

Elliot Duphonte

excerpted from the novel Elliot and Theresa

Alyssa June

One day mother was being extremely strange. She was drinking, but she was being as sweet as pie and a little jittery at the same time. She was pacing from one room to another while I was watching *Flight of the Offspring* on the television. She would pick something up off the table, like a knickknack or an empty glass with gook at the bottom, and kind of look at it for awhile then set it back down and go on pacing and humming to herself. Her drinking station was in the kitchen, so she had to stop in there too, have a swig then come back into the other room so she could pace some more. Then she said that something was wrong with her.

“What do you mean something is wrong with you?”

“I mean that something doesn’t feel right inside of me.” She returned to the kitchen and sat down.

I peeked in at her. She was sitting at the table, as pale as the bottom of a foot, looking down at the table top, her drink just sitting there. She was shaking her foot. “Oh, I’m okay,” she said because she knew that I was looking. “Why don’t you go sit back down and watch your shows.”

But I didn't do what she said because she was being strange. Also, I was beginning to see that a smoky white figure was growing around her or maybe creeping up behind her and I couldn't tell if this were a trick that my eyes were playing on me or if it were a symbol.

"Maybe you need some medicine," I said.

"Medicine? Something to numb me maybe? To make the pain disappear."

"That's what medicine does."

"Okay," she said. "Bring back something good." She went on nervously shaking her foot.

As soon as I was walking to the medicine store, I saw some coeds, I remember, I saw some old people too. An old lady on the bus that passed was staring at me with her big blinder eyes. You're a symbol of dark times ahead, I thought, then I started laughing, because the truth when it presents itself is so blunt as to make a man laugh. Then I was at the medicine store, which was the pharmacy and medical supplies store, but which also sold candy and magazines. Before I looked for the medicine, I needed to take a quick look at the magazines. There was one in particular that was good which I still looked at to this day and which you might have heard of. It was full of much inspiration.

It was called *JJ Allen's Footwear* and was a catalogue of artful shoes. You can look at it and see flesh stems and shoes, flats, clogs, stiletto heels, sandals, whichever kind of shoe, and some new shoes that designers make only once and that no one buys, but that's not the point. You can see the shoe, the ankle, the flesh stem, the toe cleavage, and finally, the glare from some light on the smooth flesh stem, and you can see it for what it is but you can also catch a glimpse of what is behind the image if you are imbued with the kind of intelligence that I had. In this issue, there was a high heeled shoe that was neon yellow, and the foot inside of it was bare and pale. The shoe was strapped at the front so that you could see the toe cleavage, but the tips of the toes were concealed by yellow leather. A yellow feather, of all things, had been inserted between two of the toes. A yellow feather from a yellow bird. That's magnificent, I thought. The caption read: "The Feathered Foot." It amazed me, it unnerved me. I set the magazine back down and went looking for the medicine, and I felt that I wanted to forget that I had seen that

picture, but one cannot forget what one has seen when it has made an impression on him.

I bought a bottle of medicine that said PAIN KILLERS on it and said DROWSINESS in the side effects section, so I figured this was a good bottle to buy, but I wasn't really thinking at all. I had the bottle in my hand, but for some reason I wasn't moving. I felt I was swallowed up in a space. My brain was fuzzy. One of the clerks in a blue store jacket was on her knees, scanning items on the shelf with a little gun that shot a red beam. She was giving me funny looks.

"There," I said out loud.

"Excuse me," said the clerk.

"Oh, never mind," I told her. Then after a moment of deliberation, I repeated myself. "There."

