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Je ne suis pas un chapeau. Je suis un homme. Je ne suis pas un chapeau. Je suis un homme. Je suis un homme. Je ne suis pas un chapeau. Je suis un homme. He speaks, repeating these words, but the news vendor does not understand at all. The man beneath him whose very head he sits upon does not understand at all. What's there to understand? Je ne suis pas un chapeau. Je suis un homme. Je ne suis pas un chapeau! How is it said? Parlez-vous français, monsieur? Parlez-vous français? Je ne parle pas anglais. Parlez-vous français monsieur? Je ne suis pas un chapeau. Je suis un homme!

The news vendor scratched his head and gave the man wearing Bernard a very dirty look, as if he were clearly up to something awful.

"What's with your hat, pal? Are you up to something? Is this some bullshit Ministry of Morale gag? If it is, it ain't funny."

"It's been saying that all day." The man's voice was extremely contrite. He didn't speak any French ...only English. Bernard's psyche relaxed, expanded and found the language. Within moments, he remembered English.

"I am not a hat," Bernard said very slowly and matter-of-factly. "I am a man."

He was, of course, a hat. He was a grey felt fedora, pure Dashiell Hammett, on the head of an overweight used car salesman whose name lurked somewhere in there, somewhere behind the English. First soak up the form, then the content. That's how it worked. Bernard was relieved that the news vendor was looking right at him instead of down at the salesman.

"I'm sorry, son," the news vendor's voice got low, full of lament, "but I'm afraid you're a hat. Whatever else you might be or think you are, you're a hat my friend."

He wished he had little felt fists to pound the man's head and little felt legs to run off, but as a hat, he had neither. The hat struggled long and hard to get off of the man and Bernard struggled long and hard to stop being a hat. The head was a box for the hat. The hat was a box for Bernard. He struggled with boxes within boxes, like a six year old recipient of a christmas prank.

The man was named Howard Schultz. He sold cars for a living, which was hard to make much money doing, what with traffic being what it was and the city being what it was: dangerous, expensive, real tough to make a living. Howard was considering getting out of the game. Bernard, who decided it might somehow be better to be the hat than to be Howard Schultz, felt like that might be a good idea, though he was just getting reacquainted with the concept of used car sales via osmosis.

"I'm not a hat..."

"I don't need this today, hat. First you, and then next thing you know my pants are tryin' to tell me what's what. I won't have it."

"My name is..."

Before Bernard could finish this very significant thought, a chimpanzee descended from the great canopy above and removed him from Howard

Schultz's head, carrying him up into the massive, overgrown ginkgo that towered over and grew into the car salesman's apartment building. The chimps had developed an interest in hats and were known to take them from those who wore them and play with them until more interesting headgear could be found. The chimp sported Bernard proudly before the other, less fashionable, monkeys in the treetops, who looked much less chic in their visors, baseball hats and thick sunglasses. They powwowed in a circle, exchanging grunts and screeches over the newfound treasure, which impressed the other monkeys a lot.

"I'm not a hat," Bernard repeated, but the monkeys no more understood English than the news vendor understood French. He reached into the monkey for their language, but it was harder, so he decided he would talk to the other hats instead. Like most inanimate objects, they understood their own kind through telepathic signals and subtle electrical impulses, little blips of existential shock. When chairs speak to chairs, for example, they say "I am a chair and this is true", as things must know their own. The assertions must be made and they must claim the attention of the prospective listener.

"I am a hat and I am not a hat," went the message and the other hats echoed their reply in unison. "I am a hat and you are definitely wrong," it went, but somehow they could tell that the new hat was right on some level. This upset them, because it was very hard to grasp and the thought that maybe they too weren't hats was offensive and scary.

