

## *The Double Elopement*

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“How have you made division of yourself?  
An apple cleft in two is not more twin  
Than these two creatures. Which is Sebastian?”  
—*Twelfth Night*

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“My dear fellow, you really must assist me; hang it, man, you must not sacrifice the future happiness of your friend to a mere punctilio.”

“But an elopement, Frank?”

“Is now our only resource; since old Muggins’s unfortunate elevation, he has become so blown with pride and self-importance, that he is determined to bestow the hand of my own sweet little Lucy on no one under the rank of a nobleman, a prince, a grandee, or some such presumptuous absurdity.”

“But really Frank—”

He cut short my remonstrance abruptly, almost angrily. “I tell you my dear fellow, there’s no ‘but’ in the case. We were schoolfellows together, students together, we have been in fifty scrapes and fifty pleasures together; and, will you desert me at such a point as this? It is not for myself alone I plead; heaven knows the disappointment would be bitter enough, but I could endure that. But to see my poor Lucy fretting and pining, with failing hope and harsh words—and I fear treatment—of her parents, is too much. I cannot bear *that*; it drives me almost mad. Come, throw the rules of puritanical ceremoniousness overboard for once, and be natural. Your sister is with us heart and hand; and it is you who are able to make two loving ones happy or to crush their hopes forever, to save a fond and affectionate girl from a thralldom which is slowly destroying her, or to rivet her fetters tighter and break her heart.”

The quick working of his handsome features stamped the generousness of his emotion; and, carried away by his eloquence and the thronging memories of our long friendship, I at last reluctantly gave my consent to aid his enterprise; and with a disagreeable feeling in my bosom, that the part I was about to play was not one of perfect rectitude, I walked slowly homewards.

Now I am not going to defend elopements. In all cases they are but an underhand way of doing what ought to be done before the world, and in the broad daylight; and in the majority of cases they are no more than the reckless plunge of unchecked passions into the future, in which a brief gleam of happiness is dearly purchased at the price of a subsequent lifetime of misery; but still, if ever there was an exceptional case, it was that of my friend. He had long been intimate with the Muggins family, and some three years previous to the time of which I write, had discovered in the person of the fair Lucy all the charms he in his most sanguine dreams had hoped to possess in

a wife. His addresses had been encouraged, nay, even courted, by old Muggins, a retired grocer, and an alderman of the city of London, and the marriage had only been postponed on account of the youth of the fair fiancée and partly to allow Frank Clifton's position to become consolidated; but delays are proverbially dangerous, and during one of the three years of probation, Alderman Muggins had been raised somewhat prematurely to the highest honor of a citizen's ambition. He had been made Lord Mayor, and during his tenure of office, had of course been brought into connection with some of the highest dignitaries of the land, whose position is more stable. He had feasted at his table the noble, the learned, and the distinguished, he had achieved a temporary right of admission to the acquaintance of some of the most exclusive of our aristocracy; he had been flattered by the premier of England himself, had shaken hands with the occupier of the woolsack, been on speaking terms with the leader of the opposition; and forgetting that the courtesies of these potential gentlemen were directed to the office, and not to the man, and that his year of power expired, he would sink again into plain Mr. Muggins a ex-grocer, he become impressed with the most ridiculously inflated notions as to his own majesty and importance, and abruptly dismissing poor Frank, he indulged in delicious daydreams of seeing his daughter a countess, a duchess, a goodness-knows-what, and perhaps even through her influence receiving the honor-giving accolade himself. But Lucy was not ambitious, she loved Frank with all the earnestness of young, fresh, unwarped affection, and instead of entering into her father's vaulting projects, dimmed her bright eyes and sullied her fair cheeks with many bitter tears at the separation, and with many more at the harshness with which her very natural reluctance to become subservient to Mr. Muggins' ambition was reproved by her parents, whose natural feelings were completely led astray by the *ignis fatuus* they were following. So, I repeat, if elopements are under any circumstance justifiable, this was one of the exceptional cases.

"Where is Lucy?" asked Alderman Muggins, on the following morning, taking his seat at the breakfast table with as much magisterial gravity as if he were about to try the coffee and cream for some heinous offence. "Call her down directly! The girl is incorrigible, to dare to keep me waiting for my breakfast! Me! whose time is of such importance. Well," he shouted, as the servant rushed back into the room, "is this all the respect you show to an alderman, to burst into my apartment without first having obtained permission? What's the meaning of such conduct?"

"Oh, sir, oh! I beg your pardon, sir," apologised the servant, pantingly; "but Miss Lucy's gone, sir, and there was this note on her table, sir. She's cut, sir!"

Mr. Muggins snatched the note out of her hand. It was very brief— "Father, forgive me! I shall return the bride of Frank Clifton!"