What I saw that caused me to say "there" was a stack of leather bound bargain books piled on the floor. They were just sitting there in the medicinal and cold care department, waiting for me. It was strange, but it wasn't strange at all. I was used to strange things happening to me, and I knew when an empty symbol was being presented. The Holy Spirit, I thought. I imagined a pigeon floating from one rafter to another. That's the way I was, like a pigeon. They were your normal bunch of books. There was the story about the boy with the straw hat who sits on the raft with a black man, the one about the man with the mustache who lives in the castle, the stories about the magical talking frog who lives in the forest with another frog who wears a suit vest for some reason, the book about the spinning tops that sing, the book about the slaves who formed a society. The classics were all there. These were the books I learned about in high school that they never made us read, but which seemed familiar to me as if they were people I met while I was sleepwalking. But second from the top was a book I didn't recognize, had never heard of before, but its importance was immediately evident to me, for it said *A Philosophy of Leg, Foot, and Shoe*, and I practically kapowed at the top of my lungs so that everyone could hear. I was that excited. I took the book out from the stack, knocking some of the others onto the floor. Here came the clerk in the blue jacket with her special gun, wanting to help me to put the stack back together. But I didn't care. I rushed to the front where I could buy the stuff.

Now here is a thing. The government money was not going to buy my book. We had a special card with a blue design on it that was

used to buy medicine. So I had to set the book down on the counter and feared that I wouldn't be able to take it home with me since I didn't have cash. After the cashier, a fatty with a big blue stud in her nose, handed me the bag with the medicine in it and when she was looking down at the counter, filling out some information, I shoved the book into the bag with the medicine as if I had just paid for it. Then I hurried out the door. No one knew a thing. I had just stolen a special book, and no one knew. What are the chances they would care? Who would read a book like that? The book was meant for me. Next thing I knew, I was out on the street, my heart was racing. I stopped in a little park and opened up the book and found out the dumbest thing about it: the first half of the book had words in it, and the second half of the book had no words in it at all.

The beginning of this book, I am saying, looked like most any other book that you would pick up and the second half of the book was full of blank pages. How can a person respond to this in a way that is considered sane? I knew that something was coming, yet I could not have expected this, and when I finally arrived home, mother was on the sofa, and she was on her back, pressing her hand to her stomach, and she was saying to me: "Just give me something. It feels like there's an oil spill in there."

I put the bottle of medicine on the table and escaped up to my bedroom with the book. She was yelling to me from downstairs, and I was upstairs hissing at her from behind the door. Go slap yourself, I thought. I was in my bedroom alone with *A Philosophy of Leg, Foot, and Shoe*, which I had never heard of before, but which spoke to me. It was an intense feeling. It was impossible for me even to read through it at first. I could only pace around my room. The book was face down on my bed, which was actually just my mattress on the floor. I plucked up some courage. I got down on the mattress and put the book on my lap and opened it, except I opened it to one of the blank pages, which was frustrating. So I put the book back down on the mattress and did some more pacing. If there ever was a time when I had pigeons in my brain, this was it. I was lying on the floor, I was waving my arms, and then I felt calm enough to try the book again. Finally, I was sitting on my mattress and I started at page one.

I am starting at page one! This is what I was thinking, and I was shouting as much to the empty bedroom. Mother probably could

hear me. I realized I was loud, yet I had to read it. I was reading. I couldn't remember having read before. They gave us books with big letters in high school, but who read those? Would you have read those? They weren't real books, not like this one. *A Philosophy of Leg, Foot, and Shoe* was written by a man named Elliot Diphonte and that's also who the book was about. He was a man who existed some time in the past. How far in the past? It was so hard to tell. It was not clear. It was clear that it must have been some time in the recent past because there were cars and running water, but it also wasn't too close to the present because he wrote in such a way that would be impossible now. He used a typewriter. Also, there wasn't any television.

Here is what I read in *A Philosophy of Leg, Foot, and Shoe*: Diphonte in his little room. He is a bohemian, so he lives in squalor. The wallpaper is brown. There is a writing desk with a lone lamp. He is a doughy man who writes shirtless, his chest is flabby, curly little hairs pock his skin here and there. You are thinking, doughy round philosopher, about the nature of reality and the unbearable truth about meaning. He grunts. Errr. So many ideas, so hard, so hard ... Yet, he has no community. He doesn't have any peers with whom to share his groundbreaking ideas. He has relegated himself to his dirty bohemian squalor because he has rejected the university. He didn't feel accepted there, and they didn't accept him anyway.

