

TAXI

An
Adventure
Romance

By George Agnew Chamberlain

Copyright, The Bobbs-Merrill Company

SYNOPSIS.

PART I.—Robert Hervey Randolph, young New York man-about-town, leaves the home of his sweetheart, Madge VanTeller, chagrined because of her refusal of his proposal of marriage.

With his top-hat pushed back on his head, the ends of his muffer flying loose, his overcoat half unbuttoned, he swung up the deserted lower reaches of the Avenue, punctuating his thoughts with the solid rap of his stick on the pavement. It might be supposed that he was thinking and mourning over the sudden demise of the Miss Van Teller he had thought he had known for many years, but such was not the case.

Mr. Randolph was not built on mourning lines; at the moment under review, he was thinking about himself and the strange fate that had made him a foster-child of fortune. He proceeded to look back ten years. Just a decade ago he had had his one meeting with the young lady whose disappearance had brought him an unstable affluence. It had taken place on this very avenue and less than forty short blocks away. He had reason to remember the encounter, for it had brought into sudden conjunction a lovely Persian cat, a lovely wire-haired terrier, a lovely child, and himself. The cat had dashed from a proud front door to cross Forty-something street under the nose of a taxi-cab; the dog had flown in yapping pursuit and, in the act, yanked his young mistress off her pins. He, Mr. Randolph, had seized one of her flying feet, hauled her and the terrier back to safety, and no sooner placed her upright and smoothed down her absurdly short skirts than he, she, and especially it, the dog, became the center and circumference of an animated pin-wheel.

Her unshaken determination to hold to the leash, whatever happened, brought disaster. The said leash wound three times round her ankles and those of Mr. Randolph, bringing them both down kerplunk and facing each other. "My, what a bump!" she had cried, in startled tones, and then thrown back her curly head and laughed.

It was so that he remembered her—a child of ten or eleven summers and no winters, merry as a sunny day, dark-haired, dark-eyed, pink-cheeked, pampered but unspoiled. She had risen and taken his hand, told him her name, thanked him, ordered a hurried nurse to thank him, shaken her finger at the terrier, and said, "Good-by" and "Come on, Maggie," all while he was still rubbing the seat of his first long trousers.

On that day she had been Miss Imogene Pamela Thornton, petted darling of the gods and Mr. Brewster Thornton, banker and widower; two months later had come Thornton's financial smash and, immediately afterward, his spiritual, moral and bodily collapse. Everything that had made for life in him having been swept away, he died as a matter of course, and was buried. For sole inheritance, little Genie Thornton found herself possessor and possessed of one Maggie O'Rourke, a nurse of long standing, of earnest and faithful face, and a monster heart imprisoned in a pitifully thin chest.

It had taken Genie's great-uncle, Asa Thornton, six more months to forget a quarrel of sixteen years' standing with his nephew, and by that time child and nurse had been seeped into that lower world which can't afford morning and afternoon editions and is too busy praying for daily bread to look for a rain of manna in the daily press.

In short, Maggie and her charge, traced down the ladder of reputable, disreputable and impossible lodgings, had slipped ultimately from sight and the ken of people with addresses, and, as a result, Mr. Robert Hervey Randolph, whose relationship to Mr. Asa Thornton is of no import whatever to this tale of cause and effect, came into ten thousand a year and a string—the string being the possible reappearance of Miss Imogene Pamela.

"Bob," had said old Asa, on the verge of a tardy demise, "I'm not introducing you to a war between conscience and self-interest. There's no silly story-book test about my money; you are under no obligation to look for Imogene or to shout if you step on her by any twist of chance. My lawyers have all the instructions necessary along those lines; they are to make every reasonable effort, and if they succeed, why, you're man enough to look out for yourself. It isn't going to make a devil of a lot of difference to me where the cash goes so long as I die with—die with the credit."

With that last sentence, his mind had stumbled and wandered off to memories of his nephew Brewster. Looking back from the vantage of twenty-six years, Randolph caught, for the first time, the full import of Asa Thornton's farewell words to him

and to me? —P with the credit. They held the kernel of the old man's carefully measured amen.

"Great old top!" murmured Mr. Randolph aloud, and half unconsciously turned to the left at Forty-second street. Five minutes later he was caught in the maelstrom of the Thanksgiving crowd milling around Times square.

Presently he found himself on the edge of a human sea, banked up to give passage to a honking empty taxi-cab. Here was another question for a suddenly inquiring mind. Where did taxi-cabs, empty ones, go to in such a hurry? The door of this one was swinging open, and the proof of how intent the crowd was on its myriad individual goals is evidenced by the fact that a dozen voices did not inform the driver that the season was off for fans on wheels.

