

## It Feels so Luxurious

Christine came home, took off her jacket and sat down. She had been on her feet all day, making drinks and serving people food. She slipped her little black pumps off and, pulling one leg up onto the couch, started pressing, massaging different parts of her foot.

Sandy was still up and came through to the living room with a beer for her. She gave him a kiss on the cheek as he sat down. He had a cigarette hanging in his mouth.

“No thanks,” she said as he passed her the can. “Beer’s the last thing I want after pulling pints all night.”

Sandy opened his eyes wide. “Why’re you so tense, babe?” He said, pinching at her shoulders.

“I’m not tense, I’m just tired.”

Sandy rolled his eyes.

“You have it,” she continued.

“Don’t mind if I do!” Sandy took a draw of his cigarette before pulling back the ring pull. He took a long swig and swallowed loudly.

“What’s up with your feet anyway?” He asked, watching her hands work manically at the ball and the arch and the pad of her foot. “You got a wart or something?”

“Verruca. It’s a verruca if it’s on your feet. And no, I don’t have one. Just sore from standing all day. They feel flat. Do they look flat to you?”

Christine brought her other foot up to his face. He watched as her tight black skirt rode up, giving him a look at the lace edges of her pants and the inside of her thighs.

“Who cares if they’re flat?” He asked, without even looking at her foot. “Nobody sees the bottom of your feet anyway.”

“I know. I just – ”

Sandy reached out and pulled Christine’s legs over his lap. He put his hand up between them and grabbed at her bottom. He thought she looked good in that pressed white shirt tucked into such a short skirt. He would definitely tip her if she served him a beer.

Christine squealed as his thumb started pressing, rubbing over the top of her pants. Sandy continued to work her and she finally stopped kicking out at the air.

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Christine walked back into the centre of town. She had two hours free between her split shifts, which she always felt was too long to hang around but not long enough to relax. She would browse some shop windows although wouldn’t go in, not in this part of town. In need of a seat, she decided to go for a coffee.

Christine took her cup to the table and sat down, her heels resting off the ground. She thought about work. She thought about the man at the bar who had used the word “isogloss” and the conversation they’d had on the topic. When he said that he liked her isogloss she had blushed.

She thought about Sandy and all the words that he used.

Blank, Christine turned and looked out of the café window. Across the road was a shoe shop. She watched people passing in, passing out. She saw a woman take a seat and a sales assistant kneel down. She guessed that he was helping her put on a shoe, but something was in the way and she couldn’t see exactly. Christine imagined how good it would feel to have

someone look at her, look at her feet, and select something unique according to what they saw.

Christine looked at her watch and finished her coffee. She crossed the street and stood outside the shoe shop, pulling her jacket tight as she took in all the display pieces.

“Hi there,” nodded a young man, as Christine found herself inside the open doorway. Wandering around, she picked up the shoe that was directly in front of her: a black suede pump. She looked at it from different angles in her hand and stroked the material gently as she held it. Christine prodded the inside. It was soft, well made.

She put it down, picked up the shoe next to it. It had a similar design but a different finish. This one reflected the white shop light into the mirror. Again, she ran a finger discretely down the inside lining. It had as much padding as the last one, as much support. She smiled, put it down, grabbed another. A slim fitting leather ankle shoe. She stared at it for a while. She took the shoe closer to her body. This time she ground her thumb right to left, left to right, so hard, so deep into the inside of the shoe that it made a print. Fixed, she didn't take her eyes off the lining until it had returned, in full, to its original shape.

The same assistant who had greeted Christine approached her again.

“Can I help you with anything?”

She shook her head.

“It's just I saw you with those shoes.”

Christine blushed as he gestured to the ones in her hand.

“Something particular you have in mind?” He smiled as he spoke. He gestured her to take a seat then sat down too. He leaned forward, his arms resting on his legs, his hands hanging clasped in the space between.

“Well, maybe there is.” She sighed. Christine paused, but the assistant left her to speak. “At work. I’m on my feet all day. Seven hours at a time, easy, and my feet get sore. When I come home at night my heels feel flat.” She looked up, “I’m worried something might happen to them.”

