

# *Her Feet Were Crossed*

**Alan Sullivan**

Illustrated by

**R. M. Brinkerhoff**

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# HER FEET WERE CROSSED

*By* ALAN SULLIVAN

ILLUSTRATED BY R. M. BRINKERHOFF

Pettifer drew a crisp brown slice from the electric toaster and glanced across the table at his wife.

“What are you doing this afternoon?”

“I’m playing golf,” she said with a little smile.

“What!”

“I thought you’d be surprised.”

“I am,” he admitted. “Is there any special occasion?”

She nodded diffidently. “The ladies’ open handicap for the President’s prize.”

He stared at her. “But you—”

She smiled again.

“Don’t begin it all over again, Henry. I can save you a lot of trouble. You were going to say that I’m a hopeless duffer—that I haven’t any real—well—respect for golf—and that my handicap is twenty-five—which really means that I’m beyond the pale.”

“That’s about it—then why compete?”

“I don’t know—nor do I know why I stopped golf two months ago—nor why I ever began. I suppose it was really you.”

“Why me?”

“Because I’ve never been able to make myself feel about it the way you do. I never experienced the savage sort of joy you experience when you drive over two hundred yards. My soul does not leap at the click of a clean iron shot, and when I do hole out I’m chiefly conscious that I’ve got to pick the thing out again.”

“Good lord. Why didn’t you tell me this before?”

“What was the use? You were determined I should play.”

“It was for your own sake,” said Pettifer loftily, “and the psychological value of the game.”

“Golf descended on me during our honeymoon like a cloud of locusts,” she went on thoughtfully, “and do you really see any psychological value in a woman spraining her wrists and twisting her back? I can’t. I call it taking anatomical liberties.”

He frowned a little. “Then why play to-day—and in a match?”

She did not answer at once, but played with her cup and regarded him curiously.

“You don’t want me to?”

**P**ettifer flushed in spite of himself. “Why make an—?”

“An exhibition of myself!” she put in swiftly. “That’s your own pride speaking, Henry. You don’t mind three years’ continuous exhibition, so long as it appears that you’re doing your best to help me out of the pit. I’m sure everyone admired you for that. But when it comes to a match—it’s another thing.”

His flush grew a little deeper. “Please yourself,” he said sulkily. “I won’t be home till late”—then carelessly, “do you want a lesson? I’ve half an hour yet.”

What followed was trying—for each. Mrs. Pettifer planted herself firmly at the edge of a velvet croquet lawn and grasped her driver with the fingers of desperation. A profound gloom enveloped them both. Twenty feet away was the wooden wall of the tool house. She glanced interrogatively at her husband and he began to drone the weary ritual which it seemed had pervaded her waking hours for the last three years. Sometimes she heard it in her sleep.

“Stand a little more behind your ball—don’t raise your club so fast—use your left arm—don’t press—keep your eye upon the ball and follow through.”

She set her teeth, scooped a neat furrow out of the smooth turf, and felt a violent shock in both wrists. The ball lay undisturbed.

“You took your eye off,” he growled.

“I didn’t.”

“You did—you looked at me halfway through.”

“It wasn’t because I wanted to,” she murmured. “I’ll try again.”

She did try—and sliced horribly. The ball whistled past Pettifer’s stomach and plunged through a window in the adjoining house. He stared after it—mute with disgust and disappeared. Presently he came back—still red—and minus five shillings.

“That was a little better, wasn’t it?” she said sweetly. “I’ll pay for the window. I’m glad it was Julia’s.”

**H**e spluttered innocuously. “Move closer to tool house,” he got out after a moment. “Do you really care whether you hit the ball or not?”

She looked up as though astonished. “Do you think I’d begin a perfect day with contortions like this if I didn’t? Of course I care.”

“Then put your mind on it.” He had determined to see the next twenty minutes through—at whatever cost. “You’ve got to take it seriously—understand—seriously. It’s that kind of a game.”

“Is it a game at all?” she demanded impetuously.

“What else—and one’s pride should keep one up to the scratch.”

She settled for another stroke—then halted and looked up. “It occurs to me that it isn’t a game at all. With me it’s a sacrifice, and with you it’s a sacrament. That would explain a good deal.” She swung hard, and, topping the ball, buried it in the moist earth. Two little bright spots of colour appeared on her cheeks.



