The Girl and the Bill

By Bannister Merwin

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS

CHAPTER XVI.

The Struggle.

The approaching car now drew up near by, and three men jumped lightly to the road.

In the radiance of the lamps on the two cars, Orme recognized Arima. The men with him were also Japanese, though Orme was not conscious that he had ever seen them before.

It was clear enough how he and the girl had blundered into the hands of the Orientals. Maku had undoubtedly secured a car and had driven it to the vicinity of the Rookery in response to a telephoned order from Alcatrante, transmitted, in all likelihood, through the Japanese minister.

The appearance of the car on La Salle street had been expected by the South American. Perhaps he had not anticipated that Orme would hail it; the probability was that he had wished Maku's assistance without a definite idea of what that assistance should be. but the use of the car by Orme fell in nicely with his plans. He had assumed readily enough the direction the car would take, and getting promptly into telephonic communication with Arima, had arranged this meeting on the road.

Orme now remembered that Arima's car, when approaching, had sounded its horn at regular intervals, in series of threes—evidently a signal.

"Don't worry, girl, dear," whispered Orme. "I——" he broke off his sentence as the newcomers clustered about the tonneau, but the confident glance of her eyes reassured him.

He knew not what they were to face. The Japanese, he inferred, would not deal with him pleasantly, but surely they would not harm the girl.

Arima opened the door of the tonneau and with a lightning motion grasped Orme by the wrist.

"Get out," he ordered.

Orme was in no mind to obey. There were four of the Orientals against him, and he stood little chance of success in a fight with them, but if he could only delay matters, someone might pass and he could raise an alarm. So he sat firm, and said, calmly:

"What do you want?"

"Get out," repeated Arima.

When Orme still made no move to leave his seat, the steely fingers on his wrist ran up his forearm and pressed down hard upon a nerve-center. The pain was almost unbearable, and for the moment his arm was paralyzed. A quick jerk brought him to the ground. As he alighted, stumblingly, Maku caught him by the other arm. He was held in such a way that for the moment it seemed futile to struggle. Arima, meantime, spoke rapidly in Japanese to Maku. Perhaps he, as commander of the situation, was giving precise orders as to what was to be done.

Orme looked over his shoulder at the girl. She was clutching the door of the tonneau and leaning forward, staring with horrified eyes.

"Keep cool," he counseled.

Her answer was a moan of anguish, and he realized that she feared for him.

Suddenly she began to call for help Twice her cries rang out, and then one of the Japanese leaped into the tonneau and placed his hand over her mouth, smothering her voice.

The sight of this action was too much for Orme. He began a furious effort to break away from his captors. One sudden motion freed his right arm from Arima's clutch, and he reached for Maku's throat. But after a moment of scuffling, he was again held securely.

"Girl!" he shouted, "don't try to call out. Keep quiet."

The Japanese in the tonneau appeared to understand the words, for he took his hand away from the girl's mouth, though he remained beside her, ready to put an end to any fresh outbreak.

"Now," said Orme, turning his eyes on Arima, "what does this mean?"

"You give us papers," replied the Japanese softly.

"I have no papers that mean anything to you."

"We see. Give them to me."

"What papers do you want?" demanded Orme.

"You know." Arima's voice sounded less patient.

"But I have nothing that you care anything about," repeated Orme.

At that Arima began rapidly to search Orme's pockets. There was sufficient light from the lamps of the two cars to illuminate the scene.

Arima's left hand still held Orme's right forearm, and his right hand was free to hunt for the papers. Maku, on the other side, had meantime strengthened his grip on Orme's left arm, at the same time raising one knee so that Orme could feel it pressing against the small of his back.

"What this!" asked Arima, taking a long envelope from the inner pocket of Orme's coat and holding it up for inspection.

"A blank contract," said Orme. "Do you want it?"

Arima took the paper from the envelope and examined it. Then with an exclamation of disgust he replaced it in Orme's pocket, and continued his search.

"You see," said Orme calmly, "there is nothing here."

The Japanese, muttering in his own tongue, ran his hands over Orme's body and even looked into his hat. Nothing was found.

"You might as well believe me first as last," exclaimed Orme. "The papers you want are not here."

Arima was clearly puzzled. "You had them," he began.

"Possibly. But I haven't them now. How would you feel if I should tell you that the young lady and I have made this journey simply to throw you off the scent, and that the papers were being delivered by another person?"

"I not believe," declared Arima shortly.

