

The World Outside



By Harold MacGrath

THE STORY THIS FAR.

Daniel Stewart, a stiletter stranger, contracts to supply Collingswood Jeremiah Bancroft, who has just inherited his father's \$1,000,000 and is exploring "the world outside," as represented by New York, with an adventure for \$10,000. Stewart then secretly erases all except the signatures and Jerry's copy of the contract, vanishes. Meanwhile Jerry falls in love with Nancy Brown, a Broadway stage favorite, and Nancy, informed that her opera ambitions are vain, becomes engaged to Arthur Craig, the banker of her comedy, only to repent and to begin a frantic hunt for him, that she may repudiate her promise. Jerry finds a dagger and a note beneath his pillow. Four suffragans blackmail him while he is escorting Nancy home, and in his delirium while he is nursing him, he reveals his love for her. A detective, hunting for clues that will untangle the mystery that binds together the uninitiated Stewart, Jerry, his father, whose death is still a puzzle, and a mysterious "Kennedy," returned to the older Bennett's effects, reports that "Kennedy" vanished in Bolivia years ago after selling an emerald mine to Stewart.

TWELFTH INSTALLMENT.

The Doorplate.

Here the girls came in, one with toast and the other with cocoa. Jerry loved them both, differently. The touch of their tender hands was the sweetest tonic he had ever known. They scolded him, and fussed over him, renewed the fluff to his pillows and one of them fed him toast and the other hot cocoa; and he knew that he had nothing of which to envy the gods.

"I'm going to get this way once a week," he said.

"What?" cried Nancy.

"Yes, my dear. This is worth all the bumps a man could take in a single night."

"You poor nut," said Jerry; "if you ever come in this way again you go to the hospital. We're through. We haven't had any sleep yet on your account."

"You mean you two sat up all night with me? I wonder if I'll ever appreciate my luck? Supposing I'd moved in somewhere else?"

"Horrible thought!" said Nancy lightly. "I didn't bring in the puppy. He's full of pep and wants to romp. But I'll bring him in before I go to the theater tonight."

"That'll be fun!"—wondering whether it was the puppy's throat or his ears that she kissed oftmost. The funny little cogder! Now you two run along and get some sleep. I'm all right. Hicks are hard to kill."

"Did you lose touch?" asked Jerry.

"Not enough to hurt," he answered. He could be easier these days, almost blandly; that is, he could utter harmless fibs serenely, since these would never react except upon himself.

"I wondered," said Jerry. "They might 'a' got your whole roll."

"They didn't."

Nancy, returning home to her room, drew upon all her courage and telephoned Craig's home; but Craig had not yet returned from the country. For a short time her thoughts were confused. A strange kind of lover, not to telephone, not to send her even a note. The deed must be done, it was inescapable, but for all that her immediate sensation was of relief, with an undercurrent of shame that she should welcome this respite. The longer it was delayed the harder to do. But one decision she had come to irrevocably: she would not hide behind the telephone or a letter; she would make her miserable confession here in this room, face to face with him. Else her self-respect would always be a shattered thing. She would not try to escape any hurt that was due her. But, O, to have it over and done with, over and done with! Still dressed, she flung herself upon the lounge and slept until 4.

Soon after becoming a tenant Bancroft had a bed lamp installed. This day the janitor had fixed up the key so that Bancroft could have a light or darkness merely by pulling a string. At 9 o'clock that night he shut off the light and talked softly to Ling Foo, who occupied a side of the pillow and snored frequently, because at certain angles it was hard for him to breathe easily with that box of a nose.

"You're a lucky pup, Ling."

Ling Foo's tail admitted the soft impeachment.

"She took a lot of trouble for you one night; mud and rain, and that, so you wouldn't be thirsty."

Ling Foo remembered that night.

"Of course, I'm a fat."

Ling Foo didn't know about that.

"I haven't a chance in the world; but it's kind of hard. Do you think she loves anybody else?"

"No," said Ling Foo's tail.

"I mean, does she care for Craig? I shouldn't blame her. Craig has everything. He knows all the tricks of attraction, and I'm only a poor hack from the sticks, as Jerry would say. Look, how the man can

play the piano! And I can't pick out 'Yankee Doodle' with one finger."

"Music tickles my ears," said Ling Foo's tail, "and makes me sing."

"We human beings are funny, Ling. I want to know the future; and yet if the eminent lady from Cumac entered at this moment, ready to foretell, I'd boot her hence. Why? Because hope's the only thing worth having; and all hope would vanish if we could know tomorrow. There wouldn't be any good stories, either. A story is always somebody else's hope. Ling, I'm all banged up because Craig's Turkey choked me. Sounds funny, doesn't it? Truth, though, well, let's go to sleep."