When he was a student in a class on modern philosophy (something about a clock and the agreements people make with one another and how the clock is representative of those agreements), Diphonte was called on by the professor to say a few words about his understanding of the contemporary philosophies of morality and agreements among people. This is exactly what he did, yet he did it in his own way, which was to spit in the face of the contemporary philosophies. In front of the whole class, he drew a picture of a woman's shoe (I too drew pictures of women's shoes! I gushed) and stated in front of the whole class of twerps in fancy navy blue uniforms: "This is all, a lady's shoe. This is reality as far as I am able to understand. This particular shoe shows the ankles in such a way that they might seem to grow into the shoe, to become one with the shoe. It's such a small and dumb picture – it says barely anything, only that the foot, so precious, can seem to become one with the shoe – but I can stare at it forever, nonetheless. I

could sketch like these kinds of pictures of shoes and feet forever and feel that I am swimming in the heart of reality. Bring me many lovely ladies' shoes. There is something behind them, behind these images of ladies' shoes, when the shoes are on their feet. Perhaps they have symbolic value. We'll never know, for we lack that special kind of intelligence, for if we had that special kind of intelligence, we would be able to see into the dark center of the clock and see that the clock is actually nothing at all. Except, here is the thing, there is something within the clock, but it exists on another plane and we will never know, unless something alien comes crashing into this world, into this nothing, and that is when we will have the terrible insight into the multiple levels of nothing."

Duphonte sat down. There was a pause. Then all at once the entire class erupted into vicious laughter. Some applauded. Others slapped their foreheads as if to make sure that they were still awake. The professor ordered him out of his classroom. "Get out of here, sir. Get out of my classroom with your unbearable nonsense and never step foot in this or any other classroom again. Damn you for making a mockery of our moral philosophy"

"And I won't either," was the poet philosopher's response.

But Duphonte was not a joker. He was dedicated to his cause, which was no cause at all, and spent months alone in his squalor, writing about the shoe, the flesh stem, the ankle, the foot, what have you. He wrote and wrote. He sketched pictures. He threw his hands into the air and spit at his typewriter. He danced around the room like a primitive who is possessed by spirits. He sang silly songs to himself to ease his brain. Like this one: "One hand on the toe, one hand on the throat, one hand on the toe, one hand on the throat." Exhausted, he would fall to the floor and weep. He would wonder if he was making any progress at all or if he were losing his mind. But progress toward what? How could there be progress in a world of nothing?

It was unthinkable that Duphonte could stay locked in that little room forever, meditating on the superficiality of the shoe, the foot, the flesh stem, and the deep symbolic meaning or lack of meaning that might hide behind them, so he went down to the street at night and sat in one bar after another, just like the poets and philosophers of today, getting soused. He had begun to develop a reputation, though none of the other poet philosophers knew exactly what it

was he did. Sometimes one would ask him. Normally it was a young man, an aspiring artistic genius with trembling hand, who would get up the courage, hoping to make a mystery connection that might help to advance his career. He would tiptoe over to the stool where Duphonte was sitting, staring into his glass of booze, and timidly say: "Excuse me, sir," and the philosopher would not respond, and the young one would repeat himself then he would repeat himself again, again, again until Duphonte, feeling that there was some kind of human gnat on him, would turn around and say: "What? What can I do you for?" The young man would look into his eyes and see the depths of emptiness and turn away, suffering from a sensation that was equal parts terror and respect.

Night after night like this occurred. Duphonte seemed unfazed. He worked in his room, worked toward nothing, which was deeply important, deeply meaningful, he was sure, then he would go down to a bar. A young man would try to penetrate him, but to no avail. Then one night he fell in love. It was not the normal kind of love between a man and a woman that you read about in which the man looks into the woman's eyes and feels that something has changed inside of him and that he can become a better person. For Duphonte, love was a moment of delirium. He happened to look up and away from his drink. Perhaps an aspiring genius had tapped him on the shoulder and asked if he knew anything about the new gallery opening up down the street, where they were showing the works of a painter who did only elephants ("elephants that challenge our contemporary understanding of what an elephant can be") and the poet philosopher had looked up, annoyed, thinking that he might give the artsy pigeon a bust to the cheek until he saw two calves, the calves of two flesh stems, and at the bottom of those stems, brilliant flats. Let's say that they are flats in the Mary Jane style, which means that they are black and that there is a strap across the front of the foot that creates a kind of oval where the toe cleavage can be viewed.