The cab was moving more slowly than Mr. Randolph's subconscious mind, which led him to step into it and quietly close the inviting door. Upon seating himself, he tried to analyze the impulse that had lifted him from the curb. He decided that it was not so much the curiosity as to the destination of empty cabs as a natural and ancient dislike for being pushed and elbowed by people.

It was not long before the cab, unwittingly loaded for bear, drew up with a final honk at the stage-door of the Crocodile. Immediately came a rasping voice that was vaguely familiar to Mr. Randolph.

"Well," it said, "you sure took your own time getting here." The driver, expert in aggravating repartee without words, pressed the bulb of his atrocious horn three times. "Cut it out!" said the rasping voice. "There isn't any hurry now."

It was incredible, reasoned Mr. Randolph with himself, that anyone should forget that voice once heard, and he was right. He remembered it. It was the voice of Mr. Duke Beamer, whom he had had the distinct pleasure of blackballing for one club in college and three in town. Mr. Beamer, to his honest mind, was the best living example of animated slime in tailor-made clothes.

Mr. B. was not alone; Mr. Randolph could just see his companion through the slant of the half-raised window-glass, and even that distorted glimpse was very close to a vision. The girl was young, beautiful, and troubled. Her cheeks were thin and pale, her parted lips quiver; her chin was tremble. Of course she was very cheaply but neatly clothed.

"Make up your mind," said the rasping voice. "Ride with me or walk the streets by yourself, and don't forget that there's no job behind you. You've said good-by to that door for good."

The girl's wan face went through that contortion which says, "I won't cry," and doesn't, thereby achieving a pity beyond the meed of tears. The quivering of her lips, the trembling of her chin grew more pronounced—only to steady down as she swept up stricken and imploring eyes to the face of the unseen man.

"Oh, Duke," she begged, "promise—promise you'll be always good to me." "Of course, little one," said the rasping voice, promptly and much relieved, promising lightly to pay on demand, in full for a soul delivered in advance. "You'll never regret it, believe me."

The girl tore her doubting eyes from his face and stepped toward the cab. Mr. Randolph made himself exceeding small in the corner nearest the curb. An unseen agent opened the door; the girl slipped in and turned to seat herself; her escort made to follow. Then did Mr. Randolph suddenly lean forward and proceed to push in the face of Mr. Beamer with his open hand and the full weight of his shoulder. That astonished scion of a once gentlemanly house reeled backward and sat down on the pavement kerplunk.

"My, what a bump!" spoke a keen young voice over Mr. Randolph's



"My, What a Bump!"

shoulder, but he was too occupied to take note of it at the time. He leaned far out so that the driver could get the full effect of his modish top and spoke cryptic words.

"Ten dollars' worth of the park," is what he said.

The driver welcomed the sudden apparition with a friendly grin, honked defiantly three times, and threw in the clutch. They were off, and trailing after them came such a string of blasphemous utterances as made Mr. Randolph wince.

The girl was laughing. No longer did her eyes search for a gleam they thought they had lost forever. It was there within them, come back to loll in her pupils and spill itself in reckless spending.

"Oh! Oh! What a bump!" she gasped.

"Funny, wasn't it?" said Mr. Randolph weakly.

"Awfully," said the girl.

Thereupon fell a long silence. The cab cut across the traffic, reached the Avenue, and eventually the dark park before Mr. Randolph found anything further to say.

"Funny, wasn't it?" he remarked.

The girl cast him a startled look.

"Why," she gurgled, "that's what you said before."

"So I did," said Mr. Randolph frowning thoughtfully. "So I did. By the way, what's your name?"

The girl caught her breath and swallowed her laughter.

"Vivienne Vivierre," she said, after a pause.

"How awful!" commented Mr. Randolph. "One of those deliberate alterations that go with the back row of the chorus."

"Front row," Vivienne defended promptly, but unsmiling. Her lips twitched down at the corners. "At least, it was front row."

"I know," said Mr. Randolph. "You've been fired. I heard what Beamer said to you. How long have you known that snake?"

"Not very long," she answered. "He got me on, and I suppose he got me off." She drew a long breath and turned appealing eyes to Randolph.

"Please," she said, "don't let's talk about him. I want to be happy for a few minutes. I love the park at night with its border of lights. Let's play a game."

"A game?" said Randolph doubtfully.

"Yes. We'll guess which is Central Park West and which is One Hundred and Tenth street and which is the avenue. It is not as easy as you think after you've been going round a while. I'm feeling d-dizzy a-already."

