

# The World Outside



By Harold MacGrath

## FINAL INSTALLMENT.

### Home:

Nancy was full of pity and tenderness as Jerry told Kennedy's story; she would always be so for the unfortunate. To her, as to Bancroft, there was nothing repellent in the fact that Kennedy had killed a man and had been sent to prison for the deed. Tortured by the stupendousness of the calamity which had befallen him, he was not to be held strictly accountable for his immediate acts.

"We ought not to leave him alone tonight, Jerry. He might—"

"I am taking him home with us."

"The house we live in, that was once his; how dreadful!"

"Will you marry me, Nancy?"

"I rather expect to after having put my arms around your neck and invited you to kiss me."

Find the woman who does not, even in the great moment, rise superior over the man; who does not first recover poise and wit! With man it is a stunning incident in his life; he is astounded at his own, astonished at his success. With a woman it is an inevitable sequence, bound to happen, sooner or later; so she is more or less prepared. But for all that, it seemed to Nancy that her heart was filled with little singing birds. She was going to belong.

"But we'll have to wait a little while, Jerry. Mr. Mannheim has been very kind to me and I can't leave him until May, when my contract expires. And so I'm going to follow the footsteps of the Follies girls—marry the millionaire!"

"I didn't want any false friends, Nancy. I'll wait. You shall go to Italy, and study all you want to."

"No, Jerry. Never any more of that nonsense. I want a home—that old house of yours in the village, the room with all those beautiful books and vases your father saved for his friend. I want to read that splendid letter. May I?"

"The moment we return."

"Have him in my room first. I'll get some tea for him. I'll play and sing from the opera; anything to keep his mind off himself. The poor unhappy man, through no fault of his own. But bear with me, Jerry, in the days to come. I'm often moody and crochety. I am a foundling; I don't know who my people are; and never will find that makes me want to weep for this man who has lost everything on earth. I have brooded over my own story too much. Remember Thanksgiving? That night I told Mr. Craig I'd marry him; and then I backed out. I told him that all I wanted was his money. I hurt him, who had been kind to me. That's the kind of a girl I am. I'm not half as good as Jenny. When did you learn that you loved me?" For sooner or later this question was to be asked.

In the daylight he would have had to lie; but in the dark, how easy it was to tell the truth! "It will sound idiotic; maybe it is; but I loved you the night I kissed Jenny."

Well, of all—

"The poor devil!"

"What—Jenny?"

"No, no; Craig."

"I like the way you take it, Jerry. It was hard to confess, even in the dark. But it's all I have to confess."

The man downstairs could wait; everything could wait; this hour would never be repeated. The crest of such a wave hangs but for a little; then lurches back to ordinary levels.

"The celebrated Nancy Bowman?"

he said.

"Nonsense! I am like Koko in The Mikado."

Waffled by a favorite gale.

As sometimes one is in trances.

To a height that few can scale.

Save by long and weary dances.

There again, I am queer. I should be mad with joy; and I hate the whole business. What fun—talking in the dark like this!"

He began to wonder, and to worry a little, too. All this in the dark. What would be their sensations when they faced each other in the light? Wouldn't she become critical? Wouldn't she observe flaws in him she could not now discern?

"What is the matter?" she asked, as though his hand had translated his thought.

"Nothing."

"Tell me; what is it?"

"You won't change your mind in the light?"

"Poor boy! Of course not. I love you, Jerry; and I didn't love Mr. Craig. I wanted to get away from dreary back yards and clothes lines and the theater. I'll go with Jenny, and Mr. Kennedy may have my room. Yours is rather forlorn. That doorplate! And you must have believed your father a hypocrite! But I must read that letter. He didn't have anything to do with those soundtracks in the alley. He told me so. What a dear, lovable boy you are! Would you like to

kiss me again? It's still quite dark."

It was not two flights of stairs that he led her down. He stepped from mountain peak to mountain peak, with all the clear winds of earth and sea blowing into his face. Nancy loved him!

The taxicab was at the curb, Kennedy waiting patiently inside.

"I'll have to put out the lights and lock up," he said. "It's a house I bought recently."

"Give me the key," said Bancroft, who was still a little doubtful. I'll take care of everything."

"Very well," Kennedy agreed. Alone with Nancy he said: "I'm sorry for my roughness to you. Will you forgive me?"

"To be sure I will. Jerry told me everything."

"He will always tell you everything," said Kennedy; "for he is the one human being I have ever known who has nothing to conceal. Never permit any blemish to fall upon the mirror of his heart. You love him?"

"Yes. It was strange; but the question did not embarrass her."

