

FOSTER'S HAT

By Carl L. Williams

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ISBN 1-60003-346-6

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CHARACTERS

Owen	30's-40's, upper middle class, a bit somber
Jillian	30's-40's, his wife, playful sense of humor

SETTING

Living room.

TIME

Present.

PRODUCTION HISTORY

Winner of Scriptwriters/Houston Ten by Ten, 2006, produced at Houston Community College.

Also SUNY Brockport (NY) Festival, 2007.

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SETTING: Living room.

AT RISE: OWEN, dressed in a dark suit, stares down at a closed hatbox sitting on the coffee table. JILLIAN, wearing casual clothes, enters from hall.

JILLIAN: What a relief to get out of those clothes. (*looks at OWEN*)
Aren't you going to change?

OWEN: In a minute.

JILLIAN: Open it, why don't you?

OWEN: Not yet. I'm not ready.

JILLIAN: You'd think somebody's head was in there, instead of just a hat.

OWEN: (*offended*) Just a hat? Jillian . . . it's Foster's hat.

JILLIAN: You mean it was Foster's hat. I'm surprised they didn't bury him in it.

OWEN: You could show a little respect.

JILLIAN: To Foster, or his hat? (*gets a look*) I just meant the way he wore it all the time, it's strange he didn't take it with him.

OWEN: Have you ever noticed you always make jokes at funerals?

JILLIAN: Like we go to so many. This one wasn't too depressing. Lots of people, all of them sad, but in a good mood. You know what I mean?

OWEN: No.

JILLIAN: Sad he's gone, but happy they knew him. Big reception afterward, like a coming-out party. Except this was a going-in party. (*gestures downward*)

OWEN: (*irritated*) Could you stop with the jokes?

JILLIAN: Sorry, Owen. I know he meant a lot to you.

OWEN: Aside from my father, he meant more to me than anyone I've ever known.

JILLIAN: (*humor-tinged rebuke*) Other than someone to whom you're directly married.

OWEN: He was only 58. That's not old by today's standards. Natural causes, they said. What's natural about dropping dead for no reason?

JILLIAN: There was never anything natural about Foster.

OWEN: Maybe it's true he had half a normal person's IQ, but let me tell you, he had twice the heart.

JILLIAN: He was a sweet guy. Of course, he'd talk both your ears off, but it was always about something he couldn't wait to share with you. Like a bird he saw, or half a rainbow.

OWEN: (*laughs*) The rainbow story.

JILLIAN: Over and over again.

OWEN: (*imitates a simple, excited voice*) "Owen! Owen, did you see it? Half a rainbow! Where's the other half, Owen? There's got to be another half! What happened to it?" For days he went around town telling people about seeing half a rainbow.

JILLIAN: I heard it four or five times, at least. Finally I said, "Maybe it broke off."

OWEN: Jillian.

JILLIAN: I was just kidding with him, but he frowned and said, "Can a rainbow be put back together?"

OWEN: What did you tell him?

JILLIAN: I told him no. Rainbows are special, and once they're gone, they're gone.

OWEN: That might've been too much real-world knowledge for Foster to absorb.

JILLIAN: He thought about it a moment, then said, "Maybe it went to where the other half was." The idea seemed to please him.

OWEN: At the funeral I couldn't help thinking about my father. I was fifteen when he died. Heart disease. I suppose they'd call that natural causes, too. It was Foster who came and sat beside me on the back porch steps. I just wanted to be alone, and I thought, "Oh no, here comes Foster, and he's going to babble on about Dad." But he didn't. He didn't say a word. I was amazed. He just sat with me . . . feeling what I felt . . . showing what I was embarrassed to show. Tears rolled down his face. "It's okay," I told him. "Everything will be okay." Suddenly I was comforting *him*. He showed me my own pain, and took part of it away. Through the years he showed me everything good, and nothing bad. It's a shame the whole world can't be more like Foster.

JILLIAN: I wish I could comfort you now as much as he did then.

OWEN: Oh, I'm being maudlin, I know.

JILLIAN: You have a right. You knew him all your life.

