

The Girl and the Bill

By Bannister Merwin

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS



CHAPTER III.

The Shadow.

Orme walked north along the Lake Shore drive. As best he could, he pieced together the curious adventures of the day. The mystery of the five-dollar bill and the extreme anxiety of Portol and the appearance of the Japanese at the Pere Marquette. Orme sought the simplest explanation. He knew that mysterious happenings frequently become clear when one definitely tries to fit them into the natural routine of every-day life. The Japanese, he mused, was probably some valet out of a job. But how could he have learned Orme's name. Possibly he had not known it; the clerk might have given it to him. The incident hardly seemed worth second thought, but he found himself persistently turning to surmise after another concerning the Japanese. For Orme was convinced that he stood on the edge of a significant situation.

Suddenly he took notice of a figure a short distance ahead of him. This man—apparently very short and stocky—was also going northward, but he was moving along in an erratic manner. At one moment he would hurry his steps, at the next he would almost stop. Evidently he was regulating his pace with a purpose.

Orme let his eyes travel still farther ahead. He observed two men actively conversing. From time to time their discussion became so animated that they halted for a moment and faced each other, gesticulating rapidly. Every time they halted, the single figure nearer to Orme slowed down his own pace.

The oblivious couple came under a street lamp and again turned toward each other. Their profiles were distinct. Orme had already suspected their identity, for both had high hats and carried canes, and one of them was in a sack suit, while the other wore a frock coat. And now the profiles verified the surmise. There was no mistaking the long, tip-tipped nose of the shorter man and the glowing spectacles of the other. The two were Portol and Alcatrante.

But who was the man trailing them? A friendly guard? Or a menacing enemy? Orme decided to shadow the shadow.

At a corner not far from the entrance to Lincoln park Portol and Alcatrante became so apparently excited that they stood, chattering volubly for several minutes. The shadow stopped altogether. He folded his arms and looked out over the lake like any casual wanderer, but now and then he turned his head toward the others. He seemed to be indifferent to what they were saying, though he was near enough to them to catch fragments of their conversation, if he so desired. The South Americans were probably talking in that dialect of Portuguese which their nation has developed.

Meantime Orme also stopped, taking up a position like that of the shadow. He saw Portol, with outstretched, questioning hands, his eyes fixed on the face of Alcatrante, who seemed to be delivering his orders. The flashing reflections of light from the minister's spectacles indicated his authoritative nods of the head.

After a time Alcatrante evidently completed his instructions. He removed his hat and bowed formally. Little Portol echoed the salute and, turning, shot off down a side street with ridiculously rapid movements of his short legs. Orme inferred that he was bound for the North Clark street car line. Alcatrante continued along the drive.

When the South Americans separated, the shadow quickly came to life. He hesitated for an instant, as if in doubt which of the two to follow, then decided in favor of Alcatrante, who was moving in leisurely fashion toward the park entrance, his head bowed in thought. Orme found himself wondering what snaky plots were winding through that dark mind.

The procession of three silently entered the park. The shadow was about a hundred feet behind Alcatrante. Orme kept the same distance between himself and the shadow.

The minister was in no hurry. Indifferent to his surroundings he made his way, with no apparent interest in the paths he took. At last he turned into a dark stretch and for the moment was lost to sight in the night.

Suddenly the shadow darted forward. Orme hurried his own pace, and in a moment he heard the sounds of a short, sharp struggle—a scuffling of feet in the gravel, a heavy fall. There was no outcry.

Orme broke into a run. At a point where the path was darkest he checked himself for an instant. A little distance ahead a man lay flat on

the ground, and bending over him was a short, stocky figure.

Orme leaped forward and swung his cane. The stick was tough and the blow was hard enough to send a man to earth, but the robber had heard Orme's approach, and looked up from his victim just in time. With a motion indescribably swift, he caught with one hand the descending cane and wrenched it from Orme's grasp. Then he crouched to spring.

At this instant Orme heard footsteps behind him. A turn of the head showed a threatening figure at his back. There had been four men in that procession through the park!

By a quick leap to one side, Orme placed himself for the moment out of danger. His two assailants, moving too fast to stop, bumped together. They faced about for another spring at him. And then there was a short scratching sound, and in the hand of the man on the ground flared a match. "Ha!" exclaimed the prostrate Alcatrante, "I thought so!"

