

The GIRL and the BILL

SYNOPSIS.

CHAPTER X.

"Find the American."

As Orme saw from his arrest a girl in a black touring car who had caused a traffic jam on State street. He buys a new hat and is given a five dollar bill with "Remember me" written on it. A second time he helps the girl in the black car and learns that in Tom and Wallingham, they have no friends, but there is another hint of her identity. He discovers another inscription on the marked bill, which in a full confession describes the girl's name and places the copy in a drawer in his apartment. Senator Portol, South American, calls and claims the marked bill is his.

He is asked to return the bill for another. He calls in Senator Alcatrante, minister from his country, to help him. Orme still refuses to give up the bill. He learns that a Jap has called for him. Orme goes for a walk and sees two Japs attack Alcatrante. He fights them off, but is hit in the abdomen, but fails to get the marked bill.

In order to accommodate himself to the close quarters, Orme had to double his legs back, resting on his thigh and supporting the upper part of his body with one hand. The cat settled down against his knee.

The light filtered redly through the table cover. To his satisfaction he found a small hole, evidently a burn made by some careless smoker. Through this aperture he could look out. His range of vision included the greater part of the room, excepting the side on which the table stood. He could see the window and several chairs, as well as the door into the adjoining room, but the door into the hall was out of view, at his right.

While he was looking about, a man came from the next room. Doubtless it was Arima; at least Orme recognized the Japanese who had overcome him in the porter's office at the Pere Marquette the night before. He stepped into the room with a little smile on his brown face. Seating himself in a chair, he fixed his heels in the rungs and clasped his hands about his knees. He was waiting.

The black eyes rested on the table. To Orme they seemed to be boring through the cover that concealed him, and he hardly dared to breathe, but the Asiatic appeared to observe nothing unusual. Orme wondered at the unfathomable intelligence of those eyes. He had often said of the Chinese and Japanese that they did not trust them for the reason that a Caucasian could never tell what they were thinking in thought processes he found disconcerting.

A bell rang. Arima went to the door out of view, and opened it. Orme could hear persons mounting the stairs, and presently the voice of Arima said, "Come in," and the visitors entered the room.

Pausing near the door for a moment, they exchanged a few whispered sentences. Then one of them walked over toward the window. Orme repressed an exclamation, for the figure that came into view was the figure of Portol—dapper, assertive.

He was dressed as on the night before, and his precious high hat was hugged close to his shoulder.

His eyes roved with an exaggerated assumption of importance, cunning. Presently he threw over his shoulder a rapid sentence in a foreign tongue. It sounded like Spanish, and Orme inferred that it was a dialect of Portuguese.

The answer came from an oily tongue; the voice was Alcatrante's.

What were the South Americans doing here? It was only a few hours since the Japanese had set on Alcatrante, yet here he was in a stronghold of the enemy—and expected! Had they apparently belonged to a large storage loft or factory. There were no idle folk at the windows.

Orme went to the window, pushed it up, and climbed out on the fire escape. He was glad to see that the wall across the court was windowless. He might be observed from the buildings that backed up from the next street, but they apparently belonged to a large storage loft or factory. There were no idle folk at the windows.

The window of the room below was open. This was in one sense an advantage—and Orme blessed the Japanese athletes for their insistence on fresh air; but on the other hand, it made quietness essential.

Slowly he let himself through the opening in the platform and moved a few steps down the ladder. Then he crouched and peered through the dingy lace curtains that were swaying in the breeze.

The interior was dim, but Orme succeeded in distinguishing the furniture. There were straw mats on the floor and several chairs stood about. At the opposite side of the room was a closed door. From his knowledge of Madam Alla's apartment, Orme knew that this door opened into the hall of the building, and the square ground glass, with its reversed letters of the athlete's name, told him that it was used as the chief entrance. Madam Alla preferred her clients to enter into another room.

In the farther corner of the interior Orme saw a large square table. It was covered with a red print cloth, which hung over the edge, nearly to the floor. If he could reach that table and conceal himself beneath it, his position would be better.

And now he suddenly remembered that the outline of his head would be visible against the outer light to anyone within. The room seemed to be empty, but—at that instant he heard a door open. He drew his head up. Some one was moving about the room.

The steps went here and there. Chairs were shifted, to judge from the sound. But evidently there was only one person, for Orme could hear no voices. He decided that Arima was preparing for visitors.

Again he heard a door open and close. Had Arima gone out, or had some other person entered? Orme waited a moment, listening; no sound came from within. He lowered his head and peered. The room was empty.

