



2008

## The Penny Walker

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### Recommended Citation

Moses, Jessica (2008) "The Penny Walker," *Cedarville Review*: Vol. 11 , Article 1.  
Available at: <https://digitalcommons.cedarville.edu/cedarvillereview/vol11/iss1/1>

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## Keywords

Poetry

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JESSICA MOSES

*The Penny Walker*

Every year on this same day a fine old-hand comes to town,  
Onto West Main Street, his tattered boots rapping out the contagious  
sound.

Before the sun, before all else, before the dawn is whole,  
Old-hand boldly blaring an alarm clock with his soles.  
Sweet rhythm, sweet day for the people be,  
Mr. Old Hand in his penny shoes from Fine Paradise, Tennessee.

Circus-boy face and strong-man smile—battering the street,  
The children crowd and dance to best reinforce his beat.  
And on his shoes, I look real close, “those ain’t no tappin’ kicks!  
Old Hand’s big-band melody—copper pennies stuck to chewed gum  
sticks!”

Lincolns there coming down, scratching up the road,  
Old Hand still tappin’ wildly in a smile fixin’ to explode.  
Finally, frail tapper fails to finish tap four million forty-five—  
STOP!

And in his hands two socks overstocked with pennies inside.  
Old Hand waits . . . .

Smiles and waits . . .

Waits . . . .

Until slowly his big-band smile bursts from everybody’s face.  
In a bare-foot dance Old Hand ruptures, both sock ties now undone,  
Flat-copper-circles spinning golden caramel in the sun.  
Rust and grit and sweat and dirt twinkle just to fade,  
Pennies altogether thunder—SMACK the street, down, down from  
their cascade.  
And Old Hand laughs and looks to me, standing back in shy retreat  
From wild children laughing, tossing pennies in summer heat,  
“Eighty-Eight you’d think I’d learn not to make my wishing well the  
street,  
I ain’t rich but I’ve learned that they’re useless on your feet.”