

The Girl and the Bill

By Bannister Merwin

ILLUSTRATIONS BY RAY WALTERS



CHAPTER XIX.

A Saved Situation.

He waited impatiently for her return. Bessie, he knew, might be in one of the rooms just across the hall, but, though Bessie was a trump, he did not go to look for her. The girl might come back at any moment—and he did not wish to miss one instant of her presence.

Again he considered the miracle of her appearance in his life, and he rejoiced that, from the first, he had been able to be of service to her. Those loving, trusting words that she had just spoken—how they glowed in his heart! She had known that he would succeed! He could only think that the secret telegraph of his love had sent her messages of confidence.

And yet he did not even know her name. The house was just such a one as he might have imagined to be her home—beautiful, with the air of a longer family tradition than is commonly found in the middle west—an obtrusive but complete. And the furnishings of the room in which he was standing were in quiet but perfect taste.

On a table near him lay a book. Mechanically he picked it up.

It opened at the fly leaf. Something was written there—her name, perhaps.

He closed the cover without reading the inscription, conscious only of a line of writing in a feminine hand that might be her's or another's. No, he could wait. The name did not matter. She was his, and that was enough.

Near the book lay an empty envelope, addressed to—he averted his eyes.

He found himself wondering whether Portol was still kneeling in the field, and whether Maku was still running, and whether the Japanese minister was still telling charming stories on the porch at Arradale.

And presently, when she came again, her face radiant, and said softly, "You have done a great thing, my dear"—when she said that, he could only look and look and thank heaven for his blessedness.

"Where were the papers when you fooled me into leaving you?" she asked.

"Arma had them. It's quite a story girl, dear."

"Then, wait a little while," she interrupted; "we have permission to see the papers signed."

She led him through the adjoining room and to the curtained doorway of a library—long, alcoved, shelved with books, and furnished with heavy leather chairs. In the center was a large table of polished mahogany, upon which rested a reading lamp.

The glow of this lamp illuminated the forms and faces of a group of serious faced men—two seated, the others standing. In the golden light, with the dim background of shelves, surmounted here and there by a vase or a classic bust, the group impressed Orme like a stately painting—a tableau distinguished by solemn dignity.

"We are to remain here and keep very quiet," whispered the girl.

Orme nodded. His eyes were fixed on the face of a man who sat at the table, a pen poised in his hand. Those strong, straight features—the eyes, with their look of sympathetic comprehension, so like the girl's—the lips, eloquent in their calmness—surely this was her father. But Orme's heart beat faster, for the face of this man, framed in its wavy hair, was familiar.

Where had he seen this man? That he had never met, he felt certain, unless, indeed, they had shaken hands in a casual and forgotten introduction.

Or was he led into a feeling of recognition by the undoubted resemblance of father to daughter? No, it could not be that; and yet this man, or his picture—ah! The recognition came to Orme in a flash.

This was the magnetic face that was now so often appearing in the press—the face of the great, the revered, the able statesman upon whom rested so great a part of the burden of the country's welfare. No wonder that Orme recognized it, for it was the face of the secretary of state! And the girl was his daughter.

Orme was amazed to think how he had failed to piece the facts together. The rumors of important international negotiations; the sudden but not serious illness of the secretary; his temporary retirement from Washington to Chicago, to be near his favorite physician—for weeks the papers had been full of these incidents.

When South Americans and Japanese combined to hinder the signing of mysterious papers, he should have realized that the matter was not of private, but of public importance. But the true significance of the events into which he had been drawn had es-

aped his logical mind. It had never occurred to him that such a series of plots, frequent though they might be in continental Europe, could ever be attempted in a country like the United States. And then, he had actually thought of little besides the girl and her needs.

He glanced at her now, but her gaze was fixed on the scene before them. The brightness of her eyes and her quickened breathing told him how intense was her interest.

Across the table from the secretary of state sat a younger man. His breast glittered with decorations, and his bearing and appearance had all the stiffness of the high-born Teuton.

Of the men who stood behind the two seated figures, some were young, some were old, but all were weighted with the gravity of a great moment. Orme inferred that they were secretaries and attaches.

And now pens scratched on paper. The secretary of state and the German ambassador—for Orme knew that it must be he—were signing documents, apparently in duplicate, for they exchanged papers after signing and repeated the action. So these were the papers which at the last hour Orme had restored; and this was the scene which his action had made possible—all for the sake of a girl.