"I am a hat and I am not a hat," Bernard, the hat, repeated. This time the others did not respond. Bernard struggled as a hat once more to escape the tyranny of the chimp's head and as Bernard to escape the tyranny of having to live as a hat. He was sure he knew, however distantly, what it was like to be as Howard Schultz and the news vendor were: walking

around, buying and selling newspapers, choosing what hat they would wear. He decided that Howard Schultz, car salesman or otherwise, was lucky and that he too had once been so lucky. He was now, however, a hat. The news vendor had said he was a hat and the chimp was wearing him as a hat. Bernard was a gray, felt fedora. I am a hat and I am not a hat. I am a hat and I am a hat. The other hats around him appreciated it a lot. Gray felt beingness; a singular sense of purpose. There was no further need to communicate between them, as they had nothing much to say to each other; no need to discuss at length the contours of heads and the feeling that nothing was expected of them. If it were not for the fan blades that floated even above the treetops, Bernard would have spent quite awhile thinking of nothing more than life as a gray felt fedora.

The blades spun fast and the few people below wearing hats hung onto them tightly. Mothers assumed iron grips on their strollers as the wind that cooled the city blew hard, fast and cold. The temperature became a cool, crisp one hundred and five degrees, almost the weather for cargo shorts or a light skirt, the heaviest clothes people bothered to wear in the city. Bernard heard the collective sigh below as he, like every other hat, was swept up in the wind.

The last time he had felt flight was inside a rhamphoryncus, a leathery dragonbird that came down from a nest atop the control tower on the platform to feast on chimp flesh and that of a couple of harvesters. The harvesters were hard to eat, but delicious, at least for a carnivorous pterosaur. As a hat, he watched harvesters fight off the monkeys and the man-eating dinosaurs to get at the ripe, bluegreen fruits on the top branches. Their skin, engineered to endure the sun beating down hard, was jet black and covered by thick shells. Other than that, they were just people like Bernard and tasted like people.

If he had never been the pterosaur, he would never have thought that human flesh could be edible, and especially wouldn't have thought that about harvester flesh. He wished that there was a way for hats to eat, since his time as a hat was beginning to corrode his sense of decency and human propriety and had thus rendered the harvesters appetizing.

He begged himself to stop. Harvesters were people. Bernard was Bernard and Bernard was people as well. His humanity hit him hard and fast as he felt moved; moved and saddened as people walked out of their homes and workplaces to take in the three o'clock breeze. The jaguars, most of the oviraptors and even the dreaded gilawalrus instinctually came out of their places in alleys and urban underbrush to hunt when the wind came, since their prey would be distracted, plentiful and brazen. The police cars and civic triceratops couldn't stop every one of them, even if they tried and focused their energy on the wealthier boroughs where spoiled, overfed tyrannosaurs, kept as pets and guardbeasts by local fatcats, had gone rogue. People below him were not safe, not as safe as a hat, whose only natural predator was moths. For a moment, it was worth the risk for them, a moment to feel skin under the salt was a moment of actual living... They went so far as to enlist the aid of other beasts to survive, bringing out komodo dragons, king cobras and hadrosaurs to defend them against the hungry jungle cats and beady-eyed baby gobbling vermin though of course, they had yet to find a match for the gilawalrus.

In spite of the cut-rate reptilian bodyguards, the people of the city did not cool off in peace. There was a tornado of spots, claws, neon stripes and animal screeches. Blood, blood, blood. Mothers cried for their babies unprotected from the heat by the voodoo thermostats inside, pure superstition that couldn't stand up to the sun. Air conditioning was a joke, an archaism of the highest order; mandatory, but a joke.

The only hope each day was of course the wind and it saddened Bernard deeply how much people paid for it. He wished that hats had eyes so he could cry.

He embraced the freedom of flight on the wind until he landed, and where he landed was squarely on the head of Rebecca Inez Takahashi, a first grade teacher who wore a pale blue thong and sparkly pasties. She was about thirty pounds overweight, but couldn't bring herself to care. Rebecca wished that society would just acknowledge that nudity was a must in this hot, sticky, terrible world. She cheered up a little and a smile crossed her face when Bernard landed on her head. She felt glamorous, a little mischievous too. She felt like pulling off her pasties and removing her thong so she could be naked with just her silly, new, gray felt hat on. But, as was her way, she kept her exhibitionist fantasy to herself and did not subject the rest of the street to its consequences. But, it would be so nice... She preened and modeled her new hat and the people catching the breeze watched as she did.

