

Shoe Story

On a Sunday afternoon in early May, having just mowed the lawn, he wanted to rinse off his grassy legs with the garden hose, so he removed his shoes and put them on top of the car. They were a pair of his old running shoes, one of his favorites.

An off and on avid runner, he had worn out many number of running shoes over the years of daily pavement pounding. Sometimes, if he hadn't trimmed them, the nails of his big toes would carve out holes in the front of his shoes. Sometimes the soles would begin to come unglued, an annoying flop disrupting the reassuring sound of his foot strike. Or sometimes the important padding at the shoe's back would break open causing a maddening abrasive rubbing on his achilles. Most times, the shoes just began to lose their cushioning spring signaling it was time to visit the running shoe store. But he never threw out his old running shoes. They piled in his closet like trophies, like souvenirs, like old friends. Some of them, the ones still comfortable to enough wear, he would use for other activities. Lounging around the house or work in the yard. Like the ones he was wearing this day in early May.

Not wanting his old shoes to get wet, he looked around to find a place to set them aside. Normally, when he would do this, the car was either on the street or in the garage and he could place his shoes away from where the water might spray and spread. But on this day, the car was next to him on the driveway and without another thought, he placed his old running shoes on top of the car, a conspicuous spot he thought he would not forget. And usually he would not. However, on this day due to a combination of subtle circumstance and minor distraction, he did.

After rinsing his feet and winding the hose back on its rack, he went inside to dry his feet and found his wife busy with the kitchen faucet. Wanting to fix a leak, she had taken it apart and was now looking for a replacement for the worn-out washer. The contents of the spare bits jar, assorted washers, screws, nuts, and nails, were spread out on the counter. But the right size washer couldn't be found, so she asked her husband if he could run down to the hardware store with the old worn one and find the right size replacement. And so, he did, in his hurried way, hopping into the car and speeding off, wanting to get this unscheduled task done as quickly as possible.

And so, down the street he went, those old shoes still riding on top of the car, and they stayed right where they were, as if they were holding on, gripping

with their treads as he sped around his neighborhood turns and onto the main highway. As his speed picked up, one of the shoes began to bobble and shift then slide to the edge of the car's roof. And with the noise of the traffic, no ear could hear the soft rubber thudding of the shoe as it tumbled to the pavement. Two blocks down the road, racing through a yellow light, the other shoe dropped off the accelerating car.

At the hardware store, with some clerk assistance, he found the correct part and after browsing the power tools for a while, he drove home. Returning to the kitchen, he helped his wife screw the faucet pieces back together and with a cheek-kissed thanks hon, he went about the rest of his day. He had forgotten all about the shoes.

The next day, when he wanted to work in the garden, he went to the mudroom to put on his old running shoes. The mudroom was where he normally kept them and he had no reason to think, on this morning, that he had done anything different than he would normally do with his shoes, ritual repetition being one of the guiding principles of his disciplined life. But, of course, the shoes were not there. He began to look around the house for them. Under the table, in the bathroom, upstairs in the closet. He asked his wife if she had seen them, but she really didn't know what shoes he was referring to, never having really paid much attention to his footwear. As far as she was concerned, his habits and possessions were his business.

He searched his memory for a clue to his previous day's actions but, because he hadn't really paid attention to what he had been doing when he took off his shoes the day before, his memory had closed that window. Eventually he gave up and decided to wear some even older and more run down shoes for his day's work in the garden. But still it haunted him, how he might have misplaced those old favorite shoes.

But, after gardening, when he went again to clean his feet with the hose as he had the day before, it finally came back to him, what he had done, placing those shoes on top of the car. Smacking his hand to his forehead in bemused disbelief, he decided to retrace his route to the store, first on foot in his neighborhood, later in the car, driving slowly with his flashers on, scanning the curbs and sidewalks. Nothing. Not a trace, they must be long gone by now.

The next morning, going out the front door in his bathrobe to greet the morning dew, on his front porch by the mat were his old running shoes, the ones he thought lost for good. There they were sitting, toes pointing towards the house, like lost dogs coming home, eager for greetings and hugs. How strange! Who could have done this? A neighbor? What neighbor would have known his apparel and habits so well as to recognize these old shoes as his? An amazing puzzlement! But, no matter, he was very glad to have them back and he took them inside to his bedroom, facing his side of the bed. He wanted to keep an eye on them, not wanting to lose them through some thoughtless oversight again.

As he awoke the next day, lumped and groggy from an uneasy sleep, a bleary scan of his bedroom floor showed that his old shoes were not where he had placed them the day before. Once again, he scraped the inside of his brain trying to see if he was remembering it all wrong, that he had in fact left them downstairs in their proper mudroom place and that he had only dreamed of bringing them upstairs.

But when he went downstairs to look and then to search up and down all over his house, he started to think he had dreamed the entire incident of his shoes' homecoming. Maybe his obsessive possession of the old favorite shoes that should have been discarded long ago was starting to tip into delusion. For sanity's sake, best to let them go. Forget the whole thing.

On Wednesday morning, the shoes were back, sitting this time on the welcome mat, toes facing the door as if, having just wiped their soles, they were ready to come in for breakfast. Wide eyed, he stared at them. A strange buzz went down his spine and the entire front room took on a weird dizzy shine. He picked his shoes up, sort of cradled them in his arms. And they seemed to still have that same old familiar warmth and friendliness that he had always so loved. He brought them up to his bedroom and for some reason, he didn't exactly know why, he placed them on his bedroom window sill overlooking the yard and the street.

That night in the midst of a deep peaceful sleep, he had the most vivid dream, one of those dreams where everything is precise to the smallest detail, and all the colors are rich and varied, and you will be forever convinced that this thing really happened, a true experience of your life. His old running shoes were outside on the front lawn and slowly on their own they began to move, to lift heel to toe, first one shoe then the other, and then to walk down to the street, then to run down the road. And in this dream he was following them, as if on a movie camera platform running on tracks, then as if on a drone flying beside them. As they continued to run, gaining longer strides, the shoes began to get bigger. Then legs began to appear, but they were transparent as if made of glass. And the legs grew up to form a waist and a torso, chest and rhythmically pumping arms, then the head and at last he could see that it was he himself, grown to gigantic proportions. A crystalline colossus gracefully striding the earth, bright shining like a thousand mirrors in the morning sun.

When he awoke in the morning to a very silent bedroom, his dear old running shoes were still on the windowsill overlooking the yard, just as he had placed them the night before. He lay in bed looking at them in the quiet morning light for a very long time. At last he got up, got dressed, and went downstairs for breakfast, taking his old shoes with him. He sat them on the counter as he ate his eggs and toast. When he was finished, he placed his dishes in the dishwasher and took his shoes into the living room to the front door. He opened the door and went outside and put his old shoes down on the front porch, toes facing outward, to the street. He then went back inside, to begin his day of phone calls and messaging, going over reports. Planning dinner with his wife, going to the grocery store. When it was time for his daily run, he put on his current running shoes, the ones still new, checked his watch, and opened the front door. His old favorite running shoes were no longer there.

He never saw them again.