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## The Pale Blue Shoes

by Sue Hitchcock

New Year's Eve 1982/83

Florence and I had worked together at the British museum from 1966 to 1969 and now lived less than a mile apart. Of course our lives had distanced us, but we would still have a lengthy chat, when we encountered each other out shopping. That year Florence had invited us to a New Year's Eve party at her house and as our daughters, now ten and twelve, were old enough to stay up until midnight, we agreed. Florence's youngest daughter, Alice, was now sixteen.

Zoe was still a slim little girl, but Anna was plump, a lumpy teenager. She didn't look good in anything, so I agreed to a foolish pair of shoes she fancied. They were pale blue patent leather pumps with straps. Also they had very slippery soles.

The party was a Nigerian celebration. There was a saucepan of the hottest stew I've ever tasted in the kitchen, but no other food. The lounge was almost dark, with heavy Nigerian rock music and everyone dancing. We stayed till midnight. When we left the heat and noise, it was silent and cold outside. The path was white with frost. Anna and I held arms, but on the step, she slipped and we both landed on our behinds. My left leg was tucked under my right. Anna scrambled to her feet, stepping hard into the underside of my foot. Pete helped me up and I realised I couldn't stand on that foot. Fortunately a taxi came by, so we got home easily.

At home Pete brought a bowl of warm water for my foot. There was a strange swelling on the top and when I touched it, there was a pop and it resumed its normal shape. There were broken bones. Would I be so stupid as to go to the accident and emergency department on New Year's Eve? Not me!

In the morning it was decided that Pete would stay at home with Zoe, but as a punishment Anna would accompany me to the hospital. It was not really a punishment as she was interested in medicine and anyway, it takes two to make an accident. Wasn't I responsible for the slippery shoes?