

# The Girl and the Bill

By  
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## CHAPTER XIII.

### An Old Man of the Sea.

"Oh, Mr. Orme, you are the man I most wished to see." The minister's voice carried a note of unrestrained eagerness. He extended his hand.

Orme accepted the salutation, muttering the appearance of a casual meeting; he must keep Alcatraz out of the building.

"I was sorry that I could not be at your apartment this morning," continued Alcatraz, "and I hope you did not wait too long."

"Oh, no," replied Orme. "I waited for a little while, but concluded that something had called you away. Has Senator Poritol recovered from his anxiety?"

"Why, no," said Alcatraz. "But the course of events has changed." He linked his arm in Orme's and walked along with him toward the center of the city. "You see," he went on, "my young friend Poritol overestimated the importance of that marked bill. It did give the clue to the hiding place of certain papers which were of great value to him. What he failed to realize was that the papers could be of little importance to others. And yet, so perturbed is he that he has asked me to offer a considerable reward for the recovery of these papers."

"Indeed?"

"Yes," Alcatraz sent a slanting glance at Orme. "The sum is ridiculously large, but he insists on offering one thousand dollars."

"Quite a sum," said Orme calmly. He was interested in the minister's instructions.

"As for the events of last night"—continued Alcatraz, stopping short with a significant glance.

"Well?" said Orme indifferently.

"I trust that you did not think me absurd for sending that detective to you. That I did so was a result of poor Poritol's frantic insistence."

"Indeed?"

"My young friend was so afraid that you would be robbed."

"I was robbed," laughed Orme, trying to make light of the situation.

"Why, how was that?" Alcatraz's surprise was well assumed.

"Oh, after I said good-night to you, the two Japanese caught me while I was going through the tunnel to the courtyard."

"My dear Mr. Orme!"

"They are clever, those Japanese."

"And afterward you went out again?"

"What makes you think that?"

Alcatraz bit his lip. "Why," he stammered, "the detective reported that you were absent when he arrived."

"And therefore," remarked Orme coolly, "he got access to my apartment and, after rummaging through my things, went sound asleep in my bedroom, where I found him snoring when I returned."

The minister swung his cane viciously at a bit of paper that lay on the sidewalk.

"He was not a clever detective," continued Orme. "And as for Poritol, don't you think he had better offer his reward to the Japanese?"

"No," replied Alcatraz. "They may have stolen the clue from you, but I have reason to think that the papers were already gone when they went to look for them. Poritol is really very anxious."

"Doubtless," added Orme.

"Perhaps," added Alcatraz, after a short wait, "he might even go as high as two thousand."

"Indeed? Then there will surely be many answers to his advertisement."

"Oh, he will not advertise," Alcatraz laughed. "Already he knows where the papers are. While waiting for the clue of the bill, he discovered what others had already availed themselves of."

"That is curious," Orme smiled.

"How did he discover that?"

"In a roundabout way. I won't take time for the story."

They walked along in silence for a little distance. Orme was figuring on an escape, for the minister's clasp on his arm was like that of a drowning man's. Finally he sought the simplest means of getting away. "I have an engagement," he said. "I shall have to leave you, here. Thank you for walking with me thus far." He disengaged his arm.

"My dear Mr. Orme," said Alcatraz, "why should we beat around the bush?"

"Why, indeed?" said Orme.

"Poritol knows that his papers are in your possession. Speaking for him, I offer you five thousand."

"Why do you drag Poritol into this?" said Orme. "You know that he has merely been your agent from the start. You think he has bungled, but I tell you, you are the one who bungled, for



"They May Have Stolen the Clue From You."

you picked him to do the work. He had had luck hiring a burglar for you. He lost his head when he ran away with another person's motor car and had to hand the marked bill to a country justice. He showed bad judgment when he tried to fool me with a fancy lie. But you are the real bungler, Senator Alcatraz. Any capable diplomat could tell you that."

Alcatraz's yellow face grew white about the lips. His eyes flashed balefully.

"Curse you!" he exclaimed. "You know more than is good for you. Take care!"

Orme laughed in disgust. "Oh, drop this melodrama. I am not afraid of cheap Machiavellis. In this country there are some crimes that are not excused by high office."

The minister's teeth showed. "You shall see, my young friend."

"Doubtless. But let me tell you one thing; if anything happens to me, my friends will know where to look for the criminal."

Alcatraz snarled. "Don't be too sure—"

"If necessary," continued Orme, "a word to certain persons as to the commission for building warships—five hundred thousand, is it not by the new arrangement—in gold—"

Alcatraz, in ungovernable rage, raised his light cane and struck Orme. He fended the blow with his arm, then wrenched the cane away and threw it into the street. A swarm of passers-by gathered about them so quickly that in a moment they were the center of a circle.