Ling Foo had long since been ready for that. He rose, turned around a few times, then curled up on the spot he had just vacated, thereby executing one of those dog mysteries humans will never solve. But scarcely had the puppy begun to snore than a true growl vibrated his lithe body.

"Sh!" whispered Bancroft, alert.

Out of the silence came a slight click, which Bancroft instantly placed. It came from the lock on the door.

"Come right in, Mr. Stewart! come right in!" he called, cheerfully if ironically, through the dark.

The noise—the clicking in the keyhole—ceased instantly. No other sound followed directly; though Bancroft attuned his hearing to running feet, he heard nothing; but a minute later there came the sound of a door roughly closed. There wouldn't be any dagger or howie knife tonight.

But hard upon this thought came another, quite bewildering. Stewart had not known that his victim was laid up in bed. Now, what could that possibly signify? Stewart was thorough. Bancroft was assured that if Stewart had set those thugs in the alley he would be most certain to find out what they had accomplished. Again, it had not seemed possible that Stewart would sink to petty robbery. If the man had any scheme it would have breadth and originality. Chance medley, then; ordinary things who would have pounced upon any man well dressed. Suggestion; the idea of the alley had been suggested to him at the start as having a new and peculiar interest once the Great Adventure contract was signed.

Bancroft now regretted that he had not permitted Stewart to enter and given him a thorough shaking. He might even have got a glimpse of the future through Stewart's conduct in being surprised. Instead he had warned the man away. Had he, Bancroft, been afraid? He wanted to be honest with himself. If he were afraid of Stewart, physically, he wanted to know. But, search as he would, he could find no element of fear back of his action. He had merely jumped at the first thought that had entered his head—and missed a bit of real melodrama; Stewart, blinking in the sudden light, a dagger in his hand, for all the world like a child caught jam handed in the pantry; and part of the fun would have been to witness Stewart extricate himself from such a ludicrous situation, and in his rage or chagrin the man might have exposed a card or two. Too green, too green, Bancroft sighed; his brains were still so much lumber. Stewart was right.

So the alley rumpus had been chance medley; good-bye to his dollar watch, his emeralds, and his several thousands. And he might have escaped but for Craig's Thanksgiving turkey!

One thing, however, was believable: he would be the recipient of no more daggers. That phase of the game was played out; and Stewart would recognize the fact readily from the cheerful invitation to enter. But if only he had thought to let the man in and then turned on the light! Funny how the right thing came into one's head when it was too late. But if one always thought the right thing to do at the right time human beings would be perfect and there wouldn't be a laugh left in the world.

His thought leaped back to Nancy. It would always be leaping back to her when any other thought began to lose its stimulant. It was the most compelling thought he had. Whenever he encountered resistance in this queer battle in the dark he turned back to the thought of her. Rather a melancholy refuge, to be sure, but certified, unaccompanied by doubts. He loved her, but he never thought of her in the possessive sense; loved her as he loved the dawn, the sunset, the stars, the impossibility of possessing them—or her—being obvious.

He had read of the maddest attraction of the theater, and Nancy would always be on the stage or preparing for it. In a year or so—according to Nancy—Nancy would

become the idol of the town—that is to say, the idol of the continent—and Collingswood Jeremiah Bancroft (it was his habit of naming himself in full when he was ironical) would become to her recollection an inconsiderate note.

As all true men are, he was skeptical about his powers of attraction. Assembling his features, he had a face, and that was all he could see in the mirror. Eyes, nose, mouth, and chin, blocked in with flesh; none of that distinctive melancholy which drew women's glances toward Craig! Have him! The more Bancroft thought it over the more he

"Jenny is stunning, isn't she? I don't see how men can resist kissing her."

"They never kiss her more than once."

"Why not?"

"Hatpins."

"O! Did she ever stick one into you?"

"No." A wave of mocking recklessness rolled over him. "I only kissed her once."

"What! You kissed her?"

"Once. I didn't offer to do it again, because her eyes was full of hatpins."

Silence for a moment. "So you're the kind that kiss and tell!"

"But Jenny didn't kiss me. I'm not telling on Jenny, I'm telling on myself. She was the innocent bystander."

"Jerry, your moral fiber—"

"But I kissed her only once, and I'm sorry," he added, with a stab of remorse. "What had made him tell 'I'm afraid I'm a cad.'"

"You would be, if Jenny had kissed you?"

