

Select Story.

Plain John Smith.

I HAVE heard it said that few, if any, journey from the cradle to the grave without experiencing some romance in their lives. But this as it may, we will not stop to argue the point, but proceed at once to say that I, incredible as it may appear, once acted the part of hero in a very promising little drama, the story of which I propose confiding to you.

Even now, after all these years, I am still struck with astonishment that this should have been allotted to me. I was such a thoroughly prosaic, matter-of-fact sort of individual, living so humdrum and commonplace a life, that it is a marvel to me how any romance contrived to keep into it.

There was my name, too—John Smith! Who ever heard of a John Smith winning spurs for himself, or rescuing distressed damsels? (To be sure, there was extant certain scions of our family, who, having aristocratic predilections, dubbed themselves "Smythes," and I strongly suspect that I had an equal right to the y and extra letter, our great grand-fathers having been one and the same.)

I lived with my widowed mother in a little ordinary house in a common little terrace—one of those everlasting red-bricked, bow-windowed, six-roomed dwellings, run up by jerry builders in such profusion on the outskirts of our large commercial towns; there was a tiny garden before and a tiny yard behind.

How well I remember it all—the chimneys that would stroke, the windows that wouldn't draught, the rain that came in, and the draughts that we couldn't keep out—the children who screamed and gobbled in the exuberance of their youthful mirth about our gate by day and the members of the feline tribe who did ditto during the silent hours of night—the raids perpetrated on these by our young domestic, and the raids of my dear mother on that damsel.

Such was the exciting scenes of my early youth. The only romantic thing about me at the time when I consider the romance of my life began was my age, which was twenty; and even this truth compels me to observe, was but an ordinary occurrence, which must perforce be shared in common with many another.

Looking back through the long vista of years, which enables me to judge impartially, I feel bound to confess that I was neither handsome nor good-looking; I fear I was not even of the ugly-interesting type, where many figures and deep grey eyes prove saving points. No! I was merely an ordinary specimen of the genus homo, possessing no distinguishing feature to mark me out from among my fellow-men.

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