Suddenly Maku began to jabber at Arima, who, after an instant of consideration, gave a quick order to the fourth Japanese, who stood by. This man went to the tonneau and got the prospectuses which Orme had placed under the seat cushion.

Arima snatched the papers with his free hand, then, resigning Orme entirely to Maku's care, and clucking strangely, opened them.

A glance sufficed. With a cry of disappointment, he tore the paper in two and threw them to the ground.

He thrust his face close to Orme's. "Where the papers?" he said.

Orme did not reply.

The Japanese who had brought the prospectuses from the tonneau now stepped to Maku's assistance, for Orme had made a motion of the body which showed that he was rapidly losing his patience.

"Queek!"

Still no answer.

"Ha!" The exclamation had a ring of triumph. "Mees have um!" He nodded toward the car where the girl still sat.

"No," exclaimed Orme vehemently. "She has not."

"Mees have um," repeated Arima. "We hunt. We see."

"I tell you she has not," said Orme.

"No believe you." Arima chuckled. "Come, mees."

As Orme twisted himself around, he was enraged to see the Japanese in the car seize the girl by the arm and drag her to the ground. Once on her feet, she did not resist, but permitted herself to be led toward the little group.

Arima advanced a step to meet her. "Give me papers," he said.

"I have no papers," she protested despairingly.

"We search you," said Arima, taking another step toward her and extending his hands.

It may be that Arima did not intend actually to lay hands on her. His thought may have been that the threat would induce Orme to tell where the papers really were. But the effect on Orme was to set him ablaze with anger.

His swift, indignant purpose seemed to multiply his strength until the little men who held him were like children in his hands.

A sudden jerk, and he had pulled both his arms free. Maku and the man at his other side were taken completely by surprise, and before they had time to recover themselves, Orme had thrown his arms around them and crushed their heads together with such force that they dropped limp and unconscious to the ground. They were out of the fight.

At the first sounds of struggle, Arima turned. Now, as Orme charged toward him, he bent slightly forward, every muscle tense, ready to strike or trip or twist.

His framework was overlaid by muscles that were like supple steel. Light and quick, he had a strength that could hardly have been inferred from his build. And though Orme's outbreak had been sudden, the Japanese was apparently not in the least disconcerted.

He knew how to turn the rush of the American into a disastrous fall. He knew how to prod with his bony knuckle the angry man's solar plexus—how to step swiftly aside and bring the horny edge of his hand against sensitive vertebrae. He could seize Orme by the arm and, dropping backward to the ground, land Orme where he wished him. Yes, Arima had every reason to feel confident. Many a time had he got the better of American fist fighters.

But a system of offense and defense which is based upon the turning of an opponent's strength against himself absolutely depends for its success upon an accurate estimate of the opponent's intentions. A sudden shift of physical purpose may put your jiu-jitsu adept at a loss.

Arima, from his knowledge of American fighting methods, had reason to think that Orme would continue his charge and strike out with his fists when he came near enough. That, however, is something that Orme did not do. For, in his two previous encounters with the Japanese, he had learned much. He had learned, among other things, the value of the unexpected. And though his anger was almost blinding, he cooled, during those few short strides, to his usual caution.

Within two paces of Arima, he stopped short.

For one tense moment Orme opened his senses to all impressions. He could hear, with almost painful distinctness, the moans of the two men he had stunned and the rustling sounds made b ytheir writhings.

He caught a glimpse of the girl. The searchlight of one of the cars struck full on the side of her face, and drew there a distinct shadow of the network of her disarranged hair. He saw the strained, excited look in her eyes.

Her captor still held her arm. He was watching Orme and Arima indifferently, as though quite confident of Japanese skill.

All this Orme observed in an instant. Then his eyes were again on Arima.

He knew that he would have to attack. To await the trick holds of the Japanse would be to invite defeat. But if he attacked, he must use an unexpected method.

Suddenly he raised his left arm above his head and clenched his fist. His right arm remained by his side.

A step forward. The upraised arm descended. Swiftly Arima reached upward to seize it. But even as the one

"No," Exclaimed Orme, Vehemently.

arm descended, Orme swung his other, with terrific force, up from the waist, and caught Arima on the mouth.

The blow missed the chin, but it was hard enough to fell any man of ordinary strength. Arima staggered back, past the girl, and brought up against the side of one of the cars. But with hardly an instant for recovery, he leaped forward again and the man who was holding the girl also sprang at Orme.