"I am glad. For some time I have known that he loved you. A little while gone I thought of dying; but no. The boy wants me, he says. I am bewildered. For years there has been in my heart nothing but venom; and now it is empty, of everything. I can't hate and I can't love. I have emerged from my madness; but I am nothing. Perhaps you and the boy—"

"We will try with all our hearts."

"He told you that I have been in prison, that I have killed a man?"

"Yes. But you did not mean to. You were mad with grief; you weren't accountable for what you did. You wouldn't have gone to prison at all if you had told everything. Why did you keep silent?"

"I was mad, quite mad, and did not know it. I had only one idea; to get my hands around Silas Bancroft's throat. I suddenly became possessed of a profound patience, an infernal cunning. Nobody knew me. I wore a beard. I was going to play a trick on Mary, my wife. The court had to appoint a lawyer to defend me, which he could not do because I offered no help. My sullen attitude impressed the jury unfavorably. I expected the sentence in the second degree; but they found me guilty in the first. I had struck the victim in anger. I was stupefied for a few days. Fourteen years among the dregs. And all the while I was quite mad. Well, perhaps God will let me be now."

The quiet despair of the tone wrung Nancy's heart. "Please! You mustn't brood. There will be tomorrow!"

"Ay, for you two; but for me there never will be anything but yesterday. I am old and empty. But, no more; here comes the boy."

They heard Bancroft give directions to the taxi driver.

"To sleep under the old roof again! I wonder," mused Kennedy. "Ghosts everywhere; ghosts of faces, of music, and laughter. Perhaps they will be kindly ghosts."

Bancroft got in, making Nancy sit between. He was transcendently happy, and he had to express aloud this happiness to keep his body from flying up through the roof of the taxi and vanishing into the ether. He said so. But underneath this bubbling nonsense was a serious purpose. For a long time to come Kennedy would brood over the death of Silas Bancroft. He would be eternally seeing Silas reach out toward him and die, himself a passive murdered. He had shocked Silas Bancroft to death; but any one of a thousand surprises would have shocked Silas Bancroft to death. The point was to make Kennedy accept this fact. Kennedy had brooded himself into one madness; he might easily brood himself into another—suicidal. Besides, he would now be drawing comparisons—Bancroft's loyalty as against his own, and finding his a flabby thing indeed. So young Bancroft was determined to keep by the man. If he saw that the son rejected the idea that murder had been done, eventually Kennedy might be made to do so.

Bancroft analyzed his thoughts carefully and found that there was no emotion other than profound pity for the man his father had loved. The hell through which the man had passed! A weak man might have whimpered and gone on; but a strong man, vital in brain and body! Something had twisted in Kennedy's brain, under the terrific impact of his misfortunes, and only tonight had this kink been straightened out. The letter had said that there were high and worthy qualities to love in this man; and these might be uncovered and their luster renewed by the process of time. So then, to keep close by, until Kennedy had got some perspectives. What a companion he would be! The Great Adventure company!

"Will you be wanting those books, sir?" he asked.

"No. They are yours. They mean a good deal more to you now than they do to me. But what became of your father's things?"

"Don't you remember? He said in the letter that he had to sell everything to make a new start."

"A new start."

There was a lull. Bancroft searched for Nancy's hand and found it. Then he fell to describing the adventure of the ambassador's suite, of his majestic sensations, of renting his first dress suit, of discovering Nancy's photograph, all interpolated by shrewd commentaries.

Strange to state, Kennedy found this chatter amusing. The boy had the gift of describing things as they were, of tearing off the motley and revealing the bones, but without the bitterness of the matured philosopher. Kennedy felt himself amused; and from this basis a thought began to work outward. If the boy could amuse him in this black hour, it might be that contact with the youngster would stir into life again all those attributes so long atrophied for want of usage. Of course, this inconsequent chatter was uttered purposely to divert a brooding mind; but the point was, the ruse succeeded. Kennedy found himself amused.

"Jerry, said Nancy, "what's Jeremiah mean?"

"Hang if I know."

"It means the Lord's exalted—in his case," said Kennedy. "What it means in my case, only God knows."

"Nancy, what am I going to do? My father's letter—which is really the true will—orders that I pay over to Mr. Kennedy half of what I have, and he refuses it."

"And always will. I am no longer troubled by an obsession; I am troubled only by regret. When I came out of prison it was too late to pick up the truth; and such was the power of my obsession I shouldn't have recognized the truth had I seen it. A little patience in the beginning, and Silas and I might have worked together to retrieve our fortunes. But no. Battle, murder, and sudden death! But always remember, I went to prison for an act of my own. We shall not relate it to the original catastrophe."