"Forgive you!" thundered the outraged father. "Never! I'll send you to Bridewell! I'll—"

"Had you not better find her first?" interposed Mrs. Muggins, meekly.

"Of course. John, send me the police. Call a detective. Summon Sir Richard Mayne. What are you loitering for?"

"Where am I to go to, sir?"

I am very much afraid Alderman Muggins suggested a person not to be named to ears polite; and the man was thrown upon his own good sense, immediately posted off to the nearest police office.

“Here will be a pretty convulsion in the fashionable circles!” soliloquised the irate Muggins. “Here will be a nice story for the Queen’s drawing room tomorrow! It will drive the French ambassador frantic; and, as for poor Lord Convulvulus, he will certainly commit suicide! He said, at my last dinner, that Lucy was the belle of the room. Oh Lucy! Lucy! see what prospects of future greatness you have shut yourself out from!”

“Excuse me,” said a quiet, gentlemanly-looking man, who at that moment was ushered into the room. “My name is Snapem, Sergeant Snapem, of the detective force. I hear you require my services.”

“I do Mr. Snapem. My daughter has eloped, Snapem.”

“Well?”

“Well! It isn’t well, sir. You seem to take it very coolly! Do you forget, sir, that I am an alderman. That I have occupied the civic chair? and that I am, therefore, entitled to some respect, sir—some reverence?”

The detective grinned. “You want her back?”

“Of course I do.” snapped Mr. Margins.

“Then have the kindness to order your carriage to the door, and send all the servants up to me.”

The alderman looked petrified. He! the flattered of nobles, to be thus commanded by a policeman! Stupendous! But circumstances govern cases, and both requests were obeyed. Sergeant Snapem obtained all the information he could from the domestics by a few adroit inquiries; and then turning to Mr. Muggins, said, quietly, “Now if you please we will go.”

“*We* go!” stammered the alderman, horror-struck. “Why, you haven’t the impudence to propose that we should go anywhere together?”

“I am afraid I must tax your condescension so far,” laughed the officer. “As I have not the pleasure of knowing Miss Lucy Muggins personally, I shall require you to identify her.”

“The pleasure of knowing Miss Lucy Muggins personally.” This was too much! Mr. Muggins was speechless, powerless with amazement; and in that state permitted himself to be led to the carriage, and seated side by side with the irreverent Snapem.

Their first visit was to the night policeman; and, from his well-trained powers of observance, they acquired the information that a couple answering the description of the fugitives, had taken a cab at the corner of the street in which Mr. Muggins’ house stood; that the cabdriver was a

certain “Bill Stokes,” who lived at the other end of the town, and who, being a night driver, was now sure to be found fast asleep in bed.

“Capital,” said Mr. Snapem, as he hurried Muggins back into the carriage. “Come along, sir; we shall catch them yet.”

“Where are you going to now?” asked the alderman resignedly.

“Hunt up the cabman, and find which station he took them to; then off to the railway, first train, or special one, if necessary, after them: post chaise for cross country, and run them to earth in some out-of-the-way village. That’s their destination, depend upon it.”

The alderman groaned but said nothing, and the remainder of the journey was performed in silence.

“Can’t get any further,” said the driver, stopping suddenly; “there’s no thoroughfare for carriages.”

“Never mind, we must walk. Come along, sir, and make haste, please—moments are precious.”

So spoke the energetic Snapem as he opened the door, pulled Mr. Muggins out, and, seizing him under the arm, much as if he had been a pickpocket, started off down the dirty, narrow footway.

Now, the alderman was very short and fat, and, moreover, somewhat puffy and short-winded; and hence he would have had some difficulty to keep up with the active steps of his companion even on plain ground, but the causeway along which they passed was a tolerably steep hill, and paved with large round boulder stones, over which the fat little alderman plunged and floundered like a ship in a storm.

“Mr. Snapem,” he ejaculated spasmodically; “Mr. Snapem—ugh! ugh!—I protest against this ugh! ugh! ugh! It’s not consistent with the dignity—ugh! of a member of the Court of Aid—ugh! ugh! ugh!—to be dragged along at such a pace as—ugh! ugh!—this, through cutthroat lanes and up filthy—ugh! ugh! ugh!—alleys; held by a policeman—as if I were a crim— ugh! ugh! I protest against it! I prot—ugh! ugh! ugh! ugh! ”

“Very sorry, Mr. Muggins,” said his companion, “but you see it can’t be helped. And—here we are; at least I think this is the house. Come along.”

“What, up that dark, filthy staircase? Ugh! I am ald—ugh! ugh!”

The detective cut short his sentence by tightening his grasp on his arm, and with the other hand groping his way up the dark stairs.