Orme found himself looking into the contorted faces of two Japanese.

Discovery was evidently the last thing the hold-up men desired, for they disappeared like a flash, diving through the shrubbery behind them. Orme, dazed and breathing hard, attempted no immediate pursuit. He stepped quickly to Alcatrante and helped him to his feet.

"I am not hurt," said the South American. "When the man threw me to the ground, I feigned that I was stunned. It is wiser not to resist a thug, is it not so?" He brushed the dust from his clothing with his handkerchief. Orme handed him his hat, which had rolled to one side. The minister rubbed it carefully with his coat sleeve. "See," he laughed, nodding at the ground, "my cane is broken. I must have fallen on it."

"Since you're not hurt," said Orme, "we'd better get after the thieves."

"Bah!" replied Alcatrante. "What is the use? They are already far away—and they got nothing." He laughed. "Is it not always better to avoid notoriety, Mr. Orme?"

"As a rule, no doubt—but in this instance—"

"No," said Alcatrante, firmly, "I really must insist that we let the matter drop. As for me, I shall return to my hotel. Perhaps you will walk along with me."

Orme hesitated. "I don't like those thieves to get off without a chase, senator."

"But, my dear Mr. Orme, they did me no harm."

Orme shrugged his shoulders. "You forget that there was one after me as well as one after you."

"No, I don't forget that. But don't you see, Mr. Orme? These two men were not after our valuables."

"Indeed?"

"Not at all. What they would like is my little friend Portol's secret."

"But why Japanese?" Orme was puzzled.

"Why, indeed? A cunning Japanese might as easily have got wind of it as anyone else."

"But why did you say, 'I thought so'?" persisted Orme.

"Did I say that? It must have been because I suspected that only a Japanese could be so agile as my assailant. But all this is immaterial. I should have warned you that Portol's secret is dangerous. You should not have left your apartments."

"Well, this certainly is a queer kettle of fish," muttered Orme. He was beginning to feel disgusted with the situation. He did not like Alcatrante's oily smoothness, and he wondered whether it would not have been better to hand the bill over to Portol at the first demand. But it came to his mind that in a certain degree he stood committed to continue the policy he had adopted. He had sought adventure; it was coming to him in full measure.

Together they walked back toward the park entrance. The minister seemingly exerted himself to regain the ground he had lost with Orme. He proved an interesting conversationalist—keen, slightly cynical, but not without an undertone of earnestness.

"You have seen me much abused by your press, Mr. Orme," he said. "That is natural. I have the interests of my own country to protect, and those interests are of necessity sometimes opposed to the interests of other countries. But if your people would be even more patient with us—all we need is time. There is reason for our persistent tomorrow; for we are young, and it is a slow process to realize on our resources. That is why we do not pay our debts more promptly."

Orme said nothing, but thought of looted South American treasures, of exiled presidents squandering their official sealings at Paris and Monte Carlo, of concessions sold and sold

again to rival foreign companies.

They had now reached the park entrance. "There is a cab," said Alcatrante. "You will ride with me as far as your hotel?"

"Thank you, no," said Orme. "I rather need the walk."

Alcatrante smiled persuasively. "Permit me to urge you. If you should be robbed, my little friend might lose his precious secret. Poor boy!" he added. "His father was my friend, and I cannot refuse him a service."

The cab had swung around to the curb beside them. Orme had no fear of robbery on the lighted drive, but since Alcatrante was so insistent he felt inclined to yield. He might as well ride; so he permitted the minister to bow him into the cab, and presently they were whirling along southward. There was a period of silence. Then Alcatrante spoke meditatively.

"You see how it happened, I suppose," he said. "Those Japanese were waiting outside your hotel. When Portol and I came out, one of them followed us, while the other remained on guard. Then you started on your stroll, and the man who remained on guard set out after you."

"Yes," said Orme, "but I don't see how the fellow could have known who I was."

Alcatrante laughed. "Oh, he could have placed you in a number of different ways. He may have got your description from one of the servants—or from the clerk. But it is enough that he did know you."

"Well," said Orme, "this is beyond me. That five-dollar bill seems to be very much desired by different groups of persons."

