

IF THE SHOE FITS

By Annie Warren



ILLUSTRATED BY BRIAN DUKEHART

A 'NEW WOMAN' NOVEL

Copyright © 2000, Friendly Applications, Inc. - All Rights Reserved

Reluctant Press TG Publishers

This story is a work of fiction. Any similarity to persons living or dead is entirely coincidental. All situations and events herein presented are fictional, and intended only for the enjoyment of the reader. Neither the author nor the publisher advocate engaging in or attempting to imitate any of the activities or behaviors portrayed.

Persons seeking gender reassignment surgery, hormone therapy or any other medical and/or body-altering process should seek the counsel of a qualified therapist who follows the Benjamin Standards of Care for Gender Identity Disorder.

Protect Professional Fiction on the Internet!

We need *your* help! We want to keep providing our readers with low cost, professional quality fiction on the Internet. We spend thousands of dollars to edit, illustrate and typeset *each story*. It is important, therefore, that everyone works to help keep professional fiction alive on the Net.

This story is protected by US and International copyright law, and is owned exclusively by Friendly Applications, Inc, DBA Reluctant Press, which retains exclusive rights to publish these materials. The civil penalties for copyright infringement can be severe, including substantial monetary damages, injunctive relief, and liability for attorneys' fees incurred in prosecuting a case. If a court determines that the infringement was committed willfully, statutory damages of up to \$100,000 for each copyright infringed can be awarded. Even if not found to be acting willfully, a defendant can still be held liable for statutory damages of \$500 to \$20,000 for each copyright infringed. **These penalties apply even if money was not charged.** In addition, criminal penalties may be imposed if someone willfully infringes a copyrighted work for commercial advantage or private financial gain. This crime is punishable by up to five years imprisonment, up to \$250,000 in fines, or both. State civil damages and criminal penalties vary from state to state and country to country, but are always severe.

The best way to keep professional illustrated fiction available on the Internet is to do YOUR part to protect the author's and publisher's copyright. *You can be part of the solution.* Encourage others to purchase our stories. Never share the access rights you've purchased. **You** make the continued availability of TG fiction on the Internet possible. Thank you for your cooperation!

IF THE SHOE FITS

By Annie Warren

It was on our last trip to Europe that the whole thing really started.

Margo has always been wild about collecting oddities and artifacts and antiques and art and . . . Well, you get the idea, she was like the shopper's shopper. She can shop until I drop.

We would go there regularly where Margo would prowl in bazaars and curio shops and just about any place that had these trinkets or whatever else she found, whether looked for or not.

We got a lot of really very nice things in Strassbourg, in France on the border of Germany, not far from the towering cathedral.

It was in a little shop that she had spotted and dragged me where she found something a bit out of the ordinary. Well, it was a bit then, though it was to prove to be more later.

“Fred, look at that. Did you ever see a pair that looked like that?”

I heard her voice, but did not see her.

She was probing back in some dusty corner that no doubt had not been probed for years. She had a penchant for that.

“Huh? What pair? What did you find this time? Where are you?”

“I'm back here.” Her head popped up and I moved toward her, pushing some stuff aside.

I wasn't sure what the object, made of some ornately carved wood, was that I was sidestepping, but it was in my way. It is great to be slim and trim, but sometimes even that doesn't help in some of these overcrowded, heaped and piled up shops. When I started back, her head went down again only to bob up again when I rounded a table full of thingamabobs.

In her hand she had a shoe, a high heeled shoe.

“Isn't this the most beautiful pair of shoes you have ever seen?”

Well, I suppose it was. But, on the other hand, high heeled shoes are not something I have made a study of though she wore them all the time.

She wore the highest of heels, thus being much more of an expert than I. She handed one to me and I examined it. It was apparently made of some sort of red satin and studded with what looked like a collection of gems that sparkled and twinkled

even in the dim light in the back of the shop. The heels were black and towered a good 10, 11 or even more centimeters.

To me they seemed a bit heavy, especially the heel but the rest of it was light and apparently of a very fine workmanship.

Now as stated, I knew that Margo had a predilection for high heeled shoes, usually wore them whether with slacks, ski pants or just about any of her lovely skirts.

At 25, like me, she had the youthful vigor and indeed, she had a body that was more lithe than mine. She also had a good figure, *yeah, real good*, that I really appreciated.

I was taller than she was and she had to have her very highest heels on to come up eye to eye with me.

We were both blond too, but she had really long wavy hair while mine was down to about an inch above my collar and straight. Of course, she was also beautiful. If she had ever married me for my money, which I had actually inherited shortly after our marriage, then I could easily say that I had married her for her beauty, that and the fact that I was madly in love with her. . . in spite of her shopping mania.

I looked again more closely at the shoe. It was spotless on top, no scuff marks or even wrinkles or creases. Turning over the one in my hand, I saw that it seemed to have been used somewhat but was still in extraordinarily good shape. The only problems that I could see with them other than as art objects, was that they were obviously not the most modern fashion, actually being hard to pin down as to when (and if) they had been in fashion, and, too, they were decidedly way too large for Margo.

“Yes, Margo,” I said with a bit of tolerance creeping into my voice. “They are beautiful, but they are obviously old fashioned and are definitely not your size.”

“Oh Fred, that doesn't matter. They are just gorgeous. We could put them in the den with the French Provincial.”

“Uh, Margo, I don't think the style is French Provincial, though I could be wrong.”

