

THE CABMAN'S BEST FARE

A STORY OF LONDON LIFE.

BEING THE ROMANCE OF A POOR BUT HONEST MAN.

I've been a cabman ten years or more, and naturally I've had some good fares in my time. There was a bishop once who gave me a sovereign instead of a shilling, and wouldn't take it back when I told him of his mistake. There was a bookmaker who bet me a pound to nothing I couldn't catch a Doncaster special at King's Cross, and who paid me two because I landed him in time, though I damaged my cab and got my number taken on the road.

But the best fare I ever drove was a servant girl. Of course I didn't class her as any better than indifferent when I picked her up at the Great Central terminus; and if it hadn't been for a block in the street I should probably have missed her altogether. I'd meant to be in time to meet the 6:30 express, a favorite train of mine—only the other day I got a newly married couple up for the honey-moon out of it—but the block made me just too late, and when I reached the arrival platform it looked as desolate as only the arrival platforms can when one train's backed out and the next ain't due for half an hour.

All the passengers had gone except the one girl, and there wasn't a cab to be seen. The porters, all but Sam Sleeman, were talking to each other, and Sam was talking to the girl.

"Didn't I tell you there'd be one directly, Miss?" said he, as I came up. "Here's the very best driver in all London at your service."

She was a nice, pleasant-looking girl, and if I'd been taking a day off into Epping Forest or down at Hampton Court I'd have been glad enough to let her share the pony trap; but pleasure ain't business, and I began to wish I'd stopped out of the station. However, as it was there, I couldn't very well refuse her; so she got into my hansom looking as if it wouldn't take much to make her cry.

"Seventy-four Blank street, Chelsea," said Sam as he handed me up her bit of a box. "I've told her three shillings is the proper fare. Halves in the extra box, Bill."

I nodded and drove off, not meaning to charge the poor thing an extra shilling, but knowing better than to quarrel with a porter over six pence.

"Come up, horse," said I, as we cleared the station, for our way was barred, and I picked up a swell on his own legs, and anyhow we haven't had a bad day. I was driving a thoroughbred that day, own brother to a horse that won a race at Alexandra Park, and though he was more than a bit queer on his off fore leg it didn't stop him when he warmed to his work. He was as sensible as a Christian, too, and a shake of the reins was enough to make him do his best. But he didn't like pottering about searching for little streets nobody ever heard of but those who live in them. Blank street was one of that sort, and by the time we pulled up at seventy-four he'd lost his patience and so had I.

"Now Miss," said I, "speaking through the trap and rather short, 'as soon as you can, please. My horse is fidgety, and time's money."

She gave a little scream and jumped out as quick as I'd dropped a line of cracker down on her. In her hurry she managed to get her dress caught somehow, and when she tried to undo it she pinched her fingers in the door. "Oh!" she cried, and I never saw the end of the job if I didn't lend a hand, swung myself down off my perch.

"You ain't accustomed to hansom, I think," said I, as I fumbled about with her skirt.

"I never was in one before," she replied. "I'm very sorry to give you so much trouble. Oh, dear! I hope your horse won't run away."

"Not he, miss," said I. "He'll stand for an hour if I'm not on the box—but there; all's clear now, I think."

"Thank you," said she, taking out her purse. "Are you sure this is the right number?"

"Why, yes," said I, getting her box down. "Any way, it's 74. That's what you want, isn't it?"

"Yes," she replied. "But if looks like an empty house."

"It is; and I wasn't satisfied with only looking like one. I rang the bell till I broke the wire, and then I took a turn at the knocker, but it was no go. The girl stood on the pavement with her shabby little purse in her hand and her shabby little box at her feet, looking so miserable that I hadn't the heart to leave her to shift for herself. 'Cheer up, miss,' said I. 'I'll try next door.'"

A waspy-faced little woman answered my knock. "No," she said. "I don't know nothing about 74; and if I did this ain't a private inquiry office." And with that she shut the door in my face.