"You dunce," said Orme. "Do you want the police?"

"No," muttered Alcatraz, controlling himself with a great effort. "You are right." He darted into the crowd at one side, and Orme, quick to take the hint, disappeared in the opposite direction, crossing the street and jumping into an empty cab, which had drawn up in anticipation of a fight.

"To the Rookery," he ordered, naming the first office building that came into his head.

"Sure," said the driver, and away they rattled.

A glance back showed Orme that the crowd was dispersing.

At a distance was Alcatraz. He had seen Orme's escape, and was looking about vainly for another cab. But cabs are not numerous on North Parker street, and Orme, so far as he could tell, was not followed.

When his cab drew up at the busy entrance on La Salle street, he found his way to the nearest public telephone. The hour was close to five, and he must discover quickly where he could find the girl. He called up the Pere Marquette. "This is Mr. Orme," he explained to the clerk. "Have there been any calls or messages for me?"

"Yes, sir, Mr. and Mrs. Wallingham called up at 12:30 to know if you were going to Arradale with them."

The golfing engagement! Orme had not even thought of it since the evening before.

"Anything else?"

"Yes, sir. A Japanese came about one o'clock. He left no name."

"The same man who came last evening?"

"No, sir, an older man."

The Japanese minister had doubtless gone straight from Arima's apartment to the Pere Marquette. "Anything else?" asked Orme.

"There was a phone call for you about 11 o'clock. The party left no name."

"A woman's voice?"

"Yes, sir. She said: 'Tell Mr. Orme that I shall not be able to call him up at noon, but will try to do so as near two o'clock as possible.'"

"Did she call up again at two?"

"No, sir. There's no record of it," Orme understood. In the interval after her attempt to reach him she had learned at Arima's of his seeming treachery. "Very well," he said

to the clerk, and hung up the receiver.

What shall he do now? The girl had given him up. He did not know her name or where to find her, and yet find her he must and that within the next few hours. The unquestionably great importance of the papers in his pocket had begun to weigh on him heavily. He was tempted to take them out, there in the telephone booth, and examine them for a clue. The circumstances justified him.

But—he had promised the girl! Stronger than his curiosity, stronger almost than his wish to deliver the papers, was his desire to keep that promise. It may have been foolish, quixotic; but he resolved to continue as he had begun. "At ten o'clock," he said to himself, "if I have not found her, I will look at the papers or go to the police—do whatever is necessary." He did not like to break promises or miss engagements.

There was his engagement with the Wallinghams. It had absolutely gone from his mind. Bessie would forgive him, of course. She was a sensible little woman, and she would know that his failure to appear was due to something unavoidable and important, but Orme's conscience bothered him a little because he had not, before setting out that morning, telephoned to her that he might be detained.

Bessie Wallingham! She knew the girl! Why had he not thought of that before?

He got the Wallinghams' number. Were they at home? No, they had gone to Arradale and would probably remain until the last evening train. He rang off.

It remained to try Arradale. After some delay, he got the club house. Mrs. Wallingham? Yes, she had just come in. Would Mr. Orme hold the wire?

Mr. Orme certainly would, and presently he was rewarded for the delay by hearing Bessie's brisk little voice.

"Hello?"

"Who?"

"Bob?"

"Well, you ought to be ashamed of yourself; we waited over and took the next train."

"Oh, yes, I know all about these very busy people."

"Nonsense! I was fooling, of course. But we were sorry you didn't come."

"What?"

"That girl? Why, what's the matter with you, Robert Orme?"

"Business importance? That won't do, Bob. You'll have to 'fess up.'"

"Do I know such a girl? Are you serious?"

"Why, Bob, I can think of several. Shall I name them?"

"Not give their names! What on earth is the matter with you?"

"Oh, part of the business, is it? Well, let me see. Tall and beautiful, you say. Dark eyes and hair. A black touring car. Hum! I know three girls to whom the description applies. It might be—but you don't wish me to mention the name. Well, you'll have to think of something more distinctive."

Orme thought in vain. The image of the girl was ever in his mind, but describe her he could not. At last he said: "The girl I mean lives in one of the suburbs. She has a father who has lately undergone a slight operation. He is, I think, a man who is involved in negotiations with other countries."

"Oh! Where did you meet her? Why, Bob, how interesting! I never thought of her, but she's one of my dearest friends."

"Now, listen, Bessie. It is absolutely necessary that I should reach her father's house before midnight. You must help me."

