

The World Outside

(Continued From Page Three.)

By Harold MacGrath

sure, the contract would have awakened her, the wave would have crashed, and all her better instincts would have rushed up to overwhelm the vague horror that later was to wait upon her substantially. But Craig—as if penetrating the psychology with which the girl was bemused—merely took her cold hands in his and kissed them.

"Theater, theater!" called Jenny, from the foot of the stairs.

On the return to the theater Nancy laughed at every comment Jenny offered; and not all these offerings were comic; at least not to Jeremiah, who this night determined to take his time in passing alleys. What had Craig said to her, upstairs there, that made her so happy? He hoped with all his soul, that the seller of adventures would strike tonight, send a tornado or an avalanche out of the first alley. Nothing but extreme physical exertion would serve to mitigate the poignant misery swelling and constricting his heart. So this was love!

A dozen times he was on the point of inventing some excuse to halt the sedan and leave it; but he was shackled not only by common politeness but by the reluctance to leave Nancy practically alone with Craig. Somehow Jenny did count, somehow she would never count again for pinning him so trickily to the phonograph. Had Jenny some understanding with Craig? The notion filled him with bristling anger. He had read of such things—the false woman friend. Still, he had no authority for such a suspicion; and as he grudgingly admitted this fact, shame superseded his anger. No; if Jenny was bad, then there were no good women. Her action might have been mischievous rather than premeditated: it was just his own cantankerous mood.

Seven millions! Supposing he flung that at them, and proved it? Why, he could probably buy and sell Craig, as they said in the street. But there was one thing he never would do—and his spine stiffened at the thought—and that was, buy a wife. As he looked back, he began to perceive the real notion in his hiding under an assumed name; he wanted to be loved for himself alone, not for what he could bestow in worldly goods.

And here she sat, at his elbow, by the irony of the gods, had he but known it. Poor Jenny!—who would have followed him to mountain tops or down to dark abysses! He might and probably would have felt extremely sorry for her, but he would not have offered her marriage because he was sorry. The physical in woman was and always would be attracted first by the jewels; then he would take notice of the casket. Denied those inconsequential series of love affairs that attack most youths and render them love cynics before they are 20, Jeremiah's love for Nancy was a complete thing, abiding. So the misery which was his was a man's, not a callow youth's.

The queer little eddies and whirlpools going on in that smoothly rolling sedan!—the mutinies and perversities of three of those four minds! Even Craig, his intellect seasoned by observation and experience, had a vague sensation of moving forward on a slack wire. Nancy had given him her promise, and knowing her as he did, he knew she would stand by that promise; and that had to content him for the time. What would she have done had he taken her in his arms and kissed her? Why hadn't he? After such a promise, why hadn't he kissed her? Of course, she did not love him. He was no fool. She was merely attracted by his varieties; but so long as she loved no other man, there was hope that love would come to her when she learned how much he was giving both in heart and purse.

At the stage entrance he held her hand for a moment, smiled, and let her go. He wanted her alone, but that was not possible, with half the company flowing in through the stage door.

"We had a grand time, Mr. Craig," Jenny declared with only half a lie. "A real Thanksgiving dinner!"

"Makes me happy to hear you say so," Craig turned to Bancroft. "Any particular place you'd like to be dropped, Mr. Collingswood?"

"No, thanks. I'm going to jog around a bit. I want to thank you for your kindness," he lied. Jeremiah was becoming accomplished in this convention. Everybody lied; they had to, or fight. What would you? Jeremiah could not say to Craig—"Your turkey choked me, your house smothered me, and he banged to you!"—as he would have liked!

Craig lied, too, but carelessly. "I am glad I had the chance to offer it."

He had no particular fear of this boy; but somehow he was always second, under foot; seemed to have

a good deal of time on his hands for a young chap fighting the world. Where is the middle-aged man who does not underestimate youth—and pay for it?

After the second act Jenny ran to Nancy's dressing room and was admitted. Neither appeared in the opening. Jenny was as full of questions as a chestnut is of starch. Nancy's laughter had deceived her, too. She wanted to know—she was "dying" to know—what had taken place between Nancy and Craig, upstairs. But for once she found herself hesitant, that she could not put the question direct; probably because her interest was not unselfish. Still, if anything had really happened, Nancy, who was secretive, would have rushed into her, Jenny's arms, first off.

Which Nancy made no effort to do. She scarcely looked around, pretending that something was the matter with the makeup of an eyebrow, over which she fiddle-faddled until Jenny had to leave.

