



Just Imagine It - By Thomas Thursday

THE lobby of the Hotel Yankton, chief hostelry of New City, was alive with incoming guests for the weekend. The Yankton, although it did not rival the larger hotels of New York, Berlin, or Paris, was nevertheless the one thing in town that the natives looked up to with real pride.

To spend a few days at the Yankton was a joy and pleasure that few of the home folks readily forgot. For did not the bellhops hop for you and the clerks clerk for you just as though you were the Prince of Wales or the Duke of the Woofgus Islands? Quite true; and no matter whether you were a prince or a quince you received the same attention from the management.

So everybody thought that the Yankton was just the thing; that is, everybody but Mollie Palmer. To be sure, Mollie had raved about it during the first two months that she was there; but when one stands behind a cigar-and-magazine booth for eight months, at ten bucks per week, why, even the Grand Canyon would bore one at double the salary.

Step over, please, and have a look at Mollie, and see if you could blame the guests for lingering somewhat in her vicinity. Note the blue eyes, the blond hair, and the back-to-nature complexion.

Mollie was eighteen and, of course, romantic. What's more, she believed that all the Prince Charmings and the Romeos were not yet extinct. Perhaps she got this notion from a too-constant

reading of the picture-play magazines. Although she had her pick of all the periodicals, she paid most attention to those devoted exclusively to the picture folks. Especially Rodolph Randolph.

Rodolph, in the words of "Packey" Magee, captain of the Yankton's bellhops, was the rooster's crow and the kitten's cream.

It is Saturday night. Mollie, with her head down over the latest issue of *Picture-Play*, was roused by a soft, masculine voice.

"Pardon me, miss," it drawled, "but may I trouble you for a few Ritz Perfectos?"

Now the Ritz was a brand of cigar that cost fifty cents each, and not many were sold, even in the Yankton. Mollie jerked her head up with a start.

Rodolph Randolph! At least, she felt sure that it was the famous screen star himself. As she mechanically served him with the box, she noted his smart dress suit, his natty overcoat, and his sportive cane. And if Mollie stared at him, why, he most assuredly returned her stare.

"Gosh," he said to himself, "but she's certainly pretty!"

He tendered her a two-dollar bill, took three cigars, then grandly waved aside the change. "If you would care for a soda," he said, "kindly have one with my compliments." And he sauntered away to the dining room and ordered a sumptuous meal.

II.

MOLLIE could hardly wait to tell Packey the exciting news, the fact that the great Rodolph Randolph was in their midst. And when that charming tip-snapper skidded alongside her booth, she beckoned to him, all aflutter.

“Who do you suppose just spoke to me?” she asked.

“Dunno,” replied Packey. “Most anybody’s liable to gab with a pippin like you. Who was it—the King of Norway?”

“Nope; it was Rodolph Randolph—and, just think, he’s stopping at the Yankton! What do you know about that? Go over to the desk and see how he registered, then come back and tell me if he has a good handwriting. Please!”

Packey returned a moment later with a supercilious grin upon his face. “Rodolph Randolph—beans!” he snapped. “That guy is just plain William Williams, that’s all! I just had a slant at his name on the register. Stop kiddin’ yerself!”

“Well, that *proves* that it’s him, don’t it?” parried Mollie. “All those big movie stars use another name when they go out; didn’t you know that?”

Evidently Packey did not and, what was more, he wasn’t interested very much. Had Jack Dempsey or the amazingly interesting Nick Carter registered at the Yankton, he would have trailed those celebrities like a prize and well-trained poodle. But he never did go wild over the movie stars. He left all such idolatry to his lady friends.

Late Sunday night Mr. William Williams checked out of the Yankton, leaving Mollie to sweet thoughts and tender dreams. She cut out his portraits in the picture-play magazines, brought them home and pasted them upon the wall of her room. The fact that his photos did not look precisely like Mr. Randolph, as he appeared in the flesh, did not cause Mollie to doubt his identity in the least. She attributed this detail to the makeup which she knew most of them used when being photographed. However, it’s a funny world, as some of the poets have remarked, and Mollie was to learn about one of the funny points later.

III.

ON the following Monday, Packey found time to jolly Mollie about her movie star. Packey

was somewhat of a wit, according to his own ideas, and his conception of a good time was to tease the cigar-and-magazine girl.

“Well, Mol,” he chided, “I note that our he-vamp has beat it. Wonder if he paid his bill? Take it from me, clothes don’t make the man, and if he was Rodolph Randolph, then I’m the Queen of the South Sea Islands! You goils fall for anything that wears a trick suit, bushy eyebrows, and a nineteen-hair mustache. Take my advice, Mol, grab yourself a bird that may be low on swell rags and riddle lingo, but mighty high when it comes to slipping you the pay envelope on Sat’day nights. See yer later!” And the little bellhop hopped off to deliver ice water and liver pills to room No. 10.

During the proceeding few days Mollie was exceptionally absentminded. For example, when a patron asked for a La Kiddo cigar, she would dreamily hand out a box of McGoldburg’s Armenian chocolates, much to the amazement of the startled customer. And when she was asked for either a *Popular* or a TOP-NOTCH she would pass the gentleman a copy of *The Ladies’ Home Pal* or *The Saturday Evening Catalogue*. Which shows, we believe, that Mollie was in love while her customers were in Dutch.

