

*The Taxi Driver's Wife Thought Enough Exciting Things Didn't
Happen in His Business*



NIGHT FARES

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I'M SITTING in the breakfast nook taking my coffee, and the wife is talking. She's saying to me that my job driving a cab ain't romantic enough.

That I ought to get something where more things are happening, so's I can tell them to her when I get in at night.

"If you were only a cop," she says to

me, "it would be nicer. You'd be all the time unwinding mysteries and things."

"I've got fights enough without being a cop," I tell her. "A cab ain't no quiet spot."

"There's more in the paper this morning about that bank robbery," she says. "The one where the watchman was killed. They say now they've got some

idea about who done it.”

“Who?” I says.

“A young party named Foley who works there.”

I’m taking my second cup and thinking what a lot of stiffes there are running around, knocking people on the head, when I get an idea.

“What’s the name of that bank?” I says. The wife, she looks in the paper, and she says it’s the Businessman’s National, which is what I thought. And I says, “Don’t you know a girl who has a boyfriend in that bank? And ain’t his name Foley?”

Right away she sits down in a chair and stares at me.

“Heavenly days!” she says. “Anna Brodnic!”

“That’s the blond one, ain’t it?” I says. “That you told me so often is such a good looker?”

“She could be Miss America,” says the wife, “if she’d only be willing to stand up and let them look at her.”

THEY once worked together in a beauty parlor in Radio City; the wife talked about her now and then, and always said she was an ace.

“Knocking over a watchman ain’t so good,” I says. “Especially when both boys worked in the same place and maybe were friends.”

“It says here the police are looking for Foley. I’ll have to go see Anna,” says the wife, and already she’s starting to fix her hair. “Anna was one of the nicest girls I ever worked with, and there ought to be somebody to talk to. I know she thought a lot of this boy, and she’ll be feeling awful down.”

“Is she still in Radio City?” I says.

“No; there was a girl customer that used to come to the place that liked her: you know, one of these rich Park Avenue

dames. And she gave Anna a steady job. Anna told me she got the same money, and only had to take care of one person.

That day my business with the cab wasn’t anything to mention. Most times I pull into the dock and tie up at about ten o’clock; but that night I thought I’d best keep going because I might get a couple of jobs from night travelers. I called the apartment to say I’d be late, and while I was talking I asked the wife if she’d seen Anna.

But she hadn’t. They told her at the place she worked that a party had come asking for the girl a while before. From the D.A.’s office. But she wasn’t in.

AFTER that I got some business, and drew up better on the day, and coming on eleven o’clock, I headed for the garage. I was running south on Park Avenue, when I see a girl in front of an apartment building wave a hand at me. I stopped, and she says:

“Do you know Savolda’s place?”

She didn’t look like a kid that’d be wanting to go to the Savolda joint I knew. So I says:

“Do you mean Savolda’s on St. Nicholas Avenue?”

“Yes,” she says. “The dance place.”

I didn’t give myself a chance to be surprised; when she gets in, I slams the door. And while I’m turned around doing that I see something. There are two men, coming fast and waving their hands for me to stay where I was. Somehow they didn’t seem right to me, so I let the old sloop slide away from the curb.

“You wouldn’t be expecting any friends?” I says to the girl.

“No,” she says. “Why?”

“Nothing, only there were a couple of parties back there giving me the sign.”

I could see her in my mirror, an awful nice kid. She was blond, and dressed as

nice as you'd hope to see a girl anywhere. And while I was looking at her, she turns to see the guys through the little back window.

"They thought you were vacant," she says. "They're taking another cab."

Now this was all right; it was the thing people always do. If they can't get one cab, they take another. But somehow this time it didn't make me feel so good. I hadn't seen the two very well, but the way they waved their hands hadn't been the regular way.

"But," I says to myself, "what of it? Them kind of people ain't got no business with this kid. And I guess I don't know them. So, what-a I care?"

Savolda's is pretty well north, but as I have good going all the way, I'm there in no time. My fare gets out and pays. And she says:

"You wouldn't know Teddy Foley, would you?"

Somehow I remember the name, but I can't place it. I rub my forehead with two fingers, like I always do when I'm thinking. And I say:

"No, I wouldn't. What kind of a looking fellah is he?"

She didn't say anything to this but just kept her eyes on me. And she said:

"He often comes here. I think he's here tonight."

"What say if I ask Tony?" I say to her. "He knows all the regulars."

Tony is Savolda's handyman; he stands in the lobby, keeping an eye on what's going on.

"Hello, Plastic," he says to me, but looking at the kid. "Anything you're doing?"