"You are!" exclaimed Mr. Randolph. "Well, let me tell you it isn't from buzzing round a two-mile circuit. What did you have for dinner?"

Miss Vivienne shut her lips tight.

"Won't you please play my game?" she asked faintly.

Mr. Randolph frowned as though considering the subject very seriously, but the matter that held his attention was not the proposed guessing-match. That would not have been fair nor amusing, as the deadlights of his own very comfortable apartment blinked at him every time they came to Fifty-ninth street. He was justifying to himself a very questionable move. He wished to feed this stray damsel and, at the same time, talk to her with a purpose. He could not see himself doing it in a cabaret, and every hotel supper room had already become one of those things. He came to a decision and spoke.

"I'll take a hand in your game, all right, but not just as you think. Do you—would you trust me?"

Immediately the girl was on her guard. She looked into his face and read it.

"I would never have thought of not trusting you if you hadn't asked that old, old trap question," she said gravely.

"Forget that I asked it," said Mr. Randolph promptly, and leaned out to give the driver his address. A thimble and weary scorn was still on that individual's face when he drew up before Mr. Randolph's abode and honked three times derisively to the world in general as seen from the front of a taxi.

"Wait," said Mr. Randolph to the jehu, as he handed out the girl. She paused with one foot half-way to the curb, but that single word directing anything as expensive as a taxi to stand by reassured her.

Randolph preceded her to show the way and turn on lights. He never looked back to see if she followed, and this implied trust in herself seemed to drag her after him up the single flight of stairs that led to his rooms.

"Old-fashioned but cozy," he said, as he applied a latch-key and opened a door that gave directly on a large square sitting room. "I hate elevators in a place you call home."

In an open grate was a dying wood fire. He proceeded to poke and feed it at once, saying over his shoulder:

"Sit down anywhere, will you?"

Facing the fire was a deep and much worn leather couch, with a pedestal at each end carrying shaded lamps. They were the only ones he had lighted and their glow was so subdued that it blended with that of the fire without fighting it. The girl chose to seat herself stiffly in a corner of this couch.

Mr. Randolph looked at her rigid pose with marked disapproval, but said nothing. Having rejuvenated the fire till it leaped merrily to an attack on the fresh backlog, he left the room and was absent for a considerable time. When he returned, it was to place a small table before his guest, and then he fetched a tray well loaded with those things which grace in perpetuity a healthy bachelor's larder.

He drew up a chair for himself and, with an inviting nod, started to eat a great deal and very rapidly.

"Get in on the lurch while there's time," he admonished. "I warn you there's nothing more in the house."

The girl gave him a grateful look and proceeded to fill herself with the most sustaining food within reach.

She did not fail to note that there was nothing to drink but water. When they could eat no more, Mr. Randolph removed the table, and then seated himself in the opposite corner of the couch.

(Continued in Next Issue)

Herald want ads will get a buyer.

REAL ESTATE TRANSFERS

Filed for record for week ending January 15, 1921:

William Breckner to Maria Breckner, lot 9, block 7, Second addition to Alliance, \$4,000.

Daniel Marks to Caroline B. Marks, part southwest quarter of northeast quarter 22 and northwest quarter of 22-25-48, \$1.

S. A. Miller and wife to Katie Wickman, lot 7, block 2, Hitchcock, Hills and Snedeker's addition, \$675.

Earl L. Shambien and wife to Marinus Nielsen, half interest of east half of 4-26-49, \$11,680.

Alvin J. Simonson and wife et al, to

Otto R. Simonson, south 50 ft. of lot 1, block V, Sheridan addition, \$3,000.

N. P. Dodge Jr. and wife to Mrs. Maude Merritt, lots 200 and 201, Belmont addition, \$350.

N. P. Dodge Jr. and wife to E. F. Shields and wife, lots 100 and 101, Belmont add., \$160.

Frank D. Gilleran Jr. et al to Sarah A. Gilleran, southeast quarter section 24, one-third interest of northeast quarter 24-25-48, \$5,000.

Edward S. Wildy and wife to Edward C. Green, lot 31, county addition, \$2,300.

Ida F. Sweeney and husband to Alba B. Phillips, lots 8, 9, 10, 11 and 12, tract 40, Duncan's Second addition

to D. N. S. R. Trancet and part of northwest quarter of southeast quarter 25-25-48, \$2,700.

