

Capistan

I don't know if you've ever been on holiday in the seaside town of Wimple, in the borough of Homburg, in the district of Fedora-on-Fez, but, if you have, you'll know that Wimple is a town totally obsessed with hats. If you've been, you'll have noticed that half of the population wears hats, and half doesn't; and you'll also have noticed that the half that doesn't wear hats also doesn't wear normal clothes, but instead wears potato sacks, often dyed in very bright colours, perhaps to draw attention to the fact that they don't have hats.

Perhaps, if you've visited Wimple, you might have decided to have a day at the beach but, when you arrived with your towel and inflatable duck, you discovered that the beach was already littered with people in colourful potato sacks, feebly flopping about on the sand and being washed out to sea. Or you might have seen them lying helplessly on railway tracks or rolling off of cliffs or into traffic.

The reason for this strange behaviour is because fully half of the people of Wimple are oppressed, plain and simple. They are the have-nots, and what they don't have are hats. They're hat-nots and, in Wimple, if you don't have a hat, you don't have anything.

In olden times, if you didn't have a hat, the law said that you couldn't vote, or own property, or get a job, or be prime minister. And back then, the people *with* hats were often *very* mean to the people *without* hats. Being mean seemed totally justifiable at the time because their bible said that in the beginning was the word, and the word was Hat. The holy book said that God created a person with a hat *first* (with a chinstrap to hold it on), but then felt sorry for him because he was alone and needed a friend; so God put the man with the hat to sleep, took the chinstrap off the man's hat, and created the second person. But the second person didn't have a hat, only a chinstrap, which later became the drawstring of the very first potato sack.

Sometime later, the ancient philosopher Hairistotle said that people without hats had heads shaped like macadamia nuts, fewer teeth, and colder blood. It was just a fact and went unchallenged for thousands of years until somebody checked.

And then, fortunately, there was a millenary revolution and the people *without* hats were given rights fully equal to their hatted brethren and sistren. Hurrah! Unfortunately however, even after they had full rights guaranteed by the law, the hatless people of Wimple were *still* oppressed—this time, not by an unfair justice system, but by a powerful, invisible, omnipresent force. This powerful, invisible, omnipresent force was called The Hatriarchy, and it was, as they said in Wimple, a total snood.

(A snood is a kind of ethereal hairnet and is despised by all citizens of Wimple as it is nothing but a mesh bag, worn on the head *like* a hat, *but not itself a hat*. This goes against nature—it is an abomination and therefore morally wrong. Thus if something is deemed to be a total snood, it is both morally wrong and hard to see, plus either the thing itself, and/or any argument made to justify the thing itself, is by definition full of holes.)

I hope that, if you did indeed vacation in Wimple, you didn't see any tourists from other towns who sometimes go there for the express purpose of teasing the unfortunate hatless. You'll sometimes find gangs of tourists cat-calling the potato-sack people, or misgendering them, or calling them by a name that's old fashioned and outdated, just to watch them colourfully roll into the quicksand provided by society for just that purpose. It's cruel but, as one tourist explained to me recently, "They just make it so easy." Perhaps, but it's still a snoodly thing to do and should be treated as the hat crime it is.

If you've not visited Wimple but, instead, you actually live there, you've probably had many a glass of caffeinated lemonade from the caffeinated lemonade franchise that was begun there long ago. It is to this caffeinated lemonade franchise we now turn our attention, and to the two brothers who began it.

Timmy and Victor Sitting-Duck were two 13-year-old potato-sack hat-nots who lived with their parents, Mark and Patsy Sitting-Duck, and their pet scapegoat. The family had lived most of their lives in a cardboard box under a bridge but, when they got the goat, they realized that he needed a cardboard box of his own, and so they moved to a bigger bridge with *two* boxes and room for a family to grow. Mr and Mrs Sitting-Duck were in the sign-making business and what they made were all of the signs for all of the rallies and demonstrations protesting the Hatriarchy. They also devised all of the chants for the attendees to recite in unison at the rallies. *Heave ho, heave ho, the Hatriarchy's got to go!* That sort of thing, although over the years the various chants had grown to impressive length and often ended with:

Down with dehumanization!

Down with hatless degradation!

Down with floccinaucinihilipilification!

Give me an F!

F!

Give me an L!

L!

Give me an O

O!

And so on. The rallies always lasted some time but everyone enjoyed them and looked forward to the next.

One day, little Timmy rolled into a well, as was his custom, and waited patiently to be rescued. As he lay there in the muck, he began to feel bored and disgruntled and, for the first time ever, thought that surely there must be something better to do. He decided to climb out of the well himself, which he found very difficult but entirely possible, and sought out his ironically named brother Victor.

“Can’t we do anything actually interesting?” asked Timmy.

"No, we're oppressed," said Victor, who was literally nit-picking.

"Well I just climbed out of a well," said Timmy, and Victor looked up in surprise.

"How?"

"I just did it," Timmy replied, and Victor shook his head in disbelief. "You're forgetting our thousands of years of oppression. You're forgetting the Hatriarchy."

"I know," replied Timmy, "but I'm sick of it. Aren't you?"

"Of course, but there's nothing we can do about it."

"We could go to a protest."

"Nah."

"We could think up slogans."

"Boring."

"Make signs?"

Victor didn't bother to answer.

So the two young potato-sack hat-nots just sat in the dirt, under the bridge, flicking nits into a rusty bucket.

Some time later, Timmy heard a cry from atop the bridge. He couldn't quite make out what the person was saying, but it sounded like "Lemonade! Lemonade!" Timmy walked up the embankment and there, on the other side of the road, just off to one side, was a little potato-sack kid who'd set up his very own lemonade stand. "Lemonade!" he was yelling, but as it was a six-lane highway with a 110K speed limit, it was difficult to hear him and business was slow. Timmy watched for a while as the cars and trucks zoomed past him at a terrifying clip, and when the unfortunate child eventually put his little fists over his eyes, burst into tears, gave up, and abandoned the stand, Timmy raced across the road, grabbed the stand with one hand and the jug of lemonade with the other, and trundled awkwardly back.

"Victor!" Timmy shouted, "I've got an idea!"

Victor didn't bother to look up.

"It's this! *Look!*" Victor did. "It's a lemonade stand!"

“So?”

“So you know the saying!”

“What saying?”

“THE saying! When life gives you a lemonade stand...”

Victor began to catch on.

And so, despite the Hatriarchy, Timmy and Victor set up shop—not on the six-lane highway above their bridge, but just a little ways away, where there were lots of pedestrians, and not much shade, for several blocks.

Later that day, when they returned home and showed their parents the money they’d earned, their mother looked sad and remarked that life was terribly unfair, and if only they’d had hats they could have earned twice as much. The boys wanted to make some more lemonade and see how much they could sell in a day, but their father insisted that the boys put their stand away since there was a rally that evening protesting a lack of opportunities for potato-sack people.

