

TAXI

An Adventure Romance

BY 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 Imogen 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.

PART II.—One evening he is engaged by Beacher Tremont, notorious profligate, to drive him and Madge Van Teller to a hostelry known as "Greenwood." Aware of the evil nature of the place, Randolph drives the pair to Greenwood cemetery. Infuriated, Beacher gets out of the cab and Randolph leaves him there, taking the girl (who has awakened to a realization of her folly) to her home. Madge recognizes him.

PART III.—In Randolph's apartment Pamela, pondering over the strangeness of the night's adventure, realizes she is very much more than interested in the young man. Next morning Mr. Borden Milyuns, her family's legal representative, informs her of her inheritance. Learning that her acceptance of the money will leave Randolph penniless, even the furniture of the apartment belonging to her, she proposes to divide the inheritance with him. Mr. Milyuns tells her Randolph is unlikely to agree to such an arrangement, even if found. He, however, agrees to do his utmost to find the young man. Wide advertising and the employment of detective agencies fail to accomplish this. Madge Van Teller tells Mr. Milyuns of her encounter with Randolph. Knowing only that he is driving a taxicab, Pamela sets out to find him. The search naturally is a long one, but finally she comes upon Randolph in front of a hotel. Unseen by him she enters his cab, but when giving the starter her address Randolph recognizes her voice. The streets are slippery with snow, and in his excitement he smashes the cab against the curb, throwing the girl out.

Such being her state of heart, imagine her excitement when Mr. Milyuns called by appointment and related word for word the following conversation which he had participated in that very morning with Miss Madge Van Teller of East Ninth street: "Oh, Mr. Milyuns, are you doing all that advertising for Bobby Randolph?" "Yes, Madge; I certainly am, and if it doesn't bear fruit pretty soon I'll have to give up tobacco." "Are you advertising for his own good? I mean is it important to him—not to you—for you to find him? Would he be really and truly glad to be found even against his will?" "Er—yes—er—it is—er—he would—er—if he isn't sixteen kinds of a fool. I think I caught them all, my dear, but if I left any out, please repeat." "Yes," admitted the lady question-mark; "your legal mind answered them all. Now tell me just your human self—if you were in Bobby's place, would you want to be found by you for the purpose that you want to find him for?"

Mr. Milyuns did not pretend for one second that he did not understand the preposterously worded query. "You bet I would!" he answered promptly and emphatically. "Now tell me what you've got up your sleeve. Please, Madge; that's a dear girl! If you only knew how I'm worried seven times a day—"

"I'm trying to tell you," broke in Miss Van Teller, "but you talk so much I can't get in anywhere. Last night, a taxi brought me home from—er—from a drive, and the cabman was Bobby, looking simply stunning in one of those awfully high-collared, khaki, waist-effect woolly coats, chauffeur's cap, tan puttees, boots, and all—"

"Yes, yes," interrupted Mr. Milyuns; "I know now just how he looked. What was the license-number of the car, and to which company did it belong?"

A long pause. "Why, I didn't notice." "Thanks awfully, my dear." "Sound of hanging up the receiver." "So there you are," said Mr. Milyuns to the very much excited Pamela. "We've got this far and, by a duke entirely unconnected with the twenty-two sleuths I have been pensioning in advance of their lifelong service, Robert is driving one of the sixty-three thousand taxicabs that infest the streets of New York."

"Poor dear!" said Pamela, tears rising to her adorable eyes. Then she dismissed Mr. Milyuns, who would gladly have lingered. "I have to go out now,

I'm so sorry, but thank you very, very much."

"Can't I drop you wherever you're going?" asked the very human mind of the leading legal authority on corporation hedge-rows and byways.

"Oh, no," said Pamela, translucent as love itself; "I shall go in taxi."

How many vulgar vehicles for hire were blessed by the transient presence of Miss Thornton during the next seven hours is a matter of gross mathematics and consequently beneath the ken of an intelligence that can chat along about nice things like Pamela and Robert Randolph for pure pleasure and subsequently sell the remarks for cold cash. Five minutes to spot a lively cab, five minutes to ticket the driver and pile him on the discard, two more to find her purse, three more to look innocent; then start all over again. Divide seven times sixty minutes by all that, and you've got her number.

Let us leave the statistical fiend and pass on to seven o'clock of the near-Christmas evening when Miss Thornton was momentarily out of a cab and strolling down the slope of the hump in West Fifty-seventh street. A mushy snow-rain had just begun to fall, giving anyone with the price a splendid excuse for taking a cab anywhere for anywhere. Before the portal of the Great Northern Lights squatted four taxis in a line. In the driver's seat of the rearmost of these, and consequently the last on the rank, a lank human being was buried in an enormous turned-up collar roofed by a chauffeur's cap set at an angle of slumber.

