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MAX GOES PEDIMENTAL

On a recent spring morning, I was taking tea with a friend, half-Hungarian, half-Italian.

WE WERE DRINKING BARRY'S ORIGINAL IRISH BREAKFAST TEA, WHEN I NOTICED HER SHOELESS FEET and their ENORMOUSLY LONG TOES, enamelled with a HIGH-QUALITY POLISH in a vivid shade of red. I WANTED TO CONSUME THEM on the spot as one gobbles chocolate late at night, careless of morning's recriminations at the massive overnight weight gain.

Text MAX BLAGG

THESE GORGEOUS MAGYAR PLATES of meat, glorious shoeless appendages, soles slightly soiled like a pair of Alaïa sandals on sale in winter. Mary Magdalene was not more deeply moved at the sight of Jesus's crusty feet than I was tweaked and spun like sugar by this vision.

The foot, devoid of bodily connection, is an abstract sculptural shape so arcane that even Henry Moore could not fully duplicate its eminence; a curvilinear downward-facing doggy bone corrugated with slopes and nooks and tiny valleys, miniature indented gullies for the torrents of spring showers to slosh down and inundate the toes. It is the toes, though, those 10 little wiggles, that tip me over the edge. Call me shrimper, call me footballer, we are

legion, toe queens driven mad by peekaboo shoes and pedal cleavage of every stripe. Dickie Gray tells me there are films and books that cater to these special pedal needs, but of course I don't go near them, preferring to conduct my private studies in my study of an evening.

However, even though my other preferences, silk-lined handbags and leather gloves, might be quickly diagnosed by the most amateur Freudian as being directly related to the warm, inviting depths of the vagina, to what do feet correspond? Why do these elongated appendages stir such eccentric cravings in the secret hearts and private parts of certain men? Perhaps because they are the delicate, finely boned instruments that move the most

worshipful lady bodies along the earth's surface, receiving Mother Nature's electrical charge in various ways, either straight up the leg when the soles are slapping flat against the ground, or, when these trotters are fitted with heels of tremendous height, causing the calf muscles to tighten and lengthen, and the bottom to undulate and quiver, languorous as the Hottentot Venus on her day off, and men indeed do swoon in the wake of this fleshy monsoon. They are surely the key to the source of female power, the plug that connects women in their glory to the socket of earth, to life and joy and hope I get some.

It was Cinderella's rags-to-riches tale that first triggered my affection for the foot. Or maybe looking at pictures of Cinderella under the kitchen table while lying on my several sisters' feet, as they sat around drinking Typhoo tea and engaging in the deep gossip that the powerful brew triggered in the flower-fresh minds of these working-class girls. The mingled odours of their assorted feet were intriguing to a four-year-old who didn't, and doesn't, consider the smell of sweat at all disagreeable, in fact still nuzzles *con permiso* unwashed armpits with unabashed fervour –

Where was I?

There I was, under the table, unabashed, inhaling the intoxicating commingling of scents that acted upon my senses like a canister of nitrous oxide. I listened intently to coded descriptions of neighbours' habits, boyfriends' peccadilloes, the possibilities of love and marriage, all the while studying Charles Perrault's drawings of Cinderella's hard times, and the glass slippers that would release her from the bondage of servitude, the shoes that would fit only her delicate feet.

**AND THE STUDLY PRINCE,
CHARMING I'M SURE,
BUT HIS INTEREST IN SUCH
TINY FEET SEEMED
ALMOST INDECENT.**

if a four-year-old can be said to grasp such principles. What kind of man neglects his kingdom in search of a woman whose foot is so small it will fit a tiny, glass blown slipper, when there are Amazons striding the earth on feet that would span the River Trent? As I sniffed around my sisters' feet I knew that none of them would fit into that cold receptacle, that the prince would not be knocking on the door of this council house anytime soon. In later editions of the book the glass was mysteriously changed to fur, the publishers claiming the word *verre* was a misprint for *fourrure*, or furor. An unlikely story, but it created a more practical slipper then, for the creeping cold of English winters at least, and that furry interior was certainly more inviting than the cold smoothness of a crystal slipper.

