



# “Ode to Pablo’s Tennis Shoes”

Gary Soto

They wait under Pablo’s bed,  
Rain-beaten, sun-beaten,  
A scuff of green  
At their tips  
From when he fell  
In the school yard.  
He fell leaping for a football  
That sailed his way.  
But Pablo fell and got up,  
Green on his shoes,  
With the football  
Out of reach.

Now it’s night.  
Pablo is in bed listening  
To his mother laughing  
to the *Mexican novelas* on TV.  
His shoes, twin pets  
That snuggle his toes,  
Are under the bed.  
He should have bathed,  
But he didn’t.  
(Dirt rolls from his palm,  
Blades of grass  
Tumble from his hair.)

He wants to be  
Like his shoes,  
A little dirty  
From the road,  
A little worn  
From racing to the drinking fountain  
A hundred times in one day.  
It takes water  
To make him go,  
And his shoes to get him  
There. He loves his shoes,  
Cloth like a sail,  
Rubber like  
A lifeboat on rough sea.  
Pablo is tired,  
Sinking into the mattress.  
His eyes sting from  
Grass and long words in books.  
He needs eight hours  
Of sleep  
To cool his shoes,  
The tongues hanging  
Out, exhausted.