The next day however, the boys decided to set up their stand once again, but this time they decided to give it a name. “Why don’t we just combine our names and call it that?” said Victor, and Timmy agreed, flipping a coin to see whose name would come first. Victor won the toss, and from then on, their lemonade stand was called by Victor and Timmy’s names, shortened for ease. Vic and Tim’s. *Victims*.

It was a hit. Not only was the lemonade tasty and sweet (though also sour—a symbol of the lives of the hatless) but everyone wanted to do everything they could for the two unfortunate potato-sack kids and their pet scapegoat, who quickly became their mascot. (Their logo was, naturally, a play on their last name; a duck, sitting.) It was just so unusual in Wimple to see the hatless showing any initiative—not because they were lazy or stupid, but such was the power of the almighty Hatriarchy. It engulfed them in a fearsome stranglehold that was impossible to break free of. And what made it harder to vanquish was that the Hatriarchy wasn’t even located in any particular institutions (they had all outlawed the Hatriarchy long ago) and it didn’t even

exist in individuals, as no serious person supported the Hatriarchy anymore. (There were always a few noisy exceptions of course, but they were all dumdots and everybody knew it, except the Hatriarchs themselves, who spoke of “heritage” and “tradition” like a caveman might speak nostalgically of clam-and-bumblebee razors, bird hedge clippers, and woolly mammoth gas pumps.)

No, the horrible Hatriarchy was simply everywhere, like a noxious gas, poisoning everything. That’s why young people were drafted into millinery service, which essentially consisted of becoming a missionary whose job it was to educate everyone about how privileged they were to have a hat—if they had one. These missionaries—zealous and pure—popped up everywhere in order to pontificate relentlessly on the subject, and if a person with a hat dared cross them, they’d swoop onto the heretic with all the enthusiasm of a vulture on a carcass. It could get quite ugly and only ended when the hat-haver apologized profusely, vowed publicly to think the opposite of everything they’d been thinking previously, and was then ritually and actually flushed into the cancellation sewer to much cheering and fireworks.

It was Victor who thought up the idea of putting caffeine in the lemonade. He noticed that, in the mornings, his parents would groan and roll out of their cardboard cottage, in their potato-sack pyjamas, to the communal coffee bucket where they would have to drink two or three cups before they could grunt sentences more complex than “Me coffee now”. Victor had no idea why this might be so, but it occurred to him that if they could figure out how to put caffeine in the lemonade, they might get the grownups addicted and be able to charge twice the price. Like getting out of a well, getting caffeine into lemonade proved to be very difficult but entirely possible (especially after consulting *The Little Book of Potato-Sack Science* by local genius Dr. Spud Russet), and so it was that Victims began selling their special brand of caffeinated lemonade, not at twice the price of regular lemonade, but ten times that.

Thus it was that Victor and Timmy—two unfortunate potato-sack kids—became rich beyond the dreams of avarice.

But before that happened, and just a few days after opening their first caffeinated lemonade stand, a new family moved into a crumpled, discarded cardboard box next to Victor and Timmy's under the bridge. "Go over and meet them—*but be careful*," their mother instructed, and so one day they did, or at least they tried to, but as they approached the new carton in town, two of the inhabitants emerged unexpectedly; and their very presence scared Victor and Timmy so badly that they raced back home, by way of instinctively rolling in their potato sacks to safety.

To say that Victor and Timmy were shocked by what they saw is to put it too mildly. They were positively agog and both of their mouths hung open gormlessly, like two fish; specifically like two boy fish staring at two girl fish for the very first time.

Because out of the box came two girls who appeared to be about the same age as Victor and Timmy. And both of them, it must be said, were very pretty. (They were also *very* smart, but the boys couldn't tell that just from looking.) *But*, to top it all off, on the top of their heads, both of the girls were wearing ... *hats!*

"Mother mother!" Victor and Timmy cried in unison as they rolled through the door and over the goat (who made a pleasing sound, like a whoopee cushion). "The new people next door—they have *hats!*"

"And therefore they are by definition people of great privilege," replied their mother.

The boys looked puzzled. "They don't *look* privileged," they said, and here they were thinking of the girl's rubbish home and the fact that they may have been wearing hats on their heads, but on their feet they wore something that looked like newspapers held together with string.

"Sometimes you can't tell from looking," their mother replied, sagely. "You can't tell from what you see. The Hatriarchy is invisible. That's why it's so powerful."

"Invisible," repeated Timmy. "You mean, almost like it isn't there at all?"

"Almost," his mother replied, and then cuffed him upside the head for coming within a hair's breadth of blasphemy.

And then ... there was a knock at what passed for a door, and Victor and Timmy knew it must be them.

Their mother opened the door.

"Hello," said the taller of the two girls. "We just moved in next door."

The goat bleated. The boys made a similar sound.

"I'm Trilby," said Trilby, "and this is my sister Tam."

The boys were speechless and so their mother said, "It's nice to meet you," and introduced herself, her boys, and the goat.

"Do you want to come out and play?" asked Tam forthrightly. Timmy and Victor—still struck dumb, in both senses of that word—looked at their mother who answered "yes" on their behalf, then shooed them all out the door so that she could have a moment's peace to plan that evening's struggle session.

"Look, we've got some cards," said Trilby. "Shall we have a game?"

Victor got up the nerve to speak. "We don't know any games," he replied.

"We'll teach you," Tam said, and so the two girls spent the next few minutes explaining to the boys about cards, and the rules of Go Fish. Then Trilby dealt five cards to each person and they began the game, or tried to begin at least.

The trouble is, it's never easy playing a game of cards with someone without a hat. The cards are dealt and immediately the hatless players start complaining about their hands and saying how unfair it is that they don't have hands that are as good as the other players. The hatless will refuse to play the hand they are dealt and will insist that everybody put their cards back until the deck is organized so that everyone can be given the exact same cards.

(Sometimes the hatless will even insist on being dealt superior cards by way of historical reparations.) After the cards are dealt again, play resumes but, if by

some miracle anyone with a hat actually wins the game, they are naturally accused of somehow taking unfair advantage. “We should all get exactly the same score! We should all be winners!” the hatless player will proclaim, which is indeed what Timmy said when Tam won by a pair of jacks.

The girls suggested some other games, with similar results, and so they gave up and just sat by the river instead.

“Can I ask you something?” said Trilby to the boys, who by way of entertainment were poking at the earth with a stick. Victor was hoping Trilby might speak directly to him and say something like *Would you mind giving me my first kiss?* but instead, much to his shock and disappointment, she said something truly ignorant and insensitive. “Why don’t you just put on a hat?”

