

# The Girl and the Bill

By Bannister Merwin  
ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS



## CHAPTER IV.

The girl of the car. "Oh," she said, with a little gasp of recognition, "are you Mr. Orme?" Her cheeks flushed softly.

He bowed; his heart was beating furiously, and for the moment he dared not try to speak.

"Then we do meet again," she exclaimed, "and as usual I need your help. Isn't it queer?"

"Any service that I—" Orme began haltingly—"of course, anything that I can do—"

The girl laughed, a merry ripple of sound; then caught herself and changed her manner to grave earnestness. "It is very important," she said. "I am looking for a five-dollar bill that was paid to you today."

Orme started. "What? You, too?" "I, too? Has—has anybody else—?" Her gravity was more intense.

"Why, yes," said Orme—"a little man from South America."

"Oh—Mr. Poritol?" Her brows were knit in an adorable frown.

"Yes—and two Japanese."

"Oh!" Her exclamation was appreciative.

"The Japanese got it," added Orme, ruefully. That she had the right to this information it never occurred to him to question.

The girl stood rigidly. "Whatever shall I do now?" she whispered. "My poor father!"

She looked helplessly at Orme. His self-possession had returned, and as he urged her to a chair, he condemned himself for not guessing how serious the loss of the bill must be to her. "Sit down," he said. "Perhaps I can help. But you see, I know so little of what it all means. Tell me everything you can."

With a sigh, she sank into the chair. Orme stood before her, waiting.

"That bill tells, if I am not mistaken," she said, wearily, "where certain papers have been hidden. My father is ill at our place in the country. He must have those papers before midnight tomorrow, or—" Tears came into her eyes. Orme would have given much for the right to comfort her. "So much depends upon finding them," she added—"more even than I can begin to tell you."

"Let me help," said Orme, eager to follow those papers all over Chicago, if only it would serve her. "Hear my story first." Rapidly he recounted the adventures of the evening. She listened, eyes intent, nodding in recognition of his description of Poritol and Alcatraz.

When he came to the account of the fight in the porter's office and spoke of the Japanese with the scar on his forehead, she interrupted. "Oh! That was Maku," she exclaimed.

"Maku?"

"Our butler. He must have overheard my father and me."

"Then he knew the value of the papers?"

"He must have. I am sorry, Mr. Orme, that you have been so roughly used."

"That doesn't matter," he said. "They didn't hurt me in the least. And now, what is your story? How did you get on the trail of the bill?"

"We came back from the east a few days ago," she began. "My father had to undergo a slight operation, and he wished to have it performed by his friend, Dr. Allison, who lives here, so we went to our home in one of the northern suburbs."

"Father could not go back east as soon as he had expected to, and he had the papers sent to him, by special arrangement with the—with the other parties to the contract. Mr. Poritol followed us from the east. I— we had known him there. He was always amusing company; we never took him seriously. He had business here, he said; but on the first day of his arrival he came out to call on us. The next night our house was entered by a burglar. Besides the papers, only a few things were taken."

"Poritol?" exclaimed Orme, incredulously.

"It happened that a Chicago detective had been in our village on business during the day," she went. "He had recognized on the streets a well-known thief, named Walsh. When we reported the burglary the detective remembered seeing Walsh, and hunted him out and arrested him. In his pockets was some jewelry belonging to me, and in his room the other stolen articles were found—everything except the papers."

"Did you tell the police about the papers?"

ing something of value had not been recovered, and told them to make a thorough search.

"The afternoon after the burglary the news of Walsh's arrest was telephoned out to us from Chicago. I talked with my father, who was not well enough to leave the house, and it seemed best that some one should go to the county jail and see Walsh and try to get the papers. My father had reasons for not wishing the loss to become known. Only he and I were acquainted with the contents of the envelope; so I insisted on going to Chicago and interviewing the burglar."

She laughed, intercepting Orme's admiring look. "Oh, it was easy enough. I planned to take our lawyer as an escort."

"Did you?"

"No, and that is where my troubles really began. Just as I was preparing to go, Mr. Poritol called. I had forgotten that we had asked him out for an afternoon of golf. He is such a funny player."

