

The Other Shoe
By
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His name is Ian. He sits alone, locked away in a dark closet. He has not eaten in three days. He rubs at the wound on his leg. Ian cut himself on shards of glass from the light-bulb he broke when he first entered the closet. It has scabbed over several times, but his constant nervous rubbing, has made it raw again. It might be bleeding. He doesn't know. He doesn't feel any pain or even any hunger. Ian's mind is on other things.

He thinks of a story he once heard. A man lives in an apartment building. He is slowly being tortured by the man who lives above him. The man above him doesn't realize that he is hurting the man below. Every night, as the man below is about to go to bed, the man above walks heavily into his bedroom. The man below hears the man above walk across the floor, and then hears the bed creak, as the man above sits down. The man above is quiet for a moment. Then he drops his shoe. The man below trembles as he listens to the silence. One minute later, he relaxes as he hears the second shoe drop. This goes on every evening for months, until one day, after hearing the first shoe drop, he waits for the second. Five minutes go by, and still he hears silence. He waits and waits, but he does not hear the second shoe. He stays awake all night, waiting for the shoe to fall. In the end, he goes mad, waiting for a shoe to drop. Ian giggles to himself for a moment over the story, and then breathes heavily. He thinks he might have been crying, but he doesn't remember.

About a month ago, Ian lost his shadow. At first, he thought it was a trick of the sun, and he forgot about it. Then one day, he noticed a very pretty lady walking by. He was watching her and realized how long her shadow had gotten. He looked around himself,

and noticed his shadow was still missing. He was afraid to tell anyone, because he thought he might be going crazy. And besides, what did he really need a shadow for?

On his way home from work, he saw it. He saw his shadow cast against the side of a building. It walked casually past him until it reached the end of the building, and then it seemed to dissipate.

That night, his parakeet died. Ian was inside watching the news on television, when he heard a shrill screech come from inside the dining room. He jumped out of his chair and ran to the parakeet's cage. A cat had once gotten in through the dining room window, and he was afraid it might have happened again. He looked at his pet. It was laying on its back, at the bottom of the cage. Its feet were sticking up in the air and its toes had curled into tight little balls. They looked as if they were holding onto an imaginary perch.

Ian looked at the window. It was locked tight. There was no sign that the bird had been attacked. He was sad, for he loved his little friend, but he had known it was getting old, and that it might die soon. He was not sure how long parakeets had lived, but he had bought this one almost seven years ago.

Its feathers had started turning white a few months ago, and he thought that was a sign of old age in a parakeet. He placed the bird in a small box, and buried it in his backyard. He felt silly doing this child-like gesture. He was a grown man. But somehow, he couldn't bear to just throw his little friend in a garbage bag.

Ian went to sleep and tried not to think about how he would miss his friend. He didn't dream. At least he didn't remember it if he did.

Ian went to work as usual the next morning. He didn't feel like going, but it seemed ridiculous to take the day off because his pet had died. He made idle chatter with his work mates.

At about two o'clock, Ian had to make some copies of a letter he had written. The room the copier was in was two offices down from his. He walked in and flipped the light switch on. The room remained dark. He thought that the bulb must be broken, and made a mental note to call maintenance and have them replace it.

He walked over to the copier. The little red and green lights on it glowed brightly in the dark. He set his letter on the machine and shut the lid. He pressed the start button on the machine, and the light began sliding back and forth as it performed its job. The light showed out from under the cover and crawled across the floor onto the wall. Ian noticed his shadow appear three times. Ian went back to work and passed out the copies.

That night, Ian got a phone call. It was the hospital calling. His brother had been driving his new motorcycle and had been hit by a drunk driver. He was dead on arrival. The hospital wanted Ian to come and identify his brother's body. He rushed to the hospital.

His brother was difficult to recognize, but Ian noticed the scar on his brother's thigh. It was a gunshot wound, that he'd gotten when he was twelve. The doctor told Ian he was sorry this had happened. The nurses outside told Ian they were sorry. The policeman told Ian he was sorry, but assured him that the drunk driver would go to jail for at least two years. Ian went home and did not sleep.