This was a low blow indeed. Could anyone be that obtuse? Had Trilby honestly never studied victimology? Had she never heard of the Hatriarchy? Timmy proceeded to ask.

“Of course I’ve heard of it,” Trilby said. “I just don’t believe in it.”

This stopped Timmy and Victor dead in their tracks. How could she not “believe in it”? What did that even mean? And how could such a nice girl say such a horrible thing? The boys were devastated. And smitten, which is a terrible combination. A crush is one thing—a crush on a girl with a hat—i.e. an oppressor—is another. Victor had heard of Stockholm syndrome—had he and Timmy developed a case of it, he wondered, in the last twenty minutes? (He quickly checked himself for a rash, just in case.)

Timmy began to tremble performatively. “I feel very triggered by what you just said.”

Trilby rolled her eyes. “Well I’m sorry but it’s an honest question—”

“That’s not an apology!” Victor said. Trilby stared blankly. “That’s a snooty thing to say! Timmy, what do you need Trilby to say to help you feel restored?” Both Tam and Trilby’s eyes rolled so hard they almost accidentally did a cartwheel.

Timmy snuffled and suggested a true apology, followed by the chanting of some slogans and the sewing of a logo of a hat, in a circle, with a red slash through it, onto each of the girl's hats.

Tam screwed her face up and said, "That's just confusing," and then asked the most incisive question of all. "What's the matter with you guys anyway? Seriously. You've got a lemonade stand. You make lots of money. You could just *buy* a couple of hats—"

"—as if hats make a difference," Trilby interjected.

"Duh—we're victims!" Victor explained defensively.

"Noble victims!" added Timmy.

"We're noble victims of the Hatriarchy!" they said in unison, as if they'd said it a thousand times before.

"You *think* you are," said Trilby. "but even if that's true—and let's say it is—does it really matter?"

"Well of course it does!" cried Victor.

"Okay, so how is it stopping *you*," continued Trilby, "and I mean *just you personally*—from doing anything you want?"

Victor and Timmy fumed. "Well what's the matter with *you*?" Victor asked angrily. "Why are you bullying us? And why, if you have hats, do you live under a bridge?"

"Because we have no money!" Trilby said, and now it was her turn to be defensive. "Just because we have hats doesn't mean we're any luckier than you are!"

This was sacrilege. Timmy and Victor had never heard anything like it. Their ears burned.

"Why don't you just ignore the Hatriarchy?" Tam asked. "Why not be hat-blind, like us?" And at this, Trilby and Tam took off their hats and tossed them on the ground.

"That's ... that's cultural appropriation!" spat Victor, not really sure if it was or it wasn't, but it seemed like the kind of righteous and powerful thing to say at just that moment. At any rate, Victor and Timmy couldn't listen to anymore

of Trilby and Tam's violent words. Luckily, just then, their mother appeared and invited the girls to that evening's struggle session.

"What would we do there?" Trilby asked.

"Do you like washing other people's feet?" asked their mother.

"No," said Tam in her plainspoken way.

"Then mostly you'd chant slogans, apologize obviously, and then come to terms with the great evil of systemic oppression and with your own fragility and privilege," their mother explained.

"No, that's okay, I think we're good," said Trilby, and here she was saying more than she realized.

But later that evening, after they'd said their prayers, and under the covers of their respective beds, Victor and Timmy quietly considered the terrible things the girls had said, and both of them had horrible nightmares in which they were being chased by hats that were trying to land on their heads, and they had to keep shooing them away in a desperate attempt to hang onto the power that being hatless afforded them.

(By the way, some people say their prayers to Jehovah, also known as The Great *I Am*, but the potato-sack people pray to The Great *Ivan*, who is their patron saint, as he is the lead singer of the greatest band of all time *Men Without Hats*. "Their music really speaks to me," is what any potato-sacker will tell you, "Ideas for Walls" being their most referenced, if least understood, hymn.)

A few days later Timmy and Victor were manning their lemonade stand, which was bigger and better than ever since the government of Capistan had given them a substantial grant available only to potato-sack peoples. Their lemonade was selling by the bucket, they'd been interviewed by all the local TV stations, and loads of police officers had stopped by to get their pictures taken with the boys, and also to apologize for the Hatriarchal dumbos on the force who still occasionally gave the hatless a hard time.

The boys couldn't have been happier—but then Trilby and Tam came by looking, it must be said, extra pretty, which for some reason annoyed the boys no end. Everyone struggled for something to say.

Trilby broke the ice. "Nice day," she said, and Victor, who really wanted to say *You are the most beautiful girl in newspaper-shoes I've ever laid eyes on and I love you* replied instead, "Maybe for you."

"It's the same day for all of us," Tam said, and Victor, like a true potato-sacker, just snorted and shook his head.

"What's that supposed to mean?" Trilby asked, but neither boy replied because neither boy quite knew, it being more emotional stance than reasoned argument.

"Well—this is uncomfortable," said Tam, and Victor interrupted.

"Oh *you're* uncomfortable," he said in a sarcastic tone. "You should try being *us*. We're uncomfortable every single day of our lives, like when we're being—" and here Victor was interrupted by a firefighter giving him a hug.

"Harassed!" Timmy continued, while accepting a ridiculous amount of money for a glass of lemonade.

"Yeah harassed!" Victor said, looking for something worse to add. "Or ..."

"Or murdered!" cried Timmy, getting into the spirit of things. Timmy was about to throw the hatless murder rate from a tiny subsection of the population of Brazil in the girl's faces, as if it applied to Capistan, but before he could get the words out Tam and Trilby had turned to leave.

"It's hopeless, let's go," said Trilby, but as they walked away, Victor shouted, "Oh that's right! Smile to our faces and then exclude us, just because we don't have hats!"

Trilby and Tam—who knew very well they'd shown nothing but goodwill to all hatless peoples and who refused to be cowed—shook their heads and kept on walking.

"I suppose we're not good enough for you!" Timmy shouted. "Aren't you even going to buy some lemonade?"

“What with?” Trilby yelled back over her shoulder and then, turning around, said, “We’re not like that you know. We’re *nice*! We’d never be mean to anyone just because he didn’t have a hat.”

“Oh yeah?” Victor responded, hating himself for saying it. “Well maybe you need to ask yourself why you’re in denial!”

“Maybe you need to ask yourself why you’re so defensive!” yelled Timmy.

“Maybe you need to ask yourself why you’re a potato-sack racist!”

The girls kept on walking but Tam said, under her breath, “Maybe you need to ask yourself why you’re so paranoid and boring.” And here Tam had hit on the crux of the matter.

The two boys scrutinized the girls intently, and longingly, as they faded into the distance.

