

Mad Hatter of 1 Durland Street

Madeline Hathermore of 1 Durland Street was known for her fondness for hats. Inside her house hats perched on shelves and dangled from hooks on walls and even ceilings.

There was the black cowboy hat she had bargained for at a cattle ranch in Oklahoma. There was the crocodile leather hat with real crocodile teeth, gifted to her by an Aboriginal friend during her visit to Alice Springs, where she had gone to learn the didgeridoo. And then there was her favourite, a large pink Southern belle hat, never quite returned to the costume department after her final performance in a play when she lived in Los Angeles. It was extravagant, boldly frilly, and so pink that Madeline loved it for its brazenness. But the hats were becoming a bit too much now, and she felt she ought to do something with them or about them.

So, she opened a hat rental shop. Anyone who wandered in could borrow a hat for as long as they wished and, with it, a small spark of imagination. Soon enough, Durland Street began to change.

Her first customer was Mr Grumble, a man who had been grumpy for so many years that people crossed the road to avoid him. When he strolled into the shop one surprising afternoon, Madeline handed him a swirling purple striped hat. The moment he placed it on his head, his face cracked into a grin so unexpected that it startled not only Madeline, but Mr Grumble himself. From that day on, he tipped his hat to everyone he passed. People began speaking to him again, and with each conversation he grew a little less grumpy.

Mr Potts, a gentleman with a fondness for tea parties and curious objects, visited the shop soon after. He requested something with character and Madeline lent him an old magician's hat that she had once traded for her chiffon saree in a Budapest market. The proprietor of the hat had been amused by the saree, comparing it to an unending handkerchief from a magician's pocket. He had said that the saree too was an unending piece of cloth, wrapped round and round a woman with great elegance. With the magician's hat on his head, Mr Potts discovered a talent for silly tricks and soon became the star of every gathering.

Even poor Mrs Dribble who had lived her entire life terrified of rain, which was difficult because she lived in England, changed. She spent most of her days indoors, peering anxiously at the sky. But after hearing rumours about the peculiar little shop, she braved a drizzle to see it for herself. Madeline, surprised to find her dripping in the doorway, placed a bright yellow rain hat on her head. The very next morning, Mrs Dribble was seen strolling cheerfully through the rain.

Weeks passed, and Durland Street blossomed with colour, laughter, and life. People were kinder and smiled a little more and a stronger sense of community formed, all because of hats.