

Stories for the Train

Tales on the go

0:6:00

Tom's Hat

By Roy Woodard

Tom has been campaigning to be the town crier for months now,,, first polite and deferential to the mayor,, , he is a man on a mission,,, he has sweet talked, wheedled, cajoled and plain harassed the woman,, , and,, it has got him nowhere,,,.

The mayor now refuses to talk to him so he shouts across at her at town meetings or even across busy streets,, , trying out his 'Oh Yay,, Oh Yay' on her whenever he has the opportunity,, he just doesn't care anymore,, .

"I just don't care anymore" he says,,, , , "I don't give a shit."

Lately there has been talk of restraining orders. Tom has redoubled his efforts,, .

He has grown a long black beard in preparation for his role.

He has taken to wearing, on occasion, what looks to be a pirate outfit, especially with that beard, but “no” he tells me,, , “it’s a Town Criers,” ,, the top hat would set the whole thing off a treat,,,. The mayor would see him in his full regalia and the job would be his,, the hat was to be the clincher,,, that was the plan..

[illegible]

So this is how things are as I watch him walk up to the bar,, the Square Brewery Pub in Petersfield,,,, early evening, it is sometime in October of last year. He has arranged to meet the barmaid,,, who, he tells me,, has a top hat for sale.

////////// " " , , , ,

Now Tom is a big man,,,, a tough man,,, he loves his mother,, calls her the Duchess,, , he moves with a limp and makes no fuss, asks no favours from God or any other bugger who might be interested.

He wears a black fedora,, red shirt and braces and carries a heavy silver knobbed cane that ,, if need be,,, ,, , would crack my skull,,,,,,

and ,,, I think,,,,,,,,,

a jumbled up brilliance somewhere between his shining eyes
and his rosy cheeks.

*He tells me that every bit of good luck he has ever had is paid for in bad,,,,,

twice over.

,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,, ,

The barmaid sees us and comes over. She has brown teeth and a thong pulled

elasticated tight,, , young crutch to belly tight, between her tee-shirt and her low hipped jeans.

It is yellow, bright yellow, ,, a rampant slit of yellow

Dirty dirty dirty,, .

She ignores me but does hand you, Tom,, in a Co-Op carrier bag,,, the top hat she has promised.

He pulls out the hat that is yellow like her pants. It has gold sequins,,,

,,, three tassels,,,.

It is a child's' party hat,, vacuum formed, plastic, a broken string for a chin strap,,,, , Tom puts it on,,, it covers barely half his head.

,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,,, " " " , , .

We look at each other, ,, ,.

Tom hands over a tenner,,, , not the thirty he promised.

"I'll see you later for the rest" he tells her,,, , , [he won't]

"Is that all right?" he asks her,,,

"Well it'll have to be" [she is not smiling when she says this]

"I had it when I worked in the circus" she tells him, tucking the tenner in her jeans and the hat back in the bag, almost furtively,, like she's hoping that Tom won't have noticed its shortcomings, or better still,, safely out of sight, he might quickly forget about them..

I make polite conversation,,, , asking about the circus,

[I'm thinking of her yellow pants and looking at her brown teeth]

She walks off,, doesn't say goodbye to me, and I,, I can't blame her for that.

"Well" says Tom, ,,, who's bit a of a poet himself ,,,

"*this* is a rare species of a different faeces, ,, ,

she's tak'in a barff ain't she,,,, , I thought it was a proper hat,, you know,, I thought it would be all gold and proper,,, , like a proper drum majorettes top hat, the real thing, this is a ,,,a ,,,, , " , , ,

He pulls it clear of the Co-Op bag, turns it this way and that, studies it from all angles as though if he could only concentrate and see things as they really are,,, just this once,,,, then this hat would reveal itself for the beauty it surely must be,,,

On the one hand he's not quite believing what he has bought, on the other,, quite fully aware that this is what his life is made of. He was born for this,,,, some people have tennis courts, an Audi in the drive, a firm square jaw, a pretty wife called Lucy to make sweet love to,,, all of it easy,, ,,, for gratis,,, , of course it is,,, that's the way the world turns, as sure as this plastic hat in front of him,, as the ten pounds he has handed over, as sure as the fast approaching bottom of his glass ,, , .