The reason I call it love, however, as opposed to saying that he became insanely lustful and perhaps wanted to give a lick to the legs, is that first of all, Duphonte was not like you. He did not see part of a woman's body and feel that he wanted to copulate then fall asleep. When he saw flesh stems that he deemed real in that they appeared to exist fully as entities of grace while also hinting at

the symbolic reality inside of reality, he experienced delirium. He was launched into an intense reverie. Also, the reason it was love was that the woman was most obviously a foot girl. A foot girl is a mysterious and saintly lady who demonstrates grace with actions such as lifting one heel out of a flat then lifting another heel out of the other flat. A foot girl might extend a leg, performing a foot gesture so profound that a man can mull it over in his mind for days. A foot girl can perform a flat dangle in which all of reality seems to be on the table as the shoe appears that it might fall from the foot at any moment, but it does not fall. It was an imaginary foot girl (one from his imagination) who inspired Duphonte to write that a woman put on and took off and put on and took off and put on and took off her velveteen flat again and again and to draw a picture of a flat and to search it for meaning. But the foot girl who stood before him was a woman of flesh and blood. According to *The Philosophy of Leg, Foot, and Shoe*, she was the first true foot girl he had ever seen.

Under what pretext did he approach her? What was her initial response? All I know is that at one moment, he was looking at her calves and the way her ankle slightly bulged above the shoe and the way she lifted her heel, causing her toes to push against the front of the flat, and then at another moment they were having a conversation.

“When I look at your stems and how they appear to grow organically into your flats and how you have your left foot turned just so, as if it is bored with the scene, and your right pointed straight ahead and your toes alert in there, erect even, so that your toes make bulges at the front of the shoe, it seems I am receiving a gesture from nothing itself. It’s as if reality is gesturing to me in a complicated way that makes me want to weep, but there is an abyss at the heart of my sadness.”

“I love that,” she muttered, “but it doesn’t mean anything.”

“How could it?”

“It can’t.”

“I know.”

Her name was Theresa. She was not given a last name. Theresa is the most common name for a foot girl. It’s simply just the way it is, and it makes sense if you think about it. That evening they went to his room of bohemian squalor, and he asked her to pose

for him. "Please," he said, "pose after pose. I need to think without thinking, and I can only think when you are posing." She did as he asked. He lay on the floor and watched as she practiced her foot and leg gestures. She lifted one leg then the other. She splayed her legs while she lay on her back. She sat upright in a chair, crossed her legs, and performed a flat dangle then crossed her legs the other way and performed another dangle. Theresa lifted one heel from her flat then the other heel from the flat so it seemed her entire lower region was winking at him in soft code. She performed these gestures in a pair of Mary Janes. Duphonte's eyes rolled into the back of his head. At one point, he recorded that a pigeon visited his room and that a fountain arose from the soil in his brain, but there was no mention of the Mystificadium. Yet nonetheless, I understood what he was going through. I, of all people, understood.

For days this continued, and Duphonte was convinced that he had found his muse. He was electrified just watching her pose. And Theresa began performing for him in more elaborate ways. She brought over insane pairs of shoes in yellow, orange, and red, some with heels, others flat, and sometimes she would introduce sandals or jelly shoes, which appeared to bond painfully to her feet. With each little dance, pose, or gesture of the foot and stem, Duphonte would reach heated new levels of delirium. Yet he did no writing and did not even sketch shoes during this period, and maybe this was for the best, for an epoch was beginning. Like any new epoch, it was at first one that could not be expressed, but which would crystallize in his brain in silence.