And when the last pen-stroke had been completed and the seated men raised their eyes and looked at each other—looked at each other with the responsible glance of men who have made history—at that moment the girl whispered to Orme: "Come," and silently he followed her back to the room in which he had first awaited her.

"Oh, Girl," he whispered, as she turned and faced him, "Oh, Girl, I am so glad!"

She smiled. "Please wait for a moment."

When she had disappeared he pictured the scene they had just witnessed. With all its absence of pomp, it had left with him an impression that could never be effaced.

Again the girl appeared in the doorway, and leaning on her arm was her father. Orme stepped forward. The secretary smiled and extended his hand.

"Mr. Orme," he said, "we owe you much. My daughter has told me something of your experiences. You may be sure that I had no notion, when this affair began, that she would have to envelop herself and others in so much mystery, but now that all has ended well, I can only be thankful. He seated himself. "You will excuse me; I am not quite strong yet, though, as I might say, very convalescent."

The girl was leaning on the back of her father's chair. "Tell father the story, won't you, please?" she asked.

So Orme quickly narrated the series of events that began with his stroll along State street the afternoon of the day before. "It doesn't sound true, does it?" he concluded.

"But the marked five-dollar bill will always be evidence of its truth," said the girl; and then, with a suggestion of adorable shyness, "We must go and redeem that bill sometime."

The secretary was pondering. He had listened with manifest interest, interrupting now and then with questions that helped to bring out salient points. At the report of the conversation between Alcatraz and the Japanese concerning the commissions on ships, he had leaned forward with especial attention. And now, after a few moments of thought, he said:

"The Japanese minister we can handle. As for Alcatraz, I must see to it that he is recalled—and Portol."

"Poor little Mr. Portol!" exclaimed the girl. "Do you think he is still kneeling in that field?"

"Possibly," said Orme, smiling. "We will look to see when we go to redeem the bill."

"I think, Mr. Orme," said the secretary, "that I may fairly give you a little clearer insight into the importance of the papers which you rescued for us. You have seen stories of the rumors of negotiations with some foreign power?"

"Yes," said Orme.

"But, perhaps you have not known of the secret but aggressive policy which Japan has lately adopted toward us. The exchange of friendly notes a few years ago might as well not have occurred. If we had done nothing to check the tendencies in the Pacific, we should have been at war within another year. Only a complete understanding and definite agreement with some strong nation could prevent hostilities. The Anglo-Japanese alliance eliminated Great Britain as a possible ally. There were reasons why it seemed inadvisable to turn to France, for an arrangement there would involve the recognition of Russian interests. Therefore, we sought an alliance with Germany."

Some swell initial stationery at the Journal office. Don't fail to see it.

"The German ambassador and myself drafted a treaty last month, with the proviso that it must be signed within a certain period which, as you know, will expire within a few minutes. My illness followed, and with it the necessity of coming to our home, here. I had expected to return to Washington last week, but as Doctor Allison forbade me to travel for a while longer, I had the drafts of the treaty sent on, and urged the German ambassador to pay me a long-deferred visit. He and his suite have been here several days, in mufti."

"Now, Mr. Orme, this treaty concerns two important relations—a just balance of power in the Pacific and a just arrangement by which the countries of South America can be made to live up to their obligations. I see, not go into details, and it will be some months before the treaty will be made public—but Japan must not dominate our Pacific trade routes, and the Monroe doctrine must be applied in such a manner that it will not shelter evil doers. You understand now why Alcatraz and the Japanese minister were working together."

"It is quite clear," said Orme. "I don't wish you to tell me any more than is advisable, but the Japanese minister said that, if the new treaty should lapse, the German government would not renew it."

"Very true," said the secretary. "The German ambassador is pleased with the treaty. After it had been drafted, however, and after his home government had agreed to the terms, Japan brought pressure to bear in Germany. The result of this Japanese effort—which contained a counter proposition for the isolation of Russia—was that the German government weakened—not to the point of disavowing the arrangement with us, but in the event of a redrafting of the treaty, to the adoption of a less favorable basis of negotiations, or, possibly, even to the interposition of such obstacles as would make a treaty impossible. You can see how essential these papers were to us. There was not time to provide new copies, for the lost drafts carried certain seals and necessary signatures which could not be duplicated on short notice."

"Did the German ambassador know of the loss?" Orme was encouraged to ask questions by the secretary's obvious desire to explain as fully as he could.

