

HOW I MET MARY

It wasn't for everyone. God knows, there was little enough to go around. I had to fight for my little bit. It got pretty rough in there. Whoever planned the thing had their head in a bucket. Before long mayhem broke out. I tried to leave but somebody kept dragging me back and throwing me on the floor. That's when I first saw Mary. Of course, I didn't know her name then, but she was struggling to get up and had a tear in her blouse. I wanted to help her, but I was in no position. Some three-hundred-pound lug was sitting on me. I was pounding his chest and screaming. He didn't care. Hell, he didn't even notice. I saw some guy go flying through the air, and I realized it was Matthew Quinn, the organizer. That's when I went unconscious for a few minutes, perhaps the guy had hit me, I wasn't sure. When I woke, he was no longer sitting on me, so I tried to stand. I saw this woman, Mary, hiding under a table, and I started to crawl toward her. Somebody fell on my back and flattened me. I lay there, trying to breathe. Somebody bent down and said, "Would you care for a weenie in a blanket?" "I'd love one, thanks," I said. I choked it down, then tried rolling the man on my back off me. "Which candidate are you for?" he said. "I'm still trying to make up my mind," I said. I crawled forward a little more. A pitcher of lemonade crashed in front of me, splinters of glass everywhere. So I stood up. Matthew Quinn was standing in front of me. "I'm so glad you could come. A really good-spirited discussion is just what we need right now," he said. "Don't you think it's gone a little too far," I said. "It's important to know what the other guy is thinking so we can come to a consensus and rally around the cause," he said. Just then something buckled my knees and I was on the ground again amid all the broken glass. My hands and knees were bleeding, but I crawled on toward Mary. Matthew was knocked backwards and I stopped to see how he was. "My nose is broken. It's nothing. It's happened many times before," he said. "I think we're getting closer to a consensus," I said. "See, what did I tell you. It just takes time," he said, bleeding profusely. I was getting close to Mary. I reached out my hand to her. She found a steak

knife on the floor and aimed it toward me. "Don't come any closer or I'll kill you, I swear it," she said. "I wanted to help you," I said. "You're an animal, just like the rest of them," she said. "No, I swear, I had no idea this was going to turn out like this. I thought it would be a good idea to discuss the issues," I said. She faked a jab at me and then said, "Yeah, me too, but I don't think I'm willing to die for them." "My name's Glenn," I said. "I'm Mary," she said. "Do you think we could find a way out of here?" I said. "We'd probably be killed or at least maimed," she said. "Most of the action is in the center of the room right now. Why don't we crawl close to the walls until we can reach that door," I said. We crawled over Eric McKenna, who was out cold. Peter Furman smashed into the wall behind us. I saw Scott Guest fly through the window. And finally we were able to slip out the door. "Those people are crazy," she said. "They're just concerned citizens," I said. That made her laugh. "What were they supposed to be talking about?" she said. "Oh, you know, the usual stuff, faulty mucilage, cross-eyed frogs, obscure birdsongs," I said. "I never heard any of those things mentioned," she said. "They were just warming up to them," I said. "Well, at least they really care about something," she said. "Those are the caringest people you'll ever meet," I said.

The zany chaos of this narrative scene (a political debate turned brawling melee) is juxtaposed with the pleasant dialogue between characters, who meet while crawling on the floor, bloodied. Tate shows us how everything (humanity, chivalry, romance, tenderness, and kindness) is still possible, when telescoped to the moment of connection.

- Virginia Konchan