

Can I Have Your Hat?

“No way he said that,” Halloway says, “No. You misheard.”

“It was exactly that,” Alice replies.

“Surely he’d said something more along the lines of, oh, I don’t know...

Imagine this. It’s so much more likely. You’re walking down the street, and an old man tips his Panama hat and says ‘Must be a crime to look so sweet.’”

“Nope. Not what he said.”

“But damn it, Alice, I’m sitting here, too. I don’t think he said what you think he said.” Halloway feels a little tiffed, sitting at the bar with his wife as they study the odd old man who’d just passed, stopping to slur a few words to Alice.

The man sits there in an off-white leisure suit, Panama hat tipped over his eyes.

“Isn’t it against ABC regulations to sleep at a bar?” Alice tries to change the subject.

“Sure, but he’s not drunk,” Halloway says.

“What do you think’s wrong with him, then?” Alice asks.

“Nothing. I don’t think he said that.”

“Oh, get off it. He’s a screw loose. Soft in the head.”

“So what’d you say he said, again?” Halloway asks.

“Exactly this: ‘It must be some ways to look at your kin that’s not legal.’”

Halloway sipped his beer and waved Keith over, their bartender.

Alice plants her palm against her forehead. "Oh, no, don't bring Keith into this. He's got to serve the bugger."

Halloway ignores his wife. "Keith. What's that man's deal?"

"God, you're so off," Alice scolds.

"You're the one who thinks he's soft in the head!"

"Yeah, but I didn't say it to other people!" Alice retorts.

"I heard you plenty!" Halloway says.

"You're both wrong," Keith interrupts.

Halloway and Alice smile at each other. It's nice to have a good bartender around with the social finesse to break up the fights others start.

"He's just looking for his hat."

Alice chokes on her beer, and Halloway turns around like he's heard someone step on a cat behind them.

"Hat's on his damn head!" Halloway says.

"He doesn't know that," Keith says, and turns off to address a new customer.

"Hat's on his damned head," Halloway repeats.

"So that's that! He's screwy!"

"He's damned covered his eyes with it. He knows it's there."

"Oh, whatever. So Keith is making shit up or the old man's crazy or both. Big deal."

Halloway strokes his chin hard like he's tugging a fishing hook out a fish's mouth.

"Maybe we ought to find it for him," he says.

“What you mean to do?” Alice asks Halloway.

“Well, I mean, let’s help him find his damned hat. Maybe he’ll stop coming round here all weird and all.”

“He isn’t hurting anybody.” Alice isn’t interested.

“What I aim to do, I’m going to approach him—and you come with me if you want—and I’ll ask—or you can—for an umbrella or a parka or a hat.”

“That’s stupid. It’s not raining.”

“Well, we already know he’s screwy.”

“Screwy enough to be completely oblivious to adverse weather?”

“I’ll say, ‘I need to run out to my car in the rain. Do you have a hat I can borrow?’ and we’ll go from there, see what happens.”

“I’m not too sure about this, Roderick,” Alice tells Halloway, but Halloway pats Alice on the back like a pet bird, and ups out of his seat.

He leaves his beer with Alice, and looks to Keith for support. Keith isn’t paying attention, though. Keith doesn’t care. Keith might just be making shit up. Who knows? This will be fun.

Halloway taps the gentleman on the knee.

The old loon looks up, but he’s crying dark, dark tears.

Halloway steps back, “I’m sorry.”

“What’s it you be needing?”

Halloway sure doesn’t want to bother someone who’s crying, but this old man said some weird shit to his wife, so he doesn’t feel all that bad when he kind of just spits out what he’d plan on asking.

He says, "Well, I've got to run to my car, but the rain. I was wondering if you have a hat I could borrow for a second."

"Hat don't leave the head. Head leaves the hat," the man says philosophically.

Something about this reply pisses Halloway off in an adolescent way. It's like he's in eighth grade. He's angry that this guy has gotten this old so easily and it kind of dawns upon Halloway that he's just going to take the hat.

So Halloway reaches out, but the old loon kicks Halloway in the balls.

Alice is back at the bar laughing her ass off. She's literally gotten out of her bar seat to bend over laughing. Keith, too. Keith is pointing, actually.

Halloway paces back to the bar, the old loon drolls his head downward again, and Alice is frank when she says, "You deserved that."

Halloway says near nothing, just a mumble, like he's about to say "Fuck you" but instead says, "Frank chops."

Alice hears it, though. "Yeah, Frank chops. Sure, sure, Frank chops, all right, buddy. Did you get your Frank chopped?"

Keith hears this from the other end of the bar and nearly drops a pint glass over a customer's pizza, laughing.

"You think it's damned funny, why don't you pry that head out of his hat."

"I don't want to. You wanted to."

"Just fucking do the damn thing," Halloways says.

"You really want to talk to me like that?" Alice asks.

Halloway has nothing to say. He's a little—well, not just a little—he's embarrassed.

The old man sits there with his head tucked a little. What's kind of funny is the old loon lost his shoe kicking Halloway in the balls. It's sitting next to his foot.

Halloway feels saucy.

"Hey, Keith!" Halloway shouts.

Keith puts up a finger to indicate he needs a moment, but Halloway isn't having that.

"Keith," Halloway repeats, and Keith comes.

"What you need, Mr. Halloway?"

"That man's down a shoe. Don't you gotta kick him out?"

"Sure don't, but I will if you need me to. Hasn't bought anything in an hour."

Alice jumps in, "No, not that old man. He's not bothering anybody who's not bothering him!"

Keith looks to Halloway, "How you feel about that?"

Halloway just kind of sits there, feeling a little pouty.

"You still want me to get him out?"

Alice straight up says no.

Keith leaves.

Alice places her hand on Halloways back, but it's a distinctively unkind gesture. "We're going to pay next time Keith has a free moment, and then we're leaving because you're being an asshole."

Halloway figures Alice is right and just nods his head. No rush apologizing. Best wait until he means it a little more than he does now. Sure, he means it a little

bit, but he's still tiffed that this whole thing started because the old loon was being a fucking old loon in the first place.

Keith comes, they pay, and it's time to leave.

Alice grabs her jacket from under the bar and runs out ahead of Halloway. Halloway looks at Keith who sees they're having a fight and adds a buck to their tip. Keith is all right. He's seen them at their best. Hell, he's helped them get there!

And on Halloway's way out, passing the old man, Halloway, just as if the hat belonged to him, like he'd hung it on the wall when he first came in, reaches for the old loon's Panama, and soon as that hat leaves the old man's head, the old man's head rolls to the floor, bringing along his neck and body which completely deflates upon its landing with a faint mist rising from the collapsed leisure suit.

Alice rushes back inside, drenched in red, and grabs Halloway desperately at the shoulders, crying, "It's raining blood! It's raining blood, Roderick!"