"No one knew of it, Mr. Orme, excepting my daughter and myself—that is, no one besides the South Ameri-

can and the Japanese. It seemed wise to say nothing. There were no secret service men at hand, and even if there had been, I doubt if they would have acted as efficiently as you have acted. The police, I know, would have bungled, and, above all else, publicity had to be avoided."

"As things have turned out, I am glad that Portol set his burglar on us when he did; otherwise Maku would have got the treaty at the last moment. Alcatraz's desire to secure a diplomatic advantage over the Japanese was really the saving of us."

The secretary paused. His face lighted up with a rare smile. "Above everything else, Mr. Orme, I thank you."

He arose and rang for a servant. "And now," he continued, "I know you will excuse me if I return to my guests. My daughter will bring you in presently, so that we may have the pleasure of making you acquainted with them. And, of course, you will remain with us till tomorrow." He smiled again and went slowly from the room on the arm of the servant.

Orme turned to the girl. Her face was rosy and her eyes were fixed on the arm of her chair.

"Girl, dear," he said, "I can hardly believe that it is all true."

She did not answer, and while he gazed at her, surprised at her silence, failing to understand her sudden embarrassment, Bessie Wallingham appeared in the doorway and stood hesitant.

"Am I still not wanted?" said Bessie, roguery in her voice. "Sure, ye'll find me a faithful servant. I mind my own business and asks no questions."

The girl rushed over to her friend. "Oh, Bessie," she cried, with a little laugh—"Oh, Bessie, won't you please come in and—"

Orme began to understand. "And wait for us a little longer," he broke in.

Masterfully he led the girl out through the doorway to the hall.

Bessie Wallingham looked after their retreating figures. "Well, I never!" she exclaimed.

(THE END.)

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CUPID CUTS CAPERS IN THE FAR WEST

Mr. Charles C. Johnstone and Miss Marguerite Walters Married at Billings, Montana.

The following account of the marriage of a former Plattsmouth lady is taken from the Sheridan (Wyo.) Post of March 3:

"It was a pretty wedding at the Northern hotel at Billings, on Tuesday, in which Sheridan young people were the contracting parties. It was precisely high noon when Mr. Charles C. Johnstone and Miss Marguerite E. Walters, attended by Mr. Cecil Wentz and Miss Lela Thurmond, entered the parlors to the graceful strains of Lohengrin, played by Mrs. John L. Scott; and were met by Rev. Mr. Fritch of the First Congregational church, who pronounced the beautiful and impressive ceremony of that church, which joined the young couple for life.

"Immediately following the ceremony an elaborate wedding breakfast was served in the private dining room of the Northern.

"The bride is the daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. O. Walters of Plattsmouth, Neb., and has made her home with her sister, Mrs. Roy C. Tarrant of this city, for some time.

"She is a charming young lady of many accomplishments, among them being music, and is popular with all who enjoy her acquaintance.

"She was arrayed in a bridal costume of pink silk of a delicate shade, and carried white carnations. The maid of honor was exquisite in white, with pink carnations.

"The groom is a son of Mr. and Mrs. Oliver P. Johnstone of Chicago, and is one of the efficient and popular railway postoffice clerks running between Billings and Edgemont.

"The young people will make their home in Sheridan for the present.

"The bridal party, chaperoned by Mrs. Tarrant, left Sheridan on Monday afternoon and returned Wednesday morning."

The bride will be remembered as the former wife of W. C. Ford, cashier of the Thermopolis State bank of Thermopolis, Wyoming. She was born, reared and educated in Plattsmouth and is a daughter of Mr. and Mrs. E. O. Walters of this city. The Journal extends congratulations and wishes the newly wedded couple long life, happiness and prosperity.

The detective that came to the city last night after the two men arrested charged with breaking into a M. P. car at LaPlatte, was in an intoxicated condition and after getting the men on the train proceeded to beat and abuse them. Sheriff Fischer says that in the future all officers who come after prisoners he arrests must be sober or he will not turn the prisoners over to them and that if the train had not started as soon as the prisoners were aboard he would have brought the prisoners back and with them the two drunken detectives of the road. He reported the matter to the railroad officials last night and filed written charges against them today.—Nebraska City News.

