

The World Outside



By Harold MacGrath

THE STORY THUS FAR.

An adventure for \$10,000—this is the bizarre offer made to Collingswood Jeremiah Bancroft, who has just inherited his father's \$1,000,000, by a stranger who says he represents the Great Adventure company, and who is tossed into Jerry's ramshackle dwelling by a terrific storm. Jerry, sitting among his books and the 1,200 books he is reading, at first scoffs and then ponders, recalling his father's mysterious death, yet to be solved, and his own sheltered, uneventful 21 years. He fails to notice the malicious looks that the stranger darts at him. The man explains that he has sold many successful adventures and that Jerry's is to begin at once, provided he signs a contract to go into the great world outside and meet it. Jerry is pondering over a memorandum in his father's effects when the bell rings—and out of the storm comes a girl, rain-drenched and in distress. It appears she is an actress; her car has broken down; she has walked five miles. Jerry escorts her on a drive to the nearest railroad station for New York.

THIRD INSTALLMENT. The Beginning of Adventure.

"NOW, I'm going with you, to see that you get there properly. This Williams is a surly dog, and not above demanding more than ten after he had you half way."

"O, no!" she protested. "It's not to be thought of. I refuse to put you to all this trouble. It isn't fair."

"Better get used to the notion. I'm going with you."

"I know you must be mystified by my coming out of the night in this queer fashion, but it can be explained in a few words. A telegram came this morning announcing the death of a man who had been like a father to me before he became a paralytic. He died penniless; and in arranging for the funeral expenses I missed my train. Some one said I could make a train here; so I hired a car. That broke down absolutely, five miles back. After waiting for an hour I got out and walked."

"Walked? Through the mud and rain for five miles?"

"There was nothing else to do. I was pretty tired when I reached your kindly door. I left nearly all the money I had with the undertaker. My work makes it impossible for me to return for the funeral."

"And all for a dog?"

"I suppose I am a fool!"

"No, no, I think that's fine. I wonder if I'd do the same?"

"Of course, you would!" She smiled again, drawing another from him.

"I wonder if that pup will ever realize what a lucky pup he is?"

And immediately Bancroft thought that that was fairly well turned for a bumpkin.

To the young woman, however, the phrase—or the flattery in the bracket of it—was as old as the hills. But men would go on using it until the crack of doom. All pretty women had to submit their ears to this kind of trouble, in this instance it was not particularly distasteful to her, because the young man's gray eyes had only honest admiration in them.

"Anything that depends upon you absolutely is a sacred obligation, even if it's only a dog; and if you ignore it you aren't worth much."

"That's a fact."

When they reached the car he was for taking the seat with the driver; but she would not hear of it.

"Please sit with me."

"All right. Step on 'er, Williams," he said, breezily; and the car began to move.

Bancroft sensed a wine in his veins that was not born of the purple grape. The Great Adventure company—forsooth! As if adventures were such events as might be prescribed and taken like medicine, whether one liked it or not! All his life he had wanted something on this order to befall his lot—to succor a young and pretty woman in distress. What pleased him immeasurably was the absence of that shyness he had often anticipated, should an episode such as this happen. The tumult in his veins, then, was one of pleasure and delight; there was no embarrassment whatever.

Out of the night she had come and back into the night she would go. She had not given her name and he had not offered his. If she wanted to know to whom she was obligated, she must ask. Some where he had read that a gentleman (in such a situation) did not offer his name until the unknown lady signified that she wanted to know it otherwise it was subtle trespass. Tomorrow she would become a memory; pleasantly to recall so long as he lived.

That she did not ask his name or offer hers was due to a simple fact; she had sensed the taint of wine on his breath. This, together with the recollection of the splendid

books and vases, had forced her reluctantly to substitute for her first impression another, that he might not be the guileless country boy he seemed. So, during the rather wild ride, she became watchful and reserved. She regretted that she had not let him take the front seat. But then, it was only here in the stuffy tenuity that she discovered the taint in his breath. Perhaps there was an edge of sadness to her thought, that she must always be watchful and reserved among men, that true comradeship did not enter (at least, had not in her case) the artificial life of the stage.

The wind had risen again, and the automobile top and sides rumbled and snapped so continuously that sustained conversation was most difficult, and after a few desultory phrases about the weather, they became verbally silent. They were frequently jounced, the road being dirt, rutty and puddled and greasy. Time after time they were thrown heavily together; but Bancroft took no hurt from this or discomfort. His one regret was that the journey would be comparatively short. Once the sharp corner of the Jaipur box swung his elbow.

