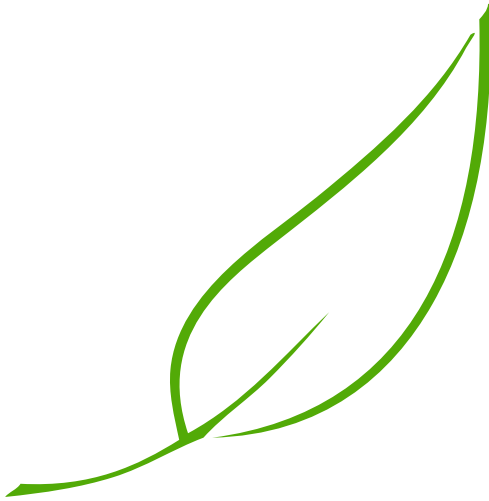


WHEN IT RAINS

by Robert L. Crowe



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SHE: Oh! You startled me! I didn't hear you come up.

HE: Well, I've been told I have little cat feet.

SHE: Can I help you, sir?

HE: Yes, I would like to buy something.

SHE: What a coincidence. That's what we do here at Womby's Department Store. We sell things. If you might be a bit more specific perhaps I could direct you to the proper department within the department store.

HE: Yes, thank you. I'd like to buy a gift for someone special.

SHE: Lady or a gentleman.

HE: Woman ... er, lady. Certainly a lady ... as opposed to just being a woman, you see.

SHE: Yes, I suppose I do. A rather subtle distinction but an important one in some people's mind. What type of gift did you have in mind?

HE: Well, that's the trouble. I don't really have anything in mind at all. I have a very fine attitude, as you can tell, but nothing on my mind.

SHE: Somehow I can tell that, too. Perhaps we could start with the basics. Do you prefer a personal gift or something for the house?

HE: Oh, personal, definitely personal. One should give personal gifts to a person and ... and ... *(he can't find an easy way out of this sentence)*

SHE: ... and impersonal gifts to a house.

HE: Exactly. So we've decided that, haven't we. A personal gift.

SHE: Yes, we are narrowing it down in such good fashion and there's a chance we may even find a category before the store closes at five. Do you think you'd like wearing apparel or a gift for other use?

HE: I don't know. If you were a lady, what kind of gift would you like?

SHE: (*taps her foot and looks at him, then*) Silence.

HE: I beg your pardon.

SHE: That's what I'd like. The gift of silence. After talking to customers all day, that would be the ultimate kindness.

HE: Have I been talking too much? If so, I will gladly pick out something with gestures.

SHE: I'd prefer that you talk and keep your hands to yourself. Did you wish to consider luggage? Luggage for a nice trip would be very much appreciated.

HE: Oh, she's not going on a trip.

SHE: Could that be because she doesn't have any luggage?

HE: I never thought of that. But anyway, she has no place to go.

SHE: No place to go? No place? What about Kenya, or Kuala Lumpur or Katmandu or Carbondale? (*becoming dramatic*) Isn't it possible that she has had a lust for travel, the flaming desire to see sunsets across a crowded room, to ... to experience a world of different foods, to be able to *spend* in many different languages? Swimming with sharks in harms way, sailing tall ships, flying at the speed of sound. Isn't it just possible that she may secretly crave that life ... if she only had some decent luggage?

HE: She's afraid of heights and gets deathly seasick.

SHE: (*quietly*) Oh. What about swimming with sharks ... in harms way?

HE: I figure if the sharks get hurt that's their own fault. No, not luggage, I'm afraid.

SHE: And I'm afraid this is going to take longer than I had painfully imagined. We have a new selection of purses. If you would walk this way. (*she crosses. He walks the same way she does. She stops and stares at him walking.*) That's a very old joke.

HE: That's a very old walk! Ha, ha! Oh, I just thought I'd bring some levity into your hum-drum world.

SHE: Well, drum that idea out of your head, Curly. Here are the purses. Calf skin.

HE: You skinned a calf to make that purse?

SHE: No, sir. *I* didn't skin the calf. I simply wrestle the steers to the ground. (*smiles*) The lady in the complaint department actually skins them.

HE: Really.

SHE: (*she changes directions*) How about giving her lovely feet?

HE: How are you so sure she doesn't already have lovely feet?

SHE: I was referring to our shoe department. Shoes. You know, sell lovely feet and all that. Here are some sturdy brown ones for walking. Very practical. Everyone needs a pair of these.

HE: Not made out of calf skin, I hope.

SHE: No. When we made the purses, we used up all the calves. These are imitation leather.

HE: Really. What are *they* made of?

SHE: We had to skin almost a score of imitations to make these. It's surprising they don't cost more.

HE: Yes. Well, perhaps some heavy hiking shoes would be the thing. Foul weather coming you know.

SHE: Is it?

HE: Well, sooner or later, I suppose. It always does. Then it turns nice again. Haven't you noticed it always turns nice?

SHE: Not in here.

HE: Well, let me ask you. If you opened a package with these brown hiking boots, would it send your heart a-flutter?

SHE: Only if they were packed in the luggage. If you wish to set her heart a-flutter ... is that what you have in mind?

HE: Most assuredly. A-flutter. That's what we want.

SHE: ... then I suggest we talk in a more personal sense. Walk right (*she stops and looks at him*) ... step this way please. (*she holds up some imaginary skimpy under-garment-type thing*) Now. This is personal.

HE: That is obscene. I have no objection to what anyone may wear ... or not wear ... in the privacy of their own home, but I am surprised ... yes, madam ... surprised that they would let you display those in a public store.

SHE: My dear sir. These aren't obscene. It is only clothing. It's not as if someone were wearing them in the store.

HE: Well then, would you slip them on for me? Ha, ha, ha, ha. (*he laughs roundly at this joke he has tried to set-up. She holds the imaginary clothing and stares at him as he says*) Got you with that one didn't I?

SHE: Your sense of humor is matched only by your credit rating, I'm sure. Very well. (*a firm jaw*) Buckle your belt tightly. We



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