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Shoes

I strutted across the street in my brand new pair of shoes. Energy pulsed through my body in a manner that can only be produced by a pair of sleek, shiny, high performance, state of the art, running machines. As I reached my friends house I knew his family was home for their car rested in their always-open garage. I rang the doorbell and awaited my friend. I could not wait to see him. He would be so jealous!

The door opened and out he stepped. His albino white complexion absorbed the sunlight, highlighting the fiendish grin permanently etched on his adolescent face. No parent had ever trusted Mark Kotful and my mother was no exception. I remembered her telling me how he was a juvenile delinquent and I should not play with him. "He will steal your things," I remember her saying. My response had been, "Friends don't steal from each other."

The first thing that caught Mark's eye were the gleaming pieces of prestige on my feet.

"I got some really awesome new shoes," I bragged.

I saw his smile diminish and an expression of deep thought appeared on his face. He was scheming, for Mark Kotful was never to be outdone.

"So, where are they?" he finally responded with a straight face.

I lifted one of my feet and boasted, "Right here!"

"Those pieces of junk, I thought you said you got some really awesome new shoes."

I looked down at them again and noticed they did not quite possess the luster they had just a few seconds ago. Yet, I knew they were better than anything Mark had.

As if to deny my previous unheard thought, Mark ordered, "Follow me if you want to see a real pair of shoes."

He lead me into the garage and after much searching, pulled out a pair of old, tattered, yellow shoes. I almost laughed in his face, but restrained myself remembering the many black eyes Mark had distributed in his day.

"Now these are a pair of shoes," he exclaimed.

"What makes them so special?" I asked, still holding back my laughter.

"You just wait and maybe I'll show you," he gloated.

I followed him back to my house and into the back yard. He pointed at the rusty, old swing set, which had not seen use in uncounted years, and said, "I bet you can't run up that slide."

I had just been challenged, and according to our boyhood code, my only option was to accept and try to make it up the slide.

I paced back from the slide and got set to make my approach. I looked down at my shoes and knew they could not possibly fail me now. After a deep breath, I bolted toward the slide as fast as my plump, young legs were capable of carrying me. As I got to the slide I used every ounce of energy in my body and shoes to hurl me to the top, but halfway up I lost all forward momentum and tumbled down to the bottom.

"Just as I thought," Mark gloated, "Those shoes are pieces of trash!"

He quickly slapped on his yellow shoes and before I knew it his slim, agile body was standing at the top of the slide.

"Now these are shoes," he bragged, "Did you see that traction? I sure bet you would love to own a pair of shoes like these," he added.

I just looked down at my poor excuse for a pair of shoes and tried to hold back the tears.

"Well," said Mark, "I'm going home and as far as I'm concerned, you might as well throw your dumb pair of shoes in the garbage."

As he left I saw his stupid smile reappear, and a spring emerge in his step.

That night I threw my ugly, pathetic excuse for a pair of shoes on the bed and stared at them. They cowered there knowing full well how much they had failed me.

The following day I trudged back to Mark's house. My shoes felt like weights on my feet.

When I arrived I noticed that their car was gone, leaving an empty garage. I rang the doorbell nonetheless, but not surprisingly, no one came to answer the door. Just as I was about to leave, I caught the glow of Mark's shoes in the corner of my eye. They were just resting there for all the world to see. No safe or lock guarded them from the hoards of people I believed would do anything to possess such a pair of shoes. I saw my opportunity and slowly crept towards the shoes. As I got next to them, I looked around one final time and grabbed them. No

alarms rang, or sirens screamed, but I ran anyway. I had those beautiful yellow shoes and they looked absolutely magnificent.

That day I just stayed in my room and marveled at their magnificence. Every tattered seam was designed for speed. The worn down soles were made for incredible traction on all surfaces, as Mark had demonstrated the day before. Sure, they were a bit old and dirty, but I just thought of them as being properly broken in.

However, at dinner, something happened which changed my view of them and myself. My mom, as usual, was bombarding me with questions only a parent would care about. I was imagining all of the astounding feats I would be able to perform with "My" yellow shoes when mom asked me what I had done during the day. After an eternity of contemplating an answer which would not be incriminating, I finally responded with a very shaky, "Ummm, Nothing..."

She immediately jumped to her usual conclusion, "You've been hanging around that Mark Kotful kid again haven't you?"

I gave no response for there was no time between her sentences.

"He is nothing but a little, immoral thief! I don't want him influencing you because as far as I'm concerned, people who steal are the lowest form of life on the planet."

I finished eating in silence. As I returned to my room, my conscience took the form of a pair of tattered, yellow shoes. They just stared at me as I cowered on my bed. My guilt seemed overwhelming. I had failed everyone, especially myself, and in my mind, I had become worse than Mark. Everyone thought he was a thief, but I was the one who had stolen. My shoes were far better than Mark's, yet I had been jealous of what he possessed, and had not appreciated my own blessings. Mark's yellow shoes tormented me all night and into the morning.

By the following afternoon I could take no more of my self-produced mental penance. I placed the shoes in a brown paper bag to conceal myself from my guilt, and ran to Mark's house. As I arrived, I looked at the yellow shoes one last time, but there was no doubt or reluctance in my action, only a confirmation of the lessons those shoes had taught me. I grasped the bag firmly and hurled it into the far corner of the garage where it disappeared from sight. I had found the only solution conceivable to my eight-year-old mind, and I knew it was the right decision. With my guilt removed, I felt as though a great weight had been lifted from my soul. As I floated back to my house, I glanced down at my shoes and saw a small glow return to them.