

## **An English Translation of *The Story of My Hat* by Takeo Arishima**

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Masako KATO

“Dad bought this hat for me in Tokyo. It cost as much as two yen and eighty sen. It looks great and is made with high quality wool. Dad told me to take good care of the hat, so I go to sleep with the hat in my arms.”

This was some of what I wrote during my penmanship class. My teacher read my essay to the class and repeated the part, “I go to sleep with the hat in my arms,” twice with a laugh. Then, everyone burst into laughter looking at the teacher, and I, too, started to laugh. Then everyone looked at me, Nao, and laughed.

I was going to be in such big trouble because I lost the hat, the very hat that I wrote about. I remembered that I had said good night, put away my books neatly wrapped above my pillow, and tucked myself in, holding the shiny brim of the hat in my hand, just like any other day. It made no sense that I did not see it anywhere.

When I woke up, I found the bundle of the books above my pillow right where I left it, but there was no trace of my hat. I sat up with such a surprise. I looked around and around, but all I could find were my dad and mom sound asleep. “I should ask for Mom’s help,” I thought, but I decided against the idea

because it would be a little embarrassing if she found the hat right away. “It is right here. You must be half asleep, silly,” Mom would say, so I kept looking. I looked under my cloak and around the bundle. At first I thought with hope that the hat would turn up shortly if I looked closely. I looked and looked, but the hat never appeared. I started to worry so much that my throat dried out. I looked for the hat under my blanket; it was not there. I looked on the front and back of my hands for the hat, even between my fingers, wishing that I had not realized that I had been holding it all along and yet, the hat was nowhere to be found. My heart started to pound.

I felt very sad that I had lost the second most important thing in my life, the most important being the brand-new dictionary I got yesterday. Tears started to fill my eyes, so I told the tears, “No use crying!” I got out of my bed and searched the bookshelf up and down very carefully. There was no trace of the hat. I was at a loss.

Suddenly, a thought came to mind: “I may have forgotten to hold my hat in my hand last night. What I remember might be about the night before last.” That must have been it! I must have forgotten to take the hat with me to bed last night. The hat must be hanging on the coat rack! I was over the moon just thinking about it. Picturing the hat with its shiny brim hanging on the rack, without any worries, made me feel silly. I flung open the sliding door and turned back to check if my parents were still asleep. Mom easily wakes, but she was completely asleep that time. I slowly closed the door and went towards the rack. The area was bright like sunlight that night, although all the lights were usually turned off. The bright sunlit-like room made everything so clear to see. I kept telling myself that my hat, the hat my father gave me, was hanging proudly on the coat rack. Still, on my way to the rack, I was so scared that I could not look directly at the place where the hat should be. I finally got there and looked up to see the hat before I started to overthink things. All I saw was my dad’s brown hat, as if nothing had happened. My hat was supposed to be there. I looked around and

around restlessly.

Then I found something, something black. That black thing was stuck in between the sliding door at the entrance near the coat rack. I looked closely with the light. It was my hat! I put on the sandals sitting right there and ran like crazy towards the hat. The sliding door opened itself quietly and the hat rolled out into the street just a second before I reached the door to pick up the hat. The storm shutter was oddly open that night as well, but I had no room to think about this at that very moment. I dashed through the sliding door, chasing the hat before I lost sight of it. The hat was flying, spinning and spinning three blocks ahead of me. It looked just like a dish thrown into the air. It was so strange; there was no wind whatsoever that night. I ran frantically and reached the hat at last. As soon as I bent over to pick the hat up with great relief, it slipped right out of my hand and rolled and rolled three blocks ahead of me, again! So, once again, I jumped up and started to run after the hat. Just like this, the hat kept running away from me.

The hat stopped rolling at the tool store owned by the neighbor lady at the corner, where my school was. It spun right and left three or four times, and then suddenly jumped up in the air and started to dart towards the school, right before it hit the ground. In a blink of an eye, the hat passed the dentist's place and hopped on the rainwater bucket at the liquor store where the boy who always teased me lived. Then the hat spun some more and fell behind the bucket and reappeared diagonally in front of the row of houses, grazing them as if blown by the wind. The hat continued to run proudly above the forlorn street. I ran all over the place following that hat. Even in the darkness of the night, the hat was so visibly bright that I could even see the medal on it clearly. The hat was right there, crystal clear, but I could not catch it. Chasing the hat like this was entertaining at first, but after a while I started to feel frustrated; the frustration eventually turned into anger, and at the end I felt so pathetic that I could burst into tears. Nevertheless, I held it together. "Wait up!" I said, knowing that a hat would not understand. I still could not stop the urge to say something to the hat. At

that moment the hat, which was already at the front gate of my school, suddenly stopped moving. Then the hat turned to me and said, "Catch me if you can!" The hat surely said those exact words! "You hat!" I shouted, feeling strength in my body as I jumped on the hat. The hat and I wrestled together, rolling without any resistance right through the iron bars of the closed school gate.

In the blink of an eye, I was inside the plum class classroom. I had no idea why I was in the plum class because I belonged to the pine tree class. In the classroom, Mr. Iimoto was showing a one-sen coin to the class. The teacher asked the class, "How many of these coins do you need to ease a stomach pain?" "One would fix the pain," answered the rambunctious Kurihara, after only a moment. The teacher shook his head. "Two," answered the quiet Ito, after raising his hand. "Good job," said the teacher. "That is correct." I was impressed; without a doubt Ito was a smart student.