“We’re all right,” he muttered; “I hear him.”

“What do you hear?” asked Mr. Muggins querulously.

“Why, his snoring; listen.”

Mr. Muggins *was* conscious of a peculiar grunting sound, that had gradually been getting more distinct as they ascended, and now broke upon his ear in its full melodiousness, as Snapem opened the door of the room in which the nasal vocalist lay.

“Well,” soliloquised the astonished alderman, “there he is, I suppose; but I never knew that that singular sound was—ugh!—one of the distinctive peculiarities of night cabmen! Ugh!”

In the meanwhile, Sergeant Snapem was engaged in rousing the musical one from his balmy slumbers; and, the feat having been accomplished, Bill Stokes sat up in bed, and stared vacantly at the intruders.

“You took a lady and gentleman at the corner of — street, this morning?” said the officer, curtly.

“Perhaps I did, and perhaps I didn’t,” rejoined Mr. Stokes, defiantly; “it ain’t no business of yourn.”

The detective eyed him sharply for a moment, and then, turning up the cuff of his coat, disclosed to his view—a button, a common white metal button, which, by some singular fascination or spell, instantly rendered the man intensely obsequious.

“Yes, sir, I did take ’em up, sir; no offence I hopes, sir.”

“Describe the lady.”

“Well, sir, she were middlin’ tall, and rather nice lookin’, I thinks, only she’d got a wail on.”

“Her dress?” asked the detective.

“Well, sir, she’d got a handfull o’ lace, with a flower stuck on one side on it, on her head.”

“What do you mean?” asked the alderman.

“She meant un for a bonnet, sir; and then she’d got a thing like a whitey-brown blanket tied round her neck.”

“That’s Lucy’s burnous,” ejaculated Mr. Muggins.

“A burn hoo, is it? And her dress was a lilacy stuff, with a stripe of gray down each side, as if she’d ha’ run short of material, and helped it out with a bit o’ old bed tick.”

“That’s Lucy!” exclaimed the excited father. “And now describe the—the scamp that was with her.”

“He were tall, with a light moustache, and dressed in black.”

“Any luggage?” asked the officer, who was busy taking down in his pocketbook all the particulars.

“Yes, sir,” replied Mr. Stokes; “a black box, covered all over with a ’ruption o’ brass nails, like a blackey with the smallpox. I look ’em to the Great Northern Railway, and the gent giv me half-a-crown to drive fast, cos he wanted to catch the half after six train.”

“That will do, my man,” said Mr. Snapem; “and now take my advice, and keep clear of that crib in K— street, you know, or it won’t be very good for you.” And with a knowing wink, the speaker turned out of the room, leaving Mr. Stokes perfectly thunderstruck, and muttering ejaculations of astonishment in an undertone.

The news thus obtained infused fresh spirits into Mr. Muggins, and he dashed out of the room with an activity equal to that of his companion, who without giving the wretched Muggins a moment’s opportunity to remonstrate, pounced upon him, dragged him away, tumbled him into the carriage, entered after him, and they were again flying along the streets at a rate that brought them to the Great Northern Railway terminus at King’s Cross, before the outraged alderman could recover breath enough to denounce the irreverent and disrespectful insolence of his companion.

“Capital time,” said the latter, as quietly as if nothing had happened, “in a quarter of an hour the express starts. Ah, by-the-bye, I may as well telegraph on before hand,” and leaving the carriage, he walked into an adjoining office, and in a few minutes his wishes were flying through the wires with lightning rapidity.

“They have been seen,” he remarked to Mr. Muggins, when he rejoined him; “started by the 6:30 train, and alighted at Sudbrook 9:45. What ticket shall I get for you—first or second?”

“Neither,” screamed the unfortunate alderman, “I have endured these indignities long enoug—ugh! ugh! Go, you are on their track—ugh!—you have their descriptions, which tally—ugh!—exactly, box and all; go! and repair the injury which your want of veneration has done me—ugh!—by restoring me my daughter.” And having delivered this magisterial injunction, the battered Muggins shut the door of the vehicle, and gave the word “home.”

Mr. Snapem relieved his feelings by a whistle, and then turning into the express train, was whirled down to Sudbrook at a pace that would have not a little astonished his great grandfather, who had been accustomed to regard a coach that performed the same journey in a day and a half, “weather permitting” as a perfect miracle of fast traveling, almost profane in its rapidity.

At Sudbrook the detective found his shrewd conjecture realised. The fugitive had taken a post chaise, and started immediately to a village about ten miles distant; and the indefatigable Snapem, pouncing upon the first vehicle that came in his way, directly started, in hot pursuit, only arriving at his destination to be again disappointed, his quarry having once more “levanted” before his arrival. Through half a dozen turns and doubles did the acute sergeant track them, until

at length, just as the shades of evening were rendering the distant horizon dreamy and indistinct, he drove up to the door of the “hostelrie” of a remote hamlet, and to his infinite satisfaction learned that the runaways were then recruiting their frames by a comfortable tea in the inn’s only private room.