It would be folly to meet the two. Orme turned and ran quickly in among the trees of the little grove. The darkness was his friend, for the pursuers halted in their quick run and separated, proceeding more cautiously.

As for Orme, once in shelter, he stopped for breath.

He could see the two men coming toward him. They were outlined against the radiance from the motor cars. Cautiously he stepped toward the south, hoping that they would pass him in the darkness, but he dared not move rapidly, lest a stumble or the breaking of a twig betray him.

All this time the engines of the two cars had continued to work, and their muffled chug-chug-chug helped to cover the noise of footsteps.

What pleased him most was to see, out of the corner of his eye, that the girl had taken advantage of her release to climb to the chauffeur's seat of the car in which Maku had brought them from Chicago. That meant that, if he could reach the car, they might get away. But the papers——

By this time Orme was between his pursuers and the road. He stopped and groped about till he found a fair-sized stone, then worked toward the edge of the grove. The moment was at hand to make a dash.

Ten steps would take him to the car; then a leap into the tonneau, and off to the northward he and the girl would speed. Pursuit would be delayed for a few precious moments, for the Japanese would have to turn the other car around. Those few moments would determine the margin of success or failure.

But there were the papers. At all cost they must be secured. The plan that flashed into Orme's mind was to draw the Japanese from the spot and then, jumping from the car let the girl lead the pursuers on while he returned.

Just as he was about to rush for the car he heard a sound among the trees. He wheeled and saw the dim outline of one of his enemies coming toward him. In his excitement he had forgotten that just as they could be seen by him when they were between him and the road, so he could now be seen by them. Undoubtedly he was outlined, as they had been, against the background of the light.

The Japanese was only a few feet away. Orme threw the stone; by good luck it struck the man in the stomach, and he dropped to the ground and rolled in silent agony.

But at the same moment Orme was seized from behind, and held in a grip he could not break. Indeed, when he tried to break it, there was a sudden, killing strain on his spine. Then Arima's voice said, close to his ear:

"Where the papers?"

The papers!

Japanese character thus brought its fresh surprise to Orme. Even after this hard fight, when three of his friends lay groaning on the ground—when he had in his power the man who had injured them, who had temporarily bested himself—Arima's chief thought was still of the papers!

He seemed to have none of the semi-barbarian vengefulness that might have been expected. He merely wished the papers—wished them the more desperately with every passing moment. The lives of his companions counted for nothing besides the papers!

"Where?" repeated Arima.

"I haven't them," said Orme. "You ought to know that by this time."

The answer was a torturing pressure on Orme's spine. "You tell," hissed Arima.

As the pressure increased Orme's suffering was so keen that his senses began to slip away. He was gliding into a state in which all consciousness centered hazily around the one sharp point of pain.

Then, suddenly, he was released. For a moment he staggered limply, but his strength surged back, and he was able to see how the situation had changed.

The girl had swung her car in closer to the edge of the grove and nearer to the struggling figures. Doubtless she had some idea of helping. But the effect of the change in the position of her car was to permit the searchlight of the other car to throw its bright beam without interruption down the road. And there, perhaps 50 feet to the southward, gleamed something white.

The girl could not see it, for her car was headed north. But Arima saw it, and in a flash he realized what it was. The papers lay there at the side of the road, where Orme had tossed them a moment before the two cars met.

There had been no other way to dispose of them. If the car from the north had stopped at a different angle, or if the other car had not moved, the light would not have shone upon them and the Japanese might not have suspected where they were. Or, if Orme had tossed them a few feet farther to one side, they would have been out of the range of the light. But there they lay.

Arima leaped toward them. Even as he started, a figure appeared at the other side of the road and walked toward the cars. It was a man with brass buttons and policeman's helmet. He walked with authority, and he held a stout club in his hand.

"What's goin' on here?" he demanded.

Arima stopped in his tracks.

To Orme, at this moment, came the memory of the girl's desire to avoid publicity. "Nothing wrong," he said.

The policeman stared. "I've been watchin' you from over there," he said. "It looks like nothin' wrong, with men fightin' all over the ground."

"Just a little trial of strength," explained Orme.

"Trial of strength, hey?"

"Well," admitted Orme, "this man"—pointing to Arima—"wanted something that I had. It's not a matter for the police."

"Oh, it ain't? Somebody's been hurt." He gestured with his club toward the shadows where the three injured men were slowly coming back to their senses.