He heard her laugh. "Help you? Of course I will."

"Where does she live?"

"Not far from Arradale. Bob, you come right out here. I will see to the rest. It certainly is the funniest coincidence."

"I'll catch the first train."

"There's one at six—for men who come out to dine."

"All right. Expect me. Goodbye."

Orme looked at his watch. He had an hour and a half—which meant that time must be killed. It would be unwise to return to the Pere Marquette, for the South Americans and the Japanese might both be on watch for him there. But he did not care to wander about the streets, with the chance of coming face to face with some of his enemies. It was obvious that swift and elaborate machinery would be set in motion to catch him. Of course, there were many places where he could conceal himself for an hour, but—

Tom Wallingham's office! Why had he not thought of that before? Tom was at Arradale with Bessie, but the clerks would let Orme stay in the reception room until it was time to start for his train. Indeed, Orme remembered that Bixby, the head clerk, had been at the wedding of Tom and Bessie—had in fact taken charge of the arrangements at the church.

Moreover, Tom's office was in this very building—the Rookery. Doubtless it was for this reason that the Rookery had popped into his head when he gave directions to the cabdriver on North Parker street.

Hurrying to the elevators, Orme was about to enter the nearest one, when suddenly a hand seized his elbow and pulled him to one side. He turned quickly and saw—Alcatraz.

The minister was breathing rapidly. It was plain that he had made a quick pursuit, but though his chest heaved and his mouth was partly open, his eyes were curiously steady. "One minute, Mr. Orme," he said, forcing his lips to a smile. "I had hard work to follow you. There was no other cab, but a small boy told me that you directed your driver to the Rookery. Therefore I got on a street car and rode till I found a cab." He said all

this in the most casual tone, retaining his hold on Orme's elbow as though his attitude was familiar and friendly. Perhaps he was thus detaching his own adventures merely to gain time; or perhaps he was endeavoring to puzzle Orme.

But Orme was simply annoyed. He knew how dangerous Alcatraz could be. "I am tired of being followed, Senator," he said, disgustfully, frowning his elbow.

Alcatraz continued to smile. "That is part of the game," he said.

"Then you will find the game serious," Orme shut his lips together and glanced about for a policeman.

Alcatraz again grasped his elbow. "Do you want publicity?" he asked.

"Your principals do not. Publicity will injure us all."

Orme had been given enough light to know that the South American's words were true.

"If it comes to publicity," continued Alcatraz with an ugly grin, "I will have you arrested for stealing a certain important document and offering to sell it to me."

"Rubbish!" laughed Orme. "That would never work at all. Too many persons understand my part in this matter. And then—" as he noticed the flash of triumph in Alcatraz's eyes—"I could not be arrested for stealing a document which was not in my possession." It was too late; Alcatraz had been able to verify his strong suspicion that Orme had the papers.

A wave of anger swept over Orme. "Publicity or no publicity," he said, "unless this annoyance stops, I will have you arrested."

Alcatraz smiled. "That would not pay, Mr. Orme. There would be counter-charges and you would be much delayed—perhaps even till after midnight tonight. You Americans do not know how to play at diplomacy, Mr. Orme."

Controlling himself, Orme hurried quickly to the nearest elevator. He timed his action; the starter was just about to close the door as he hurried in. But quick though he was, Alcatraz was close behind him. The agile South American squeezed into the elevator by so close a margin that the door caught his coat.

"Here, what are you trying to do?" shouted the starter.

Alcatraz, pressing in against Orme, did not reply.

The starter jerked the door open, and glared at Alcatraz. The steady and undisturbed eye of the minister had its effect, and after a moment of hesitation the starter banged the door shut and gave the signal and the car leaped upward.

Tom Wallingham's office was on the eighth floor. Though he knew that Alcatraz would cling to him, Orme could think of nothing better to do than to go straight to the office and count on the assistance of Bixby, who would certainly remember him. Accordingly he called out "Eight!" and, ignoring Alcatraz, left the elevator and walked down the hall, the South American at his elbow.

They passed a long series of doors, the glass panels of which were inscribed, "The Wallingham Company—

Private," with index fingers pointing the direction of the main entrance. This was the Chicago branch of the great New York corporation, and Thomas Wallingham, Sr., had placed his son in charge of it two years before. The business was the manufacture of refrigerators. One side of the reception room which Orme entered hurriedly, Alcatraz still beside him, was given over to a large specimen refrigerator chamber, built in with glistening white tiles. The massive door, three feet thick, was wide open, showing the spotless inner chamber. In the outer wall was a thermometer dial fully a foot in diameter.

