

Marooned in London.

By FRANK CLIFTON. "I'm sorry, miss," said the agent politely, "but there is not even a berth left."

"Perhaps I might get in the second cabin," suggested Madge, with a sudden accession of hope. The agent smiled.

"There are more persons going back second cabin than there are who want firsts," he explained. "You see, lots of those who come over first cabin only have enough for the second cabin on the way home. Some of them discount their return ticket for the little extra money they can get that way. Of course some one might decide not to go at the last moment, but there are 137 applications in ahead of yours, and there would have to be 138 passengers not going before I could fix you up on that boat."

"But the next?" she persisted. "Just as bad, if not worse. I am afraid that I shall not be able to book you before the end of next month."

With a sigh, Madge turned away from the counter. She had lingered on in Europe after the rest of her original party had returned. She had joined the Worthingtons after that, but now they were starting for the Nile trip, and it was important that she should get home. There had been no hope of obtaining passage on the French and Hamburg liners, and she had run over to London supposing that there would be a better opportunity.

But everywhere the same story was told. The rush of west-bound traffic was unexpectedly heavy and there would be no chance for a stateroom for weeks to come. Aunt Clara was fretting at the delay, her father had written her that he was not well and he wished her to return at once, and yet they would probably be forced to remain in London for five or six weeks. Madge always thought better when she walked, so she dismissed her cab and started to walk back to the Cecil. The busy London streets quickened her thoughts, but these only served to show how unpleasant was her situation. It was a very blue face that crossed Tom Manning's line of vision.

"Miss Howard!" he cried, starting forward. "This is indeed a surprise. I had supposed that you returned long ago."

"Returned," she laughed dismally. "Why, we are marooned here. We cannot get a berth for love or money."

"If misery loves company you have lots of it," he laughed. "Let's go and have some lunch. That may cheer you up a little. I'll telephone Mrs. Twomey."

Madge nodded gratefully. She had always liked Tom Manning, and they turned toward the Carleton. She waited while he went off to telephone her aunt.

He ordered a capital lunch, for he had a rare sense of gastronomic proportions, and she really enjoyed the dainty meal, though she caught herself wondering how much more glad she would have been had it been Frank Roper whom she had encountered. He was a business man, where Tom was a mere society butterfly. Frank could have found some way of getting her out of the trouble; Tom was only a momentary diversion.

Almost as though in answer to her question Roper entered the dining room and came toward them. His alert bearing was in marked contrast to Manning's rather boyish pose, and yet somehow she did not feel so glad to see him as she had been to greet Tom.

He took a seat at their table in response to Manning's invitation and listened gravely to her recital of her troubles.

"I regret that I cannot be of assistance," he said when she had concluded. "I made every endeavor yesterday to arrange a similar matter for the relatives of some business friends, and the case is hopeless. Even the

freighters are booked far ahead." "Then you are marooned, too," she laughed gleefully.

"I never permit such a situation," he said complacently. "My interests are too large to admit of a delay. My room was booked before I came over. I am going day after tomorrow."

"I guess we exiles shall have to charter a steamer," laughed Manning. "If you are done, Miss Howard, shall we go?"

She left the table with relief. Somehow Roper's attitude of complacent satisfaction was positively hateful. She had always liked him before. Down in her heart of hearts she had vacillated between the two men ever since her coming out ball. Her preference had been for Roper until now, but at present Tom's mercurial temperament suited her mood better, and she was glad that she had met him first.

"Since Frank has refused the request, may I take it up?" he asked as they parted at the hotel. "I may be able to sandbag some unwary tourist and take his stateroom from him."

"If you only could!" she cried impulsively. "Father is in poor health, and I am so anxious to get to him."

"Can you sail at once?" he asked.

"I'd like to go this minute," she cried.

"Consider it done," he said, with mock dramatics. "I will work the sandbag persuasion this very day."

Madge went upstairs oddly comforted by the assurance, though her sense told her that Manning could not succeed where Roper with his influence had failed.

It was with misgiving that she opened the note he sent her that evening, but a delighted cry escaped her when a ticket fell out. She let it flutter to the floor when she read the letter. It ran:

Dear Miss Howard—I am called out of town and am mailing these to you. You can fix it up when I see you in New York. Hope you will have a pleasant passage. With regards to your aunt and yourself,

THE SANDBAGGER. Roper called that evening to explain that he had heard of a berth that she might obtain four weeks later and seemed much relieved to find that she had been provided for.

"I should have offered you my room," he said, "had it not been that it was imperative that I should be in town next week. We shall be fellow passengers."

Madge could not arouse great enthusiasm over this fact. A few weeks before she would have been glad. But since the luncheon she had changed. It was unreasonable to expect him to give up his stateroom, yet the complacent way in which he had dismissed that possibility had irritated her.

It was not as pleasant a trip as Roper anticipated. Madge was pleasant, but there was no chance to get a chat with her, and they were nearing home before the opportunity came to put his fate to the test.

He had regarded her acceptance as a matter of course, and her prompt and emphatic negative put him out of sorts with himself. He did not come near her again until they lay off quarantine and the steerage passengers were being transferred to the Ellis island boat.

The cabin passengers were hanging over the rail watching the odd characters as they trooped on board the little steamer. Roper leaned on the rail beside Madge.

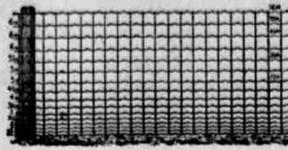
Suddenly he grasped her arm and pointed to the gangway. "Isn't that the richest joke?" he chuckled. "There goes Manning. He probably got strapped and came over steerage because it was the best he could afford. This is rich."

In a flash Madge solved the situation.

"I am afraid," she said, "that

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we are occupying Mr. Manning's stateroom. That is probably his reason for coming third class. He knew how anxious I was to get home, and that is the way he solved the problem. Had I known I should never have consented."

Roper's mirth changed to a sickly smile. "I congratulate—Mr. Manning," he said as he turned away.

That evening Manning presented himself at the Howards' in response to Madge's note. "I was going to arrive officially in a couple of weeks from now," he explained sheepishly. "I did not want to see you two left alone in London, and I had to get back on a big deal I was working. I'm sorry you saw me, though."

"I'm not," she said decidedly. "I used to think you were just a society butterfly, and I'm glad to know differently."

"Oh, I work," he said lightly. "Only I don't bring my business to 5 o'clock teas, and I rather like the teas—that's all."

"Just the teas?" asked Madge meaningfully.

"Do you mean?"—he stammered. "Yes," said Madge. Since you are afraid to appear to take advantage of your action I suppose I shall have to force you to propose."

"It won't take much forcing," he laughed. "Will you?" "Gladly," said Madge.

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