

Shoes in Church

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"
here 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.