

O. Henry's Shoe

By Mark Saunders

SYNOPSIS

An older man missing a shoe persuades a younger man to give him one of his in this morality tale about modern generosity.

CHARACTERS

LUCKY (50s-60s street person on crutches; his left leg is defective but wears a shoe; his right leg works fine but is shoeless)

GRAHAM (the Husband; successful male, 30, quiet type, nicely dressed in expensive slacks, shirt, shoes, the works)

ELIZABETH (the Wife; also well-dressed, 30, fast talker)

SETTING

Outside patio of a high-end espresso shop. Early afternoon of a beautiful spring day.

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O. HENRY'S SHOE

AT RISE: GRAHAM sits at the café table, reading a magazine, a fancy cup of coffee in front of him. LUCKY sits across from Graham, who is seemingly unaware of Lucky's presence. Lucky shrugs, stands, walks away from the table and faces the audience.

LUCKY

What you are about to see is something of a morality tale, more or less, like a parable. It might be an allegory except as I understand it allegory is supposed to feature animals telling us something about the human condition. There are no animals in what you about to see. At least no lions and tigers and bears. Just the two-legged human kind. Or in my case, a man with one good leg. Oh, my. And, of course, one shoe. It's often said you can tell a lot about a person by the shoes they wear. Or in my case, don't wear. Whatever. Not much to look at, am I? Got a bum leg, no job, no home, no money, no prospects, only one shoe. I suffer from lazy eye, prone to pink eye. Highly allergic to both mold and dust, so they get me coming and going. Got the Big Wheeze. Pain in my lower back, a disc pressing against it, don't you know. Pre-diabetic, but, hey who isn't these days? Carpal tunnel or maybe it's Bursitis. For all I know, man, it could be a torn rotator cuff, but that's what baseball pitchers get, not people like me. Bad teeth. Bad breath. Bad ticker. Bad knees. Got 'em all, man, got 'em all. Arthritis, of the Rheumatoid type? Got that, too. Can't sleep at night 'cause the one good leg I have suffers from what they call restless leg syndrome. My friends call me Lucky. You're probably thinking, like that dog. Remember the poster? 'Lost. Dog. Three legs, blind in left eye, missing right ear, tail broken, recently castrated, answers to name of Lucky.' But that's not why I'm called Lucky. They call me Lucky because, uh, hmm, ah. It's like Hollywood says: Show, Don't Tell.

Lucky walks back to the table.

LUCKY (CONT'D)

Mind if I sit here?

Lucky sits.

GRAHAM

Yes. My wife will be --

LUCKY

-- Name's Lucky.

GRAHAM

I meant I do mind. I'm waiting for my wife.

LUCKY

What's your name, man?

GRAHAM

Graham.

LUCKY

As in the cracker?

GRAHAM

As in named after my grandfather.

LUCKY

What you drinking?

GRAHAM

A non-fat Cappuccino.

LUCKY

Wet or dry?

GRAHAM

If you don't mind, I'd like to be left alone.

LUCKY

What you reading?

GRAHAM

A magazine article. Look, I'd really appreciate it if

Lucky grabs the magazine and looks at the article. He reads aloud.

LUCKY

"The Legacy of Charity." Hmm. Worried about your legacy. You don't have any kids do you? Or maybe you do but the seed of your loins is a bad seed. You just never know, man. You give it your best shot and you just never know.

Graham snatches it back.

LUCKY (CONT'D)

Say, you think these rich folks are doing it out of the goodness of their heart or is it for a huge tax deduction? Maybe they fear eternal damnation? Bragging rights, maybe?

GRAHAM

Doesn't matter. The end-result is a charitable act.

LUCKY

You think generosity should be its own reward?

GRAHAM

Of course.

LUCKY

Doesn't hurt to get a hospital wing named after you. I got a wing named after me.

Graham stares, waiting for the payoff.

LUCKY (CONT'D)

It's a wing at K-F-C. That's a joke.

GRAHAM

No kidding.

LUCKY

I can tell. You want to do something charitable but you don't know where to start. Right? If you want to be charitable you can start by helping me, man.

GRAHAM

I don't carry around money. You'll have to try someone else.

LUCKY

Why's everybody think money is the only answer?

GRAHAM

Whatever else could I have that you would want?

Lucky wiggles his shoe-less foot in the air.

GRAHAM (CONT'D)

A pedicure?

LUCKY

A shoe.

GRAHAM

Do I look like I carry an extra pair of shoes around with me?

LUCKY

I don't need a pair. Just one. For my right foot. That's sure a nice looking shoe you got.

GRAHAM

It wouldn't fit you. It was custom-made.

LUCKY

Come on. Don't be so greedy.

GRAHAM

I am not greedy.

LUCKY

Don't bogart your shoes, man.

GRAHAM

This conversation is over.

Beat.

LUCKY

I tell you what, let me try it on. If it fits, I keep it 'cause that means it was meant to be. If it doesn't, I'll walk away, shoeless. Deal?

GRAHAM

I don't have to make a deal with you.

LUCKY

Chicken?

No. GRAHAM

Coward? LUCKY

No. GRAHAM

LUCKY
Social Darwinist? ... Come on. Let's see how generous you can be.

GRAHAM
I'm very generous. Now leave me alone. Please.

LUCKY
I bet if I asked for the shirt off your back you'd give it to me. But a shoe is different.

GRAHAM
All right. I'll let you try it on. Then you'll leave me alone.