Then I tried the other side. There they were more civil, but almost as ignorant. There had been a lady and a gentleman living at 74, and for all 72 knew, they might be there yet, only, perhaps, out just at present. No furniture had been moved lately, not to their knowledge, and so I said, "There's a sport called 'Shooting the moon' wasn't there?"

And what with false references and such-like things you never were sure of your next-door neighbor, and I was stopping in the boarding house at Har-mingham, where I was housemaid, and I was to be parlor maid here. But, oh, what shall I do if she's left?"

"No need to think about that till we're sure," said I. "Perhaps the lady's in the city, and it had 'Mrs. Stuy-leton-Penrose' in the middle, and '74 Blank street, Chelsea,' down in the left-hand corner, as correct as any card I ever saw."

"Did they know you were coming by this train?" I asked.

"Yes," she replied. "When Mrs. Penrose engaged me she told me exactly how to come, and the time and every-thing. She and her husband had been stopping in the boarding house at Har-mingham, where I was housemaid, and I was to be parlor maid here. But, oh, what shall I do if she's left?"

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thing to do with the delivery of letters; and they couldn't, or wouldn't, tell me much, though I cross-questioned the young woman in charge nearly as hard as a lawyer once cross-questioned me when I was a witness in a running-down case.

I walked slowly back, hoping to goodness somebody belonging to the place would have turned up while I was away; and sure enough when I got round the corner I could see some one talking to the girl.

"That's all right, William," says I to myself. But it wasn't, the chap was only a policeman.

"Hullo, 10,414," says he. "Trust a cop to take the number of a cab if he stands within sight of it for five seconds. 'What's the meaning of this?'"

"That's just what I want to know," says I. "If you're the officer on the beat perhaps you can tell me where to find somebody belonging to 74."

"Ay," says he, chucking. "I can tell you fast enough. In Holloway prison on remand—charge of general swindling. Surely, you're not another victim?"

"No fear," I replied. "But I'm afraid this young woman is. A Mrs. Stuy-leton-Penrose has engaged her as parlor maid."

"Oh! she has, has she?" said he. "Tell me, my dear, did she borrow any money from you?"

"Oh, yes, sir; she did, indeed," cried the poor girl, now fairly breaking down. "Ten pounds the day before she left Har-mingham. I was to have extra wages for being so ready to oblige her."

"Ah!" said the policeman. "I thought so. My lady has been playing the same game, or a similar one, all over the country for some time; but we've got her at last, and we shan't let her go in a hurry. If you care to have a dig at her you can come round to the station along with me and tell your story to the inspector. The more of you who appear against her the longer she's likely to get. If that's any consolation to you, it would be to me, I know."

"And to me," I chimed in. "I'll drive you and the officer round with pleasure, miss, if you'd like to go."

"Oh! no, no," she moaned. "She was sitting on her box at this time, and crying as if her heart would break. Even the copper looked sorry for her; and I felt as if hanging would be too good for a rascal like that. 'I don't want revenge, but what am I to do, what am I to do?'"

"Well, if you'll take my advice, put in the copper, 'you'll let cabby here drive you back to the station, and take the train home to your friends.'"

"I haven't any friends," said she, "or any money to pay my fare if I had."

"Don't say that, miss," said I, winking at the copper. "There must be some one down in your part of the country who'd put you up till you've time to turn round; and as for fare, what if they know me so well at the Grand Central that I could arrange it with the booking clerk?"

She stuck out she couldn't think of any where to go. She said she'd no parents; no relatives, even, that she knew of; and as for friends, well, a servant in a boarding house naturally don't make many of the sort that's useful in a crisis.

"What the dickens are we to do?" I whispered to the copper.

"There's the casual ward," he whispered back.

"Oh! sink the casual ward," said I, disgusted.

"With all my heart," says he. "But what else is there?"

"Well, ain't there a refuge or a home or something somewhere handy?" I asked.

"Why, yes," replied he. "There's one in X square; but I don't know whether they'll take her in; and if they will, it's hardly the sort of place for such as her. It's more for you know."