“Well, who cares. As far as I am concerned, they are beautiful and are French and that is where we will put them.”

With that she took the shoe from me, put it with the other one and headed for the shop keeper with me trailing behind.

The shop keeper was fussing with something or other up front by the door. He was a wizened, little old man with thinned white hair under some sort of cap that he wore on the back of his head. He had a long beard that was as white as the hair on his head. He was almost a caricature of what wizened, little old shop keepers should look like. And, he, most likely, like the caricature he looked like, was quite ready to make a sale. He looked up and smiled when he saw Margo approaching.

Margo opened but forgot the word for shoes, “Monsieur, je vu ses, . . uh, ses. . . ”

“You wish buy shoes, Madame?” *Maybe this shop was not so far off the tourist routes as I thought or else he was an exceptional shopkeeper.* It wasn't correct English, but was no doubt a lot better than our French.

“Yes, I mean Oui!”

“Tres bien, mais c'est impossible.” At this he smiled a quite crooked smile like at a secret joke.

“What do you mean impossible?” By now I had caught up with her and had heard her reply.

“Madame, shoes sold only man.” He replied in his broken English. Then he looked at me and continued, “So, I sell you, but not wife.”

His smile was now that of the shopkeeper trying to please a customer for a sale.

I looked rather incredulously at him, almost totally ignoring his bad English that said he would sell me but would not sell my wife. Like all husbands, I'm sure, there are times that I wished that I could sell her, but that was another matter altogether. So, he wouldn't sell the shoes to my wife but would sell them to me?

This wasn't making any sense.

-000-

“Oh Fred, let's see what he wants for them and if reasonable, let's buy them. I must have them. . . if they are reasonable.”

“How much? À quel prix?” I tried my French on him, none too sure of how good it was.

He looked down at the shoes for an instant and then said, “quarante-cinq franc et vingt-cinq centimes.”

“Uh, forty-five francs and twenty-five centimes?” I *don't believe my ears. My* mind was doing translation tables and that seemed to me to be dirt cheap for such relics, whether or not Margo could put them on. It wasn't as if they were flimsy cardboard or some such, for I had looked them over reasonably well. They were well made, apparently hand made, and should have been quite expensive.

“We'll take them, right Fred.?” Margo burst out almost before I had finished saying the sum, and she immediately started rooting in her purse for the proper number of francs. With the variance of the value of the franc, I don't remember what it was, but he was practically giving them to me.

He shook his head no and then looked at me over a pair of spectacles perched low on his nose. They looked like they were older than the shoes or, for that fact, than anything else in this antiquated shop. “Seulement pour vous, Monsieur. Only to you and you must sign for them.”

French and broken English all the time and suddenly a clear line of good English. I had the feeling that this line had probably been given to him, perhaps in a number of languages? *Whatever.*

“He insists that I buy them, dear,” I said to Margo and it was my turn to dig for my wallet. As I made that move, he reached under the counter and got out a small ledger. It looked older than any of the objects in the shop other than his glasses and had more

dust on it than was usual. *Apparently, not too many people had to sign for things here.* Yet he opened it somewhere in the middle almost to the last entry.

I started counting out the money as he wrote an entry in the book. Margo nudged me and asked me in a low voice if we shouldn't try bargaining. I replied in a lower voice, that if she really wanted them, that bargaining could probably lose them for her. *The price was ridiculously low for such, uh, artifacts and I did not feel like pressing it.*

The owner then spun the ledger as I had the money ready. He pointed to the entry. I read it:

"1 Pr Shoes, sold to _____ to be resold only to a man at a price equal to or less than price paid. Fr 45.25 Received from _____"

He pointed to the first blank underlined spot and said simply, "Please print name".

What a pain, I thought, *but if Margo is to be satisfied, Okay.* I printed my name in it. He then pointed to the second space and said, "sign please..."

He took the money and counted it out as I signed the ledger. As I signed I looked at some of the previous entries. They were hard to read but seemed to be for various trinkets. The degrees to which the ink had faded looked like I had been right, nothing had been signed for in it for years.

Why now? Why this pair of shoes? If that's what he wants, then I'll appease Margo and do it.

When I finished signing, he closed the book and put it back under the counter and smiled now the smile of a successful salesman. Then, reaching yet again under the counter, he produced several pages from some old newspapers and proceeded to wrap up the shoes. It seemed appropriate to have such a cheap wrapping for such cheap shoes, well, cheap in price for such expensive looking and feeling relics. He then gave them to me, placing them directly in my hands while avoiding the outstretched hands of Margo as she reached to take them. The smile then faded as I took them and a touch of sadness passed over his face.

"Monsieur, the shoes are yours; please remember conditions." When I looked puzzled, *what conditions?*, he pulled out the book again and popped it open, pointed to the line, and I reread the conditions, *strange conditions. Okay, whatever you want.*

I smiled back and replied, "Merci beau coup."

"Rien du tout, Monsieur, absolu rien du tout" he said as we headed out the door with her prized shoes in my hands. *What a strange man, what a strange deal, and what an even stranger thing to say to us. I'm glad we're leaving.*

Out of earshot, Margo bubbled. "What a steal, Fred. I'll bet that some of those stones, if not all of them, are real. They looked too good in that bad light to be fake. Oh, this is what coming to Europe gives us. Oh goodly goody!" I was afraid she might bubble over.