"Not seriously," said Orme.

"We'll see about that later," replied the policeman decidedly.

Orme tried to carry the affair off boldly. Every moment of delay now threatened defeat for him. "There is nothing serious," he said. "They have done me no real harm. But the young lady and I shall be obliged to you, if you will keep these Japanese here until we can get away. They attacked us, but I don't wish to make a complaint against them."

The policeman showed new interest. He glanced at Arima. "Japanese!" he exclaimed. "There was one slugged on the campus last night. I guess you'll have to come along with me."

"Nonsense!" protested Orme. "Just because somebody hit a Japanese over the head last night—"

"Ah, you know about that, do you? No"—as Orme made a movement—"stand where you are." He drew his revolver.

During this colloquy, Arima had edged nearer and nearer to the papers. Orme's sudden step was involuntary; it was due to the fact that he had seen Arima stoop swiftly and pick up the papers and thrust them into his pocket.

"Keep quiet," continued the policeman. "And you, there"—he nodded toward Arima—"come here."

Arima hesitated, but the muzzle of the revolver turned toward him, and he came and stood a few feet away.

"There's somethin' mighty funny about this," continued the policeman. "We'll just get into one of these cars and go to the station."

"This man and me?" asked Orme. He had visions of no great difficulty in satisfying the questions of the local justice, but he knew that an arrest would mean delay, perheps of hours. And Arima had the papers.

"I mean that man, and you, and the woman. I'll send some one for the others. If you're the fellow that did the sluggin' on the campus last night, you won't get away from me again."

"What's the use of dragging the young lady into this?" demanded Orme.

"None o' your business."

"Can I speak to her a minute, first?"

"No, you can't. There's been too many Chicago hold-up men around here lately, and I won't take chances with you." The policeman made this explanation apparently in deference to Orme's appearance, which, in spite of the evidence of struggle, was that of a gentleman. "Looks don't always tell," he continued.

That the girl should be taken to the station and held, under such suspicious circumstances was simply not to be thought of.

Doubtless she could quickly set in motion forces that would liberate her, but the disgrace of detention was something she must be saved from at any cost.

She was known in Evanston. Her identity once established, the story of her arrest would be sure to spread. Her position would then be the more painful, because the circumstances of the case were such that she was unwilling to explain them.

Moreover, Orme realized that, if he and Arima were held, the care of the girl would be his first thought, and the recovery of the papers would be forced into second place. That would not be according to her wish. Assuredly, if he was to get the papers, he could do better alone.

She sat in the car, not more than six feet from him, her face the picture of mingled emotions. Orme saw that he must reassure her as to himself before he carried out the plan which had suddenly come to his mind.

"You will make a mistake, officer, if you detain me," he said, speaking distinctly, so that the girl would be sure to hear.

"Cut it out," said the policeman.

"A little telephoning will set me free in an hour," Orme continued, bending to pick up his hat, which had fallen to the ground at the beginning of the fight. "You can't do anything except take me to the station and find out that you have bungled."

"That's my affair," said the policeman. "But here, we've done enough talkin'." He waved his revolver in a gesture which indicated that they were to enter the car.

Now, Orme knew that the girl had not seen him throw the papers to the road. Neither had she seen Arima pick them up. Whatever guess she had made as to his disposal of them, there was no reason for her to doubt that he had again got them into his possession, during some stage of the struggle.

He looked at her earnestly and significantly, then smiled slightly in the thought of reassuring her.

When he was certain that she was watching his every move, he glanced at the car, then up the road to the north. Then, with such quickness that the policeman had no time to prevent, he snatched from the inner pocket of his coat the envelope containing the blank contract which had first disappointed Arima, and tossed it into the tonneau.

"Go!" he shouted.

Like a shot, she sent the car forward. It disappeared swiftly into the night.

Thus far, Orme was satisfied. He had got the girl safely away. She thought that he had thrown the papers into the car, and when she came to examine them she would be disappointed, but Orme felt that she would then understand—that she would continue to trust him.

As the car darted away the policeman swung his club at Orme.

Before the blow could strike, the upraised arm was caught by a little hand and with a quick jerk, the policeman was pulled to the ground. His revolver, which he held in his left hand, went off as he fell, and a leaf, cut from a tree above by the bullet, sailed into Orme's face.

The policeman lay helpless in the cunning hold of Maku—Maku, who, fully restored to his senses, had crept up to save Arima from the law.

