

A Night Adventure In New York

by Darius Cobb

The rain was beating against my window, and I was in a semi-drowsy state of mind, when I thought I heard a low moan in the street, directly under me. At first I was disposed to drop off again into a lazy mood, in which I could picture something more agreeable than storm and violence. But I was brought up to an extraordinary point of wakefulness by a second moan, which increased into a low cry of distress. I waited no longer, but threw up the window and looked down into the street.

“Is that you, up there?” shouted a lodger, who hired the room under mine.

“It’s I, sure enough!” I returned, while the storm beat vengefully down my throat. “I thought I heard something in the street, and I presume that by your head being out at this moment, you heard it as well as myself.”

“That I did!” shouted the lodger, “and it’s a kind of sound I don’t fancy. Let’s go down and see what’s up.”

“Just what I was going to propose, myself,” I returned; and with these words I closed my window, and seizing my overcoat and hat, I opened the door. But no — I had better take with me a provision against emergency; so I stepped up to my bed, and took from under the pillow a small revolver, and this time left the room and descended the stairs. I found my neighbor waiting for me at the door of his chamber, and we went down the hall stairs to the front door. We were about to open it, when there was a loud ring of the door-bell.

“Who’s there?” cried a voice from the top of the stairs.

We did not answer but opened the door, and were greeted by a strange sight, which, as revealed by the flickering gas-light of the hall, was effective in the extreme. It was a tall and elegant lady, dressed entirely in black, drenched with rain, and as pale as death.

“It’s Longwood and I!” cried my neighbor, “*we* rang the bell by mistake.”

With this exceeding stretch of truth, he pushed me onto the step, and followed, closing the door.

“Now, my good woman,” said he, “I am not unused to this kind of surprise, and know something of what you rang the bell for. It seems uncivil to shut you out in the rain, but you will understand it shortly. You rang for help—”

“O gentlemen! Do not let us lose time here! My daughter is being carried away, and I want your aid to recover her!”

I now saw the wisdom of my neighbor’s action in shutting the door. Had the lady in black been ushered into the entry, my host and hostess and the list of boarders, from Mary Mellon to Charles

Soft heart, would have been down in the tick of an old fashioned clock, and delayed the poor woman a good half hour in wondering questions and wild suggestions. So my friend was right.

“Come to my friend Brown’s, and tell us the whole story, and then we can leave you there and go ahead,” said Jacobs, my neighbor. “It’s right on the way.”

The woman only said:

“I will rest there, as I cannot go as fast as you,” and then broke down and sobbed convulsively. Brown’s was the apothecary shop on the first corner, and having reached that, we quickly learned that three ruffians had darted from an alley-way upon them, and had seized her daughter and made off with her, striking down the mother for appealing to them for mercy.

Such things were not strange in this great city, and we did not stop to wonder at the story; but having got from the exhausted narrator the direction the villains took, as near as she could give it, we sprang out into the storm and pushed our way along the street.

My neighbor Jacobs was a born detective, and I think had dabbled some in it for pastime. He went straight on till we came to a turn which brought us facing a sort of triangular building, which the street in its rear direction left at the right. To the left of this narrow building, ran a narrow street encased by very high and massive buildings.

“We’ll go down here,” said he. Now I should never have noticed any difference between this street and any other, but might have kept on till I should have come to an old building, narrow lane or something of the kind.

“Ten to one, they carried her down there,” he said. “Phew! How the rain falls!”

“What makes you think so?” I inquired.

“Dark street and no dwelling-houses. Nor are there stores that policemen trouble themselves much to watch. Just the street to be clear of everybody.”

“I’m with you then.” And with these words I followed him, as he made toward the head of this narrow street.

As we entered it, we thought we heard a faint cry, from a long distance down. We were stretching our ears to catch another if it should reach us through the storm, when a little ragged fellow ran like a sprite up to us, and exclaimed:

“Misters! They’ve got a girl down there, and I guess she ain’t a-goin’ to her own house!”

“What makes you think so, my boy?” hurriedly asked Jacobs.

“Cause they swear at her like blazes, and she tries to holler, an’ can’t. I hid, I did, and know just where they went with ’er.”

The little fellow's voice sounded honest enough, so Jacobs threw a couple of coppers into his hand, and told him to lead the way.

The boy started off at a rapid pace, which required all our efforts to keep up with. The rain was now falling in perfect torrents. It was a night for violence, and I shuddered as I thought that possibly we might be unsuccessful in our efforts to deliver the young lady from the hands of scoundrels, who would consign her to a fate far worse than death. I was wondering what the morning papers would say of the whole affair, when our guide shot into an alley-way, at our right, and was out of our sight in an instant.

"A regular imp," said Jacobs.

"Deserted or betrayed us," I suggested.

"Neither. I know their ways. Wait and see."

We did wait and see, but only for a moment. The urchin reappeared, and talking fast, and in a low voice, said:

"Say, misters, they've gone up there, an' down the other way, and if ye go down to the next alley, an' get up on the sly to the rickety old house to t'other end on it, ye'll see what ye're after."

Jacobs said not to say a word, but clapping some more coppers into the boy's palm proceeded to follow the youngster's directions to the letter. I might have stopped to doubt the integrity of the boy, thinking myself sagacious in so doing, but Jacobs was more experienced, and knew well what he was about.

