

# TAXI

## An Adventure Romance

### GEORGE AGNEW CHAMBERLAIN

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## SYNOPSIS.

PART I.—Robert Hervey Randolph, young New York man-about-town, leaves the home of his sweetheart, 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, unseen 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. There, after lunch, a chance remark convinces him the girl is the missing Pamela Thornton. He does not tell her of her good fortune, but secures her promise to stay in the flat until the morning, and leaves her. In a whimsical mood, also realizing that the girl's reappearance has left him practically penniless, he bribes the taxi driver to let him take his job, and leaving word with the legal representative of the Thornton estate where he can find Pamela, takes up his new duties under the name of "Slim Hervey." He loves the girl, but his pride forbids him approaching her under their changed conditions.

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 meekly. "Won't you please tell me what's going to happen?"

"You've guessed it—Christmas," he answered enigmatically, 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 things! 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 def 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 buzz-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.

"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 peevish. "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, what 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 appraising 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 bat. 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, hurled 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



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

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 Lammemoor, is pupping tonight, and I'm hers 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 let 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 plunged, "Pat O'Reilly lost his job to me last night shooting 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 and 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 weekly press. 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 York; he knew everybody casually, from Mr. Milyuns and his daughter, Eileen, down to the latest addition to the pitiful ranks of the midinette. 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.

In addition to being by right of birth an integral part of all the social strata of Manhattan, he knew the surface of the island and of the adjacent commoner soil of the mainland considerably better than he knew the palm of his own hand. In fact, he could scarcely ever have been conscious that he had a palm, even as a map of personal fortune; for he who is completely satisfied with the present never worries about the future and Mr. Randolph had been born content.

With such an equipment, it is to be wondered at that he found the taxi field rich with unexpected and surprising blooms? Fair flowers, he had known heretofore to nod only over tea tables and solid silver appeared suddenly transplanted to his cab and ready to nod on a stalwart shoulder. Strong male tiger-lilies of the money market, grafted to the cushions of a taxi, became complacent pillars upon which some clinging ivy twined.

In six nights he learned the sound that a banker makes when slender fingers tickle him under the chin; the gasp of a girl, first-kissed; the cry of a young man upon discovering the absence of grandfather's gold watch, his

since graduation day; the cluck of a top-hat fairly sat upon in the excitement of a moment that else would have been tragic, the exasperating tap, tap, tap, of a hen-pecking tongue that explained and condoned a murder mystery in the next morning's papers, and the sob of a ruined youngster who had played with borrowed money.

All these incidents took place with people whom Mr. Randolph knew or knew of and just to show what an extremely honest young man he was, let it be said that it did not once occur to him that he need never be poor while humanity, supposedly in good standing, continued to lay itself open to blackmail at the rate of a case a night. At the same time, he was not stupid and occasionally tapped out a missive loaded with dynamite on the garage typewriter when no one was around. Here is a sample.

"Mr. Pointexter MacGulter, Sir: As I was driving you and Miss B. B. last night who was foster-mothered by an aunt of a friend of a friend of mine, I heard you talkin' to her and all I got to say is if I see you out with her again short of the bands of matrimony I'll get another friend of mine to get Mr. Robert Herv Randolph to tell what he knows about you cheatin' at cards on Dec. 23 last."

Nights that gave birth in the morning to such illiterate tit-bits could scarcely be called dull, but it was not long before Mr. Randolph found himself threatened by an unexpected monotonous employment. Unfortunately for his entertainment, his reputation as the one par excellence St. Bernard lifesaver to the inebriate elite spread rapidly throughout the Force so that the telephone was constantly burdened during the wee hours with the following: "Say, is Slim Hervey on the job? Well, when he comes in tell 'im I got another tailor-model drunk here what has lost his home address from his mind."

With suspicious suddenness Mr. Randolph proceeded to forget half his school and clubmates and cold-bloodedly leave them to their fate and a night out, not without coming to grief on at least one occasion, however. "What are you comin' over me?" demanded the irate captain of the Nth precinct. "You ain't forgot that you was vally to R. H. Randolph for seven years, have ya? Has all his frens gone on the wagon?"

It looked like a loop-hole. "Sure," said Slim Hervey promptly. "His club's near busted what with water-drinkers and softs."

"Sounds kind-a phony to me," said the captain grimly, "considerin' you took this same gent home a week ago come Friday."

"Did I?" said Slim, and with feigned surprise managed finally to recognize the mess of evening clothes that was huddled on a near-by bench. "You're right, Captain. He's drunker than I ever saw him before and besides he's wearin' a new set of shirt-studs. Kind of changed his looks."