“Oh man, girls suck,” Victor declared, and Timmy agreed, but that night the nightmares returned and the boys dreamt terrifying dreams of men without hats, and girls without shoes.

It got worse. A few days later many of the hatless were enjoying a rambunctious riot against the Hatriarchy, so Timmy and Victor decided to close up shop for the day and walk down the riverbank to the shores of Lake Capistan. Many of the citizens of Wimple were there, enjoying the sunshine or washing out to sea in their potato-sacks as was there wont—but those many citizens included, as it turned out, Trilby and Tam.

Victor and Timmy felt a sense of some powerful, nameless emotion stirring in them as Trilby passed by, in a bathing cap, on waterskis, laughing and waving. She looked radiant and at ease, which was supremely irritating. Tam was no better. She was sitting on a beach towel, engrossed in a book—but when Trilby good-naturedly yelled out “Hiya boys!” Tam had looked up, spotted Victor and Timmy, and beckoned them over.

As the boys approached, they saw that Tam was sitting there, bold as brass, reading a book by a beloved children’s author that had nevertheless been banned for having a terrible word in it that would, it was said, rot the eyeballs

of anyone who looked at it—even if they couldn't read. It was *that* powerful. Victor and Timmy gasped and put their hands over their eyes. If they'd had pearls, they would have clutched them.

"What's the matter with *you*?" Tam asked for the second time.

"You're reading *THAT BOOK!*" Timmy cried, peaking out from between his fingers (though if the truth be known he was looking, not at the book, but at Tam).

"So? It's a free country," she replied, and here she'd hit on the fundamental difference between these cardboard-box neighbours. Victor and Timmy knew that it was easy for *Tam* to claim that she was free, given her privilege, but that they themselves certainly were *not* free—not in a country where the question was never "Are we being persecuted?" but, rather, "So how are we being persecuted *this time*?" usually followed by a giant sigh. Given the systemic nature of the horrible Hatriarchy, persecution was a given, but Tam could *never* understand this, they knew, because she'd grown up with a hat.

"That's easy for you to say!" Timmy cried, even though what he really wanted to yell was a Shakespearian sonnet about love, and summer's day, and darling buds and whatnot.

"Yeah!" added Victor, who was watching Trilby swerve past again on one ski, his heart palpitating and his thoughts turning in the same direction as Timmy's. "You don't live in our world! You don't have our—" and so distracted was Victor by Trilby's acrobatics that he couldn't remember the exact expression—

"Authentic lived experience!" Timmy said, filling in the faddish term for 'anecdote' that was currently all the rage. "You can't understand what it's like to be us!"

Tam put her book on her towel, turned, and looked Timmy directly in the eye. "Try me," she said.

Timmy felt himself falling to pieces. He wanted to flop on the sand and roll into the sea, like a proud potato-sacker, but he wanted to be with Tam even more. Still, instinctively, he did the salute of his people (shooting his left arm

out straight in front of him, twirling it in circles, then bending it at the elbow and putting his hand flat on top of his head to symbolize the absence of a hat).

“Est semper de hats omni tempore. Heu!” Timmy said slowly, repeating the latin slogan of the potato-sack people.

“Which means?” asked Tam.

“It’s *always* about hats *all the time*. Oy!” Victor responded on auto-pilot, in a dreamy, far-away voice, as Trilby let go of the rope and coasted elegantly to shore.

Tam clucked her tongue and shook her head. “That’s just dumb. Not everything’s about hats you know.”

“It’s the most important thing,” Timmy replied.

“Is it though?” Tam argued back. “What about money? I think money’s pretty important. What about being funny, or creative, or athletic, or smart? What about being beautiful? Isn’t that a big advantage?” Tam batted her eyelashes like Lucy in a Peanuts cartoon.

Victor thought he might faint as he stared at Trilby emerging from the lake like some kind of young Venus emerging from a clamshell. “Not as important as having a hat,” he said, but even as he said it, some part of him—and we need not specify exactly which part—knew that now he was just outright lying.

“Listen to me!” Tam shouted in total exasperation and again looked Timmy right in the eye. “You’re an individual! Got that? An *individual*! The potato sack doesn’t *define* you! Having a hat or not having a hat—it only matters as much as you think it does!”

“That’s not true,” Timmy argued. “You know the studies—I’m less likely to be hired than you—”

“—Yeah, okay, *fine*,” Tam interrupted, “but my point is that we *all* have disadvantages. You don’t have a hat—I don’t have shoes. You think I can get a job without shoes?”

Timmy didn’t know what to say. He was so conditioned to believe that the hatless were the ones having a hard time, it had never occurred to him that a person *with* a hat might be having a hard time too.

Trilby approached, pulled off her swim cap, put on a sunhat, and greeted everyone; and although Victor could see that she had her lovely long hair done in a way that, traditionally, was only ever worn by the hatless, and so this really *was* cultural appropriation, for sure, and he was absolutely bursting to say as much, it was as if the string from her string bikini had him literally tongue-tied at just that particular moment.

“Come on, we’d better get going,” Trilby said to Tam, breaking the boys hearts. “Besides I’m dying of thirst.”

“You could come to our lemonade stand!” Timmy blurted out to his own surprise as Victor nodded enthusiastically. “And you wouldn’t have to pay,” he added, sheepishly. “It could be on us.”

The girls were taken aback, and although Tam whispered something a bit snarky like *That’s more like it*, to herself, Trilby smiled and said thank you, and the girls put on their beach coverups and packed up their towels and books, putting the lot in a plastic grocery bag.

And then the four young Capistanis walked together along the riverbank and, for the first time, had something resembling a civilized conversation. Tam explained about the book, and told them that although the author had used an old-fashioned word, it was just an old-fashioned word, nothing more, and it had no power in and of itself, only what we allowed it to have, and it certainly wouldn’t make anyone’s head explode. It just didn’t have to be that big a deal, she thought, besides which she didn’t believe in censorship. Trilby explained about her hair and said that she just liked to wear it that way and that, in her opinion, imitation really is the sincerest form of flattery. It was okay to look at things in a pleasant way, she said, rather than assume that everything was born from the worst of intentions.

“But do you really not believe in the Hatriarchy?” asked Timmy, who was still shocked by Trilby’s violent opinion.

“Listen—I get that people with hats ruled the world for thousands of years,” she replied, “and it’s only been a few decades that you’ve been allowed to vote, and marry people with hats—”

"And be recognized as persons under the law," Tam added, remembering her civics lessons.

"Exactly," said Trilby. "But that was *ages* ago. Seriously. How long are you going to keep guilt-tripping people with hats? Plus, even if the Hatriarchy's still out there, it doesn't mean that *you* can't do whatever you want." They were nearing the street with the boys' lemonade stand. Trilby slowed down, the group stopped and looked at her, at which point she delivered the great message. "You *don't* need a hat. You don't *not* need a hat. You're free either way. You just need a dream, and that's what you've got with your lemonade stand." And then she smiled.