The journey exceeded an hour and a quarter. Arriving at the wayside station, they found the 11 o'clock train had come and gone; but the 12 was on schedule. Bancroft wanted to remain until train time, but Williams objected boorishly.

As Williams had the car going, Bancroft had to jump aboard.

"You're a surly codger, Williams."

"I be, huh? Well, I ain't goin' t' hang around th' depot so's you can talk with th' girl. She paid me; nothin' for me t' wait for, is there? It's late, an' I want t' get back home."

"If you were 10 years younger I'd punch your head."

"Well, I ain't 10 years younger."

Bancroft looked back, but the strange young woman had entered the waiting room.

"Where'd she come from?" asked Williams, after a few minutes.

"I don't know"—rather absently, for his veins were still echoing their recent delight.

"O, you don't know, huh? What's a young woman doin' at your house this time o' night?"

"None of your infernal business, you old crook!"

"Who you callin' crook?"

"You!"

"Young man, that's libel, defamation of character. I can git you hauled up for that. Anyhow, I can make you walk. You ain't payin' me no fare t' lug you back t' town. Git out!"

"Try putting me out!" replied Bancroft, belligerently. "Two dollars is generally your top price for this job, and you imposed upon the unfortunate when you charged this young woman ten."

"Unfortunate, is she? Huh! So that's th' kind. . . ."

All Bancroft's pent-up wrath of years against the village and its inhabitants broke through the weakened barriers; and he let the deluge fall upon Williams' head. "All my life my father and I have been ostracized because some one called him a miser and the rest of you took it up. Now you're going to hear my opinion of you and the rest of the villagers. You're mean. Your minds are obscene; for you see evil in all things you do not understand, and hope for the worst. You never offer the boot unless the object is down. You go to church Sundays, not to worship God, but to give your wives a chance to pick up any gossip they missed during the week. You are ready to stone the beggar and lick the rich man's boots—as presently you'll try to lick mine. Here's some gossip for you. My father left me nearly seven millions. Do you get that? Seven millions! And you won't get one single horse trough out of me, not a single trough. That's that!"

Perhaps it was the invisible impact of so much money that caused Williams' hands to falter, or it might have been a simple hole in the road. Whatever the cause was, the car swerved unexpectedly and plunged into the shallow ditch. The engine gave a loud whout in protest and stopped.

"Now look what you went an' done!" gasped Williams, plaintively.

This was too much for Bancroft's wrath, which evaporated, and a rush of boyish laughter followed. He regretted that his tongue had run away with him. He had intended that the village should live in wonder as to how much his father had left. Now the whole town would know about the millions in the morning.

It took a quarter of an hour to coax the engine out of its sulks. For five minutes the car slithered back and forth in the effort to regain the road. This accomplished, the vehicle careened toward home.

"Seven millions, huh?" said Williams, after they had covered three miles. "Mebbe. I wouldn't touch a dollar of it."

"You never will."

Williams had his revenge in a minor degree. Bancroft was forced to walk home from the garage. As he swung back the gate he fell into laughter again. He had entered upon this adventure with \$10,000 in his pocket! So much for a pretty face. Still, she might have asked where to send old Mrs. Horne's shoes and stockings.

He entered the house, tossed his hat and slicker upon the hall chair, put out the lights and went up to his room. He sat on the side of the bed for awhile and tried to marshal the events but either the girl got in the adventurer's way or he got in her's; Bancroft could not concentrate upon either with any success. He smiled. Who could say? The advent of the girl might be an earnest of what the Great Adventure company was capable of offering its clients. If so, he was rather inclined toward a contract. Manstuff only. Well, you never could tell. One thousand down, wasn't it, and nine upon the happy completion of the cycle? This time his smile was less humorous than ironical.

And yet, how oddly the man had fondled that antique chair, and what a singularly beautiful thing his smile had been!

He yawned, undressed and got into bed, and in a little while Somnus brought forth his blackest nightmare and Bancroft was condemned to ride it through the night. Up and down the world, into far countries, and always the unknown young woman beckoned him on, but with the adventurer's smile. Ships foundered under him and men tried to take his life. Battle, murder and sudden death! (The concrete phrases that we hear during the daytime and how loosely they wander through our dreams at night!) Over seas of rocking water; over mountains of slithering gold; still passionately he pursued her.