"Well, you'll never wear them Margo, so I hope they look good with the decor, wherever you put them. That sure was an odd, small ritual that I had to go through."

“What do you mean ritual?”

“Signing his book for the shoes. I had to sign that I would sell them only to a man and for a price that is equal or less than the price I paid. That was his reference to the conditions. It is reminiscent of the story of the “Bottled Imp” by, who was it, Poe? or was it Stevenson? How many things have we ever bought over here that we had to sign for?”

There was a silence as we walked along for a bit until she replied, “Now that you mention it, I don't remember any. I see now why you call it strange. That was an odd ledger too.”

“There were many entries that were older, much older. It is as if he had a stock of items that were all sold out, all of which required a signature. I wonder where he got the English for that receipt.”

“Oh well, we got the best of him anyway, didn't we, Fred?”

“I suppose. Want to go look at the cathedral now?”

With that the shop and the strange ritual passed into history, over but not forgotten. We would have forgotten it altogether except that we had that newspaper wrapped pair of shoes, remarkably mine, as I had paid and signed for them.

But, they got tossed in with the other junk that Margo bought and were eventually shipped back home, arriving a whole two months after we got back.

But now we were headed for the cathedral and then onwards. . .

0-0-0

It was like Christmas to get that crate of stuff. I remembered some of the things that we had sent but not all. Margo seemed to remember what I had forgotten, she has a sharp memory. We opened it and started pulling out the relics. When you have been away for a while you remember the trip, not what necessarily all the things you bought. Now the purchases can remind one anew of the trip. There was some ornate glassware from Italy, some beautifully carved castanets from Spain, some lace from Czechoslovakia and then there were those shoes from France. They were still wrapped in the cheap newspaper. I unwrapped them in the relatively brightly lit den where we were unpacking and found them really elegant and, yes, as Margo had said, beautiful.

The other things were unpacked and either hung, stood, perched, or whatever, where she felt best or, repacked and, almost sheepishly, relegated to that attic storage area that no one else ever saw. Our house has a large spacious attic that had been slowly filling up over the years. Margo never seemed to get rid of her mistakes. Perhaps she thought she might change her mind, or else maybe she just did not want anyone else to know that she had made such a foolish purchase in the first place. *Whatever.*

Well, the shoes did not go with the French Provincial. They also did not go in her closet but actually ended up in a glass case with some really fine china and porcelain. I had to agree that they looked almost like they had been made of porcelain. And there they sat until....

0-0-0

I had long forgotten the shoes and all of the ruffraff that went along with them. Oh, I saw them every so often like when you see a door you pass through. You see it yet you don't try to remember the last door you opened. Was there anything special about it? Or the tenth door back. They were just a part of the furniture.

0-0-0

The occasion was just a summer get-together with a couple of our friends, George and Martha Simpson. We had a pleasant meal prepared by our cook and had retired to the study for some after dinner coffee. Oh yes, the study was our “both room”. The den was supposed to be mine and the sewing room Margo's. The dining room, kitchen, living room, bathroom, and of course our bedroom were the rooms on the first floor. All of them were roomy too, as it was a large house. I think some of the rooms had been originally designated as bedrooms as they had closets and there was, come to think of it, another bathroom in there somewhere too. But we had redesigned them.

Having no children nor wanting any, there was no need for more bedrooms anyway. Our “children” was Margo's collection, in a way, as it used up the space that children might have used. Children were a moot point anyway since Margo, bless her soul, just could not have any. It is one of those facts that she had long since accepted. On the other hand, I wasn't so sure that I would ever want children. I still valued my independence, especially when I had inherited the money to go with it. Being in our mid-twenties, we were enjoying life to the hilt. *And with no regrets.*

Well, we had brought our cups in from the dining room and were browsing our mini-museum's exhibits.

When we came to the case with the shoes in them, George whistled and commented, with his “flair” for description, “Now, there's a set of spikes with more flash than the Hope Diamond.”

“Yeah, we picked them up in France, Strassbourg, in a little curio shop. Margo found them and just had to have them. I have to admit that they are pretty in a garish sort of way.”

“You know, George, that was a strange set up,” Margo added. “The shopkeeper wouldn't sell them to me but only to Fred.”

Martha looked at the shoes and then at Margo's feet.

“Well, Margo, it must have been obvious to him that they would never fit your feet. I know how much you like to wear high heels though. I really don't like them all that much, myself.” She looked down at her flats and then at Margo's heels, worn even for this casual get-together. “You could try two feet in one shoe though,” she added with a smile.

“Just because they don't fit is no reason to just leave them there in the dust and darkness. Maybe I'll pad them and try them on sometime or something or just leave them on display, like this. They are too pretty to hide. Actually, I was sort of miffed by

the shop owner, but the price was a steal, so I sort of let Fred do the talking and buying”

“And signing,” I had to add, “For some reason the owner wanted me to sing for the dumb things. No other shop we ever visited seemed to want me to do that.” At that point I reiterated the whole story from entry into the shop, to finding the shoes, to the process of buying them.

“Ok, Fred, you got a bargain,” George said, then asked, “Ever have the stones examined, you know, evaluated? Think of the height of the steal if they turned out to be real gems. Who knows how old they are or who had ever worn them? In Europe, shoes like that, could hold mysteries and have histories that could lead anywhere. Some people think that crystals have powers, you know.”

“Oh come off it. That's new age stuff and not old world stuff.”