Orme wondered whether the girl had heard the shot. Probably not, for she was driving into the wind. But he had no time to consider the point, for Arima, suddenly conscious of freedom, leaped for the remaining car. He had the papers; he would hurry them safely to his master, leaving Orme and the policeman to the mercies of his reviving confederates.

The papers were still first in his thoughts. And why not? Orme remembered the scathing rebuke by the Japanese minister. In the flash of thought that preceded his own action he realized that the recovering of the papers was Arima's one means of righting himself.

As Arima grasped the steering wheel of the car and threw on the clutch, Orme ran behind the tonneau. His action was swiftly calculated to give the impression that he was dodging around the car in the hope of escaping on foot.

That is what Arima might have thought, had he glanced around—what Maku might have thought, had he done more than throw one swift glance at Arima, then devote himself again to the prostrate officer.

But Orme, reaching upward, got his hands over the high back of the tonneau. He hung on tightly, raising his feet from the ground. The car plunged forward.

For a time Orme merely kept his position. The dust whirled up in his face, and he had to close his eyes, but he was conscious that the car was gaining speed rapidly.

The situation was as difficult as it was dangerous. He planned nothing less than to climb into the car and deal with Arima even while they were flying along the road. But he must wait until they had gone a safe distance from the battleground. On the other hand, he must act before they got into the thickly settled streets of the town.

He figured that they had gone about a quarter of a mile, when he began his effort. Pulling himself up by his hands, he peered over the back of the tonneau. He could see Arima, huddled forward over the steering-wheel, doubtless watching the road ahead with a careful eye for obstacles and for the police.

For Arima was driving the car at a law-breaking speed. Clearly, he was an adept at motoring. But Orme did not stop to ask himself how a humble teacher of jiu-jitsu—a professional

"We've Done Enough Talkin'."

athlete—had acquired so much skill in the handling of a car.

It proved hard to get into the tonneau. Several times he got one leg almost over the back, only to be dislodged as the car bumped into a rut or over a stone. Once he almost lost his grip entirely. But a final effort gave him a leg hold, and slowly—very slowly—he climbed over to the leather cushions of the wide seat.

If Arima now turned and saw him, almost anything might happen. But before he could become conscious that anyone was near him, Orme was crouching in the tonneau.

The car was going at a 35 mile clip. The street lights were flashing by, and not far ahead were the frequent lights of houses. Nothing could be done here; therefore Orme got down as low as he could. He realized that he would have to wait till they had passed through the town.

Arima had not remained on the Sheridan road. He had taken a street which struck off from it, more directly southward, and Orme surmised that the intention was to avoid the main streets of Evanston.

When the car came to a cross street and turned westward this surmise was strengthened. They bumped over railroad tracks. Several times they passed other vehicles.

Presently Orme raised his head and discovered that the houses were thinning out. The car appeared to be heading straight into the open country, and Arima put on more speed. Forty miles an hour was not a high estimate for the rate at which they were traveling.

For several minutes Orme continued in his crouching position. The positions of the stars told him that they were still going west—not south toward Chicago. Every turn of the wheels, therefore, was carrying him farther into unknown territory—farther from the girl and all chance of communicating with her. Surely he must act soon, if he was to act at all; for Arima evidently was proceeding to some rendezvous, where Orme might find himself again in the midst of an overwhelming number of enemies.

But what could he do? Rapidly he turned over in his mind the various courses open to him. Should he try to stun Arima with a blow, and then reach forward and take the steering-wheel before the car could swerve into the ditch?

The blow might not prove effective. In that case, the chances were that Arima would involuntarily swing the car to one side. Then there would be a smash—with death or serious injury threatening both Arima and himself.

Should he try to cut a tire?

The feat was almost impossible. In attempting it, he would run great risk of premature discovery, and even if he succeeded in the attempt, the situation would be little changed. The necessity of stopping the car to make repairs might not put Arima in his hands.

The plan he at last decided upon was to throw his left arm around Arima's neck and draw him straight back, trusting that he might be able to get over the seat and set the brakes without losing his grip. The throat of the jiu-jitsu adept is tough, made so by patient development of neck muscles, but Orme had a strong arm, and he believed, moreover, that Arima would not have time to protect himself by stiffening his muscles before the grip was secured.

(To be continued.)

Attorney Charles L. Graves, the Union attorney, was in the city last evening and registered at the Perkins.

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