And even though the boys disagreed—or, at least, imagined that they *should* disagree, on principle—Trilby had the most infectious smile ever, and they just couldn't help themselves. They smiled back.

Their smiles were short-lived. The four of them rounded the corner and what awaited them was a terrible sight.

The lemonade stand lay in ruins—smashed beyond all recognition—and everything of value had been stolen by rioters. The jugs were gone, the glasses were gone, the money box was gone, and all that was left was the sign, trampled and crushed, of the business that once was.

Victims.

"But we're potato-sack people!" Timmy cried, incredulous, picking through the rubble. "We're the good guys!"

Trilby and Tam gave each other a look. Then Trilby walked up to a house and borrowed a broom and a dustpan, and asked for some garbage bags, after which Tam knelt down on the sidewalk and began picking through the debris while Trilby swept the sidewalk clean. Meanwhile Victor and Timmy raged.

"How could they do this?" lamented Victor, kicking at a broken lemonade jug.

"I wouldn't take it personally," Trilby replied. "I expect mobs don't care much about who they're mobbing."

"But everyone *knows* about our stand," said Timmy. "Everyone *knows* we're potato-sack people."

"Which means," said Victor conspiratorially, "that probably it wasn't actually potato-sackers doing the mobbing. It was probably Mad Hatters!"

"Excuse me?" asked Trilby and Tam.

"Don't you get it?" said Victor. "The rioters were actually people with hats—disguised as us!"

"To make us look bad!" added Timmy.

Tam looked up. "You're not serious," she said in her deadpan way.

Victor pounded a fist into the other palm. "It's the only thing that makes sense," he explained, pacing, but before he could expound further, a rowdy mob of people wearing potato-sacks rounded the corner and headed their way.

They aimed right for Trilby and Tam.

"Look, we've got ourselves a couple of hat-tramps!" exclaimed one of the potato-sackers, noticing the girls' posh heads and their scraggly feet. The mob circled around the two girls as Victor and Timmy were pushed to the margins.

"What do we have here?" the ringleader said, seizing the grocery bag away from Tam and dumping it upside down on the sidewalk that Trilby had just swept.

"Look!" someone yelled, picking up the book that Tam had been reading at the beach and holding it aloft. "It's that banned book! The one with *that* word in it!" The mob gasped and chanted. "Snood! Snood! Snood!"

"And look at her hair!" someone else screamed pointing at Trilby. "That's *our* hairstyle! She stole it!" The mob chanted some more and hands reached out as if to snatch Trilby's hair right off her head.

"Make them do the salute!" someone in the crowd yelled, saluting, and soon everyone's hands were on top of their heads, as if playing a game of Simon Says. Trilby and Tam looked at each other and, moving closer together, and holding hands, calmly stated, "We don't do salutes."

The crowd rumbled. "Make them say the slogan!" someone yelled.

"Yeah!" the crowd responded. "Sack lives matter! Sack lives matter!"

"Well *of course* they matter," Trilby interrupted over the chanting crowd. "That should be obvious to anyone."

"Every life matters," said Tam, at which the crowd positively erupted.

"We don't do slogans either!" Trilby yelled above the mob, at which point someone yelled, "They don't do slogans!" and the mob chanted, "Silence is violence! Silence is violence!"

This was pushing Tam too far. "OMG," she said, spelling the letters O M G. "Silence is the *opposite* of violence—*seriously!*"

The mob went nuts. Two of them grabbed the girls from behind as the ringleader pulled some brown, wrinkly, blobby things out of his sack and shoved them in the girls' faces.

"HOW MANY POTATOES ARE THERE? HOW MANY POTATOES ARE THERE?" he screamed at them, over and over, and the sisters answered in unison.

"There are four potatoes! There are four potatoes!"

"THERE ARE FIVE POTATOES!" the crowd shrieked. "THERE ARE FIVE POTATOES! SNOOD SNOOD SNOOD!"

Standing at the edge of the crowd, Victor and Timmy really couldn't see the four potatoes the ringleader was holding, and they really weren't sure what had happened in the end—or, at least, that's what they reported. All they knew, they later told a police officer in a panicky tone, is that when the dust had cleared the mob was gone, so were Trilby and Tam. They'd been taken away by a bunch of angry potato-sackers, or possibly Mad Hatters, and Victor and Timmy had been helpless to stop them.

The boys felt wretched. "If only we had hats!" Victor lamented later on as he picked the girl's belongings lovingly off of the sidewalk and put them back in the plastic grocery bag. "If only we weren't victims!"

Timmy looked thoughtful. "It sort of felt like Trilby and Tam were victims that time," he said, but Victor snorted and said, "No that's impossible, they have hats."

Timmy didn't want to say anything, but what he was thinking, in his heart of hearts, was that maybe he wasn't actually helpless. Maybe, he thought, I'm not a victim; maybe I'm a coward.

Timmy put the thought from his mind and, carrying the girls' bag and their *Victims* sign, they shuffled slowly in the direction of their cardboard box. When they got home they found the goat, symbolically made him take the blame for everything, and drove him like the scapegoat he was into the wilderness (which was actually just a patch of dirt beside the bridge but it would do in a pinch). They felt a little better after blaming the goat, but not as much as usual.

"Maybe we'd better tell their parents," Timmy said.

"Won't the police have done that?" asked Victor.

"Just in case," Timmy replied, and so he and Victor walked to the cardboard box next door and knocked. There was no answer. "Maybe we should just throw their bag inside," Victor suggested and Timmy agreed, but when they opened the cardboard door just enough to toss it in, they saw that Trilby and Tam were sitting on the dirt floor, wedged in a corner at the back of the box, holding onto each other for dear life, wide-eyed and shaking with terror.

"You're here!" Victor cried with relief, an emotion which flooded over both boys as they raced to their beloved Trilby and Tam. They had never been happier in their lives to see anyone and, as they approached, they realized to their horror that Tam's face was bloodied with a split lip and a black eye, and that Trilby's beautiful long hair had been cut right off and was sticking out of her head like an unkempt hedgehog's.

"What have they done to you?" Timmy exclaimed frantically, and at that moment he wanted nothing more than to sweep Tam into his manly-ish arms and keep her safe from anything that could harm her ever again. Victor felt the same about Trilby and he put his arms out to her—and, with his arms, his heart. Yes they were only youths, but so were Romeo and Juliet, Harry and Ginny, Bella and Edward, that hatless ginger kid and the girl wearing a cloche in *Love Actually*—and at that moment both boys had a vision of their destiny—

a destiny that absolutely for *certain* included Trilby and Tam, a wildly successful business, and a double wedding.