"As soon as I told him I was going to the Chicago jail to interview a burglar about some stolen goods, he insisted on acting as an escort. He was so amusingly persistent that I finally agreed. We set out for the city in my car, not waiting to take a train."

"When we reached the jail I presented a letter which my father had written, and the officials agreed to let me have a private interview with Walsh."

Orme opened his eyes. The girl's father must have considerable influence.

"It is a horrid place, the jail. They took us through a corridor to Walsh's cell, and called him to the grating. I made Mr. Poritol stand back at the other side of the corridor so that he couldn't hear us talk."

"I asked the man what he had done with the papers. He insisted that he had seen none. Then I promised to have him freed, if he would only return them. He looked meditatively over my shoulders and after a moment declined the offer, again insisting that he didn't understand what I was talking about. 'I took the other things, miss,' he said, 'and I suppose I'll get time for it. But so help me, I didn't see no papers.'"

The girl paused and looked at Orme. "This seems like wasting minutes when we might be searching."

Orme was pleased to hear the "we."

"Well," she went on, "I knew that the man was not telling the truth. He was too hesitant to be convincing. So I began to promise him money. At every offer he looked past my shoulder and then repeated his denials. The last time he raised his eyes I had an intuition that something was going on behind me. I turned quickly. There stood Mr. Poritol, extending his fingers in the air and forming his mouth silently into words. He was raising my bids!"

"It flashed upon me that the papers would be of immense value to Mr. Poritol—for certain reasons. It only

"I, too? Has—Anybody Else—?"

I had thought of it before! I spoke to him sharply and told him to go outside. It always seemed natural to order him about, like a little dog."

"However, little dogs have the sharpest teeth," remarked Orme.

"That is true. He replied that he couldn't think of leaving me alone in such a place. So there was nothing for me to do except to go. I would have to return later without Mr. Poritol. 'Come along,' I said. 'My errand is done.'"

"Mr. Poritol smiled at me in a way I didn't like. The burglar, meantime, had gone to a little table at the back of his cell. There was an ink bottle there and he seemed to be writing. Looking into the cell, Mr. Poritol said: 'The poor fellow has very unpleasant quarters.' Then he said to



Walsh: 'Can't we do something to make your enforced stay here more comfortable, my dear sir?'"

Orme smiled at the unconscious mimicry of her accent.

"Walsh came back to the grating. He held in his hand a five-dollar bill—the one that has made so much trouble. It had been smuggled in to him in some way. 'You might get me some "baccy,"' he said, thrusting the bill through the bars and grinning."

"Now I understood what was going on. I reached for the bill, as though it were intended for me, but Mr. Poritol was quicker. He snatched the bill and put it in his pocket."

"I didn't know what to do. But suddenly Mr. Poritol seemed to be frightened. Perhaps he thought that I would have him arrested, though he might have known that there were reasons why I couldn't. He gave me a panicky look and rushed out of the corridor. Afterward I learned that he told the guard I had sent him on an errand."

"Well"—she sighed—"of course, I followed, after a last glance at Walsh, who was peering through the grating with a look of evil amusement. He must have been well paid, that burglar. But then," she mused, "they could afford it—yes, they could well afford it."

"When I got to the street, Poritol was just disappearing in my car! I can only think that he had lost his head very completely, for he didn't need to take the car. He could have mixed with the street crowd and gone a-foot to the hotel where—"

"Alcatraz?"

"Yes, Mr. Alcatraz—where he was stopping, and have waited there. But Mr. Alcatraz was playing golf at Wheaton, and Mr. Poritol seems to have thought that he must go straight to him. He cannot escape from being spectacular, you see."

"He ran out through the western suburbs, putting on more and more speed. Meantime I set a detective on the track of the car. That is how I learned what I am now telling you. As for the car, Mr. Poritol sent it back to me this morning with a hired chauffeur. He wrote a note of abject apology, saying that he had been beside himself and had not realized what he was doing."

"After setting the detective at work, I went out to our place by train. I dreaded confessing my failure to father, but he took it very well. We had dinner together in his study. Maku was in the room while we were talking. Now I can see why Maku disappeared after dinner and did not return."

"But how did Poritol lose the bill?" asked Orme.