"What about a young fellah named Foley?" I says.

"Would that be Teddy?"

"Yeah."

Tony looked like he didn't want to talk

much.

"He may be inside, but I don't know," he says. Then he keys down the voice. "Who's the girl?"

"A friend of his. She rode up here with me to see him."

While I was saying this, I turn around to look at her; but she's not there. Then I get a glimpse of her passing through the door that goes into the dance hall.

"That fellah," says Tony, "ain't wanted here. Savolda told me to shove him out if he came in. I ain't seen him yet; but he'll have to go when I do."

"What's he been up to?"

"Some kind of a jam," said Steve. "And we don't want the police in here."

I go out to the cab; but when I get in I start thinking. I don't like any of what's happened. When I saw the girl going through the door into that place I remembered the kind of monkeys that're always there.

"They'll make what're called advances," thinks I, "and she ain't got nobody with her to sass them back."

So I pulls the old crate to the other side of the street and leaves it there. And I went back to Savolda's and says to Tony:

"Pass me in. I want to make sure of something. "

TONY'S hard, but not bad; he gives the gatekeeper the sign, and I go in. And almost the first person I see is the girl; she's talking to a guy, and she's smiling like as if she's glad about something.

"Hello, Teddy," she's saying.

"Hello," he says to her, and smiles, too. I didn't want to do it, but I couldn't help thinking he looked all right.

"I wanted to see you," she told him. "And I thought you might be here."

"That was a smart guess."

"You oughtn't to be," she says to him.

"Why not?" says he, and he still

smiles.

"Well, it's one of the places they might come searching for you." She puts her hand on his arm and looks into his face. "I don't want them to find you," she says. "I'd heard you come here once in a while; and when I thought you might be tonight, I got frightened and came to warn you."

I'm standing with my back to the wall, trying to look like a dumb mug interested in the gals and boys dancing. And while I'm doing that Cash Mabie comes in. I know Mabie. He's the steel knuckles for Big Herbie, the fellah that one time tried to turn the cab drivers into a racket. And Cash's always had it in for me because I rammed him in the eye for saying I was a sucker. And now that I see him, I know him to be one of them that waved to me when the girl was getting into my cab.

He didn't pay any attention to me. Maybe he didn't even see me. But right away he caught hold of the girl by the arm, and he says to her:

"I want to talk to you."

She tried to get away from him, but he held on. The guy she calls Teddy didn't like what was going on at all.

"Is he a friend of yours?" he says to the girl.

She says Cash wasn't; and right away Teddy pops him one in the same eye I'd once hit him in. And as Cash lets go of the kid and steps back, I take hold of him.

"Listen," I says to him, "if you keep running into things this way, you'll not be able to see on that side at all."

Cash looks at me, and he looks at this Teddy. He didn't say anything, but turned around and walked out. And then Savolda, the boss of the place, comes over.

"Look," he says to us, "this ain't no fighting place like the Garden."

"I'm sorry," says Teddy. And as I'm gazing at him, I think to myself he's got nice kind of manners. People don't often

stand up straight that way at Savolda's and be polite.

"Suppose," says Savolda, "you go out. Both of you."

The girl is already pulling at Teddy's arm. She wants to go, and so he steps along with her.

Outside, I say to her:

"Cab, lady?"

Up to then she ain't recognized me, or anything; and now, when she does, she laughs. And she says to take them to a number on Park Avenue which I think must be where I'd picked her up. So the two of them gets into the cab, and I start. And I ain't been going more than a minute when I know something. Somebody's tailing us in another bus. And right away I passes the word to my fares.

"Cash Mabie's following us," I says.

"Who's Cash Mabie?" asks Teddy.

"He's the party you slapped in the kisser just a while ago," I tells him.

"Oh, yes," Teddy says, and I see he's interested. "Maybe he wants another one." Then he says to the girl: "Where'd you get to know him?"

"I don't," she tells him. "I never saw him before."

I think this sounds funny, seeing Cash seemed to know her so well. But I says to Teddy:

"He's Big Herbie's twelve-minute egg. And the fellah with him is his stooge. It was them that tried to stop us when you got into this cab down on Park Avenue a while ago," I says to the girl.

This seemed to scare her; she grabbed hold of Teddy.

"They are after you," she says. "They followed me to Savolda's, thinking I was trying to find you."

I'm going along kind of lively, when all at once another cab starts crowding me into the curb.

"Hey!" I says. "What do you think

you're doing?"

But I'm up on the sidewalk before I can stop. I see Cash Mabie knock Teddy over as he gets out. I hear the girl start screaming. And when I get out to do my bit, I'm conked before I can get my hands up.

