

RED BOOTS

I left the red boots in Istanbul. On the sky-blue rug in the sea-blue room in the Hotel Kybele on Yerebatan, in the heart of Sultanahmet. The red cowboy boots I'd worn for so many years, with their toes pointed east — toward the Blue Mosque and the Aya Sofia — and their sloping heels turned to the spice bazaar. The red boots a friend had helped me choose at Hollywood Shoes one autumn evening after the summer my mother had died. A bargain, she'd insisted, and perfect to wear with my princess skirt. Boots I *needed*, my friend had said, because I'd had red cowboy boots as a child, as a little girl in a frilly dress my mother stitched, one Christmas, by hand. *Magic boots*, I thought, and thought they meant, *You can go anywhere*. I wore them to jump on my parents' bed with the gold satin spread, with my sister Mary— six that Christmas when I was three — floating beside me, holding my hand. Our father shooting the silent home movie into the mirror, through cigarette smoke. So that we looked like two little girls adrift in silver clouds, our ruffled skirts billowing. In matching homemade dresses and the cowboy boots we believed Santa Claus had brought. My sister's boots brown and my boots red, like the red boots I'd wear, so many years later, everywhere I went. In Los Angeles and the south of France and Paris and Warsaw and Rome. In Krakow and Berlin. In Vienna and Orvieto and Geneva and Basel and New York. In London and San Francisco. In Pietrusza Wola, Poland, and Rainbow's End, North Carolina, and Pittsburgh and Shepherdsville. And in Istanbul, where one summer I had them re-soled and, the next, I finally left them, at last.

They were almost worn through, by then; the leather so soft I pressed the boots against my cheek and whispered good-bye. After I'd paid the hotel bill and before I rushed out into the street to kiss the singing shepherd so long. I'd worn them as hard as I could, after all. I'd worn them like my mother's death, who had been beautiful and wild. Like the little girl I was, once, in a ruffled dress and cowboy boots, allowed to jump on her parents' bed with its gold satin bedspread on Christmas day. Caught in mid-air in her gone father's smoke, in the smoky mirror, shimmering. Given red boots and allowed to fly, to believe she was flying, and so I'd flown. I wore those red boots all over the world and left them, for luck, in Istanbul. Then I slipped into shoes embroidered all over with flowers, stepped out into the weightless city, the daughter of everything.

Cecilia Woloch

HARRY & PEARL: A VILLANELLE

My father wears shoes in the afterworld
— the shiny, brown dress shoes we buried him in.
My mother goes barefoot and answers to *Pearl*

— though that wasn't her name. Daddy called her *girl*
and told us, *Your mother works hard; be good kids.*
Now Daddy wears shoes in the afterworld

because he lay shoeless his last years, lay curled
like a child in his bed crying out, or he'd sing
and our mother went barefoot and answered him. *Pearl*

was her middle name, given her, slurred, at birth
— a drunken grand uncle's grandiose gift.
But our father wears shoes in the afterworld

and our mother, who followed him — ever his jewel —
to wherever they've gone, in her last white dress
goes barefoot beside him now, answers to *Pearl*

— won't answer to *mother* and won't be implored;
she cooked and she cleaned and she sang *that's enough.*
Now my father wears shoes in the afterworld

— shiny brown dress shoes — and gives her a twirl
in his arms she's his girl, she's his girl again, laughs,
my mother, who's barefoot and answers to *Pearl*

when I call to her, call to my sweet disappeared
mother and father who slipped through my breath.
My father wears shoes in the afterworld.
My mother goes barefoot and answers to Pearl.

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