“Yeah, but new age stuff had to come from somewhere and it could just as well have been old world,”

“You sound like they're mysterious and full of power.”

“You know the story of the red shoes that caused the wearer to dance herself to death.”

“That's not the way I heard it, but it was just a fable, a story made up to keep the children in line during the dark ages or somewhere thereafter.” With that I moved on and showed Martha some of the Czechoslovakian lace. For the moment the shoes were forgotten, at least for the moment.

0-0-0

It was later, when we were sitting eating coffee cake after looking at some slides of our last European trip, that they came up again. In our visit to the Cathedral, we had gone high into the tower and out onto the upper ramp and taken pictures of Strassbourg. On one of them I pointed out the street where the shop with the shoes had been. You could not see the shop but could well see the Fachwerk of the houses and the narrow winding streets.

George, would not let the topic go. “Margo, have you ever tried on the shoes?”

“What shoes?”

“The sparklers you got in Strassbourg.”

“Oh heavens no, I can see at a glance that they are too large for me.”:

“You ever try them, Fred?”

“Hey man, leave it alone. I don't wear ladies shoes, much less high heeled ones.”

“You know, Fred,” Margo piped in, “they just might fit you..” She got up and went to the case, opened it and pulled out the shoes.

“Not you too, Margo. I'm not about to try them on, any more than the shopkeeper probably didn't. He was glad to see them go, if I remember correctly.”

She placed them down by my feet and knelt there. "Let's just see. Now I *AM* curious. See? they look like they are the right size.."

"Cut it out, Margo. Why should I want to wear such shoes?"

"Just to satisfy my curiosity, if nothing else." She smiled up at me with a slight twist in her lip. "After all, they *ARE* your shoes, you know. You even signed for them so you might as well at least try them on. It can't hurt. . . please?" The smile had changed to a sort of pleading request.

"Oh all right, if you think I should, go ahead and give it a try, if it will make you happy."

These people are driving me crazy about these shoes. If trying them on would end it, then I'd do it just to get on to other things.

"Maybe you shouldn't, Fred, you never know what will happen."

Well, that was the one thing George could say for sure to get me to do it, so, I offered no resistance when Margo took off my shoes. I had on some very thin socks, almost as thin as nylons, so she didn't take them off. With a deft motion she fitted my right foot into the shoe.

It fit.

In fact I felt what seemed to be some kind of odd, pleasant warmth from it. Of all things, it even seemed to be comfortable in spite of the angle that my ankle now had when my foot, uh..., shoe was "flat" on the floor.

She sat back on her haunches. "Well, I'll be. Look at that! It fits better than many of mine do. Maybe that is why the shopkeeper sold them only to you, though I can't guess how he would have known. Let's try the other one too."

She pulled off my other shoe and then put the other high heeled sparkler on my left foot, but, before my foot settled in, it met with some resistance.

I stopped her and reached down and took it off. I then probed down into it with my fingers and, down in the toe, I found a tightly folded piece of paper which I extracted. As I opened it up, Margo took the shoe and again fitted it onto my left foot. Now, without the paper in it, like the right one, it fit too and had the same pleasant warmth and comfort. Even though both of my ankles were at a rather odd, high angle, being bent by the height of those high, black, shiny heels beneath the red satin upper, they felt comfortable. *Odd.*

The paper had writing on it. At the bottom it was dated early in 1921 and was hand printed in some sort of antiquated script or something that was hard to read. There was a signature at the bottom but it was in old German script and was totally illegible to me. The text was in German and was badly faded, totally disappearing in many places. We'd bought the shoes in a French shop but they must have been German or at least had been sold by a German. I silently read through the parts visible; it said, sort of —

(See text, next page- ed.)

As I was reading what I could, I was getting very little out of it, at first. I then read it out loud to the others, but they apparently knew even less German than I did, and they all had blank looks on their faces.

“So, Fred, what does it mean? I don't remember enough German to get more than that it is some kind of warning?” George asked.

“I'm not sure. I could do a better job of translation with a dictionary. Some of the words I did not know at all.”

So, I simply arose, went into my den and retrieved my German-English dictionary and a pad of paper and returned to them. When I came back in, they were all staring at me.

“What are you guys looking at?”

“Fred,” Margo exclaimed. “You just up and walked into the den on those high heeled shoes like they were your bedroom slippers.”

“As smooth as the silk on them,” added Martha. “Where did you ever learn to walk in such high heels, Fred? Do you have a past that we should know about? or maybe shouldn't know about? It took me years to get to the point that I could walk in high heels without wobbling all over the place!”

I sat back down a bit red-faced.

“No, I just didn't think of it. Now, let me see if I can translate this...”. While they gabbed about my miraculous act, that I didn't understand myself, I looked up a bunch of words that I did not know and finally came out with a sort of broken translation of the broken text, holes and all. I got their attention and read it to them:

“Warning, danger, attention, warning

“These shoes are of the *** You have to *** destroy. The man who put them on is *** must he take and starts the sex *** will become *** without any retreat(?); The longer he or she *** the faster you will *** such (something) to me and two friends *** DRAW the shoes *** they cannot destroy after *** so much I know exactly. Since one of my *** is ***. I am now *** the shoes give up but only to *** that you receive better from them. My *** but I long for *** Follow my *** the if possible or *** without hope.

“Strassburg the second of April 1921”

After I had read it to them, they were quiet for a bit, deep in thought, musing about it I guess.