“GET OUT!” Tam screamed hysterically as the girls dug their heels into the earth and backed up even further against the wall. “GET OUT, GET OUT, GET OUT!”

“LEAVE US ALONE!” Trilby yelled as she kicked her legs, one of which made contact with Victor’s shin. “You ... you jerks! [Trilby wasn’t used to insulting people, so wasn’t very good at it.] You *betrayed* us!”

“Ow, no!” said Victor, rubbing his leg and desperate to explain. “Those people—we didn’t even know them!”

“We tried to help!” Timmy protested. “But we don’t have hats so—”

“OH MY GOD SHUT UP ABOUT HATS!” Tam exploded, one of her legs also kicking out (because it had looked so satisfying when Trilby did it) and connecting with one of Timmy’s shins. “We get it! We’re not stupid! You don’t have to go on about it all the time!”

“But the Hatriarchy!” Victor cried reflexively.

“Urgh!!!” Trilby almost growled in frustration. “Why can’t you get this? You’re not a hostage—you’re not a prisoner because you were born without a hat. It’s not about hats at all—it’s about what kind of a person you are!”

“And you guys are total shits!” Tam added, bluntly.

“Now GET OUT!” Trilby yelled in a frenzy and, rising from her corner, strong-armed the boys out the door.

It had all happened so fast. Victor and Timmy’s heads were spinning, and their shinbones aching, and they walked with their heads bowed back to their own cardboard box, utterly devastated and ashamed.

The girls and their parents moved the next day. Victor and Timmy had no idea where they went, and Trilby and Tam weren’t inclined to leave a forwarding address.

In the years that followed, Timmy and Victor built their lemonade business up into the corporate wonder everyone knows today. They became global celebrities and went from *Victims Lemonade*, to *Sitting-Duck Airlines*, to their own line of *Scapegoat Spaceships* that took the sins of humanity off the Earth entirely and dumped them in a globular cluster near the constellation Scapegoatus Capricornus. Their parents continued in the Hatriarchal protest business, which was booming as donations poured in from big-hearted potato-sack allies just trying to do the right thing. The Sitting-Ducks moved as a family to a 66,000 square foot cardboard box on Lake Capistan with acres of land for their scapegoat. They were living the life of hatless oppressed billionaires, and although by any measure they had a life of comfort and ease, they could never be truly happy, of course, while there was still so much work to do in the exhausting, never-ending battle against the Hatriarchy.

Despite their global billionaire status, Victor and Timmy thought about Trilby and Tam every day and, truth be told, everything they did in their personal and business lives was really for them. They could never stop loving them and both men imagined that when the business got big enough, Trilby and Tam would come back, and they would shower them with shoes, and billion dollar bills, and anything else their hearts desired.

One day, Timmy and Victor caught wind of an important protest that was happening on the shores of Lake Capistan and they decided to lend their celebrity status to the event. It was the first of its kind—a confrontation between both people-*with*-hats and people-*without*-hats on the one side, and on the other side a brand new group that had been formed to oppose them both. This group was a terrible, destabilizing threat to everyone in Wimple and they were known, simply, as The Fascinators.

Fascinators, in case you don't know, are miniature hat-like accessories known for their range of individual styles. Some fascinators look like pie plates with butterflies and feathers; others have netting and ribbons and bows and beads and clocks and mini-pagodas and bee circuses. A fascinator can be

whatever you want it to be, and (according to Fascinator doctrine) you're free to wear it wherever you want to wear it on your body. You can wear a fascinator decorated with little shoes, say, on your head—or you can wear a fascinator decorated with little hats, say, on your feet. The Fascinators, then, were a group for *all* people—people with hats and people without hats alike—who as individuals were free to design their own fascinator, that expressed their own personal style and values, and then to wear them together, in freedom, equality, and solidarity.

Timmy and Victor lead the march toward The Fascinators who were proceeding along the Lake Capistan shore. The citizens of Wimple were carrying punchy signs and banners manufactured en masse by Sitting-Duck Industries. Timmy and Victor held the biggest banner between them, a banner which read *Fascinator??? Assassinator!!!* because The Fascinators were surely trying to wipe out the serious work of uprooting and ending The Hatriarchy. The Hatriarchy was, The Fascinators believed, not even an actual thing but, rather, the work of imagination run amok; and after all of these decades of progress since the great millinery revolution, they said, there were surely more sophisticated and more accurate explanations for why some troubles persisted other than A Big Bad Invisible Force. Hats were not an accurate indicator of privilege, they claimed, and there was no convenient divide between hat-people and potato-sack people as oppressor and oppressed, besides which misfortune comes to us all, and we're all equally deserving of understanding, tolerance and compassion. And, most importantly, they asserted, *Men Without Hats* is a band for *all* peoples, not just potato-sackers, as their scripture-based lyrics clearly promote true inclusivity and the freedom to be whoever you want to be by doing your own thing—you can dance *IF* you want to—and by thinking your own thoughts. *You want a room with a view? You need ideas for walls.*

It was propaganda of the vilest sort.

The Fascinators and the citizens of Wimple marched toward each other and halted about an arm's length away. The two lead Fascinators held a sign

between them that was as wide as Timmy and Victor's, and it read *Collaborator, Negotiator, Emancipator, Fascinator!* They were holding their banner high, obscuring their faces, but when the two sides stopped their advance, The Fascinators slowly and dramatically let their banner drop.

And there, standing before Victor and Timmy, were the very founders of The Fascinator movement.

It was Trilby and Tam.

Victor and Timmy let go of their banner. It wafted to the ground in what felt like slow motion as the two men gazed rapturously on the faces of their life-long loves.

"Hiya boys," said Trilby and she smiled that infectious smile that Victor had longed to see for these many years. "Fancy meeting you here."

Both Timmy and Victor were spellbound, and speechless—much like that fateful day all those years ago when their mother had introduced them at the door of their cardboard cottage. Trilby was still the taller of the two, and she wore her lovely long hair straight down to her waist, with a fascinator that looked like a mini-newspaper pinned to her shoe. Tam had a fascinator that looked like an open book and she wore it proudly, like a butterfly perched on the side of her head. Both women were strikingly beautiful (and also, of course, strikingly brilliant but, as before, Timmy and Victor couldn't tell that just from looking). All they knew was that for years they'd rehearsed what they would say to these two girls, now women, when they finally met again, and they knew they'd begin with an effusive apology for failing them all those years ago when the mob had gotten ahold of them and hurt them so terribly. That day still haunted Victor and Timmy, and shamed them, and they'd spent years examining their learned helplessness, and beefing up at the gym just in case, and imagining how, someday, they'd make everything right. And, after apologizing, they'd go on to declarations of love, as they'd rehearsed, after which they'd whisk their sweethearts away on their private jet to their private yacht moored beside their private island. There they'd have a private wedding with just the captain, their parents, and the goat. It would be perfect.

