



From the Cabby's Seat

THE CABBY HAS HIS OWN SPECIAL PLACE from which he looks at life. His view of people is simpler, perhaps, than the view of a man who does any other kind of work. From the high seat of his cab, he looks down upon everybody. People are not important to him unless they wish to go somewhere. Then they are only something to be carried from one place to another.

You may be President or you may be no one, but to a cabby you are only a Fare—only someone who rides in his cab for a price. You get into his cab, he shakes you a while, and he puts you down.

Then the time for payment has arrived. If you pay him the lawful amount and no more, you can easily see what he thinks of you. He thinks you are less than nothing. If you discover suddenly that you have no money with you, you will wish you were dead.

It is probably true that the cabby's view of life is formed by the shape of his cab. He sits up there on his seat, high as a god. The seat is small; no one shares it with him. While you are in his cab, your future is in his hands. You are helpless. The cab shakes you. You can't get out until he stops his horse. If you want to speak to him, you must talk through a little hole in the back of the cab.

In a cab you no longer feel like a person. You may be someone very important. But in a cab you are no more than something in a box, being carried from one place to another.

One night there were sounds of pleasure and joy in the big house beside McGary's Family Restaurant. The sounds seemed to come from the rooms of the Walsh family. A crowd of interested neighbors stood outside the door. Again and again a waiter came bringing food or drink from the restaurant. The neighbors stood aside every time to let him pass. Then they would move near the door again. And all the time they were talking about what was happening inside. Anyone who listened would have learned quickly and easily that Norah Walsh was being married.

After some time had gone by, the happy people started coming out the door. They mixed at once with the neighbors who were standing there. Joyful cries and laughing voices rose in the night air. All this noise was born of the drinks from McGary's Restaurant.

At the edge of the street stood Jerry O'Donovan's cab. No cleaner or more shining cab could be found. And Jerry's horse! I tell you he was fat with good food.

Among the moving crowd Jerry's high hat could now and then be seen. His nose, too, could be seen; it was thick and red, for it had been beaten by fares who wanted to fight. And also now and then his fine green coat appeared. It was easy to see that Jerry had had more than enough to drink. Everyone had noticed it.

Out of the crowd in the street or perhaps from among the people walking past the house, came a young woman. She stopped beside the cab. Jerry saw her there. A fare! He made a sudden move, and three or four people near him fell down. He himself—No! He caught himself

in time and did not fall. Quickly he went up to his seat. When he was there, he was safe. All of McGary's drink could not throw him down from there.

"Step in, lady," said Jerry.

The young woman stepped into the cab. The door closed. The crowd in the street jumped away. The horse started and the fine cab rolled down the street.

The horse went fast at first, but after a little time he went more slowly. Then Jerry called down through the hole in the back of the cab. He tried to make his voice soft; he wished to please.

"Where will you be going to?"

"Any place you wish," was the answer. The voice was happy. It sounded like music.

"She's riding for pleasure," thought Jerry. And then he said:

"Take a trip in the park, lady. It will be cool and fine."

"Just as you wish," answered the fare, pleasantly.

The cab turned toward Fifth Avenue and then went north on that perfect street. Jerry was moved up and down in his seat, and from one side to the other. McGary's drinks moved at the same time, and seemed to rise inside his head. He began to sing.

Inside the cab the fare sat up straight on the seat. She looked to the right and to the left at the lights and the houses. It was dark inside the cab, and her eyes were shining like stars.

When they came to Fifty-ninth Street, Jerry was half asleep. But his horse went through the park gate. The horse knew where they were. The horse pulled the cab into the park every night.

And the fare sat there, as if in a happy dream. She could smell the clean fresh smell of green leaves and flowers. And the wise animal pulling the cab moved as usual. He was at home here.

Jerry too tried to do as he did every night. His voice was thick, but he asked the questions that cabbies always ask in the park.

"Want to stop at the Casino Restaurant, lady? Have something to eat? Listen to the music? Everyone stops."

"I think that would be nice," said the fare.

They made a sudden stop at the door of the restaurant. The cab door opened. The fare stepped out. At once she seemed caught by the wonderful music. The lights and the colors were bright, almost blinding. Someone put a piece of paper into her hand. On it was a number—34.

She looked around and saw her cab. It was twenty yards away, taking its place in a line with other waiting cabs.

She was led inside, and soon she was seated at a table.

She realized that she was expected to buy something. She had a little money. She counted it and found enough to buy something cold and fresh to drink. There she sat, drinking slowly and looking at everything around her. Life here had new color, a new shape. It did not seem real. It was like a beautiful dream.

At fifty tables sat people who looked to her like kings and queens. She thought their clothes and jewels were wonderfully rich. And now and then one of these people would look at her. They saw a small woman in a simple dress. They saw a plain face. But on that face they saw an expression of love of life, and the queens wished that they could look the same.

While she sat there, two hours passed. The kings and queens began to leave. Their cabs rolled away. The music ended. Waiters took everything off tables near hers. She was sitting there almost alone.

Jerry's fare stood up and held out the numbered piece of paper.

"Is someone going to give me something for this?" she asked.

A waiter told her that it was for her cab. He said that she should go to the door and give it to the man there.

This man took it and called the number. Only three cabs stood in line now. The driver of one of them went and found Jerry asleep inside his cab.

Jerry spoke a few words in anger, and then went up to his seat. He turned the horse and the cab rolled to the door and stopped. His fare entered. The cab turned again, and went through the cool darkness of the park, following the street that would lead most quickly to the gate.

At the gate, Jerry began suddenly to think. He was still half asleep, but there was a doubt in his mind. There were one or two things he

had to ask about. He stopped his horse, and his voice came down through the hole in the back of the cab.

“I want to see four dollars before going any farther. Have you got the money?”

“Four dollars!” laughed the fare, softly. “No. I’ve only got a few cents with me.”

Jerry made the horse run. The animal’s feet were very loud on the street. But above the noise of the horse’s feet, Jerry’s voice could be heard. He was full of anger. He shouted at the stars in the sky. He shouted at other cabs as they passed. His words were so bad that another driver, hearing them, could not believe his ears.

But Jerry knew what he could do about this fare without money. He knew where he was going.

At the building with the green lights beside the door he pulled his horse to a stop. He opened the cab door and he jumped to the ground.

“Come on, you,” he said, and his voice was hard.

His fare came out with the dreaming smile still on her plain face. Jerry took her by the arm and led her inside. He was going to tell the cops what had happened. They would do something about it.

A gray-haired cop looked across the table. He and the cabby were no strangers.

Jerry began, in his loud, hard voice, “I’ve got a fare here that—”

Jerry stopped. He put his hand, reddened by the weather, to his face. The drink from McGary’s Restaurant no longer clouded his mind so darkly.

“A fare, sir,” he continued, with a wide smile, “that I want you to meet. It’s my wife that I married at old man Walsh’s this evening. And a wild time we had, it’s true. Shake hands with him, Norah, and we’ll go home.”

Before stepping into the cab again, Norah took a long deep breath.

“I’ve had a very nice time, Jerry,” said she.