“It seems to indicate danger, but from what? It doesn't say when or where they has been lost. Is there a chance to recoup it and see what it really says?” asked Margo. “Do you think you should wear them, Fred.”

“Oh pooh, Margo. You don't believe in magic do you? They would have to be magic in order for there to be any kind of danger at all. And, besides, what could a pair of shoes do? ”

“Well, Fred,” said George, “maybe you had better take them off, anyway. It was a bit scary seeing you walk out of here and back in them like you had been wearing such shoes all your life.” He looked over at Martha with a sort of sheepish grin. “I've

watched enough women wearing high heels and know that many women, even after long years of practice still have a definite ankle wiggle to their gait. You still do that, Martha.”

“I thought I had gotten rid of that. Oh well, I don't wear heels that often anyway, but maybe you're right.” She turned to me. “I think that you should take them off Fred. That note indicates some sort of danger.”

“First you drive me to put them on and now you drive to pull them off. Sheess! You just can't please some folks. Ok, Margo, take them off.”

Margo looked at me somewhat disdainfully, but she did come over and kneel before me and easily pulled them off. Oddly my toes stayed pointed down until she put my shoes back on. She then took the shoes and put them back into the cabinet as I shifted a bit. I found I had an initial tendency to sit with my toes pointed. It was odd, but for a short time I almost felt like I was still wearing the shoes.

“Maybe I can go over to the university and see if they can recoup the missing words. I am curious what the message says.”

“You do that, Fred, and let me know what it says. I too am curious now. It sounds sexy somehow. Actually, I'd like to go along and see how it's done, if that is possible and you don't mind.”

“If you want, George. but it may take a while.”

“I can take it over if you don't want to go”

“No, I'll do it. After all they ARE my shoes, you know.” *My turn to point it out, right?*

“Have it your way, but remember that I am interested and would like to go along when you go.”

At that, the topic was dropped and we went on to other things, ending late at night. It is nice to be independently wealthy; you don't have to worry about getting up early in the morning to go off and do some kind of work or such. Yechh! Especially if it is for someone else!

0-0-0

When I arose the next morning nothing seemed out of the ordinary. I did my morning ablutions and got dressed. I put on some really comfortable running shoes and went out to have breakfast. Margo had arisen earlier and was sitting at the table reading the paper when I came in. We made small talk about this and that and what was new in the paper that I then read. On the topic of what to do for the day, I said that I thought I'd play some golf. She reminded me of the note and I said that there was no hurry. I would get to it in due time. I wanted some exercise today and visiting the University would not give me the exercise I wanted. She smiled and said that she was going to play in the garden and let it go. We had a gardener but some areas of our yard were designated as Margo's and he left them alone for her to play in, or with, as the case may be.

The shoes and that mysterious note in German were not a high priority in my book. I'd get to it when I had time.

Well, I played golf and enjoyed the sun and some of my friends and returned home about mid-afternoon. Margo was still puttering in the garden and I came in, took a shower and went for a cold beer. I had put on a cool shirt and a pair of shorts that let my hairy legs stick out. Margo never said anything about the hair on my legs, but I occasionally noted a look of somewhat concealed repugnance on her face when I wore shorts. As for me, I didn't mind, never had.

As I passed the case, however, I noticed the shoes, or was it the shoes that noticed me? I stopped and opened the case and pulled one out. I looked out at Margo and then pulled out the other one and went to the kitchen table where the light was somewhat better. Not knowing why, I kicked off my shoes and put the heels on.

Again there was almost a warmth. It is hard to describe. It is like wearing a pair of gloves that have been well broken in to your hands. They go on and fit just right. As I stood, I could not help but notice the change in perspective. You don't rise 11 or more centimeters above where you normally stand in an area that you are almost overly used to seeing from a lower perspective, and not notice it unless you never look around. I walked easily over to the fridge and pulled out a beer. Again, oddly, I decided this time to be more elegant and got a glass. Somehow pulling on a beer bottle just didn't seem right. So, I got the glass and poured the beer into it and then walked easily over to the window and watched Margo, down on her knees weeding or planting or something. It was good that she had hobbies like that.

I forgot all about the shoes.

I walked into the den and went to my computer. I had been writing about some of my adventures in Europe. Soon I was engrossed in the word processor as I wrote and rewrote what we had seen and where, and what we had bought. I had a pile of receipts and notes and was simply carried away.

Quite some time later, I heard the door open as Margo came in. She went to the fridge and got herself an iced tea. I then heard her call out.

"Fred? Must you leave your things lying about?"

It brought me out of the writing and I began to shut it down. "What things, dear?"

"You left your shoes in the kitchen."

I suddenly remembered the heels I was wearing and looked down. *Yes, they were still on.* I had totally forgotten them but was now semi-forcefully reminded. I reached down and quickly pulled them off. I figured I could get them back before Margo noticed and so tiptoed to the case and put them in. I took two steps towards the kitchen when she came out carrying the shoes I had sloughed off.

"Is this a new mode of dress? Are socks in?" She grinned as she looked down at my feet. "Really, Fred, on this carpet, there is no reason to tip toe; I wouldn't hear you anyway even if you had been wearing wooden clogs."

I looked down, saw that I was still on toe tips and so put my foot flat, only there seemed to be a slight, momentary discomfort that disappeared almost before I noticed

it and that could not be pinned down. She brought me my shoes and I put them on. All was normal again and the twinge or what- ever it was, was quickly forgotten.