Sadly, before they even had a chance to say so much as *hi*, someone in a sack launched a potato from a cannon. It travelled through the air making a sort of whizzing sound—wwhhhhhizzzzzzzzzz—and then THWAK!!!! hit Trilby clean between the eyes, knocking her flat.

There was gasping, screaming, and cheering.

Victor was aghast. A split second before he'd been caught up in a dreamworld of flowers, champagne and happily-ever-afters; now his one true love had been hit in the head by a potato. It was all wrong. Instinctively Victor moved to help his beloved but was screeched at by Fascinators who surrounded their leader like a flock of starlings and carried her off to the back of the brigade.

"STOP!" Tam yelled, attempting to put an immediate end to any hint of violence. "We come in peace, as individuals, representing our common humanity! We seek to overcome the forces that divide us! Through reason, civility, and the rule of law we—"

Bam!!! This time it was Tam who went down like a sack of potatoes.

It was Timmy's turn to be aghast but he didn't even have time to react. The potato-sackers had been spoiling for a fight. If there was one group they resented more than people with hats, it was people with tiny, ridiculous accessories messing with their rights as a special interest group.

Mayhem ensued. To their credit, this time Victor and Timmy fought valiantly, their years of gym membership, and eventual worldwide gym ownership, finally paying off. They tried desperately to get to Trilby and Tam, fighting the unruly mob, but the situation was made so much worse by the fact that, just as all hell was breaking loose, a reparations plane passed by overhead dropping giant sacks of money onto Victor and Timmy and anyone else without a hat. Ever since the millinery revolution, whenever the government of Capistan caught wind of a gathering of potato-sackers, they'd send a reparations plane which would dump potato sacks of coins, each sack containing a card with a sad-face emoji signed by the Prime Minister. Occasionally they'd even dump furniture, household goods, baked items, and

grand pianos, with predictable results. Some felt this was a micro aggression on the part of the prime minister—“Here, take this!” he could be heard yelling from the reparations plane as it dumped another SUV on an unsuspecting potato-sacker, but nothing could ever be proven.

Fighting a mob or, in this case, two mobs, is never easy—not even for a couple of ultra-fit, gym-franchise-owning billionaires. The details of the battle aren’t important—all that need be said is that, once again, when the dust had cleared, Victor and Timmy found that Trilby and Tam, and indeed every last Fascinator, had been seized by the mob and officially cancelled.

It was the ultimate nightmare. Victor and Timmy reeled from the pain of their injuries and from the even worse pain of losing Trilby and Tam. *Again*. And yet, as humiliating and hellish as the situation was, there were still more horrors to follow.

Later that very day—just after Victims and the entire Sitting-Duck Corporation had been evaluated as the third-most valuable corporation in the entire universe—the little potato-sack kid from whom they’d stolen the very first lemonade stand suddenly appeared on the world stage, demanding compensation. None was offered and so, not long thereafter, he took Victor and Timmy to court in a millinery tribunal and what turned out to be the trial of the century. Some people said it was an outrage, but the potato-sack kid made a powerful case, which was that *if* his original lemonade stand hadn’t been stolen, he would have done *exactly* as Victor and Timmy had done, and therefore everything that was now Sitting Duck Industries would be his. The judge (who’d once joined a Sitting Duck Gym and wound up in small claims court trying to cancel his membership, to no avail) thought this made total sense and thus ruled in favour of the poor little potato-sack kid who’d had the idea in the first place. Victor and Timmy—the greatest billionaire potato-sack success story of all time—lost everything.

And so the two hatless has-beens and their parents were forced to move out of their 66,000 square foot cardboard mansion back to their box under the

bridge. Tragically the goat died from the sheer weight of Victor and Timmy's shame; thus, going forward, they had no one to blame but themselves.

A few months later, a new family moved into Trilby and Tam's old place next door and, as before, their mother suggested that Victor and Timmy go and meet them. The two men did as they were told and went next door and knocked. As they waited for the door to open, they imagined that Trilby and Tam would answer and that they would sweep them into a romantic embrace and whisk them off to—and that's where the fantasy ended, not only because they owned, in total, a box, but also because the person who answered the door was an insane looking, disheveled, toothless old man with a perpetual squint and a gammy leg. The old man didn't even bother to say hello but, instead, turned his back on his visitors and limped back to whatever it was he was doing, all the while muttering to himself like a lunatic.

Victor and Timmy introduced themselves.

"You don't need to tell me who you are—I saw the trial—you're cheats and swindlers," the old man said, squinting and scowling. "I'm surprised you haven't been cancelled. I could do it you know, and I would, in a heartbeat."

Victor and Timmy looked confused. "Excuse me?" Timmy asked. "What do you mean you could cancel us?"

"Just what I said!" the old crank replied in an ornery tone. "Who do you think invented the whole system? Me, that's who! I invented the cancellation sewer and I could flush you into it lickety split!"

Victor and Timmy were stunned. Everyone knew the name of the great man before them; it was Capistan's very own potato-sack genius—Spud Russet—revered worldwide for his various discoveries and inventions and for his seminal work *The Little Book of Potato-Sack Science*—and he was living in the box next door!

"You're our hero!" Victor exclaimed, remembering that it was Dr. Russet's book that had explained the concept of citrus caffeination which was so pivotal to the success of their previous business. Dr. Russet just grunted and

continued to fiddle with some copper wire, galvanized nails, uranium 238, and a potato.

“But what exactly *is* the cancellation sewer?” Timmy asked, and here Dr. Russet was only too happy to launch into a detailed explanation.

Now—many people have heard of black holes—these are the gold standard holewise in cosmological circles—but brown holes are just as important, though not nearly as popular for some reason, and it was a brown hole that Dr. Russet had discovered under a box one particular annus horribilis. And that particular brown hole became the basis for the entire cancellation system as it transported irredeemable individuals to the valley of the damned where all of the shunned go to be forgotten by society.

In the midst of Dr. Russet’s explanation, Timmy suddenly slapped his palm to his forehead and yelled, “Of course! *This* is the way!”

“What’s the way?” asked Victor.

“The way back to Trilby and Tam!” he cried and then, turning to Dr. Russet, cried, “Do it! Cancel us! We’re okay to go!”

“Oh that’s what you want, is it?” Dr. Russet asked in a sarcastic tone. “You want to be damned, do you? Damned to what can only be described as a living hell?” And shortly thereafter, after an enthusiastic YES from both men, and after quickly answering one last question from Timmy, Dr. Russet was only too happy to oblige.