*“I wish you’d go to your train, Henry, I know everything you’re going to say, so if you’ll move on. I’ll imagine you’re there—and saying it.”*

“I wish you’d go to your train, Henry, I know everything you’re going to say, so if you’ll move on. I’ll imagine you’re there—and saying it. Just now you make me feel like—chanting about ‘having left undone the things’ etc.”

Pettifer lighted his pipe. “What you should have is a large mat to practise on, and your handicap doubled. Good morning.”

“Thank you, dear. I’ll order the mat at once. Dinner at eight to-night. I may be a little late.”

She looked after him with a little wrinkle in her white brows. The garden gate banged—rather viciously, she thought. Peace settled on the velvet lawn. She replaced the turf and went next door to apologise to Julia Martin who had a handicap of twelve and, four years ago, was a particular friend of Henry Pettifer’s. She found her obviously amused, and inclined to be patronizing.

Presently Julia glanced at her curiously.

“You’re playing in the match this afternoon?”

Mrs. Pettifer nodded in the most offhand manner. “Yes, I thought I might as well.”

“I’ve just telephoned to the club. They’ve drawn.”

“And whom do you play with?”

“You.”

Mrs. Pettifer gulped in spite of herself. “Isn’t that funny?” She hesitated a moment—then with a little smile—“I break your windows in the morning, and play with you in the afternoon.”

“Oh, that doesn’t matter—and Henry came over at once.”

“Of course—but do you know,” Mrs. Pettifer went on, her lips curving into a mischievous smile, “it must have seemed just like old times to Harry to be going to your house so early in the day.”

**J**ulia Martin did not smile. She was imperatively reminded that while she could give Sybil Pettifer a stroke and a half a hole—and beat her—the fact remained that the latter had walked off with Harry. It was something which moved more or less constantly in Julia’s mind. It was a bigger contest than golf—but, she instantly decided, this afternoon would be a disastrous one for her visitor. The idea stimulated and piqued her. It might be a stepping stone to other things.

“I’m afraid I can’t give you much of a game.” Mrs. Pettifer’s voice had a touch of humility that was new to it.

Julia shook her head. “That doesn’t matter a bit. It’s the spirit of the thing that counts, isn’t it?”

The other girl nodded, and again the curious smile. “That’s what Henry says—you and he would have made a wonderful team. See you at two o’clock.”

Miss Martin stood for a moment—her eyes suspiciously bright. “Sybil has asked for it—and she’s going to get it,” she murmured half aloud. Then she got into an easy chair and tried to relax—in preparation.

The Plumley golf course—like most in Essex—presents no particular difficulties. Bogie is eighty-four—which practically tells the story. It does not attract professional matches, but is beloved by that type of male mammal who regards a putting green with absolute veneration, and is haunted by the recollection of lost opportunities. For the rest of it, there is a comfortable club house and a rather carefully picked membership.

rs. Pettifer had joined—on her husband’s urgent insistence, but she wondered secretly how many other women there were to whom, in private, golf was a tribulation and not a game. Then she thought suddenly of Julia Martin and what she might have meant by ‘the spirit of the thing’—it being Julia’s habit to mean not infrequently more than she put into words. Slowly the light dawned—and kept on dawning. And at that Mrs. Pettifer set her lips and got out her clubs.

“If I’ve got to climb up on the altar and lie down. I’m going to do it properly,” she half whispered.

The only man in sight was the professional—and for that she was thankful. Julia—at the first tee—was swinging her driver with a certain businesslike precision. Mrs. Pettifer watched her without speaking and felt a little sick. Presently Julia turned.

“Married women first,” she said coolly. “Please drive.”

Something hot and tingling throbbed in Mrs. Pettifer’s veins.

“It doesn’t really matter, does it?”

She teed her ball with fingers that trembled ever so slightly—then swung. Instinctively she closed her eyes for a fraction of a second. The ball was still there. Julia appeared not to have seen her. She swung again. The ball rolled jerkily forward, swerved abruptly to the left and nestled cosily in the roughest part of the rough. She stared at its course with speechless aversion. Julia did not speak. Then came a neat swing, a clean click and a speck of white landed in the middle of the fairway a hundred and thirty yards off.

