



Raz Ma Taz

The mountain is a gorgeous green today, sitting quietly up against a bright blue sky. Birds fly down through the leaves of maple and oak that blanket the heights, to roost on the dirty white canopy above my head. I stand beside my pickup truck and fill gas cans for a weekend afternoon of mowing and yard work.

Down here below the mountaintop is the disorderly mess of a gas station, garbage cans overflowing on the edge of the tiny plaza, oil spots in front of the gas pumps, paper wrappers and plastic bags blowing about in the gentle breeze, and bird poop all over the place. I wonder if these beautiful and sleek heralds from on high fly down here just to defecate, rather than make a mess up there.

Aside from 16 year old Abdul in the small hut opposite the garbage cans, where he takes money and sells cigarettes, a fortyish woman in a halter and muddy shorts stands at a nearby pump. A smoking cigarette hangs from her lips as she pumps enough high test gasoline to blow us all to Kingdom Come if an ash drops down and ignites the liquid. I find myself hoping she'll soon go back to wherever she came from.

Out on the highway, a pearl grey Chrysler New Yorker slows down on the highway and turns in to join us, bobbing up and down on enormous springs, and swiftly bringing its passenger to the pumps in comfort and style. From the velvet padded depths steps a man of my height, dressed in cream colored pants, a blue striped shirt, shoes that cost more than my riding mower, and a cream colored teardrop fedora circled by a black band. He is a vision, complete with Caribbean tanned skin. Here among the bird poop and fly specked overhead lights, I am struck by the sight of him, appearing in our midst as we go about the dirty chores of our ordinary lives. Mary, the Mother of God, couldn't have been more impressed when the Archangel Gabriel showed up in her pantry. I almost cringe as I think of him getting any of the messiness here on his garments.

The man looks around, as a Martian might upon landing, and then walks into the little hut. He might be seeking directions and I completely understand his reasons for consulting neither myself nor Gravel Gertie at the next pump. He may think us incapable of normal intelligent speech.

Leaving the man to the mercy of Abdul, I pump gas into my pickup truck and get to thinking. Although his impeccably clean New Yorker certainly cost more than my

four wheel drive pickup, it's entirely possible he has no more spare cash than I. If you stood the two of us side by side in our boxer shorts and took a snapshot, we'd look like two overweight brothers, one better tanned perhaps. But he, dapper in his clothes and fedora, and I in my jeans and polo shirt, appear as different as night and day. Either could have chosen the other's style. How did the two of us come to have such different tastes? I choose LL Bean over Gucci. Even my best suits are a bit on the informal side, Glenn Plaid instead of Banker's Stripes. What is it that goes into our choice of a presentation style in life? For that's what it is, a presentation we choose to make to other people. And with very little thought about it afterward, it becomes our habit.

Through the window of the hut I see Abdul gesticulating as he provides the stranger with directions. I know the first leg will always take a traveler past the hamburger stand owned by Abdul's cousin, Morris. It's a wonder the young man never thinks to express ignorance, suggesting his cousin might know the way. Soon Mr. Fedora comes out and walks to his car. He glances first up at the mountain and next at the garbage cans overflowing onto the edge of the pavement. Without acknowledging Gertie or myself, he gets in his Chrysler and drives off toward the hamburger stand.

I turn to my companion at the pumps, and sensing she'll see the humor in my question, I ask, "What's he got that I ain't got?"

A smile forms on her lips and she says, "He's got RazMaTaz!"

Yes, I think, he definitely does. Maybe in the original sense of the word, flash and dazzle to hide the real move, or maybe in a sincere desire to simply present himself well on whatever planet he came from. I do no different in my world.

I take my gas receipt from the pump as my new friend Gertie walks to the hut and then rather quickly comes back. On her way, she flicks her cigarette over among the garbage cans. Opening the door of her car, about to climb in, she swats her behind with both hands and a cloud of mud dust billows out from her butt. Then she looks over at me and winks while rubbing her bottom salaciously. "Raz Ma Taz," she says, and hops in behind the wheel.

Her car has no muffler and the engine explodes into life sounding like an 18 wheeler. With a roar that sends the birds scattering in every direction, her old car pulls out of the gas station and out on to the highway. Watching all of this, I fail to notice Abdul coming out of the hut until he is standing right next to me.

"She say you pay," he says. I laugh.

"Raz Ma Taz, Abdul," I say to him as I climb in my truck and leave.

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