WHEN I come to, I'm in St. Luke's, and they're fixing up a bump on my head. I'm all right, except my brains are singing; and, funny enough, out of the singing I'm getting something. The name of Teddy keeps coming to me. Yeah, I knew. He was the fellah that was in my cab. Teddy! He was the boy the blond girl went to Savolda's looking for. The old brain went on humming, but now it didn't only say Teddy. It got putting another name to it. The name Foley. Teddy Foley. And then I had it. That was the name the girl asked me. She said did I know him. And I said I didn't, though at the time I felt somehow that I ought to. But I knew who he was, now! He was the fellah who robbed the bank and killed the watchman. And also I knew who the blond kid was. She was Anna Brodnic; and that Park Avenue place was where the wife said she worked.

When the police got talking to me they didn't mention any names; and so I didn't mention any, either. I tells them a driver, who was maybe drunk, shoved me up on the sidewalk; I didn't know who he was. Then I went home, and when I breaks the news, the wife turns on the excitement.

"Your head'll keep," she tells me. "It's a thing that nothing much can happen to. But I've got to find out about Anna right away."

She called up the Park Avenue place and asked for Apartment L. But no one was at home. She looks at me, more scared than before.

"Something's happened to Anna!" she says.

"It looks like it," I says. "When Cash Mabie grabs her at Savolda's he says he wants her. And now it looks like he's got her."

No sooner was the words out of my mouth when somebody rings the doorbell.

"Police!" says the wife.

"What for?" I says. "But if it is, don't start talking."

But when the party comes up, who is it but Teddy.

"Hello, Plastic," he says. "I found out where you lived from the hospital people, and I thought I'd stop around. Is it all right?"

"All fine," I says. And then I says to the wife, "This is Teddy."

She looks at him for a couple of seconds, and I know she's thinking he oughtn't to have brought this bank business in on us; then she sees he also has been shoved around some, and she gets out some hot water and things and begins to clean him up.

"Where's the girl-friend?" I says to him.

"I don't know," he tells me. "When I got up out of the street there wasn't a soul around but you, and you were out cold. I called the police at the drug-store phone, and then began asking around for the cab that must have taken her away. But nobody knew anything about it. Then I thought you might have seen the driver and might know him. After that I began to ask about you."

"The bus that drove us ashore," I tells him, "was a private one. What I mean is, it didn't belong to any company. I didn't get a look at the driver, but I did notice the cab. It had what you call a monogram on it: in red, on the door. The monogram was either C. B. or B. C."

"That might turn out to be something," Teddy says.

"If I can get Mike Whalin on the phone he'll tell us something," I says. "Mike knows more about guerilla cabs than anybody else in New York."

So I call him at the garage; he's not there; then I try at his home and get him.

"A monogram on a cab door. Big, and in red. C. with B. Or B. with C." He didn't say anything more for a minute, and I grins to myself; I can see him scratching his red head and thinking. "Do you know that fellah they call Jeebers?" he says.

"Only a little."

"Well, he's got an old float that was once owned by Carter & Barnes. And it might still have their initials on it."

This Jeebers has a rep for being as dirty a rat as you could find, and who'd go into anything he could take a little money out of. So I think this is our lead. I put on my coat and cap, and I says to Teddy to come on.

"Don't you get hurt," says the wife to me as we're going.

"This time," I says, "I'll duck quicker. Nobody ever hits me twice with the same punch."

I know the garage where a fellah like Jeebers'd be likely to put up; and when we get there I ask one of the boys if he's around.

"Just now rolled in," says the boy.

I looked at the cab; and it's the one I have the grudge against. And I says to Teddy:

"Listen, fellah. Keep in the shade, do you hear? Don't let too many people see you." He's going to say something; but I don't want no arguments. "I'll be back in a minute," I tell him.

Jeebers was in the corner office of the garage, talking with a couple of hangers-on. I call him out; he's one of those parties that're thick from the feet up, and he

stands with a smile on his fat mush, looking at me.

"You got something the matter with your head, ain't you?" he says.

"Yes, and I know how I got it," I tell him. "And so do you."

"Now, wait, Plastic," he says. "I don't ever hit people. Anybody'll tell you that."

"All right," I say. "I've been in the hospital, and saw the police," I say. "I told them I didn't know who worked on me, and I'm going to stick to that unless something happens to make me change my mind." I look at him. He's still smiling, but just the same he don't care for what I've said. "Where did you take the girl?" I say to him.

"What girl? I didn't take no girl anywhere."

"I was hit in the head with a wrench," I say to him. "And I think I might as well go back and tell it to the cops. Unless you say where you took the girl."