Once inside the reception room Orme stopped and looked again at Alcatraz. There was menace in the look, but the South American did not flinch. Indeed, the glance which met his own seemed to Orme to be disarmingly good natured. Its essence was a humorous recognition that the situation had a ridiculous side.

But Orme, knowing that much was at stake, did not for an instant trust his unwelcome companion. Alcatraz would cling to him like an Old Man of the Sea, awaiting the opportunity to get the better of him. Every wile would be employed; but publicity was no part of the game—Orme began really to believe that.

To shake off Alcatraz, perhaps there was no better way than to lure him to some deserted place and overpower him. But would not Alcatraz be likely to have anticipated such a move? And would he not resort to desperate measures of his own before Orme could put his own plans into practice? Bixby might help.

Orme walked over to the inquiry

window. "I want to see Mr. Bixby," he said, offering his card.

The young woman behind the window took the card, but at the same time she said: "Mr. Bixby left a few minutes ago. He won't be back today. Shall I keep the card for him?"

"It doesn't matter, thank you," he said, turning away. Luck was against him. Besides Bixby no one in the office knew him.

Alcatraz smiled genially. "Since Mr. Bixby is absent," he remarked, "shall we leave the verification of the notes until tomorrow?"

"What are you talking about?" exclaimed Orme.

"Why—" Alcatraz's face was the picture of astonishment—"the Wallingham company notes, of course. The notes you wish to sell me." His voice was raised so that the girl behind the window could not help hearing.

"Rot!" said Orme.

"What?" A note of indignation crept into Alcatraz's voice. "Are you evading? Perhaps you thought I would not insist on the verification." Another clerk, a man, had joined the girl behind the window. Alcatraz suddenly addressed him. "This Mr. Orme told me that he needed to raise money and would transfer to me cheap some notes signed by your company. I met him at the hotel. He said that, if I would come here with him, he would show the notes and have them verified. I don't understand."

The clerk left the window, and, opening a door, came into the reception room. "What are the notes you have?" he asked.

"I have none," replied Orme, in disgust. "I have never pretended to have any. This man is crazy, I think." He pointed to Alcatraz. "He has followed me here uninvited for reasons of his own. I asked for Mr. Bixby, whom I know. I would have asked for Mr. Wallingham, my personal friend, but that I had already learned of his being at Arradale."

"There's funny business here somewhere," exclaimed Alcatraz, with great earnestness. "Do you mean to say that you did not introduce yourself to me in the lobby of the Framington and ask me to buy the notes?"

Orme did not answer.

With a conservative eye the clerk looked at the two. He was not one to involve himself in a dubious affair.

"I can't settle this matter for you, gentlemen," he said.

With a slight bow, Orme went into the hall. It dawned upon him why Alcatraz had invented so remarkable a story. Without question, the minister had feared that Orme would enlist aid in the office, or that at least he would manage to deposit the coveted papers in safety while he found other means to get rid of his shadow. Hence the sudden effort to discredit Orme.

In the long corridor Orme gave no further attention to Alcatraz, who was patting along beside him. The course he now had in mind was to hire a cab and ride out of the city—all the way to Arradale, if possible. The distance could not be much greater than 15 miles. If Alcatraz chose to pursue, well and good. There would be ways of disposing of him.

Then an audacious notion flashed into Orme's mind. Why not let Alcatraz ride with him? Why not take the minister all the way to his destination and at the end turn him over a prisoner?

The idea was hardly practicable. He might meet other enemies, and in that event he would not care to have an enemy already at his side. It came to him for the first time that the nearer he approached his goal, the greater would be the opposition he would have to overcome. Whatever else the South Americans and Japanese might do, they would have their guards about the house of the girl's father. Hitherto he had assumed that, once free of Alcatraz and safe on the train to Arradale, he would have plain going; but now he realized that the dangers would pile up higher as he advanced. In any event, he must get rid of Alcatraz, and as they approached the elevator grills, he spoke.

"Senator," he said, "unless you stop following me, I shall be obliged to hurt you. I give you fair warning."

Alcatraz laughed. "If you hurt me, as you threaten, you will find yourself in difficulties. You will be arrested, and you will have no opportunity to deliver the documents on time. My position as minister—my extra-territoriality—will make it very difficult for you to extricate yourself."

Orme looked grimly down into the sallow face. "My fist against your chin," he said, "might do it."

Alcatraz did not lose his smile. "You will hardly try that, I think. There would be no time for you to get away. People in these passing elevators would see you."

Orme turned away and pressed the "down" button, and a few seconds later a descending car stopped. He pushed his way in, Alcatraz after him.