Slim lingered. "Look here," he murmured to the captain confidentially. "You're on to me, but just let me whisper. I'm getting to be the delivery wagon for all the high-spot soaks in town. The first one of 'em that loses his jewelry between the curb and his own front door, just tell me where I get off, will you? I'm honest; I got a reputation, an' I tell you, Captain, I'm willin' to bill 'em through for you when you ask for the home port, but it's nix on me handlin' all the high-explosive freight north of Forty-second street. Get me?"

"Sure, Slim," said the captain, appreciatively. "I'll pass the word, lad."

Thus did Mr. Randolph make good his new front name and a little capital besides, working on the stalwart



"I'm Getting to Be the Delivery Wagon for All the High-Spot Soaks in Town."

old motto: Every knock is a boost. Instead of becoming a mystery and consequently anathema to the Force, an impression was created that Slim was a hustler, but clean white goods ready to sacrifice a fare or two that he might sit high up alongside Caesar's wife. By stopping at two or three strategically placed police stations during the wind before the dawn to ticket such drunks as were of his acquaintance, he was able to give the glad hand of farewell to a job not to his taste.

About this time a series of coincidences befell the young and fevered Fair of the city of New York which would have given pause to the persons involved had they been able to get together and compare the dope. Take

what happened to Miss Georgiette Hattone. Her people had played in hard luck and died. Georgie had secured a job and was doing pretty well at it until young Doctor Bones met her and gradually persuaded her that she was threatened with galloping consumption. Once he had frightened her, the rest looked easy; he would take her out of bad ventilation into his run-about and the open-air—out of the goodness of his heart and the fullness of his purse, he would take care of her.

He began by leading her to a Netherlimb Show and supper afterward. They danced a little and for the first time in her life, but under medical advice, she took something in the way of stimulant after the initial pretty cocktail. They issued from supper and it was when Mr. Chauffeur Slim Hervey heard the whispered address that the game became a threesome.

Counting upon the abstraction, or rather the concentration of his fares on interior fittings, Driver Hervey soon switched his cab from the chartered route and made for downtown through silent back streets. In just ten minutes he drew up at an old-fashioned house in a very quiet square, shut off his engine to the idle and waited. Not for long. Out of the cab came a blasphemous exclamation in medical tones and with it a cry of awakening from Georgie. Through one window she looked upon the home of her childhood; through the other upon that happy railed garden-square, which was the umbrageous garner-close of all her dearest, purest and dreamiest memories.

"Oh!" she gasped. "No, you mustn't scold him. This is just where I want to get out and walk. It's—it's extraordinary." Then from the curb. "I may be going to die of consumption, doctor, but, after all, I'd rather—rather die that way."

Twist things around a little and you'll get what happened to Miss Terry de Guest with the difference that that beautiful and hungry young woman who had all but turned her back on Settlement work and her face to the Great White Way, suddenly awoke not in the moonlit embrace of Clairmont, but before the accusing face of a House in Henry street.

Nor was Mr. Slim Hervey partial to sex in salvation. There was the instance of young Bertram Blossome who shame-facedly hurried into his cab a painted, wan-faced waif of the street with self-accusing eyes. No case this of hunted and hunter—rather two strayed bits of weak humanity driven before the unleashed dogs of poverty and lust. How readily and unquestioningly the boy slipped from the cab at his home address, miraculously confused almost as by the meddling finger of God with one very different! How gratefully the girl took the possible fare and "something over," and how her tears brimmed when ten minutes later the blue-eyed chauffeur, a wage-earner like herself, said: "Nothing doing, Sister. The ride is on me," and promptly whirled away!

While all these incidents were engaging, each in its own way, and showed a reasonable profit to all concerned, Mr. Randolph looked upon them more or less as a means of getting in his hand during a period of initiation. Once he felt sure of himself and of his new chauffeuring point of view and attitude toward the gay world from the under side, he began to haunt the neighborhood of East Ninth street at the hour when dinners are plenty and taxis scarce.

Twice he saw Miss Madge Van Teller carried off in Somebody's private car, but he was not discouraged, for he recognized in the very fact of that public privacy the badge of preliminary outings. In due course his night and hour-came. He was hailed by the arriving Mr. Beacher Tremont and ordered to stand by; twenty minutes later he was listening to that gentleman explaining to Miss Van T. that a cylinder had gone wrong on his own car at the last moment.

Miss Madge Van Teller, upon whom Mr. Randolph had not laid eyes since the very definite parting of their ways on the rock of ready cash, was more beautiful tonight than at any other time since the evening of her coming-out party. The reason was one and the same. Tonight, as upon that other, she stood within a threshold and peered out on Life with a big L. A flame was in her cheeks and in her eyes; her lips were half-parted and thirsty, her bosom agitated. She was divinely dressed.