"Say, did y' ever see such a house," began Jenny. "I'll tell the world! Lord!—I be rich like that! First time I ever had a butler toddle around my chair. But, oh, did you pipe his fiz? I bet he was born on th' steps o' Grant's tomb. Th' aunt was reg'lar. My! but did you notice th' emeralds? An' Jeremiah! Lud! Never missed a fork, an' looked 'a if he'd had a thousand butlers in his young life. An' he wasn't tongue-tied, either. I was, though. I was actually afraid o' th' butler! Plum puddin', with real brandy sauce. An' not a drop o' drink! He knows you don't like it."

Nancy peered into the glass critically.

"Where's Ling Foo?"

"I had to leave home. Not much for him to give thanks for—alone all day," said Nancy, still with her gaze focused upon the strange face in the mirror.

"We're goin' 't have a grand windup at th' Claridge. Come along."

"Too tired."

"A little supper by your two-some?" Which was as near as Jenny got to the utterance of the real question.

"I am going straight home, Jenny—alone."

"Been a great day for a couple birds who expected nothin' better than the corner beanery. Well, th' music has stopped. I'll have to skeddaddle. See you later."

"Good night, Jenny!"—with a sudden yearning to run into Jenny's arms, none kinder in all this world; but she dared not, fearing the consequences.

Outside the door Jenny paused, yellow; Jenny Malloy was yellow; she hadn't the nerve to ask Nancy straight-out if anything had happened. Maybe nothing had happened. If anything had, Nancy wouldn't have acted so coolly about it. Jenny proceeded to the wings and waited for her cue. She began to hum a few lines from the verses she would soon be singing—

We are human manikins
Dolls for ladies to admire.

The wave of perversity—to carry on the illusion—was beginning to make in Nancy's ears certain ominous little sounds. But her chin was still projected stiffly and defiantly. It was at the end of the performance, in her dressing room, where she had neither mental or physical diversion with which to dyke the flood, that it fell, crashing, thundering, smothering. Instantly she saw herself for what she was, a despicable creature! . . . For his money! She did not care for him in the least; just his money! . . . And she must hurt him, a man who had never harmed her, who offered her an honorable contract, who had shown her many little kindnesses. . . . Oh, she was as base and vile . . .

No. The psychology of her mood—too many backyards, too many clotheslines, too much hard work and not enough play, too much thinking; a vast blind anger against fate, which she could not reach, and so must vent her anger upon something—upon herself equally as upon Craig, the innocent bystander. She must find him and tell him at once.

The perversity which had driven her into this morass now reversed its energies and became animated terror. To get out, now, tonight! There was something of the Furies in her subsequent actions. With part of her makeup still on, she flew out of the dressing room and down the corridor to the doorkeeper's cubbyhole.

"Have you seen Mr. Craig?" breathlessly.

"No, Miss Bowman. Ain't seen him tonight."

She turned and ran back, crossed the stage and knocked upon Mannheim's door. The manager himself answered the summons. The big hazel eyes of his, the pinched nostrils, the pale natural check, and the dashed, the tenseness of his body, immediately conveyed to him that she was laboring under some

extraordinary excitement.

"What is the matter?" he asked.

"Where is Mr. Craig?"

"Why, he was out in front with his aunt. He didn't come back. Anything I can do?"

"I . . . I wanted to see him." Never had she known such shame! "Come in and sit down while I telephone his house." Mannheim knew that Craig had taken his aunt by auto to her country place and would spend the night there; but he wanted to give the girl a chance to recover her poise.

Nancy sat down, her fingers tensely locked. Mannheim gave her a worried glance as he took up the telephone. Something had happened between this girl and Craig, during the dinner or after. He lengthened his talk with the Craig butler; anything to give her time. Finally he set down the telephone.

"Craig has gone with his aunt for the night. Want to leave a note? I'll have a boy carry it around to his home."

"No. I thought if he were here I might catch him. Thank you." She rose.

"Supposing I send out for a cup of coffee? You look done in."

"I want nothing," and she departed, closing the door.

What the deuce had happened? Something serious, to have given her that tragic expression. Mannheim was uneasy. He made a step as though to go after her, but reconsidered. He wondered if anything . . . Oh, pahaw! Craig was a thorough gentleman. The girl was having one of those temporary breakdowns with which he was tolerably familiar. She would be all right tomorrow.

To see Craig now, while she was hot with shame; to confess she hadn't meant it; to ask him to forgive her, while all her best instincts were in force, before her courage receded! Tomorrow the shame would be there, but it would be a cold and horrible thing. There was only one way to recover her self-respect, and that was to face him. To write him would be cowardly, and he did not deserve such treatment. But tomorrow, in the cold daylight! What a vile thing she was!

She never recollected how she finished taking off the make-up or how she reached the street. She started over her usual route to the elevated, blindly almost; and after a while became aware that some one was keeping step with her, and she looked to see who it was.