"Sir, they are inseparable. On board of the ship, before you put in, you were tremendously happy. You were, according to the market reports, a rich man; the years of bondage were over. From the peak of happiness to the bottom of despair, all in an hour or two, is more than any human brain can stand. Something became twisted in your poor head and only this night readjusted itself."

"But what confuses me is your attitude. You should hold me in horror."

"But there is always my father's letter, sir; his will that I should find you and help you if I could. That was enough for me. Besides, you were coming back on your own. Your original notion was to do away with me; in the end you demanded only what you considered legally yours. The past was coming back. You began, perhaps, subconsciously, to see my father in me; when you were young. After all—fan your thought—I was guilty of nothing. So you would take what you considered yours, and vanish. The Great Adventure company! Don't you see, sir, that I am greatly indebted to you? You have indirectly given me more than I ever dreamed of having. If you had not lured me out of it I might still be in that village; whereas I came to the great city and found adventure and love."

Nancy, with passionate tenderness, pressed his hand. It came to her that she would always be two things in this boy's life—his mother and his sweetheart.

"Innocent bystanders, mused Kennedy.

"All of us, every human being that lives, passively or actively, innocent bystanders, paying the price of another man's roguery, half the time a man we never heard of."

"Do with me as you will," said Kennedy, in complete surrender.

"The Shadow was right."

"The Shadow?"

"For several days you were under constant surveillance. He warned me that I was underestimating you. And I told him not to think, thinking being my part. He was right. What a wild night that was! I stood beside your window, watching you, weighing you."

"And I walked five miles through that storm," broke in Nancy; "through the rain and the rain to Jerry's door."

"For a dog?"

"The old roof," said Kennedy. "I wonder what will happen to me?"

The taxicab came to a halt.

Jenny heard their entrance and subsequent mounting of the stairs, and guessed at their identity. She rushed into the hall. Jeremiah's clothes were considerably disordered and streaked with dust, and Nancy's, too, her hat at a precarious angle; otherwise there was nothing to suggest a hazardous adventure in the night. Jenny, however, was somewhat puzzled over the pale, handsome stranger, who apparently took but little note of his surroundings, and stood waiting for either Nancy or Jeremiah to direct him. What was he doing in the picture? She embraced Nancy.

"Have they hurt y', kid? Are y' all right?"

"We're all right, Jenny, but a little tired," said Nancy. "Will you let me share your bed tonight? This is Mr. Kennedy, who once owned this house. He is going to take my room for the night."

Jenny bobbed her head; but Kennedy did not seem aware that an introduction had been made. A thousand questions bubbled in her throat, but Jenny did not voice one of them, comprehending that at this moment questions were not in order and that some extraordinary event had happened. Where had she seen this man before?

"Want any help?"

"Have you got some lemons?"

"A bagful," Lemons she thought.

"Bring one in. I am going to make some tea."

"Tea—" began Jenny, but stopped, observing that Jeremiah was holding a finger to his lips. "All right."

She brought in the lemon. The stranger was sitting on the lounge, Ling Foo on his knees. He appeared to be in a dream; fondled the puppy's ears and stared dully at the far wall. This stranger was no ordinary guest. Was he the man in Jeremiah's story? If so, what in the world had happened to bring him here? Kennedy; now she remembered—the name on the doorplate. He was the man! Profoundly stirred, Jenny tried not to stare; but the pallor on the handsome face, the inertia of the body, the dullness of the eyes, fascinated her. This was the man who had stuck daggers into Jeremiah's door-jamb, and here were Nancy and Jeremiah fussing over him as though he were some long-lost uncle, returned!

"I pass," said Jenny inwardly. Here, in Nancy's room, when he ought to be explaining to the police, on an abduction charge!

Then her gaze strayed to Bancroft, thence to Nancy; but their faces offered no key to the riddle. On the contrary, something on Bancroft's face, something on Nancy's, something in the way they were smiling at each other across the teakettle, made plain to Jenny that there had been a double adventure; for these exchanges were patently adoration. All the hope she had had—and so long as Nancy did not love Jeremiah there would be hope in Jenny's breast—flickered and died. They had not even heard her enter; or if they had, considered the incident so ordinary that it wasn't worthy the turn of the head. Jenny Malloy wasn't wanted here.

Jenny had never heard of the Iron Virgin of Nuremberg; but for all that, she knew that dull iron spikes were being slowly pressed into her heart.

"Catch!" she called, and gaily. Bancroft turned and Jenny tossed the lemon. "See y' later, Nancy. I'll leave th' door unlocked. But don't wake me up if you c'n help it."

