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Men Around Town

“Hey, how you doin’?”

I was standing at the corner waiting for the light to change. Twice a week I work half a day in a law library in Midtown Atlanta, then hustle a few blocks up Spring Street to man the reference desk at a hospital depository. That day, the green light gods disturbed my flow. As a consolation prize, they sent someone to keep me company.

“Fine, how are you?” I turned briefly to glance at the man who’d greeted me. I really didn’t want to speak, but I thought being mean for no reason while trapped at the light was not in my best interest. I offered the words then quickly turned my attention back to the four lanes of streaming cars.

“You got a boyfriend?” Involuntarily I looked down at my feet. In my rush to get from A to B, I must have stepped into a portal that transported me back to high school. My eyes found the face of the man who had decided I was going to talk to him in spite of the obvious reluctance in my side glance. The man was somewhere in his mid-forties, short and thin with dark, rough looking skin, wearing clean, but distressed clothes. He stared at me from the seat of a ten-speed bike. I turned back to the racers on the road.

He waited on me: arms straight and stiff as his fingers clutched the handle bars. I did not get the impression that the bike was his way of lessening his imprint on the environment. He was so not my type. But, apparently I had been emitting something, because he was the third not-my-type man to approach me that week.

On Monday morning a guy handed me a faded 8.5”x 11” “business card” after remarking that I was beautiful and looked like I “should get roses regularly.” The printed telephone number was crossed out and another written in above it. I was supposed to call him. Darn, I forgot.

Mid-day that Tuesday, another guy...well, I heard him before I saw him. I was making my way to the hospital when I heard someone yelling, “I want to kiss you.” When I looked around there was a man hanging out of the back window of an SUV, throwing the words in my direction. He repeated himself down the block and out of sight around the corner. If I had only worn my running shoes that day, maybe I could have caught him.

Now in the middle of Thursday, I turned back to the traffic as my response to the man of the moment sprinted out of my mouth. “I have a husband.”

There was the smallest of pauses and then, “You from Atlanta?” I didn’t look back. Somehow, I thought the conversation ended after “I have a husband.” Apparently, I have been married so long I’ve forgotten about the tenacity of men on the prowl. Standing to my right and also praying silently for traffic to halt, was a tightly buttoned-up man, around the same age as my new best friend, who was pretending not to follow the conversation. I think he was taking mental notes, just in case things worked out in the other guys favor.

“Yes.” Cars were slowing down, green turned to yellow. I lifted my left foot off of the curb and onto the street. After my last word, the guy coasted past me to the farthest corner of the side walk. “He’s a lucky man,” I heard him say as I stepped onto the road.

I trotted across the street a little flushed from the long wait in the sun and from the sweetness of the comment. Sincere or not, it sounded good. I could have gone back for him, thrown his bike in the back of my truck and rode off into the sunset. But, I was running late and I didn't have time to follow him down the side walk.