On Saturday evening Mr. William Williams made his second appearance at the Yankton, much to the great joy of Mollie and the suspicions of Packey Magee. As he passed her booth, en route the desk, he bowed in a Chesterfieldian manner and smiled. But as soon as Packey got one look at him, he made it his business to dash up to Mollie’s stand to offer that young lady a few cryptic remarks.

“I see that that baloney is in again,” he said, as he coyly mooched a few bonbons. “Believe me, I think there’s something phony about that baby, wait and see! Before the night is over I bet we get a call for the house detective to find some bird’s watch and chain and maybe a coupla pocketbooks. Yer can’t fool me!”

“Packey,” returned Mollie, “I think you’re just terrible. You don’t know a gentleman when you see one. Really, I’m surprised! Didn’t he give you a large tip the last time he was here?”

“Yeah,” admitted Packey; “but that don’t mean nuthin’ at all! D’yer remember that fancy gent that stopped here a coupla months ago—the bird that registered as the Duke of Porto-Punko, or some thin’? Well, he give everybody such big tips that we thought he was a Rockefeller. And you ain’t

forgot what happened, have yer? When he walks out he takes everything but the boss' whiskers and toupee. Laugh *that* off. See yer later!"

William Williams, or Rodolph Randolph, walked in to the dining room after registering and ordered the best of the culinary specials. The waiter, remembering the generous tip of last week, paid obsequious attention to the diner. He assisted him to remove his coat, took his hat, and took charge of his cane. After which, the waiter pulled out a chair, beamed, and then the immaculately attired gentleman sat down. As he ate his entree, his thoughts turned to Mollie Palmer. Somehow, she had stuck in his mind.

"I wish," mused Mr. Williams, or Mr. Randolph, "that I could tell that young lady the truth about myself. Oh, well, that's what I get for acting. But gosh, she's pretty!"

IV.

AS on the previous Sunday the mysterious guest checked out of the hotel, leaving Mollie to her dreams, dreams that even the jovial Packey could not rouse her from.

The succeeding two weekends Mr. Williams registered at the Yankton and left just as quietly and mysteriously as before, much to the bewilderment of Packey. The bellhop could not understand why nothing had been reported missing. None of the other guests had notified the management that either their wallets, wives, or initialed pajamas had been stolen. On each of his weekly visits the handsome young chap would purchase his favorite brand of cigars, remark about the weather to Mollie, then walk into the lounging foyer and stroll majestically around.

The following Saturday Mr. Williams, or Mr. Randolph, did not appear, much to the gloom of Mollie. She moped at the stand and, during the three evenings each week that she attended McDuff's Commercial School, where she was taking a general course in business efficiency, her instructor had repeatedly called her attention to the fact that she was turning in some horrible examples of homework.

The following Saturday Mollie Palmer resigned from her job at the Hotel Yankton, having given the management a week's notice, and stating that she had a new position to go to on Monday; one that the McDuff Commercial School had obtained for

her.

"Best o' luck, Mol!" said Packey as she departed. "And listen. If you ever see that trick gent that you're stuck on, jus' give 'im my regards. S'long, Mol!"

V.

THE town of Humstead is twenty miles from New City and the Hotel Yankton. And its only bank is known as The First National.

It is nine o'clock, Monday morning. A nattily dressed and handsome young fellow enters the bank to take up his duties as paying teller. As he passes the door he is met by the president of the institution, Mr. John Jameson.

"Good morning, Mr. Williams," greeted the president. "I have decided to promote you to take charge of the stocks and bonds department. However, there is one thing that I must call your attention to." And here the fatherly bank executive placed his arm around "Bill" Williams' shoulder. "I know that your character is as solid as the mountains," went on the president; "but, Bill, I'm afraid that you'll have to stop posing around the Hotel Yankton on your weekends. Oh, I know how it is! I used to do the same things myself when I was your age, and it didn't do me any harm. However, some of our depositors have called my attention to it, and you know what that means. They probably think that some day you will rob the bank, or something." To which Bill Williams said nothing. He couldn't.

"You will have an assistant," went on the president; "to help you with the correspondence and office routine. Er—I believe that this is her coming in now."

"Miss Palmer," greeted Mr. Jameson, "permit me to introduce you to Mr. William Williams. Mr. Williams, your assistant, Miss Mollie Palmer." And then the president turned abruptly and walked away.

"And just think," said Mollie a few minutes later, "I thought that you were really Rodolph Randolph!"

"I hope," replied Bill, "that you are not terribly disappointed. Yes; I have often been taken for Mr. Randolph but that is not the only reason I used to hang around the Yankton!"

Mollie showed that she knew how to do a becoming blush. "Oh, that's all right," she said. "In

a way, I'm glad that you're not!"

One day, in the following June, Packey Magee, worlds' snappiest bellhop, got a day off from the Yankton for the purpose of throwing the overwhelming majority of rice and old shoes—not

to mention the tin cans that he tied to the auto—at a certain affair.

"Lots o' luck, Mol," said Packey. "See yer later!"