"Now, wait, fellah," he says. "Don't go making trouble. You know I don't—"

"That was Cash Mabie you were with, and another one of Big Herbie's people. The police can reel both their records out by the yard. You were paling around with wrong parties, Jeebers. You run me ashore, knocked me cold, and abducted a girl. To me it looks awful bad for you."

"But, listen! Cash told me the girl was a friend of his, and that she was with a guy she didn't want to be with." Jeebers was now ready to call for help; all his fat was shaking. "And I didn't sock you, Plastic. It was that fellah, Stutz."

"Where's the girl?" I says.

"I drove them to Big Herbie's office. On Eighth Avenue. But I didn't have nothing to do with anything. They was only fares. I give them service, and they paid me."

"Okay," I says to him. "I'm going down to Herbie's. And, don't forget, if

you're lying, I'll pick out the very wrench you hit me with."

OUTSIDE, I says to Teddy, "We're going down Eighth Avenue a piece. I'm stopping in to see a fellah." It was a half dozen blocks or so away, and when we get there I tells Teddy to wait for me.

"Look, Plastic," he says, "ain't there some little thing I can do?"

"Yeah," I tells him. "You can keep out of sight. I ain't acquainted with you much, Foley, but the wife knows Anna, and I don't want to see you hooked."

Big Herbie's office is over a Blue Platter place, and you smelled the knockwurst going up the stairs ahead of you. The second floor hallway was pretty dark; but I knowed someone was in Herbie's because there was a light showing under the door. I hadn't taken more than two steps away from the top of the stairs when somebody behind me slips an arm around my neck and begins to put on the pressure.

"Make a noise," says the guy, "and I'll stop your breath."

NOW a hold like that one is stick candy to me. I goes down on my knees and bends over, pulling the guy up on my back; then I reach up, get him around the head and hump my back, hard. So he goes over my head, breaking the hold, and then I work on him; and when I get up he's pretty quiet. There had been a couple of heavy jars while this was going on; but nobody showed from Herbie's office. So I knock on the door. There's no answer, and I turn the knob. It's locked. I wait a little, and then I hear someone. The door opens, and I see Cash Mabie. He's surprised, and tries to shut the door; but I shove my way in. There's Herbie, with his shoes off, easing his feet; and Stutz is sitting on the edge of a table. But I don't

see anything of Anna.

Big Herbie don't seem to be any disturbed seeing me. And he says, "Hello, Plastic; you're up kind of late, ain't you?"

"Just making a few calls," I say back to him. I know Herbie, and the thing I know most about him is there's no use wasting time in talk. So I says to him, "I've stopped in for Anna Brodnic. Where is she?"

They're very quiet for a minute, and then Herbie says:

"What do you mean, Anna Brodnic? Who's she?"

"Don't stall," I says to him. "Let's have Anna. If you don't, I'm going some place and do some talking."

This fellah Stutz got off the table, and he says to me:

"You're a singer, eh? Well, I always had an idea about you."

When he says that, and I remember he's the party that flattened me as I was getting out of my cab, and I do something that maybe I shouldn't have done. I smack him square in the kisser. Then Cash comes for me; and I see Herbie hurrying on his shoes. Cash is the kind of a party that always talks a good fight, and I know, since I smacked him that time about the cab racket business, he don't want too much of me. But this time, as I'm stepping back to get a long swing at him, I stumble over a chair, and while I'm trying to get my footing, I see Herbie coming. Now, Herbie, by himself, is tough; and I know I ain't got any chance at all with him and the two stooges. So as I gets balanced, I think about tactics; I see a door at one side, and right away I go through it into the next room. And in that room is Anna.

I slam the door and try to lock it. Anna don't recognize me and she's let out a scream. I've got my shoulder against the door, trying to get it shut with Herbie pushing it, and while I'm doing that I try

to explain whom I am. And then I feel Herbie take his weight off the door; besides that I hear a lot of sounds in the next room. Fighting. Surely, I says to myself, the three boys ain't got so mad at me that they've got to picking on each other. So I open the door to look, and there I see Cash on the floor and this Teddy whaling the daylights out of Stutz. And not only that, there is another young fellah with a black eye, who is piling into Herbie with a good bit of enjoyment. But they don't call this party Big Herbie for nothing; he's got a lot of weight on the other boy; so I slip out beside him and give him a belt in the puss just to make things more even.