Pamela, the very moment her eyes fell on the recumbent figure, felt that short quick leap of the blood in her veins which is ordinarily termed a "hunch." She longed to step forward and raise the veiling headgear, but she dared not, for not only was the hotel-starter on the job but also the window-shades of the Poppy club next door were still elevated by special request, owing to the slippery state of the sidewalk in conjunction with the home-walk-bound stream of dress-models.

As a consequence, she was necessarily content with opening the car door for herself and stepping in. The starter politely begged her to pass to the taxi at the head of the rank and just as politely she informed him that her feet were wet enough as it was. In the meantime, even her light weight on the running-board had startled the driver into wakefulness and, without going through any motions, he had heard the unforgettable tones of her voice.

The starter shrugged his shoulders, barked out an address in Fifty-ninth street and kindly offered to "turn her over for him." The driver laid trembling hands on the wheel and cautiously drew himself up to a sitting position without disturbing the shielding angle of his cap. Far from his troubled mind were thoughts of snow, and the slush and skidding. He threw in his clutch, started her with a jerk, rounded the cab in front successfully, skidded mightily thereafter, straightened her out, skidded again, and crashed, with a great splintering of spokes,



She Longed to Step Forward and Raise the Veiling Headgear.

broadside front on the curb directly before the delighted windows of the Poppy club. Nothing would have happened to Miss Thornton had she been sitting back in a ladylike manner, but at the moment of the cab's collision with the imperturbable curb, she was otherwise occupied; in short, the glass being a bit frosted, she was standing up and trying to peek through the speaking-slot. As a consequence, when the door flew open with the shock, she also flew

and volplaned to a landing on hands and knees in the very middle of the very wide sidewalk.

With a cry of, "Oh, miss!" the driver sprang toward her, but when, still on hands and knees, she looked up and gasped, "Oh, Randy—Mr. Randolph!" he turned and fled down the hill.

"Hi! You Slim Hervey!" yelled the starter. "Come back here an' sign up for the junk!"

In the meantime, which wasn't much more than the twinkling of an eye, three perennial near-youths dashed down the steps of the Poppy club to the assistance of the loveliest trouble that had ever sent out an S. O. S. signal in the face of ready help to the falling. Individually and collectively, they raised the curly-haired vision to its feet.

"It was Mr. Randolph," gasped the maiden, in evident distress, "and I've been looking for him for weeks."

"Not Bobby!" exclaimed Mr. Nearton.

"Not Hervy!" ejaculated Mr. Verries. "Not Randy!" interjected Mr. Berry. Pamela nodded three times, but her eyes failed to show wonder. Nowadays everybody she ran into seemed to know everybody she knew by his first name.

"Excuse me," said Mr. Nearton, intent on getting there first with a remark—any remark; "does he owe you money, too?"

The effect was electrical. Miss Thornton assumed a freezing dignity. She fixed Mr. Nearton with steady eyes.

"How much does Mr. Randolph owe you?" she asked.

"Only tw-twent," babbled Mr. Nearton.

"Well, here it is," said Pamela, drawing a yellowback from her chatelaine and thrusting it into Mr. Nearton's nerveless hand. "I happen to owe Mr. Randolph a great deal more than that." Wherewith she turned and made for the corner and the nearest telephone booth.

Pamela was short of breath when she reached the telephone, but she managed to get Mr. Milyuns' residence on the wire and learned that he was detained at the office. She called up that safe den of the world-be undisturbed and connected with a new and strange drawl.

"You've got the wrong number, lady. This Mr. Milyuns went home early to celebrate his silver wedding."

"Will you put me through to Mr. Borden Milyuns," asked Pamela, in a sugar-sweet voice, "or do you really want to start looking for another job?"

"How do I know you know him—Miss Hurry, did you say? The office-boy ain't here, so I can't ask him. Leave me your number, an' I'll have him call you."

"Know him?" gulped Pamela, in a rage. "Why, I've k-kissed him!"

"Kissed Mr. Milyuns?" responded the voice, taking sudden notice. "Well, dearie, why didn't you say so? I thought you was one of them high-brow dames. If it's a matter of kissin' the boss over the wire, why just you go to it. I won't listen—oh, no!"

And a moment later, Pamela, in a streamline body:

"Oh, Mr. Milyuns, this is Pamela and I've found him! . . . Yes; Randy—Mr. Randolph. . . No; he got away! . . . Yes. He's going under the name of Slim Hervey and he was driving the Village Cab company's No. 1898, and he smashed it on the curb just in front of that horrid Poppy club, and when he saw me, he ran. . . Oh, you will get him, won't you? Please hurry. And now, if you'll hang up, I have a few words to say to that new telephone girl of yours. . . Oh, no! you needn't tell her; I can feel her sagging on the wire. . . Oh, will you? Oh, thank you! It isn't as if she didn't deserve it."

PART IV.

The Ascent to Mars.

