

# Wipe Your Feet

by Jack Swenson

Two years later I married an American girl I met in Europe. There was no such thing as free love in her opinion. Most nights I drank myself to sleep. I liked bourbon and country music, a bad combination. Many evenings that summer I fell asleep on a day bed in the den listening to "Hello Walls" or "Faded Love." One night after dinner I nursed a martini and told my wife I had made a mistake. I wasn't the marrying kind. Later I sat on the edge of our bed and read the brief message on a slip of paper that the preacher's wife had tucked into my shirt pocket as I left the party. Poor woman, I thought. She's lonely. I wondered what she would look like if she lost a few pounds. In the morning when my wife got up, she headed straight for the bathroom. I could hear her throwing up.

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I remember that I lay there on my back in somebody's yard looking up at a full moon in a sky as black as ink. I tried to stand, and I couldn't. The engine of my car was dead, but the radio was still working. Willie Nelson was singing "Blue Eyes Crying in the Rain." It was supposed to have been a "let's have a talk" occasion. A kinder, gentler way of saying you go your way, I'll go mine. What about love, I said? It wasn't important, she said. What she wanted was a man she could respect. The last thing I remember is turning on the radio and opening the driver's side window so I wouldn't fall asleep. I woke up the next day in a hospital bed. A nurse told me my hip was dislocated. My little friend visited me. She sat on the edge of my bed and smiled. I recognized the smile. It was a "I've got you where I want you now," smile. She was wearing a black dress.

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Doc and his wife settled into the sheepskin lined seats of their Lexus and headed for Sin City. The ravens that nested in the tall pines in back of their hilltop home watched them go. That night in their room at the Wynn, Doc walked the floor half the night as he often did. He suffered from insomnia. He rarely got more than five

hours sleep. He remembered how years before they had packed their stuff into his VW bug, had breakfast, and rolled out of town on their honeymoon into a desert wasteland, headed for the Badlands of South Dakota. He also recalled the day some years before when he and Harpo and Harpo's girlfriend drank beer and played strip poker at Harpo's house in Minneapolis. Later he had walked into a bedroom upstairs while they were fucking, and the girl had a fit. Afterward she told Doc that she was sorry she had yelled at him. It wasn't long after this that Doc gave up drinking and smoking and started wearing old man's clothes.