“Good stroke,” said Mrs. Pettifer involuntarily.

“It wasn’t bad—but I didn’t get much distance.”

“Distance!—that would be enormous—for me.”

Julia did not reply to what she considered an obvious statement of fact, while Mrs. Pettifer took three to get out of the rough. Finally her eighth stroke worried itself into the hole. Julia was comfortably down in five. She took out her card with the least touch of condescension.

Mrs. Pettifer watched her silently. The massacre had begun, there was no doubt of that but something in her opponent’s manner was stirring her to hitherto undreamed-of revolt. It came over her now that Julia

had always been condescending—ever since her neighbour came home from her wedding trip. It was just as though a curtain had been lifted and she saw a new Julia, much more vividly than she had seen the old one. And at that the beating of her heart steadied and she felt a slow, cool wave come over her. Simultaneously the weight of the game of golf fell from her shoulders, and she experienced a reckless sense of freedom.

“Your honour,” she said briskly.

The second hole at Plumley is a half-shot and a little tricky—the green being bunkered to right and left. Julia played quite deliberately short, and lay in good position for a pitch.

“I always do that here—it’s safest,” she remarked.

Mrs. Pettifer nodded and lifted her iron. Her lids, as usual, twitched, but between them she held a glimpse of the ball. She let the club swing as it seemed to want to swing. Then she shut her eyes—being afraid to look.

Julia gasped. “A beauty—you’re lying dead.”

Mrs. Pettifer blinked. She was only some three feet from the hole. How had the ball got there?

“I’ve never—”

She broke off suddenly, as though some inward mentor had commanded silence—then—without a shade of surprise, “It wasn’t bad.”

Julia looked at her, said nothing and lost the hole. Mrs. Pettifer took out her card.

“Four for you? I’m two.”

**O**n the way to the third tee, Henry’s admonitions came back to her. “Stand a little behind your ball—don’t raise your—” She cut them off in the middle. It seemed they were graven on her heart. She would remember them now, and sent up a wordless petition to that mysterious deity who broods over green and bunker. As she swung, she rehearsed the ritual again.

Came that hideously familiar shock in wrist and arm, and a violent wrenching of muscles that revolted against maltreatment. The concussion vibrated in her very spine. The ball lay a few yards away. Five minutes later Julia was one up.

The fourth hole at Plumley is nearly five hundred yards and the two paused as they surveyed its verdant length. Julia reckoned on a six, while Mrs. Pettifer did not calculate at all.

“I think,” said the former, as she fastened her glove, “that what helps me most is to keep my mind on the game.”

“I’m afraid my mind is on Harry—he’ll be two to-morrow,” hazarded Mrs. Pettifer thoughtfully. “That’s one reason I can’t play as you do. It must be of great assistance,” she added, with a daring glance, “to have no responsibilities like that.”

Julia Martin addressed her ball with an inaudible murmur. A little flush had risen in her cheeks. She swung, but not with her usual precision, and pulled out of bounds into a field of clover.

“Hard lines,” said her opponent smoothly, “and how very unusual for you. My hole, I think.”

Julia nodded. She found it difficult to speak. Her second drive was not much better but playable. Mrs. Pettifer made a neat little mound of red sand and placed her black dot on top. Breathing another prayer she took her stance.

**T**hen, as she swung, a curious thing happened. Her husband’s maxims were wiped clean from her mind, and she heard a new voice, small but very distinct, that brought with it a sudden thrill of confidence such as she had never known before. It bade her hit the ball on the nose, and hit it in her own way, unembarrassed by rule and precept, and hit it hard. This happened very quickly. She glanced at her ball, then at her driver, and felt assured that the one was admirably designed to come into violent contact with the other. Simultaneously a thrill ran through her. She took one long breath, and without any further thought of stance or position bent upon the ball one malignant glance, and with all the strength of her supple body lashed out as though her driver were a whip. The black dot looked as big as an orange.

There was no jar—no shock. She heard a clean, crisp smack, and observed a small spherical object that travelled like a bullet down the fairway. She stared after it with something of contempt. What a tiny thing to be worried about. Then she glanced at Julia Martin.