Now the thing about hell—and here I mean hell as one finds it in the afterlife—is that all of the cool people are there, a fact that’s often pointed out by people like you who suspect they might be going to hell themselves. “All of my friends are there!” you say, chirpily, as if perpetually burning in a lake of fire with the people you just happen to have met in the past is somehow superior to partying in a mansion in heaven with the people you’ll just happen to meet in the future—but never mind that now. The fact is that all of the smartest, funniest, most interesting people who have ever lived *are* there. Scientists, rock stars, comedians, Christopher Hitchens—everyone’s in hell having the time of their lives. That’s why nobody’s really afraid of the afterlife

anymore; when it was only ancient people, with their poor fashion choices, boring lute recitals, and implausible stories about talking donkeys and foreskins, Satan threw them into the lake of fire out of sheer boredom and who can blame him—but now George Carlin's there and Satan can't get enough.

What's true of real hell is also true of cancellation hell—eventually all of the most interesting, honest, truth-seeking, reality-based people end up there. And also, of course, some real shitheads, and that was Victor and Timmy's surefire ticket in. The actual experience of travelling through the hole was, of course, unpleasant, as it was full of hot air and inhabited by cutthroat cancellation trappers and scavengers, plus it served as a deafening echo-chamber for all of the voices of the eternally offended—but once they'd arrived in hell things weren't so bad as the two men were quickly forgotten, the trappers and scavengers having quickly moved on to some fresh outrage.

As they wandered about in a place much like where you are now (only with the strong, fragrant aroma of freedom in the air), their one and only mission was to find Trilby and Tam, and then to beg for forgiveness, a date, and their hands in marriage. They noticed, quite near hell's entrance, a craft table set up for people to make their own fascinators and, by way of honouring their lost loves, Victor and Timmy made two themselves. Victor's had what looked like a tiny pair of crossed water-skis on it, and Timmy's had a tiny book with a bad word in it, and both men wore them fastened to their potato-sacks, like talismans, over their hearts.

The men wandered like mendicants—they knew not wither they went, nor for how long they strayed. They asked all and sundry if they'd seen the two most beautiful women in the world, but soon realized they'd have to be more specific after being directed repeatedly to the same twin Capistani supermodels (who'd been blacklisted when someone dug up an ultrasound photo of them in utero, looking racist).

Finally it happened—one day, across what Victor and Timmy had hoped would be a grassy meadow but in reality was a strip mall parking lot—they

saw Trilby and Tam going into a bookstore. Barrelling across the concrete wasteland like a couple of potato-sack Usain Bolts, the two men reached the shop and, in their ardour, practically ripped the door off its hinges.

And there they were: the women of their dreams, directly in front of them, their backs turned, in the best-seller section, each one holding a copy of *Victims: Love's Lemonade Labours Lost LOL!* by the obnoxious potato-sack kid who'd stolen their business. Victor and Timmy willed them to turn around and eventually, like magic, and also after Victor had cleared his throat about a dozen times, they did.

As with the great battle forever known as The Hat & Sack Fascinator Clash, the details of the reunion between Victor and Timmy and the loves of their lives aren't important; suffice it to say that nothing happened exactly as the men had hoped or planned and that protestations of love had to be delayed for quite some time as both women had rather a lot to say, and to throw; and even in the days that followed when the two men occasionally found a tiny crack in the conversation to insert their speeches on the subject of two hearts beating as one and soulmates joined for all eternity and so on, they were surprised to find that their feelings were not only *not* reciprocated, but appeared to be inversely proportional, as the more they emoted at the two women, the more likely the women were to remember that time they kicked the boys in the shins, and how good it felt, and to do it again.

Nevertheless, over the weeks that followed, Victor and Timmy made headway, as did Trilby and Tam in their fight for equality and fairness for all people, whether they had a hat, or not. It wasn't clear who had the harder task: two men attempting to win the hearts of two women who thought they were joyless, pathetic, self-centred, and tedious; or two women attempting to change civilization by bringing down the entire millinery industrial complex. What *can* be said is that, as the days wore on, Victor and Timmy's task became easier, while Trilby and Tam's became much, much harder.

Because the millinery industrial complex had become monstrous as people had discovered, not the truth about the Hatriarchy—truth didn't come into it

—but something else instead. People had discovered fracking, but not fracking for oil—now they fracked for guilt, as there were veritable mountains of cash to be made by hitting a rich vein of innocent people who could be made to feel that everything was somehow their fault—even things they’d never dream of doing, or had never heard of, or that happened before they were born. The whole millinery industrial complex was fuelled by this psychological fact, and as it grew day-by-day, and more and more people found jobs in millinery intelligence, logistics, and supply chain management, so too did the wealth of those who profited from it until there was an entire class of people whose livelihood depended on its robustness, solvency, and permanence.

Trilby and Tam, the Fascinators, and scores of other citizens of cancellation hell, were having none of it. They knew perfectly well that the the Hatriarchy had been outlawed decades ago—now it was time to wipe out the last traces of discrimination on the basis of hats by (and this was the radical idea) not discriminating on the basis of hats. No quotas, no diversity schemes, no special treatment under the law. From now on there would only be individuals, united with one another in their common humanity, ever advancing in freedom and peace.

In that spirit, Trilby and Tam organized a mighty march out of hell, aided especially by Timmy, whose last question to Dr. Russet had been *how the heck does a person get out of there?* In fact, Timmy and Victor were instrumental in planning the march, not only because they wanted to win favour with Trilby and Tam, but also because they’d enrolled in a special counter-indoctrination class (along with their parents, who’d come to hell looking for them); and so, over time, they came to believe in this grand procession as much as any Fascinator. Gradually the Sitting-Ducks were deprogrammed out of their maladaptive belief in themselves as victims who should wear sacks and live in a box, to a belief that freedom was theirs for the taking, if they would only reach out and grab it. Timmy and Victor intended to do just that, and so did their parents, who immediately found another cause to support and began devising chants. (*Down with dyslexia! Give me an L!*)

And so they marched. The Fascinators and their allies advanced out of the bowels of hell, through the town of Wimple, to the seat of the national government of Capistan in the megacity of Duncce. Standing on the steps of the capitol building, Trilby and Tam gave a rousing speech, exhorting humanity to stop it with the hats already and to get a life and a better personality, and to stop making everything into one big fat problem (or something along those lines). And after their speech they descended the steps together and, along with the countless others who didn't give a toss about hats, they kept on marching right out of Capistan and into a new land where the speech was free, the hats were irrelevant, and no one would ever get hit in the head by a potato ever again.

Trilby and Victor, and Timmy and Tam, led the way, each of them holding aloft a beacon that symbolized liberty, equality, truth, dignity, reason, generosity of spirit, self-actualization, diversity of opinion, card games, waterskiing, music, lemonade, books, fun times ... and love.

There were four lights.

© I. H. Smythe 2022