

sep 30

the shoe man poem

my alarm went off
it was Sunday again
i was sleepy and tired
my one day to sleep in

but the guilt i would feel
the rest of the day
would have been too much
so i'd go and i'd pray

i showered and shaved
i adjusted my tie
i got there and sat
in a pew just in time

bowing my head in prayer
as i closed my eyes
i saw the shoe of the man next to me
touching my own - i sighed

with plenty of room on either side
i thought, "why must our soles touch?"
it bothered me, his shoe touching mine
but it didn't bother him much.

a prayer began: "our Father" ...

i thought, "this man with the shoes
has no pride
they're dusty, worn, and scratched

even worse, there are holes on the side!"

"thank you for blessings," the prayer went on

the shoe man said

a quiet "amen"

i tried to focus on the prayer

but my thoughts were on his shoes again

aren't we supposed to look our best

when walking through that door

"well, this certainly isn't it," i thought
glancing toward the floor.

then the prayer was ended

and the songs of praise began

the shoe man was certainly loud
sounding proud as he sang

his voice lifted the rafters

his hands were raised high

the Lord could surely hear

the shoe man's voice from the sky

it was time for the offering

and what i threw in was steep

i watched as the shoe man reached
into his pockets so deep

i saw what was pulled out

what the shoe man put in

then i heard a soft "clink"

as when silver hits tin

the sermon really bored me
to tears, and that's no lie
it was the same for the shoe man
for tears fell from his eyes

at the end of the service
as is the custom here
we must greet new visitors
and show them all good cheer

but i felt moved somehow
and wanted to meet the shoe man
so after the closing prayer
i reached over and shook his hand

he was old and his skin was dark
and his hair was truly a mess
but i thanked him for coming
for being our guest

he said, "my names' charlie
i'm glad to meet you, my friend"
there were tears in his eyes
but he had a large, wide grin

"let me explain," he said
wiping tears from his eyes
"i've been coming here for months
and you're the first to say 'Hi'"

"i know that my appearance
is not like all the rest
"but i really do try
to always look my best

"i always clean and polish my shoes
before my very long walk
"but by the time i get here
they're dirty and dusty, like chalk"

my heart filled with pain
and i swallowed to hide my tears
as he continued to apologize
for daring to sit so near

he said, "when i get here
i know i must look a sight
"but i thought if i could touch you
then maybe our souls might unite"

i was silent for a moment
knowing whatever was said
would pale in comparison
i spoke from my heart - not my head

"oh, you've touched me," i said,
"and taught me, in part;
"that the best of any man
is what is found in his heart"

the rest, i thought,
this shoe man will never know
like just how thankful i really am
that his dirty old shoe touched my soul

- leanne freiberg