The girl laughed. "It was really ridiculous. He over-speeded and was caught by one of those roadside motor car traps, 10 or 12 miles out in the country. They timed him, and stopped him by a bar across the road. From what the detective says, I judge he was frightened almost to speechlessness. He may have thought that he was being arrested for stealing the car. When they dragged him before the country justice, who was sitting under a tree near by, he was white and trembling."

"They fined him \$10. He had in his pocket only \$11.63, and the marked bill was nearly half the sum. He begged them to let him go—offered them his watch, his ring, his scarf pin—but the justice insisted on cash. Then he told them that the bill had a formula on it that was valuable to him and no one else."

"The justice was obdurate, and Mr. Poritol finally hit on the device which you have seen. It fitted in well with his sense of the theatrical; and the detective says that there was not a scrap of paper at hand. The point was that Mr. Poritol was more afraid of delay than anything else. He knew that I would put some one on his track."

"When did all this happen?" asked Orme.

"Yesterday afternoon. Mr. Poritol came back to Chicago by trolley and got some money. He went back to the country justice and discovered that the marked bill had been paid out. He has followed it through several persons to you, just as Maku did, and as I have done. But I heard nothing of the Japanese."

"You shouldn't have attempted this alone," said Orme, solicitously.

She smiled faintly. "I dared not let anyone into the secret. I was afraid that a detective might learn too much." She sighed wearily. "I have been on the trail since morning."

"And how did you finally get my address?"

"The man who paid the bill in at the hat shop lives in Hyde Park. I did not get to him until this evening, while he was at dinner. He directed me to the hat shop, which, of course, was closed. I found the address of the owner of the shop in the directory and went to his house. He remembered the bill, and gave me the addresses of his two clerks. The second clerk I saw proved to be the one who had paid the bill to you. Luckily he remembered your address."

Orme stirred himself. "Then the Japanese have the directions for finding the papers?"

"My predicament," said the girl, "is complicated by the question whether the bill does actually carry definite directions."

"It carries something—a set of abbreviations," said Orme. "But I could not make them out. Let us hope that the Japanese can't. The best course for us to take is to go at once to see Walsh, the burglar."

He assumed that she would accept his aid.

"That is good of you," she said. "But it seems a little hopeless, doesn't it?"

"Why? What else can we do? I suppose you saw to it that no one

else should have access to Walsh."

"Yes, father arranged that by telephone. The man is in solitary confinement. Several persons tried to get into the cell on the plea of being friends of Walsh."

father that he could thus regulate the treatment of prisoners?"

"So there were abbreviations on the bill?" she asked.

"Yes. They weren't very elaborate, and I puzzled over them for some time. The curious fact is that, for all my study of them, I can't remember much of anything about them. What I have since been through, apparently, has driven the letters out of my head."

"Oh, do try to remember," she implored. "Even if you recall only one or two bits of it, they may help me."

"There was something about a man named Evans," he began. "S. R. Evans, it was."

"Evans? That is strange. I can't think how any one of that name could be involved."

"Then S. R. Evans is not your father?" he ventured.

"Oh, no." She laughed a light little laugh. "My father is—but are you sure that the name was Evans?"

"Quite sure. Then there was the abbreviation 'Chl.'—which I took to mean 'Chicago.'"

"Yes?" she breathed.

"And there were numerals—a number, then the letter 'N.'; another number, followed by the letter 'E.' So far north, so far east, I read it—though I couldn't make out whether the numbers stood for feet or paces or miles."

"Yes, yes," she whispered. Her eyes were intent on his. They seemed to will him to remember. "What else was there?"

"Odd letters, which meant nothing to me. It's annoying, but I simply can't recall them. Believe me, I should like to."

"Perhaps you will a little later," she said. "I'm sorry to be such a bother to you."

"Bother!"

"But it does mean so much, the tracing of this bill."

"Shall we go to see Walsh?" he asked.

"I suppose so," she sighed. Apparently she was discouraged. "But even if he gives the information, it may be too late. The Japanese have the directions."

"But perhaps they will not be able to make them out," he suggested.

She smiled. "You don't know the Japanese," she said. "They are abominably clever at such things. I will venture that they are already on their way to the hiding-place."

"But even if the papers are in the pocket of one of them, it may be possible to steal them back."