No official has got license to beat prisoners, much less a lot of hiring detectives, many of whom are worse than the thieves themselves, and when they resort to such means of treatment they should be arrested by the public officers and fined to the fullest extent of the law or fined and imprisoned both. We are surprised that the Missouri Pacific keeps such brutal hyenas in their service.

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SIXTH AND MAIN ST.

MUNICIPAL OWNERSHIP OF THE WATER PLANT DISCUSSED LAST NIGHT

Meeting of the Committees at the Council Chamber, and a Subcommittee Appointed to Investigate the Plant and Its Surroundings.

From Tuesday's Daily

The joint meeting of the committees appointed by Mayor Sattler and Mr. Pollock of the Commercial club held a session at the council chamber last evening and made considerable progress toward the solution of the vexed question of the water franchise and what shall be done with it one year hence.

The committee from the council, composed of F. Neuman, William Shea, William Weber, George Dovey and D. O. Dwyer, were present with the exception of Messrs. Dovey and Dwyer.

The committee from the Commercial club, composed of T. H. Pollock, C. C. Parmele, J. P. Falter and Superintendent William Baird, were all present save Mr. Falter. The committees organized for business by electing Councilman William Weber as chairman and Mr. J. P. Falter as secretary of the joint meeting, Mr. Pollock acting for Mr. Falter until his arrival.

Several communications were read from the city clerks of cities in both Nebraska and Iowa which own their own water and light plants. The members of the committees expressed their views freely as to the situation and it was agreed that the matter should be acted upon promptly, as the time (one year) was brief enough in which to transact the business necessary, should the city decide to own its plant.

Mr. C. C. Parmele moved that a committee of three be appointed by the chair to ascertain what the Plattsmouth water plant could be purchased for and on what terms; also, learn what the expense of running the plant is; also, that the secretary correspond with a competent engineer to ascertain the physical value of the water company's property. Chairman Weber appointed on this committee Mr. C. C. Parmele, Mr. William Shea and Mr. William Baird.

Among the letters read to the committee was one from Mr. B. O. Bond, treasurer of the water company, to Mayor Sattler, in which he suggested the way to arrive at the value of the water plant was to have appraisers appointed, one by the city, one by the company, and these to appoint the third, and the three go over

the plant and fix the value. A letter from R. D. Pickett, clerk of the city of Broken Bow, to Mr. Wurl, was in substance that Broken Bow owned its water plant, which it purchased from the private owners five or six years ago at a cost of \$15,000. The plant was in a poor state of repair and the city spent quite a sum on it. The rates there are: First 1,000 gallons, \$1.25; the minimum 4,000 gallons after first, 35 cents per 1,000 gallons.

A similar communication from Ed Lehmkuhl, clerk of the city of Wahoo, was to the effect that their city, prior to two years ago and for twenty years, had had a water plant owned and operated by private parties, water being furnished to consumers mostly on flat rate, those who had meters took water at 50 cents per 1,000 gallons for ordinary consumption. The city paid hydrant rentals for first ten years, \$2,000, and for the last ten years, \$2,500 per year. The best the company would offer for a continuation of the franchise was \$3,500 per year for hydrant rental and a continuation of the private rates and maintained that the company was operated at a loss. The light plant was owned formerly by private parties and sold to the current consumers at 25 cents per kilowatt. The old water plant was owned by Pittsburg parties, and bonded for \$75,000. The city did not arbitrate with either concern, but employed engineers to estimate the cost of a new plant of each kind combined. The city finally bought the water plant for \$17,500 and the light company's consumers and franchise for \$1,000. The combined plants now stand the city about \$64,000. The light rates are on a sliding scale now, ranging from 15 cents down to 10 cents per kilowatt. The meter rates for water are planned on the same sliding scale, from 25 cents to 10 cents per 1,000 gallons, payable quarterly, and the light accounts are payable monthly, both with 10 per cent discount if paid at the office within the first five days of the month.

Letters were received also from Shenandoah and Clarinda, Iowa, both of which were favorable to the proposition of the city owning its own plant.

The committee adjourned to meet at the call of the chairman.

In the City on Business.

From Tuesday's Daily
 Charles H. Busch of Nebraska City and John H. Busch of Avoca were in the city today looking after some business matters. The former gentleman is in the concrete manufacturing business in Nebraska City and was here to meet with the county commissioners in regard to their adopting the new reinforced con-

crete culverts in this county, of which Mr. Busch makes a specialty. Both gentlemen were callers at the Journal office and we were pleased to meet them.

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