"Well, she didn't. But please don't tell Jenny I told you."

"No need to. Jenny told me her—"



The doorplate was graven simply—"Kennedy."

become convinced that his face was merely a sketch and that the artist had not cared to develop it.

And yet Nancy and Jenny could have told him that he possessed what many women would have offered their souls for—an utter complexion, a serious fine skin under which the clean blood came flood and ebb to his emotions. He could still blush. He could even blush in the dark, as he did when Nancy called to him through the door, after midnight. He had slept fitfully, never soundly; so when she knuckled he awoke instantly.

"Jerry?"

"Who is it?" he called.

"Nancy."

"Was then he blushed. "You want Ling Foo? The door is unlocked. Open it a little and I'll drop him to the floor."

When this business was accomplished Nancy asked: "How are you?"

"O, I'm all right. Head aches, but nothing to speak of."

"Is the bandage all right?"

"O yes!" he answered, eagerly, substantially afraid she might offer to come in and fuss over the bandage; and with her fingers fluttering about his head, heaven knows!

"Got the puppy?"

"Yes. But your door ought to be locked."

"Nobody will bother me."

"Well."

"How was everything tonight?"

"The same as usual."

"Where's Jenny?"

"Burning other people's candles for them."

He laughed, there was a flash of pain. "I don't see how she does it and still keeps her good looks."

"Then I haven't spilled the beans, as she would say?"—relievedly.

"No; but I'm going to wear hatpins myself after this."

"Why, Nancy, I wouldn't—"

"Well, that's complimentary; am I not as pretty as Jenny?"—a little female devil joggling her elbow.

All this in the dark, of course, and softly spoken.

He was speechless; he did not know what to say. Presently he heard a low laugh, succeeded by the light patter of shoes. She was gone. She had been having fun with him; and no doubt, from now on, she would be giving him sly digs regarding that harmless kiss. All at once the colossal mistake of his confession came home to him. He had told the woman he loved that he had deliberately kissed another! O, the double dyed sin that he was!

On the contrary, fate had played him a kindly stroke. The naive confession had caused the evanescence of all doubt relating to the kiss from Nancy's mind. Jenny had told the truth, that he hadn't meant it. He hadn't, or he wouldn't have jested about it. (Not that it mattered.)

The little comedy had made away with much of her depression; and there was now a gleam rather than misery in her heart as she constructed tomorrow's defenses of what she considered her admirable conduct. Craig was to call at four, the following afternoon.

Precisely at four Nancy opened the door for him. With terror in his heart and a smile on his face he entered and told his hat and coat on a chair; then he offered his hand.

"I ought not to take it," she said

gravely. "I have done a beauty thing."

"No. I should say that you were a young lady who had been thinking too much of late." He sat down.

He knew exactly what this interview signified—the wreck of his dreams. He had had a premonition of this hour immediately after he had left her at the stage entrance and returned for his coat. Why? Because all his life he had been unlucky; and it did not seem possible that fate should relent so unexpectedly. The girl's manner at his house, the artificiality of her laughter, the unchanging pallor on her face, had put this premonition into her consciousness. As he picked up her telephone calls and later saw Mannheim this premonition became absolute conviction; Nancy wanted to get out of it, to break her promise. Never in all his life had he known such hurt, and never would the future hold anything like it.

But the thing important in his mind just now was to let her get out of it with all the honors, suitably to draw the odds upon his own shoulders. He recalled the exact wording of his proposal. Fortunately he had not actually spoken of love. So then, to be cheerfully but adroitly. He would not hurt her; so why waste his breath trying? But ah, dear God, how it was going to hurt! Strange, but he knew this child better than any other man would ever know her. She was made up of all metals, and the gold was constantly working its way out through the base in the melting pot of her conscience.

"Well?" he said.

"It was all here and out of me," she began, her fingers locked. "I wanted the things you could give, not you. I have debated myself. I shall never be clean again. I could have written you and asked if that was all, but that would have been cowardly. I am not going to hurt you, but I am going to hurt myself, too."

"Then you didn't mean it?"

"No. I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"

"No, I was full of fury against the world, against myself. I thought, if you came here, I could make you understand better the basis of my unhappiness." She rose from the lounge, crossed to the window, and looked out to him. She pointed to the dingy back yards and the cluttered, cluttered streets. "Whenever there was a window, that was the vista. So long as I had my emotion these wretched things oppressed me. But now I feel any emotion. Henceforth I have told me that I was wanting to hurt you, but I could not hurt you; but I am going to hurt myself." "Then you didn't mean it?"