HIGH GRADE PIANO AT SACRIFICE PRICE

For quick sale will give big cut in price. This is one of our best pianos left on our hands in public storehouse in Alliance. Examine it. Easy payments to responsible party. Write today for full information to The Denver Music company, Denver, Colorado. F12-22

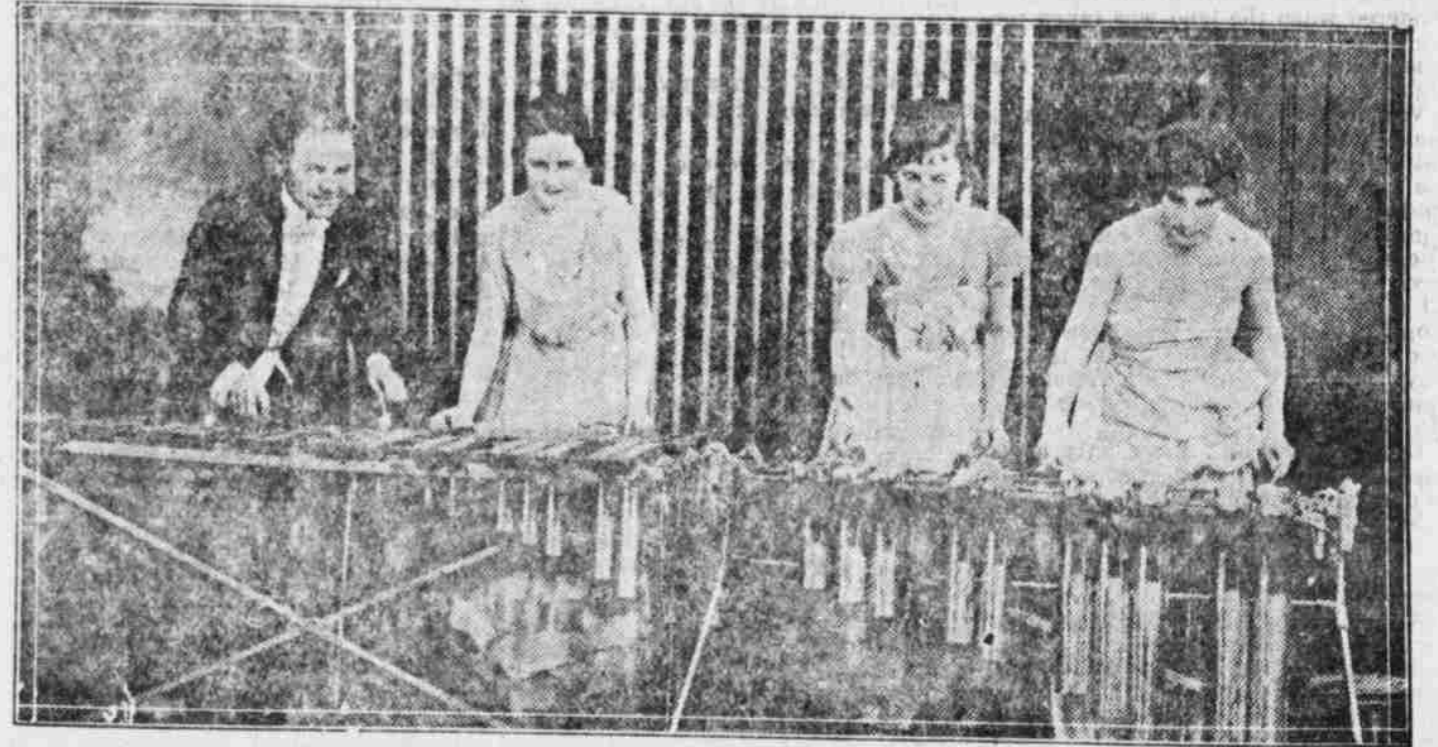
Stock hogs wanted by the Nebraska Land Co. 103-14

Imperial Theater

Monday, January 24

Special Vaudeville DeLuxe

The Orchestral Entertainers



H. J. LEAKE AND ORCHESTRAL ENTERTAINERS.

A Company of Artists which has no equal in the entertainment line,

In addition to our regular Photoplay—

EVA NOVAK in "THE TORRENT"

At a Give-Away Admission—Night: Children 22c; Adults, 50c and War Tax.

The Man Who Borrows

The man who borrows gets the habit. And it's a bad habit. The chronic borrower is shunned by his friends, and soon becomes his own worst enemy. The best way to keep from borrowing is to have a savings account at the bank. Then, if you need money, draw it and you are under obligations to no one.

Most men and women make a fizzle of saving, because they put a great deal of thought into earning of money and none at all into the saving of it.

First State Bank