

The World Outside



By Harold MacGrath

THE STORY THUS FAR.

An adventure for \$10,000—this is the bizarre offer made to Collingwood Jeremiah Bancroft, who has just inherited his father's \$7,000,000, by an eccentric stranger who says he represents the Great Adventure company. Jerry, sitting among his 1,200 books and failing to note the stranger's malignant glances, scoffs and then ponders, remembering his own 24 hours' ordeal and his father's mysterious death—of fright, according to reports. Later, as Jerry is recalling a memorandum in his father's effects, reading "Paid Kennedy in full," out of the storm comes beautiful Nancy Bowman, a Broadway stage favorite, rain drenched and lost. Jerry escorts her to the nearest railroad station and the next day, trailed by agents of the sinister seller of adventures, goes to New York, where he learns the girl's identity. The shadow and terror of Bellman, two crooks in the employ of Daniel Stewart, the seller of adventures, reveals that he had served 14 years in prison for killing a policeman. Jenny Malloy, Nancy's friend, tells Nancy her opera ambitions are vain and urges her to be more kind to Arthur Craig, backer of her musical comedy.

FIFTH INSTALLMENT.

"Your Father Was an Honest Man."

Nancy's knees shook so violently that she had to sit down. She was stunned by Jenny's frank summary of her prospects. It was as if she had climbed a vast flight of stairs, only to find a bottomless pit between her and the second half of the journey. She knew that Jenny loved her and that Jenny was never known to lie. Jenny had the habit of speaking the truth boldly, even hurtfully; friends and strangers, it did not matter, her lash swept about impartially and impersonally.

But it could not be true; it just couldn't be! It did not serve, however, to reiterate this denial; she recognized the depressing fact that her confidence had been shattered, and from the smoke of it came the ugly shadow of doubt. No drama in her voice. . . . If the conductor had said that! A wave of terror swept over her. Without the shining goal to buoy her up, how could she continue to play the part of the female clown? Jenny was wrong. This was not Nancy Bowman's game. She could not turn about now and direct her energies into the lesser way. She might not be able to go forward, but how was she to turn back?

"O, Jenny, why didn't you leave me be?"

Jenny had indeed awakened her. Tomorrow night her full consciousness would be with her. How would she act?—how would she sing? How would she be able to put vivacity into a numbed body, rollicking mischief into her face, and vocal honey into her throat?

But wait! Hadn't her teacher told her again and again that she had the making of a great artiste? This hope was short lived, falling back as it did upon a cynical truth: that it was her teacher's bread and butter to praise her. Had poor old Daddy Bowman been wrong? Had he let hope bemuse his knowledge of the truth—for her sake?

This life, instead! Never to know anything better than this, mediocre verse and music, the association of scatter brained girls whose highest flights never rose beyond lobster and sable and square cut diamonds! The fading terror was swept aside by a wave of bitter recklessness. She was almost tempted to recall Jenny and go with her into the night.

She waited 10 minutes until her eyes cleared, then she went out into the corridor. She paused as she reached the doorkeeper.

"Is Mr. Craig about?" she asked.

"On the walk, Miss. He's waiting for Mr. Mannheim."

Jenny stepped out into the night and cast a glance about.

"O, Mr. Craig!" she called.

Craig, much astonished, approached. "Is there anything I can do for you?"

"Yes. You can let me thank you for Ling Foo."

"O, that!"

"I did not realize until tonight how abominably I have behaved. I should have sent the dog back or acknowledged him."

"You like him, then?"

"That's just it. After a few days I couldn't give him up. You see . . . it's hard to explain! . . . but I'm too busy to make friends. I never go anywhere. All my free hours are devoted to study."

"Study?" he interrupted.

"Yes. I am trying to make my voice worth something."

"Grand opera? We were all wondering," he said. So that was it? Just a sensible young woman with a fine ambition.

"Would you like me to take tea with you somewhere after the matinee tomorrow?"

"I beg pardon?"

With some confusion, she repeated the question. Supposing he now declined? It would serve her right?

"Why will you?" he cried.

There was something in the appeal that shocked her. Never had she heard a voice so full of hunger

and loneliness. She was not near enough to tell, but she wondered if there was liquor in his breath tonight.

"Where and what time?"

"The Ritz, at 5. You make me very happy, Miss Bowman."

"Five o'clock, then. Good night."

Craig remained bareheaded until Nancy turned into Broadway; then he put on his hat. For the sake of the dog! He wanted to laugh, but his throat was dry. So it was grand opera? Why hadn't the Malloy girl mentioned it? Well, if grand opera was the girl's dream he could help her; he had influence in that direction. Some day he would get Sorrentino to try her out.

The stage door opened and Mannheim came out.

"Anywhere you say, Craig," said the manager. "But where can we talk. I've the synopsis of a new book. You're always alive with suggestions, background stuff and costumes. There's a great part in it for Bowman."

"Just had a little talk with her. She's going to take tea with me after the matinee."

"Well, now!"