Light drizzles from a sunlit window at the Met, illuminating the feet in a Caravaggio painting, the flesh stretched over the fantastic network of bones and cartilage and muscle. How many hours that murderous little Italian must have spent labouring over those appendages, almost as much time as Quentin Tarantino was allowed to lavish on the extraordinary feet of Uma Thurman, which are almost a subplot of their own in Kill Bill (forget if it's Vol 1 or 2). I was so resentful that a former video store manager had gotten such extraordinary access to this sex bomb's feet, but then I've heard that actors will do pretty much anything to get a part, so if QT wanted to slaver over her metatarsals for a few hours, Thurman was good with it. Imagine my surprise, which quickly turned to

rage and envy, when a YouTube clip showed Thurman gargling white wine from a very pointy Louboutin shoe (her own), while seated next to QT at a roast in his honour. So it wasn't just a one-time thing, having feet as gorgeous as Thurman's to languidly nuzzle with his Panavision lens. Damn! Those bright red soles, even my deli counterman knows them now, common really, but still they glow like the tail-lights on a Mercedes ES550 that has flipped over on your bed, *nome saine*?

And what of these Asian foot-binding techniques? Such practices operate on the same level as their insensate cravings for shark fin soup and rhino horn. A sliver of Viagra is far more efficacious than the powdered horn, if only these one percenters realised that. Small feet don't appeal to this shrimp-boat captain, and the agony the women go through in order to attain this exquisite deformity seems positively medieval. But a fetishist cannot fairly dish other fetishists. Let he who casts the first shoe... people in fur-lined houses shouldn't throw shoes... etc.

Foot and shoe fetishism is so widespread as to be quite common. Less well known are the cravings of certain low characters for purses, handbags and gloves. In my case, only the most high-end of these accessories will do. What will they do? They will do anything you ask! A handbag can't talk back, a glove is at your mercy when you open its wristy neck.

A pair of Marilyn Monroe's gloves was recently advertised on eBay, only used once, allegedly, to stroke Joe DiMaggio's ample bat. One can only imagine Marilyn's glad hand preparing Joe for spring training. How nice it would have been to buy these fine Italian leather gloves and kid around with them, and thus connect myself to the dizzy blonde with only a few degrees of separation. But Craigslist and other parts of the internet are a minefield. Nowadays fetishists advertise there for used handbags and well-worn gloves, so seller beware if someone actually prefers "used" to NWT.

How can a man be attracted to a handbag? In the movie *The Boston Strangler*, which starred a very sinister Tony Curtis, the detective investigating the murders, played by Henry Fonda, the father of Barbarella, at one point interviewed a potential suspect and discovered that he had a whole linen cupboard just stuffed with handbags of every description. In this age of label madness you (I) would probably do it to a Vuitton, but would you hit a Bally? I've had a Marc Jacobs, and a Coach or four, but the Calvin I battered in an attic on Bleecker Street was a bit tough. A quilted black Chanel was much admired, especially the way the mouth gaped, but my long affair with Miss C ended abruptly when she turned out to be a replica manufactured on Canal Street. I should have known from the quality of the interior, which lacked, on closer inspection, the indescribable softness, the heft, the warp and woof, the quimmy texture into which leather can be rendered by expert tanners.

Would you, gentle reader, do it to a handbag? If you are a man, the answer, alas, is yes. The late, great Lenny Bruce, in a long-gone monologue, perfectly pinned our irresistible, irrepressible need for constant gratification. If there were no women around, he asked, would a man do it to a chicken? And answered, that yes indeed, we would. We would do it to mud? Are you kidding? The chicken is a step up. The wife comes home, finds hubby in bed with the chicken. "Go get your chicken to make dinner for you!" Recalling that line made me laugh out loud on the street the other morning, walking my dog and wondering how I could write about shoes and feet and handbags and gloves, without sounding like a degenerate of the first water. I'll drink to that.

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