Alcatrante nodded. "I am not sure," he said slowly, "but that it would ease young Portol's mind if you would place the bill in my hands



Bending Over Him Was a Short, Stocky Figure.

for safekeeping. Not that he mistrusts you, Mr. Orme, but he imagines that you may not realize how important it is to him, and you might not guard it carefully."

"I agreed to keep it until tomorrow," said Orme, quietly. "As for thieves, my apartment is on the tenth floor, pretty well out of their reach. The only danger of robbery lies between the cab and the hotel office."

"I know, I know," chuckled Alcatrante. "It is, of course, as you will. I was merely thinking of my young friend's peace of mind. I am his fellow countryman, you see, and his confidence in me—he stopped, with another chuckle. "Singular, is it not, how impressionable are the young?"

Orme said nothing. He did not enjoy this fencing.

"Look at the lake," Alcatrante suddenly exclaimed. "How beautiful an expanse of water. It has so much more color than the sea. But you should see our wonderful harbor, of Rio, Mr. Orme. Perhaps some day I shall be permitted to show you its magnificences."

"Who knows?" said Orme. "It would be very pleasant."

"As to the bill," continued Alcatrante quickly, "do you care to give it to me?"

Orme felt himself frowning. "I will keep it till the morning," he said.

"Oh, well, it is of no consequence," Alcatrante laughed shortly. "See, here is your hotel. Your company has been a pleasure to me, Mr. Orme. You arrived most opportunely in the park."

Orme jumped to the curb and, turning, shook the hand that was extended to him. "Thank you for the lift, senator Alcatrante," he said. "I shall look for you in the morning."

"In the morning—yes. And pray, my dear sir, do not wander in the streets any more this evening. Our experience in the park has made me apprehensive." The minister lifted his hat, and the cab rattled away.

The entrance to the Pere Marquette was a massive gateway, which opened upon a wide tunnel, leading to an interior court. On the farther side of the court were the doors of the hotel lobby. As a rule, carriages drove through the tunnel into the court, but Orme had not waited for this formality.

He started through the tunnel. There was no one in sight. He noted the elaborate terra-cotta decorations of the walls, and marveled at the bad taste which had lost sight of this opportunity for artistic simplicity. But through the opening before him he could see the fountain playing in the center of the court. The central figure of the group, a naïf, beckoned with a hand from which the water fell in a shower. The effect was not so unpleasant. If one wished to be roccoco, why not be altogether so? Like the South Americans? Was their

to an inner steel construction? Orme wondered.

Midway of the tunnel, and at the right as one entered, was a door leading into the porter's office. This door was shut, but as Orme approached it, it noiselessly opened out. He expected to see a porter appear, and when no person stepped over the sill, he inferred that the door had been blown open by an interior draft.

Just as he was turning out to go around the door—which shut off all view of him from the inner court—a figure shot through the opening.

Before Orme could dodge, he was seized firmly by the shoulders and jerked into the room, with a force that sent him staggering. He tripped over a chair and went to the floor, but quickly scrambled to his feet and wheeled about.

Two men stood between him and the door, which had been closed silently and swiftly. They were short and stockily built. Orme exclaimed aloud, for the light that filtered through a window from the street showed two faces unmistakably oriental.

If this was an ordinary robbery, the daring of the robbers was almost incredible. They ran the risk that the porter would return—if they had not already made away with him. Only the most desperate purpose could explain their action.

"What do you want?" demanded Orme.

"Your pocket book," replied one of the men—"queek!" He smiled an elusive smile as he spoke.

"What if I refuse?" said Orme.

"Then we take. Be queek."

A call for help would hardly bring anyone; but Orme gave a loud cry, more to disconcert his enemies than with any hope of rescue.

At the same instant he rushed toward the door, and struck out at the nearer Japanese.

The blow did not land. His wrist was caught in a grip like an iron clamp, and he found himself performing queer gyrations. The Japanese had turned his back toward Orme and swung the imprisoned arm over his shoulder. A quick lurch forward, and Orme sailed through the air, coming down heavily on his side. His arm was still held, and in a few seconds he was on his back, his assailants astride him and smiling down into his face.

Orme struggled to free himself, and promptly felt a breaking strain on his imprisoned arm. The knee of the Japanese was under the back of Orme's elbow. A moderate use of the leverage thus obtained would snap the arm like a pipe stem. This Orme realized, as he ceased struggling. The strain on his arm relaxed slightly, but the grip was maintained.