Now, then, before the seller of adventures departed the village he drew up before the hostelry and blew his horn three times, sharply, and waited. Almost at once a young man hurried out and approached the car.

"Remain and watch him, Shadow. Follow wherever he goes, and never let him see you. Report by wire anything unusual."

"All right, professor."

"Plenty of money?"

"Yes, sir."

The professor nodded, and the car went on, into the storm and the night.

The young man called Shadow returned to the hotel veranda and watched the red tail light until a bend in the road shut in behind it. Queer old bird; something loony about him, for all his intellect. What was his game, anyhow? And what part in the cast had this poor country boob and his money? Well, the old boy knew what he was about, and it didn't pay to question or cross him. He had a way of boiling up furiously, and in those moments he was bad medicine to brook.

Yes, sir; a queer old bird. Every matinee day you'd find him in the parade, up Broadway or down, peering oddly into the faces of the women—the young ones. Nothing raw about the way he did it; more like a painter seeking a special model. Once he had taken the liberty to quiz the old boy.

"What are you hunting for, professor?"

"A smile."

"Why, you're getting 'em right and left!"

"But not the one I seek, Shadow."

There was the emerald company, too. All on the level, not a nail out of plumb; really dug up emeralds and sold them. But ever against this, the Great Adventure company, which was about as logical as old George W. Perpetual Motion; and there wasn't one chance in a million of this boob here falling for it. And what was going to happen if he did sign the contract? Some fool movie stuff? Well, well; his job was to watch Friend Jeremiah, and watch him he would, from pancakes to prayers.

Meanwhile, there could be no harm in convincing a certain village smartly that kelly pool was an art all by itself. Humming a popular air, the Shadow re-entered the hotel.

The professor—evidently known as such by his few intimates—arrived in New York at 12. He tossed the car into a garage and

took the elevated downtown to Fourteenth street. Eventually he turned into Twelfth street and entered an apartment house. The apartment consisted of three rooms with bath. The furniture was comfortable and substantial, but the lack of style and uniformity intimated that these objects had been purchased indifferently. The living room was lined with bookshelves, but the books were battered and soiled from passage after passage through second-hand bookshops. There were no pictures on the walls, no photographs.

The occupant, having no servant proceeded to make himself a cup of tea, which he drank thoughtfully. He got out of his clothes, but abstractedly, which resulted in a disorder of their placement.

All this while there had been no expression on his lean handsome face to imply that he considered his business in the country a success or a failure but he swung himself into bed heavily, after the fashion of a man weary in mind and body.

He turned on the reading light and reached for the book on the bed stand. It was Burton's "The Anatomy of Melancholy." He opened the volume at the marker and began to read and soon became absorbed in this remarkable analysis of mental depression.

Sometimes we seek books, not in idle amusement, but in hope that we may find some example which will either excuse our conduct or cure it.

At 1 o'clock the young woman with the Jaipur box came to the door of a brick dwelling with marble steps and window ledges in Ninth street. With no sound beyond the opening and closing click of the latch, she tiptoed into the hall and up the first flight of stairs, and let herself into a room which faced the yards. She closed the door and turned on the light simultaneously.

A Pekinese puppy, gray brindle black of face, with a coat so fine and thick and soft that it rivaled spun silk, dashed toward her with such expressions of joy and welcome and love madness, that the girl fell upon her knees, swept the puppy to her throat and rocked with him.

"Hush, hush," she whispered, to still the puppy's whimpering. "Sh! O, Ling Foo, Ling Foo! What shall I do? I can't give you up, and I can't leave this place. . . . I'm so unhappy! I'm nobody; I don't belong!"

She set the puppy down, picked up the Jaipur box and rose. She gazed about, questioning mutely her trunk, the bureau and the wall-stand. After all, it did not matter where she put the box there was nothing within it of monetary value, while the box itself was like dozens she had seen in the Fourth avenue shops. It might be worth \$5, no more. She decided upon the wall stand, and placed the box there.

Next, she began to prepare for the puppy a dish of condensed milk and diluted with warm water, which she heated over an alcohol burner; and while the puppy satisfied its thirst and hunger the girl let down the folding bed and freshened the pillows.

The room was large, with a clothespress of satisfying dimensions. There was no suggestion of luxury, but all the furnishings intimated comfort and excellent feminine taste. There was a grand piano by one of the windows, and the top of this was littered with songs and opera scores.