Mr. Snapem lost no time in ceremony, but walking straight to the room indicated, opened the door, and entered.

“What means this intrusion?” said the gentleman, springing to his feet.

The intruder vouchsafed no reply, but, drawing out his notebook, minutely surveyed the lady and gentleman before him.

“What do you mean by this conduct?” thundered the enraged gentleman.

“Come, come sir,” said the detective, coolly “no nonsense. You have led me a pretty dance, it’s true, but here I am at last; so the game’s up, you know.”

The lady rose, and threw herself into the arms of her companion, ejaculating tremulously, “What does this mean?”

“It means,” said Mr. Snapem, “that I shall want you to return with me to your father, without delay, and not imperil your reputation any further by these romantic escapades.”

“This insolence is insufferable,” exclaimed the gentleman; “who are you that thus presumes to address a lady in such terms?”

“Sergeant Snapem of the detective force. You, sir, are Mr. Frank Clifton, and this lady is Miss Lucy Muggins, whom I am empowered by her father to bring back to the home from which you induced her to flee.”

For a moment, the gentleman addressed looked staggered, but recovering himself, he replied haughtily, “Then Mr. Snapem, you are wrong. My name is Charles Dalton, and this is Clara Dalton, my sister; so, sir, the sooner you leave the room the better.”

Mr. Snapem laughed incredulously. “Of course, you are not Mr. Clifton? oh, no. Nor is your luggage contained in a black box, peculiarly marked with brass nails; but whether this young lady is Miss Muggins or not, I shall take upon myself the responsibility of taking her home to her father immediately.”

The poor girl sank sobbing into the arms of her companion, who exclaimed, “Do what you will then, Mr. Snapem; but remember that you do it under my most earnest protest. And now, sir, I am here, you will not insist upon this young lady returning with you tonight. Remember she has been travelling without rest all day, and is worn out and fatigued. No harm can possibly accrue from letting her rest tonight, and returning (under protest mind) tomorrow morning.”

The detective stretched his own wearied limbs, and looked keenly in the face of the speaker. "If you will give me your word that you are not going to attempt to evade me, I will."

The required promise was given, and the agitated girl retired to her room. As soon as matters were settled, the prisoner (for so we must regard Mr. Snapem's companion), threw off all his previous hauteur, and inviting the detective to join him in a bottle of wine, they managed to pass a very agreeable evening, one that we are sorry to say somewhat infringed upon the small hours, ere they retired to rest.

The journey to London next day, was a rapid one, and noon had scarcely chimed from the neighboring steeple, when the trio were ushered into the presence of Alderman Muggins, who, in order to give the reception a proper tinge of solemnity had converted his library into an extempore court of justice.

"Now, young woman," magisterialised Mr. Muggins, "what have you got to say for yourself?"

No answer ; but she hung upon her companion's arm, quivering with emotion.

"Madam," thundered the ex-lord mayor, "I sit here upon the stool of justice, as Brutus sat when he tried his son Agamemon, for the murder of Titus Andronicus, here to forget the father in the dispenser of the laws of my offended country."

Thus affectingly addressed, the young lady could retain her self-possession no longer, but throwing up her veil, indulged in a passionate burst of laughter.

"Why, who the duce is this?" ejaculated Mr. Muggins, forgetting his dignity in his astonishment.

"Your daughter," said Mr. Snapem savagely.

"Nothing of the kind, Mr. Detective, I never saw her before in my life."

"Who are you, then?" asked Mr. Snapem, ruefully, addressing himself to me.

"As I told you before, sir," I replied, for I may throw off my disguise now. "I am Charles Dalton and this lady is my sister Clara. And, now, Mr. Muggins, unless we come to an arrangement, I shall bring an action against you, and lay damages at £500, for this most outrageous infraction of my liberty."

But we did come to an arrangement, by which Frank and Lucy were forgiven as the price of my foregoing the terrible action and over a bottle of Muggins's execrable port, we determined to let bygones be bygones, and washed down all unkindness in a draught of the vilest stuff that ever paid duty to her most gracious majesty.

The explanation is obvious: Clara had taken Lucy's dress and memorable black box, whilst I by a little alteration in my attire and a false moustache, converted myself into an ugly likeness of Frank, and thus we eloped, and whilst the pursuit was actively being urged after us, and thus



thrown completely off the scent, the real culprits were quietly married at a little chapel within five hundred yards of Mr. Muggins' door.

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