THE WORLD OUTSIDE

By HAROLD MacGRATH

...ing story of a fight for $7,000,000 and a beautiful girl's love by the author of "The Man on the Box," "Lock of the Irish," etc.

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...y Silas!"

BANCROFT could not see the man's face distinctly, he wasted little time in conjecture from these. At first ...wave sensation, but presently ...passed and mummies ...Kennedy was now grip...

...Kennedy read on. At last he reached ...his hands fell away from the ...written sheets; his body seemed ...ess. Then one of the hands ...his eyes, an attitude which suggested that of a man coming out of a ...into the sunlight suddenly, to ...himself partially blinded. Without warning, Kennedy flung himself ...downward on the table, and Bancroft witnessed what he ...wanted to see again; the rending ...grief of a strong and virile man. ...too, felt himself being torn. He ...to go to the stricken man, to ...hand on his shoulder, but he knew ...the time had not yet come for ...So he waited for the grief to ...itself, which it presently did, and ...were only sighs; but even these ...dreadful to hear.

...killed him!" said Kennedy, in ...but tragic whisper. "I killed ...!"

...No, no! He never knew, sir. How ...he have known? He saw only ...miraculous return of the man he ... It would have been the same ...you entered at the door; he could ...have sustained the shock, unprepared. You mustn't let that thought ...hold of you, sir."

...Kennedy slowly raised his head and ...back, his hands still resting before ...on the table. The gas jet began ...whistle again; but this time it appeared that Kennedy did not hear it. ...thing in a darkened corner held his ...; perhaps a specter.

"He was always strongest in spirit," ...Kennedy, without turning his head. ...could beat him physically, but he ...ys dominated me, at work or at ...."

...Bancroft's body grew warm again. ...e was hope, if the man could offer ...bit of reminiscence out of his ...y.

"I was wild and untamable, and he ...with me more as a check than as a ...rer of my wildness. Silas." The ...in fingers came together and shook ...with the tensity of the power thrown ...to them. "I was always more or less ...olent in temper, but my rages never ...nt beyond sundown. I was always ...rry. That was the flaw in my make-... And I wouldn't give him even ...benefit of a doubt! Without working patiently to gather all the facts, ...sought at once to kill him! My loyalty wasn't worth a damn! But to come ...home and find everything gone, my wife ...her grave, my child vanished! Who ...knows? I have been mad all these ...years, absolutely mad. One day I happened to remember that your mother had ...been born in that village. I found ...Silas, followed him into town, to the ...law office. Then I walked out onto ...the fire escape. Oh, I killed him!"

...Kennedy's head sank.

"I will not have it that way, sir. It ...was the shock of seeing you. How ...could he dream what your intentions ...were? He might have read all about ...the accidental killing of that policeman, the trial; but the name Stewart ...could have meant nothing. What he ...never could understand was your total ...disappearance after the ship landed. ...From that hour on—nothing. By my ...father's son, do not believe that you ...caused his death save indirectly, as ...it might have caused it had I rushed in ...upon camp unexpectedly. You will recall that in that letter he speaks of my ...going to camp and his doubt that I ...should ever see him alive again. He ...survived the shock of my departure; ...but a sudden return would have been ...disastrous."

"You forgive?"

"Dear God, why not? I understand, ...I can visualize your stupendous ...misfortunes and I have nothing but ...pity for you. More," Bancroft added, ...with infinite wisdom, "I want to ...take the place my father once had in ...your life. We have both lost something, I my boyhood and you your best ...years. You will take of my youth and ...I will take of your wisdom. I know ...my father will look down with happiness ...upon such a union."

"You're a good lad," said Kennedy, ...turning and offering that singular smile ...Bancroft had seen once before. Of ...what did it remind him? "But, no. ...through my insane violence I have ...killed a man. I didn't mean to; but ...here the deed is before God and man. ...I am an ex-convict. My photograph ...and my thumb prints are in the police ...archives. Until the governor interfered ...in my behalf I had to account for myself occasionally to the police."

"As Stewart, yes. But Stewart ...vanishes forever this night, and Kennedy returns. The bitter long lane ...comes to its turning." Bancroft's ...tones were thrilling with eagerness.

"How easily youth can throw off ...these things! You have hopes, dreams; ...I have only tragic recollections. My ...friendship would only embarrass you. ...I am always meeting some one who ...was up there when I was."