One evening, exhausted and giddy, Duphonte took a break and asked her how she first learned that she was a foot girl. Theresa told him a story that broke his heart. This was a monumental episode in Duphonte's career as a poet philosopher and the moment that inspired his greatest act. Imagine Theresa going to the window to smoke a cigarette and extending a flesh stem, barefoot, so that she appeared to be dipping her foot into a vertical pool. Then she said this:

"When I was little, I wanted to disappear. The only thing about me that was any good was my feet. I knew that since I was a girl. At the swimming hole, the boys and the girls both, they would gather around me and compliment me on my feet for being long, thin, and pale. Then we would go into the water and dunk our heads

and splash around, and the girls all stayed away from me. They said I was a princess, but I didn't care, I didn't like them. I hung around with the boys mostly, and they were hitting each other and trying to drown each other for fun, but still, they didn't go after me. No sir. They made circles around me. They were circles of ruckus, and I always stood in the center of those circles, splashing a little, maybe I would whistle to make a sound, and one time a bird, this big blue pigeon came soaring out of the sky and almost clipped me! But I didn't care that they acted strangely toward me. I wanted the attention. I didn't want a lot of attention. I didn't want to be fawned over or anything. I just wanted to find my place and to be good at something. I guess that was really at the heart of it, that I wanted to be gifted in some way, to be someone with friends who played with me because they respected me, but it didn't happen this way. Then one afternoon, something strange occurred. We were all out in the water. The boys were splashing one another and trying to drown one another, or whatever, and the girls were standing in a circle and hooting and hollering for no reason, and I was kind of caught between the two groups, not really knowing what to do, just kind of being awkward. I liked the way the ground of the swimming hole felt on my feet though. It was muddy wet sand, or whatever, and I started digging my feet into it, making my feet squish. Then eventually I was doing a little dance. And no one seemed to notice or care. Then eventually the girls went up to the shore and draped themselves in their towels because they were cold and pimpling up all over, and I was still dancing and humming to myself. La-di-da-da-di-da sort of stuff, enjoying the feeling of my feet sinking into the ground beneath the water then slipping free, sinking in then slipping free. There was something primordial about having all that mud on my feet. I liked it. Then the boys all got out of the water too because the girls weren't there anymore and they had no one to show off for, so it was just me. I knew I was alone. I wasn't trying to perform, I was just enjoying it, enjoying the feeling of my feet. Then I was in the shallow water, and I was splashing around. And this is when I knew that something strange was happening. This is when I knew that my feet really were special, because the boys and the girls both were watching me. Their faces were dumb. I remember thinking that. I remember thinking that they all looked so dumb, watching me splash my feet around in the shallow water, and I kept

on doing it. I was trying to make their dumbness come out of them. I think now that I was trying to extract the dumbness from their faces as I splashed my feet in the water. Then I was posing. For the first time in my life, I was consciously doing foot and leg poses, and it was only because of the dumbness I was causing in them. I would lift one leg out of the water and dip in my toes then do the same with the other leg and foot. Then I turned around and did the same thing with my back facing them, showing them my calves and heels. And when I turned around again they looked even dumber than they did before. These poses, they were elementary and not very well executed – I know that now – but I don't think it mattered. I had it, and they, the other girls, they did not have it. I guess it was as simple as that. That's all there was to it. And the next time we were at the swimming hole, it was the same thing. The boys were off in their group, doing their splashing and punching, and the girls stood off in their circle, making moaning noises, hooting, hollering. I started off in the center of the boys' circle then I moved away from them, kind of approaching the girls, but also I was kind of scared to get too close, so I stood alone. And I began doing my little dance and humming to myself. I really enjoyed it. And this time, I swear, they all exited the swimming hole like before, but this time they exited as soon as I started dancing. They knew the show was beginning and they didn't want to linger too long and miss it. The boys left the water first, then the girls followed suit because they didn't want to be in the water without anyone to show off for either. And just the same as during the time before, the boys watched me with dumb looks on their faces, but with the girls it was not the same. With the girls, it was something different. They were not happy. They had snarled looks on their faces. I could feel that they were judging me, and they were judging me. They hated me. They hated me for my feet.