"Jerry?"

"I thought maybe you'd like company to the elevated," said Jeremiah. He had found his alleys—for he had deliberately sought them—empty of anything suggesting battle, murder, and sudden death, and had returned to the theater, having nowhere else to go. Home was out of the question, at least for a time; for his pillow would offer him nothing but unbroken thought. On the streets there would be varying interests to distract him. But where was Craig?

"Are you going anywhere?" she asked.

"No."

"Then come home with me. But don't talk, Jerry; I'm dead tired."

Jeremiah! She was glad to see him. He would be a tower of strength this night. His presence would hold her together until she gained her room. A boy, with age-old wisdom on his lips, who had the gift of silence; that is, he always knew when she wanted to talk and when she didn't. Taught by the silent fields and woods. What would he say if he knew how base a thing she was? . . . For money!

The world grew a little brighter to him for that "Jerry." He drew her arm through his and patted her hand, quite brotherly; and with a thrill—perhaps of melancholy origin—felt her arm tighten.

The seller of adventures, having followed them from the theater, did not pursue them as they climbed the elevated station steps. He was content. This would be the girl when the time came. He laughed and turned away. Jeremiah would find another knife, this time imbedded in the inner jamb of the door. Rank theatricality; but the point was to keep the boy in a constant state of expectation, until the real trap could be sprung. Disposing of the Bolivian Emerald company was not an easy task; money was tight. Meantime, Jeremiah must be amused. Stewart burst into laughter again, his cheeks wrinkled sardonically.

Nancy began to count—the advertising signs in the car, the people, the electric signs in the air, the number of lighted windows on the level with the rails, not an uncommon way of fighting an insistent thought. She was fairly successful; but intermittently she heard the car wheels murrur: Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow! The day of reckoning.

Once her arithmetic was interrupted by a thought which more or less translated this murrur of wheels

ness. Before Daddy Bowman's death she had never been subject to moods so violently perverse in character. She knew now she had hoped against hope that, fearing he might lose her, he was holding back the truth until his death; who she was, who her parents were. A box of Jaipur enameled brass and a little gold chain, no more evidential than a blade of straw; a foundling, with no hope at all of ever being anything else. And atop of this, to learn that her ambition was bootless! Her bitterness had this day culminated in a cold rage against a mocking fate—and she had flung herself into his abyss! But the solution of her mood in no wise mitigated the appalling shame that burned in her heart.

At each station she counted the people who got out and those who got in. She switched to a tooth paste advertisement on the station platform, and followed this down-town. . . . Tomorrow, tomorrow, tomorrow! She must send for Craig and tell him, in cold blood. Perhaps she could make him understand, if the explanation took place in her own room, with the dingy back yards and the clotheslines burdened with soggy flannels, the Jaipur box, and the wreck of her dream. . . . Two—three—four; she went on with her counting.

From time to time Jeremiah stole a glance at her. She looked pale and careworn, and there was a droop to her mouth. Frequently he saw her lips move and wondered what the words were. (She was counting.) Two things were evident. Craig had not appeared at the stage entrance, and Nancy was unhappy about something. And yet she had come down those stairs at Craig's, her eyes glowing, her face marked by enticement.

By and by he reached down and tapped her hands which were folded listlessly in her lap. He rose.

"Home," he said, putting a smile, to it.

"We are there?"—her first spoken words since getting on the train.

"Yes." How about a cup of coffee?" he suggested.

"I want to go to sleep, Jerry, if I can."

"All right."

As they started down the station stairs, he drew her arm through his again, but there was no pressure from hers. Together they made the street. A desire shot into his blood and took possession of him before he could repel it. . . . To kiss her as he had kissed Jenny! But this act was not on the knees of the gods. There was a dark alley in between. He was half way past this alley, when he heard a scutter of feet, and understood instantly what was about to happen.

"Run, Nancy! Run!" he cried. Before he could set himself to do battle, the avalanche of human beings fell upon him.

Nancy then witnessed one of those instances of which she had often read but never dreamt of seeing. During the initial phase she looked upon the scene as she would have looked upon an interesting picture in an art dealer's window. Four men, with gray patches for faces, swarmed over Jeremiah and obliterated him—temporarily. Almost immediately there came an upheaval, and Jeremiah stood free.

He was the reincarnation of that amiable ruffian whom we know as Ajax, who challenged all Troy daily to come out of its walls and fight him. Homer doesn't mention this so particularly, supposing, no doubt, that it would be understood. Jeremiah—meaning the Lord's exalted—fought because his soul and body demanded it for all he had suffered that day. He had no other notion. It wasn't to protect his lady or his wallet in which were several thousand dollars and a sprinkling of emeralds. No; it was the lust of battle, the pride of flesh, in an instant he went back several thousand years. The pop of his fist in a face or against a chest was to him what the thump of the tympani is to a symphony orchestra—the basic color.