0-0-0

That evening we went over to the Warren's together. He was the president of the bank and she was the head of the local PTA. Their children had grown and flown, so to say, and they were enjoying the good life, a bit belatedly, as we were, though we were a heck of a lot younger. It was a delightful evening and we returned rather late.

We came into the house and I decided I wanted a drink of cold water and so went to the fridge and got some ice cubes that I put in a glass of water. As I walked out, I could see in the dim light from the kitchen the jewels on the shoes that seemed to be sparkling and almost winking. I walked over and looked at the shoes. They were remarkable and even more remarkable was their fit. I wished my regular shoes felt as good. Of course, none of them made me as tall as these. It was strange.

Well, I had my drink and so went off to bed and a restful sleep.

0-0-0

In the morning, try as I might to ignore them, I couldn't help but think of those damned shoes. I was convinced that they were the most comfortable shoes I had ever worn, yet, how could that be? They had heels as tall as if not taller than any high heel that Margo had and for sure higher than any that Martha had by far. Although she would probably argue with me, I don't think any of Martha's high heels really qualified for high, being probably no higher than 5 or at most 7 centimeters. Yet here were these, easily double that and I had found them comfortable. It was, as the logicians say, counterintuitive.

I pulled out the note again and tried again to read it. I found that by holding it up to the light I could get a couple more letters and see where others were, but could get no more than I already had understood. With this side obsession with the shoes, I decided to see if I could find out what the note really did say. A few phone calls should lead me to some help somewhere.

As I sat down with the phone book, I heard Margo come into the living room. She came over to me and said that she was going to go visit the Thorntons. They were a new family in the neighborhood and they had children. She was doing one of her "PTA Welcome Wagon" type house calls. Even though we did not have children, Margo had managed to be active in the PTA. Another of her "hobbies". I knew she would not be back before mid-afternoon.

Seeing the phone book and the note, she asked, "Going to find out what it says? Well, I'll be back this afternoon. You enjoy yourself."

She kissed me lightly and was off.

I watched her go, heard the front door close, and then heard her car pull out of the garage. The sound died in the distance and was gone. I sat watching the door after she left all that time musing to myself. Since I was anticipating going to the university, I

put on a short sleeved dress shirt, a good pair of slacks and my black shoes. When the sound of her car could no longer be heard, I snapped out of the musing and looked at the note. I did not read it, just looked at it. Then after several moments, I looked at the shoes, said a “*what the hell*” to myself and took off my shoes.

Again I was wearing thin socks. I walked over to the case, opened it, and, in two easy moves, put my high heeled shoes on. Now I saw more of the tops of the shelves than before. But instead of pondering this new angle, I pondered how the shoes would feel with some nylons on, thinking that I should really wear nylons with these shoes, nylons with a nice lacy garter belt holding them up or a nice snug corset. When these thoughts flashed in my mind, I shook my head and they evaporated.

Strange.

This was the first time I had put them on where the sun could hit them. The other day I had been inside and the shades had been drawn except in the kitchen. Now I walked over to the large windows in the breakfast nook (called so because there were large windows facing eastwards) where sun was still streaming in.

I must say that the shoes in sunlight were nothing short of stunning. The gems, small as they were, caught the light and reflected it and refracted it and twinkled and shone and, well, just made the most of any light that came to them. I almost felt blinded when I moved my feet in this bright light.

How could anybody even think of destroying such beauty. I wondered if they had been made by some artist that may have signed them or something, but they felt so comfortable that I just did not want to take them off even to look for such tokens.

I moved into the kitchen and got a second cup of coffee and carried it back to the sun in the nook where I could watch the further effects of the sunlight on the high heels as I sipped the hot liquid. They were nothing short of mesmerizing.

I sipped my coffee and watched the shoes, extending first one leg, then the other. I was amazed that I felt no discomfort nor difficulty at all in balancing on either foot, both of which was now shod in women's very high heeled shoes. There wasn't an ounce of masculinity anywhere in these shoes. On the other hand, the thought struck me that maybe these shoes were older than that, extending back into the period when men wore them. If that were true, however, there should be more wear on them. But the wear was comparatively light. I pulled the current foot up and twisted it to see the bottom. Yes, there was definite wear, but not much. If anything, it almost looked more like well worn shop samples, but there were most likely no shoe stores around when these were made. 1921 was a top date, definitely not a bottom one!

Finally, my cup was empty. I looked at the clock and noted that I had been gazing at the shoes and sipping coffee for almost an hour. I moved back to the chair where the note still sat on the table. I got out a pad of paper for notes and referrals and started looking up numbers.

Who should I call first?

I won't bore you with the search. To begin with, I got half a dozen “not here” replies to the query if they did such, and a dozen referrals. While I thought it would be a piece of cake to do, finding someone who would do it was another matter. I got suggestions

like doing it myself with ultraviolet light or infrared light. Suggestions, yes, but they wouldn't do it.

By noon I had exhausted the university's resources. Oh it could be done, most likely, they reassured me; only, no one there had the time, or would take the time. I thought summer would be a time of rest and relaxation. Well, so did they. Many were gone for the summer and those that had stayed all professed to be either overworked with summer teaching, or too engrossed in their own research projects to have extra time. Some were obviously annoyed that some other colleague had suggested I call them.

