

TAXI

An Adventure Romance

GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

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PAMELA THORNTON.

Synopsis—Robert Hervey Randolph, young New York man-about-town, leaves the home of his sweet-heart, Madge Van Teller, chagrined because of her refusal of his proposal of marriage. His income, \$10,000 a year, which he must surrender if a certain Miss Imogene Pamela Thornton (whom he has seen only as a small girl ten years before) is found, is not considered by the girl of his heart adequate to modern needs. In a "don't care" mood Randolph enters a taxi, un- seen by the driver, and is driven to the stage door of a theater. A man he knows, Duke Beamer, induces a girl to enter the cab. Beamer, attempting to follow, is pushed back by Randolph and the cab moves on. His new acquaintance tells Randolph she is a chorus girl, and has lost her position. She is in distress, even hungry, and he takes her to his apartment.

PART I—Continued.

The girl considered gravely for a moment; then her face broke into a smiling smile that swept up and settled in her eyes. She reached for a cushion, put it at her back, tucked one foot under herself, and waved the other in the same fashion as had Miss Van Teller earlier in the evening. "Now talk," she said.

"Do you like me?" asked Mr. Randolph.

She nodded her head.

"You're not afraid to be here?"

She shook her head.

"Have you ever been in a man's room before?"

She looked him straight in the eyes and made no other sign.

It was Mr. Randolph's turn to flush.

"Then," he said, "if you like me and if you're not afraid, please begin at the start and tell me all about it."

The girl's eyes fell and sought the floor. Her face slowly paled to the shade of her somber thoughts. She was no longer pretty; she was beautiful, with a revealing transparency that made her seem unfeigned, a disembodied spirit of sincerity and truth, indubitably pure.

"I had a nurse once," she said, in a low voice, "and a wire-haired terrier, a show-dog and a darling. His name was Sport." She raised solemnly to Randolph's face as though measuring his powers of understanding. "My nurse died and then, one day, I had to sell Sport; I wasn't old enough to sell myself."

She stopped speaking with an unmistakable finality. Randolph was overwhelmed by the flood of information that this slip of a girl had packed into two-score words. A life-story in four lines and a revelation of the heart thrown in for good measure! Over and above that, he had to reckon with the confirmation of a suspicion which had been slowly establishing itself in his mind that he had met her before, that not for the first time this night had those soft lips, curved for merry words, cried, "My, what a bump!" within his hearing.

So many considerations pressed to his immediate attention that he awoke to the actual present too late to stem the tide of tears that suddenly rose to the girl's eyes.

"Oh," she sobbed, "what is to become of me? I was so happy here, if you hadn't made me think!"

If anything has been said in the course of these pages to give the impression that Mr. Randolph was modeled after Joseph or heyn out of ice or packed with probity to the exclusion of red blood, forget it. At the sight of those tears, he sid the length of the couch to first base, held the girl in his arms, switched her round so that she lay across his knees, drew her face against his shoulder, and rocked her gently.

"You poor kiddie," he said softly, "what a devil of a time you've had! But believe me when I tell you it's all over. This is the night that starts your old happy sun into the blue sky again. Don't worry."

She stopped crying and looked up into the honest face so close to her own, puzzling as to how just those words could have come from it; but the world had taught her a hard lesson in varying standards. She drew a long quivering sigh.

"If you could only wait until I love you, body and soul," she breathed.

"What on earth do you mean?" asked Mr. Randolph.

"Why, then it wouldn't be so bad—so ugly."

"I don't get you," remarked Robert Hervey.

"A man told me just a little while ago that he was making a catalogue of reasons why women give themselves," she continued, "He had eleven already, and yet he was one of the nicest men I've met. He talked to me as though he were showing me a way that I must travel alone."

"Really?" said Mr. Randolph, stifling perceptibly.

"The lowest reason of all was for cold cash," she went on, as though he had not spoken. "Then came the glitter of precious stones, and, after that, silk underwear!"

Mr. Randolph, mystified and interested in spite of himself.

"Of course you couldn't understand that," she said, "not unless you had seen some poor girl bury her face in crepe de chine and lace, tremble to try them on, and then sob because she had worn them over them."

