

A Mistake That Turned Out No Mistake

BY JUDGE CLARK

My name is Smith—John Smith, to be more precise—and thereby hangs a tale.

I had barely reached the age at which the law, subject only to its own requirements, gave me the right to do as I pleased, when business of no consequence to the reader called me to Hinnomsdale, a remote country village, ten miles from the nearest railroad, and twice as far from anywhere else.

I was walking the platform waiting for the train when my attention was attracted by the arrival of a carryall literally covered with trunks and drawn by a span of nervous-looking horses driven by a gawky youth evidently as new as themselves to the situation.

Just then a whistle sounded, whereat the horses took fright, and, in spite of the ill-directed efforts of their incompetent driver, dashed off in a direction which, in another instant, would have brought them and the vehicle in front of a rapidly approaching train. I sprang to their heads, and knowing it would be impossible at once to arrest their progress, put forth all my strength to change their course, and succeeded in doing so barely in time to escape being crushed by the ponderous engine, whose iron framework brushed my garments as it thundered by.

It was now that I first saw that the inmates of the carriage were a couple of ladies—one of them very young and very beautiful, the other not so very.

I was gracefully and gratefully thanked by both; but the look I received from the younger made me half regret that I had come off without receiving at least a scratch for her sake. She was pale, and her voice trembled a little, but she exhibited no other token of being conscious of having passed through great and recent peril.

Her companion was more up to the etiquette of the occasion. First of all, when the horses had stopped and it was evident that there was no longer the slightest danger, she uttered an artistic little scream, very like those that opera composers are in the habit of setting to music; and afterwards as her feet felt the assuring touch of *terra firma*, she fainted in my arms with the perfection of grace that could only have been acquired by long and patient practice. The cry of “All aboard!” rallied her in the nick of time, and a tallow-faced young man in goggles having seen to the checking of the ladies’ baggage, pursuant to instructions asked and received of the younger, we proceeded to take our places.

An hour brought us to the town at which the ladies stopped. During the whole time Goggles had managed to monopolize the pretty one, leaving me to my fate with the other, who continued to pour out any numbers of vials of wrath on the subject of her sex’s wrongs, till at last I fairly “blushed and hung my head to think myself a *man*.”

But rich amends were made when Beauty gave me her hand in parting—she didn’t give it to Goggles, God bless her!—and, with a visible flutter in her voice, repeated her charming acknowledgement of what she was pleased to term my recent “heroic conduct.” And then how I

cursed my stupidity and Goggles together, as the train moved on, and she stood waiving her dainty little handkerchief, for preventing my having ascertained her name and address.

“Charming young lady, that,” remarked Goggles.

“Yes,” I grunted, as who should say, “what’s that to you?”

“Know her name?” he asked.

“No!” I growled, more gruffly than before.

“I *do*,” he added with a wink, a repetition of which would have rendered his being thrown out of the window, a probability by no means remote; as it was, I looked “daggers, but used none.”

“It’s Miss Araminta Stubbs,” he added, communicatively, “and she lives at Hinnomsdale.”

“How do you know?” I inquired, a little mollified by curiosity.

“Saw it on her trunk,” he replied, with the knowing look of a man accustomed to take a great deal of notice.

“My name’s Smith,” he proceeded to inform me—“John Smith,” he added expletively, thereby meaning, no doubt, “what might *yours* be?”

I didn’t tell him it was the same. The fact is, I didn’t feel particularly proud of it just then; and without asking Goggles to excuse me, I struck a bee line for the smoking car.

“Araminta Stubbs! Good Heaven! was ever maid so fair so foully named?” was my *first* reflection, as I sat musing amid philosophic clouds of my own puffing; and the *second* was like unto it: “what an improvement it would be to change Stubbs to Smith—a name illustrious, in spite of Goggles, by such shining lights as Dr. Adam Smith the philosopher, and Captain John Smith, who founded Virginia, to say nothing of ‘Extra Billy,’ who didn’t. By George! she’s worthy of such a name, and I’ll never rest till I lay it at her feet!”