Maybe this hat could save him,,, a sort of talisman to change his luck,,,, things could only get better from here on,,,, surely,,,, , a man needs hope after all,, , maybe he could even start a family,, maybe,, two kids with bright Boden'ed smiles,,, ,,,,and wouldn't that be nice,,,,, .

Would they reminisce on white dog shit, as we do now, sitting here,, , I doubt it,,,,

,,,,, "you know" says Tom,, "it's because of all the butchers bones they used to eat, the calcium in them,, now it's all sanitised, homogenised, purified, buggerised, cannerised rubbish, that's why you don't see the white stuff anymore, it's the calcium,, or the lack of it,, " , , he lets out a sigh,,,,.

He's tried, but even this topic just doesn't do it for him at the moment,,

-and,, it is one of his favourites- , , , there is silence,,,,.

I see his hands turn back to that yellow hat,,,, of which he is now part owner, with twenty quid still to be paid and,, , , , one particular tassel,,,, he gives it a tentative pull,, , that will need sewing back on.

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*Well you may not believe this but it is true,, every word. I'm meeting up with Tom to buy a painting he had on display at the local library. It's a picture of a worried looking milkman standing at a garden gate,, but viewed from ground level through the legs of Toms Bull Terrier. All you can see of the dog are its balls hanging down,, like dumbbells,, swinging between its two back legs. It's very funny and I should have bought it there and then when I first saw it,, after all, you don't come across things like this every day [it was up for £50] but anyway,, no harm done,,, I had gotten Toms phone number from Leah and had made the offer. "You know" I had mused to Leah at the time,, "if that was hanging in a Cork street Gallery it would be seen as post ironic chic or something or other and go for thousands,,. "An innocent enough comment but of course Leah had then passed this on to Tom and between the two of them had somehow come up with the notion that his painting was worth thousands and I had plans to rip him off and sell it to a Russian billionaire. It took ages for me to disappoint him of this notion, and I feel he was never completely convinced of what I said. The truth is the painting now sits in a storage box somewhere, lost in my recent house move and still in tattered pieces after his dog,, Jack ,, had chewed it. Evidently,, after me offering to buy it Tom had searched out the picture, which was at the back of his wardrobe, and spread it on the kitchen table to flatten it out, with a tub of marge holding down one

end and a salt pot or something at the other. He had then gone down the pub to celebrate. Honestly you couldn't make this stuff up,,. On his return that night,, what did he find but Jack in the corner with a bit of the painting sticking out of his mouth,, the rest of it scattered around the floor,, the marge was nowhere to be seen, ,, that's why he had said about his poor luck. Anyway,,, to cut a long story short,, he fobbed me off about meeting up for a few weeks and painted the whole thing again. It was this one he tried to sell me.

I have to say I was a little disappointed when I finally saw it ,,,. 'You know Tom', I had said,,, 'it's not how I remembered it,, I can see that it's better painted and there's more detail [I am a kind hearted man], you've put in some trees,, but it's somehow just not funny anymore, have you worked over it or something?'

Tom comes clean and admits it's a different picture,,, and slightly abashed,, pulls out of his pocket the remains –now creased up and still in pieces- of his original.

Well you had to laugh,,, "I'll buy it," I say,,, "it's even better now,,, and I love the story behind it,,

fan-tast-tic Tom,, I love it,,, ",,, Tom looks at me as though I'm the only crazy in the room,,, "What " he says,,, "this one,, are you sure ?,, spreading the bits out on the table,,, "At least let me knock something off for the missing bit" ,,,.

I do like this man.... "No,," I say,,, "no it's great as it is, it's well worth it, better than ever,, I'm happy if you're happy. Let me get you a pint."

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And I buy him a pint



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