

# JOHNS ADVENTURE.

Well would you like to hear my adventure in New Orleans? John Bright leaned his elbow on the arm of the red plush chair in which he sat with a thoughtful look in his dark blue eyes. "Why yes, of course."

"By all means."

Eugene Caribon and his sister looked eagerly at the handsome blonde in front of them.

"I was walking down Canal street one afternoon," John began, "when it began to rain, not violently, but enough to make a man feel uncomfortable, and the feathers on a woman's bonnet limp. Fortunately I had an umbrella, which of course I immediately raised. Just as I did so, a young lady came out of one of the large dry goods stores behind me. She stood irresolute for a moment, as though untroubled by the rain, yet an evident anxiety possessing her to reach the car. It seemed like a piece of impertinence, yet on the impulse of the moment I mustered all my gallantry, and stepping forward offered to escort her to the car."

"To my surprise, and I must say pleasure she accepted gratefully, and we walked to the next corner to meet a car. I noted then the extreme loveliness of her beauty, which was of the pure creole type and the marvelous finish of her toilet, which showed in its richness of coloring the southern taste. I could not censure her for her hesitation in exposing herself to the disastrous effects of the rain."

"When we reached the corner there was no car," John continued. "Being in Mardigras time, there was always more or less delay. When the car did arrive, it was so crowded there was not a foothold. The next and the next proved to be the same. Unconsciously we walked on, the young lady by an almost imperceptible guidance directing our footsteps. We walked along the Rue Royal quite into the heart of the old French town, the young lady scarcely seeming aware of the fact that we had traveled so many blocks. I was too delighted with her bright conversation and naivete to wish to undeceive her, and so we walked along until she stopped suddenly in front of one of those gloomy French houses, so dreary in exterior appearance, but often beautiful and gay within. A high wall surrounded the dwelling, surmounted by nails driven in so that the points projected upwards, a sure safeguard against marauder. As usual, a high balcony graced the front of the house. From the gate—a massive iron-barred one—a stone paved led up to the old-fashioned door."

"I feel very grateful, she said lifting her big eyes to mine with a shadow of timidity in their depths which made them all the lovelier; and, she hesitated a little, 'I know my father would wish to thank you also if—'

"If you only know whom to thank, I added, with a conscious shame at my own lack of courtesy. Now, I don't know what delectable prompted me to the action, but instead of handing her my own card, I gave her one of Frank Smith's, a young fellow rooming with me at the St. Charles, a drummer for a large hat firm in Detroit. His name graced the card in full, and also Tremoine & Leeman, the name of the firm he was connected with. It was a foolish thing to do, yet I never expected to see the young lady again, and I suppose it occurred to me that it would be a good joke on Smith."

"To my great astonishment she recognized the firm name. 'You must come in and see my father, she said. Mr. Tremoine is an old friend of ours, and he will be delighted to see you.' 'Into what kind of a scrape had I gotten myself? I decided as cautiously as possible, trying to hasten away; but just then an old gentleman appeared at the door, in answer to our ring at the gate, for as you remember in New Orleans most of the bells are on the front gate. 'In a few words the young lady explained the situation. With a true southern hospitality he invited me to enter, thanking me in most valuable terms for my kindness to his daughter. Seeing I would offend by not accepting their invitation, I stepped in with them. As usual in these French houses, the hall led into a little barren-looking court. From this, how-

ever, we entered into an apartment elegantly furnished.

"I confess I was a little dazed by the sudden turn affairs had taken, and the tete-a-tete with the old gentleman (whose name I ascertained to be De Chartre) was most embarrassing, for he asked me a score of questions about Detroit and the people there all of which I had to answer at random, or from vague reminiscences of what Smith had told me casually.

I tried in vain to turn the subject, and had almost given myself up to a desperate fibbing, when I chanced to perceive that a piano was behind me. During a momentary lull in the conversation, in which De Chartre was probably trying to reconcile my rambling information with his own knowledge and conjectures, I turned to the young lady, requesting some music.

To my relief she consented immediately, thus saving her father from any further surprises in the way of chaotic guessing on my part. She sang and played quite prettily, and I found myself even more prepossessed than I had been at first.

After she had played several songs, I rose to go, but as I did so, dinner was announced, and I was urgently invited by them both to remain. Again I saw that to refuse would be to offend, so in order to preserve Smith's reputation from further damage, I accepted, resolving that I would exert my talents to the utmost in being entertaining.

The dinner was served in good style, and quite enjoyed by Smith, who was sometimes rather dilatory in responding to his name, but who managed to keep the upper hand in the conversation, not allowing the old gentleman a single gap in which to insert his inquiries about Detroit and the Tremoines.

After dinner we adjourned to the parlor—this is the young lady and myself—the old gentleman going off for a smoke, in which I declined to join him.

The rain, which had been mild at first, now turned into a raging torrent. It beat savagely against the windows, and the wind swept mournfully through the court.

With such a charming hostess the moments sped swiftly. I became more and more enthralled with her dark eyes and her gracious manner so typical of the grace which has made the Creole woman celebrated. I don't know to what length I might have committed myself, had not the door opened and Monsieur de Chartre once more appeared on the scene. As it was, I think he surprised me saying some foolishly tender things to his daughter.

I looked at my watch. A flash of shame crept over me. It was past 10 o'clock. I felt that I had intruded on the hospitality extended to me. I began to apologize, but Monsieur de Chartre stopped me.

My dear sir, he said cordially, you cannot go out in such a storm. I will not permit it. My house is large. We have ample accommodations. Remain with us to night.