OWEN: I just thought of something. It never struck me before. But I remember Dad telling me Foster was fifteen when he first put him to work in the store, running errands and opening boxes. Not that it means anything . . . that he was fifteen when Dad took him on, and I was fifteen when Dad passed away. Just an odd coincidence. We look for meaning in things that have no meaning . . . no reason.

JILLIAN: It was good of your Dad to make a place for him.

OWEN: Foster more than earned his keep. He was a good worker.

That's why Uncle Matt kept him on after Dad died. He said Foster worked harder than I did, and I imagine he was right. I talked to Foster a lot back then, during my years of confusion.

JILLIAN: I didn't know they were over.

OWEN: (*ignores her*) I could always confide in Foster . . . talk things out with him about what was going on in my life, in school, later in college. He didn't have any answers for me, but he was always willing to listen, and he never made judgments. He wasn't able to. Then one day I told him there was this girl I wanted to marry.

JILLIAN: You told him about me?

OWEN: No, this was someone else.

JILLIAN: What?!

OWEN: Of course it was you. I confessed to Foster, and really to myself, that I was in love with you. I said, "Do you think I ought to tell her?"

JILLIAN: I'm assuming he said yes.

OWEN: Something more profound than that. He said, "If somebody loved me, I'd want them to tell me." I felt like saying, "Don't you know, Foster, everybody loves you." But I didn't. I wish now I had.

JILLIAN: (*trying to lighten the mood*) Yes, I'd have to give Foster's funeral a 10.

OWEN: Now you're scoring the funerals?

JILLIAN: Flowers, music, attendance . . . everything came together nicely. Especially the eulogies. A definite 10 there. When I go, I'll be lucky to get a six in that category. I'll be graded down for my inappropriate humor. They'll be saying, "Remember when she said the new Methodist church looked like a mausoleum?" Come to think of it, that might be an appropriate recollection, considering the circumstances.

OWEN: You know one of the things I love about you?

JILLIAN: That I've kept my figure all these years?

OWEN: (*in jest*) Where do you keep it?

JILLIAN: (*mock offended*) Oh!

OWEN: No, what I love is how relentless you are.

JILLIAN: Relentless?

OWEN: You don't let things get you down. You don't dwell on them the way I do. You just keep pressing on with life.

JILLIAN: I didn't know I had a choice.

OWEN: Which is something you might've had in common with Foster. He never understood about choices, either. He was what he was, and he couldn't choose to be anything else.

JILLIAN: Go on now and open it. He wanted you to have it. What he treasured most.

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OWEN: *(takes the lid off the box and pulls out a plaid hat)* It's almost like holding a part of him. Whenever you saw Foster, you saw his hat.

JILLIAN: What is there about growing old that makes men want to wear plaid hats?

OWEN: What is there about growing old that makes women want to wear knee-high stockings?

JILLIAN: Leave my mother out of this. And let it be noted she wore pantyhose to the service today.

OWEN: Actually, Foster was young when he got this hat. He wanted it because it looked like the one Bear Bryant wore, though of course Bryant's was really a checkered pattern.

JILLIAN: *(as if concentrating)* Bear Bryant? Wasn't he a wrestler or something?

OWEN: *(gives her a look)* You know who Bear Bryant was. Foster couldn't imagine himself playing football, but he could imagine standing on the sidelines and watching the game. And for all he knew, that's all there was to being a coach.

JILLIAN: Put it on.

OWEN: Put it on? The hat? No.

JILLIAN: Oh, go ahead. It's yours now. See if it fits.

OWEN: Like I'm going to go around town wearing Foster's hat.

JILLIAN: You could wear it around the house when no one's looking.

(OWEN, turning the hat around in his hands, finally raises it to his head and puts it on. Too small, it sits ridiculously on top of his head.)

(laughing) It's so you. And it goes so well with the suit!

OWEN: Your eulogy just dropped to a five. *(takes off the hat, looks at it thoughtfully)* And you know what? You were right. It's just a hat.

Foster's gone. This was nothing but a part of his mortality . . .

something he left behind. *(spots something inside the hat)* What's this?

JILLIAN: What's what?

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