"Hardly," she arose. "I fear that the one chance is the mere possibility that Maku couldn't read the directions. Then, if Walsh will speak out—"

"Now, let me say something," he said. "My name is Robert Orme. Apparently we have common friends in the Wallinghams. When I first saw you this afternoon, I felt that I might have a right to your acquaintance—a social right, if you like; a sympathetic right, I trust."

He held out his hand. She took it frankly, and the friendly pressure of her fine, firm palm sent the blood tingling through him.

"I am sorry," she said, "that I can't give you my name. It would be unfair just now—unfair to others; for if you knew who I am, it might give you a clue to the secret I guard."

"Some day, I hope, I may know," he said gravely. "But your present wish is my law. It is good of you to let me try to help you."

At the same instant they became conscious that their hands were still clasped. The girl blushed, and gently drew hers away.

"I shall call you Girl," Orme added. "A name I like," she said. "My father uses it. Oh, if I only knew what that burglar wrote on the bill!"

Orme started. What a fool he had been! Here he was, trying to help the girl, forcing her to the long, tired recital of her story, when all the time he held her secret in the table in his sitting-room. For there was still the paper on which he had copied the abbreviated directions.

"Wait here," he said sharply, and without answering the look of surprise on her face, hurried from the room and to the elevator. A few moments later he was back, the sheet of paper in his hand.

"I can't forgive my own stupidity," he said. "While I was puzzling over the bill this evening I copied the secret on a sheet of paper. When Poritol came I put it away in a drawer and forgot all about it. But here it is." He laid the paper on the little, useless onyx table that stood beside her chair.

She snatched it quickly and began to examine it closely.

"Perhaps you can imagine how those letters puzzled me," he volunteered.

to him. With her, he realized, only direct relations were possible.

"How much of a journey is it?" he ventured to ask.

"Not very long. I intend to be mysterious about it." She smiled brightly. Her face had lighted up wonderfully since he gave her the paper that contained the secret of the bill.

But he knew that she must be tired; so he said: "Can't you send me alone on this errand? It may be late before it is done, and—"

"And I will not sit and rest while you do all the work. Besides, I cannot forego the excitement of the chase."

He was selfishly glad in her answer. "Do we walk?" he asked.

"We will go in the motor," she said.

"Where is it?"

"I left it around the corner. The thought came to me that Mr. Poritol might be here, and I didn't wish him to recognize it."

Orme thought of the hard quest the girl had followed that day—battling for her father's interests. What kind of a man could that father be to let his daughter thus go into difficulties alone? But she had said that her father was unable to leave the house. Probably he did not know how serious the adventure might be. Or



Putting on More and More Speed.

was the loss of the papers so desperate that even a daughter must run risks?

Together they went out to the street. Orme caught a dubious glance from the clerk, as they passed through the lobby, and he resented it. Surely anyone could see—

The girl led the way around the corner into a side street. There stood the car. He helped her in and without a word saw that she was restfully and comfortably placed in the seat next to the chauffeur's. She did not resist the implication of his mastery.

He cranked up, leaped to the seat beside her, and took the levers. "Which way, Girl?" he asked.

"North," she answered.

The big car swung out in the Lake Shore Drive and turned in the direction of Lincoln park.

To be continued.

## FIVE PERISH IN GAS EXPLOSION

Flames Destroy Store Building at Connellsville, Pa.

TWELVE PERSONS ARE INJURED

Young Woman Maddened by Pain Bites Finger of Attempted Rescuer and is Left to Die—Two Bodies Burned Beyond Recognition.

Connellsville, Pa., Jan. 13.—Five dead and twelve injured is the toll of an explosion which wrecked a 5 and 10-cent store here. Fire destroyed the building and damaged nine other structures. A score of shopgirls and a number of customers had narrow escapes. The explosion blew out the front wall of the building, tearing down telephone, telegraph and electric light wires, which hung about sputtering as they crackled fire, hampering rescue work. Several customers and clerks were buried in the collapse of the building, and those that got out reported thrilling experiences.

One young woman, whose body was later found burned, went mad in the store after the crash and bit the hand of a man who tried to rescue her. A man and a woman were taken from the ruins so much burned that they have not been identified.