The latter stood regarding her with eyes very wide open, and on her face was a curious admixture of astonishment and respect. Presently she spoke—

slowly—as though something inside of her were forcing out the words.

“That’s the longest drive a woman has ever made on this course.”

Mrs. Pettifer picked up her clubs. “Why shouldn’t it be? You’re playing four, aren’t you?”

Julia nodded and played—indifferently. They were nearly at the green when the other woman laughed outright. Julia stared at her.

“What is it?” she said sulkily.

“I was only thinking that baby is going to have a nose just like his father. It looks awfully funny—even now. You play five to my three—don’t you?”

She made the hole in five herself, and was one up. She felt no surprise whatever, being inwardly and sharply assured that the job set her for that afternoon was bigger and deeper than golf. The job was to put Julia Martin once and for all where she belonged. It was ridiculous that golf—especially her golf should be chosen as the agency. But there it was.

At the same time she saw this game—this combined sacrament and sacrifice in a new light. How deplorably she had bowed to its yokes and burdened her spirit with its protocols. She had hated golf. It hung like a sword of Damocles ever above her head, imposed upon her by a husband, who, because he liked it, took it for granted in the time-honoured British fashion that, forsooth, she must like it too. She saw herself the incarnation of myriads of other weak-spirited women who had swallowed the same dose as pliantly as herself, and, year after year, dragged their weary bodies over the green turf, weighed down with instruments of self-torture which they wielded in speechless long-suffering. But now, she decided, the hour of reckoning had come.

She drove off, and her glance followed the hard-hit ball. Had a good professional seen that drive his very soul would have cried out. There was no stance—no timing—no particular grip—no balanced use of arms and shoulders—no follow through, but just the swift and reckless stroke of a



*“That’s the longest drive a woman has ever made on this course.”*

healthy, young woman who wants to get something done with the least possible delay, and is not in any manner particular how she does it. And when she saw what she had done she knew that it was good.

Julia bit her lip, emulated something of the same wild freedom, and failed dismally. She felt stiff, awkward and uncertain. Mrs. Pettifer's brows went up a little. The least suspicion of a smile played on her mouth.

"I'm afraid you took your mind off it—that time." Her voice was soft and ingratiating.

Julia moistened her lips. "As a matter of fact, I did. I was thinking of your game—not my own."

"Don't worry about me. I'll go to pieces any minute. Did I tell you that baby is beginning to talk already—or perhaps Henry has told you. You played with him last week, didn't you?"

It was sheer guess work, but it struck home. As a matter of fact Henry had played with her; a long, satisfying round about which he said nothing at home. He had found Julia very understanding, very: and there had been no mention of baby's linguistic achievements.

"Yes, Henry did tell me," came the hasty answer. "Isn't it wonderful?"

Mrs. Pettifer indulged in a little secret smile. Now she knew. If Henry had discussed it with Julia, he would have come home and bragged about it. She wondered just how many such games there had been.

"Henry's simply crazy about him," she said wickedly. "I once thought men didn't care much for that sort of thing, but now I know better."

It was a Parthian shot. Julia, addressing her ball, saw not that glistening sphere, but her one-time lover with another woman's baby on his knee. The club wavered. Mrs. Pettifer stood, waiting silently, but the other girl was painfully conscious of her presence—and lost the hole.

At the next drive it was she—and not Mrs. Pettifer, who went to pieces. The hideous thing about it was that as her own game dissolved her opponent's increased in brilliancy. By now there was something of a gallery—early players strolling back to meet those behind them. Someone glanced at Mrs. Pettifer's card, and the whisper went round that so far it was low score for the afternoon.

hat the little woman herself felt about it was not easily determined. Her attitude toward her ball was one of supreme contempt. She hit it as she felt she wanted to hit it, and always with the same remarkable result. Julia had dropped hopelessly behind—but that made no difference. Her opponent made the eighth—a tricky hole at Plumley—in a cool four, and the ninth—four hundred and fifty yards—in six. Then she went on and two hours later handed in a card which showed a gross score of two over fives—or ninety-two. Julia initialled it without a word, murmured her congratulations, and had turned away, when she stopped, hesitated, and came slowly back.

“Do you mind if I ask you something about your golf?” she ventured a little unsteadily. “I’m awfully puzzled.”

