

The Girl and the Bill

By Bannister Merwin

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS



CHAPTER VII.

A Japanese at Large.

What was the girl doing out there in mid-lake in the company of her enemy? Orme had seen her enter the house of her friends in Evanston; had bidden her good-night with the understanding that she was to make no further move in the game before the coming morning. She must have left the house soon after he walked away.

Had she known all the time where the Japanese was? Had she hunted him out to make terms with him? If that were the case, her action indicated a new and unsuspected distrust of Orme himself. Her failure to call for help when Orme and Porter came up in their launch seemed to show that her presence in the other boat was voluntary. And yet Orme could not believe that there was not some simple explanation which she would welcome the first chance to make. He could not doubt her.

The immediate thing to do, however, was to find out just what she desired. Suppressing his excitement, he called out:

"Girl!"

At the same time he turned the lantern so that his own face was illuminated.

"Mr. Orme!" she cried, rising from her seat. "You here?"

"At your service."

He smiled, and turned his eyes for an instant on her companion. The face of the Japanese was a study. His eyes were narrowed to thin slits, and his mouth was formed into a meaningless grin.

Orme spoke to the Japanese in French. "Maku has confessed," he said. "He is under arrest."

The face of the Japanese did not change.

"Do you understand?" asked Orme, still in French.

There was no answer, and Orme turned to the girl and said, in French:

"I don't think he understands this language."

"Apparently not," she replied, in the same tongue.

"Tell me," he went on, "are you there of your own will?"

"No."

"Has he the papers?"

"I think so. I don't know."

"See if you can manage to get past him, and I will help you into our boat."

"I'll try." She nodded, with a brave effort to show reassurance.

Orme frowned at the Japanese. "What are you doing with this young lady?" he demanded.

"No understanding," the Japanese repeated.

"Yes, you do understand. You understood well enough when you robbed me this evening."

"No understanding," the Japanese repeated.

The girl, meantime, had moved slowly from her position. The two boats were close together. Suddenly, after a swift glance from Orme, the girl stepped to the gunwale and leaped across the gap. Orme reached forward and caught her, drawing her for a brief instant close into his arms before she found her footing in the cockpit.

"Splendid," he whispered, and she tossed her head with a pretty smile of relief.

Porter had been standing close by, the boathook in his hands. "Is there anything more to be done?" he asked of Orme.

"Yes, wait a moment."

The Japanese had made no move to prevent the girl's escape. Indeed, while she was leaping to the other boat, he balanced himself and turned to his motor, as though to continue the work of repair.

"Now, then," called Orme, "you must give me those papers."

"No understanding." The Japanese did not even look up from his task.

Orme turned to Porter. "Give me the boathook," he said, and, taking it, he hooked it to the gunwale of the other boat, drawing the two crafts together. His intention was to use the boathook to bring the Japanese to terms. But the Oriental was too quick. His apparent indifference vanished, and with a cat-like pounce, he seized the boathook and snatched it from Orme's grasp.

The action was so unexpected that Orme was completely taken by surprise. He made ready, however, to leap in unarmed, but the Japanese thrust the blunt end of the boathook at him, and the blow, which struck him in the chest, sent him toppling backward. He was saved from tumbling into the cockpit by Porter, who caught him by the shoulders and helped him to right himself. The two boats tossed for a moment like corks in the water.

When Orme again leaped to the

gunwale, the Japanese was using the boathook to push the craft apart. A final blow widened the distance to six or eight feet. The jump was impossible. Even if the boats had been nearer together it would have been folly to attempt an attack.

Stepping down into the cockpit, Orme bent over the girl, who had sunk down upon a cushion. She seemed to be content that he should play the game for her.

"What is wrong with his motor?" he said. "Do you know?"

She answered in an undertone: "I shut off the gasoline-supply. He wasn't looking. He didn't see."

"Good for you, Girl!" he exclaimed. "Where did you do it? At the tank?"

"No. Unfortunately the valve is at the carburetor. Oh," she continued, "we must get the papers!"

Orme turned to Porter. "Are you willing to take a risk?" he asked.

