The Easter Hat

ROSEMARY HAVILAND

Putting the lid on the ivory powder-box, Doris gave the dressing-table a last hurried glance. She moved the pin cushion an inch to the right and snapped off the lights. Picking up her gloves, she walked with firm, steady steps to the door of her room and paused. After a moment's hesitation, she walked back to the dressing-table and switched on the lights.

"My old hat looks terrible," she thought to herself. "This is such a nice day . . . I think I'll wear my new hat - just once, to break it in before Easter."

Doris threw the brown felt on the bed and untied the blue box. She folded back the tissue paper and carefully took the blue straw from the billows of white froth. It was an expensive hat - that is, expensive for Doris; but it was such a temptation, and with proper care, she could even wear it next year. Mentally she calculated her savings. Yes - Tom would want her to have the hat, even if he could not see her wear it.

She adjusted the veil and once again walked to the door, with light-hearted steps; and hearing the clock in the hall hiccup seven tinkling dings, she ran down the stairs.

"I'll be home at four-thirty, Mrs. Hartly. Please put my letters on the hall table." And without waiting for an answer Doris left the house.

Waiting at the curb for the stop light to change, she smiled at the green daffodil shoots bordering the lawn. After crossing the street, she had to walk across Climbing Creek bridge to the street car stop. Leaning over the wide gray stone railing, she looked at the splashing river, swollen with spring rains.

The March wind gave a tug at the new hat, rolled it down the stone railing, and snatched it from the bridge. Doris uttered a combined cry of surprise and anger, but it was of no use; the Easter hat was gone. The water grasped it from the wind and playfully tossed it from her sight.

The street car was grinding to a stop, and Doris ran to catch it. After losing her hat, she did not want to be late for work.

"What's all the trouble? Somebody givin' away cigarettes?"

"I don't know. Seems like it must be somethin' important - police all over the place."

"Life savin' squad, looks like. Probably somebody left the gas on all night. I hope the street car won't be tied up. I have to get to town in a hurry. See you later, Ed."

"Good morning, Miss Newcomb. Lots of excitement this morning. Ed just told me that somebody probably left the gas on all night. If so, there isn't much hope for them. Police might as well go back."

"Do you know who it is?" asked Miss Newcomb, eyes wide with concern.

"No, but it must be someone who lives near here. There's my ride.... You find out the particulars and let me know all about it tonight."

"Mrs. Findley!! What's the matter? I have such a short time before I must
leave for work and I’m alive with curiosity. Mr. Bradford said that someone left the gas on all night.”

“My dear,” twittered Mrs. Findley, “I wouldn’t know about the gas, but they finished the business by drowning.”

“Drowning?”

“Yes, evidently it was a woman. They found part of her clothing. Real expensive it was, too. Harold told me her hat was straw with lots of veiling and white flowers.”

“Do you mean to say that she leaped off the bridge?”

“Leaped, fell, or was pushed,” said Mrs. Findley with some satisfaction. “I don’t doubt but what she leaped.”

“The crowd seems to be leaving, Mrs. Findley. Are you going downtown?”

“Yes, I thought I’d do the marketing early. If I don’t get down there when they open, all the fruit is bruised.”

“Good morning, Reverend Price. I suppose you’ve heard the news?”

“Yes, it started out to be a fine morning, Miss Newcomb. It is a shame that a thing like this should happen. I heard that she must have had unfortunate news from her husband. So much sadness in the world; the war leaves terrible sorrows. If I can find out her name, I’ll see that her family is notified. Waiting for a street car? You are welcomed to ride downtown with me.”

“Thank you, but I believe I’ll wait. I don’t want to get to the office so early, and I’d like to find out more about this poor woman.”

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It seemed to Doris that the daffodils had grown an inch since she had left that morning. She stooped over to touch the leaf of a slender green shoot and straightened up when she remembered the letters waiting for her.

Mrs. Hartly opened the door for Doris, saying, “Your letters are on the table. But just wait until you hear what happened today. A girl committed suicide by jumping off the Climbing Creek bridge — must have happened about the time you left for work.”

“Why did she kill herself?” asked Doris as she glanced at the postmark of the two letters. Thank God! Tom was still all right. She listened halfway to Mrs. Hartly’s chattering.

“... and they say she got a telegram from the government and just killed herself. I suppose she didn’t want to live after her husband died. They found part of her clothing on the bank. She must have had plenty of money ... the prettiest hat ... veil and flowers. Doris, you should have seen all the excitement. Policemen came out with grappling hooks. She tried to kill herself with gas, but it didn’t work, so she leaped off the bridge.”

“What did she look like?” Doris still thought of Tom.

“I didn’t see her. In fact, they didn’t find the body. The police only stayed about a half hour, just long enough to question the boy who found the hat. I tell you, I’ve really put in a day ... It’s hard on my heart. Run along, dear, and read your letters.”

Doris bowed to the clock in the hall and opened the door of her room. The brown hat was still on the bed.

“I guess I’ll wear the brown hat tomorrow,” she mused. As she opened the fat letter, her mind flitted back to the girl and Climbing Creek bridge.

“I’m glad I’m not that girl. I’m thankful that this isn’t a telegram from the government.”