When Mr. Robert Hervey Randolph, alias Slim Hervey, chauffeur, vice Patrick O'Reilly, ex-driver of the Village Cab company's No. 1898, skidded that vehicle disastrously to the curb in front of the Poppy club and, as a result of his criminal negligence, in conjunction with Miss Imogene Pamela Thornton's reprehensible peeping occupation, hurried that young lady to the middle of the sidewalk on her hands and knees, he leaped from his seat on a spontaneous impulse to help her to her feet and administer every kind of first comfort that the occasion seemed to demand.

Two considerations, however, shot from the double-barreled blunderbuss of Ridicule and Honor, caught him on the wing, as it were, and deflected his flight from west to east with a sharp turn due south at the corner of Fifty-seventh street and Sixth avenue. In the first place, out of the corner of his eye he had seen his one-time friends, Mr. Nearton, Mr. Verries and Mr. Berry descending the shallow club front steps in an avalanche; in the second place, he suddenly recollected that Miss Thornton was an heiress, high above his present station and intent, as he had gathered from between the lines in various advertisements in the local press referring to the location of his person, on thanking and otherwise recompensing him for turning to the right in a matter of ten thousand dollars a year, unearned increment.

As he gazed for one too brief second down into the pleading eyes and adorably eager face of this lovable vision on her hands and knees, which it seemed unbelievable he had once held in his arms, only the oft-repeated favorite poem of his nurse:

I could not love thee, dear, so much
Loved I not honor more,
kept him from facing the avalanche of ridicule and giving the eternally

searching Diogenes with his lantern a run for his money. As previously stated, it was not to be. Mr. Randolph turned from the waiting arms of the sweetest temptation ever reigned by man and made his swift way to the sanctum of Mr. Tourke O'Shaughnessy, foreman-manager of the Village Cab company.

"Tourke," said Mr. Randolph, "I'm through. Smashed up the two off



"Tourke," Said Mr. Randolph, "I'm Through."

wheels of my wagon on the curb in front of the Poppy club. Dock me thirty, please, and make out my pay check."

"Through, Slim? Whadda ya mean?" said Mr. O'Shaughnessy. "Think I'm goin' to sack you for a skid on a day like this? Pay for your fun, kid, but take another wagon."

Robert Randolph, alias Slim Hervey, shook his head.

"You don't understand," he said. "I—I've lost my nerve."

"Lost your nerve?" gasped Mr. O'Shaughnessy. "Whadda ya mean by tellin' me a lie like that? Come on, now; draw a map! Did ye kill the inside?"

"Oh, no," said Slim; "that's just it. I mean, the young lady is very much all right."

"I begin to get you," murmured Tourke. "Skirt on your track, eh? A look of pity followed by one of loyalty crept into his eyes. "Look here, Slim," he continued: "I know that tryin' to trick a female is like playin' hockey with a stick o' dynamite, but we got a lot o' high cards to draw to. First shot out o' the box, all the boys here is for you. Then there's your friend, the Force. I want to tell you, Slim, you're the first driver I ever had that could flatten out a cop on a busy day an' make him think it was a joke."

"Thanks," said Mr. Randolph, but shook his head sadly.

"Now, listen," resumed Mr. O'Shaughnessy: "I'm goin' to have the boys up here as they come in an' put 'em on. In the interact, you slip out for a makeup. Get Sally Painter round the corner to tone your face down to the color of your freckles, do a little job on yer eyebrows, an' fix a deep scar in the upper lip of yer speakin' tube. Get me?"

Mr. Randolph's widely placed blue eyes narrowed in an effort to examine the proposition shrewdly from all angles, and the light of hope was just beginning to dawn across the trouble in his honest face when there came a sharp knock on the door, followed promptly by the rattle of the loose knob and the unceremonious entry of one birdlike, bald-headed, dapper corporation lawyer and two corpulent gum-shoe plain-clothes men.

"Yere! Wot the—" exclaimed the outraged Mr. O'Shaughnessy.

The legal light paid him no heed and advanced on the fast-wilting Slim Hervey with outstretched hand.

"Robert!" he cried beamingly. "My dear boy, I'm glad to see you!"

"Don't take the glad hand, Slim," warned Mr. O'Shaughnessy. "The little runt may be tryin' to serve papers on yer. Now, gent's, show yer warrant er I'll call the boys an' you take the consequences."

"I guess it's all right, Tourke," said Slim weakly. "They aren't going to pull me, exactly."

"I don't care whether they think they're goin' to pinch you er not," remarked Mr. O'Shaughnessy, fixing malignant eyes on the two heavy flanking forces of the small lawyer. "I never did like the smell of fat." Suddenly he roared: "Hey! Boys!"

The two bulls, strayed into inhospitable pastures, turned, stepped cat-footed to the door, and took the flight of steps in three. They cannot be blamed, for they had recognized in Mr. O'Shaughnessy the man who had once been arrested for pushing over with one hand a Ford that had crowded him.

(To be continued next week.)

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ANNIE WALKER, Administratrix Estate of Jack Walker, Deceased. 3-31 Bamberg, S. C., March 15.