"Anything in reason." The life-saver grinned. "Of course, I don't understand what's going on, but I'll back you."

"This is a good, stout tub we are in," Orme hesitated. "I want you to ram her nose into that other boat."

Porter shook his head.

"That's going pretty far," he said. "I don't know that there is warrant for it."

"It won't need to be a hard bump," Orme explained. "I don't want to hurt the fellow."

"Then why—?"

"To frighten him into giving up some papers."

Porter looked straight into Orme's eyes. "Do the papers belong to you?" he demanded.

"No," Orme spoke quietly. "They belong to this young lady—or, rather,



It Looked as Though the Collision Could Not Be Prevented.

to her father. This Japanese, and the other one, there on the shore, stole them."

"What is the lady's name?"

"I can't tell you that."

"But the police—"

"It isn't a matter for the police. Please trust me, Mr. Porter."

The life-saver stood irresolute.

"If this boat is damaged, I'll make it good five times over," continued Orme.

"Oh, it wouldn't hurt the boat. A few scratches, perhaps. It's the other boat I'm thinking of."

"It's pretty grim business, I know," remarked Orme.

The younger man again studied Orme's face. "Can you give me your word that the circumstances would justify us in ramming that boat?"

It flashed over Orme that he had no idea what those circumstances were. He knew only what little the girl had told him. Yet she had assured him again and again that the papers were of the greatest importance. True, throughout the affair, thus far, with the exception of the blow he had given Maku, the persons concerned had offered no dangerous violence. The mysterious papers might contain information about South American mines—as little Portol had suggested; they might hold the secrets of an international syndicate. Whatever they were, it was really doubtful whether the necessity of their recovery would justify the possibility of slaying another man.

Perhaps the girl had unconsciously exaggerated their value. Women who took a hand in business often lost the sense of relative importance. And yet, she had been so sure; she had herself gone to such lengths. Then, too, the South Americans had hired a burglar to break into her father's house, and now this Japanese had abducted her. Yes, it was a serious game.

Orme answered Porter. "I give you my word," he said.

Porter nodded and tightened his lips.

"At the very least, that fellow has tried to abduct this young lady," added

Orme.

"All right," said Porter. "Let her go."

The other boat had drifted about 50 feet away. Orme called out:

"Hello, there, Japanese. Will you give up the papers?"

No answer came.

"If you won't," cried Orme, "we are going to ram you."

"Oh, no!" exclaimed the girl suddenly. "We mustn't drown him."

"We shan't," said Orme. "But we will give him a scare." Then, in a louder voice: "Do you hear?"

The only reply was the tapping of metal on metal. The Japanese, it seemed, was still trying to find out what was wrong with his motor.

"Well, then," Orme said to Porter, "we'll have to try it. But use low speed, and be ready to veer off at the last minute."

"He'll try to fend with the boat hook," said Porter.

"If he does, I'll get him."

"How?"

"Lasso." Orme picked up a spare painter that was stored under the seat, and began to tie a slip-noose.

The girl now spoke. "I suppose we shall have to do it," she said. "But I wish there were a less dangerous, a less tragic way."

Hardly knowing what he did, Orme laid his hand gently on her shoulder. "It will be all right, dear," he whispered.

If the word embarrassed her, the darkness covered her confusion.

Porter had started the motor, setting it at a low speed, and now he was steering the boat in a circle to gain distance for the charge.

"I've lost the other boat," exclaimed Orme, peering into the darkness.

"She's off there," said Porter. "You can't see her, but I know the direction."

He swung the launch around and headed straight through the night.

"Hold on tight," Orme cautioned the girl, and coiling his lasso, he went to the bow.

The launch moved steadily forward. Orme, straining his eyes in the endeavor to distinguish the other boat, saw it at last. It lay a few poles to starboard, and Porter altered the course of the launch accordingly.

"Make for the stern," called Orme, "and cripple her propeller, if you can."

Another slight change in the course showed that Porter understood.

As the lessening of the distance between the two boats made it possible to distinguish the disabled speeder more clearly, Orme saw that the Japanese was still tinkering with the motor. He was busying himself as though he realized that he had no hope of escape unless he could start his boat.