The hadrosaurs and komodo dragons looked to and fro, but the raptors weren't abroad on Fourth Street and the Fourth Street jaguars had decided that starvation would be better than enduring the punishments dished out by the hard heads of the duck-billed dinosaurs or the great bulk of a komodo dragon pouncing upon them. On this day, Fourth Street relaxed, for the most part.

Relaxed, that was, until one of THOSE THINGS arrived. The hadrosaurs growled low and strained on their leashes, able to recognize the threat the fairly humanoid creature that walked down the street posed. This "man" was not shirtless, nor did he wear denim cut-offs or a speedo. This "man" was dressed in a thick, beige overcoat with a white dress shirt and neatly pressed pants. This "man" carried an umbrella, although it was not one of the scheduled precipitation days. From the slightly green tint of his skin and the

hard, clumpy chunks of green vomit running down his chin, it was clear that this was a Suburbanite. If hats could tremble, Bernard would have.

"Give me back my hat, cocksuckers! I need my lucky cocksucking hat, cocksuckers!" it shrieked.

Before Rebecca Inez Takahashi could say anything or relinquish the hat (which she was certainly not willing to die for), the Suburbanite was upon her, biting a hole in her throat. As she bled to death, the Suburbanite fell to his knees and wept bitterly, making an awful, inhuman sound with his throat; the gurgling sound of the mud churning and coming up. Bernard looked on from the top of the dead woman's head watching the disgusting spectacle of the Suburbanite crying, screeching and vomiting green mud.

"I want my lucky cocksucking hat, you cocksucker!" the Suburbanite once more wailed. The citizens stared at the abomination and couldn't help but wonder why they still let those things roam free.

"Disgusting!" said one of the citizens, who was almost run down by a police cruiser remote dispatched to the scene. The cruiser needed only to open its door before she grudgingly got in, not wanting anymore trouble for her intolerant outburst. With a blaze of the cruiser's side-mounted machine guns, the Suburbanite and the body of Rebecca Inez Takahashi were both perforated to shreds. As was, for the most part, the grey fedora that was Bernard. As death pulled at him, he pulled away.

Falling through the dust tunnel, he came out the other end. Heaven and Hell had no objections, as always. So, as always, he came out and found the bed, where his father and Professor Sagramore stood over him anxiously.

"Deep Objectivity," Professor Sagramore declared, "I hate to say it, but the side effects are catching up."

"But he isn't a Suburbanite."

"We've done better than that. Transcended it."

“More CRAMPS? Should we give him extra injections?”

“Absolutely. You know what I say about extra injections.”

Bernard’s father plunged the syringe into him, but it did little good. Bernard was already gone again. Deep Objectivity caught up to subjects quickly.

He wandered the city, a new tyrannosaurus devouring innocent people, pedestrians and irate hadrosaurs. When the police triceratops came around, he tussled hard, but he came out on top, feasting on the delicious innards of his foe. This stirred something in the back of Bernard’s saurian brain, revealing something strange and fantastic; a message, an image. There was a place out there, thick with foliage like the city, but different. There was but one building, made up of marble, tended by smiling, nude golden haired ladies and surrounded by fruit trees which grew into a sky, blue as any ocean, though that could not be said since the secret place overlooked an ocean which was bluer than any other, bluer than any sky or any ocean could be. Great sea turtles, ancient perhaps as the earth itself and wearing contented, wise expressions on their leathery faces swam in this ocean.

“The Archelon Ranch is calling you,” a voice said over the message, “the Archelon Ranch is calling you home. Primal and beautiful man, come home, you are welcome once again.”

But, like all the other journeys into deeper Objectivity, this one ended with Bernard coming back to the bed, eyes wide, heart hungry. Archelon Ranch is calling me home. I am welcome once again.