"Look here," said Mr. Randolph,

at her almost appealingly as if his whole sum and substance were crying out to be appraised at face value but no less.

"That's me," he said rapidly. "My name is Robert Hervey Randolph. Some people call me 'Bob,' some 'Herv,' and the sly ones say 'Randy.'"

"And I shall call you 'Mr. Randolph,'" said Miss Thornton bravely, and then broke into: "After—after I've th—thank you again and—and again from my heart. I'm going now."

"That's a wrong guess," said Robert, smiling happily—he didn't know exactly why. "I'm the one that's going, after you promise me that you'll stay here until ten o'clock tomorrow. But before we come to that, please don't thank me ever. It's selfish, but I'd simply love to have you remember me as Bob or Herv or, at the very worst, Randy. Won't you?"

She looked this way and that before she let her face ripple to its wondrous smile.

"I'll go as far as Randy," she conceded gracefully; then the smile went and the shadow came. "But I really can't stay here, you know."

Mr. Randolph leaped to his feet, reached her in a single stride and caught her by both wrists. "Look at me!" he said. "If you won't promise to stay here without a break till ten o'clock tomorrow and thereafter at your pleasure, I'll stay myself and hold you. Now, do you or don't you? One—two—"

"I do."

"Do what?" inquired Robert.

"I promise."

"Make yourself absolutely at home, then," he said, as he dropped her hands and turned toward the door.

"I feel like Christmas eve," said Miss Thornton mockingly. "Won't you please tell me what's going to happen?"

"You've guessed it—Christmas," he answered emphatically, tossed the latch-key on the table, and left her.

She can be excused for spying upon him from the curtained window. She saw him awake the cabman, and then watched the pantomime of a long colloquy.

"Oh!" she moaned. "No wonder! The awful, awful price of those horrid clock times! Why did I let him tell it to wait?"

Presently she was amazed to see both the driver and Mr. Randolph disappear into the dark recesses of the cab and close after them its door. For twenty breathless minutes she watched, tormented by the thought that they had retired to have it out where they wouldn't be disturbed by the police. But at last they issued—both of them. Mr. Randolph proceeded to crank the car and then, walking rather strangely, went off, headed west; the driver mounted his box, threw in the clutch, and scurried to the east as though he were off to meet the morning.

"Strange doings!" thought Miss Imogene Pamela Thornton, as she turned from the window to start on a privately conducted voyage of discovery.

Strange doings, indeed, and stranger still could Imogene Pamela have heard as well as seen. This is what really happened: Mr. Randolph awoke the cabman gently but thoroughly; then he said:

"Look here: I want to buy your wagon."

"Gowan, boss; wot d'yer take me for? Here I been freezin' most to det fer two mortal hours an' a gent like you starts right in kickin' on the clock widout even readin' it."

"Shucks!" said Mr. Randolph. "What's biting you? Never mind the meter-reading; here's twenty for you to forget that. Now tell me: Who owns your huzz-wagon? You?"

"Naw; the Village Cab company," replied the saturnine cabman as he stuffed the twenty-dollar bill into his trousers pocket.

"Well," said Mr. Randolph, "you and I are about the same build and I've got a proposition for you. Change clothes, hand me over your cab, and take two hundred dollars to see yourself to another job."

The driver showed no surprise; he contemplated the offer with half-closed eyes and dubiously working lips.

"Slim Hervey," taxi-driver.

(TO BE CONTINUED.)

HAD REHEARSAL OF FUNERAL

Curious Notion Held by Spanish Monarch Concerning Ceremony in Which He Would Figure.

Charles V, king of Spain and emperor of Germany in the sixteenth century, was a pious ruler. Toward the end of his life he conceived the curious idea of rehearsing his own funeral, not because he wished to have the event go off without a hitch when the time should come, but because he thought the performance of the ceremony would redound to the credit and well-being of his soul in the after-world. His friends sought to dissuade him, but, deeming it a holy act, the ruler went ahead with his preparations. A catafalque was erected and the service performed. The high altar, the catafalque, and the entire church shone with wax lights; the friars were all in their proper places and the household of the emperor attended in deep mourning. "The pious monarch himself was there, attired in sable weeds," according to the monkish historian, "and bearing a taper, to see himself interred and to celebrate his own obsequies." While the mass for the dead was sung, he came forward and gave his taper to the officiating priest as a symbol of his desire to yield up his soul. Not only once, but for many years, until he finally died in 1558, Charles V performed this strange ceremony annually.

