

The World Outside



By Harold MacGrath

THE STORY THUS FAR.

Collingswood Jeremiah Bancroft, who has just inherited his father's \$100,000 and the mystery of the latter's death—a mystery complicated by a memorandum reading "Paid Kennedy in full," and by the initials "C. J. B." in a book—is offered an adventure for \$10,000 by Daniel Stewart, a sinister stranger representing the Great Adventure company, a concern masked behind the more conventional name of the Bolivia, Ecuador company. After much hesitation and after struggling with his lawyers to nullify any contract he may sign under duress, Jerry, who has gone to "the world outside," as represented by New York, contracts for the adventure. Stewart promptly absconds with the money, an assistant who suspects his designs and erases all the text of the contract, leaving only Jerry's name, the notary's seal, and the names of the witnesses. Meeting Jerry has met beautiful Nancy Bowman, a Broadway stage favorite with aspirations toward grand opera; her chum, Jenny Malloy, and Arthur Craig, who is in love with Nancy. Jerry sends a detective to Bolivia to trace the mysterious Kennedy.

NINTH INSTALLMENT. Nancy's Doom.

Foster's studio covered the entire top floor of the house in Ninth street. The house was four storied, and the space occupied by the studio had once been blank—a garret. Foster, at his own expense, had put in a fine skylight. He was the one tenant who had a lease. Whenever his friends wanted the studio for a rout he always turned it over to them. There was little risk. The furnishings were worthless; the sofas and lounges lacked springs, the chairs had paled legs, the oriental rugs on the floor were not antiques, but ordinary rugs worn out. All this with a definite purpose: Foster, who was a famous portrait painter, came here to work, not to serve tea.

Bancroft strolled about, examining some of the canvases which hung from the walls of unadorned brick. It did not seem possible to him that 10 days ago he had been living a drab existence in a drab village. It was all luck, of course. If Nancy Bowman had not rung his doorbell he would not be here this night, among these friendly bohemians. The word had already been explained to him. It seemed that there were two sets of bohemians. One set made it a business, the other set became bohemians after a day's work. They became children romped, told stories, sang, played. Greenwich, so-called, meant no more to them than Hoboken. They weren't reforming or inventing any art; they were successes in their particular fields and would have resented the title of bohemian.

"Those bugs," Jenny had explained—meaning the regular bohemians—"are always yodeling about th' decline in art; an' they couldn't cut a pie or macaroni without messin' it. Keep away from that bunch, Jeremiah. If you have a good idea, they sponge it out o' you an' dump you. They toddle back an' forth, shoutin' Failure, an' expectin' t' sell it. Long haired and bobbed, writin' larder poetry 'cause they can't rhyme an' sex novels that 'd made poet o' Anthony Comstock baldheaded tryin' t' tell what it's all about. When you see success anywhere, Jeremiah, toddle along behind."

Her guests tonight included Mannheim, Craig, some of the chorus and principals of the operetta, a famous newspaper paragrapher, three successful illustrators, a magazine editor, and a dramatist of note.

Presently Bancroft came upon a half-finished piece which he recognized instantly—Jenny Malloy. The artist had caught her off guard, as it were; for there was only sweetness and kindness in her face and eyes, the true Jenny. He had read somewhere—probably in Ruskin—that it was not possible to deceive the real portrait painter, that sooner or later the true character of a subject will reveal itself. He was beginning to understand Jenny's sustained banter: It was her shield against the continuous battle of life.

"There's a touch of genius in it," said a voice at his elbow, and Bancroft turned to discover Craig.

"Have you ever seen her like that?"

"No," said Craig, "but Foster has, for he never attempts to idealize a face. That's what made his struggle so long. He was 45 before the world grasped what he was trying to do—paint portraits instead of candy box faces."

"How old is he?"

"Sixty-two. That's why you don't see him here tonight. He works all day and is too old to play at night. I'm the only idler here. I haven't any talent."

"Neither have I," replied Bancroft.

"Then we belong to the community of interests. But I know. It must be fine to have a goal to work toward, to see a dream take shape. But you are young. Perhaps this sort of company may uncover an

unsuspected talent. You never can tell. You are not a New Yorker?"

"Oh, no. I came from the country about a week ago. All these actions are wonderfully new to me. All accident—my knowing Miss Bowman and Miss Malloy."

"Miss Bowman is a charming young woman. She is the first comedienne in town—and doesn't realize it."

"I don't quite understand," said Bancroft.

"Nor does anybody else," replied Craig smiling. "She is a born comedienne—and resents it. That is as near as I can get to it."

"Have you known her long?"

"I hadn't spoken a dozen words to her until this week."

The air relaxed, as it were; the congealment disappeared. Bancroft's reserve gave way to a tentative friendliness. Craig did not know Nancy as intimately as the

self at the piano, and he struck the opening bars.

A perverse mischief took possession of Nancy. She sang the pitter-patter, but the expression on her face and her gestures were those of a mechanical doll, badly put together. When she had done there was a shout of approval.

Mannheim rushed to her, seized her shoulders, and shook her. "You infernal minx! That's the encore hereafter. We'll rehearse the orchestra at 10 tomorrow."

"But—"

"No buts at all. My orders. The unexpectedness will knock the audience off their chairs." Then Mannheim put his arm through hers and led her to an obscure corner of the studio. "After the rehearsal," he said, "you'll come into my office and we'll make that contract right. I'm an honest man, Miss Bowman, and you're worth a

Libestraum. Tenderly and wistfully the music rose above the chatter, which began to drop and shortly to cease altogether. Nancy was not conscious that she had seized Mannheim by the arm and was holding tightly. Her dark eyes were shining, her face was eager, her lips slightly parted. Throughout the impromptu concert—for Craig played from the tenderer inspirations of Chopin, MacCowell and Greig—Nancy did not move, she scarcely breathed.