LUCKY
If it fits I get it?

GRAHAM
If it doesn't fit, you leave.

LUCKY
I'll need your sock. Just like in the shoe store, man, you can't try on a shoe without a sock.

Graham removes his sock and hands it to Lucky, who tries on the shoe. It fits.

GRAHAM
I don't think it fits you.

LUCKY
You kidding me? Fits like a glove. Make that a sock. I'm gonna see what I look like. There a rest room here?

GRAHAM

Through the main door.

Lucky leaves, Elizabeth arrives. Graham tries to hide his bare foot from his wife.

ELIZABETH

Why are you sitting like that? It's bad for your posture.

GRAHAM

Like what?

Elizabeth spots his bare foot.

ELIZABETH

Why'd you take your shoes off?

GRAHAM

Shoe. Just one.

ELIZABETH

Where is it?

GRAHAM

I, uh, gave it away.

ELIZABETH

You gave one shoe away?

GRAHAM

Remember the expression, "Giving someone the shirt off your back"?

ELIZABETH

It's an expression, not a city ordinance. Similar to "he doesn't have the sense he was born with." That's an expression, too.

GRAHAM

No need to be nasty.

ELIZABETH

It's a good thing I got here when I did. An hour later and you'd be buck naked. What's next? If he'd asked for our car, would you have given him the keys?

GRAHAM

There is no next. He only had one shoe and my shoe fit him. Maybe it was meant to be.

ELIZABETH

We give at the office, Graham, not at the coffee shop. And you gave a stranger part of your wardrobe. How was that meant to be? Did you ever think to give him something less personal, perhaps money, some loose change?

GRAHAM

All I have on me are credit cards and he didn't exactly look the American Express type.

Beat. They turn away from each other.

GRAHAM (CONT'D)

We're always talking about doing more for the less fortunate. Isn't your favorite story that O. Henry one about the Christmas gifts a poor husband and wife give each other?

ELIZABETH

They bought a hair brush and a watch chain at the Dollar Store. You gave away one-half of an eight-hundred dollar pair of Italian shoes, thus rendering the other half useless. Those shoes were made by hand by an Italian in Italy from the finest Italian leather. The shoes came over here on a ship just like any other immigrant in the classic American dream story. Visions of the good life, being worn and admired for their Old World beauty and craftsmanship. And now they're separated. Pretty much useless. Worthless.

GRAHAM

It's a shoe. Not some Italian family's Hallmark Special of how they arrived in America. It's a meaningless shoe that covers a foot. Just a shoe.

ELIZABETH

Not just a shoe. Italian. A hand-made Italian leather shoe.

GRAHAM

I have other shoes.

Not Italian.

ELIZABETH

Shoes are shoes.

GRAHAM

Unless they're from Italy.

ELIZABETH

Generosity is its own reward.

GRAHAM

So's stupidity.

ELIZABETH

I have more than enough to spare.

GRAHAM

You sure do.

ELIZABETH

Lucky returns. Elizabeth sees him.

Is that him? Is that the man?

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Yes.

GRAHAM

Hey, mister. Hello. You. The man wearing my husband's shoe. Come over here.

ELIZABETH

Lucky walks over to the table.

I should have you arrested.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Elizabeth!

GRAHAM

LUCKY

That's a fine introduction.

ELIZABETH

Who are you?

LUCKY

You mean what is my name? So you can tell the police?

(Pause)

Lucky.

ELIZABETH

Who's lucky?

LUCKY

I am. That's my name.

ELIZABETH

Ha!

GRAHAM

Well, Lucky. You may keep the shoe. I don't need it. Don't want it. I have plenty more at home. It's yours.

ELIZABETH

Graham!

LUCKY

You sure about that? I can't pay you for it.

GRAHAM

Generosity --

ELIZABETH

-- Generosity is its own reward.

Lucky turns to walk away.

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

Hey, mister, why are you called Lucky?

Lucky turns and stares at the couple.

LUCKY

Because I bring good luck. Just as I'm about to bring you. I am not the poor beggar you see before you. I walk the Earth and reward those who surprise me by their generosity.

GRAHAM

Like Diogenes?

LUCKY

I think he carried a lantern and looked for truth. I walk on a crutch and look for compassion.

ELIZABETH

Forget the police. I'm calling the state hospital.

LUCKY

When you hear thunder clap three times, you will receive your reward and ye both shall be rewarded ten-fold for giving me this shoe. I promise you. Ten-fold. I say.

GRAHAM

Ten-fold? Wait a minute. I've never understood that expression. Is that ten times everything or just ten of one thing?

LUCKY

Ten-fold is ten fold. It fits perfectly, you know. The shoe.

ELIZABETH

Of course it does, it's Italian.

Lucky exits.

GRAHAM

Thunder? Ten-fold?

A CLAP OF THUNDER.

GRAHAM (CONT'D)

There's not a cloud in the sky.

ELIZABETH

A car probably backfired.

A second CLAP OF THUNDER.

GRAHAM

He said three thunder claps.

ELIZABETH

He said we'd be rewarded ten fold.

*A third CLAP OF THUNDER. Suddenly
TEN shoes fall from the ceiling (or are
thrown in from the side of the stage).
Elizabeth and Graham gather the shoes.*

ELIZABETH (CONT'D)

What shoe did you give him? Left or right?

GRAHAM

Right.

ELIZABETH

These are all for a left foot.

GRAHAM

And they're the wrong size!

(END OF PLAY)