"Ay, I know," I said with a sigh. "I might try it, though."

"Yes," says he, "you might, if the young woman has no objection. Anyhow, she can't stop here all night, come, clear off, you boys."

It was a very quiet place, was Blank street, but a little crowd had collected by this time. While Robert moved them on, I told the girl about the refuge; and, while it was easy to see she didn't like the idea of it, she said she'd go, and thanked us both for the trouble we were taking.

"Don't mention it, miss," said I, and Robert he slipped a shilling into my hand on the sly.

"Of course I trust you," she said, and I thought I'd take her chances, and if they won't have her," he whispered, "I think you're a chap to be trusted."

"The same to you, my boy; and thank you," said I. "You've got my number, and I'm always to be heard of at Roscoe's yard, Lambeth."

"All right," says he. "You'll do the best you can for the poor thing, I'll warrant. Good night."

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more words I clambered up and drove off down the Chelsea embankment and over Vauxhall bridge to Roscoe's to leave the cab. The yardman stood with his hands on the young woman out and shouldered her box.

"Blessed if Bill Taylor ain't been and got married!" I heard some of them say; and "I'll be back for my second horse about five," he called out to prevent the report from spreading among my mates. I thought even a yardman would have sense enough to know a chap wouldn't have a second horse on his wedding day.

"No lived close to the yard; and my mother stared harder than the men had done when I came in with the box. 'That's a queer thing to be left in a cab, Bill,' said she.

"Tain't been left, mother," said I; and then I explained things to her as quickly as I could, for the girl was waiting on the landing—we had two rooms in a block of modern dwellings.

"You ain't angry, mother?" I asked, for she looked when I'd finished, only looked at me with a queer light in her eyes.

"Angry! No," says she. "Only proud of my son. Come in, you poor deary, come in. You must excuse Bill for leaving you there. He never did have a grain of sense."

Then they threw their arms around each other and had a good cry, while I scratched my head and wondered at cause of that sort of woman. When they'd done, mother bustled about and got tea, making the girl help, just to set her at ease.

She told us her name was Jessie Morris, a little legacy, and I set up a hansom, earning her own living ever since she was fourteen—latherdowns two and twenty that night, but knocked off a couple of years when I saw her after she'd had a bit with a family at Bristol. We didn't lose sight of her. When I'd time I'd look her up, and when she'd an evening out she'd come down to see me, who wasn't as active as her at last my girl, and we shan't let her go in a hurry. If you care to have a dig at her you can come round to the station along with me and tell your story to the inspector. The more of you who appear against her the longer she's likely to get. If that's any consolation to you, it would be to me, I know."

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A COMPARISON.

On o'er the pastures, where the mountain flowers
Starring the sward trim garden beds out-
shoot!

On through sweet pine woods, cross the
torrents' flow;

On o'er vast boulder mounds, while still
the hours

Make labor lightsome! For above these
towers,

Unseen as yet, the peak; on o'er the
snow!

Nor heedless tread its smoother plain,
for lo,

The blue abysses yawn, the avalanche
lowers!

Scale yonder beetling cliffs, where now
the sun

Beats fiercely, hew sure steps in walls
of ice;

What though with toll-worn limb and
labouring breath,

Hold bravely on until the heights be won.
So run's the tale; childhood, youth's
paradise!

Hard manhood, weary age, the goal of
death.

—H. T. R., in The Spectator.

THE COLONEL'S DAUGHTER.

He had read dime novels, had Saunders. He had read them as a boy in New York. In the afternoon, as he came home from school, he had bought them from some street-corner vender of "penny dreadfuls," and had gloated over them as only a small boy, born and bred in a great city, can gloat over tales of the west. He had not been discriminating, of course, and had a natural leaning toward the most blood-curdling recitals; but he had chosen always something in some way connected with army life.

The army to him was a beautiful dream, a highly varnished picture, and to be part of it—a major part, of course, something like a general, or at the very least a colonel—had been from the first his one ambition