How I found out at last that Beauty’s name wasn’t Araminta Stubbs, that it *was* Annie Lawrence, that she was the cousin of my old college chum, Tom White, and that it was the *other* lady’s trunk whose superscription had led Goggles to his sagacious conclusion—how I obtained an introduction to my charmer in due form, proposed, and was accepted, and how the wedding-day was at last set, it would be bootless here to tell. Suffice it to say, everything went smoothly till the day before that on which the name of Smith was to receive the crowning touch of lustre in being assumed by the prettiest woman that ever wore it.

I had hardly gotten off the cars at the little station already mentioned, when I was taken aside by a trusty friend, and informed that a deputy sheriff was then on the way from Hinnomsdale with a writ for my arrest—and, reader, for what, do you think? You would never guess it: *for the breach of a marriage promise alleged to have been made by me, John Smith, to Miss Araminta Stubbs,*

whom, as Heaven is my witness, I had never seen since the unlucky day on which I had the misfortune to save her life! Was ever mortal man, since the beginning of the world, placed in a position more preposterous? What *could* be the meaning of it, and what would Annie think?

Just then I saw Goggles, my evil genius, walking on the platform. He had come, it seems, by the same train without my knowing it. I had no ground for it, but I couldn't help somehow associating him with my present predicament, and a plan of vengeance flashed upon my mind.

"How soon will the deputy arrive?" I inquired of my friend.

"I look for him every moment," he answered.

"Does he know me?" I asked.

"No," said my friend; "I'm sure he doesn't."

"You see that man?" I added, pointing at Goggles.

"Yes."

"Well, *his* name is John Smith. I'll just step inside, and when the deputy comes and inquires for John Smith, just point *him* out."

My friend wanted no better fun. I had barely ensconced myself in the passenger's waiting-room near a window that commanded a full view of the field, when a man drove up in a buggy at a smartish pace. Throwing the reins to a boy, he jumped out, and taking my friend aside, held a short confab with him, which ended in the latter pointing with his thumb over his shoulder toward Goggles, who chanced, for once, to be taking notice in the wrong direction. "Like a guilty thing upon a fearful summons," as the officer laid his hand upon his shoulder, and said something I could not hear, did Goggles start, stare, and tremble.

It was easy to tell by the gestures he used how earnestly he was begging, arguing, and explaining, and all to no purpose; and when at last the deputy took his prisoner by the arm, led him to the buggy, assisted him in, took a seat by his side, and drove off, a more rueful looking object than poor Goggles it would be difficult to imagine.

I must tell the rest of the story as I learned it afterward.

On reaching Hinnomsdale, it was too late for Goggles to give bail, if he had had any to give, which, being in a strange place, he hadn't. Next morning he sent for Miss Stubbs' lawyer, who produced a package of letters, the genuineness of which Goggles had not the hardihood to deny, containing evidence enough to hang their author, had that in hand been a hanging matter.

Goggles persisted that they had been written in good faith, and with no design of trifling with the affections of the young lady, whom he was not only ready, but willing to marry on the spot. This, the lawyer thought, looked like business, and sent for his client at once, who came apace.

At the sight of each other, both plaintiff and defendant stood aghast. As Sir Harry Boyle, the Irish member, said, "It somehow turned out to be neither of them." Laboring under his original mistake, fallen into from the name on the trunk, Goggles, it would seem, had written a series of most affectionate epistles to Miss Araminta Stubbs, which the real Araminta had duly received, and quite as affectionately answered, never doubting that they came from one whom modesty forbids me to mention, but whose name she had, in some manner, discovered to be John Smith.

It was when she had learned the supposed duplicity of her imagined lover, and his engagement and near prospective marriage to another, that the vials of wrath sought and found legal vent.

How far Araminta and Goggles entered into mutual explanations, nobody will ever know. So much is certain: when my worthy namesake—I have long since forgiven the manifold injuries he never did me—discovered that Miss Araminta, if neither young nor beautiful, was nevertheless rich and well-to-do, and when Miss Araminta discovered the real merits of Goggles, and reflected that a man in the hand is worth two in the bush, the sensible conclusion was soon arrived at, that the best way to correct the mistake was to make it no mistake.

As for Annie Smith, *née* Lawrence, though now a matron of many years standing, I still insist she is the handsomest woman in the State.

New York Ledger, October 16, 1869