Wet Shoes

  *I will show you fear in a handful of dust...*

* T.S. Eliot

Wet grey slabs of cement glistening coldly in the morning light. A drizzle, then, to suit the iciness, another sham to make my shoes freeze and God he must be laughing. Laughing his head off like a merry-go-round so he can watch me flail and flounder and make a fool of myself. Watch him laugh. Watch me watch him laugh.

Half a dozen steps and already I am soaked to the bone. Small bones, showing through like brittle eggshells whenever I clench my fist, a flexing of fingers – *tap tap* – another pair of shoes out the door and I breathe a sigh of relief so he can’t hear, so nobody can hear, because that’s all nobody is good for, that and spewing nonsense. Which is basically sense standing on its own head, going first one way and then the other *tap-tap* like a paint-spattered canvas, all filth and nonsense, dashing me against the rocks. Another *tap*.

Each step squelches. Muddy water, why am I doing this to myself. Always the same question. If I had wanted an answer I would have shaken my name off, this name that is a hand-puppet I’ve been forced to contort, the wax doll melting by the stove. Too old for dolls, too old for anything I once had, damn him for making me do this to myself, what on earth am I lying for? Because a lie is a lie when it is a lie, and here I am the resident expert on density. Bell, book, candle.

Oh? Ring it, then. Ring the bells for have you heard, a broken door is still a door. I can’t go back, not when there is no way forward. He knows how to use a feather. No doors behind me, and none in front. Trapped. When the sidewalk is slippery, down into a puddle and then six feet under. I know complaints are biting the dust. If I had wanted someone to lie to me I would have done it myself. Not him. He’s pathetic. He who cried when I lay on that hospital bed, reaching up to grope at the dancing lights I thought were stars. He said he would give them to me if he could. *Avec ta morale de bigote, tu prends ton pied quand tu tricote.* Liar. No one lies to himself, but he’s done it and now I’m doing it too. Shall I weep for you?

One more corner. A car engine screeches and dies. We’re pretty the way we’re not meant to be, wet shoes and all. Raindrops drip down my neck, winces and wintry moods. The career girl without a career. This isn’t how it’s supposed to be. I could keep stumbling, or else stay here until the sky and the clouds swallow me whole and there is nothing left. *Pourquoi ce chemin de croix.* No, I don’t see. Of what use are eyes when one is staring into a void that reflects no light? Yawning, tired. Still there. Still laughing. His scythe is tacky.

Nervously I rub my bracelet, turning over each rounded pearl. Pearls are cheap these days, but they’re still worth more than tears. Two little fishes hammered out of a thin sheet of silver. I am a drowning Pisces. That’s hilarious – is he laughing? Are you laughing? Because if he doesn’t, if you don’t, then this is all for naught. Don’t lie to me, don’t waste my breath, I can barely walk as it is. One shoe in front of the other, when I get back I’ll turn on the air-conditioning full blast... Get back where? My grave-worms are on loan.

Curses don’t work here. Drink too much wormwood, and your face will stay puckered long after your hands have lowered the beaker. The things I do to live this lie. *I’ve scarce the heart to plague the wretched creature.* He doesn’t know. I can shut the door in his face, but then I would’ve shut myself out. Draw the blinds first. He is not my keeper. If a mistake is all that there is, then a mistake will mend the damage done. Not every stumbling woman is a hussy. Everybody knows... wine and brandy and vodka burns. It doesn’t chase away the wet.

I can mutter to myself. It’s not the same as a staying silence, a flood on the floor since it’s still drizzling. Still tapping. He and nobody and the hospital lights that dance. I don’t remember reaching for them – too ill, too calm, too ready. Unlike today. The inverse functions of fortune. *When God is gone and the devil takes hold, who’ll have mercy on your soul?*

Does this road never end？I’ve lost track again. All roads lead somewhere, but I don’t remember where. This one doesn’t go to Rome. Almost. Almost is not *there*, not quite. A fake grin. Two blocks of ice. He must be laughing his head off, that’s what he always does. It’s all about him, and what I mean. Can fish breathe in rain？Well enough to be stared at. A hospital is no place for dreaming. Twenty-four hours of pointing my fingers at the ceiling, and I don’t recall any of it. Was I a dream too, then? Was I. Wasn’t. I do remember telling him he talks too much, because he’s a dream and one I can’t wake from. That makes him real. A looming face above, staring down at me with all the anxiety of a cat at a dead bird. I’d rip the needle from my arm if I could. Falling trees. I didn’t smile when I finally woke up, so he wasn’t supposed to either, but somehow he did. I’d rip the needle out if I could. If this is nothing, then perhaps I like it. When I walk with my eyes shut because the cold tap water didn’t *quite* work the way the way it was supposed to and I woke up again. Delirium Tremens. You can’t teach an old dog new tricks.

Sometimes I wonder what could have been if I chose. Choices are lies, don’t make me repeat myself. If they don’t work then people wouldn’t keep telling them. My shoes are soaked through. A conscious decision. Grief glossed over with quick, clean strokes, trailing water all over the carpet. Lobotomy was a solution like no other. For liars like me like no other. If you lie to me, that means I can lie to him and he will lie to you. We’ve come a long way. Full circle. Still broken. Still silent. Still the Least Important Player. I’m not one of those people with white plastic sticking out of their ears.