“Hmm,” the young man nodded. He set his hands on his thighs. “Madam, if you wouldn’t mind – may I take a look at your feet?”

Christine blushed again but agreed.

He smiled at Christine reassuringly then knelt in front of her, taking her right foot in both of his hands. His grip was firm and he worked his way from her heel, along the bridge of her foot right down to the ball. Christine looked away as he put that foot down and rested it on his leg. He didn’t say a word as he picked up the next foot and followed the same procedure. Her body flushed at the idea of her feet in someone else's hands.

“It seems to me,” he eventually said, “that you have quite a heavy tread.” Christine thought for a moment. “Do you put your feet down hard when you walk?”

Christine supposed that she probably did. If work was busy, if she was in a hurry, she would march up and down the bar without realising it.

“Well,” she hesitated, “that could be fair to say.”

“And are these your work shoes?” Christine was ashamed to hand them over.

“Yes. I’m on my way back to work now.” The assistant took one of the shoes off the floor and bent it into the shape of a rainbow.

“See this? They give you no support at all. The sole is like cardboard. It gives you nothing.”

“A weak sole is no good.” Christine shook her head. “Not anymore.”

“But these ones here – the ones you were looking at – will give you all the support you need. A real cushion for your feet. Try them on?” Christine looked at her watch out of the corner of her eye then looked at the shoes. She agreed to try them on.

“Oh!” She put a hand to her mouth. “It feels so luxurious.”

“Mmm-hmm!” He gave her a wide smile. “That’s how every pair of shoes should feel.”

He told her to walk from the seat to the mirror, the mirror to the seat.

“They feel great!” Christine beamed.

“Good. They suit you.”

“They do?” She scrutinised her feet in the mirror, bending a knee and raising a heel.

The assistant, whose name was Adam, asked if she would like him to box them and leave them for her at the cash desk. She started to nod before realising that she still didn’t know the price.

He told her the price and her face went hot. She said she was sorry but it was twice more than she could afford at the moment.

Adam told her that was a damn shame because they looked so good on her and that a quality pair of shoes was an investment for life. Christine kept her eyes to the floor as she undid the buckle and he helped her out of them.

When she slid her feet back into her old, worn shoes, she was sure she could feel every bit of grit, every crack in the floor tiles more pronounced than before. Christine thanked Adam again and said that talking to him had been more valuable than he knew.

Adam saw the look on her face as she went to leave.

“Wait!” He said, reaching for her shoulder just before she got to the door. “There is one other thing I can show you. It’s all I can do.”

He took her over to a wall hanger and quickly flicked through plastic packets until he found her size. “Try these. I promise. It’ll be a start...”

Christine and Adam looked at each other for a moment without saying a word.

“I must go. I really am late for work.”

Without looking at what he’d given her, she put the change on the counter and left before the receipt had printed.

That night Christine got back to the flat late. Sandy had left a note to say that he was out for a drink with some guys she didn’t know. All the rooms were dark. She kicked off her shoes and dropped her handbag on the living room floor. She boiled the kettle and took a mug of boiling water back to the sofa. She sat, blowing and sipping at it in a slow half rhythm as she stared at the wall; the other hand working her feet.

Dim patches of streetlight came in through the window. As Christine got up to fix the curtains that Sandy had left open, she saw light reflect off something that was coming out of her handbag.

Christine went over to the bag and pulled out the plastic packet that she had bought in the shoe shop. She took it over to where she had been sitting and looked it over. *Towel lined insoles. 100% comfort. 100% fresh.* She ripped at the plastic packet, tore at it with her teeth and shook out the contents.

They felt funny. They were spongy, about half a centimetre thick and had a top layer of soft, white towelling. She pressed one between her fingers and watched the foam as it slowly came back to size.

Christine squeezed the insoles into her shoes. She held her breath as she put her feet in. She stood up. She took a few steps around the room. She didn't know what she had been expecting. Christine could still feel the nails of the floorboards, only a little duller than before.

She let out a long breath and sat back down on the sofa in the dark.