



Hat Woman: The Beginning

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Selma Katz dreamt of a vivid blue hat. All the shades of sky and sea, wind-blown and swirling. Cobalt blended with sapphire, mixed into periwinkle and peacock. It was a fur-felt fedora, with an aquamarine silk sash. In her dream she touched the sash, softer than corn silk. Tiny iridescent fish swam along the folds, excitedly diving into the darker shades of the fur-felt. Selma felt her whole body tug and before she could catch her breath, holding tight to the sash, she fell into a magical sea of the felt. It was friendly and warm and frightening. It was change.

She awoke sweaty with fear. Yet, for the first time since she'd left Vincent, she wasn't wrenched from sleep by a violent dream. California's lockdown for Covid-19 gave her the impetus she needed to leave Vincent. Walking away from everything she owned was better than living in fear and isolation with him. Her only regret was leaving behind her jewelry box, which, among other pieces, held a beautiful set of pearls her mother had worn.

She had found a furnished condo in San Diego on Fifth Avenue. Its bland eggshell and taupe decor suited her. Marriage to Vincent, while attractive and colorful, was a disaster. Where "just the two of us" had been romantic, it became stifling. Then controlling. Then scary. The condo gave her a blank space to heal. She badly needed to find some confidence.

Selma's condo had one parking space, where she kept her bicycle. She could walk or bike wherever she needed, and easily get to her job downtown by bus if she was in a hurry.

She made herself coffee, still thinking of the hat in her dream. She needed food. It was Sunday, and the Farmer's Market was open.

Selma biked there, feeling the intense sun on her arms. She locked her bike next to others at a bike rack and strolled into the market, which was a long loop of busy vendors. First she saw ball caps and visors, and then cheaply made bucket hats and straw hats with florid fake roses. She paused, hearing a low, sweet voice.

"A blue fedora?"

It was an older woman, dressed in dark blues, wearing a vintage circle hat. Selma didn't believe she'd heard the words blue fedora.

"You look for a special hat," added the older woman, "I know it."

Selma stood silent, taking another long look at this strange woman. She peered into the woman's stall, and then stepped inside, feeling a cool darkness. It smelled a

little like pot.

And there it was.

The blue fedora she had dreamt of, floating on an alabaster bust. Selma approached the hat to get a closer look.

“You made this hat?” asked Selma.

The woman nodded. “You like?”

Selma touched the brim and felt a ripple of excitement.

“How much?” Her heart raced.

“For you, fifty dollars.”

Selma pulled the cash out of her pocket and counted it for the woman.

“Very good. The hat is yours,” said the woman. “Put it on.”

Selma lifted it from the white bust. The lining was the same color as the sash, and then, like in her dream, she saw silvery fish swimming, round and round. She blinked hard, and the fish stood still.

“Go ahead. Put it on.”

The older woman took the hat from Selma and placed it on her head. Heat rushed through Selma’s bones as she felt the hat’s sweatband pull tight against her temples. Was it too small?

“You will like the hat,” said the old lady, “a pretty young woman like you should dress smart.” The hat maker turned and disappeared into the back of her tent.

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The hat made her stronger, more agile, and oddly, hungry. It gave her courage she had never known. And it listened. To her thoughts, to her fears, to her hopes, and to her needs.

After wearing it a week she was sure she could finally face Vincent and ask for her pearls. So one night she put the hat in her backpack, put on her bike helmet, and started out for Vincent’s house.

The ride to his house in North Park took 20 minutes. She parked next to a tree, three houses before his. The helmet came off and she put on the fedora, instantly feeling its power.

Selma waited while a woman walking a small dog passed, and then knocked on Vincent’s door. There was no answer. Now what? She still had a key. Had he changed the locks?

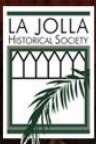
Perhaps her blue fedora gave her *too much* confidence. Nevertheless, she tried the key. It worked, and she walked into Vincent’s living room. The TV was blaring. Vincent had always left it on high volume when he was out, but when he was home insisted on absolute quiet. He wanted to be able to hear Selma’s every movement. She walked softly into the bedroom and checked the dresser. Her jewelry box was there, right where she had left it. She lifted the lid and smiled to see her mother’s pearls.

In a moment she stuffed the box into her backpack. On the way out she decided to put the TV on mute and change the channel to PBS. He would hate that. It felt so wonderful, like she was stealing something that belonged to her.

As she was retrieving her bike she heard Vincent’s Corvette rumbling down the street. He would be so angry when he figured out she had been in his house. Did he

know where she lived? Would he come after her? She didn't care. The fedora gave her such a feeling of exhilaration.

It was the beginning of a beautiful friendship.



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