

ONE FOOT IN THE PAST

By B.C. Pope

*Dear Gerwald,*

*Here within this letter is the full detail of your inheritance. I never had the heart to tell you about what lays in the crates my lawyer have presented you. It was stupid of me to think that keeping a secret from you would save you pain more so than giving you this letter now unable to answer your questions. I am sorry for that. I hope that my purpose will be clear and my love is understood.*

*Your loving father,*

*Henry*

The letter was one paragraph but was only the first page of the hundred-page manuscript sitting on the table before Gery Helm. He was tired, a fact that could be told from the rumpled nature of his clothes and the dark circles etched below his eyes. Gery took a sip from his cup of coffee the lawyer's assistant had given him. It was cold and bitter but grounded him as he read on.

You see son when you were born I was so worried about your future that I sought the console of a seer. Her name was Радатель Hela M'Tynri and was renowned for her skill. I asked her straightforward and simple what worries you would face during your life and what I could do to aid them.

She said only a few simple words. “Your son will lose a foot.”

When I asked her to explain, she said that is all she saw. I left harrowed by the news that you may at some time be crippled. Like what I thought a good father would do I decided to do what I could to fix the problem.

When I returned home, I took down my tools, my pencils, my drafting square and I began to draw your feet. I had measured then while you slept and by morning I had carved a near perfect replica of each foot. They were wooden but if needed would keep you mobile. But when I looked at them I knew these would not do. Hela had not said which, or when, or how you would lose your foot. I took it upon myself as a quest of old. I would craft you a pair of feet for every age. I studied the anatomy of feet in books and talked with podiatrists who specialized in prosthetics. I even sold a few of my designs to larger companies to finance my endeavors. I found better material and trained myself to mold it, as I needed.

Each night I would measure your feet down to the most minute of details. Without rest till the day I passed I crafted you 97 pairs of feet at my last count. I know you no longer need the pairs of feet from your youth, so I am donating them to hospitals around the world. The adult pairs I beg you to keep and take care of. They are my legacy to you, the love I have for you in physical form.

Gery put the documents down on the table in front of him. He felt sick like the world was moving too fast around him. His father knew something like this and had not only kept it from him but had worked every day of his life to prevent it. The distance that Gery had always felt from his father was only a runoff of his father's need to protect him. His father worked every night so that Gery would not have to carry the burden of it. It was too much to take in.

Gery's dizziness strengthened as he reached for his coffee cup. His hand missed the mark, and the cup was knocked over the table spilling the coffee on the letter and notes from his father. Gery rushed to catch the liquid but his hand was too shaky, it only made the coffee run faster toward the floor.

Gery rose from the table pushing the chair away from him. The assistant had rushed in to aid him in his clean up. She placed a folder on the table with Gery's name on it. Inside were the release papers for the prosthetics he could no longer use. He drew his pen and signed them. He handed it to the assistant and walked out of the room leaving the cases and his father's notes behind him.

Later that week a delivery truck parked outside of Gery's house. The men asked where the cases should go; Gery gestured to the garage. When they were finished, Gery gently opened each of the cases. There before him were smaller cases each holding a single foot and a placard

reading an age and either right or left. Gery was astonished by the craftsmanship and care put into each foot.

Searching the collection of boxes he found the one listed 45 RIGHT and pulled it out from its case. Gery took off his shoe and sock and placed the artificial foot down next to his. It was a perfect match down to the coloring of his toenails. Gery smiled a small crack of a smile. How had his father managed to copy his foot so perfectly? Fifteen years had passed since the last time Gerry had seen his father. His astonishment overruled his need for answers as he put the foot back into its case.

For the next several hours, Gery worked his way through each of the cases. It was as if he was traveling through time watching one piece of his body age before him year by year. He eventually came to the end and began to return the feet to their cases. When he reached 57, he could not match one right foot to its matching half. He let it and continued to return the feet to their cases. When he had finished the missing foot had not been located. Gery unpacked and repacked each set of feet. He looked all around his garage then through the whole of his house. He could not find it anywhere. The foot had managed to walk away from him on its own.

Gery repeated his search through each and every case. He walked every inch of his garage with a flashlight. He called to his wife and children to aid him. Gery's frustration boiled in the back of his throat. After all the years, his father had put into protecting him Gery had managed to undo it in one afternoon.

“Where is it dammit?” Gery yelled. The house shook with waves of rage his yell let loose.

Suddenly in the grips of anger and madness it dawned on Gery. He began to laugh deep and resounding. Long dark laughter at first then giggles that turned into chuckles. He laughed so much he cried. Sitting on the floor of his garage surrounded by models of his own feet crafted by his father he laughed till he could no longer.

“She was right Dad; I did indeed lose a foot.”