Nancy walked across town to the Elevated, which she took, being particularly careful to keep Ling Foo covered. The puppy seem to appreciate her difficulties, for on these midnight journeys he was always as quiet as a mouse. The responsibility attendant upon the care of such a dog, combined with the alertness and secretiveness with which he had to be guarded, had filled an enormous void; and tonight she had something alive to whisper to and cuddle, to mitigate her profound happiness.

She would appear friendly toward Craig; but a single false move and she would have no more of him. If she could find in him a real friend she would be grateful; but she was full of doubting.

So, while she prepared the puppy's supper, while Bancroft rolled upon down in his sultan bed, now amused, now exultant, the seller of adventures wove his web, so fine, so broad and high, that one day both Bancroft and Nancy Bowman found themselves inescapably enmeshed in it.

Bancroft was awakened the next morning by the early sunshine. He had forgotten to draw the curtains, and the golden light, beaming with motes, struck his eyes and picked out the costly appointments of his bedroom. It all came back in a moment; he knew where he was.

With a laugh Bancroft jumped out of bed and trotted about the room on his toes, did a little shadow boxing, then made for the white enameled bathroom, with its perfumed soaps, its lilac toilet water, its bag of sea salt. He felt vaguely embarrassed; it was almost as if he had entered some feminine domain. But suddenly he burst into laughter again. The world was full of laughter this crisp October morn.

Nancy Bowman. If she really owned a dog all would be well with the world. Amazing fact! They two—stage favorite and country humpkin—shared a secret. After all seven millions weren't going to be such a burden. But on the heels of this complacency came the thought that he wasn't going to have seven millions for many weeks to come: he was going to be a poor young man who had come to the city to make his fortune. Nancy: English and old fashioned. How she could sing and how she could dance! O, this world was all right.

But what should he do? He would have to have a job of some kind. He couldn't sit in his room and twiddle his thumbs between meals. No store job; that would be intolerable; whatever he did he must be his own master. He could, at a pinch, translate one of Horace's books of Satires. He would not have to apply himself rigorously to the task; only when time hung heavy on his hands; enough work to prove that he was thus engaged.

Besides, it was the best of mental exercises, the study of any foreign tongue. Still, the Satires would scarcely do. He ought to have something that had a business air about it, a financial promise. Ha!—a text book for beginners; that was a capital notion. He recollected having read that text books which were adopted by public schools were gold mines. In his case it would not matter how much he pirated; the work would never be offered to any publisher.

The Great Adventure company. The animation faded from his expression, as a cloud shadow will suddenly obliterate a field of sunshine. First, an interview with George Bellman; next, quietly to investigate the financial status of the Bolivian Emerald company. If Bellman and the emerald mine

came through, all the more reason for signing the preposterous contract. Something sinister lay behind it all. He could not analyze this feeling; he was only conscious of its presence. What a mau, though!—what an antagonist for a boy!

Nevertheless he would attack the problem as he had, not so long ago, attacked problems in trigonometry. An adventure of this caliber sooner or later resolved itself into pure mathematics. This adventure company in some way related to his father and the sustained mystery of his father's actions and conduct of life. Bancroft was this morning as certain of the fact as he was of his sight, which automatically calculated the depth of the water rushing into the tub.

First off, clothes: he must be thoroughly if modestly outfitted from head to foot. He had already had it carried home to him that here in New York clothes had precedence over morals and worth. Nobody studied countenances for

dared not admit to himself that there was a possibility of becoming really acquainted with Nancy Bowman. She was high romance, and he had no right to aspire to such.

During this walk, this adventure of the eyes, the mathematical atoms had been swarming in search of procedures, what he should do chronologically. His legal affairs first, then to gather all the data he possibly could regarding his father; then a room somewhere. These affairs out of the way, George Bellman and the Bolivian Emerald company would come into the circle of action.

The law office of Snell & Pride was situated in the warehouse district. Winter and summer there was the stench of cured hides. The main office—first floor up, no elevator—was large. Thousands of yellow law books bent the shelves; they were stacked in corners for lack of room on the shelves. Mingling with that of hides was the vague odor of the finished product.



"Who owns this house?"

the distinguishing characteristics of a soul, but rather the label in one's hat. A fashionable label was open sesame. A Piccadilly bowler was a better passport in New York than King Ferdinand's Bulgarian whiskers.

Immediately after breakfast he proceeded to the shopping district. What he selected at the clothier's, the haberdasher's and the shoemaker's spoke of natural good taste. This business, which he found more than ordinarily pleasurable, brought to a conclusion, he purchased a stout leather suitcase and a small trunk. He was now ready to face the world.

He began to rove the streets. They were irresistibly fascinating. Pretty girls; they were everywhere, coming and going, crossing the streets, always at a brisk pace. Where did they come from? Where were they going? Where and how did they get those silk stockings and flimsy shirtwaists? How did they escape pneumonia? What were their homes like? Were they as happy as they looked?