"What happened to the hat?" I thought, realizing that I was mesmerized with the coin in the teacher's hand. I hurriedly looked around everywhere, but there was no sight of the hat.

I rushed out of the classroom and then I was in a vast field. All I could see was the big, wide field with short grass. There, high in the dark, cloudy sky was my hat, hanging like a black moon. There was no way I could reach that high. Even an airplane could not reach that high up in the sky. I was speechless, and all I could do was to stomp my feet in frustration, glaring maliciously at the hat. The hat, on the other hand, stayed cool, not being bothered by my malicious frustration. The hat kept looking away with a mean look on its face, as if it were telling me that it would not respond to any of my words. I did not think that Dad would believe me, even if I told him that my hat ran away and became a black moon in the sky. I would have to go to school without the hat, beginning from tomorrow; how ridiculous it was! I took great care of the hat and this was what it got me; how come the hat had to give me such trouble as this? I felt even more upset. Then these troublesome tears started to wet both of my eyes.

The field was getting darker and darker. There was nobody around, nor were there any house lights. I was at a loss; I did not even know how to get back home from there. That thought was something I should not have thought about. “Maybe a racoon transformed into my hat and was teasing me,” I wondered. I had not been a believer in transforming racoons, but at that time it seemed possible; that store Dad bought the hat from WAS the headquarters of some transforming racoons, and he must have been tricked; the racoon, that turned into my hat deceived Dad first so it could lure me into the woods. That must be why the hat looked so appealing to me; it was made to attract me. Thinking about that made me feel creeped out. I looked up at the hat and the dark moon-like hat started to look like a racoon curled up in the sky; but still, that really was my precious hat.

In that moment, I heard someone calling me. There was somebody crying, too. I thought the head of the racoon clan came for me at last; terrible chills went down my spine.

In front of my very eyes were Dad and Mom frantically looking for something; they were in pajamas with their eyes swollen from all the crying. I felt mixed feelings; I was sad and happy at the same time. I almost jumped on them, but stopped myself, thinking that they could be racoons. It was creepy. I observed them closely.

My parents did not seem to have realized that I had been right next to them; Mom kept looking inside the drawers of the chest calling my name; Dad was taking down all the books in the bookcase, one by one, looking inside each book while wiping his tear-filled glasses. That is right; the exact bookcase and chest that we had at home were right in front of me. “You could not possibly find me there,” I thought. I watched them look for me quietly for a while, feeling somewhat fortunate that they had not been able to find me. “There is no way that we could not find him here in this book,” Dad eventually said to Mom. “No, he would not be inside that book. He must have fallen asleep in this chest of drawers, hiding again. The moonlight is so dark that he cannot be found,” said

Mom to Dad with frustration in her crying voice.

Those WERE my real parents. They must have been. There would be no other people in the whole big world who could care about me that much. I started to smile very widely with a newly discovered courage. “Boo!” I said to surprise my parents with a loud voice, running towards them but, to my surprise, I ran right through my parents as if they were thin air, just like when I rolled through the closed iron gates at the school. I turned back, astonished. My parents continued to look for me inside the bookcase and chest of drawers, as if nothing had happened. I moved closer to my parents and tried putting my hand on them. I realized that I could not touch my parents or the pieces of furniture. Knowingly or unknowingly, my parents wholeheartedly continued to call out to me; they called my name over and over again in tears. I, too, cried out to them. My voice became louder and louder. “Dad! Mom! I am right here! Dad! Mom!”

I cried out to Dad and Mom, but that was in vain; both of my parents kept looking for me where nobody was, not knowing that I was right in front of them. I felt so hopeless that I could cry like a baby.

Then I suddenly got this idea: my parents could not see me because of the raccoon hat up in the sky. That must have been it! I had to defeat that stupid raccoon that dared to transform into my hat! I was going to jump at the hat in the air and beat a confession out of it. I was on my mark, as if I would make the high jump, and “Ready on the mark, get set, GO!”

I put all my might into my feet to jump up. Up and up I went into the sky. I kept floating up higher and higher, and I reached the hat at last. I grabbed onto the hat so hard that the hat said “Ouch!” At that moment both of us plummeted down to the ground. It felt as if the nail on which the hat had hung in the sky had just come out. Down we went forever and ever. “My feet will touch the grass on the ground soon,” I thought, but that never happened. We went down and down and down. Our surroundings started to light up, thunder started to rumble, and at last we were about to go through into an ocean of flame so bright that I could

not keep my eyes open. There was no way that I would survive; I would burn to death. The hat cried, “Help!” All I could do was to groan with fear.

Somebody shook my body. I woke up, surprised. ALL THAT was a dream. Mom was right by me, leaving the storm door halfway closed. “Are you okay? You were groaning terribly... You, sleepyhead, it is time to go to school.” Mom told me, but I did not care. I abruptly looked by my pillow. I was holding onto the hat with my right hand with all of my might, the hat with the shiny brim, the hat that cost Dad two yen and eighty sen.

I felt so happy. I looked at Mom’s face and smiled.