"Jiu-jitsu," explained the Japanese in a tone that sounded gently apologetic.

The other robber now stooped and ran his hands over Orme's coat. Finding the pocket book, he took it from its inside pocket and went swiftly to the table. He produced from his own pocket a little electric hand lamp, by the light of which he took rapid count of Orme's money.

His eyes glittered; a wide scar on his forehead stood out whitely. Suddenly he gave a little cry and held up a single bill. He jabbered excitedly to his companion for a moment, then spoke quietly to Orme.

"This all we want," he said. "We are not thief, see—I put other five-dollar bill in its place and leave pocket book here."

He thrust the selected bill into his pocket, put the fresh bill in the pocket book, and laid the pocket book on the table.

"See here," said Orme, still prone, "what's the meaning of all this?"

"Don't say." The Japanese smiled. He went over to the door. "Come," he said. The man astride Orme released his hold and sprang to his feet. Like a flash, both the Japanese disappeared.

Orme jumped up. Seizing his pocket book and his hat, he darted after his assailants. At the street entrance to the tunnel, he looked quickly in both directions, but his men were not in sight.

Pursuit was futile. Slowly he turned back. He thought of notifying the police, but, after all, he was none the worse off—except for his promise to Portol and Alcatrante, now involuntarily broken. He must explain to them as best he could. The marked bill had been of no consequence to him except as a focus of adventure. And he had had about as much adventure as he could expect for one evening.

But the secret of the bill still tantalized him. Blindfolded, he had played in a game at which the others saw. It seemed unfair—as if he had some right to know the meaning of all these mysterious incidents. Why had Portol wanted the bill so badly? Why had the desire to possess it driven the two Japanese to such extreme measures?

Orme crossed the court and entered the lobby. The clerk looked at him curiously.

"Mr. Orme," he said, "there is a young lady in the reception room, waiting to see you."

"Me?" Orme looked his surprise.

"Yes, sir. She gave no name."

"Has she been waiting long?"

"Nearly an hour."

Without further questioning, Orme turned to the door of the little green-and-gold room. At the threshold he paused in bewilderment. Arising to meet him, smiling frankly, was the girl of the car.

To be continued.

Subscribe for the Daily Journal.

COMMERCIAL CLUB LISTENS TO ADDRESS ON "PARCELS POST"

Mr. Fodrea Makes Pleasing Talk on the Subject That is Agitating the People Throughout the United States.

The Commercial club met last evening at their rooms in the Coates block, with the new president, T. H. Pollock, in the chair. A good sized audience of the business men of the city greeted Mr. Pollock on making his inaugural address. Before introducing Mr. Fodrea, the speaker of the evening, Mr. Pollock announced the names of the directors of the club as well as the different committees for the ensuing year.

On being introduced by President Pollock, Mr. Fodrea began his remarks by comparing himself with a Missouri congressman in that he had a few words to say before he began his speech. And introduced his remarks by stating the subject of parcels post was a vast one and engaging the attention of the people of the United States at this time to a remarkable degree. And stating that the people of the United States already had a parcels post system and his idea was more to the thought of what should be done with the system we already have rather than to enlarge on a system which was already adequate to the demands of the public.

Under the present system of mail carrying the rate is 16 cents per pound and the limit a 4-pound package. Some of the agitation working through certain periodicals advocated the reduction of the rate to 1 cent a pound and increasing the weight limit. These agitators disregard the cost of the service entirely, which the speaker regarded as radically wrong, as no transportation should be considered that did not take in the cost of the service.

As the matter was handled at the present time the rate was a flat one and distance was not taken into consideration and the postage required would carry the package one mile or three thousand miles as the case might be. That the loss on carrying parcels great distances at the flat rate was made up to the government from the surplus in carrying the first class postal matter. The actual cost of handling goods through the post-office department when the distances are considered, is from 14 to 15 cents per pound.

Since the organization of the government it had had a monopoly on the letter carrying business, hence the cheapness of the rate, but there had been no monopoly on the transportation of goods, hence the government gets all of the unprofitable freight business, the long haul for low rate, while the express companies get the profitable business, the short hauls, for a high rate.

