



HATS *Little Leon*

HATS
by
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Mr. McClosky lived in New York City, and he owned a dog named Leon. Mr.

McClosky had a great collection of odd hats, and so did Leon.

Every time Mr. McClosky took Leon for a walk in the park, he would put on one of his odd hats. He would put a smaller matching hat right on Leon's head too.

When Mr. McClosky and Leon went to the opera, people who saw them smiled.

Mr. McClosky always bought first balcony seats. They had to check their top hats at the checkroom. These hats were too tall to wear during the show.

On their sailing trips, Leon and Mr. McClosky wore sailing hats. The wind sometimes snatched their hats and blew them far away. The boat rose up and down in the water a great deal. Leon liked to come back to shore best of all.

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Mr. McClosky and Leon often went horseback riding in their riding hats. The horses didn't like Leon. One day, while they were riding, a big black horse decided to toss Leon off his back!

Little Leon lost his hat in a mud puddle -- the beautiful black riding hat with the leather brim. Mr. McClosky had to take Leon home and give him a bubble bath, because Leon had gone into the mud puddle to fetch the hat.

Leon ruined the riding hat, but he washed off clean.

The next morning Leon opened his eyes in his warm basket bed. He looked up at the empty peg where his leather brimmed riding hat used to hang. Leon remembered how he had ruined the riding hat in the mud puddle.

Oh dear, thought Leon, I've been too much trouble to Mr. McClosky lately. Leon decided to go away. He loved Mr. McClosky too much to be a bother to him.

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So, after a breakfast of two eggs, two strips of bacon, and two pieces of whole wheat toast and some water, Leon put on his favorite little bowler hat. He opened the backdoor and slipped away.

Not knowing quite where to go in New York City this hot August morning, Leon decided to take a walk to the end of his block.

I'll look in the hat shop window at the corner, thought Leon. He bounced down from the back brick step of the house onto the hot sidewalk pavement. Leon stared at the feet of all who walked by him. Many wore open-toed shoes. Nobody noticed a little dog in a bowler hat.

Leon hurried to the corner.

At the hat shop window, Leon placed his paws on the window ledge and peered inside. The shop wasn't open, but Leon could see the hats. There were men's and women's hats in the window. There was a new riding hat with a leather brim exactly like the one Leon had spoiled.

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Oh my, Leon thought. Isn't that a fine hat! He barked his approval. Only two barks. Nobody noticed. Then Leon heard a familiar sound.

Boom! Boom! Boom! It sounded faint in the distance. Leon turned to listen.

Boom! Boom! The sound came again. People ran to the corner of Leon's block.

"It's the circus parade!" They shouted.

Leon and Mr. McClosky had seen the parade last time the circus came to New York City. They loved the circus!

Leon ran after everyone to the corner. The booming came louder now. The hot pavement shook, because elephants walk with heavy footsteps. He smelled the circus smells coming to him on the hot breeze. Leon bubbled with excitement. He heard the lions roaring and the monkeys screeching.

Leon remembered the wonderful circus hats.

I must see those hats again, he thought! Mr. McClosky wasn't there to pick him up so Leon could see the circus hats.

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I must go up higher, Leon thought. The small dog struggled through all the people's feet crowding along the curb. Leon saw some iron steps -- a fire escape ladder.

Up, up he went up the fire escape of the building on the corner. Leon went up to the first landing and then to the next, higher and higher he climbed, high enough to see everything -- especially the circus hats. The wonderful, wonderful circus hats!

Soon, the circus parade came into view way down the street. There was a loud BOOMING of the bass drums. The circus band marched along playing a lively tune.

The ringmaster blew a blast from a silver whistle that hung on a cord around his neck. The parade marched by below. As he strained to see, Leon's own little bowler hat nearly toppled off his head. He jammed that hat back on tight.

Leon barked when he saw the ringmaster's black silk hat bob by below as the ringmaster, in a smart red uniform, marched by keeping time with his black bull whip.

Leon barked again when he saw the bareback riders' hats full of plumes and sparkles.

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Leon barked loudest when the clowns ran by wearing many different kinds of hats -- colorful, silly, wonderful hats. Leon almost slipped through the fire escape bars.

Sitting quietly, Leon watched the parade until the last sounds of the bass drums faded, and the crowd had moved along. He thought and thought about the circus hats.

I must go too; I must wear hats like those circus hats! Leon thought. Suddenly, he ran down the iron steps. He squeezed between the lions' cages as they rolled by on huge red wagons with golden wheels. He joined the crowd of clowns and danced and danced with them down the street.

No one noticed Leon in his little bowler hat. They thought Leon was a small clown.

Leon ran on with the clowns. The circus band played and the elephants swayed on, on to Madison Square Garden for opening night.

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In his great haste to join the circus, Leon forgot how Mr. McClosky would feel when he couldn't find Leon. Leon forgot that he shouldn't cross the streets of New York City by himself.

Leon thought only of the clown hats. He ran on and on as the parade moved past the waving crowds. The small dog kept his eyes on the clowns' hats as he danced along to the circus music.