Jenny went out, closing the door softly; not to mention another door, forever. Love! The poor kids; why, they fairly shouted it. Well, it was Nancy and Jeremiah, the two human beings she cared for. They would never know what a fool Jenny Malloy was. The rescue; hero stuff, and Nancy had fallen into Jeremiah's arms, and they were going to be happy ever after. Maybe. Tomorrow she would be all right; but tonight she wasn't properly keyed to listen. When Nancy came in she would pretend to be asleep; no confidences as to how it happened. Jenny was wild to hear all about the man Kennedy; but she didn't care to hear all about Jeremiah at the same time.

She paused before her mirror and offered her reflection a caustic smile, for Jenny had the virtue of sometimes seeing herself as others saw her.

"Y' poor nut!" she said. "You an' that kid in Sunday school are in th' same boat. Our golden text is: Then wot'a got gits; an' them wot ain't got gits left."

Jenny undressed and went to bed, which is the one true compensation for all our petty ills. The only real magic in life is the pillow.

Kennedy began to talk, but to no one in particular, ramblingly.

"He called Jeremiah, after me. The innocent bystander again. I hated it."

"Why, it's a beautiful name!" said Nancy.

"Then the incident is closed. This used to be a nursery," went on Kennedy, dreamily. "Little dolls and cradles; Mary was just beginning to walk. The window with the stars, her mother used to call that one."

"The window with the stars," repeated Nancy. "What a poor thing I am, for I never saw anything out of that window but dingy yards and sodden clotheslines!"

Bancroft nudged her, and she understood that she was not to interpolate again. The causal tone in which Kennedy recalled the room was a good sign. They must let him run on as he pleases, any whither.

"The old roof, I was born under it. In those days it was quite fashionable down here. Mary, my wife, lived over in Washington place, and I used to go to her parties. I wore a white sailor collar, stiffly starched, and a blue polka dot tie. I met your father there, and we had a fight over Mary in the conservatory. I won. Your father had a bloody nose and I a black eye; but I was atop of him when they pulled us apart. Later, at college, he saved my life while we were in swimming. There's a queer phase in saving people's lives. You're bound to watch over them forever after, as your father watched over me. Banky, old Banky; and he used to call me Chuck; but when he wanted to get a rise out of me he'd call me Jeremiah." He paused. Ling Foo yawned.

The window with the stars! thought Nancy, throwing a glance over her shoulder. Had she ever noticed the stars particularly? She wondered. So could visualize the mother with the little child in her arms, crooning a lullaby and watching the stars grow crisper and brighter as the night deepened. What a handsome young man he must have been. Her heart was wrung again by the thought of what the man had gone through. The torturing memories of this moment; this house in which he had been born and known happiness. The mother and the child, here in this room. The tender ghosts that he must be seeing!

"So he bought the house, to hold it for me? And he did not have time to tell me. Your clerk was wrong. There were no high words. He put out his hands—to fend me off as I thought—and gave a great cry, and fell upon his desk. God should have struck me down also. But your father was fit to die, and I wasn't."

Kennedy let Ling Foo slide to the floor and began to move about, inspecting this object and that, to dike the crowding flood of memories. He was finally drawn to the Jaipur box, as he would have been drawn toward anything of beauty. His interest was only casual. The box was not valuable as a curio; there were thousands of them in existence. He opened it and saw the gold chain and broken locket end. There were millions of such things. Suddenly his voice shot across the room electrically.

"Where did you get the Jaipur box?" Tableau. Bancroft was stricken dumb by the pregnant suggestion in Kennedy's demand and the vigorous expression of it; while Nancy was hypnotized. The cup she was holding slipped from her hand and tingled and retinkled as it shattered and rolled upon the door. It seemed to her that thought was suddenly suspended, no longer hers to command.

"Answer me! Whose is it?" Kennedy ceased to wear the aspect of the broken man; he was alive, terrifyingly alive.

"Patience, Mr. Kennedy," warned Bancroft, finding his voice.

"Patience? Well, yes, that is so." Some of the tenacious went out of Kennedy's body. "But I demand to know how this box came to be in the possession of Miss Bowman."

"Why?" asked Bancroft, speaking for Nancy, who could not have uttered a word just then had her life depended upon it.

"Why?" Because the box is mine, mine!"

"Nancy!" cried Bancroft, beginning to understand what was toward. He laid his hand on her arm.

The touch broke the spell. "It was with me when Daddy Bowman found me outside his door," she whispered, because even to whisper took all the strength she had.

"Don't you understand, Nancy?" said Bancroft, the blood thundering in his ears. "Mr. Kennedy is probably your father."

"Probably?" Kennedy let go the old ironic laughter that came from behind walls, or out of caverns. "And I thought God was done with

(Continued on Page Seven.)