There I was rubbing lotion on them. You like the color I got on my nails? Coral rose pink? And she comes up and orders me out of her chair. I mean they are all her chairs, right? But she acts like nobody can sit in them but herself. Makes me feel like hired help. That's all I ever was to her. Hired help. And she used to be my favorite aunt. Can you believe it? You ought to treat family different, is all I can say. But no. I was just hired help, and she didn't have the time of day for anybody else but herself and that book.

Some book. You know where stuff like that leads. I read a chapter once. Not one word there a normal person could understand. And she had the nerve to order me out of her chair. Mrs. College-Educated. Thinks she's Queen-for-a-Day just because she's married and I'm not. Not that I haven't had offers. And I slept in the basement just under their bed. King-size waterbed with mirrors, too. It was the quietest room in the house, if you know what I mean.

Not only that, but she orders me out of her chair, and the cat can have any chair in the house. She had this Siamese, and you know how they are. If looks could kill. She treated that cat better than she treated people. Her husband included. I could have married the husband. I would have been a good wife for him. But the cat was something else. Had its own door. Came and went whenever it pleased. Brought live field mice right into the house. Walked along the counters. His butt sticking up in your face every time you turned around.

And she orders me out of her chair and that cat can have any chair in the house. And when I have to be careful of my feet. I have to massage them, night and day. It takes a lot of my time. And I have to sit in the blue velvet plush because of the way it supports my back. And she doesn't understand any of

this. I can't get it through her head. I was just putting on my lotion like always, sitting there cross-legged in my red shorts, and she comes by and accuses me of rubbing grease onto her best chair. I mean, I was halfway though creaming my left foot, and she wants me out right now. But I had her on that one. I just held up the tube. "Greaseless," I said.

I'm completely relaxed now. Do one more time around my heel. I like the way you handle that.

So the woman says to me, "Lucky," she says. She always uses my first name when she knows perfectly well that I prefer Amberdeen. It has a nicer sound to it, don't you think? Anyway, so she says, "Lucky," she says, "I want you to fix up some things for Burton's party." I want you to do it up nice. You will remember I hired on only to clean and take care of the baby. A real screamer, too. She lets him get away with murder. Worse than the cat. There'll be hell to pay when that baby grows up is my bet. But that's none of my business. I just did what I was told. Then, in addition to everything else, I had to cook for her party like I said. Big to-do over her you-know-what. So while she's puttering around the house doing just about nothing, I'm out in the kitchen trying to hunt down enough ingredients to make her look good in front of her in-laws.

Did I ever cook for her party. And what thanks did I get? I scraped my knuckles shredding carrots and nearly died from an allergic reaction to yellow onions. She buys yellow when I always tell her to get red. And then to top it off, while I'm out there maintaining order and serving her guests, she's in the back bedroom diddling my boyfriend with her fat ankles. I mean is that nerve or isn't it? I wouldn't have him back after that. Would you?

Okay, okay. I'm getting this image of something cool and green and shady. Something by John Denver. A man in Colorado in his boxer shorts getting ready to step into a cool dark pool. Yes, laying out by a pool. I'm letting it all go now.

That's where we had the party, by the pool. Picture this. Puffed shrimp. Marzipan. Ham rings. I love to make ham rings. People always think you've fussed. But they're no trouble really. Just a matter of rolling it up and slicing it off. You ever had ham rings? I'll give you the recipe.

Okay, I'm visualizing without talking. Here goes.

(One, two, three, four, five, six, seven, eight, nine, ten.)

Laying out by a pool. Floating down a river. On a raft. A raft of rafts floating down a river. No. Laying out on a sandy beach. Hawaii. Nice sand, not fishy sand. Seashells lying all over the place. Brown Hawaiian giving me a sip from his glass. No. Forget that.

Okay, here it is. Laying out. Deserted beach. Warm day. Hot sand. Toes digging down to cool. Rubbing the sunscreen in just so. The ultimate in warm beach experience. Eyes closed. Surf pounding. Man walking up the beach with a cake. Don't ask me why. Are you getting all this?

The man with the cake. Big cake. Decorated. Fluffy yellow cream. Green trim. Vanilla wafers. Nicco candies. Real rock candy rocks. Everything on it. Little red hot hearts. Burns your tongue until it hurts. Big cake sitting on my chest. I'm licking

off the hearts. Fluffy cream icing all over the sides. Real fluffy. Lots of eggs. Oodles of eggs. The man with the cake licking off the Nicco candies. Tickles all the way down to your toes.

There. What do you think of that? How's that for visualization? I should have been the writer, don't you think? Or how's this? Real fluffy cake. Noise inside. Siamese cat pops out. Spoils everything. Fluffy cream, spreading and all. And the moral of that story is, you can't have your cat and eat your cake too. Tricky, huh. What do you say to that?

Ow! That hurt. My ovaries? Yes, my foot hurts there, but what's that got to do with it? Sometimes a foot is just a foot. Do you know what I mean? Leave my ovaries out if it.

No comment, huh. Here then. Take my other foot. ☒



STONE LAKE

Snow should have fallen.

On a canvas of loss in grey light,
spines of plants twist then droop
toward frozen earth

where footsteps are
coldly refused, all sound
compact, hard.

Somewhere far back—a remembrance:
beneath steep snow where you cave through,
the earth still pliable, warm enough
to steam.

Just off this trail: part of a bird's wing,
coated with frost. The unmoved trees
have turned their backs—
nothing more to lose.

My feet leave no tracks
along the shrunken lake:
the long memory of stone-cold
held here—the sky

like stone, the lake stone,
the morning rocks in frozen silt
no longer sounding separate
to footfall, no longer any warmth
to surrender.

—DIXIE PARTRIDGE