The next day, Ian called in to work. He told them his brother had died, and they told him to come back in when he was up to it. He spent all day watching television, but not really watching it.

At about three o'clock, he went to the corner market and bought some food to make sandwiches with. He also bought a twelve pack of beer. Ian had never drunk beer before.

He looked around carefully when he walked to the store, and again when he went home. He did not see his shadow. Where does it go when it's not with me, he wondered.

He went home and left the food on the counter. He did not really feel very hungry. He put the beer in the refrigerator, taking one into the living room with him.

He opened the beer and took a sip. It tasted strange, but he didn't mind it. That night, he drank eight of them. His head felt fuzzy, and later he threw up. In the morning, his head hurt. He did not think he would drink beer again.

He went back to work the next day. Everyone said they were sorry, and he did not have to come in that day, but he did not want to stay at home. His shadow showed up again three days later.

Ian had been walking to a hot dog stand to get something for lunch. Usually, he made his own lunch and brought it to work with him, but he had forgotten. As he ate his hot dog, he saw his shadow cast against a bus. It moved with the bus, and almost looked like it was a passenger.

That night, on his way home, he picked up a newspaper. Most people liked to read the paper in the morning, but he enjoyed reading it at night.

There was a story in the paper about an old high school friend of his. Ian had not talked with his friend in years, but they used to be best friends. His friend had been on his honeymoon in Hawaii. He had been the victim of a shark attack earlier that day. They had only found a few pieces of him.

The next day was Saturday. Ian did not work on Saturdays. He slept in much later than he usually did. When he got up out of bed, he went into the bathroom and took a shower. Ian liked his shower to be very hot; it always relaxed him, and he felt much better after he was finished.

Ian went to the park. He did this every Saturday. He liked to watch the children play, and watch the dogs run, and watch the pretty women walking.

He found a bench, and sat down. It was warm out, so he unbuttoned his coat. He saw a group of children playing leap frog. It was funny to watch them take turns jumping over each other. He smiled. He turned his head and stopped smiling.

Ian saw his shadow, moving as if in slow motion. It was walking towards him. Part of it was cast on the sidewalk, the other on the lawn. He watched as each blade of grass that the shadow fell on died. They just shriveled and withered. His shadow stopped when it's feet touched his. This was the first time in a while that the shadow had reattached itself to him. The shadow began extending farther and farther across the grass. He watched, his heart pounding, as it reached for the children.

Ian stood up and yelled at the children. He screamed for them to run away, but they just stood there and looked at him. One of them began crying. The shadow continued to extend. Finally it touched just the tip of one little girl's sneaker. She screamed and her eyes got very wide. Blood began to pour from her mouth and eyes and nose and ears. She got very pale, and then her eyes turned up so that only the whites were showing. She fell over backwards and did not move again. The other children screamed and ran away, looking for their mothers. Ian looked down at the ground and saw that his shadow was gone.

He turned away and began walking towards his house. He picked up the pace and walked faster, and soon he was running as fast as he could. He looked straight ahead. He did not want to see his shadow.

As he got into his apartment, he locked the front door. He stood with his back against the door, breathing heavy. He opened his eyes and saw his shadow against the wall. He stared at it and it stood there and seemed to stare back. A small crack opened in the head. It was smiling.

Then it disappeared. Ian screamed and ran into his bedroom.

He ran into the closet, and shut the door, hearing it click. Suddenly, the light turned on. The switch was on the outside of the closet. Ian made a fist and hit the bulb causing it to shatter. He sat down in the glass particles, cutting his leg.

The phone began to ring.

Three days later, Ian was still in the closet. He thought about the things that had happened over the last week. Pairs. Everything happened in pairs. He had last seen his shadow as he entered his apartment. He had not found out who died yet.

So Ian sat in his closet.

He did not eat.

He did not feel pain.

He just sat in the dark.

And waited for the other shoe to drop.