Narrower, narrower, grew the intervening gap of dark water. Orme braced himself for the shock. In his left hand was the coiled painter; in his right, the end of the ready noose, which trailed behind him on the decking. It was long since he had thrown a lariat. In a vivid gleam of memory he saw at that moment the hot, dusty New Mexico corral, the low adobe buildings, the lumbering cattle and the galloping horses of the ranch. There he had spent one summer vacation of his college life. It was ten years past, but this pose, the rope in his hand, flashed it back to him.

Now they were almost on the Japanese. For the moment he seemed to waver. He glanced at the approaching launch, and reached uncertainly for the boat hook. Yet it did not seem to occur to him to yield.

And then, as for the hundredth time he laid his hands on the motor, he uttered a cry. It was plain to Orme that the cause of the supposed breakdown had been discovered. But was there time for the Japanese to get away? It was doubtful. He opened the feed pipe and let the gasoline again flow in. The launch was now so near that Orme could almost have leaped the gap, but the Japanese bent his energy to the heavy fly wheel, tugging at it hurriedly.

The motor started. The boat began to move.

Even now it looked as though the collision could not be prevented, but the Japanese, seizing the steering wheel, turned the boat so quickly to starboard that the stern fell away from the bow of the approaching launch. There was no crash, no hard bump; merely a glancing blow so slight that in that calm water it scarcely made the boats careen.

Then Orme threw his noose. The distance was less than ten feet, and the loop spread, quick and true, over the head of the Japanese. But, swift though the action was, the Japanese had an instant to prepare himself. His right arm shot up. As Orme, jerking at the rope, tried to tighten the noose, the hand of the Japanese pushed it over his head and it slid over the side into the water. In a few seconds the swift boat had disappeared in the night.

Tightening his lips grimly, Orme drew the wet rope in and mechanically coiled it. There was nothing to say. He had failed. So good an opportunity to recover the papers would hardly return.

Silently he turned back to the others. Porter had swung the launch around and was heading toward the distant lights of Evanston. The girl was peering in the direction whence came the sound of the receding boat. Thus, for some time they remained silent.

At last the girl broke into a laugh. It was a rippling, silvery laugh, expressing an infectious appreciation of the humor of their situation. Orme chuckled in spite of himself. If she could laugh like that, he need not stay in the dumps. And yet in his mind rankled the sense of failure. He had made a poor showing before her—and

she was laughing. Again the corners of his mouth drew down.

"I suppose the notion is amusing," he said—"a cowboy at sea."

"Oh, I was not laughing at you," she had sobered quickly at his words. "I shouldn't blame you, if you did."

"It is the whole situation," she went on. "And it wouldn't be so funny, if it weren't so serious."

"I appreciate it," he said.

she went on. "But truly, Mr. Orme, I am glad that we did not damage that boat. It might have been terrible. If he had been drowned—her voice trailed off in a faint shudder, and Orme remembered how tired she must be, and how deeply disappointed.

"Now, Girl," he said, bending over her and speaking in a low voice, "try to forget it. Tomorrow I am going after the papers. I will get them."

She looked up at him. Her eyes were softly confident. "I believe you," she whispered. "You never give up, do you?"

"No," he said, "I never give up—when I am striving for something which I greatly want." There was meaning in his voice, though he had struggled to conceal it. She lowered her eyes, and said no more.

Slowly the lights of shore grew brighter. After a time Orme could distinguish the masses of trees and buildings, grayly illuminated by the arc lamps of the streets. He spoke to Porter in an undertone.

"Can you land us some distance south of the life-saving station?" he asked.

"Sure. I'll run in by the Davis street pier."

"I'll be obliged to you," Orme sighed. "I made a bad mess of it, didn't I?"

"Oh, I don't know," replied the life-saver. "We got the lady."

Orme started. "Yes," he said, "we got the lady—and that's more important than all the rest of it."

Porter grinned a noncommittal grin and devoted himself to the wheel.