“But it got worse, too. One of the boys must have told his parents about my dances, and one day a father showed up. I don't know whose father it was. He sort of sat off in the distance and watched the boys splashing and trying to drown one another, and he watched the girls in their circle making noises, and he watched me who seemingly belonged to neither group. But when the boys came out of the water and sat on the ground and when the girls followed and wrapped themselves in their towels and contorted

their faces, the father who was sitting in the distance came up closer so that he was standing with the boys, and he was watching me do my dance. Each time I did this dance in the water, lifting my feet in and out of the water, I became a little more graceful, so by the time the adults started showing up, I was a relatively graceful foot girl. I was a natural born foot girl, after all. I caught on quickly. And the adults started showing up too, day after day. Men and women alike. They would stand there and wait for me to start posing. One day, I remember, the boys and the girls didn't even go into the water first, and some of the girls didn't even show up. There was a small crowd on the beach rocks, a few women but mostly men, waiting, it seemed, for nothing, or for something that they wouldn't be able to explain. It looked like they had come because they were following some mass feeling. Confused, they were scattered among the rocks, not talking to one another, just waiting. When I showed up, the silence became intense. Since no one else was in the water, I didn't go in either. I sat there and waited. I guess I thought we were all waiting for the same thing. I refused to believe that I – little Theresa – was the cause for all of this insane behavior. But then one of the men grunted. He didn't say a word or anything. He grunted loudly enough that we all could hear him, and we all turned to him. He was standing up and grinding his fist into his hand nervously. And then he saw me, and I saw a light in his face and it was like everyone else saw the light too because they all turned to me, and I knew then that it was my turn. And it was the strangest thing, the feeling of anticipation that followed me into the water. It was like I barely had to do anything at all. It was like all I had to do was stand in the water and do a mindless dance, lifting my feet from the water, putting them back in. I got out of the water and extended one leg then the other like I was dipping them into a vertical pool. There was silence, there was dumbness. Then it was over. I guess I got tired and decided to stop, so I stopped. I used my towel to dry off my feet and legs, and I went home, and they all remained and there was a terrible, depressing, heavy silence that I seemed to leave behind.

“My parents heard about my little show. Word spread. They didn't like that. They were religious, not in a good way, and my father told me that it was the Devil making me do it, but I knew it wasn't. It was the Holy Spirit, Duphonte, and the reason I know that is because I didn't take much pleasure from it. I didn't feel

like I was enjoying myself. I felt like I was satisfying some need, something burning inside, but it wasn't for my pleasure. It was for their pleasure. It was for their pleasure, for the people watching. It didn't matter. He had my mother tie me to the bed by my ankles so that I couldn't go to the swimming pool anymore. The rope left horrific red impressions in my pretty ankles. That didn't deter me though. I probably would have eventually hidden my foot girl talents from the world even if it weren't for my mother. I didn't like the feeling of being watched, of the weight and the silence, though I did like the dumbness I caused in them. But because she hated me for my talents, I decided that my talents were all I have. In a way, she blessed me with her cruelty."

After hearing this story, Duphonte felt inspired. It wasn't a positive inspiration in which a brilliant light appeared to him. Instead, there was a white smoke that moved through his head. He was in delirium. "Lie down on the bed," he ordered her, and Theresa did as she was told, expecting that perhaps copulation would finally ensue. On the contrary, he went to his typewriter and began to write down her story. But this was a bad idea. This was in opposition to the foundation of Duphonte's own ideas, for what is writing other than the insistence on the most neophytic kind of meaning, and it was something he realized pretty quickly, too. He was writing what Theresa had told him, he was attempting to do so word for word from memory with her lying on the bed as if he could channel her experiences, but as he did this he felt there was something mechanical about his writing. And even Theresa, whose story he was typing and who was lying on the bed, wondered why he was doing this. It seemed so futile to her.

The time came when he threw his arms up into the air and closed his eyes and made a long drawn noise of beastly release through his mouth.

"What is this?" said Theresa.

"I don't know what I expected," he replied, "A man cannot make a poet philosophy of nothing. If it exists, then it exists without my having to describe it. That is the complication of reality."