They were very silent on their way to dinner at the Knickerbocker, but they exuded an aura of tense expectancy that made nothing of the glass barrier between them and the car pilot, who soon felt himself lifted and carried on its wave. Something was cooking beyond a doubt and he then and there determined to stick a fist through the crust of the pie just before the smell of burning.

There is nothing more stereotyped than a night run before the fever hounds of New York. It is invariably a four-act play that starts with a single cocktail and a tasty dinner, goes on to a show peppered with double meanings, thickens at the cabaret in the close harmony of booze and dance music and finally bursts "somewhere in the country."

The first act was easy for Randolph; he went on with the villain and the leading lady, but once the revolving door of the hotel had clucked on their backs he had to withdraw to the wings and dope out a means of evolving from a super into a star of the first magnitude. He decided that it didn't much matter who wafted the couple from dinner to the show, but that the next extract would hold the crux of the night's entertainment, for the cab

that secured the freight for the cabaret would stand a good chance of nailing it after the ball.

Consequently he was content to pick up a gutter-snipe and then trail his prey to the theater. "Them is the two," he said to his ally, suborned with the promise of two bits, cash on delivery, "the John with the high hat and the dream-dame in smoke-colored chiffon."

"That's some name for a skirt, Cap," said the extreme youth admiringly, "an' some skirt, believe me. Nor! I won't forget 'em."

And he didn't. No sooner had Mr. Beacher Tremont, bearing a thistle-down burden on his arm, swelled out from the theater with the anxious look on his face of a man with three cars in the garage at home and no call number in his left hand waistcoat pocket, than the imp was at his side. "Say, mister, wanter taxi? Got one at the head of the line that I'd give up just to youse for a dime."

"Lead me to it," said Mr. Tremont. "Say," said the snipe to Randolph as the car jumped, "I've took the boss inside on fer a friend. You watch yerself."

It was a short run to the lair of the Midnight Rolic, but Mr. Randolph was not surprised at the double wage he received nor at the murmured conversation that accompanied it. "Fill



"Wait for Me at the Seventh Avenue Northeast Corner. Get Me?"

up your gas tank and wait for me at the Seventh avenue northeast corner. Get me?"

"Sure," grunted Mr. Randolph.

"Where to, mister?"

"Greenwood hostelry," breathed the villain.

"I'm on," said Mr. Randolph, ran his car to the comfortably quiet nook designated, dug out a road map of Manhattan and vicinity, scrutinized it carelessly and settled down to meditate.

To a select and once affluent few, the name of the G. hostelry above mentioned will bring certain vivid recollections and will also place the chronology of this yarn, for the said abode of revelry was too good to last very long; it choked to death on its own popularity and consequent publicity. From the outside, even in its hey-day, it presented a most innocuous appearance, just a renovated farmhouse standing under a clump of veiling sugar-maples on the top of a hill whence the nearest neighbor was out of sight.

But once within its modest portal, its habits found themselves in the cleverest fake atmosphere of a pleasure-loving decade. An organizing genius, sensitive to all those cheap adjuncts which usually grate on the soul hovering at the edge of the decline to Avernus, had pandered effectively to an ignoble end and made of each small room an isle of forgetfulness; price, twenty-five bucks in advance, supper and drinks extra.

For the benefit of those who do not remember the epoch of the Greenwood hostelry and are consequently reading on and on in mortal dread of the paragraph that will introduce the War, let it be said at once, Forget it. Stake out the beginning of the international mix-up, hurl another boundary mark into November of 1918, and the time left outside of those limits will be found entirely sufficient to the needs of this chronicle. Let it further be noted that it is inconceivable that a single drop of the kind of blood which flowed in the veins of Mr. Robert Hervey Randolph could ever answer to the name of slacker, proof positive in itself that the events herein set forth happened when the War didn't.

Mr. Slim Hervey, chauffeur, was still plunged in reverie when his senses were assailed by a whiff of lilac, a mere nuance of perfume, that proclaimed the approach of Miss Madge Van Teller. He jumped out just in time to throw open the door of his cab for the couple and take the murmured order of Mr. Beacher Tremont. "All right. Hit it up for Greenwood."

Luckily for the cabman's entertainment, his engine was working in silent perfection that night. The late hour gave him almost undisputed right of way so that driving became an automatic adjustment of his course in line with the curb and released his attention to gorge itself at leisure with eaves-dropping. By squirming his shoulders he managed to cock one ear over the top of his high overcoat collar; it was the ear next to the open speaking-slot.

(To be continued next week.)