The men, weaving and waving over him, presently brought him down once more; but again he bore up and through, laying about lustily. Whenever he saw the right opening, he let go his boot effectively. There were no rules to this combat, no chivalry; kill or be killed. He could have pulverized any two of these unmanly rats—but four! One of his eyes was closing, his lips were pulp, his nose was bleeding, and there was a dagger-like hurt in the small ribs. But he was giving mark for mark, hurt for hurt.

It was when, for a second, Nancy saw his face, bloody and battered, in the street light which hung obliquely from the alley that she came out of her hypnosis. She rushed into the melee as a tigress after her whelp. With furious hands she seized one of the ruffians by the collar and dragged him back. When he saw that it was a woman, he started, wheeled, gave her a buffet on the mouth and smothered and

stunned her. The male animal will not fight the female of the species; but there are male humans who like nothing better than to pummel the soft flesh of a woman.

The blow did not take the fight out of Nancy, but it made her reasonable. She turned and ran dizzily down the street—for help. She never thought to cry out. That was one of the peculiar phases of this battle against odds; there were no sounds above the panting lungs, the thud of buffets and the scuffling of feet.

As the Homeric enthusiasm began to ooze out of him and civilization edged its way back, Jerry found himself sorely put to keep from going down for the third time, which he guessed would be the last. So now the notion came to him to take to his heels; but it came too late. A blackjack descended upon his skull; and after a singular constellation, not to be found upon any chart left by Copernicus, a soothing velvet blackness took all Jerry's pains and troubles away.

Around the first corner Nancy sighted help in the form of a policeman. They are frequently found in New York when you need them. But the discouraging fact is this: they are skeptical beyond belief after midnight. A thousand false alarms to contend with; wife-beaters, husband-beaters, neighborhood rows, children's squabbles—air bubbles. The cry of Murder no longer thrills; generally it is some woman trick to avoid a beating. So when Nancy rushed toward him, disheveled, he did not greet her with enthusiasm; her appearance had all the earmarks of the old stuff.

"Quick!" she cried. "They are killing him!"

"Who?" asked the policeman, amiably. Here was a pretty young woman, for all that her hat was hanging over an ear and a little trickle of blood was zigzagging down her chin. A row with her "steady"; wanted him locked up tonight, and tomorrow she'd be tearing at the bars to get him out.

Now Nancy was still boiling with fury, and it overflowed at the sight of the policeman's lack of professional interest. She caught him by the sleeve.

"You blockhead! I'm telling you that bandits are killing my escort. . . . Killing him!"

"Where?"

"The alley!"

"Show me!"—still skeptical.

She turned and raced to the corner, the officer hard upon her heels, his automatic in hand. Ninth street was empty.

"Well," he said, slowing up, "where's this war o' yours? I don't see anything."

But she flew on ahead. When she reached the alley she dropped to her knees. The policeman, reconsidering his flippant diagnosis, scuttered up just as Nancy raised Jeremiah's bloody head in her arms.

"O, Jerry, Jerry!" she cried, breaking into hysterical sobs; which it was now chronologically proper that she should.

The policeman opened the bloody shirtfront and felt of the victim's heart.

"Four of 'em, huh? Just my damn luck to be a few minutes late."

"Is he dead?"

"Not yet. His heart's going. I'm sorry, miss, I didn't dope it right; but even then I'd a' been too late. Why didn't you yell?"

"I . . . didn't think of it. I tried to help him, but I wasn't of any use."

"You waded in?"

"And one of the beasts struck me on the mouth. The poor boy! . . . to defend me! What's the odds, so long as she never learned the truth?—that she mistook Ajax for Menelaus?"

The policeman searched the victim, but his practiced hand found nothing but a keyring. The crooks had cleaned the boy thoroughly. Blackjack, too. Waded in, eh? Women—if they were worth anything—generally waded in for those they loved. They might pummel their lords and masters, but they would not permit anybody else.

"Did he carry any valuables?"

"I don't know," she answered, rocking slightly.

"Well, stay with him until I send in a call for the ambulance."

"No, no! We both live in that house there, with the marble steps. I'll help you. A surgeon lives next door, and he'll be home now."

The policeman thought it over. Probably the chap would get proper care more quickly if the girl had her way. "All right. I can handle him alone, if you'll give me a boost when I say so. There's his hat. You take it." Presently he swung Jeremiah's dead-weight into a scientific sling. "Show me the way, miss. How many flights?"

"One flight up."

"Fine!"

"We'll put him in my room until the doctor decides. But, oh, hurry! If he should die!"

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