Rank Shown by High Heels.

When high heels were introduced in Venice they were highly decorated. The height of the heels proclaimed the rank of the men and women wearing them.

Even when a fellow tells a girl he would die for her he balks at having her in the data.

Robert Hervey Randolph, six feet tall, freckled-nosed, open-faced, blue-eyed and broad-shouldered, looked up

at her almost appealingly as if his whole sum and substance were crying out to be appraised at face value but no less.

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PART I—Continued.

"More than that," went on Randolph: "I'm not taking your job just for tonight; I'm going to hold it. The only thing I want you to promise is that you'll keep your trap closed if you see any ads in the personal columns looking for me."

"How do I know you won't lift the car and whoop it up fer New Haven?" Randolph fixed him in the eye.

"You know I won't, because I say it."

"Sure—that's all right, boss," said the driver conciliatingly. "No bones broke. Now, there's just one thing more: have you figured that it's five hours to the opening of second-hand Sixth avenue or the Bowery, an' I'd have to wear those clothes of yours all that time?"

"What's the matter with these clothes?" asked Randolph, a little peeved. "Well, you've heard my offer. Take it or leave it."

"Sure I'll take it!" said the driver promptly. "If I wasn't a-goin' to have took it from the first, wot would I 'a' been standin' here talkin' for?"

Whereupon they entered to the cramped privacy of the cab and exchanged garments. Randolph was ready in ten minutes, but it took him another ten to complete the apperiling of the puzzled chauffeur. "That worthy added to his investiture in Randolph's best evening suit a sickly grin.

"Say," he asked, "how do I look?"

"Mr. Randolph surveyed him.

"Oh, you'll do, all right. You look about the way I would if I'd been on a but. Better have a few drinks, if you can find them, and the world will fall for your clothes. What time do I turn the wagon in, and what time do I go on again? Do you bunk at the garage, by any chance?"

"Never you mind where I bunk," said the ex-cabman suspiciously. "D'you think I'm goin' to throw in a happy home for two hundred? You're on the night shift for this week. Read the rules and regulations when you get to the garage. Say good-by to the boys for me an' tell the manager to go to blazes."

They followed this remark out of the cab; the tough in fop's clothing cranked the car and turned westward, as previously chronicled, while Mr. Randolph, now substitute to Patrick O'Reilly as driver of the Village Cab company's No. 1898, hurried his chariot eastward, not to meet the morning, as it had appeared to the watching Miss Thornton, but in search of the residence of the head of the legal firm charged with the duty of carrying out the instructions of the defunct Mr. Asa Thornton.

Mr. Randolph, vice O'Reilly, drew up at the familiar address in Madison avenue and laid his car cheek by jowl with the curb as though anchoring it for a long stay; then he descended from the driver's seat, entered the cab, exclaimed thanksgiving at finding a rug, wrapped himself in its warm folds, curled up on the seat and went to sleep.

In the cold early morning the strong arm of the Law reached in and dragged him back from the Elysian fields where he had been wandering hand in hand with a lovely person dressed in a little velvet toque and very cheap clothes.

"Here, you!" said the voice of the Law. "Don't you know you can't put up a hotel in this burg without a license? Wot the—"

"Morning, Officer," said Randolph, trying his best to be pleasant. "I'm waiting for my fare. Any regulation against that?"

"Don't pull that stuff on me," said the Law. "This ain't the Tenderloin."

"I know it isn't," remarked Mr. Randolph. "But I happen to be waiting for Mr. Borden Milyuns, of Milyuns, Branch & Milyuns. Ever heard of him?"

"Sure," said the cop, impressed but still suspicious. "He lives here all right, but I ain't seen him turning down his own cars for night-hawks lately."