The dead: Mabel Wagner, Christobel Smith, Minnie Mulac, unidentified woman, negro porter.

Workmen who had removed a natural gas meter had failed to cap the supply and just as a porter was instructed to plug the pipe by the store manager, the explosion came.

Few Claims on Wild Animal Bounty.

Oskaloosa, Ia., Jan. 11.—Mahaska county paid out in bounties for wild animals, mostly gophers, during 1910 the sum of \$267.30. This is less than half the cost in 1909, which amounted to \$541.50.

Throws Himself Before Train.

Correctionville, Ia., Jan. 13.—Mrs. Frank Stamper, aged thirty years, threw herself in front of a Northwestern passenger train at this place and was instantly killed. It is thought she was mentally unbalanced.

## SAYS FACTIONAL FEUDS HURT IOWA

Carroll Blames Bitter Political Fights for Loss in Population.

BYERS WILL STAY IN RACE.

Former Attorney General of Iowa Says He is Still a Candidate for Senatorship—Accepts Office of Corporation Counsel of Des Moines.

Des Moines, Jan. 13.—Governor Carroll in his inaugural address to the Iowa assembly made a plea for the cessation of political and factional feuds in Iowa, declaring they had had an unwholesome effect on the state.

"While these things may not have driven anyone from among us," said the governor, "I do not apprehend that they have in any way encouraged people to locate here. There is evidence on every hand, and from almost every county that these bitter factional alignments have had their influence on business conditions of the various communities. Nothing better could come to our state than that there should be an end to these matters. Give the business of the state precedence over the ambitions of men and let the people join in a united effort to promote the material welfare of the commonwealth."

Governor Carroll endorsed the suggestion of President Taft that Iowa halt its efforts to legislate long enough to secure compliance with the laws already enacted, so that it might be known just what additional legislation was needed. The governor's address dealt principally with the growth and development of the state and questions relating to the doings and actions of the people as a whole.

Carroll Takes Oath Again.

Governor Carroll and Lieutenant Governor Clarke were sworn in for their second terms by Chief Justice Sherwin in the joint assembly before a large number of visitors. There was a musical program.

There was a brief address by Senator Life Young, who spoke of the necessity for education among the people and especially along agricultural lines.

Lieutenant Governor Clarke spoke briefly to the senate before announcing his committees and declared that the legislature was no place for partisanship and only the good of the state should be considered.

At the afternoon session of the senate several bills were introduced, one to abolish the office of state printer and binder and another to add a fifth judge of the district court in Polk county.

At the close of the first lively debate of the present session the house endorsed New Orleans as the location of the 1915 Panama exposition over San Francisco. A second attempt by the Democrats to take the naming of the house committees from the speaker was laid on the table.

Byers Will Stay in Race.

Former Attorney General H. W. Byers of Harlan accepted the office of corporation counsel, to which he was chosen by the Des Moines council some days ago. He issued a statement that he is not out of the race for United States senator and requests the votes of all legislators who are favorable to his candidacy.

PROBLEM OF RURAL CHURCH

Too Much Prosperity, Minister Says, Is Matter With Iowa.

Ames, Ia., Jan. 13.—The problem of the rural church was under discussion at the evening meeting of the short course. "People are not made more respectable by retiring from the farm," said Rev. Richmond A. Smith of Jordan's Grove Baptist church at Central City. "It would be better for them and better for the community if they would retire on the farm and spend their money there instead of in town. Iowa's rural population has decreased because of too much prosperity. Prosperity has caused many former Iowans to become permanent members of the Iowa picnic at Los Angeles."

Falls From High Bridge.

Monticello, Ia., Jan. 13.—Mal Magee of this place was possibly fatally hurt when a blind horse he was driving to a wagon loaded with wood made a mistake on a bridge and plunged, with the rig, to the ice, thirty feet below. Magee was found unconscious some time later and taken to a hospital, where it is said his condition is critical. The wagon was demolished and the horse killed.

Urbandale Car is Again Attacked.

Des Moines, Jan. 13.—Urbandale car No. 21, which was stripped of its furniture by indignant citizens, was repaired and put in service, only to be again attacked. A crowd of coal miners threw bricks and rocks through the windows, but the motorman speeded away before serious damage was done.

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