The speaker thought that the present rural delivery system, with the facilities already afforded, furnished to the farmer all of the facilities for getting goods by mail which he reasonably could expect. That the government did not object to the rural carrier taking small amounts of merchandise in his mail conveyance so long as the quick delivery of the mail was not interfered with.

And he mentioned localities in the central part of Nebraska where the rural carriers were delivering merchandise along their routes and increasing their compensation thereby.

The speaker was asked why the parcels post was so far advanced in foreign countries and also why the cost of transportation was so much less by mail there compared with the rates in the United States, and in

reply said that the distances in the old country were so much less, and that the plan there of grouping the farmers in villages lessened the cost of delivering mail, and their low cost of labor, and in Great Britain in the mail service were 15,000 boys working at a low wage.

There are many bills pending before congress at this time looking toward the enlargement of the parcels post system of the United States.

All of these bills look toward the establishment of a flat rate and none take in the cost of transportation. Some of these propose to raise the weight limit to a 11-pound package and fix the rate of transportation at 25 cents. Many of the bills propose the increased service without providing any increased facilities. This the speaker deemed a grave mistake. As the ordinary Christmas mail in some of the thickly populated rural sections of the east was not yet distributed on the routes, and add to this the parcels post mercantile deliveries, would only double the difficulty in the distribution of mail and merchandise.

When asked from what source the parcels post was receiving financial backing, the speaker referred to letters received by him from eastern concerns and named The Larkin company, National Cloak and Suit company, Retailers' Dry Goods company, and others who were contributing large sums of money to the Postal Progressive League treasury for the promotion of the parcels post.

On being asked why it was that a parcel weighing 20 pounds could be sent to any of twenty foreign countries at the rate of 12 cents per pound while it cost 16 cents per pound to send the same parcel to Pacific Junction, the speaker replied that the foreign rate was controlled by the treaty making power entirely and not subject to the jurisdiction of congress. The president had full authority to fix this rate with the foreign powers, and that the rate mentioned was thus fixed as a diplomatic measure and a concession to the foreign government in a way to United States. The speaker thought that the misunderstanding of this point had caused some of the agitation for cheaper rates on mail matter in this country.

The speaker paid a glowing tribute to the country newspapers of the country and the papers of the smaller cities of Nebraska, and said if the merchants would do their part anywhere as well as the newspapers did toward boosting their home towns, there would not be the complaint against the mail order houses that there is heard today.

The speaker was not alarmed about the department houses of the east establishing agencies in the smaller towns and shipping to them large bills of goods, and distributing through the rural parcels post, if one should be established different from what we have, as the expense of this distribution would be too heavy. And there could be no particular end served in this way, as the farmer could go to the station and get his goods without the aid of an agent.

Mr. Fodrea occupied the floor for an hour and a half, replying to such questions as were propounded and giving much valuable information on this vexed question. At the close of the discourse a vote of thanks of the club was tendered the speaker for his able address.

OFFICERS AND DIRECTORS OF THE COMMERCIAL CLUB

The following is the list of officers, directors and important committees of the Plattsmouth Commercial club for the ensuing year:

T. H. Pollock, president; J. P. Falter, vice president; E. H. Westcott, secretary; Rae Patterson, treasurer.

Directors:—Wm. Baird, C. C. Parmele, H. A. Schneider, A. L. Tidd, Joe H. McMaken, E. A. Wurl and Philip Theiloff.

Legislative Committee:—Hon. R. B. Windham, J. P. Falter and Mike Hill.

New Membership Committee:—Geo. Falter and John Hiatt, Jr.

Banquet Committee:—H. A. Schneider, Henry Goos and John Bauer, Jr.

President Pollock has appointed R. B. Windham, captain for New Orleans, and H. A. Schneider captain for San Francisco, each to select an able corps of assistants to debate the subject of where the Panama Canal

Exposition celebration shall be held, at the opening of the canal. The debate is to occur at the next meeting of the club.

August Stander, of near Louisville, was in the city today on important business, and during his sojourn called at Journal headquarters and renewed his allegiance to the Old Reliable for another year. Mr. Stander is one of the substantial farmers of Cass County and the Journal is pleased to number him among its friends.

Mrs. F. J. Mergan spent the afternoon in Omaha, going on the fast mail.

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