



Charlie's Hats

By Juliana Carter



Charlie was a collector of hats. Now, they weren't displayed neatly on hooks in his bedroom. You see, Charlie was a collector of many things, so his room was a bit of a jumbled mix of stuff. For instance, rocks. Charlie had rocks ranging in size from the smallest pebble to some that were as big as his hand. Gray rocks with black dots, green rocks, red rocks with sparkles, and one in the shape of a heart. Many of these were saved just in time by Charlie's mom, who checked Charlie's pockets before doing the wash. Oh, and there were silver washers and old worn-out screws, ends of pencil erasers, and shiny pieces of metal that caught Charlie's eye and would then promptly find their way into his pocket. In fact, Charlie had so many collections that when Mom and Dad walked past his room, they shuddered. Charlie's room was a mess!

But let me tell you, Dear Reader, about Charlie's hats. These were special hats, at least to Charlie. When he put one on, he became whomever he wanted to be at that particular moment.

Charlie had one very special hat. Well, it wasn't a hat so much as a helmet that an astronaut would wear when traveling to the far reaches of the galaxy. When Charlie pressed the large blue button on the front, it gave a countdown. "3, 2, 1. Blastoff!" Then, Charlie was off, exploring the solar system. He looked out the window of his rocketship and watched the comets as they whizzed by. His rocketship shook as it hurtled its way through a meteor shower, buffeting Charlie this way and that.

Some days Charlie might take a short trip and explore the dark side of the moon. With his gravity suit, he would jump and glide over the lunar craters,

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always looking down, searching for a new rock to add to his collection. On days when he was feeling more adventurous, he might travel to Jupiter. He liked exploring his favorite Jupiter moon, Io, but the lava flows from its volcanoes gave off so much heat, he couldn't stay long. He wanted to go to Pluto one day, but it was such a long trip, he thought he might run out of snacks.

Now, space exploring was always fun, but sometimes Charlie put on his construction helmet. This was not a toy construction helmet but a real hard hat that Charlie's dad purchased from the corner hardware store. Charlie's Dad made a few adjustments so it would fit Charlie just right. Now he wouldn't have to worry about falling debris.

When Charlie was ready to work, he'd put on his hard hat and ride the freight elevator all the way to the top floor of the highest skyscrapers, holding on tight to the rail as he watched the world whiz by. Once he was at the very top, Charlie would blink once or twice as the sun was very bright. Delicately balanced along the steel beams, Charlie would set to work, using the various tools hanging from his tool belt. Charlie would look down at the cars below, smaller than ants. The city was beautiful from the top. Luckily, Charlie was not afraid of heights.

When he felt like being a pirate, Charlie would put on his pirate hat emblazoned with its black and white Jolly Roger, red feather jutting out at an angle. When his parents saw Charlie reading while wearing his pirate hat at night, they automatically gave him an extra five minutes. This was their agreement.

Some days Charlie donned his knight's helmet with matching wooden sword and shield. He battled dark knights and tamed ferocious dragons. Charlie kept heavy-duty nylon cord in his pocket, and with this, he would fashion a loop to put around his dragon's neck and would then parade his now tame dragon through the streets of the grateful village. Other days Charlie chose his tan pith helmet when he wanted to search for a new species of insect waiting for him in some far-off jungle.

Charlie had collected so many hats, he would never run out of adventures. And when people would ask Charlie what he wanted to be when he grew up, he would reply, "Oh, that's easy. I want to be an astronaut explorer, and I'll build my own house, and I'll paint all of the pictures that I hang on the walls. On the weekends, I'll sail the seas..." and Charlie would go on and on. Charlie would never have too many hats.

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