

High School Short Story Honorable Mention

Clunky Red Shoes

By Samantha Mouyard, Walter Johnson High School

Angel Inn was busier than any other day on the 16th of November that year. It had no reason to be, but the waiters of the tavern on the first floor were happy for the extra tips. It was disorderly, but lively and fun.

The bell at the door chimed and a man cast a tall shadow as he walked toward the bar. He ordered a mug of some foul-smelling alcoholic beverage and slicked back his greasy, long, blond hair. The bartender, Melvis, told him a joke that you or I would classify as a dad-joke, and he laughed a hearty laugh from his chest. He introduced himself to the bartender; his name was Leon.

Melvis laughed and talked with Leon for a bit. They each boasted about their accomplishments and pretended not to be impressed with the other one's. Leon then began to brag about something other than how long he could continuously burp.

"Earlier this week, I was doing a show with my mates," he said (Leon was a mandolin player, you see), "and usually it's old farts with they wives, but in the third row, there was an itty, bittie, lil' girl. She had these clunky red shoes, and some sort of pup with 'er; bout yea high." He guesstimated the size of the dog based on his memory.

Melvis chuckled, as well as another patron of the bar who had started listening in. "So this kid, she ain't smilin' at all, right?" (The growing crowd was guffawing at his story.) "And after the show, I'm off signing some baby's face with my autograph or somethin', and she walks up to me and says, 'Hey mister! You wanna buy a mandolin pick?' She takes out some box or somethin' with about 50 mandolin picks in it. I tell her that I already have a mandolin pick and I pull it out to show to her. She says, 'But what if it breaks?' I say 'Well, it ain't gonna break.' This little girl plucks the damn pick outta my fingers and snaps it right in two. Then she says in the most sarcastic voice you ever did hear, '*really?*'" By then, quite a few of the patrons were listening to Leon's story, and they all laughed.

"Whatcha do next?" asked Melvis, still chortling.

"Well, I laughed so hard my cider came spurtin' out my nose!" Leon's showmanship was met with a roar of different sounding chuckles and laughter. "And I did pay for one of 'em picks, still have it with me now." He held up an iridescent, frosty green mandolin pick for everyone to see. "Oh, the girl also gave me this." Leon pulled out a peachy whitish handkerchief from the same pocket that had been holding the mandolin pick. "Said a hankie came free with every purchase."

By then, practically the whole bar was surrounding Leon and Melvis, listening to the story. It was a pack of rather gossip-hungry wolves. A little bit further down the bar, there were two old women, drinking alcoholic beverages and eating bologna sandwiches while catching up. One of them, with large, droopy earlobes, was listening to the story. When it was over, she pushed to the center of the crowd and spoke up.

“Hey, hey!” she said, “My sister met a girl just like that a few days ago!” She turned to the other lady that she had been sitting next to. “Cybil. Cybil! Come on, tell these folks about the kooky girl you met at the park the other day.” Cybil shrugged, but finally walked up to where everyone was after some more persuading from her sister. “Well, oh, er. I was at the orchard, picking apples and such. The girl was reading under one of the trees—she had this, this big sort of green-brownish cloak. To keep warm, I suppose. Except, she was wearing shorts, not pants. Anyway, it was a rather nice day, at first. And I mean nice; sunny, not a cloud was in the sky. Very abruptly, the girl stopped reading, got up and walked over to me. I remember her red shoes squishing into the mud with each of her steps.” The crowd didn’t laugh at Cybil’s story nearly as much as Leon’s, but rather listened intently. “She took this umbrella out of her backpack and gave it to me. She said it was about to get chilly. I, of course, told her to look up. ‘There’s not a cloud in the sky,’ I said. She shrugged and said, ‘Isn’t it better to be prepared?’ “

At this point, some of the patrons did, in fact, chuckle. “Oh, ho ho, that’s what I thought. I returned to my apple picking, and she stood next to me, watching. Maybe 10 minutes goes by, and it begins to rain. A bitter, unpleasant rain. She handed me the umbrella once again, as well as the scarf around her neck. She said that the scarf matched my complexion, and that I should keep ahold of it.” Cybil let her sister show off the scarf to the intently listening patrons. The scarf was tightly woven cotton and depicted images of crisp-blue hydrangeas. Melvis passed around drinks as the patrons discussed theories about the girl. The more popular speculations deduced that she was some type of witch.

The bell at the door chimed and a young adult came giggling into the tavern, carrying a chicken by its feet. “*Hehehehe*, Melvis!” They teased singsonging with the chicken in their hands.

Melvis held his arm up from the center of the crowd and waved. “Over here, Lawrence!”

They walked over, and proudly displayed the chicken, which looked rather confused and uncomfortable from being held upside down. It was a plump chicken with auburn feathers.

“I just got this guy from a little kid!” Lawrence could hardly contain their laughter. “He even comes with a *mini top hat* and his own *itty-bitty bed*.” They placed a down feather pillow on top of the bar, with the chicken and his top hat, atop it. Everyone was chuckling a little, but Lawrence was full on snort-giggling.

“His name is *Chester*. *HAHAHA*.” With persuasion from the patrons (including Melvis, Leon and Cybil), Lawrence elaborated that they did, in fact, get the chicken from a little girl with a dog and clunky red shoes.

“I wasn’t even doing anything special! And she hands me Chester and his *things*.” Lawrence dramatically recreated the scene, with voices for the girl and chicken, of course.

At this point in the night, little flurries could be seen outside of the musty windows. They would not stick, of course, but it was still nice; it gave the tavern a cozy atmosphere. Though the many patrons of the inn were making fun of the little girl in clunky red shoes, they were doing it together. Melvis and Leon were able to practice their showmanship abilities. Cybil was stepping out of her social comfort zone. And, of course, Lawrence was talking in a baby voice to Chester the chicken. The initial excitement when the story of the girl arose had not faded, but rather morphed into a group affinity toward each other. Then the bell rang.

The patrons would not have noticed the ringing of the bell had it not been for a dog coming through the door, covered in snowflakes and barking. Accompanying the dog was a little girl. She had a look on her face of a coal miner returning home after work. Her frizzy hair smooshed over her thin shirt, and she was shivering. Most of all though, she wore bulky and graceless candy-red wooden shoes.

Although collective speechlessness in a crowd is rare, none of the patrons could find a word to say. The girl clattered up to the bar, pushing her way to the center of the crowd. She turned to Leon and plucked the handkerchief right out of his front pocket. She used the handkerchief to blow her nose, in a rather trumpety way. Leon looked more dumbfounded than grossed out.

The girl then turned to Cybil, who was shyly hiding behind her sister. The girl dramatically swiped the scarf off of Cybil's neck. People were still rather flabbergasted (though a man named Jules in the back had caught on and started hiding his possessions). The girl finally turned toward Chester.

“Excuse me,” she said toward the chicken, and plopped him off of the pillow. With all of her claimed possessions in hand, the girl used each accordingly; she wrapped the scarf around her shoulders like a blanket, blew her nose once more with the handkerchief, and tightly hugged the pillow. She walked up to the stairs and started to climb them, seemingly ready for a nice long sleep. Three steps up though, she stopped and looked down at the patrons. “Let me know when Chester is soup, pretty please. I have a stinkin’ bad cough.”