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AT THE CROSSING

Miss Martin stood on the extreme edge of the street raging with young torrents of dirty water, and held up her skirts to the exact height modesty permitted.

"I want to get across," she exclaimed plaintively, gazing with expressive horror at the stream of traffic.

She leaned forward and prepared to dig a policeman in the back with her parasol. Unfortunately the weapon found instead a resting-place in a broad, frock-coated back, near the policeman.

The victim turned sharply with a ferocious expression, and a short emphatic word.

"You!" the man gasped.

"Oh, dear, how very tiresome!" murmured the damsel, annoyed. "It was meant for the policeman, of course."

It was a meeting not quite free from embarrassment. Only the day before Miss Martin had refused the proposal of marriage—sent by letter—of Mr. Tom Durrant.

"I can't stand in this absurd attitude all day," she remarked, pettishly, putting a small foot for-

once.

The policeman had vanished, but Helen Martin could not be expected to notice that.

"He's gone," said Mr. Durrant, very shortly; "allow me."

"It's very tiresome," she said, with a frown as she took his arm with a great air of reluctance.

He looked down at the pretty face, with expressive blue eyes.

"It can't be helped, I suppose," he said in a resigned sort of way.

"Escorting me across?" she inquired sweetly.

He thought of his beautifully-expressed letter and sighed again. All those exquisite sentences, those poetical thoughts, wasted! He had not taken a copy, and she had kept the original. Not that that mattered, because he was perfectly sure he would never love again, and that his life was wrecked. He had been wondering whether, under the circumstances, it would be more suitable to go abroad and shoot big game, or atay at home and drink himself to death. He had almost decided on the big game as more amusing when the cause of all his woe had dug him in the back—in mistake for a policeman. Hard-hearted little wretch! To write that sarcastic refusal! Not one sentence beautifully expressed, and two marred by doubtful grammar! No comforting poetical assurances of undying regret! And she had encouraged him. There was no question about that fact. He recalled a dozen little scenes and a dozen situations that told him, if anything ever told anything, that she would very much like him to write her just such a proposal as he had sent. She was a dangerous flirt, a breaker of men's hearts. It was enough to shatter his faith in woman, and send him away to hunt big game.

By WINNEFRED TOLE

"I am so sorry I troubled you!" apologized Miss Martin. "Oh, I'm going to be run over!"

She clung to his arm in a panic. He regarded her with gloomy satisfaction. For the moment she was the dependent feminine, not the superior goddess.

"There's no danger," he said quietly, "we can wait a moment."

He drew her on to the isle in the middle of the street. He declared it unsafe to cross just yet. He might as well see as much of her as possible, for of course when she got to the other side she would give him a cool bow and dismissal.

"Oh, can't we go now?" she said when the street was clear for the tenth time. "I am going to gaze in at that hat shop, and then shall look out for Mrs. Desert, and we can go have a chocolate. I want to try that new shop in Bond street."

"Mrs. Desert is out of town," he remarked; it seemed strange Helen did not know the movements of her best friend.

so thirsty!" exclaimed Miss Martin tragically.

"If I might dare to suggest taking you? I leave England to-morrow, so it will be for the last time."

"What are you leaving England for?" she inquired innocently after a long pause.

"For big game—among other things," he returned.

"I hope you will have a nice time."

"Thanks. I expect to enjoy myself hugely."

"Is big game dangerous?" she inquired carelessly.

"Not unless it bags you first," he returned.

"And does it ever? I thought you took natives and things, and stayed in the rear yourself?"

"In fact, use 'em as decoy?" he remarked sarcastically.

"Well, that's better than getting eaten yourself, isn't it?" she retorted; "besides, they are accustomed to that sort of thing."

He smiled, a glint of amusement in his eyes. "Here's a soda fountain at any rate," he said. "I shan't find anything so refreshing in the jungle—or such charming company," he added gallantly.

"Oh, don't!" she said impatiently.

He looked at her face; it seemed to have grown a little less smiling. "But it's the truth," he maintained.

They sat down at a little table apart from the rest.

"I don't see what you want to go to the silly old jungle at all for," she said crossly; "it'll be very hot and uncomfortable, and you'll miss the best of the season—and get eaten up by wild beasts!"

"Well, it'll be a new experience," he said cheerfully; "I'm sick of this same old round."

"He wants to go," she thought in a panic; "oh—oh, what a mess I have made of things! Even a proposal by letter was better than nothing at all

—from him; if he did copy bits of it out of poems and things instead of just telling me that he liked me properly! Who wants people to express themselves beautifully under those circumstances? It usually means they feel little. And I was sure he would come round as soon as he got mine and ask me properly, and now he's going out of the country, and I can't tell him bang out I've changed my mind."

"I got your letter," she remarked conversationally; "how exquisitely you express yourself! I'm sure it would look lovely published."

"What do you mean?" he demanded, laying down his cup.

"That it was written to an editor—not to me," she returned carelessly.

Is that why you wrote such an abominable answer to me?" he demanded, trying to take her hand. He caught her cup instead and burned himself.

"You've put your thumb in my chocolate," the girl remarked, injured; "how horrid of you!"

"If I had only known you would please you—a chap told me it did—"

"You discussed the matter with another—?"

"Oh, no; do let me explain, Helen; you see, this chap once told me about the lovely letter he'd written his wife when he proposed, and how pleased she was and accepted him at once, and so I thought it would give me an extra chance. I thought you'd be sure to accept me after all the work I'd taken to write such a perfect poem of a letter, and instead of that—"

"You got what you deserved," she retorted, blushing; "the idea of trying to cheat a girl out of the excitement of a verbal proposal and temporizing, and making you frantic, and then giving in at last when you asked awfully nicely and—and—all that sort of thing!"

"Then you didn't mean that letter as final?"

"I expected you to come round at once and beg me to change my mind. No girl with any self-respect could accept a man at first asking; you know, in these days of slumps in husbands—if that's the right term—it would look to much like jumping at him."

"Then you will have me—darling?"

"Well, you can call round and ask me," she returned, withdrawing a captive hand with decision. "You can't propose at a soda fountain; it wouldn't be a gentlemanly sort of thing to do; besides some one would be sure to overhear."

They can't, not if I speak in a whisper. Will you marry me?" he whispered in ghostly tones. "I am sure you heard what I said. Will you accept my life-long escort through the streets of life."

"Now you are being poetical again," she said, disgusted; "besides, a man never escorts his own wife; it would hardly be proper nowadays."

"May I be permitted to pay for your frocks? Is that sufficiently common sense?"

"I'm afraid you would say it was something different from common sense if you saw the bills," she replied.