"Well," said Mr. Randolph, "I could tease you along for some time and make you look like a nut, but I won't. The truth is, his prize bitch, Bride of Lammermoor, is pupping tonight, and I'm here to take the lady and her litter down to the dog-show in time to get 'em settled for the opening. Messy job, but the meter is charging for it."

"There ain't a man living that could think up a lie like that, not sudden," murmured the officer, and turned to resume his beat, while Mr. Randolph promptly hit the mat in the hope of catching up with Elysium. He slept; he slept too deep for dreams, and was beyond the reach of the call of any motorhorn when Mr. Milyuns' town car tried to shoo him along at eight-thirty of a bright morning.

Once more was Mr. Randolph dragged by main force to wakefulness. "Good-morning, Thomas," he remarked. "Is the old man up?"

"Hully gee! Mr. Randolph! What 'ave you been up to now?"

"None of yours, Thomas," said Robert Hervey, in a kindly but firm voice. "Get me a bit of paper and a pencil."

The chauffeur discovered the required articles in Mr. Milyuns' car, handed them over, and curiously watched Mr. Randolph write his note to the effect that Miss Imogene Pamela Thornton would receive her legal representative at Mr. Randolph's rooms in Fifty-ninth street between nine and ten. It was added that the said rooms, upon which rent had been paid to the end of the quarter, and all they contained, including the man, Tomlinson, were at the perpetual disposition of the said Miss T.

"Now, Thomas," said Mr. Randolph, "you take this in to the old man himself and tell him a chauffeur with an empty cab brought it. If you say another word I'll have you up at the union for losing me my job, and I'll lick the stuffings out of you besides. Get me?"

"Sure thing, Mr. Randolph," said Thomas. "Leave it to me to help you make trouble whenever you feel like it. It's a slow world except for the likes of you."

As soon as the man had entered the house, Mr. Randolph started his cab and made for a point of vantage in the park, from which, in due course, he beheld the arrival of the lawyer at Fifty-ninth street. He waited long enough to make sure that the legal gentleman had penetrated to Miss Thornton; then he threw up his flag and made for the garage.

He sought out the manager. "Say," he plucked, "Pat O'Reilly lost his job to me last night shooting

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craps. My clock read twenty-eight dollars this morning; here's my slip."

The manager glanced at the slip, and took a long look at Mr. Randolph. "You're on, kid," he decided. "Take any shift you like. What's your name?"

"Slim Hervey," said Mr. Randolph promptly.

"One of them earned names," commented the manager. "All right. Go to it."

PART II.

Flesh, Spirit and the Veiled God.

Mr. Randolph spent the day getting acquainted and proved himself a good mixer. By telling a few stories that had not yet sifted down from Clubland and by standing a few drinks he soon found himself made free of all the technical information he needed and some more that was so ultra-technical that it could beat the brains that invented the delicate mechanism of the taximeter. He also established part ownership in a comfortable room in a house very much on the wrong or west side of Broadway, in fact within smelling an' almost spitting distance of the North river.

While he was still in funds he bought himself a woolen khaki overcoat with one of those enormous collars which look like an inverted bucket when they are up and surpass in efficiency the traditional black mask so beloved by illustrators of the weeklies. He also had a speaking slot cut in the glass of the cab window just behind his best ear and subsequently removed and lost the slide that had been fitted over it with considerable skill and trouble.

During the next few nights he proceeded to have the time of his life; so much so that he was constantly overwhelmed with wonder at his stupidity in not having become a taxi-driver years before! It should be remembered that Mr. Randolph was of New York Yorky; he knew everybody casually, from Mr. Milyuns and his daughter, Eileen, down to the latest addition to the pitiful ranks of the midnights. More than that, so broad was his acquaintanceship that as a sporting gent he had once or twice been tipped off as to the where and when of a proposed gun-play.

"Don't Pull That Stuff on Me," Said the Law.

"Sure I'll take it!" said the driver promptly. "If I wasn't a-goin' to have took it from the first, wot would I 'a' been standin' here talkin' for?"

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