It struck him depressingly that he had never known a pretty girl—that is, one with whom he could laugh and jest, with whom he could loiter against the gate or sit on the porch steps in the evening. How often the sight of other boys enacting these idyls had racked his heart! Well, here he was, in New York; he would be a country humpkin indeed if he did not find some pretty girl to talk to. He

Everything was old—the books, the desks, the clerks. It was almost British in its mustiness, its dinginess. The firm of Snell & Pride never dealt in divorcees, murder, theft, but was sometimes forced into court in the matter of tampered wills and litigation over wills. The general business was estates.

There were three private offices, the windows of which offered the pleasing prospect of an alley into which the sun was never able to squeeze. There were no names on the roughened glass of the doors. This gave the occupants a certain protection against unwelcome visitors.

Bancroft had never been to the offices before. Snell had come out to the village to read the will, or rather to offer it. He was unknown here, so he stood outside the gate, striving in vain to catch an eye. At length an aged clerk approached.

"You wish to see . . . ?"

"Mr. Snell, I am Mr. Bancroft."

A slight rustle was audible among the dozen human fossils. It was a sign of tremendous interest, had Bancroft but known.

"Mr. Bancroft? Oh, sir, come right along with me," said the clerk. "Mr. Snell is in his office. Mr. Pride is in San Francisco."

The clerk knocked on the middle door, and a brisk voice bade him enter.

"Mr. Bancroft, sir."

"Well, well!" began Snell, with-

ered but peppery, for all that he had spent the major portion of his days in this demi-tomb. "Sit down. Glad you're so prompt." He pressed a button. "Bancroft," he said in answer to the clerk's inquiry. "Well, how does it feel to be a millionaire?"

"Some day I'll be able to tell you; just now there are other things in my forehead."

"Ah, yes, I see. The Johnson matter. Well, I don't know."

"Mr. Snell, I'm going to ask you a question which may startle you. Was my father an honest man?"

"Come with me," said Snell. "We'll go into the office your father occupied all these years."

On the way Snell was given the tin box which held the Bancroft papers. Once within the elder Bancroft's room, the lawyer turned and laid his hands upon the young man's shoulders. "Here in this room, where the spirit of your father may sometimes return, I say to you solemnly that under God's heaven there lived no honest man than your father."

"Then every dollar is clean?"

"As the sunshine is in your part of the world."

"But why live as he did? Why did he treat me so?" cried the son passionately.

"God only knows. What your father's motives were for acting the misanthrope and pretending to be a miser, I have no knowledge. But so far as his honesty is concerned, I can declare that. You know nothing about rents in New York at the present time; but you'll get a glimmer when I tell you that all your rents are the same as pre-war times. He had all the chance in the world to gorge, but he didn't. Now, observe this slip."

Upon this slip Bancroft read about 20 names, with addresses. Against each name was a sum of money.

"People who owe him?"

"No. Your father was not only an honest man, my boy, but a kindly one. On December 20, year after year, I made out these sums into checks and mailed them. I doubt if, even at this day, the beneficiaries know where the money comes from. Nearly \$10,000 a year to men and women who had in some way, at some time, performed an act in his service disinterestedly."

"Charity?"

"Precisely."

"I don't understand. He never gave me any money."

"But today you are only 24 and the absolute master of nearly \$7,000,000. That seems answer enough. The day you went to camp he said he was making his will in your favor; every dollar, stick, and stone. I vaguely protested about the looseness and suggested a trust. He said no; and went on to say that all the money you had ever had you had earned by the sweat of your brow, that you would know what a dollar was and how far it would go. So that part of the riddle seems clear enough. He taught you the pleasure of honest work."

"But not a line of advice!" said Bancroft. "As if he were absolutely indifferent what I did with this money. Not a legacy of any kind. Supposing I had grown up illiterate—what then?"

"Ah, but you didn't," countered Snell. "Your father knew what you were about, but he said nothing. Supposing he had admitted his wealth and sent you to college, would you be as well off as you are today? Would you be half so well educated? Wait a minute." Snell dug into the box and produced a bundle of receipts. "Whose signature is that?"

"Miller's!—The academy principal! Fifteen hundred a year!" Bancroft's bewilderment was rocking him painfully. "But he kept me at arm's length, Mr. Snell, always at arm's length." There was a break in the young man's voice.

"I know no reason for that. But one day Miller came in. In some manner he had learned that your father had his office here. He came to suggest that you be sent to college. Your father asked Miller if he couldn't give you the equivalent of a college education, and Miller answered that he could. So for seven years Miller drew a salary of \$1,500. He proved himself to be something more than a tutor, a teacher; he became your moral guide as well because he was fond of you. You aren't merely educated; you are a scholar."

"Yes, yes! But my youth—where is that? All these lonely years!"

"Your youth? You have just entered upon it equipped beyond ordinary, a fortune and the brains with which to enjoy it. Or you can dissipate it all, youth and fortune, in 40 months"—dryly.

Bancroft picked up the list of his

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