The elevator was crowded. Clerks and stenographers were beginning to leave their offices, for the hour was nearly five. Orme wedged his way in at one side, and, in order to gain a momentary sense of seclusion, turned his back upon the persons who were pressing against him and stood with his face to the side of the cage, looking through the scroll work of the grating to the swiftly ascending cables in the next well. He was conscious that Alcatraz stood close to him as the car began to slip downward. It was all very ridiculous, this persistent pursuit of him.

Suddenly Alcatraz's voice burst out: "Stop the car! I've been robbed! Stop the car!"

There was immediate commotion; a girl screamed, and the swaying of the huddled group made the car rattle. The elevator man quickly threw over his lever. The car stopped with a

jerk between floors.

Orme had started to turn with the others, but with a quick exclamation he checked his movement and pressed his face against the grating. A remarkable thing had happened. The ascending car in the next well had stopped at Alcatraz's outcry. The few passengers it was carrying, eager to see what was happening, hurried to the side nearest to Orme. Less than two feet from his face was the face of a girl. Almost before he saw her at all he knew her. He forgot that he had given her apparent cause to doubt him; he did not stop to wonder what she was doing in this building.

"Girl!" he whispered.

Her lips parted; her eyes opened wider.

"Girl! Go to Tom Wallingham's office. I'll come up there. Keep out of sight when you hear me coming. Alcatraz is with me."

She nodded.

"I have the papers," he added, and his heart thumped happily when he saw joy and gratitude flash into her eyes.

From his position and manner he might have been explaining to her what was happening in his own car. But now, conscious of the necessity of taking part in the discussion about him, he reluctantly turned away from the girl.

Alcatraz was still exclaiming volubly. His purse had disappeared. It had been in his pocket just before he entered the car. Therefore someone in the car must have taken it. He did not accuse any single person, though he flashed suspicious glances at Orme, who recognized, of course, that the move was directed against himself.

To embarrass Orme with arrest and detention would well suit the purpose of Alcatraz. At this late hour such an event would prevent the delivery of the papers. Orme wondered whether the minister had realized that the papers might be found by the police and disposed of properly. The explanation of this apparent oversight on the part of Alcatraz was not difficult, however, for perhaps it was not a part of the plan that Orme should be actually thrown into a cell. It was more likely that an arrest would be followed, after as much delay as Alcatraz could secure, by a refusal to prosecute. One advantage to Alcatraz would be the opportunity of getting assistance while Orme was in the hands of the police so that after the prisoner was released he would have more than one person to contend with. Alcatraz would give up acting alone.

"Somebody has my purse!" Alcatraz was shouting. "Somebody here! You must not let anybody out!"

The elevator boy had been gaping in seeming paralysis, but now several of the passengers—men who doubtless were sure of their positions—were angrily ordering him to take the car down. Some of them had trains to catch.

"No! No!" screamed Alcatraz.

Orme had kept out of the discussion, but now he spoke quietly. "I think, Senator Alcatraz,"—he uttered the name distinctly, knowing that the South American probably did not wish himself identified—"I think that, if the boy will take the car almost to the bottom, the starter will help you."

There was a chorus of seconds to this suggestion. The boy pulled the lever and let the car descend slowly, while Alcatraz continued to exclaim.

How would the South American try to throw suspicion where he wished it? Orme puzzled over this question, for certainly the police would not arrest all the passengers. And then he suddenly remembered how Alcatraz had crowded against him when they entered the car.

A cold wave of horror swept over him. Was it possible that—?

He put his hand into the left side pocket of his coat. Something was there that did not belong there—a smooth, bulging purse. Alcatraz had put it there.

Orme fingered the purse. He would have to get rid of it, but he dared not to drop it to the floor, and if he thrust it through the grating and let it fall into the elevator well, some one would be almost certain to detect the action. There was only a moment left before the car would stop. He looked down at Alcatraz, who was close in front of him. Then his face relaxed and in spite of the gravity of his situation he smiled; for he had found a solution. Promptly he acted upon it.

To be continued.

Desire Sentiments In Writing.

Councilman Frank Neuman, appointed as chairman of a special committee by the mayor last evening to ascertain the sentiments of citizen property owners, business men and the Commercial club, relative to the advisability of owning water plant, will call a meeting of the members of the committee at an early date. All persons wishing to express their sentiments as to whether it would be advisable for the city of Plattsmouth to own and operate its water plant, are requested to put the same in writing and deliver the same to Councilman Neuman. This should be done at once, as some action on the part of the city will have to be taken soon.

**Poultry Wanted**

Highest prices paid for all farm produce.

**HATT PRODUCE CO.**



The South American Did Not Flinch.

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