"In a little while, sir, all this will ...become as a bad dream."

Thus the two formed a tableau of ...several minutes' duration, and the imaginative sounds returned to disquiet ...Bancroft's ears. Somewhere above ...Nancy was sobbing.

"May I keep this letter for a few ...days?" asked Kennedy, turning.

"Of course. Read it over and over, ...as I have done. I, his son, ...doubted him, too. Remember that. ...But I wish you would listen to me, ...sir. I haven't anybody. Why not ...accept me as a son? I will renew ...your interest in life."

"A son?"

"And tomorrow we'll go together to ...Ed Snell and make a proper division. ...Snell read the letter. He will understand."

"No, my boy."

"But, sir, it is my father's will."

"I refuse. All the money must remain yours, to do fine things with. I ...have more than enough for a broken man ...like myself. I can't accept your generosity, neither of purse nor of hand. ...But if you will let me see you once in ...a while—for a little talk. Keep my ...books, the porcelains and the chairs; ...you are fond of them. Your father, ...in this letter, tells how he used to come ...down at night for a drink of water and ...find you curled in a chair, under the ...lamp, reading. Poor Silas, who ...couldn't put his arms around his son!"

"But you, sir, might."

"Who knows? But there is one ...favor I shall ask of you. Keep me by ...you this night. I'm a little afraid of ...myself. Perhaps if I might spend the ...night in the old house——"

"You shall stay with me, sir, so long ...as you please. That's just what I ...hope. Tomorrow will be a new day. ...We will not see things tomorrow as ...we see them now."

"Perhaps." Kennedy rose. Out of a ...[illegible] he took a tear. "She is up-... Go to her, ...[illegible] I'll go for a [illegible]. ...[illegible] Ah! Tell her I forgive my roughness. She didn't whimper, though."

"She'll forgive when she understands. She's that kind."

"And your kind, too."

Bancroft grasped the key, but immediately wrung the hand that had offered it. Then he raced to the door and was gone. Kennedy could hear him thundering up the stairs.

That letter! The will of the man, to have thus resolutely set a broken body against the strength of fate, and to have won, by denying himself all that made life worth living. To have built a fortune with one hand while he held death at bay with the other.

Kennedy made his way to a window, where he could see the stars.

"Mary, what shall I do? I am, or was, a potential murderer. I have in these years killed Silas a thousand times. The tortures I invented for that sublime man, whose only fault was that he wanted to make me rich! What shall this wreck, who was once your lover, do? How shall he make amends to God? You always warned me that some day I should suffer for not learning to curb my temper. But there never seemed to me anything to curb. I could not anticipate the outbursts. They were on me and gone before I was really aware of it. And God knows, I was always sorry. It was never directed at you, Mary. You know that. I am very tired. All this damnation because I never wanted to be seperated from you again; enough money so that I should be my own master. Do you remember that first year—the honeymoon—when we crossed the world together? Then little Mary came and I had to travel alone. Innocent bystanders! The boy is right! Annihilation for me and mine, by a man I never knew, never heard of!"

Kennedy left the window and went down into the street to search for a taxicab. He would have plenty of time, he reasoned. Youth and love!

Meantime, Bancroft, thrilling to the last corpuscle in his body, courageous to the point where he would have defied all the world to keep him from that door, opened it with such excitement and violence that it slammed against the inner wall, setting loose a hollow clamor of echoes.

"Nancy?" he called joyously.

No answer. Naturally; for the unexpected racket, which did not in the least suggest to her that she was being rescued, had sent Nancy into a corner, speechless and terrified. She was brave enough, but in the dark, the previous silence, the queer madman who had locked her in, and this sudden hubbub, scattered the remnant of her courage.

"It is I, Jerry—Jeremiah.!"

Still there was no answer.

Bancroft's joy evaporated, and an agonizing fear rushed in—fear that she might be dead! With trembling fingers he struck a match. The head snapped off, describing a glowing parabola dying before it reached the floor. He bunched several matches and struck them, and under this demi-torch he quickly glanced about. A bit of white—a bird wing on Nancy's hat—caught his eye; and he rushed to the corner. She was dead! He flung aside the matches, careless whether they set the house on fire or not, knelt and took Nancy into his arms, rocked with her and sobbed (for his emotional side was still highly susceptible) and called her all the endearments he could think of, and asked God to bring her back; tender and beautiful nonsense: and 'twas a pity Nancy missed it, for Jeremiah would always be shy in love, never violent, never clamorous, as in his fear he now was.