Ling Foo, now drowsy with comfort, sat up and begged to be put to bed. The girl smiled. He was so funny. He was worth a 100 miles of mud and rain. He defied melancholy; he was irresistibly an optimist, and his optimism was contagious. So she nestled him between the pillows, from whence he eyed her contentedly, with an occasional wag of the tail.

Of all things that live, there is nothing more loving or lovable than a dog—any kind of a dog. He is a human need. Most of us must have something upon which to lavish our affection. If we may not, or dare not, for reasons of aliveness or reasons of convention, lavish this affection upon humans, we may safely turn to the dog, who will answer our appeal with all he is, with deathless loyalty, whether we are worthy or not. He has no diversions; he has only one thought, and that is of you. He grieves when you leave him, he welcomes you joyously when you return. If you punish him, he crawls to your feet to be forgiven. He has displeased the object of his love; he doesn't always know how, but he is always sorry. A cat is a luxury, but a dog is a necessity.

As she took off the borrowed shoes and stockings, she made a little gesture which indicated self-reproach. She would never be able to return the articles. She might, of course, address them blindly to "the house of many books and vases;" but on second thought she dismissed the purpose as ridiculous as well as impractical. She was conscious now of having acted too much upstage without any justification other than that the young man's breath had been tainted with drink. He had played the part of the Good Samaritan perfectly; and she would still be in that dismal village but for his ready courtesy. All the other houses had been almost articulate in their expressions of forbiddingness.

Because of other men unknown to him, this chance benefactor was made to suffer apparent ingratitude. It was the way of the world. One man committed an evil; and like water responding to the stone cast, the ripples reached far and wide, bringing misery and disruption to the innocent. (Of which is the wool and warp of this tale.)

At length she sat upon the bed Turk-wise, in her kimono, and reviewed the salients of the letter she had found in the metal box. A letter, written months gone, in anticipation of his death, while he had yet the use of his voice if not his hands. A dictated letter.

Daddy Bowman, dear old Daddy Bowman! . . . Who had found her outside his studio one morning, years ago! He had never told her about the box and the chain because "it would only have tantalized you and directed you nowhere." She was not an ordinary founding. Daddy Bowman had always maintained the opinion that she had been stolen for ransom, and some slip in the plans of the rogues had forced them to abandon her at the nearest door, which fortunately had been his. While he lived she had been Daddy Bowman's; now she was nobody's; and it was beyond all possibility that the box and chain would ever lead to her identity. But why had they taken the locket and left the chain? How one rogue robbed the other?

Darling Daddy Bowman, who had taught her all he knew about music, so that today she was capable of providing for herself! How glad she was, in the midst of her grief, that she had in turn been able to take care of him, to visit him Sundays and to take him flowers! Now he was gone; and tomorrow the muddy earth would cover him forever.

Suddenly she turned and buried her face in a pillow; and then Ling Foo discovered that for once his endearments were unreciprocated.

When he awoke in the early morning, as was his habit, Bancroft sat up in bed, plowed his fingers through his hair and licked his lips. Pah!—what a night! Never any more of that stuff in his goblet. A nightmare was a novelty, but of a character not urgent upon echoes. He must have gone to the bottom of the sea 10 times, and he could still taste the brine of it . . . or the wine of it!

He grinned, jumped out of bed and threw up the curtains. It was a glorious day. In the yard the ground cobwebs flashed like diamond sunbursts. The upland fields were ruddy and golden brown with stubble and emerald green with winter wheat; and above the fields the wooded heights, with scattered torches of flaming maple. The changing beauty of this vista was eternal; each of the four seasons was a sublime artist. And he might be gazing thitherward for the last time.

What had chained him here? Why hadn't he run away from it all and gone adventuring as some of the village boys already had? Cowardice? Had he feared his fate too much? Did he love the hills and valleys, while he hated the inhabitants? Had the soil held him? He could not answer. Certainly his father had not held him by any sign or word. Had his motive been greed; an unexpressed hope that some day he might inherit the house and a little money? He could not recall any such thought coming into his open. He remembered departing for the military training camp delighted and relieved at the idea that in all probability he would never see the town again. Yes, on his return, a demobilized soldier, the sight of the familiar hills had filled his heart with a joy that nigh burst it. There was no highway for this introspection; it followed along an unbroken wall.

His thoughts, lured by his inevitable impulse, took another direction. Had the girl really taken all that trouble for the sake of a dog? He was conscious of wants.

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