I hesitated a moment; the rain beating on the window-pane seemed dismal enough. Besides, I was in a part of the city with which I was unfamiliar. I might lose my way and wander about those narrow streets for hours; and then blood-curdling tales came back to me of strangers who had been robbed and half murdered in those dark thoroughfares.

I thanked him sincerely. I could not feel grateful enough for such a warm and cordial hospitality. It is true indeed that these southerners have the kindest and most hospitable hearts in the world.

"A few moments later Jaquet came to show me to my room. With a lingering glance I bade the young lady good-night. It seemed to me that her beautiful eyes were filled with regret for our short acquaintance. Her father followed me to the court without giving me several messages for Mr. Tremoine and other friends in Detroit, all of which I promised to carry faithfully. Then, with a courteous good-night, he intrusted me to the care of the waiting African attendant.

"My apartment was handsomely furnished, in keeping with the rest of the house. It was apparently a back room connecting with one in the front of the house by heavy folding doors across which a rich crimson por-

tiere fell.

"Jaquet brought me a pitcher of fresh water and some clean towels, and then, mumbling something in his unintelligible Creole French, bowed himself out.

"I examined the room carefully, lock all the doors except the folding one, which I found fastened on the other side, and went to sleep thinking what a capital joke this was on Smith, who was undoubtedly reposing beautifully in No. 105, at the St. Charles, unconscious of the strange escapade I had gotten him into. I resolved to write to the young lady as I left the city, informing her of my little deception, and introducing the original Smith, whom I was quite sure would fall head over ears in love with her at sight. Poor Smith, I was just mapping out his future most beautifully, when Morpheus seized me and carried me off into dreamland.

About midnight I was awakened by a slight noise in my room. I listened, but all was as still as death. Apparently the whole household had fallen into slumber. I attributed the sound to my own imagination, and was about to compose myself to slumber, when a cold chill crept over me. I was sensible of a near presence; the room was intensely dark and I could see nothing. Neither could my faculties, which were now thoroughly acute, perceive the slightest movement or sound. Yet my blood ran cold with the premonition of evil. I could feel a cold sweat breaking out all over me—the chill crept to the very roots of my hair. A terrible presentiment took possession of me. I dared not move for a second. My knees trembled, the cold drops of moisture stood on my brow. What could it be—this awful presence that seemed to lay cold fingers upon me in the darkness and wake me from my sleep? I lay there shivering as though chilled by some actual, icy touch for a moment, then my healthy, vigorous physique reasserted itself. I was no coward even to myself. I rose stealthily and crept to the light, turning the full blaze on suddenly.

"A change in the room startled me. The heavy portiere was thrown aside, the folding-doors stood wide open. Resolved to penetrate this mystery, I stepped into the other room.

"A cry of horror escaped me as I did so. I stood in the middle of the floor, petrified, the very blood freezing in my veins. There on the bed lay a man with his throat gashed from ear to ear, the red blood oozing slowly upon the white counterpane and the rich carpet beneath. His wide eyes were upturned to the ceiling, his white face transfixed with the death agony. "For a second I stood there as if frozen to the spot, my senses reeling, my hands clinched in a sudden agony of mortal terror; then like a flash of lightning the truth swept over me. A terrible crime had been committed. The responsibility was laid on me. In the morning the police would come to arrest me. What vestige of power would I have to disprove it?

"With a sudden, quick energy, born of desperation, I went to my room and dressed myself, leaving not the slightest trace of my presence there. Assuring myself that not a card or a slip of paper was left as a clue to my identity, I took my boots in my hand and crept noiselessly down the stairway.

"When I reached the door beyond the court, I shrank back in dismay. I had forgotten it would be locked and barred. I entered the apartment where I had been entertained the night before, hoping to find a window unbolting. To my surprise I heard voices and perceived a light emanating from the room adjoining. The door between was slightly ajar. I walked breathlessly across the room and peeped through the crevice.

"Horror of horrors! What did I see there? The fine, courtly old gentleman of the night before seated at a faro table, surrounded by a motley crowd—and my fine young lady, the brilliant, sweet-voiced enchantress of the dinner table dealing out farobanks opposite!

"It was enough. I turned away, realizing then that I was in New Orleans. I had gotten into one of the worst dens of the French city, and the beautiful Creole was probably one of the notorious characters I had so often read of.

"No wonder my blood ran cold. What if I could not escape? These were desperate characters, with whom I could not cope. The outlook was terrifying.

"I tried each window cautiously. They all resisted my efforts to raise them; all but the last—a yielded a little. I struggled mightily, with the strength of despair. In doing so my hand touched a spring which I had not perceived before. In an instant the window was pushed up noiselessly and with a stealthy bound I leaped through, landing unhurt on the ground a few feet below.

"But what to do next? There was the wall, surrounded by its rows of sharp nails. It would have been madness to have attempted to scale it. The gate was barred and fastened by a heavy chain. I could not cry for assistance; that would have meant certain death from those desperate, dark-browed men at the faro table. What should I do? Again the cold drops of moisture dampened my temple. I was frantic. What should I do?"

John stopped in his narrative and lit a cigarette Eugene had handed him a little while before.

"What did you do?" Eugene was impatient of the delay. He leaned forward anxiously. His own cigarette had gone out. He had forgotten it in his absorbing interest.

"Yes, what did you do?" Nell repeated the question with a terrible anxiety in her brown eyes. Her Kensington lay unheeded on the floor, her elbows rested on her knees, one hand supporting her disheveled face. Her breath came short and fast. She awaited the sequel with sympathizing anxious eyes.

"Way"—John gave an energetic puff at his cigarette—"I awoke!"—Fannie Isabel Sherick in Frank.

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