I got up and strolled into the kitchen to make some sandwiches and a new pot of coffee. I looked out at the blue sky and the warm sun and thought that I should be playing golf, or working on one of my cars or... just out *there*.

While standing there looking out, I caught my reflection in the large window and again realized I still had the heels on. It never ceased to be a wonder that I could have such high heeled shoes on and not really feel them or the height of their heels. I felt as comfortable as if I was wearing my well broken in bedroom slippers.

When the pot was ready, I took it, the sandwiches, a plate, and a cup with me out to the phone. The table had 6 sheets of paper littered with notes, names and scribbling. I cleared the notebook and nibbled the sandwiches and sipped coffee as I thought of who else to call. Then I thought that such things were routinely being done by the FBI or the police. I scribbled them down as possible. I wondered why no one at the university had suggested them? I guess academia is too often wrapped up in academia; nothing else exists outside of their "ivory towers". I looked through the index of the yellow pages but got no more leads there.

There was an 800 number for the FBI, so they were probably not local or didn't want to be known as local. Under the police department there was no lab listed, only a non-emergency number. I called it and found that again, yes they could do it but wouldn't. Their laboratories were limited to criminal forensics and such and had no time nor funding for private inquiries. But they gave me the number of an independent laboratory that might be able to do it. I called them and, after all the previous hours and so many referrals, got at least an, "It most likely can be done. I think we can do it, bring it in and we'll look at it". The first date that I could do this was over a week away, so I made an appointment and hung up.

Remembering George, I called him up, and he was home. I told him of the appointment and he repeated that he wanted to go along and so we set it up.

I sat by the phone for a bit after I hung up. If there was danger, should George know about it? Did I want him knowing about my foolishnesses? Well, it was done and I could not think of a good excuse to back out of it. I emptied my cup and took the pot back to the kitchen.

I then remembered one of my notebooks for my manuscript that was still in my car. So, I decided to go and get it out of my car. So I went to the door and stepped out onto the cement of the garage.

I was suddenly acutely aware of my footwear, not from the feel, that hadn't changed, but from the noise of the heel as it hit the cement. It was nerve shattering at first and I stopped cold, thinking that everyone with a one mile radius could hear me and wonder what the clatter was. Margo's shoes had never made quite so much noise. Picking up one foot I noticed something that I had totally forgotten: the heel for all of its height was apparently iron, explaining their disparity in weight. The small bit of metal at the tip was not a tack, like so many of Margo's shoes had, but the worn off end of the core. To move was to "bang" these metal spikes on the cement, to make a heck of a lot of noise to my ears. I tried to tip toe, but the heel was taller than my tipping could toe and I still made noise. Not as much, but far from silent.

Since no one could see me (hear? yes, see? no), I finally just strode forth, noise and all, and got my notebook and then went back into the house. By now it was after one in the afternoon. Margo was sure to be coming back in, but when? With the greatest of regret, I went back to my shoes where I shucked the heels and put my own on.

There was still that slight discomfort, stronger this time, but it did not last, nor could I pin it down. Nonetheless, I had a tendency to want to walk on my toes. There was an even stronger desire to put those towering teasers back on, but I resisted. It was even tough to take them back to the case. But I put them back in and then forgot the notebook and went off to my computer where, instead of writing, I played games until Margo got back. I had little concentration. I told her of the appointment and she took the note and put it in with the shoes, "where we'll KNOW where it is."

That night we watched TV and retired early.

That night for the first time, I failed to get it up. I just could not get a firm erection, almost enough but not really enough for penetration. Margo was understanding, but it worried me.

0-0-0

As the next day dawned, I knew was going to be another good day for golf. I asked Margo what she was going to do, and she said that she was going to do some shopping in Bigton where a new mall was opening. Martha had indicated an interest and so they decided to go together. When she asked what I was going to do, I said that I was going to do some more work on my computer. She looked out the window at the clear sky with its warm sun and then back at me and shrugged her shoulders.

I found that these shoes were becoming a small obsession with me. Since I had first put them on and worn them, the comfort and ease of moving, and the, well, I guess it was primarily the comfort after all. I had no shoes that were that comfortable. I wore slacks, a sports shirt and another pair of thin nylon socks that day. Need I say that the socks were "in preparation" should the chance arise? And here the chance was more or less pushed at me.

Again, as the sound of her engine died away in the distance, I moved to the case, opened it and took out the shoes. They seemed to sparkle even more than the day before, . . . and I wasn't even anywhere near the sun that was streaming in the window of the dining nook. Maybe I should have the stones evaluated.

I looked the shoes over very carefully. There was no sign of “real” aging, nor of anything that would even hint at the age of these gloriously comfortable spikes. They could have been made yesterday, or 200 years ago or maybe even more. Although there was no sign as yet of aging, the style was definitely not modern. And no, the toe did not curl up nor did smoke come from them when I rubbed them.

But, shucking my shoes again, I found the ease and comfort that those shoes gave me. I was again comfortable and again I had even stronger feelings that I *should* be wearing silk stockings now firmly attached to a corset that would take down my thick waist. I almost visualized it but it seemed to evade me.. Strangely, this time I seemed to notice that it was more than just the shoes, but a larger comfort.

Simply said, I felt good.