"I don't understand," said the foot girl, who embodied the exact principle of reality to which he was referring.

"Nor do I," said Duphonte, for even though he did understand he felt that he was not worthy of understanding.

Next for the poet philosopher was depression. It was a dark nasty depression. Theresa came to and left the bohemian squalor a few more times, but Duphonte did not even go down to the bars anymore. He would sit with his clothes on in the dry bathtub then he would move to the floor. He ordered Theresa to bring him booze. More and more booze. "Just stand there," he ordered her. "Stand there without moving an inch." And he would stare at her legs and feet. He might have her put on her shoe then take off her shoe. He might have her repeat the action. Duphonte would lay curled on the floor. Sometimes he growled the demands at her, other times he sounded like a whiny little boy. "This is it," he said to her one night in a drunken stupor. "This is it," he repeated. "This is the problem right here, my little foot girl. When you are still, just as you are now, it seems like I am able to see what is, I am able to see what's real, and it's all so simple and inexplicable, but the moment you engage in movement, and not just any movement, but the graceful movement of the foot girl, the lifting of the heel, the raising of the heel, the pushing of the toes against the inside of the flat, I suffer a feeling of surrender. Everything moves out of place. It makes me feel hopeless, euphoric. Whatever is behind it," he said solemnly, "is there and also not there."

One thing that you should know is that foot girls, when they are real foot girls, do not appreciate the search for meaning, especially when the search impedes on their ability to act as foot girls who exist for the sake of being graceful and making people dumb and who don't wish to have their style cramped by self-righteous soul searchers, which is what Duphonte was being. Eventually Theresa, who could take it no longer and who felt that her philosopher friend was curling on the floor and sucking all of the grace out of her, told him what follows.

"You are no different from religious men like my father," she said. "You know the type, sitting in the dark churches of the world, looking into their laps for meaning. That's what you're doing. You're not being yourself, Duphonte. You are not accepting the complexity and the simplicity all at once. You're driving yourself into a whimpering little ball. Stop looking and start accepting!"

At first Duphonte felt that he had been struck by a bolt of hurt that left him dumbfounded. Lying on the floor in a ball, he thought of the way she had described the boys at the beach whose faces

had become dumb during her little foot dance in the water, and he realized that he was one of them and that he was in denial. He wanted to be something more. Then a terrifying image occurred to him. He saw himself dressed up nicely in a navy blue uniform like one of those aspiring academics he had left behind. He saw himself with book in hand, and he saw himself giving a little speech for his class about the nature of moral law. "There is a clock on the wall," he heard himself say, "and we can all look at the clock and agree as to what time it is, and this agreement among us is the basis, nay, the foundation ..." Then he thought, I am not who I think I am. Such terror and self loathing this caused in him that he dragged himself into the bathroom and began banging his head against the ledge of the bathtub, again and again, inflicting as much pain as possible on himself and attempting to knock himself out completely. He didn't have the nerve to knock himself out, though he caused himself enough pain, and he lay on the bathroom floor now, rubbing his forehead where a red welt had appeared. Theresa came into the bathroom and looked down at him disapprovingly.

Then she did something which she had meant to be demeaning, but which ended up causing Duphonte another moment of true inspiration. All she did was lift her foot, which was bare, and pressed it against his face with enough pressure to cause him discomfort. He didn't bother to move or to protect himself. Lying on the floor with a damaged head and with his muse's foot pressed on his eyes, Duphonte experienced something amazing, and this is where I began to wonder if perhaps Duphonte did indeed enter the Mystificadium. According to the book, he did not see a pigeon as I had seen, but instead had seen the image of a bird. It is described in *A Philosophy of Leg, Foot, and Shoe* as the outline of a bird that glowed in green and red. And then he found himself in a dark shadowy space where he was able to see only lights shifting. I wonder if this is because the story of Duphonte occurred before ceiling fans were invented, so even if he saw ceiling fans, he wouldn't know how to describe them except as something alien. At any rate, Duphonte saw a fountain in his vision. He does not describe the fountain, except only to say that it seemed to him to be more than an ordinary fountain and that it was to him – and he did not mean this symbolically or figuratively or in any other silly way – it seemed to him to be a source of a new life, of a new world of thought and a new entry point into the poetic

philosophy which he had yet to invent.