In Mrs. Pettifer’s gray eyes there moved a sudden light. “Not at all.”

“You see, you’ve made a remarkable score. I’ve never known you to play like that before, and I was wondering just how you did it.”

“Really?” The voice was low and distinctly sweet.

“Yes, really—I mean it.”

“I wonder if you’d understand.”

“Is there any reason I shouldn’t?” said Julia a shade stiffly.

“No, I suppose not; but,” rippled Mrs. Pettifer, “you did it—I didn’t. Now I must be off to baby.”

She went on to the club house nodding right and left her acknowledgment of a murmur of congratulation. Her head was up, and she walked with a jauntiness she had never before displayed in the purlieu of the Plumley course. Her face still wore that queer little smile, as though there were that in her mind which was food for hidden mirth. In the locker room she was about to put away her clubs, then paused, and, after an instant of deliberation, swung them over her shoulder and started for home.

Pettifer arrived at seven-thirty. He had not had a very satisfactory day, and emerged from his dressing room a shade more precise than ever. During the past few hours he had given scanty thought to the débacle which he was assured must have been enacted on the Plumley course. Descending to the drawing room, he found Sybil curled up in a big chair, staring at the empty fireplace. Her small face expressed nothing, and, he concluded instantly, the

competition was a subject to be avoided. He could count on Julia to supply the details.

“Well,” she said, “what sort of a day have you had?”

“Only fair! Things were very quiet in the city. How’s baby?”

“Splendid,” she nodded. “Do you know, Henry, I think he’s going to be very like you.”

**T**here was a tone in her voice that rather baffled him.

“Just how?”

“Well,” she answered dreamily, “with that nose I’m sure he’ll make his wife play golf—whether she wants to or not. Can’t you just see him?”

Pettifer stiffened a little. “I hoped you had got ambitious about golf.”

She shook her head. “It’s you who are ambitious for me. It hurts your pride to have me a duffer, but it didn’t occur that my suffering might be greater than yours. Just how often have you determined to make me play like—well—like Julia.”

“Fairly often,” he admitted, then, after a tentative pause, “I suppose you didn’t play like her to-day?”

“No—I didn’t,” Sybil’s gray eyes were half closed.

“You weren’t unlucky enough to be drawn against her, of course?”

She nodded. “That’s exactly what happened!”

Pettifer groaned. “Oh Lord—and the score?”

“Two over fives,” said his wife reminiscently.

He was silent for a moment, then—turning: “It might have been worse.”

She laughed softly. “It might—but not much. Do you find the room chilly, Henry?”

“I’m sorry about to-day. Yes, I do.”

She disappeared, and came back with a bundle of wood in a newspaper. Thrusting this neatly into the grate, she lighted it. The paper blackened—curled—and, inside, Pettifer saw a splintered mass of smooth, brown sticks. Suddenly he leaned forward—his eyes bulging.

“Great Heavens, Sybil—aren’t those golf clubs?”

She spread her slim fingers toward the blaze.

“Yes—but not yours—mine. Makes the room quite cosy, doesn’t it?”

“Are you crazy?” This was an outrage on his very existence.

“No—I’ve just avoided that, Henry, you remember about the Crusaders—don’t you?”

“I suppose so, but what has that got to do with this insensate foolishness?”

“Well; the Crusaders used to buck up now and then, and put on their armour, and go and kill a few Saracens or things that they thought were their spiritual enemies. They felt better—a lot better—after they did that—and then came back and made a sort of oblation on the home altar to the deity that, so to speak, pulled them through. And when that was done, they settled down, and led a decent, normal, comfortable life, till they were buried in the Temple Church, or somewhere, with their feet crossed to show that they’d been on a Crusade.”

“Historically correct,” he said acidly. “But I am still in the dark.”

She gave a soft, little laugh. “I had two spiritual enemies, though I didn’t realise it till this afternoon—and now I haven’t any. That fire is my oblation on the home altar, and—Henry—look at my feet.”

THE END

## TRANSCRIBER NOTES

Mis-spelled words and printer errors have been corrected. Where multiple spellings occur, majority use has been employed.

Punctuation has been maintained except where obvious printer errors occur.

Illustrations have been relocated due to using a non-page layout.

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[The end of *Her Feet Were Crossed* by Alan Sullivan]