AND now as Cash gets up and I'm measuring him for a bye-bye, I hear a girl talking. I think it's Anna come out on the battlefield, and I turn around to tell her to beat it back to where she'd been. But it's not Anna; it's another blonde kid, just as nice looking, and terrible excited. And who she's talking to is cops. About five of them. They don't say nothing, but right away they stop the fighting. Big Herbie and his two goats are taken away; and the sergeant, who was in the detail, begins to ask some questions. And then the other ones begin to answer. All at once Anna talks; so does the other blonde kid; Teddy talks, and so does the young guy with the black eye. They talk so loud and so frequent that the sergeant puts his hands over his ears.

"You'll have to go down to the precinct house with me and tell it to the captain," he says in between what they say. "I can't make head nor tail of it."

FOR me, I think about it all the way home, and it's not till I get there and begin explaining it to the wife that I make anything out of it, either. She has a lunch

for me, I guess thinking I'll be needing something; and while I'm making headway on a pork chop between two pieces of rye, and a can of beer, I tell her how it was.

"It turns out," I says, "that the young fellah that was here ain't Teddy at all."

"Heavenly days," she says. "Who is he?"

"He's a guy of the name of Henry. The stranger with the black eye, who got into the trouble all of a sudden in Herbie's place, he's Teddy."

"My goodness," she says. "The way things turn out."

"And the girl I had in the cab wasn't Anna," I tells her. "She was the Park Avenue queen Anna works for. The girl that came in with the cops on the last bell, that was Anna."

"Plastic," says the wife, looking at me as I bite the end off the pork chop, "you wouldn't fool me?"

"It's just like I'm telling you," I says. "The way I've straightened it all out is something like this: the bank's robbed, and the watchman's knocked over. Teddy is blamed for it. Anna is scared. She tells the Park Avenue girl—who goes looking for Teddy while Anna is seeing the D. A., the police and lawyers and other people. Park Avenue has been told that Teddy often goes to Savolda's; so she goes there. And she meets Henry and thinks he's him."

"He's a terrible nice looking boy," says the wife. "But you can't always judge them by that."

"I figure out," I says, "what went on at the places where I wasn't present was something like this: When Anna got through with seeing people, she knows Teddy ain't in the thing at all. The bank watchman lived long enough to say it was Big Herbie's people what done the job. And that the hat that was found with Teddy's name in it must have been left by

them to throw the blame on him. It's late, and she hurries home to the Park Avenue place to tell the news. And when she gets there she finds Teddy in the lobby, waiting for her. Now what started the whole thing was that Teddy had got over his head and hands in Big Herbie's race book and couldn't pay. Herbie says he'd clear the slate if Teddy'd fix it so they could open the bank. Teddy had the pants scared off him by this and he right away tells Anna. But the job is pulled off without him, and when he hears about the hat he hides.

"So, then," I says to the wife, "now that he knows he's out in the clear, let him and Anna go upstairs to tell the girl Anna works for that everything's right. And the girl ain't there. Then they find out she went away in a cab. The doorman said she'd asked him where Savolda's was. So the two of them went to Savolda's, and they heard what had happened, and find out about my cab. Telephoning around for me, they pick it up that I had been taken to the hospital, but with no word about the girl. This real Teddy is bright; he tells Anna to go to the police and tell them to move in on Big Herbie. She goes in one cab; he gets another and goes to at Herbie's. This real Teddy is the fellow that tried to garrote me in the hallway at Herbie's when I get to the second floor; I guess thinking it was one of the stooges. Henry came up the stairs right afterwards and found him and got him on his feet. And then when the girl starts to scream in the inside office, they both tear in and start to swing. And Anna then shows up with the police."

The real exciting parts about the fights and things don't seem to interest the wife as much as some of the others.

"I hope this Henry ain't the kind that goes dancing to places like Savolda's," she says. "I'd like to see him turn out to be somebody this other girl can start going around with."

"Well," I says, "he's in the bank. He was only at Savolda's looking for Teddy to tell him everything was all right."

"Maybe he's one of the bank officers," she says.

"He might be. I ain't got all the lowdown yet. But I'm asked to stop at the Park Avenue place tomorrow. Maybe I'll have the rest of it then."

She is quiet for a little while, and then she says:

"Listen, you often come in at night with things to tell me, but they're always something about what a cop said to you, or how somebody tried to squeeze you out of the line or how someone else bumped into you when you weren't noticing. This is the first time you ever brought home anything romantic."

"So it is," I says. "And I never gave it a thought."

"I suppose these people have plenty of money," she says, "and maybe they'll be wanting to give you something. But don't you dare take it."

"Why?" I says.

"Because if you did, it would be just business. And I didn't want it that way," she says to me. "I want it to stay nice and romantic. So that when the children are at school on afternoons, I can sit by the window and sew, and think about it."