"Queer chap," thought Mannheim. He's talking to this girl here, saying all manner of foolish and beautiful things to her, and she only hears the sounds, not the message." He looked down into Nancy's face and comprehended what the tension of her grip signified. Music mad, one of those emotional creatures whose souls were full of harpstrings.

"Why . . . that was wonderful! I didn't know," she said, as Craig

fitting answer to whatever the girl had to say: All the while watching Nancy and the man who was without any talent. Craig had repeated himself at the piano and Nancy leaned against the side.

"You play wonderfully," she said. "I didn't know. What was that last? Something by Grieg, but I've forgotten."

"The Old Mother." Softly Craig began to run through the composition. "Can't you see her, by the fireplace, a thin fire under the kettle? Her man is dead, and all her sons have gone. She is alone. The old mother, forgot there among the ruins of her dreams. The end of all mothers. You love music."

"Yes. That is why I despise the songs I sing." She could tell Craig the secret, off hand, in this manner; but she could not tell Mannheim!

"Somehow I understood that. Now I wonder if I am going to offend you? I have made an appointment for you with Sorrento at 2 o'clock tomorrow. Will you go?"

The ancient suspicion flashed into her mind—that favors had to be paid for. But Sorrentino, the famed impresario, a disinterested judge; to know one way or the other!

"You are not offended?" he repeated.

"No. I am rather stunned. He seldom bothers with any but those who have more or less arrived."

"He is an old friend of mine, and he will give you half an hour. We met frequently in Italy, after I had completed my studies in Munich. He will tell you truthfully whether or not you have a voice suited to grand opera. You have a well trained voice as it is, and you know very well how to use it. He was quite pleased tonight, though he knew that your voice really has no chance with that style of music."

"He was in the theater tonight?"

"Yes; but he had to leave after the first act. I am to telephone him in the morning."

"It is very kind of you. I will be there. But you mustn't do anything more for me in this way. It embarrasses me, for I cannot make any return."

"Is it because I sometimes drink?" he asked unexpectedly.

"Why . . ."

"Supposing I gave you my word never to touch the stuff again; would you be glad?"

"Of course I would—as any good woman would be. You are a distinguished man; you possess great gifts."

"But what can I do with it I am a rich man. I am not selfish; only there are so few who would understand the kind of music I play, that I rarely do what I did tonight. I thought perhaps you might understand."

"You told me you had no talent," said a voice from behind them.

Nancy was positively glad to see Bancroft standing at her shoulder, for the conversation between her and Craig was nearing rather dangerous ground.

Craig smiled. If the interruption annoyed him, he did not show it. "I meant that I had no public talent. You enjoy music?"

"Very much. It rouses all that is best in me; makes me want to go forth and commit some sublime folly. In the little village I came from there is an old maid who plays the church organ. I used to blow for her. After rehearsals she would play for me—Bach, Beethoven, Mendelssohn. I used to go home in a dream that lasted for hours. But there is something in your music that was never in hers."

"Thank you. What is in your music that was never in hers?"

"I am ignorant. I don't know what it is. It hurts, and hers never did. You wanted it to hurt." Bancroft's tone was almost resentful.

"And you told me that you had no talent," returned Craig, smiling again.

"But I haven't!"

"You are a poet. Only poets can feel beauty to the extent that it hurts."

"I don't know one rhyme from another," Bancroft declared.

"Both David and Solomon were poets; their thunder goes down the ages. And where's the rhyme or meter in anything they wrote?"

"But if I had your talent . . ."

"Well, what would you do with it?" asked Craig, amused.

"If I had your talent and were a rich man I'd go about the country and give concerts, turning the proceeds over to charitable organizations. No man who has your gift has any right to hide it. Genius isn't private property; it is something we must share with everybody, anywhere. Why don't you go among the soldier hospitals and give those poor boys music? Think of the pleasure it would give you!"

The thrilling earnestness of Bancroft affected both Craig and Nancy oddly. To Craig it was a distinct novelty to find himself rebuked by a boy—justly rebuked. As for Nancy

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young man from the country! Why this thought should lighten Bancroft's spirit he did not pause to analyze, nor why he should now be inclined toward friendship with this rather elegantly but professed idler.

The chatter of the guests rose. There were frequent bursts of laughter. Some one began to play syncopated music on the piano—an unusually fine instrument. Bancroft was informed that Foster played frequently during the sittings, as a physical relaxation, to take the cramp out of his palette arm.

"Eats!" cried Jenny. "Everybody help themselves!"

And everybody did; and there was more chatter and laughter, and one of the pretty chorus girls began to make eyes at Bancroft and nudge him about possessively, until Jenny warned her to "lay off," as Jeremiah was particularly hers.

Never before had Bancroft had such a good time. He had been a little diffident at first, recalling, naturally enough, the newspaper stories of the wild doing of the theatrical folk at play. But this fun was as innocent as a church social at home.

After the hunger was satisfied there was a demand for amusement. Jenny, being hostess, was first on the list, and she gave a capital imitation of the madame in the model shop, the wife and the husband; and the dramatist boldly joined it down for future use. Then Mannheim, who had been elected as master of ceremonies, called upon Nancy, to sing the hit from the operetta.

"But who'll play it?" she asked.

"I will," said Craig, seating him-

self at the piano, and he struck the opening bars.

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