It was a wonder that she ever did come back, so tightly he held her. That which should have been a long sigh of returning consciousness was more like an agonized gasp for breath. She struggled, then relaxed, her consciousness complete. She knew who it was who held her.

Home.

"Not—not so tight, Jerry!"

"Oh, Nancy! I thought you were dead!"

"Foolish of me to faint. But such noise! I knew you would come."

For a little while that was all; except that she put her arms around his neck; because otherwise they would have been perfectly useless. And so they rested, in the beautiful dark that erstwhile had been so full of menace.

"Do you care a little?" he asked, trembling. Her arms she might have been put around his neck out of fear.

"More than I ever thought I could for any man. But I didn't know for sure until they came to me with the lie that you were hurt. I thought you had been set upon again. Poor boy; you're going to have your hands full of me!"

It flashed into his head sprightly, that it was well enough for the present to have his arms full of her; but he did not utter the jest; such words would be sacrilege. So another spell of silence ensued.

"Was it as dark as this when you kissed Jenny?"

Something in her voice told him that she was smiling. He blundered against her ear, her cheek, her nose—sweet blunders, however—before he found her lips. Then he leaned back, happy and bewildered! She cared! The unbelievable had happened! He heard her laugh softly and contentedly; and he was never to know why.

All at once she pushed him aside and struggled to her feet. "That madman! What has become of him? Where is he? Can we leave?"

"He is waiting outside for us, Nancy. He is no longer mad, but a subject for all the pity you have in your heart. It is a long story. I may as well tell you now. Do you mind the dark?"

"No"—smiling again. "Mind the dark! I don't mind anything, not even the future. But, Jerry, you'll have to go to work."

It was his turn to smile. "I'll have a job tomorrow. Didn't I tell you last night that I had one? This story began many years ago."

"Where is your hand, Jerry?"

"Here."

Nancy was full of pity and tenderness; she would always be so for the unfortunate. To her, as to Bancroft, there was nothing repellent in the fact that Kennedy had killed a man and had spent years in prison for the deed. Tortured by the stupendousness of the calamity which had befallen him, he was not to be held strictly accountable for his immediate acts.

"We ought not to leave him alone tonight, Jerry. He might——"

"I am taking him home with us."

"The house we live in, that was once his; how dreadful!"

"Will you marry me, Nancy?"

"I rather expect to, after having put my arms around your neck and invited you to kiss me."

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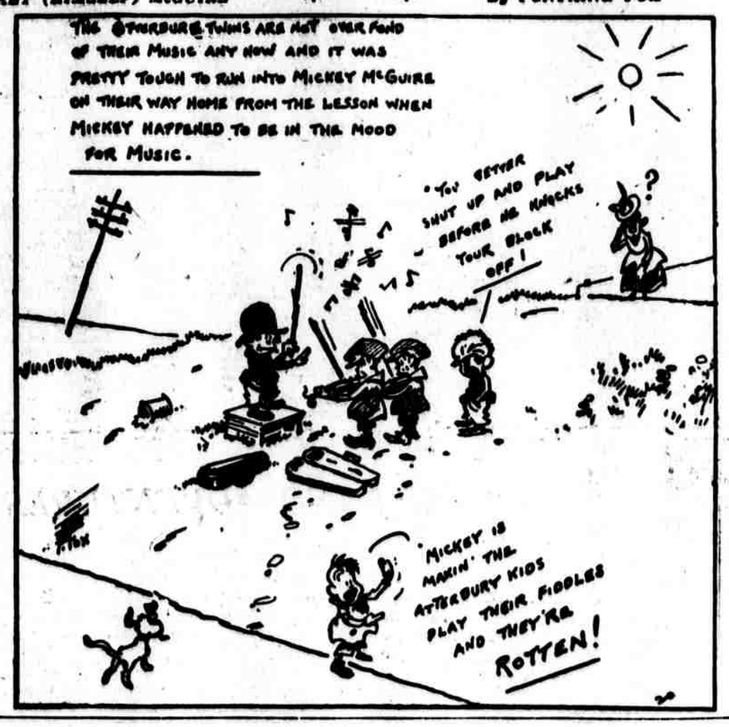

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