The lad did not accompany us further, no doubt reflecting that he had neither strong arm nor pistol to aid with, and, therefore, could afford to keep out of the reach of recognition, he, no doubt, being well known in that quarter.

We pushed our way against the gale to the alley the boy had mentioned, and turned up this into intense darkness. We were groping our way along, when we saw the reflection of a bright flash, and then a report. The impression with me at first was, that we had been betrayed by the imp of a guide, and were about being rewarded for our stupidity in trusting him on so short an acquaintance. But I was soon undeceived, for, following the report, came through the noise of wind and rain a loud cry of pain, and then a fierce oath. The voice that uttered the oath was different from the one that uttered the cry.

"Take that for your meddling!" exclaimed the voice of the swearer. "You may feel cursed lucky if I haven't finished yet! Let a gentleman be with his game, next time, my honey."

It was evident that we were about entering on the active scenes of our drama, and that powder and ball might be summoned to act out a portion.

“Is your barker in order?” inquired Jacobs, in a low voice.

“Capped and dry,” said I, in return.

“Then keep it ready for use; for I know that voice. The fellow that fired the shot is a strong one, and about the quickest hand in the city. But have no fear, for we are equal to them.”

I responded rather stiffly that I was not afraid, and we had recommenced our steps up the alley, when a low moan was heard ahead. It was that of a woman, and we had no doubt who it was.

“The devil take ye!” cried a voice that we had not yet heard. “You’ve given us enough trouble! Now behave, or I’ll— Does ye feel that, miss?”

“O, don’t kill me, sir!” responded a sweet, female voice. “Let me return to my mother, and Heaven will bless you for your kindness!”

“Preaching, ay?” broke in the voice of the ruffian that fired the pistol. “Well, my gay one, just go up an’ tell yer mother to come down and visit us, and perhaps we’ll let ye go an’ blow on us— *perhaps* we’ll do that thing, ’cause we’re jest a little green here, jest a bit!”

This sally was greeted by a hoarse laugh, and the deep groan of anguish that followed showed how hopeless was the cause of their victim.

“Now, Longwood, you understand how these things must be done. Don’t be in a hurry, and don’t fire a shot too many. I think we’ve got to kill one of those men. An hour hence we can tell better whether one of them or more, or whether one of us or both, will be food for rats.”

Jacobs had a professional way of speaking which turned my blood a little cold, and made me feel for a time just as if I had rather the little boy had not helped us to the track of the villains; but this did not last long, for a loud oath from one of the scamps, and a piteous cry from their victim, re-
aroused what manhood I had within me.

“Now for it!” exclaimed Jacobs, between his teeth, and he moved rapidly up in the darkness, while I, with a violent reaction within me, felt like covering the space with a bound, and discharging my revolver without asking or giving mercy.

We were soon at the door of an old, broken-down hovel. The noise of the storm fortunately drowned that of our footsteps, and we reached the door without giving alarm.

As we stood there considering the best means of gaining an entrance, the ruffians got into an altercation; and the object of their heated discussion I think best not to record. The impatient Jacobs did not stop to try the door, but gave it a kick that burst the rickety thing from its hinges. I rushed in after him, and found myself in an old room, lit by a tallow candle, that flickered as if in perfect frenzy at the wind that beat in through the cracks, and from under the rotten floor.

Off in the opposite corner was crouched in mortal terror a beautiful girl, her hair disheveled, and her upturned eyes bathed in tears. In her despair, I could see that she was mutely appealing to Heaven, while the fiends before her were engaged in their diabolical confab regarding the lovely victim.

Jacobs had drawn his revolver, and bidding me see to the man who was nearest the girl, he presented his pistol to him nearest the door, whose size showed him to be the one spoken of by my companion. The fellow lifted his hand as I passed, and I saw something gleam in it. I saw no more, but dashed upon my man as a pistol flashed in the hand of Jacobs. I heard a cry of pain, a fearful imprecation, and a body tumbled against me. I heeded nothing, but, springing forward, closed with the ruffian apportioned to me. He showed fight, but I was too quick for him, and, dealing him a blow with the butt of my revolver, sent him reeling against the wall. In another moment I had him against the window, and my pistol presented to his head. As I pressed him backward, however, the time-eaten woodwork gave way, and we both fell into the yard, amid the shattering of glass, and curses of my opponent. The fellow did not wait to fight it out longer, but tearing himself away, he leaped to his feet, and, no doubt thinking me a watchman, made off in the rain and darkness with all speed.

I hastened in to the aid of Jacobs; but he had taken good care of himself. I found the light blown out by the entrance of the wind through the shattered window, and Jacobs was ordering the third ruffian to follow him. It seemed he had shot the big fellow dead, and the other—there were three—being the one wounded in the squabble that occurred while we were in the alley, was conquered without difficulty.

I can make the rest of my story short. The girl so providentially rescued from a fate worse than death, was conducted by us to the apothecary's, and the meeting between mother and daughter, so ruthlessly sundered, and so unexpectedly restored to each other's arms, I shall not attempt to describe. I leave it to the imagination of the reader.

As for ourselves, we had to repeat our story at the table so many times, that I write it here simply to tell the reader what the boarders have heard over and over again.

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