When Duphonte regained consciousness, he found himself on the floor of the bathroom, and he awoke with a sense of mission, though he needed his Theresa, who was no longer in the apartment. It was night outside. He went from bar to bar, peeking his head inside each, hoping to find her. Eventually he did find Theresa at a bar he seldom visited. It was called the Tutu, and the reason Duphonte avoided this place is because it was full of what he considered sissies. What are sissies? I want to take a moment to say that sissies, according to the poet philosopher, were not men of the homosexual persuasion. They were artists. More than anything, they were performing artists. When Duphonte walked by the Tutu, he recognized his muse's well shaped pale calves through a window that was fogged with the hot breath of conversation. The shape of her calves was embedded in his memory. No other woman in the world could have calves like hers. He rubbed the welt on his head and entered the bar. Theresa was with a man in a pink bowtie and another man who was spinning on one foot and a woman who was dressed up like a man and who was wearing a fake mustache and a man who was pantomiming that he was hanging himself by yanking on an invisible rope that was supposedly around his neck. They appeared jovial. Duphonte took a deep breath and swallowed and approached them. Theresa was talking to two male thespians. One of the thespians was turning around in a circle and pointing to the top of his bald head. The other thespian was turning from Theresa to the spinning man as if a serious conversation were taking place. Duphonte paused for a moment in disgust. Then he grabbed his muse's arm and she hollered in fright. The thespians squealed.

"Quiet everyone," Duphonte ordered. Then he whispered into her ear: "I had a vision, but I need you to come with me." She was unsure, and she looked back to the thespians. One stepped forward to help, and Duphonte acted like a brute. He picked Theresa up and carried her out of the bar as if she were a child, an action which excited her.

It was then that he was able to complete his great work, which was to tie her by her ankles to the bed posts, just as her mother had done, but instead of doing so to prevent her from showing off her feet and flesh stems, he did it so that he could turn them into the reality that is drawn over reality. In short, he was able to enact the

dream he had labored over for so many years and which had him kicked out of school, and he did so without typing a word.

Here is what Duphonte did. He took an ink pen from his cup of writing utensils. It was a thick headed pen, a marker, if you will, and he got on his knees beside the bed and began to scribble on her left shin. It felt so strange to him at first, as if he had just walked into a dark room that he didn't know was there. Theresa watched him with nervous anticipation.

"What are you doing?" she mumbled shakily. "Are you going to write on my legs? Duphonte?"

"I think so," he said. He imagined that dark space he had entered when his muse had pressed her foot to his face and he realized that in order to fulfill what was in his head, it only made sense that he should imitate exactly what he saw in his head, which was the hole in reality, the reality within reality. The poet philosopher gave over to his instincts. He was not looking at a figurative clock with a bunch of academics with combed hair and pocket squares, but was drawing a new clock, one that was rather useless for not being a clock at all, on the wall across from the actual clock and knew that it was dumb and juvenile, and this made him feel all the more impassioned about it. He scribbled away without design. Theresa, for her part, alternated from a dreamy silence to outright manic laughter. She splayed her toes when the pen pinched her. She went eek. She stretched her arms and sighed. When he was finished, he untied the rope from around her ankles and ordered her to stand up, and she did and looked down at herself.

"I'm not going to ask you what you think," he said, "because I don't think it matters too much." He did not mean this to be cruel. Theresa understood that. What he was saying was that he had realized that her legs, in a sense, did not belong to her at all, that they were a function of the reality he saw and that what he wanted was not to understand flesh stems that functioned as a part of her body, for wouldn't this amount to nothing more than knowledge? Wouldn't he really be acting the part of the academic if he were concerned with her legs as they were? Hadn't he accomplished something that was greater than that by refusing to acknowledge the needless complexity of the whole body?

The following pages were blank. I paced my bedroom nervously. For the first time in my life, I felt full of excitement and possibility.

8