Orme might return at any moment, but the chance had to be taken. Quickly, silently, Orme descended on the platform, slid over the sill and tip-toed over to the table. Another in instant and he was under the cover.

"It is well that you communicate with me, sir," he said, "we're working at cross-purposes when, in reality, our interests were identical."

Alcatrante bowed. "I came to that conclusion late last night," he said. "I do not deny that it would have pleased me to carry the affair through by myself."

"Yes, your position would then have



It Now Remained to Find Something to Take the Place of the Abstracted Documents.

been stronger." The Japanese smiled faintly.

"But," continued Alcatrante, with a slight grimace, "the activity of your men made that impossible. I have no lieutenants such as yours." He shot an ugly gleam at Portol, whose sudden assumption of fearsome humility was in strange contrast to his usual self-assurance.

Now, the table was cheaply made. The drawer was shallow and narrow, and it was held in position, under the table, by an open framework of wood.

When it was pushed in, it was stopped at the right place by two cleats; there was no solid strip to prevent its being pushed in too far.

Orme put his hand to the back of the drawer. There was a space between it and the table-top.

Cautiously he pushed his hand through the opening. His fingers touched a flat object—a pad of paper, or—the thought made his heart beat a large, thick envelope. Could Arima have used the drawer as a hiding place?

Slowly he got the edge of the object between his first and second fingers and drew it a little way toward the back of the drawer. A moment later he had it under his eyes.

Yes, it was a long envelope of heavy linen, and there were bulky papers within. The gummed flap was toward him. He was interested to note that, important though the documents seemed to be, the envelope was not sealed with wax.

He remembered what the girl had said: her father's name was written on the address side. He had only to turn it over to learn who she was. In the circumstances such an act might be justified. But she had not wished him to know—and he would even now respect her wish and keep his own promise to her first.

His first thought was to slip the envelope into his pocket, but it occurred to him in time that, if it did indeed contain the documents concerning which Alcatrante and the stranger were disputing, it would be sought and missed long before he could escape from the room. So, taking a pencil from his pocket, he inserted it under the corner of the flap and slowly worked the flap free. The strength of the linen prevented any tearing.

He removed the contents of the envelope—two folded sheets of parchment paper, held together by an elastic band—and thrust them into the inside pocket of his coat. All this was done smoothly and noiselessly.

It now remained to find something to take the place of the abstracted documents. In his pocket were some printed prospectuses of the mine which he had come to Chicago to investigate. In shape and thickness they were not dissimilar to the documents which he had taken. He slipped the prospectuses into the envelope and, wetting his finger, rubbed it along the gummed surface of the flap. Enough glue remained to make the flap adhere, after a little pressure. The job was no means perfect, but it was not likely to be detected.

At that moment Alcatrante raised his voice and said, still in French: "You are sure, then, that this will not delay the game, but end it?"

"Quite sure," said the Japanese. "Unless the documents are signed before midnight tonight nothing can be done for some time. We have the Germans fixed. They will do what they have thus far agreed to do, but if any technical hitch arises, such as a failure to sign within the time limit, they will decline to renew negotiations. That was all we could get from them, but it is enough—now."

"And for other ships," said Alcatrante, "the commission shall be five hundred thousand."

"Five hundred thousand. Seven hundred and fifty was too much."

"Five hundred thousand in gold."

Orme slipped the envelope back into the drawer and put his eye to the hole in the cover. His position was now solid, as he had supposed—rattled strangely. At the moment he could not investigate, but as soon as the cat

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The stranger turned to Arima. "Give us the envelope," he said.

Arima approached the table. Orme crowded back against the wall as far as he could, knowing that the chances of escaping discovery were strongly against him. But he was saved by the very eagerness of the others. They all crowded about Arima, as he lifted the cover, opened the drawer and took out the envelope. So close did they stand that Orme was out of their angle of vision. The table cover fell again, and he was safe. He resumed his position at the peep-hole.

The stranger stepped to the middle of the room, the others gathering around him. With a quick jerk he tore the envelope open, and taking out the papers ran his eye over them rapidly. He uttered an exclamation. "What is it?" said Alcatrante. The South American's hand was shaking, and perspiration stood out on his forehead.

The Japanese snarled. "Tricked!

They've fooled us. That honorable burglar of yours got the wrong envelope."

Alcatrante snatched the papers.

"Prospectus," he read, "of the Last

Dare Mining Company. But I do not understand."

The Japanese glared at him angrily. "If you had kept out of this business," he snapped, "and let Maku attend to it, everything would have been right. Now your burglars have spoiled it."

He snatched back the harmless prospectuses and tore them in two, throwing the fragments to the floor and grinding them under his heel.

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