I did not walk out on the cement again. I actually stayed in and played with my computer and then did some reading and more or less enjoyed myself. I did not notice anything unusual. I did decide, however, to give Margo the same margin for return and so, with greater regret, took off those most comfortable shoes and put on my own around mid afternoon. This time, there was a definite discomfort in putting on my shoes, but I still could not pin it down. It went away almost immediately, but was quite notable. It was not a case of bad fit but some sort of discomfort.

I felt a little guilty about wearing the shoes when Margo wasn't there, but, on the other hand, it was not generally “the thing” to do. Men don't go around wearing women's high heeled shoes. It, well, it just isn't done. If they were really men's high heeled shoes of a much past era, then even more reason not to.

The metal in the heel was iron and not steel, so that was not a measure, though I don't know when that idea first came about, or if this was a case of earlier placement for some other reason.

Thus I didn't know when these shoes were made, as they seemed so unusual as to defy the “normal” in shoes. Again I had to admit it myself; these shoes were slowly becoming an obsession!

Nothing out of the ordinary happened that evening. There was more tube watching, some listening to music, reading, whatever. However, that night after we went to bed, there was a repeat of my impotence. I just could not get it up and it seemed to even be more insensitive than before.

Again Margo was very supportive, but I was worried.

0-0-0

Thursday was the day we played bridge. There was a club, sort of, and the members would go to different houses to play with different couples. Before it got properly organized, I think we once drew ourselves to play with, much to the amusement of all but the organizers.

The net result is that I passed the shoes several times in the morning and had them as a low order distraction in the bridge game. I consoled myself with the fact that I'd find out what that message was all about when I got it fully translated, but that

was yet a while off. I really wanted to know why as I was being distracted above normal by the comforts these shoes provided, where in reality, there should be only discomfort and wobbly ankles. At that thought I flexed my ankles. Was that the source of discomfort? Well, I'd just have to wait.

That night, for the third night in a row, I could not get an erection. There was even more insensitivity. At this I decided that it was time to see our doctor!

0-0-0

Friday morning I went into the bathroom for my morning ablutions, nothing out of the ordinary there. When I came out, however, Margo, who had been sitting in bed still, reading, looked up and asked, "Fred, whose PJ's are those?"

"Mine, why?"

"I did not know that the legs were so long on them. We'll have to have Katie, take them up a bit or get you some new ones.."

I looked down as I absentmindedly scratched an itch on a nipple on my chest. It was true. The cuffs dragged and the front was slightly puddled on the toe of my slipper. I had not noticed it at all but they were definitely a little long. I hadn't remembered them as being all that long. *Strange.*

"It beats me. Could they have stretched or something?"

"Have you been swinging from the rafters on them, unbeknownst to me?"

"Hardly." I ambled over to my dresser and got a pair of underpants. I undid the waistband of the PJ's and let them drop. I didn't know why they seemed long. I couldn't hike them up any higher so they had to be long. Margo was now watching me. She saw the pants fall and noted another difference that I hadn't.

"Fred! Whatever did you shave your legs for?"

"What do you mean by that? I didn't shave my legs. What would I want . . ." I had looked down. "Gak! What's happened to my hair?"

Now, I had grown up with me and had a very reasonable idea of what I looked like, or what I was supposed to look like. When I looked down at my normally hairy legs, I saw my legs; I was reasonably sure they were my legs, but the hair on them had diminished to a much shortened pale shadow of what should have been there. They were not shaved but the hair had been greatly diminished, enough so that from her perspective she thought they had been shaved!

"Margo, they aren't shaved, but what happened to my hair?" I ran my hand down my legs, forgetting for the moment that I was naked from a bit below the waist downwards. "Is this some of your doing?"

By now she was out of bed, coming over to me, her ample breasts swaying under her thin night gown. I looked in her eye and saw that there was no mirth; it was not one of her jokes. Coming to me she knelt down to look at my legs more closely. She ran her hands up and down them. She too had a reasonable idea of what they should

look like. Meanwhile, I had shifted my scratch to the other nipple that was also itching slightly.

“The hair seems to have gotten shorter and softer.” She looked up at me and then stood up. “It is almost as if you shaved it and the new hair had started to grow in and a lot softer instead of being a stubble. It feels nice compared to what you used to have. You sure you didn't shave it? I don't suppose you could have shaved it and forgotten.”

“It is strange, isn't it, Margo.” Meanwhile I had snagged the underwear and was stepping into it. “I don't remember it going away or changing. I don't look at my legs that much. I wonder if I should go see a doctor.” I fished for her opinion on going to our doctor.

“I could see you doing that. 'Uh Doc, somebody clipped my hair and used a softener on it last night'.” Her imitation was poor, but it got the point across.

I pulled off my PJ top and grabbed a tee shirt. I heard her gasp.

“Now what?”

“Look. Your chest and your arms! They've lost hair too. All of your body hair seems to have suddenly gone into remission. What have you been doing to cause that?”

I looked at my chest and belly. It was true, well, almost true. Here the hair had diminished even more greatly than on my legs. They had medium hair while by body had just fuzz. Again, it looked like someone had shaved me clean and I had only begun to grow it back, from scratch, not re-growth like a beard. Nevertheless, I pulled on the tee shirt before she could reach out and feel it.

“Nothing that I know of. Well, bodies do strange things, but I haven't heard of this one happening before, have you?” I walked over towards the bed.

“Me neither. Maybe you *should* see our doctor.” She too had gotten back in gear and had pulled on her peignoir, not that it really covered all that much more.