At the circus, the ringmaster hired Leon and gave him a special costume to wear -- a little yellow raincoat and a firefighter's hat and a green umbrella. The raincoat's sleeves hung a bit too long; Leon rolled them up a few times. He happily placed the new circus hat on his head. He put his bowler hat on a shelf in the clown's dressing room until after practice.

Leon practiced all day at the circus, never thinking of Mr. McClosky.

Meanwhile, back home, Mr. McClosky finished his breakfast. He realized that Leon wasn't there.

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Mr. McClosky set out immediately, but not before he put on his bowler hat. He noticed that Leon's bowler hat was missing from its peg. He wore his bowler hat to be like Leon.

Why did Little Leon leave? Mr. McClosky wondered as he hurried out to look for Leon. Was it because Leon ruined the riding hat?

Back at the circus practice, the clowns gave Leon a police officer's hat and a silver whistle.

Leon was ready. He had two circus hats to wear!

No one fed Leon his supper. He grew hungrier and hungrier. Since Leon didn't have money to buy any food, he ate the peanut shells he found near the lions' cages.

A lion growled at Leon when he came too close to the lion's cage. Someone said that Circus people eat their suppers after the show.

After searching for Leon all day, Mr. McClosky went home. When he finished his supper, he read the paper and decided to go to the circus that night. Once there, Mr.

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McClosky could forget his troubles and laugh at the clowns. Of course, Mr. McClosky had no way of knowing that Leon, at that very moment, was at the circus preparing for his debut as the new little clown, "Lollipopup."

As Madison Square Garden opened its door to the huge crowd, Leon had no way of knowing that Mr. McClosky was taking his seat right outside Leon's dressing room! The show was about to begin!

The ringmaster blew his whistle . "Fifteen minutes," he shouted. Filled with excitement, Leon forgot all about being hungry.

Children and parents entered the grand arena and took their seats. Backstage, Leon put on his firefighter's hat. He and the clowns stood by the back door entrance.

The sound of the ringmaster's voice came again. "Five minutes!" He shouted. Then, dressed in a formal tuxedo, the ringmaster signaled for the show's opening walk-around. The crowd cheered. The lions roared. The monkey's screeched. Leon barked and

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barked. They all walked around the arena before the clapping audience. Leon walked on his hind legs. The yellow raincoat and firefighter's hat had made him look more than ever like a small clown.

The ringmaster ran into the center ring and blew his whistle. He waved his top hat. The band stopped playing.

"In the center ring," announced the ringmaster into his microphone, "we are presenting, OUR NEWEST LITTLE CLOWN, LOLLIPUP!"

Leon raced out to the center ring with his raincoat flapping. He put one paw on his hat and took a deep bow. He jumped when the band began a spirited circus tune.

Holding the green umbrella high over his head, the tiniest "clown" ever, turned round and round.

A skinny giraffe with a hose in his mouth sprayed icy water at Leon! This surprise was not in the practice that afternoon. Leon shook the water off his raincoat. Wet and

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cold, Leon spun around. Time to put on the police officer's hat with the silver star on the front.

Next, three clowns, dressed in black striped suits, picked up Leon and placed him on one of the prancing circus horses! This horse knew right away that Leon was not a little clown. The horse reared, eyes flashing and hoofs waving. As the crowd gasped, the horse tossed Leon higher and higher.

Leon found himself flying through the air. The police officer's hat fell off Leon's head.

All the faces below screamed as Leon flew higher and higher. Up to the trapezes in the tent top. Leon began to fall. Leon fell down, down, until he landed in the safety net. He missed his hat. Feeling shaky and frightened, he climbed from the net. Leon trudged back to his dressing room.

Leon sat before the makeup mirror. His fur felt dirty and wet from the icy water and the circus dust. He'd lost two circus hats.

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Leon reached up to the shelf for his own little bowler hat. He popped it on his head. He felt hungrier than before. He missed Mr. McClosky too. Leon missed his own hats at home -- all neatly hanging on their pegs over his bed. Oh how he missed his soft warm basket bed. Leon wanted to go home.

While Leon performed in the center ring, Mr. McClosky watched from the audience.

My, my, what a clever little clown, thought Mr. McClosky. He looked closer with his binoculars.

“Why! Lollipop is really Leon! Mr. McClosky shouted.

After the performance, Mr. McClosky ran backstage to see the new clown Lollipop (who was really Leon).

“It’s I, Leon, old friend. How about it, want to come home now?” Mr. McClosky asked Leon.

Little Leon Little Leon sighed and nodded, “Yes.”

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Slowly the little dog took off his dripping raincoat, but he kept the bowler hat on his head.

Mr. McClosky held the door open. Little Leon followed.

After a nice warm supper and bath, Leon carefully placed his little bowler hat on the right peg. Then, Leon curled up in his basket bed. He lay quietly remembering all he had been through that day. He missed the wonderful circus hats, but he didn't miss being a clown in the circus. Leon looked forward to wearing his own beautiful hats that were exactly like Mr. McClosky's hats.

Leon didn't think he'd be riding on Brewster in the park anymore. Leon decided that horses could tell that he was a little dog.

Leon would never run away from home again; he knew that every hat he could ever want was right there with him.

Before Leon fell asleep, he remembered to give Mr. McClosky a nice kiss on the hand when Mr. McClosky came to say "good night."