They had saved the girl! In his disappointment over the escape of the Japanese Orme had forgotten, but now he silently thanked God that Porter and he had come out on the water. The girl had not yet explained her presence in the boat. In her own good time she would tell him. But she had been there under compulsion; and Orme shuddered to think what might have happened.

He stole a glance at her. She was leaning back on the seat. Her eyes were closed and her pose indicated complete relaxation, though it was evident from her breathing that she was not asleep. Orme marveled at her ability to push the nervous excitement of the evening away and snatch the brief chance of rest.

When at last the launch ran up under the end of a little breakwater near the Davis street pier, she arose quickly and sprang out of the boat without help. Then she turned, as Orme stepped up beside her, and spoke to Porter. "If you and Mr. Orme had not come after me," she said, "there's no telling whether I should ever have got back. I should like to shake hands with you," she added; and bending down, she held out her firm white hand.

Then Orme laid his hand on the life-saver's shoulder. "You've done a piece of good work tonight," he said.

Porter laughed embarrassedly. "I only ran the boat for you," he began.

"You took me at my word," said Orme, "and that's a good deal in such a case. Goodby. I will look you up before I go back east."

At the side of the girl, Orme now walked slowly through the deserted streets. It was some time before she spoke.

"After you left me at the home of my friends—" she began at last.

"Don't try to tell about it," he interrupted quickly. "You are tired. Wait for another time."

They were passing under a street lamp at the moment, and she glanced up at him with a grateful smile, pleased apparently by his thought of her.

"That is good of you," she exclaimed, "but my story is easily told. Let me go on with it. I explained myself to my friends as best I could and went to my room. Then it suddenly occurred to me that Maku and his friend might have come to Evanston by boat."

"Just as, later, it occurred to me."

"I thought that the others were waiting for Maku. The motor car that we heard—there was no good reason for thinking that our man was in it."

She paused.

"I know," he said. "I thought of those things, too."

"It flashed on me," she went on, "that if I could find the man, I might be able to buy him off. I didn't believe that he would dare to injure me. There are reasons why he should not. My car had been taken in, but I had them bring it out, and I told them—well, that part doesn't matter. Enough that I made an excuse, and went out with the car."

"You should have taken some one with you."

"There was a likelihood that the Japanese would run if I had a companion. As long as I was alone he might be willing to parley, I thought. At least, he would not be afraid of me alone. So I went north on Sheridan road to the upper end of the lower campus. There is a cross-road there, you remember, cutting through to the lake, and I turned in. I left the car near a house that is there, and walked on to the edge of the bluff."

"Moored to a breakwater below was a boat, and a man was standing near her. I called out to him, asking what time it was. He answered, 'Don't know,' and I knew him at once to be foreign and, probably, Japanese. So I went down toward him.

"When he saw that I was comrade, he got into the boat. He seemed to be frightened and hurried, and I inferred that he was about to cast off, and I called out that I was alone. At that he waited, but he did not get out of the boat, and I was standing at the edge of the breakwater, just above him, before he actually seemed to recognize me."

"Did you know him?" asked Orme.

"I never saw him before to my knowledge; but he made an exclamation which indicated that he knew me."

"What did he do then?"

"I told him that I wished to talk to him about the papers. His answer was that, if I would step down into the boat, he would talk. He said that he would not leave the boat, and added that he was unwilling to discuss the matter aloud. And I was foolish enough to believe his excuses. If he wished to whisper, I said to myself, why, I would whisper. I never felt so like a conspirator."

She paused to look up at the street sign at the corner which they had reached, and turned to the right on a shady avenue.

"Well, I got into the boat," she continued. "I told him that I—my father was prepared to pay him a large sum of money for the papers, but he only shook his head and said, 'No, no.' I named a sum; then a larger one; but money did not seem to tempt him, though I made the second offer as large as I dared."

"How much will you take then?" I asked at last. Instead of answering, he bent down and started the motor, and then I noticed for the first time that while I was talking we had been drifting away from the dock. I made ready to jump overboard. We were near the shore and the water was not deep; anyway, I am a fair swimmer. But he turned and seized my wrists and forced me down into the bottom of the boat. I struggled, but it was no use, and when I opened my mouth to scream, he choked me with one hand and with the other pulled from his pocket a handkerchief and tried to put it in my mouth."

She gave a weary little laugh.

"It was such a crumpled, unclean handkerchief, I couldn't have stood it. So I managed to gasp that if he would only let me alone I would keep quiet."

"The brute!" muttered Orme.

"Oh, I don't think he intended to hurt me. What he feared, as nearly as I can make out, is that I might have him intercepted if he let me go free. That must have been why he tried to take me with him. Probably he planned to beach the boat at some unfrequented point on the North side and leave me to shift for myself."

"When your boat came, of course I didn't know who was in it. I never dreamed it would be you. And I had promised to keep still."

"Hardly a binding promise."

"Well, before he stopped threatening me with that awful handkerchief, he had made me swear over and over that I would not call for help, that I would not make any signal, that I would sit quietly on the seat. When you recognized me, I felt that all need of observing the promise was over."

"Naturally," muttered Orme.

She sighed. "It does seem as though Fate had been against us," she said.

"Fate is fickle," Orme returned. "You never know whether she will be your friend or your enemy. But I believe that she is now going to be our friend—for a change. Tomorrow I shall get those papers."

To be continued.

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ENTERTAINED AT THE HOME OF MISS WOHLFARTH

From Wednesday's Daily.

The young ladies of Mrs. L. W. Gade's Sunday school class of the Presbyterian church met at the home of Miss Clara Wohlfarth last evening and enjoyed another evening which will long be remembered. Whenever invited to the home of Miss Wohlfarth every one expects a jolly good time and expectations were fully realized in the entertainment of last evening. An hour or so was devoted to the Bible Question card game, which made the time pass all too rapidly and which has become so fascinating that a number of the members of the class, we fear, have been refreshing their memories and searching for some of the answers to questions given at the former meetings. The young ladies entered into the game with much interest and enthusiasm, if not, more so, than in previous games. Miss Helen Chapman, on account of her unlimited brilliancy and memory, when it comes to names of characters and the like in the Bible, captured the largest number of the cards last evening. There are to be ten games and the one having captured the largest number of the cards at the close of the ten games, will receive a prize. There was some delightful music, both vocal and instrumental, after the Bible Question game, contributed by a number of the young ladies present, which assisted in making this entertainment such a splendid one. The young ladies also indulged in an old-fashioned taffy-pull, which was also a pleasing feature of the entertainment. Some delicious candy was the result of a hard and lengthy pull. There were a large number of the members of the class in attendance, who were very much indebted to Miss Wohlfarth for her hospitality and the delightful social time.

ENTERTAINED AT THE HOME OF MRS. D. C. MORGAN

The Ladies' Auxiliary of the Presbyterian church were entertained in a most delightful manner at the cozy home of Mrs. D. C. Morgan yesterday afternoon. First, the regular business session was held, after which the time was spent in a social way, some of the ladies plying the busy needle, while sociability reigned supreme. At the proper time a dainty luncheon was provided, which the ladies thoroughly enjoyed. There were a large number of the ladies in attendance.

Luke Wiles went to the land show at Omaha this afternoon, and also looked after business matters which demanded his attention in the big city.

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COUNTY WILL SUE THE CITY OF PLATTSMOUTH

From Wednesday's Daily.

Cass county has a grievance against the city of Plattsmouth, arising over the bills filed regularly by the county against the city for the board and commitment of city prisoners. The bill for the month of December in the sum of \$64.80 was sent to the claims committee, composed of Messrs. Dovey, Schulhof and Dwyer, which recommended the allowance of the claim in part, allowing only \$29.80 of the amount at the last meeting of the council, which seems to have been unsatisfactory to the county board, and this morning County Attorney Taylor—filed with City Clerk Bernard Wurl a notice of the appeal of the case to the district court. The matter will probably come up for trial at the April term, unless some sort of settlement is affected before that time.

When given as soon as the croupy cough appears Chamberlain's Cough Remedy will ward off an attack of croup and prevent all danger and cause of anxiety. Thousands of mothers use it successfully. Sold by F. G. Fricke & Co.

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